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THE RECEPTION AND USE OF FLANN MAINISTRECH AND HIS
WORK IN MEDIEVAL GAELIC MANUSCRIPT CULTURE

Eystein P. Thanisch

Volume I

Main Text

Doctor of Philosophy

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Declaration

This is to certify that that this thesis has been composed by me and is entirely my own work. No part of this thesis has been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification. I have published a specific case study of a text, covered primarily by **Chapters 2** and **3**, as ‘Flann Mainistrech's *Götterdämmerung* as a Junction within *Lebor Gabála Érenn*’, *Quaestio Insularis*, 13 (2012), 69–93. Where it becomes relevant, it is cited in the main body of the thesis as a secondary source. A re-print is also included (with the permission of the current editor of *Quaestio Insularis*) as **Appendix 32**.

Signed:

Abstract

Flann Mainistrech (active *c.* 1014 to 1056) is well-attested in medieval and post-medieval Gaelic manuscripts and in early printed works on Irish history as an authority on history and literary tradition. He appears to have been an ecclesiastical scholar, based at Monasterboice (modern Co. Louth, Ireland), but potentially operating within wider ecclesiastical and political networks.

Almost fifty texts or fragments of texts, mostly poems, are at some point attributed to him. Their subject-matter includes the regnal history of early medieval Irish kingdoms, legendary material on Ireland and the Gaels' more distant past, universal and classical history, hagiography, and genealogical traditions. In addition, various sources are extant that concern Flann Mainistrech as a character. Most imply that he was considered a pre-eminent authority; some go further and provide impressionistic sketches of his scholarship and locating him in certain social or political settings.

The secondary literature on medieval Gaelic authors like Flann has been largely concerned with establishing what can be securely stated about their historical biographies and with delineating reliable corpora of their works. In addition, there has been much discussion around whether medieval Gaelic literature is to be fundamentally characterised as secular or ecclesiastical. Recently, however, studies have begun to focus less on the literal realities of medieval authorship and more on how authorship was conceived in the Middle Ages, how it functioned as a form of authority, and how it might have been used or constructed within texts' or manuscripts' overall argumentation.

In response, in this thesis, I survey manuscript materials and early printed works relating to Flann Mainistrech and discuss how his status as an author-figure relates to his identity as an individual, considering how he was interpreted in different contexts, the extent to which later scribes or compilers used or manipulated his identity, and what made him useful or applicable to them. After analysing the textual material in light of these issues, I conclude that Flann was consistently placed in certain definable historiographical and biographical contexts and that his authority may thus have been tied to this specific characterisation. However, presentations of Flann can vary quite dramatically in emphasis, while close examination of material

attributed to him and their contexts within compilations and manuscripts reveals appropriation of his perspective, pseudonymous use of his identity, and re-contextualisation of his purported work according to later compilers' interests and priorities. Relatively consistent treatment of his persona is thus ostensibly juxtaposed with dynamic, creative reading practices. Yet such conclusions are overshadowed by evidence, also considered in this study, suggesting that what survives of the manuscript tradition may well fall short of being representative both of Flann's actual biography and of his textual persona.

As well as offering a case study into medieval Gaelic concepts of authorship, authority, and textuality, this thesis also necessarily presents more basic analyses of previously under-explored and, in a few cases, unedited texts that come to be of relevance. Several such texts are printed and translated in Appendices.

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List of Abbreviations

Where abbreviations indicate a published work or both a text or manuscript and a certain edition of that text or manuscript, the editor and title (if different) is listed here; for full references, see the Bibliography. Note that, in some cases, the same abbreviation stands for both a manuscript and a diplomatic edition.

- A*Clon: the *Annals of Clonmacnoise* (Murphy (ed.)).
AFM: the *Annals of the Four Masters* (O'Donovan (ed. and trans.)).
AI: the *Annals of Inisfallen* (Mac Airt (ed. and trans.)).
ALC: the *Annals of Loch Cé* (Hennessy (ed. and trans.)).
AM: *Anno Mundi*.
ANÍ: *Aided Nath Í ocus a adnacol* ('Nath Í's death and burial'; **1:2.2.3**; ¹**4:2.1.5**).
ASNaC: Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic Studies, University of Cambridge.
AT: the *Annals of Tigernach* (Mac Niocaill (ed. and trans.)).
AU: the *Annals of Ulster* (Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill (ed. and trans.)).
BB: the *Book of Ballymote* (RIA MS 23.P.12).
BL: British Library.
BL Cat.: *Catalogue of Irish Manuscripts in the British Museum* (O'Grady et al.).
BOCD: *Book of the O'Conor Don*.
CELT: Corpus of Electronic Texts.
CGH: *Corpus Genealogiarum Hiberniae* (O'Brien (ed.)).
CGSH: *Corpus Genealogiarum Sanctorum Hiberniae* (Ó Riain (ed.)).
CMCS: *Cambridge/Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies* (same journal).
CS: *Chronicon Scottorum* (Mac Niocaill (ed. and trans.)).
CUL: Cambridge University Library.
CUP: Cambridge University Press.
DIAS: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies.
eDIL: *Electronic Dictionary of the Irish Language*.
EUP: Edinburgh University Press.
Fen.: the *Book of Fenagh* (RIA, MS 23.P.26; Hennessy and Kelly (ed. and trans.)).
GIMP: GNU Digital Manipulation Programme Version 2.8.14.
GRSH: *Genealogiae Regum et Sanctorum Hiberniae* (Walsh (ed.)).
IHK: *Die irische Helden- und Königsage* (Thurneysen).
ISOS: Irish Script on Screen.
ITS: Irish Texts Society.
JCS: Journal of Celtic Studies.
LB: *Lebor Bretnach*.
Lec.: the *Book of Lecan* (RIA, MS 23.P.2).
LGÉ: *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* (Macalister (ed. and trans.)).
Lis.: the *Book of Lismore*.
LL: the *Book of Leinster* (TCD 1339; Best et al. (dipl. ed.)).
LMG: *Leabhar Mór na nGenealach* (Ó Muraíle (ed. and trans.)).
LR: Literature Review.

¹ Cross-references are given by Chapter, then by section. Thus, this example refers to Chapter 2, section 2.2.3.

LU: Lebor na hUidre (RIA 23.E.25; Best and Bergin (dipl. ed.)).
MD: The Metrical Dindshenchas (Gwynn (ed. and trans.)).
 MR: Methodology Review.
 NLI: National Library of Ireland.
NLI Cat.: Catalogue of Irish manuscripts in the National Library of Ireland (Ní Shéaghda and Ó Macháin).
 NLS: National Library of Scotland.
 NUIG: National University of Ireland, Galway.
 O’Conor I: Charles O’Conor of Belanagare (1710–91).
 O’Conor II: Rev. Charles O’Conor (1764–1828).
ODNB: Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (Goldman (ed.)).
 OUP: Oxford University Press.
PBA: Proceedings of the British Academy.
PRIA C: Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy: Section C.
 q.: quatrain.
 QUB: Queens University Belfast.
 RIA: Royal Irish Academy.
RIA Cat.: Catalogue of Irish Manuscripts in the Royal Irish Academy (O’Rahilly et al.).
SAM: Sex Aetates Mundi (Ó Cróinín (ed. and trans.)).
SG: Silva Gadelica (O’Grady (ed. and trans.)).
 Tara Diptych: ‘Ríg Themra dia tesbann tnú’ and ‘Ríg Themra toebaige iar ttain’.
 TCD: Trinity College Dublin.
TCD Cat.: Catalogue of Irish Manuscripts in the Library of Trinity College Dublin (Abbott and Gwynn).
TD: the Tinnakill Dúanaire (TCD 1340).
 UCD: University College Dublin.
UM: the Book of Uí Maine (RIA D.ii.1).
YBL: the Yellow Book of Lecan (TCD 1318).
ZCP: Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie.

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appropriate manner, I would like to acknowledge generally this often unpaid and obscure work put in for collective, communal benefit.

The Ph.D process is, however, still quite solitary and friends both within and beyond the academic world have been extremely encouraging, patient, and empathetic with me in this regard. For this, I am humbled and grateful. My girlfriend, Edith, has provided constant love, inspiration, sagely advice, and some much-needed alleviation from taking myself too seriously. My parents, Ann and Peter, and my brother, Alasdair, have been deeply supportive during my studies and throughout my life. They helped form my intellectual ambitions through sharing discussions, literature, and ideas and have always been there for us in their pursuit. For this reason and for many others, I dedicate this thesis to them.

Preface

This thesis considers concepts of authorship within medieval and post-medieval Gaelic historiography via a study of the reception and treatment, throughout the manuscript tradition, of the author Flann Mainistrech (*ob.* 1056). This approach's foundations and implications are discussed in full in the Methodology Review but a few points are worth clarifying at the outset.

I use the term 'author' very broadly to denote an individual to whom a text is attributed.² When greater specificity is required, terms like historian, poet, or compiler are used. This thesis' purpose is to explore some of the medieval Gaelic models and categories that might be denoted by 'author' and 'authorship', so I deliberately abstain from providing definitions for them. I use the term 'author-figure' to refer to the character implied and constructed, intentionally or not, by the texts attributed to them and by the attributions' forms and contexts, as distinct from the text's actual composer.

As is often the case with ancient and medieval authors, modern scholars often treat attributions to Flann with scepticism. This should be kept in mind. However, this thesis is largely unconcerned with what the historical Flann actually composed but rather with his later reception and afterlife. To avoid repeating cumbersome circumlocutions, I use phrases like 'Flann's texts' to refer to work attributed to Flann even where confirmation of his authorship is lacking. Similarly, when I discuss 'Flann', I do not mean the historical eleventh-century individual but the character as he appears in our sources. To indicate the real-life individual, some phrase like 'the historical Flann' shall be used (as it is above).

Finally, as a case study, this thesis uses focused analysis of material relating to Flann Mainistrech ultimately to propose more broadly applicable ideas and questions about medieval authorship and textuality. Under constraints of time and word count, I have not included much detailed comparison with other medieval Gaelic authors. Thus, while I demonstrate that analysing the dossier on a single named author-figure can yield insights, this is a case study and further work on other

² For this term's complexities, see Andrew Bennett, *The Author* (London: Routledge, 2005).

authors and on related material is needed before any points made here can be truly generalised.

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‘While the materials of tradition are indeed static and given, our attitude to tradition is also liable to historical change, and [...] sometimes such a change in attitude may be revolutionary’.³

1 Introduction: Flann, authorship, and attributions

This literature review follows scholarship specifically relating to Flann Mainistrech from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, considered in the context of conceptions of named authors from medieval sources and how they relate to the study of medieval literature. I argue that this survey reveals two major desiderata for medieval Gaelic studies.

The first is more research focused on individual medieval authors’ characteristics and their later reception, although such studies have begun to appear (**LR:3.3.1**). Since the nineteenth century, scholarship has moved from focusing primarily on authors (**LR:2**), to text-centred and generic analysis (**LR:3.2**), back to authors in the context of dating texts and debating their social and cultural affiliations (**LR:3.3**), to the rhetorical uses and impacts of authorship (**LR:4**). Given this complex history, modern scholarship on a specific, named medieval author like Flann is inevitably disconnected.

The second is sustained theoretical discourse on authorial models and conceptions evidenced in medieval Gaelic learned culture. Much relevant secondary scholarship is either oriented around an idea of original, absolute authors determining texts’ form and meaning or is ultimately concerned with assessing texts’ date and provenance. Yet most medieval Gaelic authors’ work and the generally sparse information about them are mediated to us by later scribes, compilers, and scholars, as well as by the medieval authors’ own rhetorical self-constructions. Exploring authors and compilers’ categories and uses of authorship unlocks an alternative phenomenological dimension of social meaning for their texts (**LR:4**). It also aids investigation of actual, historical authors through elucidating the models and rhetorical purposes at work in the evidence.

³ Michael Tierney, ‘O’Curry and the Irish Tradition’, *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, 51 (Winter 1962), 449–62 (p. 452).

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This thesis responds to both desiderata by diachronically surveying and analysing material related to Flann across the Gaelic manuscript tradition and in printed scholarship. As well as supplying the most extensive dossier of evidence relating to Flann published to date, it identifies points of continuity and points of innovation in presentations of him and his work. This allows us to assess the social meaning of Flann as a figure and the authorial templates and narratives used to interpret him.

While Flann appears regularly in secondary literature, there is no single self-identifying, developmental scholarly discussion on him or on medieval authorship for this literature review to follow. Insights into relevant attitudes and approaches within scholarship are thus sought more opportunistically and analytically than is perhaps normal in such a context. Furthermore, this thesis is about historiography's reception within historiography, so the boundary between primary and secondary literature – that is, between layers of historiography – is ultimately arbitrary. We begin at the inception of the formal, university-based study of medieval Irish history and literature in the mid-nineteenth century. Post-medieval scholarship is covered in **Chapters 5** (manuscripts) and **6** (early printed works) of the thesis proper.

2 'Evidence of very considerable cultivation':⁴ Flann in nineteenth-century scholarship on medieval Ireland

2.1 Overview and historical context

After the end of formal classical Gaelic culture in the seventeenth century, the literature and other remains of medieval Ireland had, for two centuries, been sporadically preserved, investigated, and debated by scholarly societies and individuals. By the mid-nineteenth century, such projects were receiving increasing support, with the foundation of academic institutions for the study of Irish language and antiquities.⁵ Medieval manuscript sources, which had long lain scattered and

⁴ Eugene O'Curry, *Lectures on the Manuscript Materials of Ancient Irish History* (London: Duffy, 1861), p. 56.

⁵ Brían Ó Cuív, 'Irish Language and Literature, 1845–1921', in *A New History of Ireland VI: Ireland under the Union, II: 1870–1921*, ed. by William E. Vaughan (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1996), pp. 385–435 (414–30); Joseph T. Leerssen, *Remembrance and Imagination: Patterns in the Historical*

obscure, were becoming more amenable to study through the growth of stable archives, such as those at Trinity College Dublin and the newly-established Royal Irish Academy. Major texts made available in early editions included the medieval Irish chronicles and literary works, like Geoffrey Keating's *Forus Feasa air Éirinn*.⁶

In the scholarship of this period, it is common to find the apparent prestige of medieval or pre-medieval authors of texts fronted in discussions of texts. This may be partly due to Romantic conceptions of the author as solitary genius.⁷ However, it is also apparent that many authors were considered significant and illuminating as characters in their own right, constituting evidence for Ireland's glorious past, and not simply metadata around the texts they purportedly composed. Promoting the qualitative merits of Ireland's ancient civilisation, as it was being reconstructed, was important for the nascent discipline of medieval Irish studies, which had long been intertwined with developing Irish national identity and political movements that had support and impact far beyond academic and intellectual spheres.⁸

Flann Mainistrech features prominently both as an icon of Ireland's lost civilisation and as a figure who made tangible and important contributions to the development of Irish historiography. Before examining these presentations, we consider the corpus of texts attributed to him by nineteenth-century scholars, which constituted the bulk of their evidence for his identity and significance.

2.2 Corpus

Two pioneers in the burgeoning study of the Gaelic manuscript corpus produced bio-bibliographical catalogues of Irish authors and the works attributed to them: Edward O'Reilly (c. 1770–1829), in the first and only volume of the *Transactions of the Ibero-Celtic Society*,⁹ and Eugene O'Curry (1794–1862), in his posthumously

and Literary Representation of Ireland in the Nineteenth Century (Cork: Cork University Press, 1996), pp. 70–77.

⁶ Geoffrey Keating, *The General History of Ireland*, trans. by Dermot O'Connor, 2 vols (Dublin: Christie, 1809); Daniel P. McCarthy, *The Irish Annals: Their Genesis, Evolution and History* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2008), pp. 69–81.

⁷ Bennett, *Author*, pp. 55–71.

⁸ Leerssen, *Remembrance*, pp. 33–156.

⁹ Edward O'Reilly, 'A chronological account of Irish writers', *Transactions of the Ibero-Celtic Society for 1820*, 1 (1820).

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published *Lectures on the Manners and Customs of the Ancient Irish*.¹⁰ Their entries on Flann constitute useful evidence for what he was understood to have composed during this period.¹¹ Indeed, after O'Curry, although Norman Moore quickly recognised the insufficiencies of his catalogue of Flann's works,¹² attempts at full assessments of Flann's corpus would not be resumed until the early 2000s (**LR:3.3.1**¹³).

Their catalogues differ in their ostensive purposes. O'Reilly aimed to provide an introductory framework for Gaelic literary history that would encourage the publication of primary texts and facilitate their study. O'Curry presented his catalogue as evidence of the antiquity and achievements of Gaelic education in Ireland, perhaps reflecting developments in his own time on the cusp of the Gaelic Revival. Both authors emphasise the positive implications of a continuous history of learning for Ireland's status as a nation.¹⁴

The poems listed as Flann's work in each catalogue are summarised in **Appendix 1**. O'Curry's eleven additional poems are almost all attributed to Flann solely in the twelfth-century *Book of Leinster* (*LL*; **2:2.2**). For 'Naemsenchas naem Insi Fáil', he refers to a supposed extract from this poem attributed to Flann in a manuscript of the *Annals of the Four Masters* (*AFM*; **5:2.1.2**).¹⁵ Both catalogues present Flann's output as quite diverse. They include regnal histories and origin legends relating to medieval Irish kingdoms, poems on the more distant legendary past, world history, satire, and hagiography.¹⁶

Whether O'Reilly or O'Curry differentiated what we would term legendary material from more verifiable medieval history in Flann's corpus is not clear, however. Their catalogues make no such distinction overall: O'Reilly's begins with Amairgen (*fl.* AM 2935; a participant in the Goidelic invasion),¹⁷ O'Curry's with the

¹⁰ Eugene O'Curry, *Lectures on the Manners and Customs of Ancient Ireland*, 3 vols (London: Williams and Norgate, 1873), II, 46–178.

¹¹ O'Reilly, 'Chronological Account', pp. lxxv–lxxviii; O'Curry, *Manners*, II, 149–69.

¹² Norman Moore, 'Flann', in *Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. by Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee, 69 vols. (London: Smith, Elder, 1885–1900), XIX, 249–50.

¹³ Cross-references are by Chapter number or section title, followed by section number.

¹⁴ O'Reilly, 'Chronological Account', pp. i–iv; O'Curry, *Manners*, II, 149–69.

¹⁵ O'Curry, *Manners*, II, 166–67.

¹⁶ The poems are discussed in detail by O'Curry and O'Reilly (and others) and in the main body of this thesis.

¹⁷ O'Reilly's date: 'Chronological Account', p. xiii.

Túatha Dé Danann (c. AM 3304).¹⁸ Yet O'Curry characterises Flann's metrical corpus as 'a vast quantity of valuable contributions to the illustration of our history'.¹⁹

For O'Curry, Flann's major contribution was not a poem but a prose work, the 'Synchronisms of Flann' (6:3). This he discussed in more detail in his *Lectures on the Manuscript Materials of Ancient Irish History*.²⁰ In the 'Synchronisms', Flann had supposedly synchronised the kings of Ireland, the world-kings (in the tradition of the Eusebius-Jerome *Chronicon*²¹), the kings of the Irish *cóicid* ('provinces'), and the kings of Alba. However, the medieval manuscript evidence provides little support for the existence of one text under Flann's name that meets this description. O'Curry is actually referring to a number of medieval tracts, often codicologically and chronologically distinct from one another. None are ever attributed to Flann by a medieval scribe, as O'Curry himself admitted.²² O'Reilly did not include the 'Synchronisms' in his own catalogue of Flann's works, noting only an eighteenth-century superscription in the late fourteenth-century *Book of Ballymote (BB)* connecting Flann with one of the medieval tracts also cited by O'Curry.²³

O'Curry was by no means the first to cite the 'Synchronisms of Flann' (**Appendix 29**). This title was first attested in Roderick O'Flaherty's (1629–c. 1718) *Ogygia* (1685) and regularly re-appeared thereafter in printed scholarship referring to various combinations of medieval tracts.²⁴ It is cited most often to supply or corroborate the chronology of medieval Gaelic historical texts. One of the tracts, which I refer to as the *Provincial Synchronisms (6:3.1.4)*,²⁵ was an important source for the origins and antiquity (or, rather, the relative lack thereof) of the kingdom of

¹⁸ O'Curry's date: *Manners*, II, 50.

¹⁹ O'Curry, *Manners*, II, 149.

²⁰ O'Curry, *Manuscript*, pp. 53–57.

²¹ For which, see Rosamond McKitterick, *Perceptions of the Past in the Early Middle Ages* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), 7–34.

²² O'Curry, *Manuscript*, p. 522.

²³ O'Reilly, 'Chronological Account', p. cviii; **6:3.1.1**.

²⁴ Roderick O'Flaherty, *Ogygia, seu Rerum Hibernicarum Chronologia* (London: Everingham, 1685); *Ogygia, or A Chronological Account of Irish Events*, trans. by John Hely, 2 vols (Dublin: McKenzie, 1793).

²⁵ 'Synchronismen der Irischen Könige' ed. by Rudolf Thurneysen, *ZCP*, 19 (1933), 81–99; 'The Edinburgh Synchronisms of Irish Kings', ed. by Alexander Boyle, *Celtica*, 9 (1971), 169–179.

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Alba and, thus, Scotland.²⁶ The origins and usage of the whole concept of the ‘Synchronisms of Flann’ as pseudo-text are traced in **Chapter 6 (6:3.2)**. For the purposes of this literature review, meanwhile, we will simply accept that they existed subjectively for some scholars and were an important source for their interpretations of Irish historical chronology.

One other major prose compilation is attributed to Flann during this period. He was identified by Heinrich Zimmer as the compiler of a collection of sagas that constituted the direct source for the late eleventh- to twelfth-century *Lebor na hUidre* (*LU*),²⁷ the earliest extant medieval Gaelic literary manuscript. Zimmer’s identification was based on Flann’s appearance in a colophon in that manuscript (**2:2.2.3**) and his apparent access to texts that also appear in *LU*, as well as on what he perceives to be Flann’s character as a scholar. References in his poems and in the ‘Synchronisms’ imply not only that he was familiar with numerous sagas but that he strove to reconcile variant narratives and recensions. *LU*’s texts and marginalia, likewise, often comprise disparate extracts and digressions into alternative versions,²⁸ leading Zimmer to identify Flann as the individual most likely to have produced such material.²⁹

Although occasionally revisited,³⁰ this interpretation did not gain widespread acceptance.³¹ Rudolf Thurneysen has specifically critiqued it, arguing that compilation from multiple sources was a feature of all medieval scholarship rather

²⁶ *Chronicles of the Picts and Scots and Other Early Memorials of Scottish History*, ed. and trans. by William F. Skene (Edinburgh: H.M. General Register House, 1867), pp. xxxi, 18–22; Dauvit Broun, *The Irish Identity of the Kingdom of the Scots* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1999), pp. 133–94.

²⁷ Heinrich Zimmer, ‘Über den compilerischen Charakter der irischen Sagentexte im sogenannten Lebor na Huidre’, *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Sprachforschung*, 28 (1887), 417–689 (pp. 678–85). I am grateful to Ms Sarah Arens for her assistance with reading this article.

²⁸ Gregory Toner, ‘Scribe and text in *Lebor na hUidre*: H’s intentions and methodology’, in *Ulidia 2: Proceedings of the Second International Conference on the Ulster Cycle of Tales*, ed. by Ruairí Ó hUiginn and Brian Ó Catháin (Maynooth: An Sagart, 2009), pp. 106–20; Abigail Burnyeat, ‘*Córugud* and *Compilatio* in some manuscripts of *Táin Bó Cúailnge*’, in *Ulidia 2*, ed. by Ó hUiginn and Ó Catháin, pp. 356–74.

²⁹ Zimmer, ‘Über den compilerischen Charakter’, pp. 681–82.

³⁰ Alfred T. Nutt, ‘The Critical Study of Gaelic literature Indispensable for the History of the Gaelic Race’, *The Celtic Review*, 1:1 (July 1904), 47–67 (p. 60); Tomás Ó Concheanainn, ‘*Aided Nath Í* and the Scribes of *Leabhar na hUidhre*’, *Eigse*, 16 (1975), 146–62 (p. 147).

³¹ *Lebor na hUidre: Book of the Dun Cow*, dipl. ed. by Richard I. Best and Osborn Bergin (Dublin: DIAS, 1929) [hereafter *LU*], pp. ix–xiii.

than something defining an individual.³² In light of the ‘Synchronisms of Flann’, however, it is interesting that Zimmer again felt inclined to make Flann responsible for a major compilation without unambiguous medieval evidence. Here, Flann’s imagined expertise is literary, rather than chronological, but the impulse to see him as the controlling intelligence behind a large body of material is similar.

Greater scepticism was applied elsewhere, however. As is evident from **Appendix 1**, some doubt existed around Flann’s authorship of a set of poems on northern Uí Néill politics (hereafter, the ‘Donegal Series’; **Appendix 31**).³³ O’Reilly simply noted that some poems are attributed to other authors in some manuscripts but O’Curry fully supports several such alternative attributions when perceived divergence in style or historical anachronism makes Flann’s authorship untenable. In fact, Flann’s involvement is even more uncertain than they imply, with no clear medieval attributions to him of any of these poems other than ‘Conall cuingid clainne Néill’. Even the latter was not undisputed. Again, these issues are examined in more detail in **Chapter 6 (6:4)**.

Pseudepigraphy was a well-known concept during this period.³⁴ Indeed, the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries could be described as the heyday of debates and controversies over authorship, in which students of the Gaelic past shared, courtesy of James Macpherson (1736–96).³⁵ Yet O’Curry and O’Reilly are rarely openly critical of the attributions to Flann they encounter, only considering rejecting them if alternative attributions are also extant. O’Curry, in particular, appears to be at least dimly aware of the problematic nature of the ‘Synchronisms of Flann’ but does not pursue the matter. Both are much quicker to emphasise that other works by Flann no doubt exist, waiting to be discovered, than they are to scrutinise what they have.³⁶ In general, during this period, it is difficult to tell how sceptical scholars were of manuscript attributions, as they tend to accept attributions without explanation and leave those they have rejected unmentioned.

³² Rudolf Thurneysen, *Die irische Helden- und Königsage* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1921) [hereafter, *IHK*], pp. 24–32 (26–27). I am very grateful to Ms Maureen Cohen for her assistance with reading this material.

³³ See also Eleanor Hull, *A Textbook of Irish Literature*, 2 vols (Dublin: Gill, 1906), I, 215.

³⁴ Harold Love, *Attributing Authorship: An Introduction* (Cambridge: CUP, 2002), pp. 14–31; for example, O’Flaherty, *Ogygia*, pp. 408–09; trans. by Hely, II, 341.

³⁵ Fiona Stafford, ‘Introduction: The Ossianic Poems of James Macpherson’, in *The Poems of Ossian and Related Works*, ed. by Howard Gaskill (Edinburgh: EUP, 1995), pp. v–xxi.

³⁶ O’Reilly, ‘Chronological Account’, p. lxxv; O’Curry, *Manners*, II, 167.

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During this period, the vast majority of the texts attributed to Flann were yet to appear in print and few of the relevant manuscript archives had been catalogued in detail. O’Flaherty included in *Ogygia* a heavily amended version of the *Provincial Synchronisms* (at this point, not regarded as Flann’s work).³⁷ Occasional extracts from Flann’s texts were printed by O’Curry.³⁸ Otherwise, *LU* and *LL*, both containing texts attributed to Flann, only became available in facsimile in 1870 and 1880 respectively.³⁹ *Adam primus pater (6:3.1.1)*, the most cited component of the ‘Synchronisms’, was published from one manuscript in 1892.⁴⁰ Most of the Donegal Series, again from only one manuscript, was published in 1875.⁴¹ In this context, concepts like the ‘Synchronisms of Flann’ gained currency and rigorous assessment of the basis on which texts were in Flann’s corpus was impractical.

2.3 Historiographical saviour and intellectual icon

Alongside texts, some nineteenth-century writers attributed specific intellectual contributions to Flann. In printed scholarship from Fr. John Lynch (*ob. c.* 1677) onwards,⁴² he was cited, on a point-by-point basis, predominantly as a chronologist, his purported work corroborating the medieval Gaelic past’s structural integrity (6:3.2.1). Rev. Charles O’Conor (1764–1828; hereafter O’Conor II) was the first to set out what he saw as Flann’s overall historiographical contribution. O’Conor II hailed him as the scholar who made common-era dating possible through synchronising kings of Ireland, who lacked absolute dating, with the great empires of Eusebian universal history, whose absolute chronology was supposedly well-established.

Meminisse oportebat, Hibernorum veterum chronologiam, neque aerae Mundanae accomodatum fuisse, neque aerae communi, usque ad saeculum X,

³⁷ O’Flaherty, *Ogygia*, pp. 422–24; Hely (trans.), *Ogygia*, II, 368–71.

³⁸ For example, O’Curry, *Manuscript Materials*, pp. 509, 523; *Manners*, II, 166–67.

³⁹ *Leabhar na h-uidhri : a collection of pieces in prose and verse*, facs. ed. by John T. Gilbert (Dublin: RIA 1870); *The Book of Leinster, sometimes called the Book of Glendalough*, facs. ed. by Robert Atkinson (Dublin: RIA, 1880).

⁴⁰ *The Codex Palatino-Vaticanus No. 830: Texts, Translations and Indexes*, ed. and trans. by Bartholemew MacCarthy, Todd Lecture Series 3 (Dublin: RIA, 1892), pp. 286–317.

⁴¹ *The Book of Fenagh*, ed. and trans. by William M. Hennessy and Denis H. Kelly (Dublin: Alexander Thom, 1875).

⁴² John Lynch [publ. as Gratianus Lucius], *Cambrensis Eversus*, ed. and trans. by M. Kelly, 3 vols (Dublin: Celtic Society, 1848–51), III:i, 264–65.

quo Flannus Synchronismos Regum Hibernorum cum Imperatorum annis collatos composuit.⁴³

He goes on to downplay the significance of the otherwise much-vaunted *Annals of Tigernach* (AT) – thought, in this period, to have been compiled by Tigernach úa Braein (ob. 1088)⁴⁴ – since Flann had laid much of their chronological groundwork a generation earlier. O’Curry later concurred with this assessment.⁴⁵

The fact that someone had gone to the trouble of chronologically correlating the traditional Irish *réim rígráide* (‘king-list’) with Latin universal history obviously does not make the former’s earlier swathes any less fictional. Nonetheless, O’Conor II put this interpretation of Flann’s work into practice, regularly drawing on the ‘Synchronisms of Flann’ to resolve chronological difficulties and provide common-era dating in his editions of the medieval Irish chronicles.⁴⁶ Elsewhere, he criticises the Four Masters for not employing Flann’s chronology in their own common-era apparatus.⁴⁷ In his edition of *AFM*, John O’Donovan (1806–61) made good this omission by regularly citing the ‘Synchronisms of Flann’ to corroborate or correct dates in *AFM*’s main text.⁴⁸ Curiously, he also listed the ‘Synchronisms of Flann’ as one of *AFM*’s sources, despite its absence from the Four Masters’ own source list.⁴⁹

While Flann’s poems are occasionally cited for similar purposes (6:2), they were eclipsed, up to the end of the nineteenth century, by the perceived rationalism and comprehensive scope of the ‘Synchronisms’. This pseudo-text was of particular interest because it did not merely re-state Gaelic tradition but enmeshed that tradition within world history as it appeared in texts common to medieval European

⁴³ *Rerum Hibernicarum Scriptores*, ed. by Charles O’Conor [II], 4 vols (Buckingham: Seeley, 1814–26), II, 67: ‘It ought to be remembered that the chronology of the old Irish employed neither *anno mundi* nor common-era dating, until the tenth century [*sic*], in which Flann composed his collated Synchronisms of the Kings of the Irish with the years of the Emperors’ (my translation).

⁴⁴ McCarthy, *Irish Annals*, pp. 72–83.

⁴⁵ O’Curry, *Manuscript Materials*, pp. 53–57.

⁴⁶ For example, *Rerum Hibernicarum*, ed. by O’Conor [II], II, p. 9 (n. 33) (MacCarthy (ed. and trans.), *Codex*, §o (pp. 302–03)); *Rerum Hibernicarum*, II, p. 31 (n. 19) (*Codex*, §t (pp. 308–09)); *Rerum Hibernicarum*, III, pp. 136–37 (n. 3) (Thurneysen (ed.), ‘Synchronismen’, III:C (p. 86)); *Rerum Hibernicarum*, III, p. 41 (n. 1–2) (*Codex*, §§l, m (pp. 298–99)); *Rerum Hibernicarum*, III, p. 52 (n. 1) (*Codex*, §n (pp. 300–01)).

⁴⁷ C. O’Conor [II], *Bibliotheca MS. Stowensis: A Descriptive Catalogue of the Manuscripts of the Stowe Library*, 2 vols (Buckingham: Seeley, 1816), I, 139.

⁴⁸ For example, *Annala Ríoghachta Éireann: Annals of the kingdom of Ireland by the Four Masters*, ed. and trans. by John O’Donovan, 7 vols (Dublin: Hodges and Smith, 1848–1851) [hereafter *AFM*], I, p. 80 (n. o) (MacCarthy (ed. and trans.) *Codex*, §n (pp. 300–01)); *AFM*, I, p. 84 (n. a) (*Codex*, §o, (pp. 300–03)); *AFM*, I, p. 105 (n. s) (*Codex*, §t, (pp. 308–09)).

⁴⁹ *AFM*, I, xlii.

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historiography. By implication, although this is never stated in so many words, its author-figure emerges as someone with an all-comprehending, overarching perspective on Gaelic historiography. However, it is also worth remembering that O'Reilly and O'Curry followed in the tradition of some seventeenth-century scholars, who presented Gaelic learning as a continuous and ancient tradition (5:3.2). This presumably limited Flann's perceived virtuosity, despite the commentary around the 'Synchronisms'.

In discussing Flann's metrical corpus, meanwhile, O'Curry is, of course, positive, but he does not seem to have felt that his poems made a decisive contribution as sources. In relation to three poems from what would later be known as the 'Cenél nÉogain Suite' (2:2.2.1), he stated that 'it would be difficult to over-estimate the historical value of these three poems', but only because they 'supply life and reality of details to the blank dryness of our skeleton pedigrees' and illuminate 'many an obscure historical allusion [...] and many an historical spot as yet unknown'.⁵⁰ He appreciated their details and curiosities but they did not, for him, revolutionise historical understanding in the same way as the 'Synchronisms'. He also pointed out the lack of originality of two further poems but puts this down to Flann's primary role as a monastic teacher.⁵¹

O'Curry, in fact, was often less interested in specific contributions and innovations attributable to Flann than he was in the mere existence in medieval Ireland of great historians composing in Gaelic. The purpose of the extended catalogue of Flann's (and predecessors') work in *Manners and Customs* was to prove 'not only the existence of an early and general education in Erin, but the continued exercise also of the practice of it in the Gaedhelic tongue, without interruption, to a comparatively recent period'.⁵² Likewise, when discussing the 'Synchronisms' in *Manuscript Materials*, he used the fact they concern not just Irish but world history to emphasise the quality of learning in eleventh-century Ireland.⁵³ They were used to make the same point by Thomas Moore (1779–1852).⁵⁴

⁵⁰ O'Curry, *Manners*, II, 156–57.

⁵¹ O'Curry, *Manners*, II, 154–55.

⁵² O'Curry, *Manners*, II, 169.

⁵³ O'Curry, *Manuscript Materials*, p. 56.

⁵⁴ Thomas Moore, *History of Ireland*, 4 vols (London: Longman, Orme, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1835–46), I, 135.

Other Middle Gaelic historians, such as Gilla Cóemain (*fl.* 1072) or Tigernach Úa Bráein (*ob.* 1088), were also used to illustrate medieval Ireland's refined civilisation.⁵⁵ Yet Flann was especially important to O'Curry because he was, as far as O'Curry could tell, a layman employed as a teacher at Monasterboice's monastic school.⁵⁶ Education in medieval Ireland was thus not sourced solely from the Church but instead permeated society.⁵⁷ Furthermore, that Flann produced much of his extant work as a teacher, for O'Curry, enhanced its reliability and utility. It represents mainstream eleventh-century Irish learning, as doubtful or controversial material would have been pedagogically unsuitable.⁵⁸ As we have seen, it also exonerated Flann from occasional platitudes. O'Curry was, in fact, the first modern scholar to treat Flann not simply as a great authority but as situated in a social context in light of which his work can be read.

2.4 The nineteenth-century: conclusions

In the historiographical record, as it stood in the final decades of the nineteenth century, Flann was the Gaelic historiographical tradition's saviour and icon. He had made a coherent and objective history of Ireland possible and his purported achievements in turn exemplified his own eleventh-century civilisation's refinement.

The type of scholarship discussed here soon came to be rivalled by more philological approaches.⁵⁹ One aspect of the latter was less emphasis on 'great authors': that a certain author composed a text became less important than that text's date, genre, and intertextual relationships. The 'Synchronisms', and thus Flann's role as master-chronologist, dropped out of prominence without ever having been directly scrutinised, to re-emerge sporadically thereafter. Serious scholarship last associated

⁵⁵ O'Curry, *Manuscript Materials*, pp. 56–57.

⁵⁶ This is based on Flann having attested offspring (1:4). In reality, marriage among clergy and other ecclesiastical personnel was widely accepted in eleventh-century Ireland (Marie T. Flanagan, *The Transformation of the Irish Church in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2010), pp. 118–68).

⁵⁷ O'Curry, *Manuscript Materials*, p. 75

⁵⁸ O'Curry, *Manuscript Materials*, p. 522.

⁵⁹ Tierney, 'O'Curry', p. 457.

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the ‘Synchronisms’ with him in 2014.⁶⁰ Otherwise, the influence thereafter of this imposing manifestation of Flann remains ambiguous.

3 The strange death of Flann the genius and the subsequent age of doubt: twentieth-century impersonal scholarship

3.1 Introduction: major themes

With its focus shifted to texts, genres, and traditions, twentieth-century scholarship lacked a developed critical framework for discussing medieval Gaelic authorship, whether within the discourse of the medieval sources or in its historical reality. Impersonal philological or literary historical approaches led to studies that powerfully critiqued the notion of Flann as an authoritative and originative historian. However, these were rarely drawn together in an explicit assessment of his meaning as an author-figure. As a result, diverse and arguably contradictory conceptions of him emerge.

Later, the author would return as a significant criterion of study in two main respects. First, any attribution to a known historical individual naturally came to be implicated in assessing a text’s date and provenance. As a result, the veracity of attributions to Flann and others came under direct scrutiny. With much more of his and others’ purported work appearing in print, a renewed impetus emerged to continue the work of O’Reilly and O’Curry and securely establish authors’ corpora.

Scholarship mid-century was also characterised, notoriously, by intense interest and debate concerning the origins and cultural affiliation of medieval Gaelic literature and, by extension, the social context in which it was produced. The two positions involved are often termed ‘nativism’ and ‘anti-nativism’.⁶¹ The former conceived of the literature as the preservation of ancient Celtic or Indo-European ideas by an initially oral, traditional, secular learned class (the *filid* (‘poets’)) with their own institutional claims to antiquity; the medieval church’s useful contribution was largely limited to the technology of writing. In the anti-nativist critique,

⁶⁰ Abigail Burnyeat, “‘Wrenching the club from the hand of Hercules’”: Classical models for medieval Irish *compilatio*, in *Classical Literature and Learning in Medieval Irish Narrative*, ed. by Ralph O’Connor (Cambridge: Brewer, 2014), pp. 196–207 (204).

⁶¹ For a useful, recent summary, see Elva Johnston, *Literacy and Identity in Early Medieval Ireland* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2013), pp. 16–23.

meanwhile, the literature was produced by a medieval, Christian, often fully ecclesiastical, literate learned class. They operated largely on the basis of contemporary political or cultural concerns, although perhaps occasionally making use of ancient narratives and motifs.

The literature's ultimate origins are not relevant to this study. However, the controversy equally concerned the organisation of medieval Gaelic learning and textual production. This aspect generated renewed and useful historical interest in known authors' identities. In this context, Flann returned to prominence; he sometimes personifies distinctively 'monastic' learning and sometimes a synthesis between cultural forces. Contradictions in his characterisation became positively meaningful.

Throughout much of this scholarship, authorship, where it is relevant at all, is consistently discussed as an actual, historical phenomenon. It was not necessarily considered radically creative: twentieth-century scholars were generally comfortable with the idea of medieval Gaelic texts having been produced within a tradition, synthesised from pre-existing sources, and then corrupted, adapted, or synthesised anew. However, individual authors themselves were invariably considered in relation to attributional issues or to their biographies, cultural affiliations, and social identities. With these questions resolved, the understood author-figures were in a position to impute provenance, context and meaning to the extant literature for the modern reader. Left undiscussed are the rhetorical use of authorship and author-figures within medieval Gaelic literary discourse and the subjective experience of authorship by medieval Gaelic readers. This dimension has begun to be addressed in more recent scholarship (**LR:4**).

3.2 Shattering questions: text-centred scholarship

Where once named authors had given structure and legitimacy to medieval Gaelic literature, texts themselves came to be the major source of evidence both for their own context and provenance and in broader historical or cultural studies. Critical self-awareness is not a feature of scholarship in the early twentieth century, but it was occasionally remarked that prior scholars' focus on authors had inhibited the study of texts. While Tigernach úa Braein, abbot of Clonmacnoise, had been

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regarded since the seventeenth century as *AT*'s eponymous author,⁶² Eoin MacNeill argued against crediting him with full authorial responsibility, attributing this erroneous view to Sir James Ware (1594–1666).

With the naming of Tigernach by Ware, what we may call the legend of Tigernach sets out on its course; and successive writers find satisfaction in building up a personality and a reputation, where six preceding centuries show nothing but a name.⁶³

Also while considering medieval Gaelic chronicles, Robert A. S. Macalister alluded to a new approach less concerned with authorship.

I had grown up with O'Curry's ideas of great scholars, Tigernach, MacFirbis, Cathal MacManus, the Four Masters and so on, who drew up these arid lists of names and dates. But now that I was actually face to face with them, and their suppositious work, I could not help asking myself the question: why did they adopt this form? Surely a connected history, on the lines of 'Lebor Gabála' or, for the matter of that, of the Old Testament, would have been more interesting and much easier to write! And then suddenly there came out of the void the shattering question: how did they do so?⁶⁴

He went on to argue that the extant chronicles could not have had single authors: they are compilations, the individuals under whose names they circulate being editors and compilers within a textual tradition rather than investigative historians. This approach was, of course, not original to the twentieth century, even where Flann was concerned: O'Curry had commented on Flann's sources for the 'Synchronisms' and saw little originality in the *Cenél nÉogain Suite*.⁶⁵ However, its application thereafter seems to have had greater impact on perceptions of Flann's authorial role.

3.2.1 Flann as 'synthetic historian'

Several scholars came to ask Macalister's 'shattering question' concerning texts attributed to Flann. MacNeill described Flann as a 'synthetic historian', a category he himself devised. That is, Flann was not a direct tradition-bearer but a correlator and

⁶² McCarthy, *Irish Annals*, pp. 72–83.

⁶³ Eoin MacNeill, 'The Authorship and Structure of the "Annals of Tigernach"', *Ériu*, 7 (1914), 30–113 (pp. 30–38).

⁶⁴ Robert A. S. Macalister, 'The Sources of the Prefaces to the "Tighernach" Annals', *Irish Historical Studies* 14:13 (March 1944), 38–57 (p. 45).

⁶⁵ O'Curry, *Manuscript Materials*, pp. 56, 521; O'Curry, *Manners*, II, 156–57; **LR:2.3**.

harmoniser of traditional materials and pre-existing texts.⁶⁶ He applies this model when interpreting a number of examples of Flann's purported work. For instance, O'Connor II, O'Curry, and others had cited the various components of the 'Synchronisms' interchangeably under Flann's name. MacNeill, likewise, saw Flann as devising and composing *Adam primus pater*. However, on the basis of close textual study (now considered erroneous), he concluded that Flann had merely translated the *Invasion Synchronisms* (6:3.1.3) from an eighth-century Hiberno-Latin original.⁶⁷

MacNeill also examined (and edited) a series of poems, dominated by the Cenél nÉogain Suite, on various Uí Neill kingdoms attributed to Flann in *LL* (hereafter, the 'Uí Néill Series'; 2:2.2.1). While accepting the attribution, MacNeill focused on the poems' sources. For history before c. 950, he argued, Flann depended on a limited array of texts.⁶⁸

Flann does not seem to have gone much in search of material to sources other than the annals and regnal lists. These provided just the sort of record that he desired. His work was mainly to abstract from them, and to supply the 'thread of poetry'.⁶⁹

Flann emerges from MacNeill's analysis as a discerning reader and versifier of pre-existing sources that are often still extant for us.

Likewise, for Douglas Hyde, the 'Synchronisms' were a genuine scholarly achievement but Flann's poems are, 'though composed in elaborate metres, anything but creative and imaginative'.⁷⁰ Like O'Curry, he envisaged Flann, as a teacher, composing them to 'enshrine [...] knowledge', derived from sources like the annals.⁷¹ Much more recently, Daniel McCarthy has traced Flann's Tara Diptych's (2:2.2.1) core king-list back to a list from the now-lost tenth-century *Saltair Caisil* ('Psalter of

⁶⁶ Eoin MacNeill, 'The Irish synthetic historians', *The New Ireland Review*, 26 (December 1906), 193–206; Eoin MacNeill, *Celtic Ireland* (Dublin: Lester, 1921), pp. 37–40; see also *IHK*, pp. 26–27.

⁶⁷ 'An Irish Historical Tract Dated A.D. 721', ed. and trans. by Eoin MacNeill, *PRIA C*, 28 (1910), 123–48; MacNeill, *Celtic Ireland*, pp. 26–27. See also Thomas F. O'Rahilly, *Early Irish History and Mythology* (Dublin: DIAS, 1946), pp. 410–18; R. Mark Scowcroft, 'Leabhar Gabhála Éirenn Part I: The Growth of the Text', *Ériu*, 38 (1987), 79–140 (pp. 125–27).

⁶⁸ 'Poems by Flann Mainistrech on the Dynasties of Ailech, Mide and Brega', ed. and trans. by Eoin MacNeill, *Archivium Hibernicum*, 2 (1913), 37–99 (pp. 40–42).

⁶⁹ MacNeill, 'Poems', pp. 41–42.

⁷⁰ Douglas Hyde, *A Literary History of Ireland from the Earliest Times to the Present Day* (London: Unwin, 1899), p. 445.

⁷¹ O'Curry, *Manners*, II, 154–55; Hyde, *Literary History*, p. 445.

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Cashel’).⁷² Flann’s use of a pre-existing text, with unnoticed inconsistencies, led McCarthy to question explicitly his status as master historian and chronologist; such broader questions are asked much more rarely in early scholarship, however.

MacNeill’s examination of the *Invasion Synchronisms* led to him distancing them from Flann. The *Provincial Synchronisms* provide a further example of the subsequent treatment of such material. On account of their Alban king-list, the *Provincial Synchronisms* had long been recognised as an important Scottish historical source (6:3.2.1). William Skene had extracted and printed the king-list under the title ‘the Synchronisms of Flann Mainistrech’ in 1867 and dated it to the early eleventh century.⁷³ The final section, which reaches 1119, he regarded as a ‘continuation’.⁷⁴ He was followed in this by Alan Anderson in 1922.⁷⁵

Anderson’s colleague (and wife), Marjorie Anderson, came to treat the tract rather differently. For much of her career, she regarded it as being by Flann.⁷⁶ However, by 1973, she was, for some reason, much more cautious.

The Dál Riata lists are all descended from one which must have been extant in Ireland in the eleventh century. It was a source of the Middle Irish work known as the Irish synchronisms, sometimes called by the name of Fland Mainistrech.⁷⁷

Nonetheless, she continued to date the text to the eleventh century and regarded the shorter version as the original.⁷⁸ This residual link with Flann was finally severed by Dauvit Broun in 1999, who argued for the priority of the longer version. Broun did not even mention Flann: the author was an Irish ‘scholar writing in or soon after 1119’.⁷⁹ Yet, even for the Andersons, the text never seems to have been significant

⁷² McCarthy, *Irish Annals*, pp. 281–84. See also Thomas M. Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* (Cambridge: CUP, 2000), p. 485.

⁷³ Skene (ed. and trans.), *Chronicles*, pp. xxxi, 18–22.

⁷⁴ See also Thurneysen, ‘Synchronismen’, pp. 81–83.

⁷⁵ Alan O. Anderson, *Early Sources of Scottish History: AD 500–1286*, 2 vols (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1922), I, lvi.

⁷⁶ Marjorie O. Anderson, ‘The Lists of the Kings’, *Scottish Historical Review*, 28:2 (October 1949), 104–118 (p. 109).

⁷⁷ Marjorie O. Anderson, *Kings and Kingship in Early Scotland*, 1st ed. (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1973), p. 44. The coverage of this matter in the second edition (1980) is identical.

⁷⁸ Anderson, *Kings and Kingship*, pp. 182–83. For more information, see Boyle, ‘Edinburgh Synchronisms’, pp. 169–70.

⁷⁹ Broun, *Irish Identity*, pp. 2, 171 (n. 23). See also *Three Historical Poems Ascribed to Gilla Cóemáin: A Critical Edition of the Work of an Eleventh-Century Irish Scholar*, ed. and trans. by Peter J. Smith (Münster: Nodus, 2007), p. 81, but also 6:3.1.4.

because of its author but because it is early compared to other Scottish historical documents.⁸⁰ Flann's purported authorship was little more than one of several dating criteria. Indeed, even as an early twelfth-century work, Broun still treats the *Provisional Synchronisms* as an important text.

Flann's authorship was thus often not refuted but simply circumnavigated. In a final example, a heated exchange took place between Tomás Ó Concheanainn and Máire West on the textual history of *Aided Nath Í ocus a adnacol* (*ANÍ*; **2:4.2.2, 4:2.1.5**). The text is described as Flann's work in some manuscripts but this is of very limited relevance to Ó Concheanainn and West, who focus on textual criticism.

3.2.2 Dating texts and attributing authorship

With access ever increasing to primary materials and philological data and insights, authorship came to be bound up in the development and critique of methodologies for dating texts. An authorial attribution, internal or in manuscript, can constitute evidence for dating a text, while the date deduced can support or undermine an attribution. Attributions, of course, can be problematic in their own way. Texts are not uncommonly attributed to fantastical authors or different authors in different manuscripts, for example. The author thus resumed prominence in scholarship not as a transcendent source of context and legitimacy but rather as a piece of data in a text's profile, often itself inviting scrutiny.

The strategies specifically involved in dating and attributing Middle Gaelic texts were reviewed by Gearóid Mac Eoin in 1982.⁸¹ After demonstrating the ambiguities and problems with internal or external attributions, historical references in-text, and linguistic dating, Mac Eoin concluded that no one method can safely be employed in isolation, only as wide a range as possible.⁸² Authors were, however, central to his approach. Specifically, he called for more medieval poetry to be published in 'editions of the type "The Poems of..."', which would establish an

⁸⁰ Anderson, *Kings and Kingship*, pp. 182–198.

⁸¹ Gearóid Mac Eoin, 'The Dating of Middle Irish Texts', *PBA*, 68 (1982), 109–37. See also Katherine Simms, *Medieval Gaelic Sources* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2009), pp. 104–05.

⁸² Mac Eoin, 'Dating', p. 137.

author's 'canon' through comparing texts alongside known historical information.⁸³ This proposal was later endorsed by Liam Breatnach.⁸⁴

Before 1982, Mac Eoin had already deployed an eclectic range of methods in studies of two texts attributed to Flann.⁸⁵ He rejected the external attribution in the fifteenth-century, sole extant version of 'Luid Iasón ina luing lóir' (4:2.3.2) after detailed linguistic and stylistic analysis of the text, comparing it with *LL*'s 'dánta Fhlainn'.⁸⁶ However, he accepted 'Cruithnig cid dos farclam' (3:2.1) as Flann's work on the basis of an external attribution and an internal reference to the still-living Mac Bethad (Macbeth), king of Alba (1040–57), while admitting that the linguistic evidence might place it anywhere between 900 and 1200.⁸⁷

Shortly after the publication of Mac Eoin's 1982 study, James Carney produced a periodised list of Old and Middle Gaelic poems datable by non-linguistic criteria, such as 'reliable' manuscript attributions or historical references.⁸⁸ The list was intended as 'anchorage' for assessment of more debatable linguistic criteria.⁸⁹ Since the texts' linguistic and non-linguistic periodisations largely align, he advocated cautious confidence in both methods.

Authors were also central to Carney's list. The majority of the poems he used have named authors and their floruits largely define his periods. Indeed, some periods consist entirely of a single author's 'reliable' oeuvre. Flann's period has only one poem, out of ten in total, not attributed to him.⁹⁰ While providing more detail concerning other poets, Carney never set out what makes a reliable manuscript attribution to Flann. *LL* attributes eight of his nine listed poems to him, *LU*

⁸³ Mac Eoin, 'Dating', p. 124.

⁸⁴ Liam Breatnach, 'Poets and Poetry', in *Progress in Medieval Irish Studies*, ed. by Kim McCone and Katherine Simms (Maynooth: Department of Old Irish, St Patrick's College, 1996), pp. 65–78 (74–77).

⁸⁵ See also Brían Ó Cuív, 'Some developments in Irish metrics', *Éigse*, 12 (1967–1968), 273–90 (pp. 284–85).

⁸⁶ 'Dán ar Chogadh na Traoi', ed. and trans. by Gearóid Mac Eoin, *Studia Hibernica*, 1 (1961), 19–55 (pp. 27–29, 49). However, see also Leslie Diane-Myrick, *From the De Excidio Troiae Historia to the Togail Troí: Literary-Cultural Synthesis in a Medieval Irish Adaptation of Dares' Troy Tale* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1993), p. 83; Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Flann Mainistrech', in *Medieval Ireland: An Encyclopaedia*, ed. by Seán Duffy (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 303–06 (305).

⁸⁷ Gearóid Mac Eoin, 'On the Irish Legend of the Origin of the Picts', *Studia Hibernica*, 4 (1964), 138–154 (p. 139).

⁸⁸ James Carney, 'The dating of early Irish verse texts, 500–1100', *Éigse*, 19:2 (1983), 177–216 (pp. 182–89).

⁸⁹ Carney, 'Dating', p. 182.

⁹⁰ Carney, 'Dating', pp. 180, 189.

corroborating one attribution,⁹¹ although Carney ignored four further examples from *LL*.⁹² This manuscript's early date and generally acknowledged quality may have been a prominent factor for him, as it was for others.⁹³ Also, Carney's nine poems are mostly attributed to Flann both internally and externally (2:2.2). Carney seems to have deliberately avoided making assumptions about Flann's expected language, style, or subject-matter and instead focused on identifying corroboratable attributions via manuscript provenance. His list was not determined by how he understood Flann, as an author, but about what he defined as reliable evidence. This was then used to date the texts and provide his desired non-linguistic framework.

No attempt at a comprehensive assessment of Flann's corpus had appeared since the bio-bibliographies by O'Reilly, O'Curry, and Moore. Nonetheless, during this period, Flann acquired a reputation for having work erroneously attributed to him. For Mac Eoin, 'Flann is one of those poets to whom scribes often attributed poems of unknown authorship'.⁹⁴ Francis J. Byrne expressed a similar view and supplied several examples.⁹⁵ Interestingly, Byrne saw factual inaccuracy or poor stylistic quality as reasons to disassociate a poem from Flann. Brían Ó Cuív also observed gradations in metrical quality in poems attributed to him.⁹⁶ From the additional presence of anachronistic material in the less technically accomplished poems, he suggested that they might be misattributed. Otherwise, it is unclear whence came this conviction that Flann's work could be defined by quality.

Despite their different approaches, all these scholars broadly tend to agree on what attributions were not to be trusted (see **Appendix 2**). Dóra Póðör is something of an exception. She is the only scholar who subsequently adopted anything resembling the broad comparative approach to Flann's corpus recommended by Mac

⁹¹ The exception is 'Réidig dam, a Dé, do nim' (1:6.3, 3:2.1, 4:2.3.1).

⁹² Namely, 'Éstid a eolchu cen ón', 'Toisich na llongse tar ller', 'Mide maigen clainne Cuinn', and 'Síl nÁedo Sláine na sleg' (2:2.2.1).

⁹³ Gerard Murphy, 'On the Dates of Two Sources Used in Thurneysen's *Heldensage*', *Ériu*, 16 (1952), 145–56 (p. 152); Mac Eoin, 'Dating', p. 124; *The Irish Sex Aetates Mundi*, ed. and trans. by Dáibhí Ó Cróinín (Dublin: DIAS, 1983) [hereafter, *SAM*], p. 43; Katherine Simms (*Medieval Gaelic Sources*, p. 105).

⁹⁴ Mac Eoin, 'Dating', p. 139.

⁹⁵ Francis J. Byrne, 'A Historical Note on Cnogba', in George Eogan, 'Excavations at Knowth, Co. Meath 1962–65', *PRIA C*, 66 (1967–1968), 299–400 (pp. 383–400 (391–92)); Francis J. Byrne, 'Ireland and her Neighbours, c.1014–1072', in *A New History of Ireland I: Prehistoric and Early Ireland*, ed. by Dáibhí Ó Cróinín (Oxford: OUP, 2005), pp. 862–98 (865).

⁹⁶ Ó Cuív, 'Developments', pp. 284–85.

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Eoin and Breatnach (her doctoral supervisor). For practical reasons, however, her study was restricted to one manuscript. Examining the language and metrics of poems attributed to Flann in *LL*,⁹⁷ she directly opposed Ó Cuív and Byrne's scepticism and argued that her corpus' twelve poems dated to Flann's lifetime and that all could be by the same author, who was probably, therefore, Flann. She concluded, in the process, that Flann composed in a conservative form of Middle Gaelic somewhat akin to the language of *Saltair na Rann*.⁹⁸ The variation in metrical quality noted by Ó Cuív was confirmed by her study but Póidör argued that the same author need not have always used similar metres.⁹⁹ Specifically in the case of 'Mide maigen clainne Cuinn', her arguments have been critiqued and rejected by Peter J. Smith, who edited the poem from all available manuscripts.¹⁰⁰ He reiterated the call for more comparative, author-based work.

Even on the basis of the texts scholars have examined, the questions of what Flann composed and how that is to be determined remain unresolved. It should also be noted, however, that the overwhelming focus of attention has been on poems from the three major Middle Gaelic manuscripts: *LU*, Rawl.B.502, and *LL*. This is perhaps because the manuscripts are early or because they were available in diplomatic editions or published facsimile.¹⁰¹ Yet new attributions of poems and prose to Flann continue to appear in the extant record right through the Middle Ages and into the modern manuscript tradition and early printed scholarship. While students of medieval Gaelic materials have long accepted that early works can be preserved in very late codices,¹⁰² this evidence, as Mac Eoin briefly notes,¹⁰³ often remained (and

⁹⁷ Dóra Póidör, 'Twelve Poems Attributed to Fland Mainistrech from the Book of Leinster' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Trinity College Dublin, 1999), 2 vols. I am very grateful to Dr Póidör for giving me access to portions of her thesis. Póidör inexplicably omits 'A gillu gairm n-ilgráda' and 'Ríg Themra toebaige iar tain'.

⁹⁸ Póidör, 'Twelve Poems', II, 186.

⁹⁹ Póidör, 'Twelve Poems', II, 188.

¹⁰⁰ 'Mide Maigen Clainne Cuind: A Medieval Poem on the Kings of Mide', ed. and trans. by Peter J. Smith, *Peritia*, 15 (2001), 108–44 (pp. 109–10). Dagmar Schlüter is also sceptical (*History or Fable? The Book of Leinster as a Document of Cultural Memory in Twelfth-Century Ireland* (Münster: Nodus, 2010), p. 138).

¹⁰¹ *Rawlinson B 502: A Collection of Pieces in Prose and Verse in the Irish language Compiled during the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, facs. ed. by Kuno Meyer (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1909); *LU*; *Book of Leinster, formerly Leabar na Núachongbála*, dipl. ed. by Richard I. Best, Osborn Bergin, and M. A. O'Brien, 6 vols (Dublin: DIAS, 1954–1967) [hereafter *LL*].

¹⁰² Elizabeth Boyle and Deborah Hayden, 'Introduction: Authority and Adaptation in Medieval Ireland', in *Authorities and Adaptations: The Reworking and Transmission of Textual Sources in*

remains) unevaluated and unintegrated into discussions of Middle Gaelic authors' corpora.

While most scholars refer to varied evidence when considering an attribution to Flann, the text's language and style are usually prominent. When applied specifically to assessing authorship rather than date, these criteria are rooted in the premise that we can access an author's authentic linguistic formations. This is argued to be achievable either through selection of an early or well-regarded manuscript, such as Póidör's choice of *LL*,¹⁰⁴ or through editorial reconstruction of an archetype. In the wider world of textual criticism, however, both approaches have been critiqued and it has been argued that an archetype, let alone an authorial original, is often not recoverable.¹⁰⁵ While it could be argued that a metrical text's very purpose was to preserve the original author's words, even poetry could be amended or supplemented and still attributed to the original author. This must qualify any implied claims to access to an author's exact words and typical language and style via later manuscripts. These issues will be discussed further in this thesis but, for now, we can note that the conception of authorship generated by the need to date texts did not necessarily match its conception in the Middle Ages.

3.3 Characterisations of Flann

While discussions of linguistic dating and authorial attributions were ultimately text-focused, authors did come to be examined as historical characters by scholars considering the cultural affiliations of medieval Gaelic literature and of the personnel behind it. Scholarship produced in this context (and unrelated to it) places an interesting range of emphases when assessing Flann's identity and has been formative in contemporary academic conceptions of him.

3.3.1 'A *filli* in monk's clothing': how ecclesiastical was Flann?

Flann's precise relationship with the church had long been discussed. Neither O'Curry nor Moore was comfortable seeing Flann as purely a monk (**LR:2.3**).

Medieval Ireland, ed. by Elizabeth Boyle and Deborah Hayden (Dublin: DIAS, 2014), pp. xvii–xlvii (xxi–xxiii).

¹⁰³ Mac Eoin, 'Dating', pp. 124–25.

¹⁰⁴ Póidör, 'Twelve Poems', I, vii–ix.

¹⁰⁵ On these issues in relation to medieval Gaelic literature, see Kevin Murray, 'Reviews, reviewers, and critical texts', *CMCS*, 57 (Summer 2009), 51–70.

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O'Curry argued generally that medieval Irish learning was not confined to the church but permeated society. While Flann was based at Monasterboice, 'it is well known that he was not in orders. He is never mentioned as an ecclesiastic; and we know he was married and left issue [...] In fact, his employment was simply that of a lay teacher in a great school; and he filled the office of *Fer leighinn*, or Chief Professor'.¹⁰⁶ Moore posits a secular, dissolute youth prior to joining Monasterboice's community: Flann 'began life as a poetical historian, wandering through the northern half of Ireland'.¹⁰⁷ O'Curry referred to the attestation of Flann's offspring, while Moore's evidence is not identifiable.

As time went by, however, Flann became increasingly associated with monasticism, perhaps influenced by the wider historiographical tendency to see monasticism as dominating church and society in early medieval Ireland.¹⁰⁸ Macalister painted an idyllic picture of Flann gaining lifelong inspiration from Monasterboice's famous high crosses while being 'nurtured' by the community's library.¹⁰⁹ Examining the annals and the genealogies, Margaret Dobbs explored the political control of Monasterboice by Flann's wider kin-group, the Ciannachta.¹¹⁰ Gerard Murphy included a short note emphasising Flann's connection with Monasterboice in his edition of 'Uasalepscop Érenn Áed' (1:3).¹¹¹

Later, attempts were made to differentiate between ecclesiastical (or monastic; the terms are often used interchangeably in this context) and secular scholars' respective output. MacNeill's concept of 'synthetic history' was viewed as instrumental. The compilation of traditional narratives and lore into history or canonical literature, such as *Lebor Gabála Érenn (LGÉ)* or the more developed sagas, was distinguished from preserving the traditions themselves and performing the direct social functions of praise and satire. MacNeill and O'Curry had understood

¹⁰⁶ O'Curry, *Manners*, p. 56; cf. Hyde, *Literary History*, p. 445.

¹⁰⁷ Moore, 'Flann', p. 249.

¹⁰⁸ Colmán Etchingham, *Church Organisation in Ireland, A.D. 650 to 1000* (Maynooth: Laigin Publications, 1999), pp. 12–46.

¹⁰⁹ Robert A. S. Macalister, *Muiredach: Abbot of Monasterboice 890-923 A.D.* (Dublin: Hodges and Figgis, 1914), p. 63.

¹¹⁰ Margaret E. Dobbs, 'The Pedigree and Family of Flann Mainistrech', *Journey of the County Louth Archaeological Society*, 5 (1921–24), 149–53 (p. 149).

¹¹¹ 'A Poem in Praise of Áodh Úa Foirréidh, Bishop of Armagh (1032–1056)', ed. and trans. by Gerard Murphy in *Measgra i gCuimhne Mhichil Uí Chléirigh*, ed. by Sylvester O'Brien (Dublin: Assisi Press, 1944), pp. 140–64 (p. 160).

the *filid* – secular, learned professionals – as fulfilling all these roles.¹¹² Critiquing this interpretation, Seán Mac Airt argued that synthetic history is fundamentally ecclesiastical, being external to secular tradition itself.¹¹³ Alongside named authors' extant output, he also sought to identify divergent learned traditions in the medieval sources' distinctive terminology. For example, titles like *fer léiginn* (lit. 'man of reading'; a textual scholar in a monastic school) or *suí filidechta agus senchasa* ('master of poetry and history') he viewed as monastic, while *fili* ('poet') or *éices* ('sage') denoted someone in the secular tradition.¹¹⁴ This line of enquiry was later developed by Michael Richter, who likewise strictly distinguished two traditions.¹¹⁵

Proinsias Mac Cana agreed with Mac Airt in identifying syntheticism as 'the great differentiating factor' between ecclesiastical and secular learning.¹¹⁶ However, he saw the two classes' relationship as both unstable and open to cross-fertilisation. Ecclesiastical scholarship adopted both the traditional materials and the artistic forms and styles of the *filid*, while the *filid* accepted and employed their counterparts' medieval Christian historiographical framework.¹¹⁷ Following the twelfth-century's reforms in the Irish church, both were consolidated into hereditary specialised learned families modelled on the ethos and professional organisation of the *filid*.

Within this framework, Mac Airt took issue with O'Curry's downplaying of Flann's identity as an ecclesiastical scholar.¹¹⁸ While such personnel are occasionally called *filid*, 'in all probability they had very little connexion with secular schools'.¹¹⁹ Mac Cana agreed, refusing to regard Flann 'simply as a *fili* in monk's clothing' but seeing him as typically monastic.¹²⁰ On the other hand, he also implicated Flann in the considerable cross-fertilisation that had developed, by the Middle Gaelic period, between 'the work of *filid* like Cínaed úa hArtacáin and Cuán úa Lothcháin and on

¹¹² O'Curry, *Manuscript Materials*, p. 583; MacNeill, 'Synthetic historians', pp. 204–05; MacNeill, *Celtic Ireland*, p. 37.

¹¹³ Seán Mac Airt, 'Filidecht and Coimgne', *Ériu*, 18 (1958), 139–52.

¹¹⁴ Mac Airt, 'Filidecht', pp. 150–51.

¹¹⁵ Michael Richter, 'The Personnel of Learning in Early Medieval Ireland', in *Irland und Europa im Früheren Mittelalter: Bildung und Literatur*, ed. by Michael Richter and Próinséas Ní Chathain (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1996), pp. 275–308.

¹¹⁶ Proinsias Mac Cana, 'The Rise of the Later Schools of *Filidecht*', *Ériu*, 25 (1978), 126–46 (p. 138).

¹¹⁷ Mac Cana, 'Later Schools', pp. 138–39.

¹¹⁸ Mac Airt, 'Filidecht', p. 150 (n. 5).

¹¹⁹ Mac Airt, 'Filidecht', p. 151.

¹²⁰ Mac Cana, 'Later Schools', p. 138 (n. 48).

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the other that of Flann mac Maelmaedóc and Flann Mainistrech himself'.¹²¹ Flann is not prominent syntactically in this quotation's context nor in Mac Cana's argument overall, so the emphatic use of 'himself' implies that he was still, for Mac Cana, the archetypal ecclesiastical scholar. Yet Mac Cana's overall point was that personnel apparently distinguishable in milieu operated in a common literary and historiographical culture. Distinctions in terminology might be because of 'social or professional affiliation' rather than cultural affiliation or repertoire.¹²²

It came to be generally agreed that the expertise and functions of *filid* and *fir léiginn* merged, lost their distinction in our sources, or had never really been separate. Interestingly, Flann (among others) is often found at the resulting intersection, with his ecclesiastical credentials once again called into question. Richter, despite maintaining that 'there had been no merging' of ecclesiastical and secular learning even as late as the twelfth century, conceded the existence – again, in the Middle Gaelic period – of a 'grey zone in the documentation' consisting of descriptions of scholars employing terms from both categories of learning,¹²³ Flann appearing as an example.¹²⁴ Kim McCone, who argued that ecclesiastical connections can be identified for all known *filid*, cited Flann as exemplifying the interdisciplinary learning of 'monastic types'.¹²⁵

Donnchadh Ó Corráin also favoured collapsing the distinction between ecclesiastical and secular scholars. He argued that native, secular learning had assimilated with ecclesiastical scholarship at a very early date in Ireland, resulting in a single 'mandarin class' that was literate, Christian, produced by and in control of the monastic education system, and highly political.¹²⁶ Indeed, since medieval ecclesiastical institutions were themselves politicised, distinguishing secular and ecclesiastical elite power is not always meaningful. They employed 'synthetic history' in order to promote an over-kingship of Ireland and the power of major

¹²¹ Mac Cana, 'Later Schools', p. 138.

¹²² Mac Cana, 'Later Schools', p. 138.

¹²³ Richter, 'Personnel', p. 287. See also Mac Cana, 'Later Schools', p. 126.

¹²⁴ Richter, 'Personnel', p. 286.

¹²⁵ Kim McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature* (Maynooth: An Sagart, 1990), pp. 22–27 (24).

¹²⁶ Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'Nationality and Kingship in Pre-Norman Ireland', in *Historical Studies XI: Nationality and the Pursuit of National Independence*, ed. by Theodore W. Moody (Belfast: Appletree Press, 1978), pp. 1–35; Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'Historical Need and Literary Narrative', in *Proceedings of the Seventh International Congress of Celtic Studies*, ed. by David E. Evans, John G. Griffith, and Edward M. Jope (Oxford: Ellis Evans, 1986), pp. 141–58.

dynasties in general, responding to the needs of influential elites.¹²⁷ They were also capable of shaping events: Ó Corráin understood the Irish *natio* as their invention before it gained political currency.¹²⁸

Like Mac Cana, Elva Johnston saw social and political roles and means of influence as distinguishing different categories of medieval Gaelic learned personnel. While critiquing the excessive uniformity and insularity of Ó Corráin's 'mandarin class' model,¹²⁹ she also traced how *filid* and ecclesiastical scholars were conceived in the literature as united, along with secular rulers, in membership of elite communities of learning, power, and cognisance of the social hierarchy that supported them.¹³⁰ Both Ó Corráin and Johnston saw Flann as a leading member of the elite communities they respectively envisaged but also continued to see him as operating in an ecclesiastical milieu. Ó Corráin described Flann as a 'churchman', while noting the tendency for less successful royal dynasties to engage in politicised ecclesiastical scholarship, thus blurring distinctions.¹³¹ For Johnston, he is a 'clerical writer' who nonetheless worked at the top of the social hierarchy.¹³²

Here, therefore, as with scholarship on dating texts, Flann was often implicated in models of the literature's origins in the absence of comprehensive assessments of his identity, significance, or even corpus. For all the extant evidence's incompleteness, he was sometimes regarded as a strongly ecclesiastical or monastic figure. However, recalling O'Curry and Moore's reluctance to categorise him as such unequivocally, he came to exemplify the intersection of political ideology and other cultural influences within ecclesiastical scholarship that constituted the way forward from the confrontation between nativism and anti-nativism. The conception of him as a synthesist, which was key to these aspects of his identity, thus endured in evolved form. Indeed, Máire Herbert has presented the Middle Gaelic period as characterised

¹²⁷ Ó Corráin, 'Nationality', pp. 17–21; see also Edel Bhreathnach, 'Kings, the kingship of Leinster and the regnal poems of *laídshenchas Laigen*: a reflection of dynastic politics in Leinster, 650–1150', in *Senchas: Studies in Early and Medieval Irish Archaeology, History and Literature in Honour of Francis J. Byrne*, ed. by Alfred P. Smyth (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000), pp. 299–312.

¹²⁸ Ó Corráin, 'Nationality', p. 19.

¹²⁹ Johnston, *Literacy*, pp. 23–24.

¹³⁰ Johnston, *Literacy*, esp. pp. 131–156.

¹³¹ Ó Corráin, 'Nationality', p. 18.

¹³² Johnston, *Literacy*, p. 151.

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by the re-interpretation and compilation of a literary heritage to address contemporary concerns, an agenda that Flann's work exemplifies.¹³³

This emphasis on authors being defined by contemporary concerns and relationships is particularly significant. In this view, authors like Flann derived both the agenda for their work and their personae in authentic sources from their political and social relationships, rather than from affiliation to a particular learned tradition, whether ecclesiastical or secular. Flann's significance is to be found in his more immediate connections and circumstances, rather than in defining categories in which he has been placed. He is to be approached as a three-dimensional historical character possessing perspectives, assumptions, and loyalties, basic considerations that had, nonetheless, generally been neglected before this point.

As a result, just as Mac Eoin had favoured focused, author-based studies of language and style, both Breatnach and Johnston called for more attention to be given to reconstructing individual authors' biographies and contexts with less focus on their membership of broad categories.¹³⁴ A solid corpus of such studies has since appeared,¹³⁵ with four concerning Flann.¹³⁶ When not based around editions or textual studies, they focus on authors' potential corpora, the inevitable attributional and identification issues, what is known of their backgrounds and careers, and how their work is to be read in their immediate contexts.

¹³³ Máire Herbert, 'Crossing Historical and Literary Boundaries: Irish Written Culture around the Year 1000', *CMCS* 53/54 (2007), 87–102 (pp. 92–93).

¹³⁴ Breatnach, 'Poets', pp. 74–77; Johnston, *Literacy*, p. 161.

¹³⁵ For a list and an example in itself: Kevin Murray, 'Gilla Mo Dutu Úa Casaide', in *Cín Chille Cúile: Essays in Honour of Pádraig Ó Riain*, ed. by John Carey, Máire Herbert, and Kevin Murray (Aberystwyth: Celtic Studies Publications, 2004), pp. 150–62 (150). Later examples include John Carey, 'Máel Muru Othna [Maelmura] (d. 887)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [hereafter *ODNB*], ed. by Lawrence Goldman (Oxford: OUP, 2004) <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/17769>> [accessed 7 April 2014]; Smith, *Three Historical Poems*; Clodagh Downey, 'Life and Work of Cúán ua Lothcháin', *Ríocht na Midhe*, 19 (2008), 55–78; Míchéal Ó Mainnín, 'Eochaid Ua Flainn is Eochaid ua Flannucáin: Súil Úr ar an bhFianaise', *Leann*, 2 (2009), 75–104; John Carey, 'In search of Mael Muru Othna', in *Clerics, Kings, and Vikings: Essays on Medieval Ireland in Honour of Donnchadh Ó Corráin*, ed. by Emer Purcell, Paul MacCotter, Julianne Nyhan, and John Sheehan (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2015), pp. 429–39.

¹³⁶ Pödör, 'Twelve Poems'; John Carey, 'Flann Mainistrech (d. 1056)', *ODNB* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/9672>> [accessed 15 April 2014]; Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Flann'; Ailbhe Mac Shamhráin, 'Flann Mainistrech', in *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, ed. by James McGuire and James Quinn (Cambridge: CUP, 2009) <<http://dib.cambridge.org/>> [accessed 15 April 2014]. See also John Carey, '*Lebor Gabála* and the Legendary History of Ireland', in *Medieval Celtic Literature and Society*, ed. by Helen Fulton (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2005), pp. 32–48 (42–44).

3.3.2 Other characterisations

We have been considering treatments of Flann in the course of an intensely charged and formative wider debate. It is also worth examining, in cognisance of this ongoing context, how he is characterised elsewhere, in scholarship on specific texts and topics.

3.3.2.1 Latent authority as a historian

Despite the predominant sense that Flann worked within textual traditions, he was still sometimes presented as providing a direct and translucent perspective on the past. For example, in James Hogan's study of royal succession in Cenél nÉogain, Flann's poems on this kingdom featured prominently: 'the source materials of no other dynasty can compare in duration, abundance and reliability'.¹³⁷ More forcefully and explicitly, Byrne, as already mentioned, believed Flann to be so competent and ethical a historian that seriously inaccurate works can simply be excluded from his corpus. Due to factual errors and problematic chronology, 'Síl nÁedo Sláine na sleg' is 'a libel on that scholar's learning', there being 'no reason to saddle Flann with responsibility for its blunders'.¹³⁸ Again citing their quality, Byrne later expelled 'a pedestrian list of Patrick's household' ('Muintir Pádraig na paiter') and 'a piece of historically inaccurate doggerel listing the kings of Cashel' ('Inn éol duib in senchas sen').¹³⁹ The implication is that Flann's genuine work can be assumed to be very accurate. This seems to be connected to his status as an ecclesiastical scholar: Byrne even denied that the terms *fili* or *poeta* could be applied to him, as they are 'almost certainly not titles that an ecclesiastical *eccnaid* like Flann would have wanted to claim'.¹⁴⁰

Yet enthusiasm among modern scholars for Flann's purported texts as straightforward historical sources has been generally subdued. In the entire multi-authored volume in which Byrne makes some of the above remarks, Flann's work (as opposed to his biography) is only cited as historical evidence on one occasion.¹⁴¹

¹³⁷ James Hogan, 'The Irish Law of Kingship, with Special Reference to Ailech and Cenél Eogan', *PRIA C*, 40 (1931–32), 186–254 (p. 201); see also Immo Warntjes, 'The alternation of the kingship of Tara, 734–944', *Peritia*, 17–18 (2003), 394–432 (p. 396).

¹³⁸ Byrne, 'Historical Note', pp. 391–92.

¹³⁹ Byrne, 'Ireland', p. 865.

¹⁴⁰ Byrne, 'Ireland', p. 867.

¹⁴¹ Byrne, 'Ireland', p. 868.

Byrne's own *Irish Kings and High Kings* pays him no attention.¹⁴² Considering other major works on early Irish history, Flann appears once in Thomas Charles-Edwards' *Early Christian Ireland*, for repeating a common error in his Tara king-list,¹⁴³ and once in Bart Jaski's *Early Irish Kingship and Succession*, where his accuracy is also called into question.¹⁴⁴ Historians engaged in reconstructing early medieval Irish political history seem to have either not considered him reliable or preferred to cite his identified sources, such as the annals, directly.

3.3.2.2 Witness to the 'Gaelic tradition'

Flann is more commonly cited for eleventh-century snapshots of certain literary themes or cultural motifs' long-term development. For example, 'Éstid a eolchu cen ón', listing the *aideda* ('death-tales') of the nobles of the Túatha Dé Danann, is often used in studying both literary traditions concerning these individuals and in medieval Irish interpretations of pre-Christian religion.¹⁴⁵

Elsewhere, his works are identified as manifestations of multifarious textual or narrational traditions. Alfred Anscombe, in a study of St Patrick's genealogy, the subject of Flann's 'Padraig abb Érenn uile' (5:2.1.2), demonstrated that the poem represents but a particular variant of the genealogy.¹⁴⁶ During a study of the different versions of Lóegaire Mac Néill's *aided*, Mac Eoin cited the Tara Diptych but identified the narrative contained therein as one of several variants.¹⁴⁷ These he traced back to early medieval Patrician hagiography.¹⁴⁸ Considering the various pseudo-historical accounts of the Picts' origins, the subject of Flann's 'Cruithnig cid dos-farclam' (3:2.1), Mac Eoin, again, understood them as a single original legend mutating, Flann's poem itself adding only 'minor points'.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴² Francis J. Byrne, *Irish Kings and High Kings*, 2nd ed. (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001).

¹⁴³ Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 485.

¹⁴⁴ Bart Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000), pp. 60–61.

¹⁴⁵ For example, Robert A. S. Macalister, 'Oidhe Chloinne Tuireann', *Béaloides*, 1:1 (June 1927), 13–21 (p. 16); Charles Donahue, 'The Valkyries and Irish War-Goddesses', *Proceedings of the Modern Language Association*, 56:1 (March 1941), 1–12 (p. 11); John Carey, *A Single Ray of the Sun: Religious Speculation in Early Ireland*, 2nd ed. (Aberystwyth: Celtic Studies Publications, 2011), pp. 17–18.

¹⁴⁶ Alfred Anscombe, 'The Pedigrees of Patrick', *Ériu*, 6 (1912), 117–120.

¹⁴⁷ Gearóid Mac Eoin, 'The Mysterious Death of Loegaire Mac Néill', *Studia Hibernica*, 8 (1968), 21–48 (p. 26).

¹⁴⁸ Mac Eoin, 'Mysterious Death', pp. 46–47.

¹⁴⁹ Mac Eoin, 'Irish Legend', p. 153.

These studies sought an overall perspective on medieval Gaelic culture. Under such an approach, an author like Flann is merely a witness to a tradition at a particular stage or branch of its development. While he might occasionally be presented as a distinctively widely-read synthesist or, as by Byrne (LR:3.3.2.1), as a reliable historian, he was also often understood as having produced but one of several variants on a wider tradition, with no particular command over that tradition. In these instances, he relied not only on pre-existing sources but on a certain strand within a corpus of sources.

3.3.2.3 Political engagement

Flann thus came to be seen increasingly as providing an eleventh-century perspective on literary history. Given Ó Corráin, Johnston, and others' conception of a highly politicised learned class, one might expect some exploration of Flann's engagement with his political context. O'Curry, O'Reilly, and predecessors had taken his purported compositions largely at face value (6:4.4). On the other hand, Moore had noted Flann's potentially partial interest in the Uí Néill and Dobbs had explored his family and institution's political connections.¹⁵⁰ Later, Carey and Byrne, despite the latter's zeal for Flann's reliability as a historian, considered the dynasties to which he may have had an allegiance.¹⁵¹

The implications of this aspect of Flann's character for reading his work have only occasionally been addressed in detail. As a 'monastic' writer and a 'national' synchronist, the notion may have existed that he somehow transcended actual politics. In one example, however, Seamus Boyle examines 'Énna dalta Cairpri cruaid', on the seventh-century Battle of Lethirbe, which he supposes was attributed to Flann (however, see 6:4.2).¹⁵² He argued that it is 'an accurate portrayal of an eleventh-century memory of a seventh-century event', via comparisons with genealogies and annals.¹⁵³ Yet the role of Cenél nÉnnai, a usually minor northern Uí Neill polity, has been considerably inflated in the poem. As they enjoyed renewed prominence in the early eleventh century, the poem is, for Boyle, a 'charter' for their

¹⁵⁰ Moore, 'Flann'; Dobbs, 'Pedigree'.

¹⁵¹ Byrne, 'Ireland', p. 867; Carey, 'Legendary history', p. 43.

¹⁵² Seumas Boyle, 'A Poem on Cenél Énnai', *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium*, 1 (1981), 9–20 (p. 16).

¹⁵³ Boyle, 'Poem', pp. 12–15.

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aspirations,¹⁵⁴ implying that Flann was actually composing source-based propaganda.

Some scholars have seen Flann engaging with contemporary politics at a significantly deeper level than simply offering his support to certain factions. Byrne and Smith have both suggested that he might have invented the idea of an ancient, continuous kingship of Tara under an Uí Néill monopoly in the Christian era.¹⁵⁵ Carey commented in general that, after this monopoly's end, his 'poems reflect the changed political landscape', in that regional kingships become their subjects and he comments explicitly on Ireland's plurality of kings.¹⁵⁶ Indeed, Broun has located him, and then Gilla Cóemáin mac Gilla Samthaine (*fl.* 1072) and successors, within a general shift in historiographical focus from dynasties to kingdoms, from genealogies to king-lists.¹⁵⁷ Broun treats this as an early example of a development in the conception and use of the past across the Insular zone in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, placing Flann in an unprecedentedly broad intellectual context, although Broun does not argue for direct influence between the authors involved.

3.4 Impersonal scholarship: conclusions

Much of the twentieth-century scholarship that makes reference to Flann does so either while focusing on specific texts or discussing much broader issues than his meaning and biography, making it sometimes difficult to identify clear views on him. It is also difficult to tell what sources and information scholars had at their disposal overall but their attention was primarily drawn to material in pre-1200 manuscripts. This is problematic. Flann's interests, as they emerge from these manuscripts, are not entirely representative of the topics with which he is associated elsewhere (**Chapters 4–6**). Furthermore, as we shall see (**Chapter 2**), despite being verifiably early, this material does not provide as secure evidence for Flann's eleventh-century compositional activity as seems to have been assumed.

¹⁵⁴ Boyle, 'Poem', pp. 15–16.

¹⁵⁵ Byrne, 'Ireland', p. 866; Peter J. Smith, 'Early Irish Historical Verse: the Development of a Genre', in *Ireland and Europe in the Early Middle Ages: Text and Transmission*, ed. by Próinséas Ní Chatháin and Michael Richter (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2002), pp. 326–41 (341).

¹⁵⁶ Carey, 'Flann'; Carey, 'Legendary history', p. 44.

¹⁵⁷ Dauvit Broun, *Scottish Independence and the Idea of Britain: From the Picts to Alexander III* (Edinburgh: EUP, 2007), pp. 39–47.

Some points of consensus concerning Flann emerged. He was persistently understood as ecclesiastical, to a greater or lesser extent, and as a literate textual scholar. In fact, the focus on him as compiler and versifier of texts seems to have undermined his authorial integrity for some scholars and may have been behind a relative lack of interest in him as a primary source. As part of broader developments in scholars' understanding of medieval Gaelic learned culture, acknowledgement came of his complicity in elite politics and of his engagement with a broader range of literary themes and styles than had been considered stereotypically 'ecclesiastical'. Indeed, he was often cited as a prime example of a synthesis of interests and traditions.

Nonetheless, Flann's authorial intentions were rarely explored in relation to individual works, even by Ó Corráin and Johnston, whose approaches are based around identifying medieval authors' specific social and political interests. In many cases, one might suspect that this was because 'monastic types' were simply expected to produce texts while operating in a cloistered environment. One might even postulate the revenant influence of the never properly dismissed 'Synchronisms of Flann', as an overarching, disinterested work on structural national and universal history.

Finally, the scholars we have examined were invariably concerned with reconstructing the original historical or textual realities of authorship. The evidence involved was often approached critically but was still treated straightforwardly as evidence, whether of greater or lesser value. How attributions and authorial (self-) representation might themselves be forms of literary and rhetorical expression rather than helpful metadata is considered in the next section.

4 It matters who speaks:¹⁵⁸ uses and constructions of authorship

One response to the categorical approaches of the nativist versus anti-nativist debate has been the increased interest in bio-bibliographies of individual authors. In another development, recent decades have also seen analysis and discussion of authorship's

¹⁵⁸ Cf. Michel Foucault, 'What is an author?', in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, ed. by Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), pp. 113–38 (138).

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significance and value within the Middle Ages. Indeed, this has been a feature of recent scholarship on medieval literature in general, beyond Gaelic contexts.¹⁵⁹ It has been recognised that medieval evidence about authors and their works has not just been mediated through protean scribal transmission within partially preserved textual traditions. Rather, it forms its own discourse, formed out of literary and rhetorical purposes more relevant to their own intellectual context than to modern scholars' need for bibliographical information.

Interest has also developed in the experience and adaptation of texts beyond their original composition. There has been a growth in studies on medieval Gaelic texts' readers, commentators, scribes, redactors, and compilers, and also on codices' patrons and owners.¹⁶⁰ At a more theoretical level, medieval Gaelic concepts and methods of literary criticism have also been considered.¹⁶¹ Both, again, follow trends occurring across medieval studies and wider literary theory.¹⁶² Texts have come to be of interest not just for what they once were but for what they could become and how they might be understood in different contexts. Such approaches open up new dimensions in their meaning and offer new ways to understand the contexts into which they were received. They also call into question the extent to which a text's original author and context continue to define it.

While authors and their acts of composition can be investigated as historical individuals and events, as we have seen, it is also evident that both had other dimensions to their existence. It is a basic phenomenological question, whether meaning is inherent or located in perceptions. The issue is practical, as well as

¹⁵⁹ A particularly prominent example is Alastair J. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages*, 2nd ed. (Aldershot: Wildwood House, 1988).

¹⁶⁰ For example, Patrick K. Ford, 'Medieval Irish Manuscript Culture', in *Field Work: Sites in Literary and Cultural Criticism*, ed. by Marjorie Garber, Paul B. Franklin, and Rebecca L. Walkowitz (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 164–67; Schlüter, *History*; Bernadette Cunningham and Raymond Gillespie, 'The Uí Dhomhnaill and their books in early sixteenth-century Ireland', in *Princes, Prelates and Poets in Medieval Ireland: Essays in Honour of Katharine Simms*, ed. by Seán Duffy (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2013), pp. 481–502 (495–501); Kevin Murray, 'The Reworking of Old Irish Narrative Texts in the Middle Irish Period: Contexts and Motivations', in Boyle and Hayden (eds), *Authorities*, pp. 291–306.

¹⁶¹ For example, Morgan T. Davies, 'Protocols of Reading in Early Irish Literature: Notes on Some Notes to *Orgain Denna Ríg* and *Amra Coluim Cille*', *CMCS*, 32 (Winter 1996), 1–23; Erich Poppe, 'Reconstructing medieval Irish literary theory: The lesson of *Airec Menman Uraird maic Coise*', *CMCS*, 37 (Summer 1999), 33–54.

¹⁶² For example, John Dagenais, *The Ethics of Reading in Manuscript Culture: Glossing the 'Libro de Buen Amor'* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Suzanne Reynolds, *Medieval Reading: Grammar, Rhetoric and the Classical Text* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996).

philosophical, however. Later sources and manuscripts mediate all material by or about Flann and most other medieval Gaelic authors. Concepts of authorship and textuality, modes of interpretation, and the possible rhetorical uses of authorship and author-figures all potentially impact upon this evidence for their historical activities.

4.1 Names and masks: authorial attributions and implied context

Medieval Gaelic poems are found not infrequently in manuscripts with attributions, internal or via scribal superscription, to impossible authors. The poem's language and ideas might be too anachronistic to be credible or the purported author might be legendary and never have existed. Mac Eoin took this as reason to be sceptical of all manuscript attributions.¹⁶³

While agreeing that such attributions are not literally true, others have analysed them as a form of literary expression. Maria Tymoczko, in a study of lyric poetry, has described some non-literal attributions as constituting 'a poetry of masks'.¹⁶⁴

In order to express most of the range of human affective experience to be shared intersubjectively in poetry, rather than present such emotions directly through a persona particular to the self, Celtic poets assumed the persona of a traditional fictional character. This assumption of a persona associated with a pre-existing or established character from history we can call a "traditional poetic mask".¹⁶⁵

In other words, certain literary characters invoke particular situations or stances.¹⁶⁶ This theory can surely be applied productively in contexts beyond strictly personal lyric poetry. However fictional he or she might be, an author-figure has a biography, loosely defined, which the learned reader might know. This forms a setting that enhances the poem by providing it with pseudo-historical meaning and reference points. As a result, the poem also constitutes a meditation on a particular theme or

¹⁶³ Mac Eoin, 'Dating', pp. 124–25.

¹⁶⁴ Maria Tymoczko, 'The Poetry of Masks: The Poet's Persona in Early Celtic Poetry', in *A Celtic Florilegium: Studies in Memory of Brendan O Hehir*, ed. by Eve Sweetser; Kathryn A. Klar; and Claire Thomas (Lawrence: Celtic Studies Publications, 1996), 187–209. See also Murray, 'Reworking', p. 295.

¹⁶⁵ Tymoczko, 'Poetry', p. 190.

¹⁶⁶ For examples, see Tymoczko, 'Poetry', p. 197

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episode in the biography. This use of author-figures to invoke admittedly stylised human situations provides an interesting counterpoint to Alistair Minnis' understanding of the 'human author' as a late medieval development.¹⁶⁷

Also considering quasi-personal poetry, Herbert has examined certain Middle Gaelic poems on exile attributed to Colum Cille (*ob.* 597).¹⁶⁸ Here, Colum Cille's well-known banishment from Ireland frames the poems' reflections with a recognisable situation. As well as expressing timeless personal sentiments, Herbert read these texts as related to emerging conceptions of the Irish nation in the period's historiography, meaning Colum Cille ultimately lends his sanctity and antiquity to contemporary socio-political ideas and thus renders them less dangerously novel.

Máire Ní Mhaonaigh has considered a corpus of poems implausibly or impossibly attributed to Cormac mac Cuillennáin (*ob.* 908).¹⁶⁹ Cormac was remembered as moving in multiple spheres, as king of Munster, bishop, and scholar.¹⁷⁰ Two of the poems dwell, from a twelfth-century reformist perspective, specifically on tensions between political responsibility and the religious life,¹⁷¹ a topic for which Cormac is a distinctively suitable author-figure. Yet others seem derive their associations from particular aspects of his reputed life: for example, some focus on him as a poet, specifically of *dindsenchas*, to the exclusion of all else.¹⁷² If his full identity was not understood by those responsible, the attribution's intended significance becomes unclear: does Cormac's name effectively constitute one mask or several?

Like any way of making meaning, particularly within a fragmentary manuscript literature, the 'poetry of masks' has its problems of interpretation. In another problematic case, Aideen O'Leary identified three separate poets, of which at least one may be fictional, whose names include the element 'Mac Coise'. Yet, apparently from an early stage, the manuscript tradition hopelessly conflates their

¹⁶⁷ Minnis, *Medieval Theory*, pp. 211–17. Minnis does not consider Gaelic sources in his study (p. 2).

¹⁶⁸ Máire Herbert, 'Becoming an Exile: Colum Cille in Middle-Irish Poetry', in *Heroic Poets and Poetic Heroes in Celtic Tradition: A Festschrift for Patrick K. Ford*, CSANA Yearbook 3–4, ed. by Joseph F. Nagy (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2005), 131–40.

¹⁶⁹ Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Cormac mac Cuillennáin: king, bishop and "wondrous sage"', *ZCP*, 58 (2011), 109–28 (pp. 115–27).

¹⁷⁰ Paul Russell, 'Cormac mac Cuillennáin (d. 908)', *ODNB* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/6319>> [accessed 3 June 2015].

¹⁷¹ Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Cormac', pp. 115–16.

¹⁷² Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Cormac', pp. 120–21.

varied personae.¹⁷³ The reverse can happen: scholars have long debated whether the arguably distinct Middle Gaelic poets, Eochaid úa Flainn and Eochaid úa Flannucáin (*ob.* 1004), were originally the same person.¹⁷⁴ An author-figure can also evolve and expand their interests over time. Seamus Mac Mathúna has explored how Gearóid Íarla's (*ob.* 1398) original focus on love poetry very possibly then expanded via later manuscript attributions and imitation to include genres such as satire.¹⁷⁵ Christopher Yocum has shown how Fíthal, originally a legendary jurist, became a more generic wisdom-figure during the Middle Ages.¹⁷⁶

Whether or not they are accurate, authorial attributions can be highly meaningful as a form of commentary on either the text or the author-figure. However, such an analysis has typically only been employed as a last resort, when an attribution manifestly cannot be taken literally. It is also most fruitfully employed when the author-figure has a biography or looser set of associations that are known to have been commonly understood in learned circles. While neither is true, in most cases, for Flann (only a couple of poems unquestionably cannot be by him), it is worth considering how many attributions, even those that look credible, use him as a mask, for his implied backstory, as a meaningful author-figure rather than as a historical author. The possibility that some poems were attributed to him because he carried authority has, as we have seen, been considered. Yet it is clear that poems were associated with figures like Colum Cille or Cormac because of traits individually specific to them. The traits that might have been understood to be specific to Flann, the visage of the mask he offered later poets and compilers, are yet to be investigated.

Even if an attribution is a true and authentic bibliographical datum, with no intent to supply a backstory, backstories would still have been supplied by the attributions' readers. The author-figure becomes a mask as soon as he or she is

¹⁷³ Aileen M. O'Leary, 'The Identities of the Poet(s) Mac Coisi: A Reinvestigation', *CMCS*, 38 (Winter 1999), 53–72.

¹⁷⁴ Ó Mainnín, 'Eochaid'.

¹⁷⁵ Seumas Mac Mathúna, 'An Fhilíocht a Leagtar ar Ghearáid Íarla i Leabhair Fhear Maí: Iontaofa nó Bréagach', in *Bile ós Chrannaibh: A Festschrift for William Gillies*, ed. by Wilson C. McLeod, Abigail Burnyeat, Domhnall-Uilliam Stiùbhart, Thomas O. Clancy and Robeard Ó Maolalaigh (Brig o' Turk: Clann Tuirc, 2010), pp. 245–70.

¹⁷⁶ Christopher G. Yocum, 'The Literary Figure of Fíthal', (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2009); Christopher G. Yocum, 'Wisdom Literature in Early Ireland', *Studia Celtica*, 46 (2012), 39–58 (pp. 48–49).

supplied, regardless of intention and provenance. Attributions to Flann, internal or external, are rarely detailed and information about him is widely scattered through the manuscript tradition and far from comprehensive and unambiguous, even when brought together. This opens to interpretation his social meaning, what his name would have supplied to a text in the experience of its medieval readers.

4.2 'As the poet said...': evidential and corroborative verse

In medieval Gaelic manuscripts, verse explicitly attributed to authors does not always appear free-standing but is often cited within other texts. The dynamics of such prosimetric works have been the subject of some discussion. As they involve an author-figure and his purported work being related to a wider narrative or argument, they yield valuable insights into the role of author-figures in medieval Gaelic literary theory and practice.

Attributed verse can enhance or authorise prose, which is invariably anonymous.¹⁷⁷ The form can convey characters' intensive or heightened speech or their eye-witness accounts. Performance of poetry can itself be an act within a story. Verse can also be attributed to a scholar, named or implied, who post-dates the events themselves. In other words, verse can be quoted or cited. Proportions can vary, from predominantly prose works with brief verse speeches or citations to lengthy poems with a short contextualising prose preface via balanced 'prose-poetic units'. Lengthy tales or treatises can be expressed virtually in parallel through prose and verse, resembling the highly-regarded medieval *opus geminatum*.¹⁷⁸

Looking specifically at citations of verse within prose pseudo-history, Gregory Toner has examined how compilers evaluated different verse citations' levels of authority, with a view to establishing an acceptably veracious account of the past.¹⁷⁹ Eye-witness testimony was particularly valuable, while accounts merely from

¹⁷⁷ Proinsias Mac Cana, 'Prosimetrum in Insular Celtic Literature', in *Prosimetrum: Cross Cultural Perspectives on Narrative in Prose and Verse*, ed. by Joseph Harris and Karl Reichl (Cambridge: Brewer, 1997), pp. 99–130; Gregory Toner, 'Authority, Verse and the Transmission of *Senchas*', *Ériu*, 55 (2005), 59–84; Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Poetic Authority in Middle Irish Narrative: A Case Study', in *Authorities*, ed. by Boyle and Hayden, pp. 263–89.

¹⁷⁸ For example, see *The Voyage of Máel Dúin: A Study in Early Irish Voyage Literature*, ed. and trans. by Heinrich P. A. Oskamp (Groningen: Wolters-Noordhoff, 1970); Kate L. Mathis, 'Gaelic *gemina opera*: the verse and prose texts of *Saltair na rann* and *Scél saltrach na rann*', *Scottish Gaelic Studies* 28 (2011), 1–20.

¹⁷⁹ Toner, 'Authority'.

later scholars (Flann appears as an example) could only be corroborative.¹⁸⁰ Both were authenticated by the stable metrical form.¹⁸¹ Beyond this distinction, however, Toner detects greater credibility being given both to verse and to codices when cited under the name of a known author or compiler.¹⁸² A humanised history behind a source seems to have made it particularly convincing.

Prosimetre's dynamics have also been examined by R. Mark Scowcroft, with special reference to the intensely prosimetric *LGÉ*.¹⁸³ Responding to the view that *LGÉ* had existed first as a corpus of poetry,¹⁸⁴ Scowcroft suggested that the prose, verse, and prosimetric iterations of the text were composed in response to each other and potentially by the same people (3:1.1).¹⁸⁵ They are distinguishable not, necessarily, in provenance but in function. The verse texts are often attributed to named authors (again, including Flann). They are thus authoritative statements from particular scholarly perspectives on defined topics, which are explicated and reconciled by the prose. Mirroring the medieval curriculum's foundation in the interpretation of (ideally ancient) *auctores*,¹⁸⁶ compilations like *LGÉ* expanded upon and connected formal contributions ostensibly from figures with identifiable claims to authority. Prosimetric form does not reflect simply the prior availability of a corpus of verse authorities but an entire exegetical approach to knowledge. If *auctores* had not existed, it would have been necessary to invent them.

These studies yield important insights into medieval Gaelic concepts of authorship. Toner has shown that author-figures' identities and primary or secondary perspectives mattered to the compilers who cited them. Scowcroft, meanwhile, has shown that the author-figure's apparent role and contribution can be constructed by

¹⁸⁰ Toner, 'Authority', pp. 75–83; Gregory Toner, 'The Ulster Cycle: Historiography or Fiction?', *CMCS* 40 (Winter 2000), 1–20 (p. 6).

¹⁸¹ Smith, 'Historical Verse', pp. 326–27; Toner, 'Authority', pp. 60–61.

¹⁸² Toner, 'Authority', pp. 63–64, 70–72.

¹⁸³ Scowcroft, 'Leabhar Gabhála I', pp. 90–93.

¹⁸⁴ *Lebor Gabála Éirenn: The Book of the Taking of Ireland*, ed. and trans. by Robert A. S. Macalister, 5 vols (London: ITS, 1938–56) [hereafter, *LGÉ*], I, x. See also John Carey, *The Irish National Origin-Legend: Synthetic Pseudo History* (Cambridge: ASNaC, 1994), p. 19.

¹⁸⁵ Scowcroft, 'Leabhar Gabhála I', pp. 90–91; R. Mark Scowcroft, 'Medieval Recensions of the *Lebor Gabála*', in *Lebor Gabála Éirenn: Textual History and Pseudohistory*, ed. by John Carey (Dublin: ITS, 2009), pp. 1–19 (8–12); Carey, 'Legendary history', p. 44.

¹⁸⁶ Martin Irvine, *The Making of Textual Culture: 'Grammatica' and Literary Theory 350–1100* (Cambridge: CUP, 1994) pp. 355–64; Jan M. Ziolkowski, 'Cultures of Authority in the Long Twelfth Century', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 108:4 (October 2009), 421–48 (pp. 435–36).

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the needs and dynamics of the text within which he is cited. Of course, a cited author might well have been known for their contributions as an authoritative scholar before they were ever cited, although Toner has suggested that citation might have increased some author-figures' standing.¹⁸⁷ Incidentally, while authors' treatment in prosimetric contexts is particularly amenable to study thanks to being set out explicitly, these conclusions could be viably related to the compilation of collections of ostensibly free-standing verse within wider manuscript contexts as well.¹⁸⁸

The author mattering while also being susceptible to re-interpretation is part of medieval writing's complex relationship with authorities identified. As well as their authorial function, the author-figure's purpose can also be constructed by later readers and compilers via how the poem is introduced or the context in which it is located. The *intentio auctoris* is a common category of information in medieval literary criticism but is more often identified with the literal meaning of the text than with any motivation on the actual author's part.¹⁸⁹ I myself have examined the ascription of multiple 'intentions' to one of Flann's poems in different recensions of *LGÉ*.¹⁹⁰ In addition, there has been some debate over whether certain poems in the late Middle Gaelic prosimetric *Acallam na Senórach* were appropriated from another context.¹⁹¹ David Dumville has examined the re-contextualisation of early Gaelic poetry in medieval chronicles.¹⁹² Dáibhí Ó Croínín has traced the subsequent transmission and usage of the twelfth-century historical poem, 'Éól dam seiser cloinne Cuinn'.¹⁹³

¹⁸⁷ Toner, 'Authority', p. 62.

¹⁸⁸ For example, Schlüter, *History*, pp. 15–21, 137–38.

¹⁸⁹ Minnis, *Medieval Theory*, pp. xxxiv–xxxv; Lerer, *Chaucer*, p. 12; Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: CUP, 2008), pp. 235–36; Reynolds, *Medieval Reading*, pp. 148–49; Ziolkowski, 'Cultures', p. 423.

¹⁹⁰ Eystein Thanisch, 'Flann Mainistrech's *Götterdämmerung* as a Junction within *Lebor Gabála Érenn*', *Quaestio Insularis*, 13 (2012), 69–93 (**Appendix 32**).

¹⁹¹ James Carney, 'Two poems from *Acallam na Senórach*', in *Celtic Studies: Essays in Memory of Angus Matheson 1912–1962*, ed. by James Carney and David Greene (London: Routledge, 1968), pp. 22–32; Seán Ó Coileáin, 'The setting of *Géisid cúan*', in *Cín Chille Cúile*, ed. by Carey et al., pp. 234–48.

¹⁹² David Dumville, 'What is medieval Gaelic poetry?', in *Explorations in Cultural History: Essays for Peter Gabriel McCaffery*, ed. by David F. Smith and Hushang Philsooph (Aberdeen: Centre for Cultural History, University of Aberdeen, 2010), 81–153.

¹⁹³ Dáibhí Ó Croínín, 'Éól dam seiser cloinne Cuinn: the fortunes of a twelfth-century Irish syncretistic poem', in *Gablánach in Scélaigeacht: Celtic Studies in Honour of Ann Dooley*, ed. by Sarah Sheehan, Joanne Findon, and Westley Follett (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2013), pp. 198–219.

These studies collectively ascribe to later compilers considerable power to interpret an author-figure's function and his work's meaning, and that before any interference with the text itself is even considered.¹⁹⁴ This does not make him less authoritative, however, medieval learned culture being based around the interpretation and reconciliation of authorities, not around reading them as absolutely prescriptive. It does, however, mean that an author's meaning and identity are not entirely within their own control but must needs be sought partially in the contexts with which they interact.

Authority and corroboration, alongside adherence to convention,¹⁹⁵ are routinely mentioned as being what cited authors offer the texts in which they appear. Yet authority perhaps should not be regarded as a monolithic medieval concept. Jan Ziolkowski has recently argued for a plurality of medieval 'cultures of authority', citing, for example, fervent twelfth-century debates over the relationship between canonical texts' *auctoritas* and *rationes* ('reasons').¹⁹⁶ It is also worth considering whether authority really was a single, transferable common currency, varying only in quantity, or whether it could be in some way qualitative and specific to individuals. Toner has explored compilers' interests in whether an author is an eyewitness or a secondary commentator. Going further, and marrying the personal subjectivity of the 'poetry of masks' to the citation of named individuals, like Flann, in historical writing, author-figures become not simply representatives of learned tradition or veracious beings that exist through their texts but sources of particular perspectives from commonly understood contexts.

4.3. Pieces in whose games? Authorial construction and self-construction

Scowcroft argued that the different aspects of *LGÉ* were produced either by the same individuals or, at least, by closely connected groups (**LR:4.2; 3:1.2**), rendering artificial any hard distinction expressed in the compilation between named poets and anonymous prosaists. Other scholars, too, have blurred such distinctions in relation to other texts and manuscripts by exploring the common historiographical categories

¹⁹⁴ For further studies on this theme, see *Authorities*, ed. by Boyle and Hayden.

¹⁹⁵ Mac Cana, 'Prosimetrum', p. 114; Toner, 'Authority', pp. 82–83.

¹⁹⁶ Ziolkowski, 'Cultures', pp. 423, 442–46.

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and conventions under which both operate. While author-figures have come to be understood as used or constructed by those who cite them, the results suggest that authors even construct themselves.

The idea that medieval authors, scholars, and others worked by re-working established traditions and models from authoritative sources is hardly controversial.¹⁹⁷ They can thus be expected to present themselves and their work not as individual and distinctive but as conventional and generic. In terms of material specifically relevant to us, Smith has produced an account of the development of medieval Irish historical poetry as a genre and offered a reconstruction of its categories, forms, and critical terminology utilised and developed throughout the early Middle Ages.¹⁹⁸ Importantly, Smith drew examples from medieval poetry, apparatus around poetry, and independent prose. This common historiographical discourse animated the work of medieval Gaelic historians, whether engaged in the composition of poetry or in the compilation of texts and manuscripts.¹⁹⁹ It is used not only to describe or structure historical poets' material but also in their formal presentations of their motives, methods, and audience.

Similarly, Schlüter has suggested that *LL*'s compilers valued historical poetry not just for its content but for the methodologies and intellectual ideologies its author-figures expressed, implicitly or explicitly; Flann is cited as a particularly prominent example.²⁰⁰ The compilers considered themselves to be in close affinity with the named historical poets, as preservers of cultural memory through careful engagement with a literary heritage for the benefit of society. This, again, operates alongside their manipulation of some attributions and their imposition of their own interpretative arrangement on the material.²⁰¹

More generally, scholars have explored the complex interplay between interpretation and composition in medieval textual culture; both, after all, were

¹⁹⁷ Ziolkowski, 'Cultures', p. 423; Murray, 'Reworking', pp. 291–94.

¹⁹⁸ Smith, 'Historical Verse', esp. pp. 327–29.

¹⁹⁹ See also Mark Zumbühl, 'Contextualising the Duan Albanach', in *Cànan & Cultar/Language and Culture: Rannsachadh na Gàidhlig 3*, ed. by Wilson C. McLeod, James E. Fraser, and Anja Gunderloch (Edinburgh: Dunedin Academic Press, 2004), 11–24 (pp. 18–21).

²⁰⁰ Schlüter, *History*, pp. 140–43.

²⁰¹ Schlüter, *History*, pp. 15–18, 137–38. Indeed, one compiler continued one of *LL*'s poems himself: Edel Bhreathnach, 'Two Contributors to the Book of Leinster: Bishop Finn of Kildare and Gilla na Náem Úa Duinn', in *Ogma: Essays in Celtic Studies in Honour of Próinséas Ní Chatháin*, ed. by Jean-Michel Picard, and Michael Richter (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2002), pp. 105–11 (pp. 105–07).

governed by the principles and strategies of *grammatica*.²⁰² Ziolkowski has noted how twelfth-century Latin writers designed their texts to become authoritative through making them particularly amenable, if also challenging, to contemporary interpretative methods.²⁰³ Seth Lerer has explored how fifteenth-century poets and compilers crafted, authenticated, and canonised Geoffrey Chaucer's (*ob.* 1400) corpus and persona.²⁰⁴ While they partly responded to their era's political and social issues, Lerer points out that they also adhered closely to Chaucer's own self-presentations.²⁰⁵ Interactions between medieval authors and readers were often far from being defined straightforwardly by domination or appropriation but, instead, by self-awareness and careful construction.²⁰⁶

The applicability of studies in medieval ideas expressed in Latin or other European vernaculars to Gaelic materials is often unclear. Recent studies have stressed the Gaelic world's participation in wider medieval literary and rhetorical culture.²⁰⁷ Equivalent tropes (e.g. **2:3.2**) and terminology – like *ugdar*, the Gaelic derivative of *auctor* ('author, authority') – are used in Gaelic primary sources. Yet the same meaning may not have been intended. While wider medieval literary theory is very useful for illustrating possibilities, it must be used with caution.

4.4 Uses and constructions of authorship: conclusions

It is clear from these various studies that medieval Gaelic authors cannot be regarded simply as historical individuals. Author-figures, named or generalised, were a highly meaningful aspect of the argumentation or poetics of subsequent works, particularly prosimetric compilations. In fact, subsequent readers and compilers canonised or even, perhaps, interpolated and created an author-figure for a poem via citation and

²⁰² Minnis, *Medieval Theory*, pp. xxxiii–xxxiv; Irvine, *Making*, pp. 364–71, 405–61; Abigail Burnyeat, 'Aislinge Meic Con Glinne: Studies on a Middle Irish tale and its afterlives', in *Celebrating Sixty Years of Celtic Studies at Uppsala University: Proceedings of the Eleventh Symposium of Societas Celtologica Nordica*, ed. by Ailbhe Ó Corráin and Gordon Ó Riain, Studia Celtica Upsaliensis 9 (Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, 2013), pp. 1–17.

²⁰³ Ziolkowski, 'Cultures', pp. 436–39.

²⁰⁴ Seth Lerer, *Chaucer and his Readers: Imagining the Author in Late Medieval England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

²⁰⁵ Lerer, *Chaucer*, pp. 5, 11–15.

²⁰⁶ Thanisch, 'Götterdämmerung', pp. 90–93.

²⁰⁷ For example, Erich Poppe, 'Grammatica, grammatic, Augustine, and the *Táin*', in *Ildánach, Ildírech: A Festschrift for Proinsias Mac Cana*, ed. by John Carey, John T. Koch, and Pierre-Yves Lambert (Andover: Celtic Studies Publications, 1999), pp. 203–10; Michelle O Riordan, *Irish Bardic Poetry and Rhetorical Reality* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2007).

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could exert a considerable amount of interpretative power over an authored poem's meaning and thus over the rhetorically potent *intentio auctoris*.

Yet authors were by no means entirely at their readers and compilers' mercy. It has been shown that an author's identity genuinely mattered. In pseudo-history, his versified testimony could be assessed for its relative value based on its author-figure. The author-figure's understood persona could also be used to provide a narrative context and thus historical meaning for a poem. Furthermore, it has been observed that texts' composers crafted author-figures themselves, via references in-text to sources or intended audience, for example. However, this was done according to conventions often shared with compilers who later cited and used the texts. In short, it seems safest to regard most statements about authors in medieval Gaelic sources, even purportedly by the authors themselves, as constructed and rhetorical.

The studies surveyed here thus lead us away from authors' actual biographies and affiliations, the focus of much recent scholarship, and into their work's reception and their social meaning as author-figures. Understanding this dimension of authorship better, as a form of expression rather than as simply erroneous scribal behaviour, not only yields insights into medieval Gaelic learned culture but may facilitate historical investigation of the actual authors.

5 Flann Mainistrech as author-figure: this thesis' objectives

Flann Mainistrech has been implicated in many of the major issues in modern scholarship on medieval Gaelic literature and intellectual history. In fact, while useful information about him has been yielded, his modern profile has been very much shaped by broader debates and priorities. The recent emphasis on author-focused research thus seems highly apposite. Such research on the historical Flann could follow various fruitful avenues already indicated in scholarship, such as assessing his work within the unstable eleventh-century political environment, further investigating his own social connections, or developing ways to establish his corpus and source materials more securely.

Before such studies can continue, however, the primary evidence's total extent and basic nature must needs be understood. Flann and his work, as with many

medieval Gaelic authors, exist for us in manuscript through interpretation and use by later commentators and compilers. Author-figures, in medieval textual culture, were both open to interpretation and to being utilised to bring contextual meaning to a text. The Flann that is accessible to us is perhaps more the author-figure of subsequent learned culture than the historical author. This is worth understanding both to facilitate research into the historical Flann and because his subsequent reception itself existed as an influential idea in its own right. In fact, given that he was clearly regarded in medieval sources as an authoritative source, understanding how he and his work were perceived could yield insights into medieval Gaelic learned concepts of authority generally.

Following the diachronic reception of one well-attested author is not only practical for a doctoral thesis but permits greater focus on continuity and change in their reception. This, in turn, allows us to assess whether a named, individual author maintains their connection with a consistent identity or perceived biography. Therefore, in this thesis, I survey the texts attributed to Flann and the material about him in Gaelic manuscripts and in early printed scholarship. In so doing, I analyse how he and his work are presented and used in different periods and in specific manuscript contexts. As I argue, alongside much adaptation, even appropriation, a consistent characterisation of Flann might be said to emerge in a sufficient variety of sources to imply that he retained a definable persona as an author-figure, whether or not this reflected his historical reality.

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1 *Intentio auctoris, constructio auctoris*: what does Flann mean?

Flann Mainistrech has been implicated prominently in many of the major issues in modern scholarship on medieval Gaelic literature and intellectual history and his profile therein has been very much shaped by its broader debates and priorities. As a counter-balance, the recent emphasis on research focused on single authors in their own contexts is very welcome. Potential topics for such specific studies, in Flann's case, are suggested above (**LR:5**).

Yet, it is perhaps more important to investigate how Flann was understood or used within medieval Gaelic manuscript culture. As with the majority of ancient or medieval authors, we access him through sources, redactions, and compilations that are generally much later than his own time. In addition, how the veracity of authorial attributions might be determined remains uncertain. Thus, to varying and somewhat unknown extents, we read Flann through others' interpretations or even appropriations.

Recent studies have also emphasised that named author-figures mattered within medieval Gaelic literature and historiography. Historical testimony was assessed based on its purported provenance and known author-figures were capable of giving a multivalent text contextual meaning. Furthermore, authorial self-presentation was part of a composition's rhetoric. Thus, even if we were somehow able to know when we were reading Flann's exact, intended words, we could not trust him to be entirely honest with us concerning himself. He is engaged in constructing an author-figure as much as any later handler, if not more so.

For Dumville, 'the questions "What *is* ...?" and "What *was* mediaeval Gaelic poetry?" should be kept apart and answered separately'.²⁰⁸ Similarly, but at a more specific level, we are left asking not who Flann was historically but what he means, what he could be made to mean, and how he might have been interpreted within the textual and manuscript contexts in which we find him. Rather than ask whether an

²⁰⁸ Dumville, 'What is medieval Gaelic poetry?', p. 153 (Dumville's emphasis).

attribution is accurate, we might instead ask why it matters whether it is accurate and why this piece of purported information about the text has been included.

Such questions are truer to the the extant material's nature and provenance and, as they concern this material's underlying purposes, they ought to be addressed prior to further biographical investigations using it. They also touch upon wider issues in medieval Gaelic learned culture. It is clear that Flann is often presented as authoritative or cited to corroborate certain arguments or narratives. By examining which characteristics are most important for his fulfilment of such functions – and whether any individual characteristics are relevant at all – we gain insights into authority's conceptions and articulations within medieval Gaelic historiography. Furthermore, concepts of authorship and the degree of emphasis placed on a single author-figure are inseparable from concepts of textuality. How medieval compilers and redactors understood the activity of an author to whom they attribute texts could well be expected to influence how they then interpreted his and perhaps other texts. This relates particularly to the dynamics of medieval Gaelic codices, peopled as they often are with authorial attributions. Finally, tracking Flann through the tradition brings into relief the wide variety of historiographical and literary contexts in which he appears. This might reflect his mutability as an author-figure but it might also be reason to question our sub-divisions of the literature.²⁰⁹

2 Investigating Flann's meaning

In this thesis, therefore, I investigate Flann's social meaning as a cited author-figure in Gaelic manuscript culture and early printed books on Irish history. This investigation involves three main strands. In one strand, I consider the context, perspective, or narrative that an attribution to Flann might be used or understood to invoke within medieval Gaelic learned discourse. If Colum Cille can invoke pious exile and Cormac mac Cuillennáin can invoke tension between worldly and spiritual goals, what can Flann Mainistrech invoke, for the citator or for the reader? This is, in a way, a study of Flann's characterisation, although it goes beyond his conventional appearances as a character within literary texts to include his role as texts' author-

²⁰⁹ Erich Poppe, *On Cycles and Other Critical Matters: Some Issues in Medieval Irish Literary History and Criticism*, Quiggin Memorial Lectures 9 (Cambridge: ASNaC 2008).

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figure and his appearances in attributional or prefatal apparatus. However, in most of his appearances in any of these categories, his characterisation and the context he invokes is implicit or ambiguous. Therefore, I seek to understand his potential social meaning through identifying consistently recurring themes across this material.

In another strand, I am interested in conflicts between external interpretations of Flann's texts and texts' implied authorial intentions or their interpretations elsewhere. Such instances illustrate the extent to which later composers and compilers re-interpreted or even appropriated Flann. His work's perceived relevance within medieval and post-medieval reading is also a facet of his social meaning, alongside what is explicitly stated about him.

Relatedly, in the third strand, evidence permitting, I attempt to assess the impact and usefulness of Flann's work within subsequent texts and compilations. Essentially pitching rhetoric against reality, or at least its best reconstruction, I consider in each case whether Flann's designation as an authoritative scholar and the citation of his work is indicative of its genuine utility. In other words, I consider whether it is the context that Flann's name invokes, or his actual purported texts, or a combination that generates his enduring stature.

As discussed below, this thesis is structured chronologically, not thematically, so these strands of investigation are pursued together in relation to successive corpora of material. I combine close reading of specific sources on Flann with surveys of his overall role in entire compilations and, ultimately, across the entire extant manuscript tradition. In so doing, it proposes new dimensions in the study of a medieval author, exploring his identity, cohesiveness, power, and utility and their impact on how he is presented and how he is understood.

3 Approaches and methods

3.1 Corpus formation

Given that this thesis is concerned with reception and perceptions, any reference to Flann Mainistrech is considered, regardless of apparent authenticity. Ambiguous references to 'Flann' are assessed on a case-by-case basis (e.g. **3:2.2**). References to authors take a number of different forms in the manuscript tradition, the form

determining the type of information offered even before content is taken into account. While this thesis is not concerned with assessing attributions' veracity, they also vary in their traceability. Brief, general definitions of each type of reference are set out below. None, incidentally, is exclusive to Flann.

3.1.1 Simple attributions

Poems appearing independently in manuscript collections can be attributed to an author-figure via a short superscription at the poem's commencement, invariably 'X cecinit' ('X sang'). Despite my nomenclature, simple attributions present various problems. First, since a simple attribution is external to the poem, we cannot be sure how long they have travelled together, unless the poem's *stemma codicum* implies as much. More a textual variant than a fixed piece of data, such superscriptions' provenance can be highly questionable.²¹⁰ Indeed, some simple attributions to Flann are in secondary hands (2:4.2). Superscriptions can also become displaced within a series of poems during copying.²¹¹

Secondly, a simple attribution appears to designate what follows as the work of a single, named individual. Yet the nature of this work is not clear. Despite the profusion of such superscriptions in Gaelic manuscripts, there has been no investigation of the possible critical meaning of *cecinit* in this context. It often seems to have been taken, by recent scholars, as ascribing absolute responsibility for the content, form and language of a poem – in short, virtually modern, copyrightable authorship – to the named individual, when medieval conceptions of the relationships between authors and texts have been shown to be much more complex. For example, many texts derive their presence in Carney and Póidör's corpora (LR:3.2.2) from such attributions and they are then treated as closely exemplifying their specified authors' language. Whether the 'X cecinit' formula can be legitimately interpreted solely via this model is a subject for a more general discussion than is possible here.

²¹⁰ Richard Sharpe, *Titulus: Identifying Medieval Latin Texts: An Evidence-Based Approach*, Brepols Essays in European Culture 3 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), pp. 21–25; Victoria L. Gibbons, 'The Manuscript Titles of *Truth*: Titology and the Medieval Gap', *Journal of the Early Book Society*, 11 (2008), 197–203.

²¹¹ Simms, *Medieval Gaelic Sources*, p. 105.

3.1.2 Detailed attributions

Detailed attributions are like simple attributions in that they constitute external apparatus for an independent text. However, they include more information than the author-figure's name, such as a summary of the text or additional details about the author, and offer a wider variety of verbal phrases to describe his responsibility for the text. They are thus valuable as explicit critical presentations. Both simple and detailed attributions can be denoted by the medieval term *titulus*, which refers not just to a text's 'title' but to other data concerning its authorship and transmission.²¹²

3.1.3 Prosimetric attributions

As discussed (LR:4.2), poetry is often cited, in part or *in extenso*, within a prosimetric composition. Even if details provided about the poem and its author-figure are sparse, such attributions allow us to assess its relevance and importance within the prosimetric composition's development and wider argument.

3.1.4 Internal attributions

Some poems contain one or more quatrains naming the author-figure and giving sundry other circumstantial details. Compared to external attributions, internal attributions' embedment within a poem's metrics might more strongly guarantee such material's long-standing authenticity within the poem's textual tradition. However, often appearing at the poem's conclusion and beyond a *dúnad*,²¹³ internal attributions' later addition can rarely be ruled out (e.g. 2:4.2). It is also possible that the poem's composer was donning a 'mask', in Tymoczko's sense (LR:4.1). Naturally, prose texts' colophons (e.g. 2:4.2.2, 4:2.1.4–5) can be even more ambiguous. Furthermore, in some cases (e.g. 4:2.1.3, 4:2.1.6.1), I argue that what has traditionally been read as an internal attribution is actually a citation (MR:3.1.5).

3.1.5 Indirect citations

An author-figure can be cited as authorising certain arguments or data without any text attributed to them being written out or even specified. While highly ambiguous in terms of provenance, such citations are significant evidence for understanding the citators' concepts of authorship, as they show that an author-figure was not accessed

²¹² Sharpe, *Titulus*, pp. 29–31.

²¹³ In general, see Tomás Ó Concheannain, 'A feature of the poetry of Fearghal Ó Mac an Bhaire', *Éigse*, 15 (1974), 235–51; Damian McManus, 'Úaim Do Rinn: Linking Alliteration or a Lost *Dúnad*?', *Ériu*, 46 (1995), 59–63 (p. 59 n. 4).

only through texts attributed to him but could be considered directly responsible for ideas and information manifestable in multiple textual forms.

3.1.6 Independent texts

We also have a small number of texts in which Flann appears not as an author-figure but primarily as a character.²¹⁴ Whether such texts are best regarded as literary, historical, or pseudo-historical is often unclear. As a character, he is still invariably a scholar or a historian in such texts and often imparts information. Like citations, however, independent texts show that the medieval relationship with author-figures did not have to be via their purported direct compositions. They evidence interest in locating Flann within a social setting and within wider learned culture.

3.2 Structure

This thesis is structured around corpora of evidence rather than topic. This better facilitates the detailed textual analysis that some sources require, being either little understood textually or, sometimes, entirely unedited.²¹⁵ In **Chapters 2–5**, its structure is derived from the dates of the manuscripts in which relevant material appears. **Chapter 2** considers manuscripts produced before 1200. **Chapter 3** focuses on prosimetric uses of Flann’s work in *LGÉ*’s medieval recensions; most of its major developments are datable to the Middle Gaelic period but its actual manuscripts are mostly late medieval. **Chapter 4** concerns other later medieval manuscripts (1200–1600). **Chapter 5** covers Gaelic-language manuscripts post-1600.

I use the dates of manuscript versions because of difficulties in reliably dating many individual texts and because this thesis is concerned not with texts’ origins but with their reception and interpretation. Many of the features via which such phenomena are studied – attributions’ precise forms or texts’ physical context – are particular to certain manuscripts. They thus make much more sense as this investigation’s primary unit of study. Consequently, the location of the discussion of

²¹⁴ This is not common for a historically-attested medieval Gaelic poet; however, for other examples, see O’Leary, ‘Identities’; Peter J. Smith, ‘Flann mac Lonáin (d. 891x918)’, *ODNB* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/17683>> [accessed 20 June 2015].

²¹⁵ Editions of several such texts relevant to this study appear, with detailed commentary, in Gisbert Hemprich, *Rí Éirenn, König von Irland: Fiktion und Wirklichkeit*, 2 vols (Berlin: Curach Bhán, 2015). However, this work has been published too late for it to be used in this thesis.

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a text in this thesis should not be taken as dating its composition, it being widely accepted that early Gaelic texts are often preserved in late manuscripts.

In each chapter, a number of different aspects of the relevant periods' Flann-related material are considered, in line with the strands of investigation set out above (**MR:2**). First, I take a broad survey of the material and interests attributed to Flann within each period's manuscripts and address any major textual issues. Then, I examine Flann's author-figure's apparent self-presentation, that is, how texts attributed to Flann implicitly or explicitly present their author. Then, I consider the evidence presented by the period's manuscripts for how these texts were understood and used, via their attributional apparatus, context, and textual variants. Flann's presentation in independent texts is also considered alongside this evidence. I also attempt to make some observations on the actual, rather than proclaimed, utility of texts attributed to Flann in each period.

Combining these various approaches offsets their potential limitations. For example, overall surveys of the manuscript tradition might be somewhat untrue to the medieval subjective experience of working within manuscript culture and thus produce an impression of Flann that no medieval individual actually held. However, this type of information is then set alongside the close examination of specific responses to him and his work and both are set alongside intellectual activity's discernible realities.

Also, while Flann's apparent self-presentation and his treatment by commentators are dealt with separately, I treat both as presenting us with constructions and analyse neither as primarily about the historical Flann. This is due to ongoing attributional uncertainty and the possibility that we are, in some cases, encountering Flann's imitators. Furthermore, as discussed (**LR:4.3**), medieval authors like Flann purposefully constructed themselves according to commonly understood categories and conventions.

Chapters 1 and **6** are slightly different; in a way, both are about the manuscript tradition's limitations for understanding a figure like Flann. **Chapter 1** identifies three independent texts most likely to contain near-contemporary material on him but shows that they not only operate within their own discourse and perspective but respond to aspects of the historical Flann's biography. His

subsequent reception may thus in part derive from invisible factors not related to any extant texts attributed to him. **Chapter 6** examines Flann's profile in early printed works on Irish and Scottish history down to the late nineteenth century. In this medium, references to Flann are dominated by two bodies of material – the 'Synchronisms of Flann' and the 'Donegal Series' – whose associations with him in the medieval manuscript tradition are extremely tenuous. However, in each case, it is possible that now-lost medieval manuscripts were behind the emergence of these attributions, raising questions concerning how well surviving manuscripts represent his original profile in learned tradition.

3.3 Techniques

This study thus purposefully takes a range of approaches. Furthermore, material relevant to Flann is quite varied in subject-matter, genre, and the means and extent of its transmission to us. Therefore, on the small-scale within this thesis, the exact methodologies deployed must necessarily respond to the evidence's nature.

In general, I proceed, as discussed, through a combination of overall surveys of Flann's corpus, close reading of specific passages internal and external to his purported work, and consideration of manuscript and textual context. In many cases, close reading necessarily calls for certain points' developed literary or historical explication. Discussion of physical or textual context necessitates due cognisance of a manuscript's codicology and palaeography or a text's history. I also deploy targeted textual criticism in specific instances while discussing whether a text's extant form is authorial or the product of subsequent compilation.

Furthermore, a number of texts relevant to Flann remain entirely unedited. Diplomatic editions, with translations, of unedited material are included as Appendices, while the main text includes highly provisional suggestions regarding their date and genre. Interestingly, most of the unedited material is not directly attributed to Flann but instead consists of citations or independent texts; its previous unavailability might explain why prior studies have underestimated or oversimplified Flann's literary and scholarly afterlife.

4 Methodology review: conclusion

This composite, diachronic study traces Flann's reception and utility as an author-figure throughout Gaelic historiography, exploring how he purportedly presented himself and the strategies, models, and agendas that defined how later compilers interpreted him and his work. It thus offers insights into a named individual's coherence, dynamism, significance, and authorising power and thus into fundamental issues of authority and textuality.

It is, of course, a single case study, so comparison with other authors or further examination of some of the concepts involved would usefully develop or contextualise its conclusions. In the meantime, this thesis maintains its focus on Flann: not only is a single case-study more practical for a doctoral project but, as we have seen, the extent to which 'Flann Mainistrech' consistently denotes a coherent individual is itself a major issue. It is intended not only to provide insights on the topics and themes discussed but also as a methodological experiment into how we might investigate medieval Gaelic authors given the material's multi-dimensional nature.

Chapter 1

Fer Léiginn and Final Sage: Three Early Sources for the Historical Flann Mainistrech

1 Introduction

In this chapter, I examine three sources that are particularly likely to preserve perspectives on Flann Mainistrech from his lifetime or very soon thereafter, although this does not at all imply that material examined in subsequent chapters is categorically inauthentic. They are Flann's obits in the medieval Irish chronicles (**1:2**); 'Úsalepscop Érenn Áed', a panegyric for Áed úa Forréid (bishop of Armagh, 1032–56; **1:3**); and the Irish genealogies edited as *Corpus Genealogiarum Hiberniae* (*CGH*; **1:4**). Even in these early sources, Flann, as the texts present him, is prestigious but also multi-faceted and amenable to sources' agendas. Importantly for our consideration of what he means as an author-figure, they show that he is also the subject of historico-literary interest independent of his purported texts.

2 Flann's chronicle obits

2.1 Textual history (1)

A large proportion of the entries in the medieval Irish chronicles consist of death-notices, or obits, for kings, ecclesiasts, prominent scholars, and other elite figures. Almost all the chronicles covering the early Middle Ages originate physically from secular learned contexts in the fourteenth century or later but it is generally agreed that they were compiled out of earlier chronicles from ecclesiastical centres.²¹⁶ While

²¹⁶ Major recent studies on the chronicles include Gearóid Mac Niocaill, *The Medieval Irish Annals* (Dublin: Dublin Historical Association, 1975); David Dumville and Kathryn Grabowski, *Chronicles and Annals of Mediaeval Ireland and Wales: The Clonmacnoise Group Texts* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 1984); *The Chronicle of Ireland*, ed. and trans. by Thomas M. Charles-Edwards, 2 vols (Liverpool: University of Liverpool Press, 2006) [hereafter, *CI*]; McCarthy, *Irish Annals*; Nicholas J. Evans, *The Present and the Past in Medieval Irish Chronicles* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2010).

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retrospective chronicling or emendation did occur,²¹⁷ much material is thought to be originally near-contemporary with what it describes.

Six medieval Irish chronicles contain obits for Flann Mainistrech (**Appendix 3**). Each ascribes him titles and areas of expertise and provides a death-formula, as is standard when noting a scholar or ecclesiast's death.²¹⁸ However, each obit also varies significantly. The feasibility of reconstructing Flann's original obits is discussed below (**1:2.3**). For now, the chronicles containing Flann's obits can be split into three groups on the basis of textual history.

2.1.1 The 'Armagh Group'

The 'Armagh Group' consists of the *Annals of Ulster (AU)* and the *Annals of Loch Cé (ALC)*.²¹⁹ These are both descended from (and continue) an Armagh-Derry Chronicle that was kept at Armagh during the eleventh century and transferred to Derry around 1189, ending in the 1220s.

2.1.2 The 'Clonmacnoise Group'

The 'Clonmacnoise Group' consists of the *Annals of Tigernach (AT)* and *Chronicum Scotorum (CS)*.²²⁰ Their textual history is generally more obscure.²²¹ They seem to descend from a chronicle maintained at Clonmacnoise throughout the eleventh and twelfth centuries and ending before 1200. That multiple pre-1200 Clonmacnoise chronicles influenced the tradition has been proposed.²²² However, Nicholas Evans has shown that such a hypothesis is unnecessary,²²³ so we will assume the existence of a single Clonmacnoise Chronicle. Both the Armagh and Clonmacnoise Group

²¹⁷ For example, Evans, *Present*, p. 144.

²¹⁸ For further examples, see Richter, 'Personnel'.

²¹⁹ *AU: The Annals of Ulster* [AD 431–1201], ed. and trans. by Seán Mac Airt and Gearóid Mac Niocaill (Dublin: DIAS, 1983); *Annala Uladh. Annals of Ulster, otherwise Annala Senait, Annals of Senat* [AD1202–1541], ed. and trans. by Bartholomew MacCarthy (H.M. Stationary Office: Dublin, 1893). *ALC: The Annals of Loch Cé. A Chronicle of Irish Affairs from A.D. 1014 to A.D. 1590*, ed. and trans. by William M. Hennessy, 2 vols (Oxford: Longman, 1871); Evans, *Present*, pp. 8–11; McCarthy, *Irish Annals*, pp. 238–44. Citations from chronicles hereafter are *sub anno* from the cited editions. Translations are my own, although referring to those of the editors.

²²⁰ *AT: 'The Annals of Tigernach'*, ed. and trans. by Gearóid Mac Niocaill, unpubl. ms., *CELT Database* <<http://www.ucc.ie/celt/published/T100002A/index.html>> [accessed: 30 August 2013]. *CS: 'Chronicum Scotorum'*, ed. and trans. by Gearóid Mac Niocaill, unpubl. ms., *CELT Database* <<http://www.ucc.ie/celt/published/T100016/index.html>> [accessed: 30 August 2013].

²²¹ Evans, *Present*, pp. 67–90, 249.

²²² Dumville and Grabowski, *Chronicles*, pp. 153–226.

²²³ Evans, *Present*, pp. 45–66.

Chronicles used the hypothetical *CI*, which ended in 911,²²⁴ although Evans has suggested that written reports continued to circulate between chronicling centres thereafter down to the mid-eleventh century.²²⁵

2.1.3 Late chronicles

Two seventeenth-century chronicles may draw on both groups. The *Annals of the Four Masters (AFM)* were compiled from a range of sources, including *AU* and *ALC* and a now-lost Clonmacnoise Group chronicle.²²⁶ The *Annals of Clonmacnoise (AClon)* is a Hiberno-English translation of a medieval Gaelic chronicle.²²⁷ According to McCarthy, this medieval chronicle used both the Armagh-Derry Chronicle and various Connacht sources related to the Clonmacnoise Group.²²⁸ *AClon*, however, remains particularly in need of further investigation.

2.1.4 Grouping the obits

Credible lines of textual transmission thus run from contemporary chronicling at Armagh and Clonmacnoise at the time of Flann's death to the various extant chronicles. In structure and terminology, Flann's Armagh and Clonmacnoise Group obits align according to the groups' textual histories and thus may well derive from the two archetypal Chronicles. On the same basis, his *AFM* obit aligns with the Clonmacnoise Group. Since *AClon* might draw on both chronicle groups, its obit is more problematic. Reverse translated, it could resemble Flann's obits in the Armagh Group but also his obit in *CS*: *AClon*'s *lector* appears as *fer léiginn* in cognate entries, its *chronicler* as *suí senchusa* or *senchaid*.²²⁹

²²⁴ However, see McCarthy, *Irish Annals*, although see also Evans, *Present*, esp. pp. 3–6; Denis Casey, 'The Irish Annals: Their Genesis, Evolution and History [rev.]', *Early Medieval Europe*, 18:1 (2010), 126–28, but also Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, 'The Present and the Past in Medieval Irish Chronicles (review)', *Scottish Historical Review*, 92:1 (April 2013), 149–51.

²²⁵ Evans, *Present*, pp. 91–114.

²²⁶ Bernadette Cunningham, *The Annals of the Four Masters: Irish History, Kingship and Society in the Early Seventeenth Century* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2010), pp. 41–73.

²²⁷ *The Annals of Clonmacnoise*, ed. by Denis Murphy (Dublin: Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland, 1896).

²²⁸ McCarthy, *Irish Annals*, pp. 252–61, 286–93. However, see Dumville and Grabowski, *Chronicles*, pp. 6–7; Evans, *Present*, pp. 45–58.

²²⁹ *Lector*: *AClon* 945 (p. 155), cf. *AFM* 948.13; *AClon* 1061 (p. 178), cf. *AU* 1061.1, *AFM* 1061.3. *Chronicler*: *AClon* 871 (p. 143), cf. *AFM* 884.5; *AClon* 1024 (p. 174), cf. *AFM* 1024.4.

2.2 Flann from his obits

It is worth discussing the terminology used to describe Flann in his obits not only to appreciate their testimony and variants but because this terminology will recur in other sources examined in this thesis.

2.2.1 ‘Textual study’, ‘historical tradition’

All of Flann’s obits – including *AClon*, reverse translated – ascribe Flann expertise in *léigenn* and *senchas*. *Léigenn* (‘textual study’, from Latin *legendum*) denotes formal textual study, often of authoritative texts and with ecclesiastical connotations.²³⁰ It is sometimes translated ‘Latin learning’, but I know of no evidence justifying such a restriction.²³¹ *Senchas* (‘historical tradition’) refers to (quasi-)traditional, communally-sanctioned, although by no means necessarily oral, information of, and ostensibly from, the past, often aetiological.²³² This information could resemble what we would call history, although can relate to diverse subjects, such as law.

2.2.2 ‘(Arch-)textual scholar’

In all chronicles except *AT* (and, technically, *AClon*), Flann is a *fer léiginn* (lit. ‘man of reading’; ‘textual scholar’); in *AU* and *ALC*, he is an *ard-fer léiginn* (‘arch-textual scholar’) while, in *CS* and *AFM*, he is specifically *fer léiginn* of Monasterboice. *Fer léiginn* is sometimes misleadingly translated ‘lector’,²³³ denoting either a liturgical reader or a teacher.²³⁴ A *fer léiginn* seems to have been both a teacher within a monastic school and a scholar and senior administrative figure in the community overall.²³⁵ Some *fir léiginn* also seem to have been primarily attached to secular kingdoms.²³⁶ The curriculum studied and taught by a *fer léiginn* is conjectural but

²³⁰ ‘léigenn’, *Electronic Dictionary of the Irish language* [hereafter, *eDIL s.v.*]

<<http://edil.qub.ac.uk/dictionary/search.php>> [accessed 13 August 2015].

²³¹ McCone, *Pagan Past*, p. 24; Johnston, *Literacy*, p. 57.

²³² *eDIL s.v. senchas*; Francis J. Byrne, ‘*Senchas*: The Nature of Gaelic Historical Tradition’, in *Historical Studies IX*, ed. by John G. Barry and Wilfred L. Warren (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1974), pp. 137–59; Donnchadh Ó Corráin, ‘Creating the past: the early Irish genealogical tradition’, *Peritia*, 12 (1998), 177–208 (pp. 188–89); Toner, ‘Authority’ p. 61.

²³³ *eDIL s.v. fer*.

²³⁴ *The Vocabulary of Intellectual Life in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Mariken Teeuwen, Études sur le vocabulaire intellectuel du Moyen Age 10 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), pp. 85–87.

²³⁵ Hérold Pettiau, ‘The officials of the church of Armagh in the early and central Middle Ages, to A.D. 1200’, in *Armagh: History and Society*, ed. by Art J. Hughes and William Nolan (Dublin: Geography Publication, 2001), 121–86 (pp. 136–38); Johnston, *Literacy*, pp. 92–130.

²³⁶ For example, *AFM* 1070.2, 1088.1, 1106.2, 1137.4; cf. *LL*, I, p. xvi.

could have resembled *grammatica*.²³⁷ The term *fer léiginn* appears in most chronicles in the tenth century and appears most often in the eleventh and twelfth. Johnston correlates this with increased vernacular literary activity and education's centralisation in major ecclesiastical centres.²³⁸

Ard-fer léiginn apparently does not mean anything qualitatively different. *AT* and *CS* never use it in any entry, so it may be more stylistic than reflective of social reality. Since, in *AU*, *ALC*, and *AFM*, an *ard-fer léiginn* tends to appear in a more prominent monastery, like Armagh or Clonmacnoise,²³⁹ it may be connected to institutional power as well as scholarly ability.

2.2.3 'Ireland's history', 'the Gaels' history'

In the Armagh Group, Flann is *suí senchusa Éirenn* ('master of Ireland's history'), while, in the Clonmacnoise Group, he is expert in *senchas* among the Gaídil. Taken literally, this denotes someone expert either in the traditions of every part of Ireland and every sept of its people or in the constructed, united pseudo-history of the island and its eventual inhabitants, as per such texts as *LGÉ*. It is also used to describe Eochaid úa Flannucáin (*ob.* 1004), a key early contributor to *LGÉ*,²⁴⁰ and Gilla na Naem úa Duinn (*ob.* 1160), known for metrical regnal histories and a metrical digest of *dindsenchas*.²⁴¹

Carey has suggested that the title, *suí senchusa*, in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, was only held by one individual at a time, as it appears in scholars' chronicle obits roughly once a generation.²⁴² This case seems difficult to sustain. The work of scholars with this title is quite varied, as Carey admits.²⁴³ The term also appears in more individuals' obits than appear in his list.²⁴⁴ Furthermore, his list draws eclectically on multiple chronicles, without any textual explanation of how the record of a continuous institution became so widely scattered. The term seems to

²³⁷ For which, in an Irish context, see Abigail Burnyeat, 'The Early Irish *Grammaticus*?', *Aiste*, 1 (2007), 181–217.

²³⁸ Johnston, *Literacy*, pp. 125–28.

²³⁹ For example, *AU* 1046.5, 1102.12; *AFM* 1106.6.

²⁴⁰ *AFM* 987.2, 1003.4; *CS* 1004; Carey, 'Legendary history', pp. 41–42.

²⁴¹ *AT* 1160.8; Bhreathnach, 'Two contributors', pp. 107–08.

²⁴² Carey, 'Legendary history', p. 42.

²⁴³ Carey, 'Legendary history', p. 43.

²⁴⁴ *CS* 1024; *AFM* 1083.1.

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have been open to more general usage. The significance of its specifically island-wide or pan-Goidelic scope in the case of Flann remains unclear.

2.2.4 ‘Arch-poet’, ‘poetics’

Interestingly, each group is split within itself on whether Flann is an *ard-fili* (‘arch-poet’; *ALC*, versus *AU*) or expert in *filidecht* (‘poetics’, ‘the profession of poetry’; *AT* and *AFM*, versus *CS*). *Fili* is thought to denote someone formally trained in metrics and linguistics who performs the social functions of praise and satire, making him comparable to a rhetorician.²⁴⁵ In the past, it has been taken as a distinctly secular category.²⁴⁶ However, recent studies have stressed the prominence of ecclesiastical institutions in a *fili*’s formation and career.²⁴⁷ These terms, when applied to Flann, could mean that he engaged in public, politically charged poetic discourse or simply that he was trained in the composition and interpretation of poetry. *AT* and *AFM*’s pairing of *filidecht* with *airchetal* might imply the latter.

2.2.5 ‘Poetic composition’

Airchetal (‘poetic composition’; lit. ‘chanting forth’) seems to relate to the more technical aspects of *filidecht*, alongside which it is used in Flann’s obits in *AT* and *AFM*. It generally denotes the composition or performance of a poem, with no particular religious connotations.²⁴⁸ However, on the three other occasions it is used in the chronicles, *airchetal* is practised by evidently ecclesiastical individuals.²⁴⁹ It might thus refer to liturgical chant or mnemonic versification in a monastic school. Alternatively, it may be a corruption of *forcetal* (‘teaching’).²⁵⁰

²⁴⁵ Brían Ó Cuív, *The Linguistic Training of the Medieval Irish Poet* (Dublin: DIAS, 1983); *Uraicecht na Ríar: The Poetic Grades in Early Irish Law*, ed. and trans. by Liam Breatnach (Dublin: DIAS, 1987), pp. 81–89; Fergus Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law* (Dublin: DIAS, Dublin, 1988), pp. 43–49; Johnston, *Literacy*, p. 146.

²⁴⁶ Johnston, *Literacy*, pp. 16–18.

²⁴⁷ Liam Breatnach, ‘Satire, Praise, and the Early Irish Poet’, *Ériu*, 56 (2006), 63–84 (pp. 71–73); Johnston, *Literacy*, pp. 144–56.

²⁴⁸ *eDIL* s.v. *airchetal*; ‘The Caldron of Poesy’, ed. and trans. by Liam Breatnach, *Ériu*, 32 (1981), 45–93 (§§3–4 (pp. 64–65)); ‘An Old Irish Tract on Satire’, ed. and trans. by Roisin McLaughlin in *Early Irish Satire* (Dublin: DIAS, 2008), pp. 41–84 (§1 (pp. 52–53), §§4–18 (pp. 52–59)).

²⁴⁹ *CS* 1085; *AFM* 1103.1, 1168.1.

²⁵⁰ ‘Mac Dá Cherda and Cummaine Foda’, ed. and trans. by James. G. O’Keeffe, *Ériu*, 5 (1911), 18–44 (p. 32 (n. 4)).

2.2.6 ‘Final scholar’, ‘authority’, ‘master-sage’

The Clonmacnoise Group is distinguished by the use of pan-Goidelic titles in its obits for Flann that also describe his level of expertise in the various listed disciplines, even though the title is different on each occasion. *Tiugsuí* (CS) only ever refers to Flann, in any source. It also appears in ‘Flann a prímhíll Buiti binn’, a quatrain cited under his obit in *AFM* (see also 5:3.1) and constituting part of ‘Úasalepscop Érenn Áed’ (1:2). In the quatrain within Flann’s *AFM* obit, O’Donovan translates *tiugsuí* as ‘last sage’.²⁵¹ Murphy’s translation of ‘Úasalepscop Érenn Áed’ has ‘final sage’,²⁵² an epithet that Murphy suggests Flann obtained through compositions ‘summarising [...] all available tradition’.²⁵³ This interpretation is attractive and interesting, as we shall see. Yet, Hennessy, in the context of his CS obit, inexplicably translates ‘great sage’; *tiug* could also mean ‘difficult’, perhaps suggesting that Flann’s scholarship is obscure.²⁵⁴

Supremacy in learning is also implied by *ugdar* (‘author’, ‘authority’; Lat. *auctor*), in *AT*’s obit. This can simply denote a text’s composer but can also take on the sense of its Latin root. This designates an acknowledged expert and thus authority worthy of imitation in particular disciplines, also passing into the more impersonal sense of a citable source.²⁵⁵ *Ugdar* is used on only two other occasions in the chronicles in relation to non-legendary individuals.²⁵⁶ Both appear in the Clonmacnoise Group; one is a *fer léiginn*, the other an *ollam*, presumably in poetry.²⁵⁷

Suí ecna (‘master-scholar’ or ‘master of wisdom’), in the *AFM* obit, is more common in the chronicles. *Ecna* connotes divine, religious wisdom (*sapiens*, *sapientia*).²⁵⁸ Furthermore, it is often used in the chronicles in relation to individuals with formal ecclesiastical roles.²⁵⁹

²⁵¹ *AFM* 1056.3; *eDIL* s.v. 1 *tiug*; see also **Appendix 28**.

²⁵² Murphy (ed. and trans.), ‘Poem’, q. 31 (p. 155).

²⁵³ Murphy, ‘Poem’, p. 160.

²⁵⁴ *eDIL* s.v. 2 *tiug*.

²⁵⁵ *eDIL* s.v. *augtar*; Minnis, *Medieval Theory*, pp. 10–12; Lerer, *Chaucer*, p. 12; Teeuwen, *Vocabulary*, pp. 222–23.

²⁵⁶ Cf. *AFM* 266.1.

²⁵⁷ *CS* 1067; *AT* 1160.8.

²⁵⁸ *eDIL* s.v. 1 *ecna*(e); Richter, ‘Personnel’, p. 276.

²⁵⁹ For example, *AFM* 946.6; *AU* 1005.4; *ALC* 1030.5; *AT* 1098.2.

2.2.7 Flann's attributes: agreement and variance

At the core of all his obits, therefore, Flann engages with texts (*léigenn*) and with traditional accounts of the past (*senchas*), very possibly pursuing the latter through the former. He, or his work, or both, are consistently of 'national' importance either to Ireland or to the Gaídil. He is also consistently ecclesiastical (*fer léiginn*, *suí ecna*, perhaps *airchetal*), although this is notably downplayed in *AT*.

In terms of variance, both groups disagree internally on whether Flann was a *fili* or qualified in *filidecht*. As discussed, this disagreement's significance is unclear. If these terms were taken as meaning that Flann's work was distinctly politicised or secular, they might have been avoided by chroniclers envisaging a distinction between such activity and some ideal of ecclesiastical scholarship.²⁶⁰ Indeed, quite remarkably, Flann is the only *fer léiginn* called a *fili* or ascribed expertise in *filidecht* throughout the medieval Irish chronicles, implying that the two categories were not generally considered compatible, at least not by some chroniclers. On the other hand, if *filidecht* simply connotes training in linguistics and metrics, then their incompatibility with the rest of his character is not obvious. The groups' disagreement, of course, may simply arise from a stylistic choice between brevity and verbosity (**1:2.3.1**).

While the Armagh Group hardly plays down Flann's significance, he is emphatically pre-eminent in the Clonmacnoise Group. The vocabulary used in *AT*, *CS*, and *AFM*'s verse citation is not only rare in the chronicles but itself denotes a scholar in command of his designated disciplines. The sense of his importance is further enhanced in *AT* and *AFM* by their precise dates for his death.

The two groups' obits for Flann also differ structurally. The Armagh Group employs only titles (e.g. *ard-fer léiginn*) whereas the Clonmacnoise group ascribes Flann both titles (e.g. *fer léiginn*) and levels of expertise (e.g. *ugdar na nGaídel*) in disciplines (e.g. *senchas*). Ostensibly, the Armagh Group is concerned primarily with Flann's social roles, while the Clonmacnoise Group is additionally concerned with scholarly disciplines, its obits also describing Flann via the disciplines in which he was adept. Indeed, the terms *tiugsuí* and *ugdar* both describe Flann's relationships with bodies of texts and learned disciplines rather than any institutional function. In

²⁶⁰ Richter, 'Personnel', p. 287.

other words, the Armagh Group obits are more biographical while the Clonmacnoise Group obits focus on intellectual matters. Whether anything should be read into this is not clear; after all, the Armagh Group obits' titles, *ard-fer léiginn* and *sui senchusa*, are also both ultimately based around disciplines. Wider research is needed into such obits' structures before this observation can be taken further.

2.3 Textual history (2)

All of these obits were written down in the later medieval or post-medieval eras. As such, they constitute interesting evidence of what their respective scribes and compilers collectively thought was legitimate material on Flann. It might also be possible, however, to reconstruct what was in Flann's archetypal obit in each group.

In the case of the Armagh Group, it is generally agreed that *AU* and *ALC* have a common source in the Armagh-Derry Chronicle ending in the 1220s. The Clonmacnoise Group is more problematic but may have a twelfth-century common source (1:2.1.2). Prior to these archetypes, except where entries appear in both Groups from a further common source (e.g. *CI*), editorial interventions are rarely straightforwardly discernible. This includes anything altered between the initial, presumably contemporary, records of Flann's death and the groups' archetypes. The latter are, however, the closest we can get to contemporary records.

2.3.1 Flann's obit in the Armagh-Derry Chronicle

Since they appear in *AU* and *ALC*, we can assume that the Armagh-Derry Chronicle contained the words 'aird-fer leighinn 7 sui senchusa Erenn, in uita eterna requiescit [or, 'requieuit']'. Also, *AClon* seems to translate the part prior to the death-formula.

ALC's *ard-fili* is not in *AU*. *AClon* could have loosely translated *ard-fili* as 'best learned' but this lacks corroboration. It is, however, by no means certain that *ard-fili* was not in the Armagh-Derry Chronicle obit. *ALC* uses neither *ard-fili* nor *fili* to describe any other individual, although it does mention expertise in *filidecht*.²⁶¹ It also attributes some verse citations to 'in file' (see below). Prior to the 1220s but before 1014, when *ALC* begins, *AU* uses *ard-fili* twice;²⁶² both individuals are absent

²⁶¹ For example, *ALC* 1086.1.

²⁶² *AU* 1048.2, 1088.5.

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from *ALC*. Pre-1014, *AU* also uses *fili* on two further occasions.²⁶³ In general, *ALC* mentions significantly fewer scholars than *AU* for 1014x1224, 32 versus 57.²⁶⁴ In one exception, *ALC* includes 12 *ollaim* (sing. *ollam*; ‘expert’, highest grade of *fili*) compared to *AU*’s 8 over the same period.²⁶⁵ While the overlap suggests that the series was in the Armagh-Derry Chronicle, *ALC* either retained it more fully or sourced information on additional *ollaim* from elsewhere.

Thus, both *ard-fili*’s presence in, and absence from, the Armagh-Derry Chronicle obit raise issues. If it was not there, then *ALC* interpolated a term it otherwise avoided and quite possibly expunged from its source, although *ALC* is evidently not completely dismissive of poets. If it was, then *AU* omitted it in Flann’s case despite using it elsewhere. None of those *AU* designates (*ard-*)*fili* resemble Flann in any other way, except perhaps for the early pseudo-historian, Máel Muire Othna (*ob.* 887),²⁶⁶ so *AU*’s compilers may have been operating according to a particularly strict definition. On balance, *ard-fili* cannot be dismissed as a late insertion into *ALC* but may also have been in the Armagh-Derry Chronicle and thus possibly in the contemporary obit.

If *ALC*’s compilers did interpolate the term, however, they may well not have intended any controversy. Between 1233 and 1293, *ALC* cites a quatrain from ‘Éistid a éigse Bhanbha’ on the death of each Ó Conchobair king of Connacht.²⁶⁷ There, they are attributed to ‘in file’ or ‘poeta’, specified once as Donnchad Baccach Úa Maoilchonaire (*ob.* 1404),²⁶⁸ *ollam* to Ó Conchobair.²⁶⁹ Hardly arcane, it is a metrical Connacht king-list recording each king’s *aided* and is thus closely comparable to work attributed to Flann (e.g. **2:2.2.1**), although the poets possibly

²⁶³ *AU* 887.5, 1009.10.

²⁶⁴ These observations are based on searches for *léigenn*, *senchas*, *fili*, *filidecht*, *airchetal*, *ughdar*, *tiugsuí*, *ecna*, *éces*, *ollam* and *dán* (including declined forms and orthographic variants) in the electronic texts of the editions of the chronicles on *CELT*.

²⁶⁵ *ALC* 1016.1, *AU* 1016.3; *ALC* 1030.9, *AU* 1030.8; *ALC* 1041.2, *AU* 1041.2; *ALC* 1048.1; *ALC* 1079.1, *AU* 1079.1; *ALC* 1088.3; *AU* 1100.1; *ALC* 1119.3, *AU* 1119.3; *ALC* 1130.3; *ALC* 1177.8, *AU* 1177.4; *AU* 1178.8; *ALC* 1181.4; *ALC* 1185.5; *ALC* 1281.1.

²⁶⁶ *AU* 887.5; Carey, ‘Máel Muru Othna’.

²⁶⁷ *ALC* 1233.3, 1274.1, 1274.2, 1274.4, 1278.1, 1288.2, 1293.1; McCarthy, *Irish Annals*, pp. 252–61. The poem is currently unedited: see Dublin, RIA, MS B.iv.2 (1080), *saec.* XVII, fols 50^v1–52^r8 (50^v21–22, 51^r7–8, 9–10, 11–12, 13–14, 17–18, 19–20).

²⁶⁸ *ALC* 1278.1.

²⁶⁹ *AFM* 1404.7.

differed in social role. As we have discussed, the semantic field of *fili* is quite broad and *AU* and *ALC* may well use it in different ways.

2.3.2 Flann's obit in the Clonmacnoise Chronicle

Flann's obit in the Clonmacnoise Chronicle probably resembled *AT*'s and *AFM*'s prose. *AT*'s omission of *fer léiginn* can be explained by its general disinterest in ecclesiastical material, *CS*'s omission of *filidecht* and *airchetal* by its tendency to abbreviate.²⁷⁰ *AFM*, meanwhile, includes all these elements, although its Clonmacnoise source remains obscure.²⁷¹ As the extant chronicles split evenly between *ugdar*, *tiugsuí*, or *suí ecna*, it does not seem possible to identify which of these terms is the original, although *tiugsuí*'s status as Flann's personal epithet might slightly recommend it.

AT and *AFM* both also include precise calendrical dates for Flann's death, potentially providing a useful clue as to their material's provenance. Flann's death occurs on the seventh kalends of December (24th November) in *AT* but the fourth kalends (27th November) in *AFM*. *AT* also specifies the sixteenth of the moon. In 1056, this occurred on 26th November, that is, the sixth kalends of December.²⁷² All this is within the scope of observational or scribal error, especially if Roman numerals (.uii., .iu., .ui.) were used. The three dates thus seem to derive from the same piece of information and, being in *AT* and *AFM*, it was presumably in the Clonmacnoise Chronicle. However, the Clonmacnoise Chronicle does not seem to have included many such entries. Other than a small corpus apparently from *CI*,²⁷³ calendrical dates are very sparse in post-911 *AT* and *CS* and, where they do appear, tend to be paralleled in *AU*.²⁷⁴ *AT* and *AFM*'s calendrical death-date for Flann thus may well have been obtained elsewhere.

It may have come from an Armagh source. It is not known where Flann died, but Monasterboice or possibly Armagh seem most likely (1:3). For the tenth and

²⁷⁰ Evans, *Present*, p. 52.

²⁷¹ McCarthy, *Irish Annals*, pp. 328–30; Cunningham, *Annals*, pp. 43–44, 55–58.

²⁷² *Time and Date*, ed. by Steffan Thorsen

<www.timeanddate.com/calendar/moonphases.html?year=1056&n=78> [accessed 7 July 2014]. The converter uses the Julian calendar.

²⁷³ For example: *CI* 617.1 (p. 129); 637.3 (p. 141); 716.5 (p. 190); 763.1 (p. 231); 862.5 (p. 315); 879.1 (p. 329).

²⁷⁴ For example: *CS* 916 (cf. *AU* 916.1); *CS* 1022 (cf. *AU* 1022.3). For *AT*'s use of epacts, see McCarthy, *Irish Annals*, p. 190.

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eleventh centuries, *AU* preserves several precise calendrical dates for events at Armagh and across the north, although without lunar data.²⁷⁵ These were presumably recorded at Armagh or within its *familia*. Furthermore, Evans has identified an annalistic document, with coverage up to *c.* 1060, which was used in both the Armagh-Derry and Clonmacnoise Chronicles.²⁷⁶ Several of *AU*'s entries containing precise calendrical dates seem to have been in this shared source.²⁷⁷ They lack calendrical dates in *AT* or *CS*'s corresponding entries but the shared source did not necessarily omit them.

In this context, it seems perfectly credible that Clonmacnoise's chroniclers received the precise date of Flann's death from Armagh. Even lacking the evidence cited, this sort of detail might be expected to originate ultimately from a chronicling centre near the incident. This raises the question of how much of Flann's obit in the Clonmacnoise Chronicle was devised at Clonmacnoise and how much was received from Armagh. We might have been considering the view of one chronicling centre on Flann, not two. Furthermore, as we will see (1:3), Flann was evidently closely involved with Armagh, raising the possibility of bias in his favour.

2.4 Flann's obits: conclusions

Flann's chronicle obits provide us with a series of rough sketches of his interests and social roles, as we have discussed. Engagement with historical traditions and formal, pedagogical interpretation of literature are consistent elements, as is the 'national' scope or relevance of his activities.

Much remains uncertain, however. Other than these core elements, it is difficult to say with confidence what was or was not in any near-contemporary obits. In particular, both the authenticity of his designation as an *ard-fili* or as expert in *filidecht* and what this might mean are open to interpretation. We have also observed that the obits may be derived from two perspectives, one defining Flann in terms of his roles, the other in terms of his interrelationships with a schema of learning.

²⁷⁵ Deaths of Armagh scholars: *AU* 1056.2 (in verse), 1064.5, 1086.1 (in verse). Other Armagh events: *AU* 989.1, 1020.4, 1092.7. Northern events: *AU* 926.6, 1004.5.

²⁷⁶ Evans, *Present*, pp. 244–46.

²⁷⁷ *AU* 989.1, 1004.5, 1020.4.

Finally, the institutional provenance of this material has also been called into question.

Further uncertainty emerges when one considers Flann's obits in the wider context of the chronicles' coverage of Middle Gaelic scholars and poets generally. Many authors with similar and apparently influential works in the manuscript tradition are absent from the chronicles, including Eochaid Éolach úa Céirin (2:2.2.3), Gilla Cóemáin,²⁷⁸ Tanaide Éolach,²⁷⁹ and Gilla Mo Dutu úa Casaide.²⁸⁰ This implies that factors not immediately discernible from authors' texts might determine their inclusion: social prestige, political activities, or connections at a chronicling centre, for example. Coverage of Flann in the chronicles thus cannot be related directly to his role as an author of texts.

3 'Úasalepscop Érenn Áed'

It is to Flann's connections at such a chronicling centre that we now turn. In 'Úasalepscop Érenn Áed', we have an apparently contemporary snapshot of Flann moving among Armagh's ecclesiastical elite. This is an anonymous praise-poem for Áed úa Forréidh, bishop of Armagh from 1032 until his death in 1056.²⁸¹ It is preserved uniquely in the seventeenth-century manuscript RIA B.iv.2. Nonetheless, the text is regarded as genuinely contemporary with Áed's episcopacy;²⁸² the obscure historical personages it mentions and its irrelevance to any subsequent political context make it unlikely to be a later fabrication. Murphy dates it specifically to 1032x1042.²⁸³

The poem is mainly concerned with Áed's generosity, piety, and erudition. Echoing secular panegyric, images of the enjoyment of alcohol in his presence recur throughout, culminating in the poet's request for an exquisite drinking-horn (qq. 1–22). There then follow seven quatrains (qq. 23–29) on the extended family of Armagh's Clann Sinaich abbot, Amalgaid mac Máel Muire (*ob.* 1049), then four (qq.

²⁷⁸ Smith, *Three Historical Poems*.

²⁷⁹ Carey, 'Legendary history', p. 44.

²⁸⁰ Murray, 'Gilla Mo Dutu'.

²⁸¹ 'A Medley of Irish Texts', ed. by Kuno Meyer, *Archiv für celtische Lexikographie*, 3 (1907), 302–26 (pp. 306–08); Murphy (ed. and trans.), 'Poem'.

²⁸² Murphy, 'Poem', p. 140; Carney, 'Dating' p. 180.

²⁸³ Murphy, 'Poem', p. 140.

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30–33) on personnel from other churches in east Ulster and Louth.²⁸⁴ Among the latter, we find Flann Mainistrech (q. 31). It is never explained why these precise individuals are included alongside Áed, beyond involvement with Armagh and its network.

The quatrain on Flann, ‘Flann a príomhchill Buiti binn’, is also cited in his *AFM* obit and elsewhere (5:3.1). It has been translated by John O’Donovan and Alan Mac an Bhaird from Flann’s *AFM* obit and by Gerard Murphy from ‘Úasalepscop Érenn Áed’.²⁸⁵ Their translations are printed in **Appendix 4**. Despite its various manuscript versions being very similar, translations of the quatrain vary quite significantly, particularly at line *c*. In general, O’Donovan rejects any involvement of alcohol. He seems to derive *mid-*, ‘contemplative’, from *midithir* (‘judges, measures’), although no other examples of such a usage are apparent;²⁸⁶ *mid-*, however, can mean ‘honourable’ as well as ‘mead’.²⁸⁷ He reads ‘suidhes’ (‘who sits’) instead of RIA B.iv.2’s ‘súiges’ (‘who drinks’),²⁸⁸ even though, as Murphy points out, we might still expect *saides* rather than *suides* for ‘who sits’ in the early eleventh century.²⁸⁹ An interest in libations is also appropriate to the quatrain’s context in ‘Úasalepscop Érenn Áed’. I am thus more inclined towards Murphy and Mac an Bhaird’s interpretation on this point.

Less plausible is Mac an Bhaird’s reading of *síde* as literally denoting underground fairy realm (gen. sing. of *síd*) in this context.²⁹⁰ It is not clear whether Murphy’s ‘magical’ is literal or figurative. The genitival adjective, *síde*, can simply mean ‘wondrous’,²⁹¹ which seems safer. O’Donovan’s anaphoric pronoun (‘side’) is not possible, as *-í-* is required for the rhyme with ‘tíre’.

Line *d*, while commanding more agreement among the translators, is difficult to interpret. We have already discussed *tiugsuí* (1:2.2.6). Murphy glosses ‘the three

²⁸⁴ Murphy (ed. and trans.), ‘Poem’, pp. 160–62.

²⁸⁵ *AFM* 1056.3; Murphy (ed. and trans.), ‘Poem’, q. 31 (p. 155); ‘Dán Díreach agus Ranna as na hAnnála 867–1134 AD’, ed. and trans. by Alan Mac an Bhaird, *Éigse*, 17 (1977), 157–68 (p. 165).

²⁸⁶ I am grateful to Prof. Gregory Toner for this explanation.

²⁸⁷ *eDIL* s.v. 2 mid; 1 mid.

²⁸⁸ For O’Donovan’s version of *AFM*, see Cunningham, *Annals*, pp. 74–76.

²⁸⁹ Murphy, ‘Poem’, p. 155 (n. 31c).

²⁹⁰ Tomás Ó Cathasaigh, ‘The semantics of *síd*’, *Éigse*, 17:2 (1978), 137–55.

²⁹¹ *eDIL* s.v. síd.

Finns' land' as 'a common poetic name for Ireland',²⁹² as if the poem echoes Flann's 'national' status in the chronicles. The 'three Finns' – Bres, Nár, and Lothar – were indeed sons of Eochaid Feidlech, legendary king of Tara.²⁹³ However, the allusion may be specifically to the north of Ireland. For Kelleher, the Three Finns' triple incest with their mother symbolises unity between the Connachta, Uí Néill, and Airgialla within Leth Cuinn.²⁹⁴ The allusion might even be to Armagh itself, as the Three Finns are sometimes associated with Emain Macha,²⁹⁵ in Armagh's immediate vicinity.

Despite these issues, it is clear that Flann is very much an ecclesiast, as well as a formidable scholar, in this poem. All other identifiable characters are of ecclesiastical rank. Flann is named alongside some of Armagh's most senior personnel, although he retains his association with Monasterboice. Corroborative evidence from the tenth century suggests that Monasterboice fell within Armagh's jurisdiction at that point.²⁹⁶ In further indication of close ties, some important figures from Patrician hagiography are ascribed origins among the Ciannachta.²⁹⁷

Flann, as depicted in his chronicle obits, is partially recognisable in 'Úasalepscop Érenn Áed'. Moving in an ecclesiastical environment, he is a summative scholar who, again, may be of 'national' relevance, depending on how one interprets *tír Trí Finn*. However, he does not appear in the poem primarily through being a great historian but because of some role or favour at Armagh's episcopal court and perhaps to enhance Áed's prestige.

²⁹² Murphy, 'Poem', p. 162; *The Bardic Poems of Tadhg Dall Ó hUiginn (1550–1591)*, ed. and trans. by Eleanor Knott, 2 vols (London: ITS, 1921), I, lvii; Mac an Bhaird, 'Dán Díreach', p. 165.

²⁹³ Kicki Ingridsson, 'Motivation for incest: Clothru and the battle of *Druim Críach*', *Studia Celtica Fennica*, 10 (2013), 45–63.

²⁹⁴ John Kelleher, 'The *Táin* and the Annals', *Ériu*, 22 (1971), 107–27 (pp. 120–21).

²⁹⁵ 'Druim Críach, céte cét cúan', ed. and trans. by Edward J. Gwynn in *The Metrical Dindshenchas*, 5 vols (Dublin: Hodges and Figgis, 1903–1935) [hereafter *MD*], IV, 42–47 (q. 5 (pp. 44–45)). However, the common name for this threesome, *Trí Find Emain*, is instead generally etymologised from *emon* ('triplet': i.e. 'the three bright triplets'): *eDIL* s.v. 1 *emon*. I am grateful to Dr Kicki Ingridsson for her input on this point.

²⁹⁶ *AU* 924.5; Etchingham, *Church Organisation*, pp. 210–13.

²⁹⁷ Dobbs, 'Pedigree', pp. 149–50.

4 Corpus Genealogiarum Hiberniae

We also encounter Flann in an early source via his genealogical identity. An extensive collection of genealogies, appearing in *LL*, Rawl.B.502 (both twelfth-century),²⁹⁸ and a number of later manuscripts, has been edited as *Corpus Genealogiarum Hiberniae (CGH)*.²⁹⁹ Flann appears in a pedigree included therein, which reaches his son, Echthigern, and, in Rawl.B.502, his grandson, Éogan.³⁰⁰ Further descendants and collateral relatives can be identified from other sources.³⁰¹

Flann appears among the Ciannachta, Tadhg mac Céin's descendants. Cían was the son of Ailill Aulomm, king of Munster, by Sadb, daughter of Conn Cétcathach and was thus descended from both the northern and southern royal lines founded by Míl's leading two sons, Érimón and Éber respectively.³⁰² In tradition, Tadhg fought for Cormac mac Airt, a legendary king of Ireland, against the Ulaid and, in recompense, received land north of the River Boyne.³⁰³ His descendants there became known as the Ciannachta Breg and, later, after territorial losses in the early Middle Ages, as the Fir Arda Ciannachta.³⁰⁴ Another branch, the Ciannachta Glinne Geimin, somehow settled in the north-west, south of Lough Foyle.³⁰⁵ The Ciannachta's origin-legend reflects their medieval situation under Uí Néill overlordship, despite their status as a *fortúath*.³⁰⁶ The Fir Arda Ciannachta were in control of Monasterboice by the eleventh century, as Flann's father and descendants occupied various senior positions in the community.³⁰⁷ Accordingly, it was asserted

²⁹⁸ Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawl.B.502, *saec.* XI, XII.

²⁹⁹ *Corpus Genealogiarum Hiberniae*, ed. by Michael A. O'Brien (Dublin: DIAS, 1962) [hereafter, *CGH*]; John V. Kelleher, 'The Pre-Norman Irish Genealogies', *Irish Historical Studies*, 16:62 (September 1968), 138–53.

³⁰⁰ *CGH*, pp. 246–48 (Rawl.B.502 154a18–21). O'Brien's edition is referenced via the manuscript facsimile whence comes his main text; Flann also appears in the other manuscripts. In current foliation, his pedigree is at Rawl.B.502, fol. 83^{va}18–21.

³⁰¹ Dobbs, 'Pedigree'.

³⁰² *CGH*, p. 146 (Rawl.B.502 153^b40–57).

³⁰³ 'Cath Crinna', ed. and trans. by Standish H. O'Grady in *Silva Gadelica: A Collection of Tales in Irish*, 2 vols (London: Williams and Norgate, 1892) [hereafter *SG*], I, 319–26; II, 359–68.

³⁰⁴ Paul Byrne, 'Ciannachta Breg before Sil nAeda Slaine', in *Seanchas: Studies in Early and Medieval Irish Archaeology, History, and Literature in Honour of Francis John Byrne*, ed. by Alfred P. Smyth (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000), pp. 121–126 (124); Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 273.

³⁰⁵ Byrne, 'Ciannachta Breg', p. 121; Byrne, *Irish Kings*, pp. 68–69.

³⁰⁶ Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 549.

³⁰⁷ Dobbs, 'Pedigree'; Carey, 'Legendary history', pp. 42–43.

that St Buite himself had been of the Ciannachta,³⁰⁸ although, for Mac Shamhráin, this was a fabrication in support of Monasterboice's eleventh-century rulers.³⁰⁹

CGH itself tells us nothing about Flann beyond setting out his purported pedigree, plus two subsequent generations. Yet, again, it is noteworthy that he is included at all. Historical poets are even rarer in *CGH* than in the chronicles; I have only been able to identify Eochaid úa Flannucáin therein.³¹⁰ The inference is that Flann is once more appearing for reasons external to his textual output.

The Ciannachta's sheer venerability may alone have warranted the inclusion of Flann's lineage. However, Jaski has tentatively suggested that Flann or his offspring may in fact have redacted *CGH*, as we have it, themselves.³¹¹ *CGH* is derived from a northern redaction of a late tenth-century Munster genealogical collection and theirs is the only identifiable northern lineage to reach the late eleventh or (in Rawl.B.502) early twelfth century. This Munster genealogical collection was part of the now-lost *Saltair Caisil*,³¹² other purported contents of which may also have been copied or adapted by Flann and his circle.³¹³ If this is *CGH*'s history, Flann's appearance therein, very much against the trend for historical poets, is explicable by the context of its production. Even if it is not, the lineage traced for the Ciannachta in *CGH* (and elsewhere) implies that Flann did not stand or fall by scholarly talent alone but was also a member of the aristocracy.

5 Flann's sobriquet

In his chronicle obits, in every text of *CGH* except *LL*'s, and in many other sources, Flann appears as Flann *Mainistrech* ('of the monastery [of St Buite]'; i.e. Monasterboice). In contrast, he is never 'Flann mac Echthigirn' in medieval sources

³⁰⁸ Natalie Stalmans and Thomas M. Charles-Edwards, 'Meath, saints of (*act. c.* 400–*c.* 900)', *ODNB* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/51010>> [accessed 15 June 2015].

³⁰⁹ Mac Shamhráin, 'Flann'. In general, see Kelleher, 'Pre-Norman Irish Genealogies', pp. 150–51; Ó Corráin, 'Creating'.

³¹⁰ *CGH*, p. 420 (*LL* 334b45–63). A search was made for Máel Muru Othna, Airbertach mac Cosse, Cínaed úa hArtacáin, Flann mac Máel Máedóc, Eochaid úa Flannucáin, Gilla Cóemáin mac Gilla Samthainne, Gilla Mo-Dutu úa Casaide and Gilla na Naem úa Duinn.

³¹¹ Bart Jaski, 'The Genealogical Section of the Psalter of Cashel', *Peritia*, 17–18 (2003–04), 295–337 (pp. 331–32).

³¹² Pádraig Ó Riain, 'The Psalter of Cashel: A Provisional List of Contents', *Éigse*, 23 (1989), 107–30; **LR:3.2.1**.

³¹³ Jaski, 'Genealogical Section', pp. 328–29 (n. 121).

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beyond *CGH*. ‘Mainistrech’ is retained in his sons’ patronymics, ‘mac Flainn Mainistrech’.³¹⁴ Yet none of his known descendants bear it in their own right, despite occupying senior positions at Monasterboice.³¹⁵ Three individuals who do not appear to be Flann’s close relatives appear in the chronicles bearing it: Ailchú Monistrech Buiti (*ob.* 723),³¹⁶ Éogan Mainistrech (*ob.* 834), *fer léiginn* at Monasterboice and abbot of Armagh,³¹⁷ and Cormac Mainistrech (*ob.* 1092), Monasterboice’s abbot.³¹⁸

Its precise significance is thus not clear: it is applied universally neither to Flann’s immediate family nor to Monasterboice’s senior personnel. Kathleen O’Brien has observed that ‘geographic by-names’, the category in which she includes ‘Mainistrech’, are very rare in medieval Gaelic sources.³¹⁹ I am not aware of any others relating to an ecclesiastical centre. There is thus little opportunity for analogy. One possibility is that it denotes someone from Monasterboice who was also prominent in wider networks. In any case, some unknown social convention seems to have shaped how Flann Mainistrech’s very name is preserved for us.

6 Historical sources: conclusion

Arguably originating from very close to Flann’s lifetime, the sources discussed here present him as an important ecclesiastical scholar of texts and historical traditions. He may also have been some sort of professional poet. His work pertained to Ireland or the Gaídil as a whole and, indeed, in *CGH*, he has his own pseudo-historical, Milesian lineage via the Ciannachta.

These sources also give the impression of not really being about Flann strictly as an author but deriving from his richer historical existence. Many comparable authors are absent from the chronicles and *CGH* and his appearance in ‘Úasalepscop Érenn Áed’ is apparently to do with ecclesiastical politics. Their presentation of Flann arises out of their own agendas and contexts, possibly including the historical

³¹⁴ *AU* 1067.1, 1104.1.

³¹⁵ Dobbs, ‘Pedigree’; Carey, ‘Legendary history’, pp. 42–43.

³¹⁶ *AU* 723.2; cf. *AT* 723.2.

³¹⁷ *CS* 827, 834; *AFM* 825.5; *AU* 831.9, 834.2.

³¹⁸ *AI* 1092.8; *CS* 1092; *AFM* 1092.3. This data on these individuals was gathered via *Index of Names in the Irish Annals*, ed. by Kathleen M. O’Brien <medievalscotland.org/kmo/AnnalsIndex/> [accessed 17 July 2014].

³¹⁹ O’Brien (ed.), *Index* <medievalscotland.org/kmo/AnnalsIndex/DescriptiveBynames> [accessed: 17 July 2014].

Flann's own career. At the same time, he is integrated into a number of constructs. It has been suggested that annalistic terminology is not simply descriptive of reality but deliberately limited and standardised to emphasise historical continuity.³²⁰ *Ériu* and the *Gáidil*, in whose *senchas* he is *suí*, were themselves pseudo-historical concepts.³²¹ Flann himself is located within them even after possibly assisting in their elaboration. Indeed, the *tír Trí Finn* allusion illustrates this discourse's thoroughly literary nature.

Other aspects are simply inexplicable. For some reason, some chroniclers presented him as a *fili* and some did not. The meanings of terms like *fili*, *tiugsuí*, *ugdar*, even *Mainistrech*, are uncertain and thus subjective. The Clonmacnoise Group chronicles render him distinctive, even imposing, within their coverage of Irish intellectual history; what he was thought to have done that merited this and whether it survives for us in the form of a text will never be entirely clear.

Therefore, even when we seek out the most reliably early sources, we encounter agendas, constructs, and ambiguities in presentations of Flann. Despite this, one important point can be securely made. None of these sources, copied and adapted throughout the Middle Ages, are about Flann as author of any specific texts. For chroniclers, genealogists, and a near-contemporary poet, he was primarily a character, rather than an author. He was not simply a function of his texts' literal meaning. This is an important insight with which to approach actual texts attributed to him.

³²⁰ *CI*, I, 24–35; Evans, *Present*, pp. 226–29; Johnston, *Literacy*, pp. 98–101. However, see also Joan N. Radner, 'Writing History: Early Irish Historiography and the Significance of Form', *Celtica*, 23 (1999), 312–25 (p. 314)

³²¹ Carey, 'Legendary history'; Broun, *Scottish Independence*, pp. 44–47.

Chapter 2

'An audience that will become *auctores*':³²² Flann Mainistrech in Pre-1200 Manuscripts

1 Introduction

In this chapter, I examine Flann's texts in Middle Gaelic manuscripts. These were produced in ecclesiastical environments during a period of intense historiographical activity and fierce political competition among Ireland's kingdoms for regional and national domination.³²³ In considering Flann's texts, I begin within them and move outwards. That is, I begin by surveying their subject-matter and arguments (**2:2.2**, **2:2.3**). I then consider authorial self-representation (**2:3**), before comparing this to their composition and authorship, as denoted or implied by external apparatus and context (**2:4**, **2:5**). At this point, I consider some of the attributions' authenticity. Finally, I examine instances in which Flann's texts can be shown to have influenced other pre-1200 compositions (**2:6**).

2 Flann's pre-1200 corpus

2.1 The manuscripts

All four Gaelic-language manuscripts produced between Flann's lifetime and the beginning of the thirteenth century contain either texts attributed to Flann or some reference to him. These are:

³²² **2:5.3**.

³²³ Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, 'Na Mainistreacha agus an Léann', in *An Léann Eaglasta in Éirinn 1000–1200*, ed. by Máirtín Mac Conmara (Institiúid Diagachta agus Fealsúnachta Bhaile an Mhuilinn: Dublin, 1982), pp. 19–30; Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, 'The literature of medieval Ireland 800–1200: from the Vikings to the Normans', in *The Cambridge History of Irish Literature*, ed. by Margaret Kelleher and Philip O'Leary, 2 vols (Cambridge: CUP, 2006), I, 32–73.

- Rawl.B.503.³²⁴ This codex consists of the *Annals of Inisfallen* (AI).³²⁵ It was compiled around 1092 at an ecclesiastical centre in Munster and continued periodically thereafter into the fourteenth century.
- RIA 23.E.25.³²⁶ *LU*, now fragmentary, contains pseudo-history, religious texts, and saga literature. It has traditionally been regarded as the consecutive work of three scribes – A, M, and H – the latter two continuing, glossing, and amending the material they found. M is often identified as the Clonmacnoise scholar, Máel Muire mac Meic Cuinn na mBocht (*ob.* 1106),³²⁷ although a case has been made for this being H.³²⁸ However, in a recent re-analysis, Elizabeth Duncan has divided H into nine separate hands (H1–9).³²⁹ The scribes’ activity has been dated variously to between the late eleventh and the early thirteenth century and located at Clonmacnoise or in Connacht.³³⁰
- Rawl.B.502.³³¹ Within this composite manuscript, Flann-related material appears in Section B, a twelfth-century historical and genealogical compilation by a single scribe.³³² Although Section B’s identification with the ‘Book of Glendalough’ is disputed,³³³ its Leinster provenance is generally agreed.

³²⁴ Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawl.B.503, *saec.* XI, XII, XIII; Brían Ó Cuív, *Catalogue of Irish language Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library at Oxford and Oxford College Libraries*, 2 vols (Dublin: DIAS, 2001–03), I, 201–02.

³²⁵ *The Annals of Inisfallen*, ed. and trans. by Seán Mac Airt (Dublin: DIAS, 1977) [hereafter, AI]; Dumville and Grabowski, *Chronicles*, 1–81; McCarthy, *Irish Annals*, pp. 37–40; Evans, *Present*, pp. 12–14.

³²⁶ Dublin, RIA, MS 23.E.25 (1229), *saec.* XI/XII [hereafter, *LU*]; *LU*.

³²⁷ For example: *LU*, p. xii; Heinrich P. A. Oskamp, ‘Notes on the History of *Lebor na hUidre*’, *PRIA C*, 65 (1966–67), 117–37 (pp. 119–20).

³²⁸ Tomás Ó Concheanainn, ‘The Reviser of *Leabhar na hUidhre*’ *Éigse*, 15 (1974) 277–88. However, see also Heinrich P. A. Oskamp, ‘Mael Muire: Compiler or Reviser?’, *Éigse*, 16 (1976), 177–82.

³²⁹ Elizabeth Duncan, ‘The Palaeography of *Lebor na hUidre*’ (unpublished conference paper, ‘*Lebor na hUidre*: A Conference’, Royal Irish Academy, Dublin, 22 November 2012).

³³⁰ See also Gearóid Mac Eoin, ‘The Interpolator H in *Lebor na hUidre*’, in *Ulidia: Proceedings of the First International Conference on the Ulster Cycle of Tales*, ed. by James P. Mallory and Gerard Stockman (Belfast: December Publications, 1994), pp. 39–46.

³³¹ Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawl.B.502, *saec.* XI/XII; Ó Cuív, *Catalogue*, I, 163–200.

³³² Ó Cuív, *Catalogue*, I, 163–81.

³³³ Pádraig Ó Riain, ‘The Book of Glendalough or Rawlinson B 502’, *Éigse*, 18 (1981), 161–76; Caoimhin Breatnach, ‘Rawlinson B 502, Leabar Glinne Dá Locha and Saltair na Rann’, *Éigse*, 30 (1997), 109–32.

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- TCD 1339.³³⁴ *LL* contains a very wide range of historical and literary texts. It was created by a circle of scribes between the later twelfth and early thirteenth centuries.³³⁵ Like Rawl.B.502, it is invariably ascribed a Leinster provenance, but views on the precise centre vary.³³⁶

2.2 Texts, topics, and interests

2.2.1 Historical poetry on Irish kingdoms

For a summary of Flann's texts in *LU*, Rawl.B.502 and *LL* (for Rawl.B.503, see **2:6**), see **Appendix 5**. Most concern Irish kingdoms in the post-Patrician era, especially Uí Néill kingdoms. They either narrate a kingdom's origins or trace its continuity by relating the *dindsenchas* of its major royal site or by cataloguing the *aideda* of its kings.³³⁷ Several of the poems attributed to Flann extend, in some or all versions, to cover events that occurred after Flann's death in 1056. This issue is discussed further below (**2:4.1**), as are the poems' relationships with the contexts in which they appear within their respective manuscripts (**2:5**).

By far the most attributions to Flann are found in *LL* and all but one of the texts in this manuscript attributed to him are in hand U, whose activity has been dated to 1151x1164.³³⁸ Within *LL*, we first encounter the metrical regnal history of the kingship of Tara formed by 'Ríg Themra dia tesbann tnú' and 'Ríg Themra tóebaige íar ttain', which are attributed to Flann both internally and externally.³³⁹ I collectively term both poems the Tara Diptych. It runs from the prehistoric Eochaid Feidlech through about eighty reigns to the return of Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill (*ob.* 1022) after Brían Bóruma's death in 1014. It ascribes the Uí Néill's various branches a near-monopoly over Tara in the Christian era and, prior to that, has Níall Noígiallach's lineage alternate with intruders from unrelated dynasties from across

³³⁴ Dublin, Trinity College, MS 1339 (*olim* H.2.18), *saec.* XII [hereafter, *LL*].

³³⁵ Schlüter, *History*, pp. 24–27; Elizabeth Duncan, 'A reassessment of the script and make-up of *Lebor na Nuachongbála*', *ZCP*, 59 (2012), 27–66 (pp. 45–49).

³³⁶ Gearóid Mac Eoin, 'The provenance of the *Book of Leinster*', *ZCP*, 57 (2010), 79–96; Schlüter, *History*, pp. 30–35; Duncan, 'Reassessment', pp. 45–49.

³³⁷ Zumbühl, 'Contextualising', p.20.

³³⁸ Duncan, 'Reassessment', pp. 51–53.

³³⁹ *LL*, III, ll. 15640–987 (pp. 504–15); Pödör (ed. and trans.), 'Twelve Poems', I, 279–303. For some reason, Pödör does not include 'Ríg Themra tóebaige íar ttain'. Otherwise, limited access to Pödör's unpublished thesis has meant I have unfortunately not always been able to consult her texts and translations.

Ireland. The Tara Diptych thus also implies that the kingship of Tara is a kind of island-wide overlordship.

‘Mugain ingen Chonraid cháin’, with a simple attribution in *LL* to ‘Flann’ (for the *LU* text, see below), narrates the miraculous birth, in the sixth century, of Áed Sláine, son of Diarmait mac Cerbaill, and ancestor of the Síl nÁedo Sláine, the southern Uí Néill rulers of Brega.³⁴⁰ It includes a prophecy that his descendants will contend for the kingship of Ireland; indeed, Síl nÁedo Sláine supposedly provided some early kings of Tara, whose achievements were later briefly matched by Congalach Cnogba mac Máele Mithig (*ob.* 959).³⁴¹

‘Inn éol duib in senchas sen’, in *LL*, bears a simple attribution to ‘Fland’.³⁴² This is the only evidence for its authorship but it has generally been interpreted as referring to Flann Mainistrech, perhaps on account of its ending in the mid-eleventh century.³⁴³ Interestingly, this poem does not concern the Uí Néill at all. It names the kings of Cashel, in succession, from Cashel’s first Christian king, the fifth-century Óengus mac Nad Froích, to Donnchad mac Bríain Bóruma (*ob.* 1064).

The northern Uí Néill kingdom of Cenél nÉogain receives particularly lavish attention via a series of five poems in *LL* (‘Cía tríallaid nech ainsnis senchais’ to ‘A ngluind, a n-éichta, a n-orgni’),³⁴⁴ termed the Cenél nEogain Suite by Schlüter.³⁴⁵ With a simple and internal attribution to Flann, they detail Cenél nÉogain’s kings, their major battles, and those that had become kings of Ireland, introduced by a metrical *dindsenchas* of their seat at Ailech. It is followed in *LL* by two poems (‘Mide maigen clainne Cuinn’ and ‘Síl nÁedo Sláine na sleg’), bearing simple attributions to Flann, on the major southern Uí Néill kingdoms of Clann Cholmáin and Síl nÁedo Sláine respectively, giving names, reign-lengths, and *aideda*.³⁴⁶ I refer to all seven as the Uí Néill Series.

³⁴⁰ *LL*, III, ll. 18208–266 (pp. 590–91); Pödör (ed. and trans.) ‘Twelve Poems’, I, 304–21.

³⁴¹ Benjamin T. Hudson, ‘Congalach mac Máele Mithig [Congalach Cnogba] (*d.* 956)’, *ODNB* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/50098>> [accessed 25 May 2014].

³⁴² *LL*, III, ll. 19369–427 (pp. 635–36); Pödör (ed. and trans.), ‘Twelve Poems’, I, 322–38.

³⁴³ For references, see Pödör, ‘Twelve Poems’, I, 323; Schlüter, *History*, p. 136.

³⁴⁴ *MD*, IV, 100–07; MacNeill (ed. and trans.), ‘Poems’, pp. 48–82; *LL*, IV, ll. 23415–850 (pp. 784–802); Pödör (ed. and trans.), ‘Twelve Poems’, I, 27–154.

³⁴⁵ Schlüter, *History*, pp. 137–40.

³⁴⁶ *LL*, IV, ll. 23853–4196 (pp. 803–14); MacNeill (ed. and trans.), ‘Poems’, pp. 82–99; Smith (ed. and trans.), ‘Mide’ [‘Mide maigen clainne Cuinn’ only].

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Beyond *LL*, ‘Mugain ingen Chonraid cháin’ appears in *LU* as *Genemáin Áeda Sláine*’s metrical counterpart.³⁴⁷ Here, it is attributed to ‘Flann Mainistrech’.³⁴⁸ In Rawl.B.502, ‘Inn éol duib in senchas sen’, ‘Mide maigen clainne Cuinn’, and ‘Síl nÁeda Sláine na sleg’ all also appear within a series of metrical regnal histories on Irish kingdoms.³⁴⁹ All lack attributions and the first two extend much further than in *LL*, to the reign of Cormac Mac Carthaigh (1125–38) and the death of Donnchad mac Murchada Móir Úa Máelsechnaill (*ob.* 1106) respectively.³⁵⁰ In the Rawl.B.502 series, Cenél nÉogain is covered by ‘Cetrí ro gabh Éirinn uile’ (**Appendix 12**), here unattributed but attributed to Flann Mainistrech in some later manuscripts (**5:2.1.3**).

Containing the only actual reference to Flann in Rawl.B.502 outside *CGH* (**1:4**), ‘Druim Cetta, cette na noem’ is a complex poem.³⁵¹ It appears as part of the preface to *Amra Choluim Chille*, an elegy for Colum Cille (*ob.* 597) composed, according to the medieval commentary, in response to events at the assembly of Druim Cett in 575.³⁵² ‘Druim Cetta, cette na noem’, meanwhile, is a *dindsenchas* of Druim Cett (modern Co. Derry), within the territory of the Ciannachta Glinne Geimin. It contains a detailed account of the assembly (qq. 8–24) but traces the site’s significance back to much earlier events (qq. 1–7) and concludes with an assertion of the Ciannachta’s prestige, based on their descent from the royal lineages of both northern Leth Cuinn (i.e. the proto-Uí Néill) and southern Leth Moga (qq. 25–28; **1:4**). The illustrious events that occurred within their kingdom at Druim Cett enhance their significance yet further. Thus, while it might have found its way into Rawl.B.502 (and later manuscripts: **4:2**) through its testimony on the well-known assembly, it can be read as, in fact, promoting the Ciannachta. It concludes with a quatrain (q. 31) that could be either an internal attribution or a citation, naming

³⁴⁷ *SG*, I, 82–84; II, 88–91; *LU*, ll. 4205–334 (pp. 133–36).

³⁴⁸ *LU*, ll. 4273–74 (p. 135).

³⁴⁹ Ó Cuív, *Catalogue*, I, 199–200.

³⁵⁰ A text of ‘Inn éol duib in senchas sen’ from the Rawl.B.502 recension can be found in *An Leabhar Muimhneach*, ed. by Tadhg Ó Donnchadha (Dublin: The Stationery Office, 1940), pp. 408–11. For more information on *An Leabhar Muimhneach*, see Nollaig Ó Muraíle, *The Celebrated Antiquary: Dubhaltach Mac Fhirbhisigh (c. 1600–1671)* (Maynooth: An Sagart, 1996), p. 156.

³⁵¹ ‘The Bodleian *Amra Choluim Chille*’, ed. [from Rawl.B.502] and trans. by Whitley Stokes, *Revue Celtique*, 20 (1899), 30–55, 132–83, 248–87, 400–37 (pp. 136–41); in-text citations are from Stokes’ edition and translation.

³⁵² Máire Herbert, ‘The Preface to *Amra Coluim Cille*’, in *Sages, Saints and Storytellers: Celtic Studies in Honour of Professor James Carney*, ed. by Liam Breatnach, Kim McCone, and Donnchadh Ó Corráin (Maynooth: An Sagart, 1989), pp. 67–75. For the date of the assembly, see Bart Jaski, ‘Druim Cett Revisited’, *Peritia*, 12 (1998), 340–50.

‘Flann’ and Echthigern. Given that both Flann Mainistrech’s father and his son were called Echthigern,³⁵³ that the poem is about the Ciannachta, and that it potentially refers to other eleventh-century events,³⁵⁴ it seems reasonable to take this as Flann Mainistrech.³⁵⁵

2.2.2 *Lebor Gabála Érenn (LL)*

Also in hand U, *LL*’s version of *LGÉ* (Scowcroft’s version N³⁵⁶) contains two poems with prosimetric attributions to Flann. These are concerned with more ancient history. ‘Éstid a eolchu cen ón’ relates the *aideda* of the nobles of the Túatha Dé Danann,³⁵⁷ while ‘Toisich na llongse tar ller’ lists the *aideda* of the leaders of the Gaídil’s invasion of Ireland in which the Túatha Dé Danann were overthrown.³⁵⁸

2.2.3 Other

Two further texts attributed to Flann in pre-1200 manuscripts also relate ostensibly to the pre-Christian past. ‘A gillu gairm n-ilgrada’,³⁵⁹ which begins a simple attribution to ‘Flann Mainistrech’, is uniquely preserved in *LL* but in hand T2, whose activity (1181x1224) is potentially the latest in the manuscript.³⁶⁰ The poem’s wider meaning and purpose are unclear. It lists and mocks an apparently risible ‘munter mallacta’ of itinerant craftspeople through highly alliterative *casbairdne*.³⁶¹ O’Curry and Myles Dillon took this as referring to the story later preserved as *Tromdám Guaire*,³⁶² set in seventh-century Ireland. However, Thurneysen and Seán Ó Coileáin convincingly

³⁵³ *CGH*, p. 247 (Rawl. B. 502 154a19–20); Byrne (‘Ireland’, p. 865), for some reason, understands this Echthigern to be Flann’s son.

³⁵⁴ *The Poems of Blathmac*, ed. and trans. by James Carney (Dublin: ITS, Dublin, 1964), p. xii.

³⁵⁵ Carney, *Poems*, p. xii; Byrne, ‘Ireland’, p. 868.

³⁵⁶ Scowcroft, ‘Medieval recensions’, pp. 3–5.

³⁵⁷ *LGÉ*, IV, pp. 224–41; *LL*, I, ll. 1306–455 (pp. 41–46); Póðör (ed. and trans.) ‘Twelve Poems’, I, 233–62.

³⁵⁸ *LGÉ*, V, pp. 104–11; *LL*, I, ll. 1920–91 (pp. 60–62); Póðör (ed. and trans.) ‘Twelve Poems’, I, 263–78.

³⁵⁹ *LL*, I, ll. 3418–518 (pp. 108–11). Póðör also omits this text.

³⁶⁰ Duncan, ‘Reassessment’, p. 54.

³⁶¹ *LL*, I, l. 3499 (p. 110): ‘cursed company’ (my translation). Unless otherwise indicated, quoted text from *LU* or *LL* is from the relevant diplomatic editions.

³⁶² O’Curry, *Manners*, II, 150–51; ‘The Yew of the Disputing Sons’, ed. and trans. by Myles Dillon *Ériu*, 14 (1946), 154–65 (p. 154).

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relate the poem, instead, to *Tochmarc Étaíne*,³⁶³ set amidst interaction between the Túatha Dé Danann and the early Gaídil.³⁶⁴

LU's *Aided Nath Í ocus a adnacól* ('Nath Í's death and burial'; hereafter, *ANÍ*) is more complex.³⁶⁵ It begins, in hand M, with an account of the death in the Alps of Nath Í mac Fiachrach, the semi-historical last pre-Patrician king of Ireland, and his burial at Cruachu. There then follows a series of poems, with prose explications, listing others buried at Cruachu and elsewhere, with brief accounts of the circumstances of their composition. Duncan's hand H1 then adds further material. This includes a colophon describing the text's compilation by 'Flann', invariably taken as Flann Mainistrech,³⁶⁶ and Eochaid Éolach úa Céirin, a poet-scholar from Leinster,³⁶⁷ and the subsequent loss of two of the codices they consulted.

Fland tra 7 Eochaid eolach hua Céirin is iat ro thinolsat so a llebraib Eochoda hui Flandacan i nArd Macha 7 llebraib Manistrech 7 asna lebraib togaidib archena .i. asin Libur Budi testo asin carcar i nArd Macha 7 as in Libur Gerr boí mMainistir 7 is side ruc in mac legind leis i ngait dar muir 7 ni fríth riam di éis. Conid senchas na relec insin.³⁶⁸

ANÍ, as extant, also focuses on Ireland's pre-Christian past. One of the poems explicitly concerns the 'tri réilce idlaide'.³⁶⁹ Of the identifiable interrees named in the text, Nath Í is chronologically the latest. Some are of the Túatha Dé Danann. Of those of the Gaídil, many are of the Ulster Cycle era.

³⁶³ *IHK*, p. 256; Seán Ó Coileáin, 'The making of *Tromdámh Guaire*', *Ériu*, 28 (1977), 32–70 (p. 43 (n. 34)).

³⁶⁴ For which, in the context of *LGÉ*, see R. Mark Scowcroft, '*Leabhar Gabhála Éirenn* Part II: The Growth of the Tradition', *Ériu*, 39 (1988), 1–67 (pp. 8–9).

³⁶⁵ *LU*, ll. 2783–924 (pp. 90–94); 'Die Legende Von König Dathí', ed. and trans. [German] by Vlad Bănăţeanu, *ZCP*, 18 (1930), 160–88. For more information, see Nicholas J. Evans, 'Circin and Mag Gerginn: Pictish Territories in Irish and Scottish Sources', *CMCS*, 66 (Winter 2013), 1–36 (p. 11 (n. 33)).

³⁶⁶ For example: Ó Concheanainn, 'Scribes', p. 146; Edel Bhreathnach, 'The World of Medieval Irish Learning', in *Princes*, ed. by Duffy, pp. 389–405 (392–95).

³⁶⁷ 'An edition of *Esnada tige Buchet* from MS Rawlinson B. 502', ed. and trans. by Michael Byrnes in *Essays on the Early Irish King Tales*, ed. by Dan M. Wiley (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2008), pp. 91–103 (98). The Uí Céirin are attested as a sept of Uí Chennselaig: *CGH*, p. 346 (LL. 316^c59 (n. g)).

³⁶⁸ *LU*, ll. 2919–24 (p. 94): 'Flann, indeed, and Eochaid Eolach úa Céirin, it is they who compiled this from the books of Eochaid Ua Flannucáin in Armagh and from the books of Monasterboice and from certain other books besides, that is, the Yellow Book that was stolen from the strongroom in Armagh and the Short Book that was in Monasterboice, which the student took in theft across the sea and of which nothing is heard subsequently. So that is the history of the tombs' (my translation).

³⁶⁹ *LU*, ll. 2867–70 (p. 92): 'three pagan cemeteries' (my translation).

2.3 Genres and purposes

Flann's texts in pre-1200 manuscripts tend to catalogue different categories of historical characters and certain pieces of information about them. His metrical regnal histories, amidst much stereotyped panegyric, also provide an order of succession. Most also include *aideda* and sporadic genealogical information and two give *aideda* and reign-lengths. Aetiological narrative also features, in most cases related directly to the kingdoms charted in the regnal histories. As such, his poetry accords with forms and styles well-attested from Middle Gaelic historical poetry generally.³⁷⁰

While they generally lack explicit statements of purpose and can feel like information for information's sake, a political purpose for the regnal histories and associated aetiological narratives seems highly credible. For one thing, such poems proclaim many of the dynasties covered to be eligible to provide kings either of Tara or of Ireland (2:3.3.3). More generally, this sort of poem essentially asserts a kingdom's legitimacy, either by tracing the continuity of its royal succession or by demonstrating the antiquity of its territorial boundaries and royal centre. *ANÍ*'s identifications of dynastic tombs in ancient sites could be read in a similar way. Broun has suggested that poets like Flann were engaged in promoting the concept of kingdoms over dynasties.³⁷¹ His interpretation also explains their incessant cataloguing of royal *aideda*, as this emphasised the 'institutional longevity of a kingship in contrast with the mortality of kings'.³⁷² Conceptions of broader political units may also have been influential. Smith sees eleventh-century historical poetry as a continuum, with histories of dynasties and kingdoms produced so that they could be synchronised and correlated into a single history of Ireland and the Gaídil.³⁷³

Alongside apparently legitimising kingdoms as entities, texts attributed to Flann can make more particularistic political arguments. The Tara Diptych, for example, is not just about the kingship of Tara's antiquity or the validity of Uí Néill claims thereupon: it concludes with open celebration specifically of Máel Sechnaill's

³⁷⁰ Smith 'Historical verse', pp. 327–29; Zumbühl, 'Contextualising', p. 20.

³⁷¹ Broun, *Scottish Independence*, pp. 39–47.

³⁷² Broun, *Scottish Independence*, p. 45.

³⁷³ Smith 'Historical verse', pp. 338–41.

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return to the kingship as ‘Hérend oenrí’ and ‘ar n-ardrí’ in 1014.³⁷⁴ His own Uí Néill sept, Clann Cholmáin, is presented as particularly significant; for example, his great-grandfather, Flann Sinna (*ob.* 916), is said to be ‘de chlethchlaind Chuind Chétchathaig’.³⁷⁵ Similarly, ‘Inn éol duib in senchas sen’ concludes with support for the apparently contemporary Donnchad mac Bríain.³⁷⁶ ‘Druim Cetta, cette na noem’ (q. 30) asserts the Ciannachta’s right to enter ‘Caindruimm’ (i.e. Tara?), its promotion of their status being expressed through a specific institutional issue.

More puzzling is the political relevance, if any, of the conclusion to ‘Toisich na llongse tar ller’, in which prayers are invoked for ‘mac meic Flaind a laechLuignib’,³⁷⁷ Luigne being a sub-kingdom of Mide. Possible identifications of this individual include the tenth-century poet, Eochaid úa Flainn,³⁷⁸ Máel Sechnaill (great-grandson of Flann Sinna),³⁷⁹ some grandson of Flann Mainistrech himself, or, perhaps most applicably, a son of Cernachán mac Flainn, ‘tigerna Luighne’ (*ob.* 1001/1012).³⁸⁰ Proposing this latter identification, Carey remarked that eleventh-century Irish political instability must have reduced Flann to seeking such a minor king’s patronage.³⁸¹ As it happens, one of the *toisich* in the poem is called Luigne.³⁸² Were he supposed to have given his name to the kingdom,³⁸³ this, alongside the concluding invocation, might also have pleased Cernachán’s son (however, see also **3:2.1, 5:2.1.1**).

The purposes of ‘Éstid a eolchu cen ón’ or ‘A gillu gairm n-ilgrada’ are less clear, since any direct eleventh-century political relevance is not obvious and few clues are provided by the poems themselves. The relationship of Flann’s *LGÉ* poems, both in N and elsewhere, with the wider *LGÉ* project is a matter for discussion

³⁷⁴ *LL*, III, ll. 15971, 15976 (p. 515): ‘Ireland’s only king’ and ‘our high-king’ (my translation).

³⁷⁵ *LL*, III, l. 15931 (p. 513): ‘of the house-post of the children of Conn Céctachach’ (my translation).

³⁷⁶ *LL*, III, ll. 19426–27 (p. 636).

³⁷⁷ *LL*, I, l. 1989 (p. 62); *LGÉ*, V, pp. 110–11 (q. 18): ‘the grandson of Flann from heroic Luigne’.

³⁷⁸ Eleanor Knott, *Irish Classical Poetry* (At the Sign of the Three Candles: Dublin, 1957), p. 16; John Carey, ‘Lebar Gabala: Recension 1’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, Harvard University, Cambridge MA, 1983), p. 364; **5:2.1.1**. However, see also Póddör, ‘Twelve Poems’, I, 264.

³⁷⁹ Póddör, ‘Twelve Poems’, I, 264; Póddör ascribes ‘mac meic’ the sense of *úa* (‘grandson’, ‘descendant’).

³⁸⁰ *AFM* 1012.7.

³⁸¹ Carey, ‘Legendary history’, p. 44.

³⁸² *LL*, I, l. 1964 (p. 61); *LGÉ*, V, pp. 108–09 (q. 12).

³⁸³ The poem does not specify that this is the case, although, since other *toisich* have names like ‘Brego’, ‘Muirthemne’, and ‘Cualgne’, it may well be (*LL*, I, l. 1940–41 (p. 60); *LGÉ*, V, pp. 106–07 (q. 6)).

(**Chapter 3**). However, the two poems' attributions to him in N imply that he was understood by the twelfth century to be an authority on the developing unified pseudo-history of the Gaídil,³⁸⁴ which is also possibly implied by his chronicle obits (**1:2.2.3**). This itself was political and associated with the construction of the idea of a kingship of Ireland.³⁸⁵ 'A gillu gairm n-ilgrada', meanwhile, can at present only really be taken as associating him with literary traditions at some remove from direct political or national history.

2.4 Flann's pre-1200 corpus: conclusion

This survey of Flann's interests and approaches, as they emerge from pre-1200 manuscripts, is based upon acceptance of all attributions to him in these manuscripts. The Flann that emerges has command of large quantities of historical information that he uses to draw lines of continuity legitimising various medieval political entities. His involvement is also attested in more abstract projects in national pseudo-history and literature. However, issues around the relevant attributions' authenticity imply that this Flann might, to some extent, be a later construct. Furthermore, manuscript compilers' contextualisation of some of these texts sometimes contrasts interestingly with how we might read them in isolation. These dimensions are discussed further below.

3 Flann's constructions of his own author-figure

3.1 Personal information

First, I examine Flann's presentation as author-figure within his texts. On a few occasions, these include biographical data relating to him. The Tara Diptych includes a prayer for Flann's salvation, in which he is described as the son of a *fer léiginn*.³⁸⁶ As we have seen (**2:2.2.1**), his father, Echthigern, may also make an appearance in 'Druim Cetta, cette na noem'. Here, intriguingly, Flann and Echthigern are presented as working or performing at Tara. The internal attribution in 'A ngluind, a n-écta, a

³⁸⁴ Carey, 'Legendary history'.

³⁸⁵ Scowcroft, 'Leabhar Gabhála II', pp. 49–53.

³⁸⁶ *LL*, III, l. 15986 (p. 515).

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n-orgni' (Cenél nÉogain Suite) explicitly describes Flann as *fer léiginn* of Monasterboice.³⁸⁷ In two further poems, Flann appears to locate himself at Monasterboice or in the environs.³⁸⁸ These scattered references imply that basic details of Flann's identity were relevant in some way to his compositions.

3.2 The author-figure in Flann's poetry

Several commentators have been drawn to Flann's texts and others like them in these manuscripts on account of the allusions they make to their authors' scholarly ethos. It seems most efficient to summarise their findings, rather than conduct a full review of the primary evidence. Key themes identified include his open, critical use of pre-existing texts and their invocation of audience and historical tradition to frame their author's place in society as a professional.

In the 1880s, Zimmer examined Flann's self-presentation while attempting to identify Flann as the compiler of a manuscript that constituted a major source for *LU*,³⁸⁹ a theory that has not met with widespread support (**LR:2.2**). However, in setting it out, Zimmer identified some interesting aspects of the texts attributed to Flann. He discusses multiple instances where Flann cites a written source or makes it clear that he is selecting his narrative from among several possible versions.

This presentation of Flann occurs most fully and clearly in H1's colophon to *ANÍ (2:2.2.3)*.³⁹⁰ In another example, in 'Mugain ingen Choncraid cháin', while Mugain, mother of Áed Sláine, is said to be from Munster,³⁹¹ the poem concludes with the alternative view that she is from Connacht.

Is sí seo cen bétblaid mbrath
cétfaid araile senchad
cona hollaltaib cen ail
ba de Chonnachtaib Mugain.³⁹²

³⁸⁷ *LL*, IV, ll. 23713–14 (p. 802); MacNeill (ed. and trans.), 'Poems', pp. 74, 82

³⁸⁸ 'Éstid a eolchu cen ón': *LGÉ*, IV, q. 26 (pp. 234–35); *LL*, I, l. 1406 (p. 44). 'Síl nÁeda Sláine na sleg': *LL*, IV, l. 24141 (p. 812); MacNeill (ed. and trans.), 'Poems', q. 22 (pp. 94, 97).

³⁸⁹ Zimmer, 'Über den compilatorischen Charakter', pp. 678–89.

³⁹⁰ Zimmer, 'Über den compilatorischen Charakter', pp. 682–83.

³⁹¹ *LL*, III, l. 18209 (p. 590).

³⁹² *LL*, III, ll. 18264–67 (p. 590): 'This is, with no treacherous deed, | the opinion of other historians | with mighty stanzas, beyond reproach, | that Mugain was of the Connachta' (my translation); Zimmer, 'Über den compilatorischen Charakter', p. 682.

Accounts of Diarmait mac Cerbail's wives do indeed vary,³⁹³ suggesting that this arose out of a wider historiographical issue.

Thurneysen, critiquing Zimmer, legitimately argues that collation of texts is but standard medieval monastic historiographical practice.³⁹⁴ Nonetheless, it is referenced with sufficient frequency in relation to Flann for it to have been considered particularly characteristic of him.

For Schlüter, historical poems in *LL* are 'connected not only by their interest in the country's past but also by a reflexion of the methods of the transmission of poetic knowledge about the past'.³⁹⁵ Schlüter cites the Uí Néill Series as particularly illustrative.³⁹⁶ As she demonstrates, in the course of this series, Flann's author-figure carefully negotiates his relationship with historical tradition, with his learned colleagues, and with the past he is charting. He implies that the kingdoms inherited by the Uí Néill are so ancient and their kings' deeds so numerous that their history is sometimes not recoverable. His various works are carved out in spite of this and in spite of the high standards of accuracy to which he claims to adhere.

This is not simply a medieval modesty topos. Emphasising the magnitude of such tasks is both a form of praise for the poems' subjects and an assertion of the importance of historical poets' role in Irish elite society.³⁹⁷ Memory and community are also repeatedly mentioned. Poets like Flann present themselves as both drawing upon and memorialising communal traditions, as enmeshed within society through preserving its collective past. In *LU*, the prosimetric attribution to him of 'Mugain ingen Choncraid cháin' frames his composition in terms of memorialising ('do chumnigud') the events in question.³⁹⁸ Such sentiments are also echoed in 'Druim Cetta, cetta na noem', often ignored in surveys of Flann's corpus. There, Flann and Echthigern are said to have provided 'senchas cuimnech' and blessings are invoked 'dona clannaib a Caidruimm'.³⁹⁹

³⁹³ 'A new edition of *Tochmarc Becfhola*', ed. and trans. by Máire Bhreathnach, *Ériu*, 35 (1984), 59–91 (pp. 60–62).

³⁹⁴ *IHK*, p. 27.

³⁹⁵ Schlüter, *History*, p. 140.

³⁹⁶ Schlüter, *History*, pp. 137–40.

³⁹⁷ Schlüter, *History*, pp. 140–43.

³⁹⁸ *LU*, l. 4272 (p. 135); Toner, 'Authority', p. 62.

³⁹⁹ Stokes (ed. and trans.), 'Bodleian *Amra*', pp. 240–41 (qq. 30–31): 'mnemonic history' [alternatively, 'memorable history']; 'to the clans in Caidruim' (i.e. Tara?).

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In Flann’s poetry and beyond, history’s recoverability is described as being achieved via *rím* (‘enumeration’) and *riagal* (‘rule, measure’).⁴⁰⁰ These terms relate to the processes of corroboration and calculation that purportedly underpin sound metrical regnal histories and battle-lists. The implication is that such poems are not simply derived, fully formed, from tradition but are created out of contemporary scholars’ careful selection, analysis, and arrangement of received material.

Allusion is made, in one of Flann’s texts, to the value and validity of these activities of selection and arrangement. ‘Cía tríallaid nech aisnis senchais’ begins with Flann framing his work via a topos typically used to illustrate and defend the strategy of *compilatio*.

Cía tríallaid nech aisnis senchais
Ailig eltaig
d’éis Ehdach áin. is gait a chloidib
a lláim Hector.⁴⁰¹

In an anecdote repeated in various forms by Jerome, Macrobius, Isidore of Seville, and others, Virgil, accused of plagiarising Homer, supposedly retorted that the one who can take the club from the hand of Hercules is himself stronger than Hercules, thus validating the re-use and re-arrangement of material from accredited authors.⁴⁰²

His use of this topos thus implicates Flann in the critical discourse around *compilatio*. It is difficult to be certain of its precise meaning in the context of this poem, as neither Eochaid nor the work referenced here under his name has been convincingly identified,⁴⁰³ so it is unclear how, if at all, Flann is meant to have put theory into practice.⁴⁰⁴ It can be taken as simply honorific. For Toner and Schlüter, Flann is deferring to Eochaid,⁴⁰⁵ while, for Brent Miles, Eochaid is being likened to Homer and Flann to Virgil.⁴⁰⁶ Indeed, it is never claimed that Flann actually took the

⁴⁰⁰ Smith, ‘Historical verse’, pp. 337–38; Poppe, ‘*Grammatica*’, p. 207.

⁴⁰¹ *MD*, IV, pp. 100–01 (q. 1); *LL*, IV, ll. 23344–45 (p. 782); Póðör (ed. and trans.), ‘Twelve Poems’, I, 1, 14: ‘Whoever attempts the telling of the story of Ailech of the herds after the noble Eochaid, it is robbing the sword from the hand of Hercules’ (Gwynn’s translation). All manuscripts except *LL* have Hercules instead of Hector.

⁴⁰² On this tradition, see Ó Cróinín, ‘Na Mainistreacha’, pp. 23–24; Irvine, *Making*, pp. 242–43; Brent Miles, *Heroic Saga and Classical Epic in Medieval Ireland* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2011), pp. 40–43; Burnyeat, ‘“Wrenching”’, pp. 198–202.

⁴⁰³ O’Curry, *Manners*, II, pp. 153–54; *MD*, IV, p. 401; Miles, *Heroic Saga*, pp. 40–41.

⁴⁰⁴ There are potentially more informative examples of possible adaptations by Flann (e.g. **5:2.1.1**).

⁴⁰⁵ Toner, ‘Authority’, pp. 62–63; Schlüter, *History*, p. 139.

⁴⁰⁶ Miles, *Heroic Saga*, p. 41.

‘sword’ from Eochaid’s hand. For Abigail Burnyeat, however, the presented relationship is more dynamic, as the Latin anecdote is generally used to imply that a *compiler* can actually surpass their source. She also suggests that its importance lies less in any personal politics and more in its expression of Flann’s strategy in this and other texts.⁴⁰⁷ It is potentially significant that ‘Cía tríallaid nech ainsis senchais’ is structured in question-and-answer form. While the questioner and respondent’s identities are unclear, this form, like the opening quatrain, sets out a dialogic relationship with established authorities.

The poems attributed to him present Flann in terms of values attested for Middle Gaelic historical poetry and scholarship more widely. He places himself within a professionalised, learned tradition and, on occasion, openly notes and discusses the sources available to him. As well as stressing these learned credentials, the social utility of his work is also asserted. The texts’ explicit statements, on which such observations are based, are broadly supported by the texts themselves. As we have seen, they are often catalogues of data quite possibly culled from different sources or traditional narratives re-expressed in metre and acutely relevant to contemporary politics’ sense of legitimacy and identity.

3.3 The polycentric author-figure: text-specific self-representation

While useful in many ways, these studies fail to bring out the extent to which certain texts emphasise certain aspects of Flann’s author-figure. Rather than fragments that can be reconstructed into a single professional existence, many of Flann’s authorial self-references arguably constitute ‘masks’ or personae designed for particular contexts. This is not to say that they were uniquely crafted for the purpose, as they are largely in line with the wider common discourse which framed Middle Gaelic historiography. However, it does imply that authorial self-referencing in these texts is bound up in the rhetoric of the text itself, as also exemplified in *ANÍ* (2:5.2.1).

3.3.1 Written evidence and the Tara Diptych

Among his poems in pre-1200 manuscripts, Flann’s references to pre-existing, explicitly written materials largely occur in the Tara Diptych and specifically within

⁴⁰⁷ Burnyeat, “Wrenching”, p. 203.

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the first poem, ‘Ríg Themra dia tesbann tnú’. Its two references to physical writing are both made when the written source has somehow proved inadequate. In one instance, Núadu Necht merits inclusion as a king of Tara on the basis of a Leinster-based tradition ostensibly preserved via orality. However, the *scríbinn* (‘writings’) give no details of his death and, since Flann has included Núadu anyway, this is presumably to be interpreted as their deficiency.

Atberat Lagin na llecht
robo rí ced Nuadu Necht;
a aided cen chobraind cain
ni fogbaim i scríbennaib.⁴⁰⁸

When a specific text is cited, it also fails to agree with Flann’s other sources.

Marb iarna rígad don tslóg
Eocho mínglan Mugmedon;
ro fírad cid cruth aile.
ro scríbad issin Scálbaile.⁴⁰⁹

The text cited here may not be directly identifiable with the text now known as *Báile in Scáil* (‘the phantom’s frenzy’), a prose regnal history in the form of a prophecy. As extant, its editor, Kevin Murray, dates it to 1022x1036.⁴¹⁰ Since the Tara Diptych was likely composed between 1014 and 1022, during Máel Sechnaill’s second reign, the ‘Scálbaile’ must be an earlier recension of *Báile in Scáil*, if not something else entirely. Given the laconic accounts both texts provide of Eochu Muigmedón’s death,⁴¹¹ what the disagreement might have been remains opaque.

Many of the Tara Diptych’s other accounts of royal deaths doubtless reference narratives preserved in some other literary form.⁴¹² Indeed, each death-tale is designated an *aided*,⁴¹³ which is well-attested both as a category of information

⁴⁰⁸ *LL*, III, ll. 15657–60 (p. 504); Pöddör (ed. and trans.), ‘Twelve Poems’, I, 297: ‘The Leinstermen of the graves say it: | even Núadu Necht, he became king; | his death, without a fine portion, | I do not find in the writings’.

⁴⁰⁹ *LL*, III, ll. 15765–68 (p. 508); Pöddör (ed. and trans.), ‘Twelve Poems’, I, 302–03: ‘After his installation as king, | at the hands of the army died gentle-bright Echu Mugmedón; | it was fulfilled, although it was another form | which was written in Baile in Scáil’.

⁴¹⁰ *Báile in Scáil: The Phantom’s Frenzy*, ed. and trans. by Kevin Murray, ITS 58 (Dublin: ITS, 2004), p. 5.

⁴¹¹ Murray (ed. and trans.), *Báile in Scáil*, §17 (pp. 38, 55–56).

⁴¹² For example, Mac Eoin, ‘Mysterious death’, p. 26.

⁴¹³ *LL*, III, ll. 15641 (p. 504), 15782 (p. 509).

handled by historical poets and as an element of titles for prose narratives,⁴¹⁴ as if this form of catalogue poem is interlocked generically with the saga tradition. Yet the only references to the material's written provenance occur when written sources have caused some sort of problem.

Fleeting reference is apparently made in 'Ríg Themra dia tesbann tnú' to an early *fianaígecht* narrative, preserved as *Scél as-a:mberar combad hé Find mac Cumail Mongán* ('the story by which it is known that Mongán is Find mac Cumail').⁴¹⁵

Án flaith Fothud Cairpdech crech
corod caith Fothud Airgdech;
maíti in tAirgdech a díth de
la Cailte i crích Cruithne.⁴¹⁶

In this Old Gaelic text, a dispute erupts between Mongán mac Fiachna (*ob.* 625), the king of Dál nÁraide, and Forgoll, his poet, on the location of Fothad Airgtech's death. It is resolved by the arrival of the *féinnid*, Caílte mac Ronáin, who confirms the king's assertion that it occurred in Dál nÁraide territory on the grounds that it was he, Caílte, who killed him. As the Dál nÁraide were traditionally considered Cruithni,⁴¹⁷ Flann is probably referencing this narrative. Nonetheless, no reference is made to physical texts, only to Caílte's boasts, with which Flann registers no disagreement.

While only mentioned twice, written evidence appears on both occasions as the object of critical comparison. In the more positive reference to Caílte, meanwhile, Caílte is an eye-witness to the event in question. As Toner points out,⁴¹⁸ this renders his testimony compelling, in medieval historiography's terms, and very possibly more compelling than mere *scríbinn*. In reference to Nuadu Necht, he also openly

⁴¹⁴ Proinsias Mac Cana, *The Learned Tales of Medieval Ireland* (Dublin: DIAS, 1980), p. 73; Smith, 'Historical verse', p. 328.

⁴¹⁵ *Compert Mongáin and Three Other Early Mongán Tales*, ed. and trans. by Nora White (Maynooth: Department of Old and Middle Irish, National University of Ireland, Maynooth, 2004), pp. 73–75, 79–81.

⁴¹⁶ *LL*, III, ll. 15745–48 (p. 507); Pöddör (trans.), 'Twelve Poems', I, 302: 'A splendid ruler, Fothud Cairpdech of plunders, | until Fothud Airgdech exhausted (?) him; | Airgdech, his death was boasted of on account of it, | by Caílte in the territory of the Picts'.

⁴¹⁷ Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 54.

⁴¹⁸ Toner, 'Authority', pp. 77–81. In general, Helen Fulton, 'History and *Historia*: Uses of the Troy Story in Medieval Ireland and Wales', in *Classical Literature*, ed. by O'Connor, pp. 40–57 (41–42).

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compares oral and written sources. In this poem, therefore, Flann evaluates a variety of historical evidence according to an attested medieval value system.

Curiously, no references to any sort of source occur in ‘Ríg Themra toebaige iar ttain’, the Diptych’s post-Patrician component. This might not be very meaningful, as such references are fairly infrequent in the first component. Yet it might also be because the historical record for Ireland’s Christian era was perceived to be more secure, meaning Flann did not need to comment so openly on the evidence before him. Given its limited appearances, Flann’s open citation and assessment of sources should not be considered simply a character trait, evidenced at random moments in his corpus, but a response to specific historiographical situations. His author-figure is shaped by the texts produced out of such situations.

3.3.2 *Rím* and the Cenél nÉogain Suite

Rím and its various derivatives frame Flann’s activity in several texts. ‘A gillu gairm n-ilgrada’ enumerates (‘tuirmem’) the risible ‘munter mallacta’.⁴¹⁹ In H1’s addition to *ANÍ*, the text’s author-figure states of the catalogues of Ireland’s various cemeteries ‘ni thic dim a n-áirim uli’,⁴²⁰ meaning either that he is not responsible for counting the interrees listed or that the actual total of interrees is uncountable.⁴²¹ While not using this term specifically, there are also a number of instances where Flann comments on chronology.⁴²²

In the Cenél nÉogain Suite, references are made to *rím* in three of the four non-narrative components. Here, it can describe either the curated data a poem contains or an unattainable historiographical ideal. Tensions over whether Cenél nÉogain’s history can be subject to *rím*, and whether Flann is capable of making it so, together articulate the relationship noted by Schlüter between historical poets, contemporary elite society, and a past that is perhaps only semi-tractable.⁴²³

⁴¹⁹ *LL*, I, l. 3423 (p. 108).

⁴²⁰ *LU*, l. 2916 (p. 94): ‘I did not count them all’ (my translation).

⁴²¹ This may also be a précis of a line from a cited poem: *LU*, l. 2867 (p. 92).

⁴²² Stokes (ed. and trans.), ‘Bodleian *Amra*’, pp. 136–39; *LL*, I, ll. 23851–70 (p. 803); Smith (ed. and trans.) ‘*Mide*’, qq. 1–5 (pp. 114–15, 129).

⁴²³ Cf. Johnston, *Literacy*, pp. 154–56.

In ‘Cind cethri ndíni iar Frigrind’, the subject of *rím* and *áirem* is the sixteen Cenél nÉogain kings who were also kings of Ireland, with which the poem concludes.⁴²⁴

Rím Aed Uaridnach Subne Mend
is Fergal fossad
Aed Ollan riam
7 a brathair Níall Frossach.

[...]

Derb ro sechnus drem na llethríg
ciabtar lanfir
ardgus n-eolaig
connachas tarddus i n-**arim**.⁴²⁵

Rím/Áirem thus seems to involve selection and definition, as well as straightforward listing. The implication here is that it has been successful. However, it is different with the metrical battle-list poems. Two begin by stating that the kings’ martial deeds are uncountable.

Aní doronsat do chalmu
clanna Eogain.
cia ’meradid
ní etat a **arim** eolaig.⁴²⁶

[...]

Angluind a n-echta a n-orgni
batar infir
is lia **turim**
connachas clunid o filid.⁴²⁷

⁴²⁴ *LL*, IV, ll. 23469–76 (p. 787); MacNeill (ed. and trans.), ‘Poems’, pp. 49–50, 53–54 (qq. 28–31).

⁴²⁵ *LL*, IV, ll. 23473–74 (p. 787), 23877–78 (p. 787); MacNeill (ed. and trans.), ‘Poems’, pp. 49–50, 53–54 (qq. 30, 32): ‘Reckon [with them] Aed Uaridnach, Suibne Menn, and staunch Fergal, Aed Ollán beforehand and his brother Niall Frossach’; ‘Truly I have omitted the list of half-kings, though they were whole men, a learned man’s high task, so that I have not brought them into reckoning’ (my emphasis).

⁴²⁶ *LL*, IV, ll. 23575–78 (p. 791); MacNeill (ed. and trans.), ‘Poems’, pp. 58, 63 (q. 1): ‘What Eogan’s race have done of valiant deeds, though ye bear it in mind, the learned cannot recount’ (my emphasis).

⁴²⁷ *LL*, IV, ll. 23711–14 (p. 797); MacNeill (ed. and trans.), ‘Poems’, pp. 70, 75 (q. 1): ‘Their deeds, their death-dealings, their devastations that were manly, their numbering is too great for you to hear them from a poet’ (my emphasis).

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The latter quatrain can be taken various ways, depending on whether Flann is understood as a *fili*. If so, he is declaring himself incapable of enumerating Cenél nÉogain’s martial deeds. If not, he is perhaps declaring that he can succeed where mere *filid* have failed. Indeed, he occasionally expresses confidence in his materials. In ‘Aní doronsat do chalmu’, he states of the battles of Muirchertach mac Erca ‘is a dó ro rath rele recta’.⁴²⁸ In ‘Ascnam na seol sadal’, Cenél nÉogain’s deeds are to be recounted ‘iarsain slicht cen breobail [...] cen dídail’,⁴²⁹ perhaps referring to them being presented chronologically. Alternatively, ‘slicht’ can also mean ‘version’ or ‘recension’,⁴³⁰ so this might instead be about Flann’s adherence to a certain source.

Yet, at the Suite’s conclusion, Cenél nÉogain’s martial deeds remain without number:

Árim a crech
ní étann nech ní nach ada
cid as aidbli coro **áirmi**
gainmi in mara.⁴³¹

Collectively, these references to *rím* imply that it is possible to put in order a matter like Cenél nÉogain’s kings of Ireland but that any account of the wider doings of Cenél nÉogain will never be definitive.

As suggested above, this careful disposition of certainty and wonder may well be rhetorically purposeful. Specifically in the Cenél nÉogain Suite, Flann presents himself as grappling with complex and mutable historical traditions. As with his assessment of evidence in the Tara Diptych, this might well partially reflect the conventions and anxieties of the historical Flann and scholars like him but it seems to be given emphasis in this context for some specific reasons. In neither case are the reasons definitely identifiable. Assessment of evidence might be important specifically to ‘Ríg Themra dia tesbann tnú’ because it is concerned with the distant past or, as has been suggested, because Flann was constructing the first continuous

⁴²⁸ *LL*, IV, l. 23599 (p. 791); MacNeill (ed. and trans.), ‘Poems’, pp. 59, 64 (q. 13): ‘clearness of record hath ascertained’.

⁴²⁹ *LL*, IV, l. 23484 (p. 788); MacNeill (ed. and trans.), ‘Poems’, pp. 54, 56 (q. 1): ‘it is no easy undertaking – according to sequence, without flaw’.

⁴³⁰ MacNeill, ‘Poems’, p. 56 (n. 3).

⁴³¹ *LL*, IV, ll. 23845–46 (p. 802); Mac Neil (ed. and trans.), ‘Poems’, pp. 74, 82 (q. 67): ‘The reckoning of their forays – we find nothing that is not lawful – what is more measureless till thou number the sands of the sea?’ (my emphasis)

Tara king-list for this period.⁴³² Ambiguity around the full recoverability of Cenél nÉogain's history, as has been suggested, might be a panegyric strategy or, indeed, a strategy of self-promotion. In each case, however, Flann's author-figure seems to have been crafted in a particular way.

3.3.3 Political subjectivity

We have already considered the potential political interests animating much of Flann's corpus in pre-1200 manuscripts, as well as the explicit support expressed therein for certain factions or individuals. Such interests provide apt interpretations for many of the poems, whose purposes are regularly non-explicit, and are in keeping with the close relationship envisaged in recent studies between medieval Irish scholars and secular elites.⁴³³

However, when considered collectively, political plurality and subjectivity across Flann's corpus mean that his textual persona cannot be characterised by a consistent political stance. This might be because some of the poems have been misattributed,⁴³⁴ but it is also arguably historically realistic. Political actors are sometimes compelled to switch sides, especially in turbulent contexts like eleventh-century Ireland. In either case, taking Flann as he is presented in pre-1200 manuscripts and in U's contribution to *LL* in particular, the views he seems to express are not necessarily to be traced back to a coherent persona but either to later textual developments (2:4) or to specific, politically subjective moments in the historical Flann's career. Like the different rhetorical self-constructions employed in Flann's poetry, the impressions we get of Flann's political interests are mediated by the needs of the texts that present them.

The starkest contradiction exists between the Tara Diptych and 'Inn éol duib in senchas sen'. As we have seen, the Diptych offers developed support to Uí Néill claims on Tara's kingship and to the idea that this kingship had long constituted the

⁴³² Smith, 'Historical Verse', p. 341.

⁴³³ Ó Corráin, 'Nationality'; Johnston, *Literacy*.

⁴³⁴ Particular scepticism has been expressed concerning Flann's authorship of the following poems: 'Inn éol duib in senchas sen' (Ó Cuív, 'Some developments', p. 285; Byrne, 'Ireland', p.865; Pödör, 'Twelve Poems', II, 189), 'Ascnam ní seol sadal' (MacNeill, 'Poems', pp. 38–39. However, see also Schlüter, *History*, p. 137 (n. 177)), 'Míde maigen clainne Cuinn' (Smith, 'Míde', p. 110), and 'Síl nÁedo Sláine na sleg' (Byrne, 'Historical Note', p. 392). For a defence of all four, see Pödör, 'Twelve Poems'.

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overlordship of Ireland.⁴³⁵ Not only does it conclude by proclaiming Máel Sechnaill, of Clann Cholmáin, to be Ireland's *ardrí* but it shows the kingship to have been consistently held by the Uí Néill or proto-Uí Néill throughout the period it covers. While the Diptych never definitively equates the kingship of Tara with a kingship of Ireland, a few of Tara's kings are identified as kings of Ireland individually.⁴³⁶ Furthermore, non-Uí Néill intruders come from across the island, implying a 'national' significance. All this is in keeping with the policy of the Diptych's honorand, Máel Sechnaill, of promoting the Tara kingship's antiquity and cultural significance, alongside Uí Néill solidarity, in the face of Brían Bóruma's more tangible successes.⁴³⁷ The Tara Diptych includes Brían's reign over Ireland and presents it in a very positive light.⁴³⁸ However, its overall scheme of consistent Uí Néill kingship accommodates such occasional intruders, so his significance is safely contained.

In 'Inn éol duib in senchas sen', the historiographical perspective is very different. Rather than fleetingly claim a long-standing Uí Néill prerogative, in this poem, Brían unifies the *cóicid* ('provinces') of Ireland himself. No pre-existing overlordship or centre is mentioned.

Ro innsaig Brian Banba mbind
ar ríge Chasil chendfind;
7 is é thall a mbarr
do choic coicedaib Herend.⁴³⁹

The poem concludes by envisaging an island-wide role for the youthful Donnchad mac Bríain,⁴⁴⁰ whose reign as king of Cashel began sometime in the late 1020s.⁴⁴¹ In short, it very much favours Dál Cais.

The dissonance with the Tara Diptych is evident. Yet a biographical context in which the historical Flann could have composed such a poem can be envisaged. No Uí Néill candidate for the kingship of Tara or of Ireland emerged after Máel

⁴³⁵ See Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship*, pp. 214–28.

⁴³⁶ For example, *LL*, III, ll. 15780 (p. 508), 15851 (p. 511).

⁴³⁷ Eoin O'Flynn, 'The career of Máelsechnaill II', *Ríocht na Midhe* 20 (2009), 29–68 (pp. 41, 52–54).

⁴³⁸ *LL*, III, ll. 15961–67 (p. 514).

⁴³⁹ *LL*, III, ll. 19419–20 (p. 636); Pöddör (ed. and trans.), 'Twelve Poems', I, 338: 'Brían [Bóruma] attacked sweet Banba | after gaining the kingship of bright-headed Cashel | and it is he who took away their supremacy | of the five provinces of Ireland'.

⁴⁴⁰ *LL*, III, ll. 19426–27 (p. 636); Pöddör (ed. and trans.), 'Twelve Poems', I, 338.

⁴⁴¹ Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, *Brian Boru: Ireland's Greatest King?* (Stroud: Tempus, 2007), pp. 101–07.

Sechnaill's death in 1022 and Flann had reason to favour Dál Cais through his connections at Armagh.⁴⁴² However, Flann Mainistrech's authorship of this poem is particularly uncertain. It is only ever attributed to 'Fland' in *LL* and there is no further evidence of any medieval tradition of Flann Mainistrech's authorship; a poet of this name more often associated (anachronistically) with Dál Cais is Flann mac Lonáin (*ob.* 891/918).⁴⁴³ Its eleventh-century end-date presumably led to the superscription's 'Fland' being identified in modern scholarship, rightly or wrongly, as Flann Mainistrech.⁴⁴⁴ It is thus uncertain whether any medieval scholar ever proposed him as this poem's author, let alone whether such a proposition would have been accurate. Indeed, its incongruities may have led the superscriptor to name only 'Fland'.

Elsewhere, Flann also notes the eligibility for island-wide kingship of Síl nÁedo Sláine in 'Mugain ingen Choncraid cháin'.⁴⁴⁵ He does the same for Cenél nÉogain in 'Cind cethri ndíni iar Frigrind'.⁴⁴⁶ For all the Tara Diptych's promotion of Máel Sechnaill, 'Mide maigen clainne Cuinn', in passing, names only Flann Sinna as a Clann Cholmáin king of Ireland, making no statement applicable his dynasty in general.⁴⁴⁷ The idea that the kingship of Tara or of Ireland was open to multiple branches of the Uí Néill or even to other factions is, of course, widely attested.⁴⁴⁸ Flann also never implies that any one Uí Néill dynasty's eligibility is exclusive. However, other than in the Tara Diptych, Flann concentrates only on a single dynasty's eligibility in any given text. Indeed, even the Tara Diptych is weighted towards Clann Cholmáin, as we have seen (2:2.3).

He thus comes across in each case as a particular dynasty's advocate. This impression reinforced by the panegyric language used to describe virtually every king, although this is normal for medieval Gaelic historical poetry. Flann seems to frame each poem as if the kingdom or dynasty in question is central to history. This situation could be interpreted biographically; the historical Flann may have at some

⁴⁴² Ní Mhaonaigh, *Brian Boru*, pp. 46–48.

⁴⁴³ Smith, 'Flann mac Lonáin'.

⁴⁴⁴ Schlüter, *History*, p. 136; Pödör, 'Twelve Poems', I, 322–23.

⁴⁴⁵ *LU*, I, 4327 (p. 136); *LL*, III, I, 18260 (p. 591).

⁴⁴⁶ *LL*, IV, II, 23469–76 (p. 787); MacNeill (ed. and trans.), 'Poems', pp. 49–50, 53–54 (qq. 28–31).

⁴⁴⁷ Smith (ed. and trans.), 'Mide', q. 34 (pp. 119, 131).

⁴⁴⁸ Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship*, p. 214.

point have had professional reason to assert the claims of each different dynasty.⁴⁴⁹ Alternatively, this may be but a generic feature of historical poetry. His political loyalties thus either changed in the course of his life or are conditioned by the requirements of the text he is producing. In both cases, we struggle to pin down a single persona through considering specific political interests, although more general interests in the Uí Néill and in national kingship are consistently attested.

3.4 Flann's author-figure: conclusion

Flann's author-figure within his texts in pre-1200 manuscripts does not contain many direct contradictions. Both the substance of his texts and the self-referencing within them imply that he gathered and ordered material from pre-existing sources, which previous investigations of specific texts have often confirmed (**LR:3.2**). This is made out to be difficult. Written sources do not always agree; it is not always possible to be confident that a complete account has been established. It is also interesting that he is twice presented as collaborating with another scholar; to these two we might add 'Eochaid' from the *Cenél nÉogain Suite* (**2:32**) and we shall encounter another instance in a text from later manuscripts (**4:2.1.3**). This is not at all common in medieval Gaelic sources and so his operation within social networks seems to be a distinctive aspect of his persona and prestige.

Politically, these manuscripts' extant texts tend to focus on the Uí Néill and a northern, Tara-based kingship. Different political interests motivate 'Druim Cetta, cette na noem', while 'A gillu gairm n-ilgrada', *ANÍ* and his *LGÉ* poems concern a more general Gaelic past. 'Inn éol duib in senchas sen', if it really was ever attributed to Flann, would present a more serious divergence from his general agenda.

These are the themes that emerge from a general survey. We have, however, also seen that Flann assumes particular stances and personae in particular texts, fronting certain methodological issues and empathising heavily with his subjects' political agendas. What seems to be a medieval text's author can be constructed or manipulated for certain contexts. It is not clear how medieval readers would have approached the resulting polycentric author-figure. We can never really know if

⁴⁴⁹ For example, Byrne, 'Ireland', p. 868.

medieval readers would have been able or inclined to gather and compare clues about Flann from multiple texts as we have done. The evidence that we do have for these texts' reception is presented below.

4 Flann and his compilers (1): attributional apparatus

This study has hitherto taken at face value the attributions to Flann in the three manuscripts under consideration. There are, however, multiple instances that lead us to conclude or suspect that an attribution might be secondary to a text's composition or even to its transcription, as we have it. There are also instances where extraneous or anachronistic material is presented under Flann's name.

This thesis does not aim to delineate Flann's corpus. However, our survey of Flann's collective textual persona must needs be qualified by the varied, sometimes suspicious circumstances under which texts come to be associated with him. Furthermore, evidence of the ongoing, dynamic reconfiguration of Flann's authorship and corpus supports our discussion of the meaning made by later compilers in their treatment of his work (2:5).

4.1 Impossible attributions

As is evident from **Appendix 5**, a number of poems attributed to Flann by *LL*'s hand include coverage of events that post-date his death in 1056. This does not rule out Flann's authorship of the pre-1056 sections. However, the addition of continuations to poems under his name or the attribution to him of anachronistic poems each imply that his historical identity was either partially obscure or not of primary importance among the texts' handlers.

In *LL*, 'Mide maigen clainne Cuinn' bears the superscription 'Fland cecinit'.⁴⁵⁰ However, it ends with the death of Conchobar úa Máil Sechnaill in 1073.⁴⁵¹ In other manuscripts, it continues to various points in the twelfth century. Smith has argued that the *LL* text represents the extent of the archetype and therefore

⁴⁵⁰ Immediately following the *Cenél nÉogain Suite*, it seems fair to take this 'Fland' as Flann Mainistrech.

⁴⁵¹ Smith (ed. and trans.), 'Mide', qq. 49–51 (pp. 121, 132–33).

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rejects Flann's authorship.⁴⁵² He and Schlüter both suggest that the attribution was made because the poem follows the *Cenél nÉogain Suite*.⁴⁵³ Previously, MacNeill and Pödör had both defended the attribution.⁴⁵⁴ Both postulate that the reference to Conchobar's death is a later interpolation, the poem having been composed by Flann during his reign (1030–73).

A similar issue is also encountered within the *Cenél nÉogain Suite* itself. While q. 59 of 'Aní do ronsat do chalmu' concerns events in 1003x1004, qq. 61–69 jump forward to 1061x1099.⁴⁵⁵ MacNeill argued that it originally ended at q. 60.⁴⁵⁶ This quatrain is phrased like a conclusion and, in accordance with the *Cenél nÉogain Suite*'s *fidrad freccomail* (alliteration between quatrains), its last line ('fora nglúnib') alliterates with the opening line of the next poem, 'A ngluind, a n-échtá, a n-orgni'.⁴⁵⁷

In both cases, therefore, attributions to Flann are incompatible with the undifferentiated inclusion of events postdating his death. Explanations have been offered that accommodate Flann's authorship. Yet the fact remains that the material was presented this way in *LL*, suggesting either that Flann's historical identity was imprecisely understood or his authorship consciously expanded.

4.2 Secondary attributions

Some attributions are themselves problematic, irrespective of the content of the text they describe. Palaeographically, they appear secondary to the text's transcription. In the case of the *Cenél nÉogain Suite* and *ANÍ*, there is reason to suspect that the text presented as Flann's work was compiled out of different components. Unlike the features discussed in **2:4.1**, these do not rule out Flann's authorship of the material but some manipulation or supplementation can be suspected.

⁴⁵² Smith (ed. and trans.), 'Mide', pp. 109–10 (cf. *AClon*, p. 51).

⁴⁵³ Smith, 'Mide', p. 110; Schlüter, *History*, pp. 137–38.

⁴⁵⁴ MacNeill, 'Poems', p. 92 (n. 49); Pödör, 'Twelve Poems', I, xi–xii, 154–55.

⁴⁵⁵ MacNeill (ed. and trans.), 'Poems', pp. 62–63, 69–70 (qq. 59, 61–69); *LL*, IV, ll. 23691–92 23693–712 (pp. 795–96).

⁴⁵⁶ MacNeill, 'Poems', p. 70 (n. 69).

⁴⁵⁷ *LL*, IV, ll. 23693–94 (p. 795); MacNeill (ed. and trans.), 'Poems', pp. 63, 69 (q. 60)

4.2.1 The *Book of Leinster*

4.2.1.1 The *Book of Leinster's* secondary attributions

In *LL* (*LGÉ* N), ‘Toisich na llongse tar ller’ is introduced, ‘is do haidedaib na toisechsa anuas ro chan in senchaid so sis’; according to both Macalister and *LL*’s editors, ‘in senchaid’ (‘the historian’) is glossed ‘.i. Fland Man’.⁴⁵⁸ This gloss is certainly rendered clearly in the lithographic facsimile.⁴⁵⁹ However, only very slight traces are visible in the manuscript as digitised on *ISOS* (**Appendix 6.1**).⁴⁶⁰ These traces’ interpretation is corroborated by the same poem’s attribution to ‘Flann’ in *LGÉ* F, the other main version of *LGÉ* recension *a*, within an otherwise very similar introductory formula (**Appendix 10.1**). Yet the gloss was clearly added after the writing of the main text and may have been added in a different ink, given the relative lack of damage to the surrounding lines.

LL’s simple attributions for ‘Mide maigen clainne Cuinn’ and ‘Síl nÁeda Sláine na sleg’ are also potentially secondary. Both superscriptions, ‘Fland cecinit’ and ‘Fland Mainistrech cecinit’ respectively, are in red ink (**Appendix 6.2–3**).⁴⁶¹ It has been suggested that the first has been erased, although, in Smith’s opinion, it is simply faded.⁴⁶² I know of no comment on the second other than Byrne’s denial of its existence.⁴⁶³

Throughout *LL*, simple attributions are otherwise in black ink encased by a red box. Furthermore, hand U originally left no space for a simple attribution of ‘Mide maigen clainne Cuinn’. ‘Fland cecinit’ only just fits in towards the left of the column, between the initial ‘M’ and the last line of ‘A ngluind, a n-échte, a n-orgni’ (**Appendix 6.2**).⁴⁶⁴ It happens to appear directly beneath the phrase ‘Fland fer legind’ and so might relate to this internal attribution and not to ‘Mide maigen clainne Cuinn’ at all, resolving the difficulties discussed in **2:4.1**. ‘Síl nÁeda Sláine

⁴⁵⁸ *LGÉ*, V, §502 (pp. 194–95 n. 16): ‘It is on the deaths of those leaders above that the historian sang this’; *LL*, I, ll. 1918–19 (p. 60).

⁴⁵⁹ Atkinson (ed.), *Book of Leinster*, p. 16 (ll. 6–8).

⁴⁶⁰ *LL*, p. 16^a6–8.

⁴⁶¹ *LL*, pp. 184^{vb}19, 185^{tb}1.

⁴⁶² Byrne, ‘Ireland’, p. 865; Smith, ‘*Mide*’, p. 109.

⁴⁶³ Byrne, ‘Historical Note’, p. 392.

⁴⁶⁴ *LL*, p. 184^b18.

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na sleg' begins a new column, within which no space has been left for the superscription.⁴⁶⁵ However, this is *LL*'s standard layout.⁴⁶⁶

I have no palaeographic evidence against these two superscriptions being, like their texts, in hand U, although the small sample size frustrates definite conclusions. Yet rubrication distinguishes them visually from other simple attributions and the unplanned position, in one case, suggests that their inscription was somehow secondary to the texts' initial rendering.

4.2.1.2 Textual history of the *Cenél nÉogain Suite*

While it is presented as a single unit in *LL*, there is reason to suspect that the *Cenél nÉogain Suite*'s overall integrity as a single work by Flann is a secondary construct. Smith and Schlüter have already suggested that the attribution to Flann of the entire *Uí Néill Series* might be motivated by the compilers' objective of presenting an amalgamated history.⁴⁶⁷ The same centripetal forces may have been at work on the *Suite* itself at some previous stage.

To recapitulate (see also **Appendix 5**), the *Suite* begins with a simple attribution to Flann and concludes with an internal attribution to him. Each component ends on a marked *dúnad* linking back the *Suite*'s opening ('Cia'), with the exception of 'Aní doronsat do chalmu', which ends 'co hArd Macha. A.'.⁴⁶⁸ MacNeill has already demonstrated that the *Suite* was open to supplementation prior to its inclusion in *LL* from 'Ascnam na seol sadal' and the 'Aní doronsat do chalmu' continuation (**2:4.1**).

Under further examination, other poems in the *Suite* give cause for suspicion that they did not originally belong in such a context. Such suspicion is aroused by the conclusion to 'A ngluind, a n-échtá, a n-orgní' (qq. 67–69), including the internal attribution to Flann.

Árim a crech
ní étann nech ní nach ada.
cid as aidbli coro áirmi
gainmi in mara.

⁴⁶⁵ *LL*, p. 185^b1.

⁴⁶⁶ Cf. *LL*, pp. 47^{ra}1 (scribe A), 149^{ra}1 (U), 181^{ra}1 (U).

⁴⁶⁷ Smith, '*Mide*', p. 110; Schlüter, *History*, pp. 137–38.

⁴⁶⁸ *LL*, IV, l. 23712 (p. 796); MacNeill (ed. and trans.), 'Poems', p. 63 (q. 69).

Meraid co bráth
 a n-adchoad do chach dia nglonnaib
 ní ara n-échnach
 ní écind cétmad dia nglonnaib.

Fland fer legind ó Manistir
 rod mór Dia.
 iss é dosróna
 dia n-iarfais nech croda cia. C.⁴⁶⁹

Q. 68 ends on a weak, unmarked, but possible *dúnad* ('dia nglonnaib') linking back to the poem's beginning ('A ngluind'). Furthermore, the poet uses the first person in q. 68 ('adchoad'), before Flann appears in the third person in q. 69. Finally, as MacNeill notes, *fidrad freccomaill* is lacking between qq. 68 and 69.⁴⁷⁰ 'A ngluind, a n-échna, a n-orgni' may thus have once been an independent poem and, during its incorporation into the Suite, q. 69 may have been added to supply both a suitable *dúnad* and an overall author.

A possible counter-argument is provided by q. 69, although this counter-argument raises its own problems. MacNeill translates line *c*'s infixed object pronoun as a third-person plural but it could also be third-person singular. Q. 69 contains no nouns to which this could credibly refer but qq. 67–68 contain both plurals ('crech' ('plunders'), 'glonnaib' ('deeds')) and a feminine singular ('árim' ('enumeration' thereof)). All describe the contents of 'A ngluind, a n-échna, a n-orgni'. Thus, q. 69 is most naturally read as stating that Flann composed this poem in particular, unless it is a synecdoche. Its *dúnad* still binds 'A ngluind, a n-échna, a n-orgni' into the Suite as a whole but, otherwise, it need not be read as describing the Suite. Indeed, in none of its five poems is the Suite as a whole referenced directly.

Turning to 'Cind cethri ndíni iar Frigrind' and 'Aní doronsat do chalmu', their textual history is also more ambiguous than is often assumed. While it is well-known that 'Cía tríallaid nech ainsis senchais' appears in various later compilations

⁴⁶⁹ *LL*, IV, ll. 23713–14 (p. 802); MacNeill (ed. and trans.), 'Poems', pp. 74, 82: 'The reckoning of their forays – we find nothing that is not lawful – what is more measureless till thou number the sands of the sea? What I have told to all of their feats will live till doom; it is not in censuring them that I would not tell the hundredth of their deeds. Flann the Lector from Monaster that God hath magnified, he hath compiled them, if any brave man ask who'.

⁴⁷⁰ MacNeill, 'Poems', p. 74 (n. 6).

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of metrical *dindshenchas* as Gwynn's Ailech II,⁴⁷¹ very few scholars who discuss the Cenél nÉogain Suite seem to be aware of two later medieval manuscript versions of the other two poems (**Appendix 7**).⁴⁷² These later medieval versions contain no mention of Flann and potentially suggest that *LL*'s closely integrated Cenél nÉogain Suite is a later construct.

In the *Book of Lecan* (*Lec.*), 'Cind cethri ndíni iar Frigrind' immediately follows 'Cía tríallaid nech aisnis senchais',⁴⁷³ within the Ailech article in the manuscript's type-C prosimetric *dindshenchas*.⁴⁷⁴ Here, 'Cind cethri ndíni iar Frigrind' is presented as a component of 'Cía tríallaid nech aisnis senchais': it has a smaller initial 'C' and the *dúnad* 'cia C.I.A.T.R.I.A'.⁴⁷⁵

'Aní doronsat do chalmu' appears elsewhere in *Lec.*. It follows an unedited prosimetric tract which *Lec.* entitles 'Catha Cenel Eogain andso o Eogan Mac Neill co Muirchertach mac Neill meic Domnaill' (hereafter, *Catha Cenél Éogain*),⁴⁷⁶ within the manuscript's genealogical collections.⁴⁷⁷ *Catha Cenél Éogain* summarises the battles fought by each king of Cenél nÉogain and each king's *aided*, from the eponymous Éogan mac Néill to Muirchertach mac Lochlainn (*ob.* 1166).⁴⁷⁸ In *Lec.*, the poem is introduced 'conad do cuimmedud na cath sin do can in file'.⁴⁷⁹ Beginning on fol. 59^v, it consists only of qq. 1–10 and 12, compared to *LL*'s 69 qq., and lacks a *dúnad*. It seems to be incomplete. The remainder of fol. 59^v is blank; fol. 60^f commences with Uí Maine genealogies.

The sixteenth-century RIA D.ii.2 also contains a type-C *dindshenchas* collection. Here, 'Cía tríallaid nech aisnis senchais', 'Cind cethri ndíni iar Frigrind', and 'Aní doronsat do chalmu' all appear within the article on Ailech.⁴⁸⁰ Here, 'Aní

⁴⁷¹ *MD*, IV, pp.100–07. On additions to the *dindshenchas*, see Charles Bowen, 'A Historical Inventory of the *Dindshenchas*', *Studia Celtica*, 10–11 (1975), 113–37 (p. 125).

⁴⁷² One exception is Gwynn (*MD*, V, 145).

⁴⁷³ Dublin, RIA, MS 23.P.2 (535), *saec.* XIV/XV [hereafter, *Lec.*], fol. 254^{rb}14–254^{va}32, 254^{va}33–254^{vb}50.

⁴⁷⁴ Tomás Ó Concheanainn, 'The three forms of *Dindshenchas Érenn*', *JCS*, 3 (1981–82), 88–131.

⁴⁷⁵ *Lec.*, fol. 254^{va}33, 254^{vb}50.

⁴⁷⁶ *Lec.*, fol. 58^{vc}1–59^{va}16: 'the battles of Cenél nÉogain, from Éogan mac Néill to Muirchertach mac Néill meic Domnaill [Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn (*ob.*1166)]' (my translation). For the only edited version of this tract, see 'The O Clery Book of Genealogies', ed. by Séamus Pender, *Analecta Hibernica*, 18 (1951), ix, xi–xxxiii, 1–198 (§§407–455 (pp. 27–37)); **5:2.1.3**.

⁴⁷⁷ Ó Muraíle, *Celebrated Antiquary*, pp. 145–54.

⁴⁷⁸ A sample entry is printed and translated from three manuscripts in **Appendix 25**.

⁴⁷⁹ *Lec.*, fol. 59^{va}16: 'so it is to remember those battles that the poet sang' (my translation).

⁴⁸⁰ Dublin, RIA, MS D.ii.2 (1222), *saec.* XVI, fols 59^{rb}22–61^{rb}24.

doronsat do chalmu’ consists of the same eleven quatrains that appear in *Lec.*. Again, the latter two poems are visually subordinated to the former; in fact, the manuscript’s cataloguer does not even list the lattermost poem as a separate text.⁴⁸¹ The configuration of *dúinte* is complicated (**Appendix 7** and below).

For the purposes of this account, I designate *LL*, *Lec.*, and RIA D.ii.2’s respective versions of these poems as T, R, and D. *x* is the archetype of all three. By Gwynn’s reckoning, the *dindsenchas* collections in *Lec.* (his ‘Lc’) and in RIA D.ii.2 (his ‘S’) have a common source (ϵ).⁴⁸² ‘Cind cethri ndíni iar Frigrind’ thus presumably followed ‘Cía tríallaid nech ainsis senchais’ in ϵ also; whether ‘Aní doronsat do chalmu’ was in ϵ is uncertain but unlikely, as we shall see. I designate ϵ ’s version of these two or three poems *e*.

In terms of the first two poems, R and D (i.e. *e*) generally agree against T, although both can agree with T against each other. Nonetheless, it seems likely that ‘Cía tríallaid nech ainsis senchais’ and ‘Cind cethri ndíni iar Frigrind’ were paired in *x*. These two poems thus have a history together independent prior to the Cenél nÉogain Suite.

As for ‘Aní doronsat do chalmu’, the *e*-texts, R and D, also tend to agree against T. The sudden discontinuation of R’s text on a subsequently blank page is presumably the result of a scribal accident unique to R. On that basis, R appears to have been the ultimate source for D’s matching text, although not its usage, of ‘Aní doronsat do chalmu’.⁴⁸³ Meanwhile, the context is partially that of T. D (or some intervening version) may have united this poem with the first two on account of their common subject-matter and metre (*snédbairdne*⁴⁸⁴). However, that D should do so despite R’s inadequacies implies a conviction that these three poems belonged together, a conviction prompted, perhaps, through indirect influence from T or ancestors thereof.

So far, comparison of these three versions supports, sometimes tenuously, their association pre-T (i.e. *LL*’s Cenél nÉogain Suite’). However, the *e*-texts of

⁴⁸¹ Thomas F. O’Rahilly, Kathleen Mulchrone, Elizabeth Fitzpatrick, A. I. Pearson, and others, *Catalogue of Irish Manuscripts in the Royal Irish Academy* [hereafter, *RIA Cat.*], 28 fasciculi (Dublin: RIA, 1926–70), fasc. XXVI, p. 3293.

⁴⁸² *MD*, V, p. 53.

⁴⁸³ Gwynn nowhere suggests that ‘S’ might be dependent on ‘Lc’.

⁴⁸⁴ MacNeill, ‘Poems’, p. 39.

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‘Cind cethri ndíni iar Frigrind’ conclude in a manner that suggests that it might once have been an independent text, even though both these versions present it as part of the previous poem. Both contain an extra quatrain (q. 33a; **Appendix 7.2**). Significantly, q. 33a supplies an unmarked *dúnad* (‘flaithchind’) linking back to the beginning of the poem. Furthermore, D omits q. 34, which supplies the Suite’s *dúnad*. It is possible that q.33a represents the original ending of the independent poem.

This hypothesis is not unproblematic. Being in both R and T, q. 34 was presumably in *x*; q. 33a, meanwhile, can only be shown to have been in *e*. This suggests that q. 33a is more likely to be the later addition. Yet R’s arrangement of q. 34 after q. 33a breaks *fidrad freccomail*; q. 33 and q. 33a, meanwhile, maintain it. Thus, even if q. 34 had been in *x*, it could still be an addition. The T tradition could have removed q. 33a, the original ending. It is also unclear why anyone would have needed to invent q. 33a with q. 34 already present.

To summarise, the conjunction of ‘Cía tríallaid nech aisnis senchais’ and ‘Cind cethri ndíni iar Frigrind’ goes back to *x* and predates T (*LL*’s *Cenél nÉogain Suite*). It is also supported by their visual presentation and *dúinte* in T, R, and D. However, as with ‘A ngluind, a n-éichta, a n-orgni’, the quatrain on which this conjunction depends looks like a subsequent addition. D’s addition of ‘Aní doronsat do chalmu’ has been shown to be secondary and unrelated to *e*. The rest of the Suite and any references to Flann are nowhere to be seen in R and D.

In light of evidence from other manuscripts, *LL*’s *Cenél nÉogain Suite* (T) is a particularly closely consolidated, unitised edition of these poems, which MacNeill has already shown to contain multiple strata. This conclusion, in turn, renders problematic the simple (but not necessarily the internal) attribution to Flann, as this is tied to the idea that the Suite is a single work. In fact, the projection of his authorship may be part of the text’s unitisation. The Uí Néill Series’ secondary attributions to Flann following the Suite may be the beginnings of another such endeavour, as Smith and Schlüter have suggested.

That being said, Flann could also have authored many or all of the components texts independently. Indeed, Póddör’s demonstration of their similar language and style and their ongoing interest in *rím* (2:3.3.2) mediate in favour of

common authorship. Later compilers seem to have appropriated his authorship through adding further material and also adapted the texts so as to emphasise his single authorship more strongly.

4.2.2 *Lebor na hUidre*

LU also potentially presents a secondary attribution. ‘Mugain ingen Choncrad chain’ is attributed prosimetrically to ‘in senchaid inso .i. Fland Mainistrech’.⁴⁸⁵ This is all within the main text, in M’s regular script. Yet its syntax perhaps suggests that ‘.i. Fland Mainistrech’ is a textually non-original explanatory gloss. Zimmer interpreted it thus,⁴⁸⁶ although mainly because he believed that Flann authored the prose and would not have named himself. The suppletive form may, of course, be simply a feature of prose style.⁴⁸⁷

H1’s three-paragraph continuation of *ANÍ*, including the colophon naming Flann and Eochaid as compilers, is of uncertain provenance, as is the marginalia added by both H1 and M. The two recognised versions of *ANÍ* in later medieval manuscripts (4:2.1.5) contain H1’s continuation, although only one includes the colophon, mid-text. Both contain within their main texts material that appears as marginalia in the *LU* version.⁴⁸⁸ For Ó Concheanainn, *LU*’s *ANÍ* is the archetype of all subsequent versions, a thitherto non-existent product of H[1]’s response to M’s text and also the dense annotation both scribes provide: H[1] added his continuation, including the colophon, on the basis of his own information and sources.⁴⁸⁹ Meanwhile, Oskamp and West (for different reasons),⁴⁹⁰ argue that *LU*’s *ANÍ* reflects a pre-existing textual tradition from which both M and H[1]’s contributions derive, West suggesting that they were working to reconcile two recensions. This interpretation mediates in favour of the colophon’s long-standing place in the textual tradition. However, both Oskamp and Ó Concheanainn ruled out the colophon’s

⁴⁸⁵ *LU*, p. 53^a1–2; ll.4274–75 (p. 135): ‘this historian i.e. Flann Mainistrech’.

⁴⁸⁶ Zimmer, ‘Über den compilerischen Charakter’, p. 683.

⁴⁸⁷ For example, *LU*, ll. 10114–15, 10711 (pp. 307, 326).

⁴⁸⁸ Ó Concheanainn, ‘Scribes’, pp. 156–59.

⁴⁸⁹ Ó Concheanainn, ‘Scribes’, p. 147.

⁴⁹⁰ Oskamp, ‘Notes’, pp. 121–22; Máire West, ‘*Leabhar na hUidhre*’s Position in the Manuscript History of *Togail bruidne Da Derga* and *Orgain brudne Uí Dergae*’, *CMCS*, 20 (Winter 1990), 61–98 (pp. 85–89). In response: Tomás Ó Concheanainn, ‘*Aided Nath Í* and the Uí Fhiachrach Genealogies’, *Éigse*, 25 (1991), 1–27.

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composition by Flann and Eochaid themselves.⁴⁹¹ The colophon is thus in general regarded as a secondary interpolation.

4.3 Attributional apparatus: conclusion

Several attributions of texts to Flann can be shown to have been introduced secondarily to the texts' initial transcriptions. Several texts, possibly by Flann, may have been consolidated and expanded by later compilers, while retaining or inserting him as ostensibly their single author. The historical Flann's contribution remains a matter for another study. For now, we can conclude that attributional apparatus was, where Flann was concerned, not simply transmitted but a site of active interest and intervention among compilers. Meanwhile, alongside previously discussed instances of texts' wholesale misattribution (2:4.1), the boundaries of works attributed to Flann sometimes seem to have been malleable.

5 Flann and his compilers (2): contexts

We have seen that later compilers were willing and able to take control of Flann's author-figure and of his corpus' boundaries. Extra meaning is often imputed into Flann and his work via the contexts in which they are placed. I examine two forms of such contexts. In the first, his texts contribute particular strands of information within larger scale collections. In the second, extended narratives can be discerned which detail how the material within Flann's texts came to be known and transmitted to and by him. As a result, we can consider presentations of Flann's work both in terms of its place in historiography and some of the mythology created to support its claims to historiographical truth.

5.1 Flann's work within intracodical networks

Texts attributed to Flann are necessarily placed in some sort of context in their respective manuscripts. *LU*'s history of fragmentation, supplementation, and re-arrangement makes its medieval structure(s) difficult to determine at present.⁴⁹²

⁴⁹¹ Oskamp, 'Notes', p. 125; Ó Concheanainn, 'Scribes', p. 146.

⁴⁹² Abigail Burnyeat, 'Compilatio and the Creation of *Lebor na hUidre*', (unpublished conference paper, 'Lebor na hUidre: A Conference').

Rawl.B.502 and *LL* offer more potential. Indeed, Schlüter has analysed *LL* as a whole in terms of thematic clusters.⁴⁹³ Below, I consider some instances in which a particular interpretation of Flann’s work is implied by its manuscript context and compare this to the texts themselves.

In *LL*, the Uí Néill Series, about which we have had much to say thus far, occurs between two texts so utterly unrelated that Schlüter understands it to constitute its own unit within the codex.⁴⁹⁴ The Tara Diptych, meanwhile, is part of a more interrelated metrical collection. It is summarised in **Table 1**.⁴⁹⁵

Table 1: The *LL Dúanaire*: the Tara Diptych in Context

<i>LL</i> , IV, ll.	Poem	Attribution	Subject-matter
14663–5256	‘Heriu ard inis na rríg’.	[Gilla Cóemáin] [fl. 1072]	Pre-Christian kings of Ireland: names, reign-lengths, <i>aideda</i> .
15257–406	‘Attá sund forba fessa’.	‘Gilla Coemain cecinit’.	Christian kings of Ireland: reign-lengths, dynasties.
15407–639	‘Annalad anall uile’.	‘Gilla Coemain cecinit’.	Pre-Christian Irish history synchronised with universal history.
15640–780	‘Ríg Themra dia tesbann tnú’.	‘Fland Manistrech cecinit’ [ob. 1056].	Pre-Christian kings of Tara: names, <i>aideda</i> .
15781–989	‘Ríg Themra toebaige íar ttain’.	‘Fland [Mainistrech] cecinit’.	Christian kings of Tara: names, <i>aideda</i> .
15990–16158	‘Can a mbunadas na nGaedel’	‘Mael Muru Othna cecinit’ [ob.887].	Migration of the Gaídil to Ireland.
16159–427	‘Rofessa i curp domuin dúir’.	[Airbertach] ‘Mac Cosse fer legind Ruis Ailithir cecinit’ [ob. 1016].	World geography.
16428–17396	‘Adam oenathair na ndoene’.	‘Gilla Mo Dutu cecinit’ [fl. 1147].	The metrical <i>Bansenchas</i> .
17396–725	‘Rédig dam, a Dé, do nim co hémid, ní hindeithbir’.	‘Dublithir hua Uathgaile cecinit’ [fl. 1090].	Biblical origins of nations.
17726–18170	‘A rí riched, rédig dam’.	‘Gilla in Chomded ua Cormaic cecinit’ [fl. 11 th /12 th cent.].	Miscellaneous information from Biblical, Classical, and Gaelic traditions.

⁴⁹³ Schlüter, *History*.

⁴⁹⁴ Schlüter, *History*, p. 137.

⁴⁹⁵ For editions and discussion, see Schlüter, *History*, pp. 128–33.

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This series (hereafter, the *LL Dúanaire*⁴⁹⁶) constitutes an encyclopaedic corpus on the past of the Gaídil and of Ireland set within a universal history, comparable in scope and interests to *LGÉ*. Flann's Tara Diptych seems to provide but one strand of information therein. For Schlüter, however, these poems complement and thus corroborate each other.⁴⁹⁷ It is also worth noting that the poems are all attributed to late ninth- to mid-twelfth-century scholarly author-figures, often overtly ecclesiastical, hailing from across Ireland.⁴⁹⁸ The *LL Dúanaire*'s composite history of Ireland, therefore, is the product of the Middle Gaelic period and of a particular social group. Flann's inclusion is in line with what we know of his biography. It is also compatible with the self-presentations in his texts, in which he is set within learned networks and traditions. In a way, such networks and traditions are replicated on the manuscript page in series such as this.

It is interesting that the *LL Dúanaire*'s compilers were happy to include the Tara Diptych's conclusion, with its express, direct support for Máel Sechnaill (2:3). None of the other poems are so specifically politicised, the series as a whole adopting a very broad historiographical scope. While we might see politicisation as compromising a historical work, the Diptych's conclusion does not seem to have had this effect, at least not to a great extent. In fact, the specific political and authorial context it provides may have enhanced the Diptych's prestige or been of interest itself as a piece of intellectual history.

LGÉ N presents a similar example in its treatment of 'Éstid a eolchu cen ón'. *N* is distinctive, within *LGÉ*, in that it separates lengthy poems from the prose and groups them at the conclusion of major sections of the compilations; other versions cite poetry where it becomes relevant.⁴⁹⁹ *N*'s account of the Túatha Dé Danann concludes with such a collection.

⁴⁹⁶ Schlüter, *History*, p. 128 (n. 110).

⁴⁹⁷ Schlüter, *History*, p. 130.

⁴⁹⁸ O'Leary, 'Identities'; Murray, 'Gilla Mo Dutu'; Peter J. Smith, 'Gilla Cóemáin (*fl.* 1072)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. by Lawrence Goldman (Oxford: OUP, 2004) <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/50121>> [accessed 2 December 2015].

⁴⁹⁹ Scowcroft, 'Leabhar Gabhála I', p. 91.

Table 2: *LGÉ N*'s metrical coverage of the Túatha Dé Danann

LL, I, II.	Poem	Attribution	Subject-matter
1190–261	‘Ériu co n-úaill co n-idnaib’	‘Is dósain ro chan in senchaid’ [elsewhere, Eochaid úa Flainn (<i>ob.</i> 1004) ⁵⁰⁰]. ⁵⁰¹	Arrival and prominent nobility of the TDD.
1262–306	‘Túatha Dé Danann fo diamair’	‘Tanaide cecinit’ [<i>fl.</i> 12 th cent? ⁵⁰²].	Kings of the TDD in Ireland: names, reign-lengths, <i>aideda</i> .
1307–455	‘Éstid a eolchu cen ón’	‘Fland Manistrech cecinit’ [<i>ob.</i> 1056].	<i>Aideda</i> of the nobility of the TDD.

Again, Flann provides a particular, complementary category of information in the company of other Middle Gaelic author-figures. His poem overlaps slightly with ‘Túatha Dé Danann fo diamair’ but, as with the Tara Diptych and Gilla Cóemáin’s work, their relationship could be understood as corroborative. Indeed, the deaths in Flann’s poem seem to occur in chronological order, as compared to the prose and other poems.⁵⁰³ It thus corroborates not only the specific narratives of the *aideda* but the overall framework of *LGÉ N*’s prose and verse accounts.

In both these examples, there is no serious dissonance between the content of Flann’s poems and the manuscript contexts in which they are placed (with the possible exception of the Diptych’s conclusion). The contexts indicate the kind of uses and connections that might be made in response to them. In illustration of how context can vary texts’ meaning, we can consider the interconnections implied by Rawl.B.502’s presentation of the two Uí Néill Series poems, ‘Mide maigen clainne Cuinn’ and ‘Síl nÁedo Sláine na sleg’. In Rawl.B.502, they are part of a series of seven poems on Irish kingdoms (**Appendix 5**).⁵⁰⁴ This more egalitarian series presents Uí Néill kingdoms side-by-side with the likes of the Ulaid, Connacht, and Cashel, the latter represented by ‘Inn éol duib in senchas sen’. Different political and historiographical schemes are at work here and in LL, and Flann’s texts, although anonymous in Rawl.B.502, play their part in both.

A dissonant example is ‘Druim Cetta, cette na noem’. As we have seen (**2:2.2.1**), this can be read as Flann and Echthigern’s assertion of the Ciannachta’s

⁵⁰⁰ For example, *LGÉ c: LGÉ*, IV, §366 (pp. 182–83).

⁵⁰¹ ‘On this, the historian sang’ (my translation).

⁵⁰² Carey, ‘Legendary history’, p. 44.

⁵⁰³ Thanisch, ‘*Götterdämmerung*’, pp.87–89.

⁵⁰⁴ Ó Cuív, *Catalogue*, I, 199–200.

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honour and political rights. Yet, in Rawl.B.502 (and in later manuscripts; 4:2), it is a component of the formal preface to *Amra Choluimb Chille*.⁵⁰⁵ As is common, the preface includes extensive information on the *Amra*'s *causa scribendi*, which concerns the convention of Druim Cett. According to our poem's superscription, its purpose is to provide information on this event: 'do tathmet na rig 7 na noeb batar 'sin mórdail inso sis'.⁵⁰⁶ It serves this purpose adequately enough but it is questionable whether that is why it was originally composed. In fact, Caoimhín Breatnach has suggested that some of its material on the convention was added to the original poem to enhance its usefulness within the preface.⁵⁰⁷

5.2 Flann's work within compositional narratives

5.2.1 Aided Nath Í

According to H1's colophon to *ANÍ* (2:2.2.3), the text is derived from Flann and Eochaid's manuscript-based project of *compilatio*. However, various other characters within *ANÍ* proper are also involved in the transmission of the information it contains. In fact, if we elide M and H1's contributions together and treat *LU*'s *ANÍ* as a single text, then buried within its catalogue of cemeteries is a stylised historiographical mythology.

Nath Í dies after disturbing the meditations of Forménus, the king of Thrace, in the Alps. Forménus prays that Nath Í's reign be ended and that his grave be obscure. Nath Í's former retainers return his body to Ireland and inter it at Cruachu.⁵⁰⁸ Yet the curse is subsequently proved ineffective. Two poets, Torna Éces and Dorbán Fili, 'tria fisidecht',⁵⁰⁹ each reveal the location of his tomb and the tombs of many other pseudo-historical kings and notables both at Cruachu and, in Dorbán's case, beyond. Each poet preserves their findings in two poems, one in *rosc* and one in syllabic verse. *ANÍ* essentially summarises the circumstances of their composition, cites the poems *in extenso*, and then replicates and expands upon the details in

⁵⁰⁵ For which, see Herbert, 'Preface'; Davies, 'Protocols'.

⁵⁰⁶ Stokes (ed. and trans.), 'Bodleian *Amra*', pp. 136–37: 'to commemorate the kings and saints who were at the Convention, this below'.

⁵⁰⁷ Caoimhín Breatnach, 'Aspects of the Textual Transmission of *Sex Aetates Mundi* and "Druim Cetta, céte na noem"', *Éigse*, 35 (2005), 9–26 (pp. 25–26).

⁵⁰⁸ *LU*, ll. 2783–2802 (p. 90).

⁵⁰⁹ *LU*, ll. 2808, 2852 (pp. 91–92): 'through his [the poet's] visionary powers' (my translation).

prose.⁵¹⁰ To this, H1 adds the colophon on Flann and Eochaid, after two largely recapitulatory paragraphs.⁵¹¹

We can discern three, perhaps four, stages through which the information on the tombs passes. At the primary stage, in Forménus' despite, Torna and Dorbán are direct, mantic eyewitnesses to the tombs' configuration and compose their poetry in response. Their poetry is somehow written down at the secondary stage. At the tertiary stage, the textualised information has become scattered through multiple codices and Forménus' curse (we might imagine) must once again be averted by Torna and Dorbán's ecclesiastical, more manuscript-orientated successors, Flann and Eochaid. A quaternary phase is implied by the colophon and perhaps by the glosses, in which their compilation itself becomes the object of study. Indeed, the colophon's composer is divided from Flann and Eochaid by the fact that the manuscript sources they consulted are, for him, no longer extant.

History's transmission from eyewitness to scribe and thence to textual scholar is, as we shall see (2:5.2.2–3), attested elsewhere. *ANÍ* sets a medieval act of *compilatio* within such a broad narrative. However, rather than minimising Flann and Eochaid's role, this narrative serves to authorise them. Their key manuscript sources' theft, inaugurating the quaternary phase, means that their compilation is now the only complete link back to Torna and Dorbán's direct experiential knowledge. Its transmission has bottle-necked with them and their compilation, *ANÍ*, is the authoritative version, the only alternatives being in lost manuscripts or presumably unrepeatable mantic experiences. We have postulated above that Flann's authorship may have been used to give unity to the Cenél nÉogain Suite; here, the presented circumstances of *ANÍ*'s compilation by him and Eochaid turn a work of *compilatio* into an originative text.

5.2.2 'Toisich na llongse tar ller'

The implied context of 'Toisich na llongse tar ller' within *LGÉ N* arguably constitutes a similar narrative to that embedded in *ANÍ*. The poem catalogues the names and *aideda* of the *toisich* ('leaders') of the Goidelic invasion of Ireland. These individuals' identities and whether they were loyal to Érimón or Éber are matters of

⁵¹⁰ *LU*, ll. 2803–2907 (pp. 90–94).

⁵¹¹ *LU*, ll. 2907–24 (p. 94).

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close interest in *LGÉ*. In addition to our poem, N provides no less than three prose lists analysing the *toisich* according to various criteria during its main account of the invasion.⁵¹²

N does not cite ‘Toisich na llongse tar ller’ while discussing the invasion but later, following N’s account of the reign of Ethriel mac Irieóil Fátha, Ireland’s fifth Goidelic king.⁵¹³ However, the *toisich* it names are closely cognate with those in the prose lists, although every list contains unique variants. The poem’s prosimetric attribution seems to refer back to the earlier lists, ‘is do haidedaib na toisechsa anuas [...]’,⁵¹⁴ as all the identifiable deaths in the poem occur between the invasion and Ethriel’s reign.

During its discussion of the invasion, N (like other versions of *LGÉ*) sets out how the information on the *toisich* was obtained from Fintan mac Bóchra and Túan mac Cairrill, who each came to Ireland before and shortly after the Flood respectively and had thus witnessed the Goidelic invasion, among much else.⁵¹⁵ Their testimony was written down through the offices of two saints, Finnia of Mag Bile and Colum Cille.⁵¹⁶ It was then ‘made known’ (‘ro innisetar’) by six scholars who were, at that time, ‘daltai Fhinniaín 7 Túáin’ (‘the pupils of Finnia and Túan’), who seem to represent early Christian Ireland’s learned class. They include the eighth-century Laidcend mac Baircheda, attested as author of early Leinster genealogical poetry.⁵¹⁷ They also include the seventh-century Cendfaelad mac Ailella, known for his supreme powers of memorisation and for his synthesis of textual study, law, and poetry.⁵¹⁸ In other contexts, he has been described by Johnston as embodying an idealised symbiotic organisation of learning,⁵¹⁹ while Burnyeat understands him as an expression of *grammatica*, ‘the common intellectual basis of medieval literate scholarly activity’.⁵²⁰

⁵¹² *LGÉ*, V, §385 (pp. 22–29); *LL*, I, ll. 1490–520, 1670–745, 1779–800 (pp. 47–48, 53–54, 56).

⁵¹³ *LGÉ*, V, §502 (pp. 194–95); *LL*, I, ll. 1912–19 (pp. 59–60).

⁵¹⁴ *LGÉ*, V, §502 (pp. 194–95 (n. 16)); *LL*, I, ll. 1918–19 (p. 60): ‘of the deaths of these chieftains down to this [...]’.

⁵¹⁵ *LGÉ*, V, §385 (pp. 22–23); *LL*, I, ll. 1490–500 (p. 47).

⁵¹⁶ Joseph F. Nagy, *Conversing with Angels and Ancients: Literary Myths of Medieval Ireland* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), pp. 4–7.

⁵¹⁷ Ó Corráin, ‘Nationality’, p. 5.

⁵¹⁸ Burnyeat, ‘Early Irish’, pp. 215–17.

⁵¹⁹ Johnston, *Literacy*, pp. 102–04.

⁵²⁰ Burnyeat, ‘Early Irish’, p. 216.

As Toner discusses,⁵²¹ *LGÉ N* supports its account of the invasion's *toisich* with both eyewitness testimony and textual tradition. Flann's poem is cited at a physical remove from the relevant passage and the gloss naming him is of unknown provenance. Nonetheless, composing several centuries later, the implication is that he based it on the tradition that the 'daltai Fhinniaín 7 Túáin' supposedly established. Interestingly, given that his poem includes more *toisich* than any prose list in *LGÉ* (2:6.2), he appears to be a leading authority on their tradition.

5.2.3 Flann as tertiary author: conclusion

In both *ANÍ* and *LGÉ N*, therefore, Flann can be termed a tertiary author: he is not a direct witness, nor does he encounter direct witnesses, but expressly works with textual evidence derived from such encounters. *ANÍ* specifies that such texts, like eyewitnesses, are mortal and require reproduction, collation, and synthesis. Allusion is made to these themes within texts attributed to Flann. As we have seen (2:3.3.1), Flann, in the Tara Diptych, treats written evidence critically but presents supposed eyewitness testimony as convincing. In the *Cenél nÉogain Suite*, he presents himself as a *compiler* and history's recovery as ever incomplete.

This three-stage development of historiography defines Flann's place on multiple occasions but it is not unique to him. A closely comparable account occurs in 'Éitset áes ecna aibind', Eochaid úa Flainn's (*ob.* 1004, if identified with Eochaid úa Flannucáin⁵²²) metrical recapitulation of *LGÉ*.⁵²³ The poem's content is said to have been textualised during encounters between Fintan, Túan, Colum Cille and Finnia. It was then interwoven ('ros n-úaigset') and discussed ('lúaidset') by unnamed 'authorities' ('auctair') through textual study ('légend'). Eochaid's account is likely closely related to N's narrative, given the poem's relationship with *LGÉ*.⁵²⁴ Yet it is useful in that, unlike N, it specifies that transmission between the secondary and tertiary phases was textual and, indeed, via *léigind*, with which Flann's obits universally associate him (1:2.2.1). More importantly, just as *ANÍ*'s narrative

⁵²¹ Toner, 'Authority', pp. 71–72.

⁵²² Ó Mainnín, 'Eochaid'.

⁵²³ *LGÉ*, IV, 252–83 (qq. 72–77 (pp. 280–83)); *Politics and Land in Early Ireland: A Poem by Eochaid Úa Flainn: Éitset áes ecna aibind*, ed. and trans. by Peter J. Smith (Berlin: Curach Bhán, 2013), qq. 68–77 (pp. 86–93). Quotations are from Smith's edition.

⁵²⁴ Scowcroft, 'Medieval Recensions', pp. 8–9.

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ultimately authorises Flann and ‘Eochaid’, Eochaid locates the ‘authorities’ in the tertiary phase: they are not mystified ancients at the tradition’s origins but relatively recent scholars who have gained command of it through textual study. As Scowcroft comments, they are ‘an audience that will *become auctores* [...] authors as witnesses to a common heritage’.⁵²⁵

6 Influence and relevance

We have considered how Flann’s author-figure is presented in texts attributed to him and how he and his work are contextualised by some Middle Gaelic scholars who encounter them. Furthermore, in **1:2.2.6**, we saw that his chronicle obits present Flann as a particularly imposing scholar. I now attempt to compare presentation to reality and assess the actual contribution made by Flann’s texts to historiography and literature before 1200. This cannot be done comprehensively, given problems with dating material and ruling out common sources. Nonetheless, there are a number of instances that could form the basis for discussion.

6.1 Limitations: Flann’s Diptych and Gilla Cóemáin’s Triptych

At the outset, it is worth noting that the mere appearance of texts attributed to Flann in pre-1200 manuscripts implies that his work was considered relevant and useful. Elsewhere, I have shown that ‘Éstid a eolchu cen ón’ may have been used in the compilation of a prose regnal history preserved in *LL*.⁵²⁶ However, the reverence expressed for Flann in some of his chronicle obits (not to mention in some secondary literature) is not always matched by his work’s technical usefulness.

A generation after Flann, Gilla Cóemáin (*fl.* 1072) composed two metrical regnal histories of the kings of Ireland, ‘Hériu ard inis na rríg’ and ‘At-tá sund forba fessa’,⁵²⁷ and a third poem, ‘Annálad anall uile’, on Irish history overall. These appear in the *LL Dúanaire* alongside the Tara Diptych (**Table 1**), which is paralleled in Gilla Cóemáin’s work. For the duration of their common coverage, Gilla Cóemáin’s king-list is very similar and he likewise divides his history into pre- and

⁵²⁵ Scowcroft, ‘*Leabhar Gabhála II*’, p. 65 (n. 173) (Scowcroft’s emphasis).

⁵²⁶ Thanisch, ‘*Götterdämmerung*’, pp. 87–89.

⁵²⁷ Smith (ed. and trans.), *Three Historical Poems*, pp. 104–87.

post-Patrician periods. However, Gilla Cóemáin's work is more elaborate. He expressly lists the kings of Ireland, not the kings of Tara, and his king-list extends much further back, before the Gaídil, to the Fir Bolg, who supposedly established the kingship of Ireland.⁵²⁸ Flann does not state that Eochaid Feidlech founded the kingship of Tara but this is where his text begins.⁵²⁹ Gilla Cóemáin also provides chronological data, including reign-lengths, for each king, as well as *aideda* in 'Hériu ard inis na rríg'. 'Annálad anall uile' presents a general chronological framework, synchronising the kingship of Ireland both internally and with universal history.

Gilla Cóemáin's work is significantly more advanced chronologically than Flann's Tara Diptych and seems to have had influence on various subsequent compositions, including *LGÉ*.⁵³⁰ It is not even clear whether Gilla Cóemáin drew upon Flann's compositions. Smith describes his work as a 'response' to Flann.⁵³¹ He lists the Tara Diptych and 'Réidig dam, a Dé, do nim' (2:6.3, 3:2.1, 4:2.4.1) as 'possible sources and analogues' but this category includes many other texts.⁵³² Most relevant, in Smith's opinion, are the *Laud Synchronisms*, *LGÉ*, and certain king-lists.⁵³³ The Tara Diptych may not even have provided the central foundation for Gilla Cóemáin but simply been one of several comparable sources, if indeed it was used at all.

Yet that does not mean Flann was to be discarded by *LL*'s readers. As Schlüter notes,⁵³⁴ even though Gilla Cóemáin's triptych supersedes Flann's Diptych, their king-lists are so similar that they may serve to corroborate each other within the *LL Dúanaire*. Furthermore, 'At-tá sund forba fessa' does not provide *aideda* for post-Patrician kings, while 'Ríg Themra toebaige íar ttain' does. While the Tara Diptych admittedly fails to emerge as the definitive work we might expect from *tiugsuí na nGaídel*, it still has its uses within a wider network of texts. Yet, as we shall see (3:2.1), this study will continue to raise questions about its usefulness.

⁵²⁸ Cf. Scowcroft, 'Leabhar Gabhála I', p. 108.

⁵²⁹ For 'Érimón is Éber ard', which precedes the Tara Diptych in some later manuscripts, see Scowcroft, 'Leabhar Gabhála I', pp. 131–32; McCarthy, *Irish Annals*, p. 271.

⁵³⁰ Scowcroft, 'Leabhar Gabhála I', pp. 119–21; Murray, 'Gilla Mo Dutu', p. 156; McCarthy, *Irish Annals*, pp. 271–303.

⁵³¹ Smith, 'Historical Verse', p. 341.

⁵³² Smith, *Three Historical Poems*, pp. 79–86.

⁵³³ Smith, *Three Historical Poems*, pp. 87–88; cf. McCarthy, *Irish Annals*, pp. 282–85

⁵³⁴ Schlüter, *History*, p. 130.

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6.2 Flann's provision of surplus material in *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* N

In both of his poems within *LGÉ* N, Flann provides more information than is integrated into the corresponding prose (**Appendix 8**).⁵³⁵ Of the sixty-seven deaths in 'Éstid a eolchu cen ón', seventeen occur under the same circumstances in N's prose account of the Túatha Dé Danann.⁵³⁶ The circumstances in verse and prose differ in two cases; thirty-seven characters who die in the poem appear in N's prose but with no account of their deaths; eleven characters from the poem are not in N's prose at all. 'Toisich na llongse tar ller' includes Palap,⁵³⁷ who does not appear in N's prose. In assessing Flann's influence, this can be interpreted various ways. On the one hand, Flann does not reiterate the same prose tradition in which he is cited and evidently has access to additional, more obscure sources. On the other, N's compiler and predecessors were unable or unwilling to integrate his extra information into their account. Indeed, his information might be so obscure as to lack corroboration.

A similar dynamic occurs when q. 20 from 'Éstid a eolchu cen ón' appears, without attribution, among the fragments of *Tochmarc Étaíne* in *LU* (hand M).⁵³⁸ In *Tochmarc Étaíne*, the Mac Óc hunts down Midir's estranged wife, Fuamnach, in Oenach Bodbgnai and slays her for banishing Midir's other wife, Étaín. However, a 'version elsewhere' ('i slicht i n-inud aile'), cited via q. 20 of Flann's poem, has Manannán slay both Midir and Fuamnach at Brí Léith. The prose provides no information that could not have been culled from q. 20 and I am yet to encounter the 'version elsewhere' in another text. For the composer of *Tochmarc Étaíne*, therefore, 'Éstid a eolchu cen ón' was citable but it did not override his main narrative. In Toner's assessment of such situations,⁵³⁹ this could be to do with the accounts' perceived relative authority. Alternatively, it may simply have not been possible for a single quatrain to provide sufficient detail and context for a developed prose

⁵³⁵ On such divergences elsewhere in *LGÉ*, see Scowcroft, 'Leabhar Gabhála I', p. 90.

⁵³⁶ *LGÉ*, IV, §§304, 306–07, 309–16 (pp. 106–31); *LL*, I, ll. 1049–89 (pp. 33–37). *LGÉ*, V, §469 (pp. 152–55); *LL*, I, ll. 1803–13 (pp. 56–57).

⁵³⁷ *LGÉ*, V, pp. 106–11 (qq. 5, 16–17); *LL*, I, ll. 1936, 1983–84 (pp. 60–61).

⁵³⁸ *LU*, ll. 10701–07 (p. 325); 'Tochmarc Étaíne', ed. by Osborn Bergin and Richard I. Best, *Ériu*, 12 (1938), 137–196 (§26 (pp. 160–61)). The citation was first noted by Zimmer, 'Über den compilatorischen Charakter', pp. 685–87.

⁵³⁹ Toner, 'Authority', pp. 68–70.

narrative to be altered. Again, Flann provides hard-to-find information but this does not prove particularly helpful.

6.3 Usage and adaptation of ‘Réidig dam, a Dé, do nim’

Even though it does not actually appear in full in a pre-1200 manuscript, ‘Réidig dam, a Dé, do nim’ is still of relevance in this context. In later medieval manuscripts, where it is attributed to Flann Mainistrech (3:2.1; 4:2.3.1),⁵⁴⁰ this substantial poem, following the Eusebian tradition,⁵⁴¹ traces a continuous world-kingship held successively by the Assyrians, the Medes, the Persians, the ‘Greeks’ (Alexander and four diadochene states), and, finally, the Romans.⁵⁴² It gives a reign-length and often an *aided* for each world-king but also contains a number of digressions that narrate particular episodes or recapitulate chronology. It ends in the ninth year of the reign (AD 717–41) of the Byzantine Emperor, Leo III, the end-point of Bede’s *Chronica Maiora*.⁵⁴³ Otherwise, its sources are not immediately discernible. It may be derived directly from Latin universal histories or from Gaelic world-chronicling.⁵⁴⁴

Jürgen Schmidt has questioned whether the poem’s five cantos were always understood as comprising a single work with a single author,⁵⁴⁵ raising issues similar to those we have discussed in relation to *LL*’s Uí Néill Series (2:4.2.1.1–2). We thus

⁵⁴⁰ ‘A Middle Irish Poem on World Kingship [Part 1]’, ed. and trans. by Seán Mac Airt, *Études Celtiques*, 6 (1953–54), 255–80; ‘A Middle Irish Poem on World Kingship cont. [Part 2]’, *Études Celtiques*, 7 (1955–56), 18–45; ‘A Middle Irish Poem on World Kingship cont. [Part 3]’, *Études Celtiques*, 8 (1957–58), 99–119, 284–97. Mac Airt passed away before completing his edition of the final, Roman canto. However, in November 2011, Prof. Dáibhí Ó Cróinín (NUIG) and Dr Daniel P. McCarthy (TCD) generously supplied me with a copy of Mac Airt’s early draft thereof (without translation): ‘A Middle Irish Poem on World Kingship [part 4]’. The final quatrains of ‘Réidig dam, a Dé, do nim’ are edited and translated from *LGÉ Lb* by MacNeill (‘Irish Historical Tract’, p. 138), and (with variants) from the *Book of Uí Maine* by Thurneysen (‘Flann Manistrech’s Gedicht Réidig dam, a Dé do nim, co hémig a n-innisiin’, *ZCP*, 10 (1915), 269–73, 396–97 (pp. 270–72)).

⁵⁴¹ Hildegard L. C. Tristram, *Sex Aetates Mundi: Die Weltzeitalter bei den Angelsachsen und den Iren Untersuchungen und Texte*, (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1985), pp. 19–24; Diane-Myrick, *From the De Excidio*, pp. 81–84; for the Eusebian tradition in general, see McKitterick, *Perceptions*, pp. 9–19.

⁵⁴² Mac Airt, ‘Poem [1]’, pp. 255–56. For a summary, see Jürgen Schmidt, ‘Zu Réidig dam a Dé do nim / co hémidh a n-indisin’, in *Festgabe für Hildegard L.C. Tristram überreicht von Studenten, Kollegen und Freunden des ehemaligen Faches Keltologie der Albert-Ludwigs-Universität in Freiburg*, ed. by Gisbert Hemprich (Berlin: Curach Bhán, 2009), pp. 211–87 (221, 224–40). I am grateful to Mr Christoph Otte for his assistance with reading this article. See also Tristram, *Sex Aetates Mundi*, pp. 174–75.

⁵⁴³ Schmidt, ‘Zu Réidig’, pp. 213–14; Evans, *Present*, pp. 122–24, 223.

⁵⁴⁴ Schmidt, ‘Zu Réidig’, pp. 254–55.

⁵⁴⁵ Schmidt, ‘Zu Réidig’, pp. 216, 220–44.

cannot be sure in what form the poem would have been, pre-1200. With that caveat, however, the influence and use of something like it is detectable.

6.3.1 Re-use of the poem's incipit

Two other poems on world history from pre-1200 manuscripts open with an identical or very similar incipit to Flann's 'Réidig dam, a Dé, do nim | co héimid a n-indisin'. All three include a rhyme between *réidig* and *éimid* ('swift') in the second line. In Rawl.B.502 (and elsewhere), 'Réidig dam, a Dé, do nim | co héimid, ní hindeithbir' concludes *Sex Aetates Mundi* (SAM),⁵⁴⁶ a Middle Gaelic treatise on world history, and also appears independently in the *LL Dúanaire* (Table 1). The poem is generally understood to be the work of Dublittir hÚa Uathgaile (*fl.* late eleventh century).⁵⁴⁷ His poem is about the genealogies of the world's ethnic groups and thus barely overlaps with Flann's poem on world-kingship in any way in subject-matter.

The other *Réidig dam...* poem is slightly more similar. 'A Rí richid, reidig dam | tria gné n-eimid n-eladan' is also preserved, uniquely this time, in the *LL Dúanaire*.⁵⁴⁸ There, it is attributed to Gilla in Choimded úa Cormaic, an obscure figure dated by Smith to *c.* 1050x1150.⁵⁴⁹ Lacking a single theme, it is a panoramic collection of information from classical and Gaelic literature, as well as some information on Eusebian world-kings.⁵⁵⁰ It is thus closer to Flann's interests, although it does not in any way purport to be a chronological history.

This incipit continues to be re-used in the context of world history in the later Middle Ages (4:3.3). That Flann's 'Réidig dam, a Dé, do nim' is probably its earliest appearance might suggest that this poem was influential in medieval Gaelic scholarship on world history. Its influence could not have been direct, given the variations in subject-matter, but might be more to do with the poem's scope and ambition. Indeed, the incipit itself is an appeal for divine assistance ('elucidate, for me, o God from heaven'). This is but a hypothesis, however, particularly given that

⁵⁴⁶ *LL*, IV, ll. 17439–725 (pp. 563–73); *SAM*, §70 (pp. 97–108, 132–37): 'Make easy for me, o God, from heaven, it is not uncertain, it is a pure deed'; Schmidt, 'Zu *Réidig*', p. 258.

⁵⁴⁷ *SAM*, pp. 41–48; John Carey, 'Rev. of *The Irish Sex Aetates Mundi* by Dáibhí Ó Cróinín', *Studia Hibernica*, 24 (1988), 160–63 (p. 163).

⁵⁴⁸ *LL*, IV, ll. 17726–18170 (pp. 574–87): 'O king of heaven, make plain to me, through a swift and artful act' (my translation). The section pertaining to *fianaigecht* has been edited and translated by Kuno Meyer, *Fianaigecht* (Dublin: RIA, 1910), pp. 46–51.

⁵⁴⁹ 'Aimirgein Glúngel tuir tend: A Middle Irish Poem on the Authors and Laws of Ireland', ed. and trans. by Peter J. Smith, *Peritia*, 8 (1994), 120–50 (pp. 124, 147–48).

⁵⁵⁰ Miles, *Heroic Saga*, pp. 48–49.

many incipits to historical poetry follow certain formulae (e.g. *At-tá sund...*, *Ériu...inis na...*).

6.3.2 Citations in the *Annals of Inisfallen*

AI (Rawl.B.503), compiled, initially, in 1092 in Munster, begins with a fragmentary Latin chronicle on pre-Patrician history with a generally universal scope drawing ultimately on writers like Eusebius-Jerome, and Bede.⁵⁵¹ This chronicle is supported by Gaelic citations and prose summaries from Flann's 'Réidig dam, a Dé, do nim'.⁵⁵²

Yet *AI* does not name him, citing instead 'in file' or 'poeta'. For Byrne, these are inappropriate terms for Flann, an ecclesiastical scholar, meaning *AI*'s compiler must have not known him to be the author.⁵⁵³ As we have seen (**LR:3.3.1**), the usefulness of such a strict sub-division of medieval Gaelic learned culture has been questioned. Furthermore, the material *AI* cites is self-evidently concerned with Eusebian universal history, suggesting that the *AI* compiler's conception of a *fili*'s purview was sufficiently broad for Byrne's distinction to be rendered irrelevant. Flann thus may or may not have been the poem's author for *AI*'s compiler.⁵⁵⁴ With that caveat, *AI*'s use of material from 'Réidig dam, a Dé, do nim' provides a valuable opportunity to analyse the repeated and detailed use of what might have been (known as) Flann's work in a wider historiographical project and consider its utility therein.

Material in *AI* corresponding to 'Réidig dam, a Dé, do nim' is summarised in **Appendix 9**. Some is definitely from some iteration of the poem. In several instances, quatrains appear *in extenso* or material from the poem is summarised in Gaelic prose within the otherwise predominantly Latin world chronicle. In these instances, I regard the poem's influence as 'definite'.⁵⁵⁵ Latin prose in *AI* can also correspond so closely to the poem that its influence might be suspected, although so might that of a common source. These are classified as 'possible'. All of *AI*'s 'definite' uses of the poem occur in relation to the Persian and Greek world-kingships. Indeed, prior to the Persians, the world-kings are not consistently tracked in *AI*. Possible influence might be identifiable elsewhere in the texts' common

⁵⁵¹ *AI*, pp. 1–54; Ó Cuív, *Catalogue*, I, 201.

⁵⁵² *AI*, pp. xvii–xxi.

⁵⁵³ Byrne, 'Ireland', p. 867.

⁵⁵⁴ See also Schmidt, 'Zu *Réidig*', pp. 212–13.

⁵⁵⁵ Hereafter, 'the poem' refers to 'Réidig dam, a Dé, do nim', as available in later medieval manuscripts.

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coverage of universal history, although I have not found any particularly compelling instances. It thus seems most useful to concentrate, for the present study, on these two cantos.

The material *AI* cites corresponds with the poem, as it appears in later manuscripts, to various extents. When *AI* cites quatrains in full, they generally agree in all significant respects with the poem; where the poem's manuscripts disagree amongst themselves, *AI*'s quatrains tend to follow the older recension represented by UM and Lc2,⁵⁵⁶ as Schmidt observes.⁵⁵⁷ Yet *AI*'s prose summaries of material from the poem can differ compared to the poem on exact figures and details (e.g. **D1**, **D5**, **P1**). This could reflect variants in the text of the poem that the *AI* compiler used but such variants' absence when the quatrains are cited *in extenso* implies that his text was not particularly divergent, at least not from UM/Lc2 (although see below). In fact, he may have turned to prose in some instances in order to amend testimony in his text of the poem. On the other hand, his Gaelic prose summaries can agree with the poem (e.g. **D2**, **D5**), suggesting brevity and clarity might also have been factors.

In both the Persian and Greek cantos, *AI* uses the poem to provide overviews of each world-kingship. That of the Persians concludes in *AI* with quatrains cited from the poem giving a chronological recapitulation in years and number of kings (**D4**). The Greek world-kingship is introduced with Gaelic prose and quatrains both describing Alexander's conquests and including a chronological recapitulation, also in years and number of kings (**D5**). The Greek world-kingship's conclusion in *AI* is lost in a physical lacuna.⁵⁵⁸

As well as chronological data, the poem is also a source, for *AI*, of narrative and sundry information relating to specific world-kingships and reigns. It is used to supply, *inter alia*, the origins of the Persians (**D1**); the story of Judith, during the reign of Cambyses (**D2**); the story of Esther, during the reign of Artaxerxes Mnemon (**D3**); possibly data on Xerxes' military (**P1**); and the details of Alexander's conquests (**D5**). The chronicler thus sought testimony from the *fili/poeta* both on the chronicle's overall structure and for narrative on specific historical episodes.

⁵⁵⁶ Schmidt's sigla; see Schmidt, 'Zu Réidig', p. 212 and **Appendix 9**.

⁵⁵⁷ Schmidt, 'Zu Réidig', pp. 213, 216.

⁵⁵⁸ *AI*, p. 30.

As is evident from **Appendix 9**, *AI*'s entries on the commencement of each Persian and Greek world-king's reign each include a short Latin section giving their name and reign-length and occasionally other details. Their reign-lengths generally agree with those in the poem. Such entries also appear sporadically concerning kings before the Persian world-kingship, particularly the kings of Judah, who were not world-kings.⁵⁵⁹ They appear much more consistently concerning Roman world-kings.⁵⁶⁰ While this information might have been extracted and translated from the poem, it seems more likely that it represents a terser Latin world chronicle which, in *AI*, is both corroborated and expanded with vernacular material from the poem (and Latin material from other sources). Importantly, *AI*'s extracts from the poem do not simply provide decoration and colour but engage with the chronicle's fundamental, technical details.

Yet, despite this intense engagement in certain sections, *AI*'s use of the poem is actually quite limited, overall. As already mentioned, there is no clear evidence of the poem's influence outside the Persian and Greek cantos, despite its other cantos containing similar narrational digressions and, naturally, chronological data.⁵⁶¹ Furthermore, the world-kingdoms do not actually dominate *AI*'s chronological framework. *AI* notes some world-kingdoms' commencement via manuscript headings but similarly notes other eras, like the *aetates mundi*,⁵⁶² which do not feature in the poem. Furthermore, *AI*'s succession of world-kings is not consistently maintained beyond the Persian and Greek cantos. For example, *AI* notes the Medes' world-kingship and their first world-king, Arbatus, but omits the poem's nine subsequent kings.⁵⁶³ Sardonapollus is said to be *AI*'s thirty-sixth Assyrian world-king but only seven have been mentioned previously.⁵⁶⁴ The poem's testimony is thus used very selectively by the chronicler. This might lend support to Schmidt's suspicions that the poem did not always circulate as a single work but it could also be

⁵⁵⁹ For example, *AI*, §§11, 59, 79, 90–171 (pp. 3, 8, 10, 12–22).

⁵⁶⁰ *AI*, §§201–344 (pp. 30–42).

⁵⁶¹ For example, Mac Airt (ed. and trans.), 'Poem [1]', I:30–59 (pp. 268–80); 'Poem [2]', II:16–20 (pp. 24–27). Citations from Mac Airt's edition are by canto number (Roman), followed by quatrain number (Arabic).

⁵⁶² World-kingdoms: *AI*, §§89, 165, 204 (pp. 12, 21, 30). Other eras: *AI*, §§139, 185 (pp. 18, 20, 26).

⁵⁶³ *AI*, §127 (p. 16); Mac Airt (ed. and trans.), 'Poem [2]', II:1–22 (pp. 18–29).

⁵⁶⁴ *AI*, §127 (p. 16). Some may have been lost with the manuscript's initial folios.

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because *AI*'s world chronicle only sporadically covered the world-kingship, meaning the poem did not always provide helpful corroboration.

Another aspect of the poem's relationship with *AI* might also validate Schmidt's suspicions. The poem's chronological recapitulation of the Persian world-kingship in III:33 (**D4**) is not accurate for the poem's account but is accurate for *AI*. The quatrain counts twelve Persian world-kings. Twelve are named in *AI* (including the *magi*), while fifteen appear in the poem (including the *magi*) in all manuscripts. The poem's III:33 counts either ten or twelve in different manuscripts (see **D4**). In both the poem and *AI*, III:33 states that their world-kingship lasted 230 years. In the poem, the combined reign-lengths total 240 years (rounding up) but 230 in *H*; in *AI*, they total 227 years. The discrepancy is produced by variations in Xerxes' reign-length (see **P1**) and the absence of three kings from *AI*.⁵⁶⁵ Since *AI*'s account is closer to the poem's recapitulatory quatrain (III:33), the poem indeed seems to have undergone subsequent development, either since *AI* used it or since their common source.

'Réidig dam, a Dé, do nim', therefore, was treated by the compiler of *AI*'s world chronicle as a useful source for both the structure and the substance of world history, if only, for some reason, in relation to two specific world-kingdoms. Yet its role is still ultimately to support the Latin chronicle. The compiler stops short of wholesale re-structuring or re-framing based on the poem, despite its consistent coverage of the world-kingships. This could be because the whole poem was not available or perhaps because it would have been too difficult to synchronise accurately with *AI*'s existing material where a framework of world-kingships was not already included.

6.4 Influence and relevance: conclusion

The influence, as far as it is detectable, of work associated with Flann on other texts in pre-1200 manuscripts seems to have been characterised by integration. His works rarely seems to dominate prosimetric or manuscript contexts in which they appear. He tends to offer one category of information or one variant version of a narrative among several. In the case of the Tara Diptych, by the time of compilation, he has in

⁵⁶⁵ Mac Airt (ed. and trans.), 'Poem [2]', III:23, 31 (pp. 38–39, 42–43).

some ways already been superseded. Just as some of his authorial self-presentation and the apparatus around his texts presents him engaging with sources, traditions, and others scholars, so his testimony, in practice, is set alongside other accounts. While his testimony might appear, it cannot be shown to prompt revision or suppression of alternatives. Presentations, ancient and modern, of Flann as supremely authoritative historian thus do not play out in practice.

7 Conclusion: Flann in pre-1200 manuscripts

In this chapter, from various perspectives, we have been considering Flann Mainistrech's author-figure in material attributed to him in pre-1200 manuscripts. Essentially, how was he understood in the learned culture of the period and what did he bring to texts presented under his name?

Certain points of consistency emerge that might give us some idea of how he was understood. In terms of subject-matter, his pre-1200 corpus is dominated by king-lists and aetiological narratives relating to what were, for the compilers, recent or contemporary Irish kingdoms. Political meaning was surely attached to such work at the time and, indeed, Flann occasionally expresses explicit support for certain dynasts and polities. His contributions to the *LGÉ* project can be read in a similar light, since its synthesis of a 'national' history was partly ideologically-driven. Yet this does not account for all the attributions to him. An interest in the ancient past is maintained beyond *LGÉ*; he potentially composes on an episode in *Tochmarc Étaíne* and another of his poems is cited within the same text, for example. Also, while much of his corpus can be described as political, a consistent propagandistic agenda is hardly apparent in his work. There might be biographical or attributional reasons for this but it does mean that political stance does not characterise his textual persona. Indeed, as we shall discover (4:1.2), subject-matter and political interests are among the most changeable aspects of material associated with Flann across different periods.

He is generally presented less in terms of his individual merits and characteristics but rather in terms of his relationships with tradition, communal memory, written sources, and his scholarly collaborators. We have encountered some

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particularly emphatic evidence in this regard. In two cases, narratives of medieval Gaelic historiography's development identify him as what I have termed a 'tertiary author', whose authority openly derives from textual study. While collaborative authorship was doubtless common in reality,⁵⁶⁶ such origins for material are, as far as I can tell, nowhere else detailed explicitly in medieval Gaelic literary discourse.⁵⁶⁷ Thus, two, maybe three, attestations of Flann collaborating with another scholar render this a distinctive aspect of his persona.

A text attributed to Flann might have been understood as the work of one situated within a learned, literate network engaged with wider elite society. This conception of him, I argue, is also manifest in how compilers arrange and use his work and that of similar authors. In prosimetric or manuscript context, Flann's texts often provide one certain strand of information among several, a supplement to an existing text, or a variant version of a narrative. Just as he conducts source-based work in collaboration with others, so his texts are set within assistive networks of reading.

Flann is characterised by his integration into an ethos and a system of learning, rather than by his own biography. Superficially, this contrasts with the rather high and lonely figure presented in his chronicle obits (**1:2.2**). It also contrasts with the simple attributions to him encountered throughout the manuscript tradition, in which a text is taken back only to him, with no room for sources or collaborators. In particular, we have encountered multiple instances where material seems to have been consolidated or expanded under an attribution to Flann. The trend was towards expanding and appropriating his authorial responsibility, not analysing and sub-dividing it.

It may be that Flann's perceived stature as a scholar and as an author-figure was derived from an understanding of his intellectual connections and context. Indeed, as we have seen (**2:5.3**), Eochaid úa Flainn, in 'Éitset áes ecna aibind', designates as *ugdair* ('authorities') those who occupy the same tertiary phase as Flann and explicitly notes scholarly exchange as a feature of their activities. Far from

⁵⁶⁶ Love, *Attributing*, pp. 33–39.

⁵⁶⁷ It is, naturally, difficult to make definitive statements about the presence or absence of an idea in the literature.

deconstructing Flann as pre-eminent scholar, the perceived characteristics we have been discussing may have established him as such.

The quantity of material we have found to analyse within and around Flann's texts, alongside the sources considered in **Chapter 1**, demonstrates that Flann's authority was not simply generic but defined and located by himself and by others. Indeed, it was of sufficient interest for it to be appropriated, on occasion. Its reception in other texts and in later contexts, as we shall discover in subsequent chapters, shows both continuity and development compared to what we have considered here.

Chapter 3

Erudition and Elucidation: Flann Mainistrech in *Lebor Gabála Érenn*

1 Introduction

I treat *LGÉ* separately both because it constitutes a single, if complex, textual tradition and because the material of interest to us therein is of uncertain date. The major developments that produced its various extant recensions and individual versions are generally dated to the Middle Gaelic period.⁵⁶⁸ Indeed, version N is in *LL (2:2.2.2)*, *LU* once contained a version,⁵⁶⁹ and Rawl.B.502 contains a related fragment.⁵⁷⁰ Otherwise, the compilation's Middle Gaelic development is witnessed only via manuscripts from the late fourteenth century onwards.⁵⁷¹

Yet major developments need not be behind the attributional aspects that interest us. Indeed, Macalister has commented that a continuing, dynamic interest in the compilation's verse components is evidenced by 'the diversity of the formulae introducing the poems [in *LGÉ*], even in mss. that otherwise have close verbal similarity'.⁵⁷² Many aspects of Flann's role within the compilation are thus difficult to date. Outwith N, any given piece of evidence relating to him could be eleventh- or twelfth-century to late medieval. It is thus safest to treat *LGÉ* as potentially straddling the periods covered by **Chapters 1, 2, and 4** in this thesis. On a more positive note, its multiple versions and extant developmental strata provide an invaluable case study in medieval Gaelic textual scholarship and, for us, reception of authored works.

1.1 *Lebor Gabála Érenn*: content and structure

LGÉ runs from Creation until the eleventh or twelfth centuries. It narrates the ancestry and migrations of the Gaídil and the history of their kings in Ireland. It also

⁵⁶⁸ Scowcroft, 'Leabhar Gabhála Part 1', p. 97; John Carey, 'The LU Copy of *Lebor Gabála*', in *Lebor Gabála*, ed. by Carey, pp. 21–32 (31–32); Scowcroft, 'Medieval Recensions', pp. 7–11.

⁵⁶⁹ Carey, 'LU Copy'.

⁵⁷⁰ Scowcroft, 'Leabhar Gabhála Part 1', p. 87.

⁵⁷¹ Scowcroft, 'Leabhar Gabhála Part 1', pp. 85–87; Scowcroft, 'Medieval Recensions', pp. 4–5.

⁵⁷² *LGÉ*, I, x.

provides similar accounts of the previous inhabitants, of which there had been four or five successive groups.⁵⁷³ These interlocking narratives are supported by genealogies, synchronisms, scriptural exegesis, and etymology. Poetry, attributed to a variety of authors, is frequently cited both in support of particular points and in general overview.⁵⁷⁴ For Macalister and Carey, *LGÉ* existed first purely as poetry, which later formed the basis for the prosimetric compilation.⁵⁷⁵ Scowcroft, while accepting that much is derived from a learned verse corpus, also emphasised the dependence of some poems on pre-existing prosimetric versions, the forms actually supporting and inspiring one another.⁵⁷⁶

1.2 Recensions and textual history

The compilation's rich content is matched by its complex textual history. Scowcroft hypothesises a terse, prose original (ω), adapted and expanded twice in the eleventh century to produce the equally hypothetical α and μ .⁵⁷⁷ Each expansion arose from distinct interests. Closely related to the work of Eochaid úa Flainn (*ob.* 1004) and thus possibly by him, α focused on the pre-Goidelic invaders and the lineages founded by the early Gaídil. Meanwhile, μ was based around the imagined kingship of Ireland. Finding the kingship's origins during the Fir Bolg settlement, μ charted its continuous history into the eleventh century. It is closely related to the work of Gilla Cóemáin and so Scowcroft likewise suggests that he might have been behind it. As a result of their distinct emphases, μ emerged with the more robust chronology, while α was richer in historical detail.

Moving into extant recensions, each represented by multiple manuscripts, *m* is derived from μ while *b* is derived from α . *a* (which includes N) is an attempt to reconcile α and μ , retaining μ 's basic chronology while interpolating material from α .⁵⁷⁸ *c* is a further attempt at reconciliation, this time between representatives of *a* and *b*. Both *a* and *c* seem to date from the twelfth century, although *c* draws upon a

⁵⁷³ For an overview, see Carey, 'Legendary history'.

⁵⁷⁴ Scowcroft, 'Leabhar Gabhála I', pp. 90–93.

⁵⁷⁵ *LGÉ*, I, x; Carey, 'Legendary history', p. 44.

⁵⁷⁶ Scowcroft, 'Leabhar Gabhála Part I', pp. 90–91.

⁵⁷⁷ Scowcroft, 'Medieval Recensions', pp. 6–12.

⁵⁷⁸ Scowcroft, 'Leabhar Gabhála II', p. 2; Scowcroft 'Medieval Recensions', pp. 4–6.

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version of *a* and so must be later.⁵⁷⁹ Some *b* manuscripts also interpolate passages from *a*.⁵⁸⁰ Furthermore, a prose-poetic synchronistic collection (hereafter, the (*LGÉ* *b*) Appendix), as well as recension *m*, were appended to the *b* archetype, apparently to correct its chronology.⁵⁸¹ Given that the Appendix is based around poetry attributed to Flann Mainistrech (**3:2.1**), both Scowcroft and Schmidt have suggested that he was the compiler of *b*, as extant.⁵⁸² Finally, recension *d* was compiled in the seventeenth century by the Four Masters, again reconciling a range of medieval sources; this version will be considered in **Chapter 5 (5:2.1.1)**.

Importantly, *LGÉ*'s development was thus largely not the result of chance and error but of conscious efforts to reconcile and explicate available materials. We thus have reason to anticipate dynamic engagement on the part of *LGÉ*'s various compilers with the texts attributed to Flann Mainistrech employed therein.

2 Flann's corpus

Eight poems are attributed to Flann Mainistrech by name across *LGÉ*'s various versions. A number of others are attributed more ambiguously to 'Flann' or 'Flann fili'. In **3:2.1**, I examine poems definitely attributed to Flann Mainistrech in terms of their content and context in *LGÉ*'s textual history. Texts that are the subjects of more ambiguous attributions are briefly surveyed in **3:2.2**. The situation is summarised in **Appendix 10**, which is subdivided accordingly.

2.1 Definite attributions⁵⁸³

Poems attributed to Flann Mainistrech or the attributions themselves can be traced to different stages of *LGÉ*'s development. As we have discussed, under Scowcroft's model, *LGÉ* developed as an integrated prosimetric compilation while, under Carey's model, it drew, at least in its earlier stages, on an independent canon of learned verse.

⁵⁷⁹ Scowcroft, 'Leabhar Gabhála I', pp. 129–30.

⁵⁸⁰ Scowcroft, 'Medieval Recensions', pp. 5, 15–16.

⁵⁸¹ Scowcroft, 'Leabhar Gabhála I', pp. 125–32.

⁵⁸² Scowcroft, 'Leabhar Gabhála I', p. 131; Scowcroft, 'Medieval Recensions', p. 12 (n. 42); Schmidt, 'Zu Réidig', pp. 219–20.

⁵⁸³ 'Definite', that is, in the sense that the attributions definitely mention Flann Mainistrech, not that he is definitely the poems' author.

Flann's corpus is varied in this respect: some of his poems become fixtures of *LGÉ* at an early stage, while others can be shown to be later imports.

The two poems whose association with him can be traced back furthest are those we have already considered within *LGÉ* N. The presence of 'Éstid a eolchu cen ón', consistently attributed to Flann, throughout both *m* and *a* implies that it was in μ ; Scowcroft has described it as a 'later addition' to μ , without going into detail.⁵⁸⁴ The role of this poem, as I have demonstrated elsewhere,⁵⁸⁵ varies in different versions of *LGÉ*. In developmentally earlier versions (*m* and N), it simply concludes *LGÉ*'s account of the Túatha Dé Danann, while, latterly (*F* and *c*), it is cited during discussions of whether the Túatha Dé Danann are human. Paradoxically, *m* actually also puts this interpretation on it internally. There, it concludes with four additional quatrains asserting that the Túatha Dé Danann are in hell and rebuking those who see them as immortal *síd*-folk.⁵⁸⁶ Although *LGÉ* *m* is developmentally early, Carey warns that these quatrains may not be an authentic part of the poem, as they are absent from versions beyond *m* and appear independently elsewhere.⁵⁸⁷ 'Éstid a eolchu cen ón' was thus of interest to medieval scholars investigating the Túatha Dé Danann from a variety of perspectives.

'Toisich na llongse tar ller' appears in both *a* and *b*. This might mean that it was in α ; it certainly suggests it is an early feature of *LGÉ*. It is attributed to Flann across recension *a* only,⁵⁸⁸ as well as in D (recension *b*), interpolating from an *a*-text,⁵⁸⁹ and in *Lc*. Despite all this, Carey (at one time) and Scowcroft have attributed 'Toisich na llongse tar ller' to Eochaid úa Flainn,⁵⁹⁰ due to the poem's concluding reference to 'mac meic Fhlainn' (2:2.3). For my solution to this issue, see 5:2.1.1.

In *F*, as in N (2:2.2.2), the poem follows the account of Ethriel's reign. In *b*, however, it supports the account of the invasion itself.⁵⁹¹ In recension *b*'s *Y*, *Lb*, and *D*, the poem follows a passage cognate with that in N (2:5.2.2) detailing the data's transmission from Fintan and Túan. Absent from *b*'s *E* and *R*, this passage was

⁵⁸⁴ Scowcroft, 'Leabhar Gabhála II', p. 55.

⁵⁸⁵ Thanisch, 'Götterdämmerung'.

⁵⁸⁶ *LGÉ*, IV, pp. 240–41 (qq. 39–42).

⁵⁸⁷ Carey, *Single Ray*, p. 18 (n. 25).

⁵⁸⁸ However, see 2:4.2.1.1.

⁵⁸⁹ Scowcroft, 'Leabhar Gabhála I', p. 115.

⁵⁹⁰ Carey, 'Leabhar Gabála', p. 51 (however, see also Carey, 'Legendary history', p. 44); Scowcroft, 'Leabhar Gabhála I', p. 120 (n. 114).

⁵⁹¹ *LGÉ*, V, §385 (pp. 26–27).

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presumably interpolated from an *a*-text.⁵⁹² Y, *Lb*, and D also omit the final precatory quatrain (2:2.3; 5:2.1.1), perhaps due to perceived incompatibility with these versions' ascriptions of great antiquity to the material.

Most versions of *m* attribute only 'Éstid a eolchu cen ón' to Flann Mainistrech. Uniquely, *Rm* concludes a prose discussion of the origins of the Cruithni with 'Cruithnig cid dos farclam', attributed to Flann Mainistrech.⁵⁹³ While *Rm* is physically sixteenth-century, we can date the inclusion of 'Cruithnig cid dos farclam' to sometime after the early twelfth century, as Scowcroft assigns this date to *G,⁵⁹⁴ *r*'s (*R/Rm*'s source) common source with the rest of *LGÉ* recension *b*.

Rm (and *R*) abbreviates cited poems to their initial quatrains but a long poem with the same initial quatrain appears in two manuscripts of *Lebor Bretnach* (*LB*), the Middle Gaelic adaptation of *Historia Brittonum*.⁵⁹⁵ Neither mentions Flann, however. In long form, the poem contains the well-known story of the Cruithni's voyages to Ireland, their friendly interactions with the Gaídil, their conquest of Alba, and their intermarriage with women provided by the Gaídil in return for enacting matrilineal succession.⁵⁹⁶ Alba was eventually seized from them by Cínaed mac Ailpín, presented here as being from Dál Riata.⁵⁹⁷ In *LB B*,⁵⁹⁸ two further quatrains enumerate the kings of Alba from the Cruithni and then those from Dál Riata. 'Mac Bretach' (= Mac Bethad (Macbeth), who reigned 1040 – c. 1057?) is named as the most recent.⁵⁹⁹

Other than *m*, the synchronistic Appendix, and interpolations from *a*, *LGÉ b* contains only one text potentially attributed to Flann Mainistrech. This is the single quatrain 'Ochtaúin August in rí', which dates the life of Christ by reigns of Roman emperors. This becomes relevant in *b*'s prose during a discussion of the date of the

⁵⁹² Scowcroft, 'Medieval Recensions', p. 4.

⁵⁹³ *LGÉ*, V, §492 (pp. 176–79).

⁵⁹⁴ Scowcroft, 'Medieval Recensions', pp. 16–17.

⁵⁹⁵ *Leabhar Breathnach annso sis: The Irish version of the Historia Britonum of Nennius*, ed. and trans. by James H. Todd (Dublin: Irish Archaeological Society, 1848), pp. 126–53; Skene (ed. and trans.) *Chronicles*, pp. 32–44; *Lebor Bretnach: The Irish Version of the Historia Britonum Ascribed to Nennius*, ed. and trans. by Anton G. van Hamel (Dublin: The Stationery Office, 1932), §7 (pp. 10–14); David N. Dumville, 'The textual history of 'Lebor Bretnach': a preliminary study', *Éigse*, 16 (1975–1976), 255–73 (pp. 255–64).

⁵⁹⁶ For context, see Mac Eoin, 'Irish Legend'.

⁵⁹⁷ Cf. Alex Woolf, *From Pictland to Alba 789–1070*, The New Edinburgh History of Scotland 2 (Edinburgh: EUP, 2007), 93–98.

⁵⁹⁸ *LB* sigla are as in Dumville, 'Textual history'.

⁵⁹⁹ van Hamel (ed.), *Lebor Bretnach*, §7 (p. 14); Mac Eoin, 'Irish Legend', p. 139.

reign of Conchobar mac Nessa. It is printed here from Y (the quatrains' versions contain no meaningful variants):⁶⁰⁰

Ochtaúin August in rí
 in n-are ro gab Crist crí.
 Tibir Cessair co curp nglan
 i n-are ro chessartar.⁶⁰¹

This is technically only ever attributed to 'Flann' but, since it is about world history (4:2.3), Flann Mainistrech is by far the most likely identification. As this quatrain appears in a passage unique to *b*,⁶⁰² Flann may not have appeared in α at all. Indeed, if Scowcroft is right to associate α with Eochaid úa Flainn, α itself might simply have predated the historical Flann.

The *LGÉ b* Appendix consists of prose synchronistic tracts, the Tara Diptych, and a full-length version of 'Réidig dam, a Dé, do nim' (from Ninus son of Belus, first Assyrian world-king, to the ninth year of Leo III of Byzantium; (2:6.3)), the latter two attributed (internally or externally) to Flann Mainistrech. The Tara Diptych is preceded by the unattributed 'Érimón is Éber ard', which carries the Diptych's king-list back to the Goidelic invasion.⁶⁰³ This Appendix seems to have been added to resolve *b*'s chronological inconsistencies and omissions, particularly in its *réim rígráide* ('king-list') of Ireland's Goidelic kings, and also formed the basis for certain revisions within *b* proper. The poetry provides a continuous list of such kings and another of the world-kings. These two regnal histories, as well as the pre-Goidelic settlements, are synchronised in the prose tracts.⁶⁰⁴ Alongside the Appendix, sections from one of its prose synchronistic tracts, 'Comaimserad rig in domain ocus Gabál

⁶⁰⁰ See also Dublin, RIA, MS 23.P.16 (1230), *An Leabhar Breac*, saec.XV, p. 143.

⁶⁰¹ Dublin, RIA, MS D.iv.1 (538), saec.XIV/XV, fol. 7^{vb}11–13: 'Octavian Augustus was the king when Christ took flesh; Tiberius Caesar, of the pale body, was king when Christ suffered' (my translation). Jaski ('Genealogical section', pp. 329–30 (n. 121)) erroneously states that 'Ochtaúin August in rí' is part of the same poem as 'Ochtauin August cen áil' within the *Laud Synchronisms* ('The Laud Synchronisms', ed. by Kuno Meyer, *ZCP* 9 (1913), 471–85 (p. 472)); both quatrains only ever appear independently.

⁶⁰² *LGÉ*, V, §594*bis* (pp. 322–25); by *bis*, Macalister designates material in *b* independent of *b*'s common source with *mac*. Scowcroft ('*Leabhar Gabhála* Part 1', p. 120) points out that *bis* material is shared but augmented by all recensions. 'Ochtauin August in rí' and its prose context is one such augmentation by *b*.

⁶⁰³ Scowcroft, '*Leabhar Gabhála* Part 1', pp. 131–32.

⁶⁰⁴ Scowcroft, '*Leabhar Gabhála* Part 1', pp. 125–27.

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nÉrenn' (Scowcroft's s; Schmidt's S-LG-A; I refer to this tract as the *Invasion Synchronisms* (**6:3.1.3**)), were also embedded within *b* as well as in the Appendix.⁶⁰⁵

Scowcroft has shown that the Appendix's use of Flann's poetry is more complex than first appears. Indeed, the Tara Diptych may not have been treated as one text. 'Ríg Themra toebaige íar tain' effectively forms a prosimetric unit with another synchronistic tract, 'Comaimserad rig n-Erenn 7 rig na coiced iar cretim' (Scowcroft's Tract V(B); I refer to this as the *Provincial Synchronisms* (**LR:3.2.1; 6:3.1.4**)), and may be its source.⁶⁰⁶ 'Ríg Themra dia tesbann tnu', meanwhile, aligns with no particular component in the Appendix nor any in *b* proper; it appears to be merely a supplement. 'Érimón is Éber ard' loosely resembles *b*'s *réim rígraide* but they need not have a direct relationship. Meanwhile, both Scowcroft and Schmidt identify 'Réidig dam, a Dé, do nim' as a major source for the *Invasion Synchronisms*,⁶⁰⁷ although Schmidt sees its direct influence as confined to the Roman era.

Thus, while *b*'s Appendix might appear to be composed of prose and verse counter-parts, its creation was more complex. Flann's texts can still be regarded as playing a major role, however. As already mentioned, this has prompted suggestions that he was actually responsible for compiling the Appendix and integrating it into *b*. *m* was also appended to *b* as an additional chronological supplement. Being based around Gilla Cóemáin's more extensive Irish king-list, *m* eclipses Flann's Tara Diptych in the Appendix in terms of scope (cf. **2:6.1**). Indeed, *LGÉ R* omits the Appendix and instead includes *Rm* alongside a terse king-list from either *a* or *c* which reaches Ruaidri Úa Conchobuir (*ob.* 1183).⁶⁰⁸

Recension *c* drew upon both *a* and *b*. Both recension *c* manuscripts, like *a*, attribute 'Éstid a eolchu cen ón' to Flann Mainistrech. *B* is laconic at the point at which *Lc* also attributes 'Toisich na llongse tar ller' to Flann and adds 'Anmann na toisech delm tenn' to his corpus for the first time, both via extended prefaces (**3:4**). As in *a*, both appear following the account of Ethriel's reign (**2:2.2.2**) within *c*'s *réim*

⁶⁰⁵ Scowcroft, 'Leabhar Gabhála I', p. 131; Scowcroft, 'Medieval Recensions', p. 12 (n. 42); Schmidt, 'Zu Réidig', pp. 219–20.

⁶⁰⁶ Scowcroft, 'Leabhar Gabhála I', pp. 129–32.

⁶⁰⁷ Scowcroft, 'Leabhar Gabhála I', p. 125; Schmidt, 'Zu Réidig', pp. 251–56. See also MacNeill, 'Irish Historical Tract', pp. 138–40; Thurneysen, 'Flann Manistrech's Gedicht', p. 269.

⁶⁰⁸ Scowcroft, 'Leabhar Gabhála I', pp. 132–33.

rígráide. Since neither poem appears elsewhere in B, they probably occupied the same position in *c*'s archetype. The latter poem had previously appeared, unattributed, in *m*, as part of its account of the Goidelic invasion. Indeed, it is similar to 'Toisich na llongse tar ller', which occupies a parallel position in *b*. Both concern the leaders of the invasion, the latter naming twelve *toisich* ('leaders') along with ten *ócthigeirn* ('minor lords') and the forts they built.⁶⁰⁹ Uniquely, *Lc* also cites the quatrain 'Suibne go sloghadh dia soí' in the account of the reign of Suibne Mend mac Fiachna (*ob.* 628) in its *réim rígráide*.⁶¹⁰ This is actually from Flann's Tara Diptych but is anonymous in *Lc*.⁶¹¹

In *c*, both *Lc* and B make their own attempts to resolve *LGÉ*'s chronological conflicts.⁶¹² Within its own embedded synchronistic tract related to *b*'s Appendix, B cites two quatrains from 'Réidig dam, a Dé, do nim', attributed to 'poeta'. Giving the Assyrian and Medean world-kingships' lengths, each concludes the relevant sections of the tract.⁶¹³

2.2 Problematic attributions

In those instances, poems are attributed to Flann Mainistrech by name or there is a particularly good reason for taking 'Flann' as referring to him, such as when Flann Mainistrech is specified in other manuscripts. *LGÉ* contains at least two further, more ambiguous attributions to 'Flann'. I am not convinced that either (**Appendix 10.2**) relate to Flann Mainistrech and so will not be discussing the texts further in this thesis. However, it is worth noting their presence, not least because later readers of the manuscripts could potentially understand them as such. Flann Mainistrech is the only clearly identifiable Flann cited in *LGÉ*, so the name 'Flann', without further specification, could legitimately be read as indicating him.

'Augaine mór mac rí Érenn', the first of three unedited poems on the history of the *bóroma* tribute in *Lc*, is 'do rér Fhloind' ('according to Flann') in a

⁶⁰⁹ *LGÉ*, V, pp. 132–35.

⁶¹⁰ *LGÉ*, V, §628 (pp. 376–77), pp. 536–37.

⁶¹¹ *LL*, III, ll. 15846–49 (p. 511).

⁶¹² Scowcroft, 'Leabhar Gabhála I', pp. 127–29.

⁶¹³ *LGÉ*, III, §§273, 275 (pp. 160–63); Mac Airt (ed. and trans.), 'Poem [1]', I:28 (pp. 267–68); 'Poem [2]', II:10 (pp. 22–23).

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superscription.⁶¹⁴ Some scholars list this poem as Flann Mainistrech's work.⁶¹⁵ However, others date it to earlier than the eleventh century.⁶¹⁶ Fland mac Máelmaedoc (*ob.* 979) – a Leinster poet, appropriately enough – has been proposed as the 'Flann' in question.⁶¹⁷ There is also the matter of whether the superscription relates just to the first poem or to all three.

H, a fragmentary version of *LGÉ* loosely related to *c*,⁶¹⁸ attributes 'Togail tuir Chonaind co ngail' to 'Fland fili'.⁶¹⁹ This poem concerns the attack by descendants of Nemed, the third pre-Goidelic people to settle Ireland, on Conand's tower, stronghold of the oppressive Fomoiri. It seems very unlikely that this is Flann Mainistrech: the poem is generally attributed by modern scholars to Eochaid úa Flainn,⁶²⁰ as it is *LGÉ d*.⁶²¹ Yet Johnston sees 'Fland fili' as specifically designating Flann mac Máelmaedoc.⁶²² It can also designate Flann mac Lonáin,⁶²³ Flann file Ó Ronáin,⁶²⁴ 'Fland fili do Ulltaibh' ('Flann the poet of the Ulaid'),⁶²⁵ and the poet behind a number of later medieval poems prophesying Ireland's liberation from the Normans.⁶²⁶ Such a ubiquitous style cannot reliably designate any particular person.

⁶¹⁴ *Lec.*, fol. 303^{va}37–304^{va}50. The first poem also appears (unattributed) in *LL* as two separate texts: *LL*, I, ll. 4872–994 (pp. 159–64). The last nine and a half quatrains of the second poem appear in *LGÉ B* (Dublin, RIA, MS 23.P.12 (536), the *Book of Ballymote*, *saec.* XIV/XV [hereafter, *BB*], fol. 31^{ra}1–20) following a major physical lacuna, implying that this was in some way a feature of *c*'s archetype. For literature on the *bóroma*, see Elin I. Eyjolfsdottir, 'The *Bórama*: the poetry and the hagiography in the Book of Leinster' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Glasgow, 2012), pp. 11–63.

⁶¹⁵ *LL*, I, xxiii; Kathleen Mulchrone and Elizabeth Fitzpatrick, *Catalogue of Irish Manuscripts in the Royal Irish Academy: Index II* (Dublin: Hodges, Figgis, 1958), p. 784; Carey, 'Flann'.

⁶¹⁶ Carney, 'Dating', p. 178.

⁶¹⁷ Mac Eoin, 'Mysterious Death', p. 29; Johnston, *Literacy*, p. 56 (n. 162).

⁶¹⁸ Scowcroft, 'Leabhar Gabhála I', p. 107.

⁶¹⁹ *LGÉ*, III, 180–87.

⁶²⁰ *LGÉ*, III, 205; Carey, 'Leabhar Gabála', p. 51; Scowcroft, 'Leabhar Gabhála I', p. 120 (n. 114).

⁶²¹ *Leabhar Gabhála: The Book of the Conquests of Ireland: The recension of Micheál Ó Cléirigh. Part I*, partial ed. and trans. by Robert A.S. Macalister and Eoin MacNeill (Dublin: Hodges and Figgis, 1916), pp. 88–89, 92–93.

⁶²² Johnston, *Literacy*, p. 56.

⁶²³ *MD*, III, pp. 312–313 (q. 33).

⁶²⁴ James Carney, 'The Ó Cianáin Miscellany', *Ériu*, 21 (1969), 122–47 (p. 143).

⁶²⁵ 'Mittelirische Verslehren', ed. by Rudolf Thurneysen in *Irische Texte mit Wörterbuch*, ed. by Ernst Windisch and Whitley Stokes, 4 vols (Leipzig: Herzel, 1891), III:1, 1–182 (p. 67).

⁶²⁶ Katherine Simms, *From Kings to Warlords: The Changing Political Structure of Gaelic Ireland in the Later Middle Ages* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2000), p. 27.

2.3 Flann in *Lebor Gabála Érenn*'s textual history

Thus, while some poems appear under Flann's name from *LGÉ*'s very early discernible stages, others are brought in during its elaboration or, indeed, its emendation and correlation with other versions. Flann was an established authority inside and outside the compilation, although his poems' changeable contexts in its various versions imply that the exact use to which they were put was in the control of its compilers. The semi-canoncity of the positions and roles of Flann's (and presumably others') *LGÉ* poems is illustrated by *Lc*'s preface to 'Anmann na toisech delm tenn',⁶²⁷ in which the prefator expresses regret that the poem had not been included earlier but notes that it still suits the position he has given it.

Indeed, the historical Flann was himself possibly behind the emendation and correlation specifically of *LGÉ b*. As this is nowhere stated in a medieval source, only inferred by Scowcroft and Schmidt, it raises a similar problem to that encountered in **Chapter 1 (1:6)**, that of aspects of Flann's activity that are not directly visible textually but which could have impacted upon his medieval textual persona. It is also highly relevant to anyone interested in reconstructing his actual intellectual biography.

3 Flann's author-figure

Although authorial self-references are relatively sparse in many of Flann's poems in *LGÉ*, themes comparable to those discussed in **2:3** and **2:5.2** can be identified. 'Anmann na toisech delm tenn' emphasises its author's own great knowledge and its subject-matter's widespread relevance.⁶²⁸ Like 'Éstid a eolchu cen ón', 'Cruithnig cid dosfarclam' (*LB Lb*) locates its author at the Boyne estuary,⁶²⁹ not far from Monasterboice. Also, this poem, like 'Cía tríallaid nech ainsis senchais', is in question-and-answer form. The interlocutors' intended identities are even less obvious but history is again presented as the product of inquiry and discussion. Also, the Tara Diptych in the *LGÉ b* Appendix contains, as in *LL* (with minor variants), the

⁶²⁷ *LGÉ*, V, §503 (pp. 198–99).

⁶²⁸ *LGÉ*, V, 132–33 (q. 6).

⁶²⁹ van Hamel (ed.), *Lebor Bretnach*, §7 (p. 14); Todd (ed. and trans.), *Leabhar Breathnach*, pp. 146–47.

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concluding celebration of Máel Sechnaill's return with the same information on Flann (2:2.3).

In his texts in pre-1200 manuscripts (2:2.2), Flann typically supplies narrative and information, relentlessly gilded with panegyric, although 'A gillu gairm n-ilgrada' is apparently satire. Much of his contribution to *LGÉ* is similar, although, in *m*'s additional quatrains in 'Éstid a eolchu cen ón', he comes across as much more forthright.

Gideraid sund íar saine
sáebuide na senchaide
síd h ag lucht na trist na treabh
ní maith la Crist in creideam.⁶³⁰

Flann may not have authored them but *m* presents them under his name. Elsewhere, he openly cites divergent opinions and makes occasional reference to divine sovereignty. Yet, *m*'s presentation of him is a notable departure, in that he not only comments on historiographical opinions but reads spiritual implications both into history and into historians' stances.

'Réidig dam, a Dé, do nim' contains the most detailed presentation of Flann and his work in *LGÉ*, perhaps in his entire corpus. It merits extended treatment here, although the recension of the poem (Schmidt's UM and Lc2) that occurs independent of *LGÉ* contains some relevant variants; these are discussed in 4:2.3.1.

Flann opens 'Réidig dam, a Dé, do nim' with a direct appeal to God the Holy Spirit to 'make easy' or 'elucidate' ('réidig') the difficult matter he is going to relate, the 'senchus deigrig in domuin'.⁶³¹ His goal, unattainable without such assistance, is the kings' enumeration ('thuirim', ultimately from *rím*; 2:3.3.2). He seeks the 'gift of knowledge' ('aeb eólusa'),

corbam finnf[h]sid each fir
dia n-innisin na rí g-sin.⁶³²

⁶³⁰ *LGÉ*, IV, 240–41 (q. 41): 'Though they say here in various ways, false men of history, that the people of the curses, of the dwellings were *síd*-folk, the belief is displeasing to Christ'.

⁶³¹ Mac Airt (ed. and trans.), 'Poem [1]', I:1–3 (pp. 257–58): 'the history of the goodly kings of the world'. Mac Airt takes the poem in Scowcroft's *LGÉ D* (Mac Airt's D) as his main text and records variants from his L (mostly the poem in Scowcroft's *LGÉ Lb*; see **Appendix 9**). His edition thus broadly presents the poem as it is in *LGÉ*.

⁶³² Mac Airt (ed. and trans.), 'Poem [1]', I:3 (pp. 257–58): 'so that I may be truly familiar with each one in order to recount those kings' (amended).

Flann's author-figure here prays for knowledge and powers of expression, which are apparently interrelated. He calls on God to make the 'recounting of them' ('a n-indisin') easy,⁶³³ while the couplet I have quoted implies that their recounting will arise out of 'true familiarity'. This positioning in relation to God and history has a number of interesting implications.

If this history can only be composed and expressed with divine assistance, the material involved must be obscure, complex, or disparate. Indeed, the poem's sources are not obvious and scholars are still in search of them.⁶³⁴ The occasional hint appears. For instance, the poem maintains that the Chaldean kings were not world-kings but subordinate to the Medes. However, reference is made to a record of Chaldean kings presented as such elsewhere ('cia dorónad a ndíne').⁶³⁵ Here, we might recognise the Flann of the Tara Diptych, the discerning source critic. Self-representation along these lines, however, is otherwise very hard to find in this poem.

The emphasis on Flann's dependence on God, combined with vagueness concerning human sources, is perhaps intended to designate 'Réidig dam, a Dé, do nim' as originative and foundational. The *ANÍ* colophon presents Flann and Eochaid's sources as disparate and, at the time of writing, lost, rendering their compilation the last and thus most authoritative version standing (2:5.2.1). Similarly here, Flann achieved another difficult act of *compilatio* only by the grace of God. Again, I argue, through the individual circumstances of its creation, a compilation has become a canonised, authoritative work.

The interconnection between knowledge and expression recurs at the poem's conclusion, in which Flann is lauded in the third person. He is said to have enumerated ('ros rim') the world-kings 'o Nin co Leomain' ('from Ninus to Leo'), as 'Flann alone' ('aenFlann'), 'sweet of word' ('feidbind'), 'the wise man' ('int eolas').⁶³⁶ The elucidation of the world-kings' regnal history is a verbal, as well as a historiographical, achievement:

⁶³³ Mac Airt (ed. and trans.), 'Poem [1]', I:1 (pp. 257–58).

⁶³⁴ Schmidt, 'Zu Réidig', pp. 253–56; Evans, *Present*, pp. 223–24.

⁶³⁵ Mac Airt (ed. and trans.) 'Poem [2]', II:22 (pp. 28–29): 'although their series has been compiled'.

⁶³⁶ Quotations are from MacNeill (ed. [from *LGE b*] and trans.), 'Irish Historical Tract', p. 138; cf. Mac Airt (ed. and trans.), 'Poem [4]'. See 2:6.3 for details on editions.

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ro-gle triana gnim a guth
re cach rig do reidiugud.⁶³⁷

It is also interesting that we now find Flann behind the *réidigud* ('elucidation, explanation'). At the beginning, he called on God to elucidate the subject; now he himself has elucidated it. The need for a *dúnad* meant that this term's recurrence was inevitable but its altered usage fits with the conclusion's new-found emphasis on Flann's achievement. Indeed, it is worth noting that he is not here a collaborator but 'Flann alone'.

Furthermore, the conclusion gives some attention to Flann's historical identity. It is stated that he is *fer léigind* of Monasterboice. The poem's composition is also dated, via a quatrain naming 'the kings of that [D: 'this'] time' ('rig na re sin'; D 'sea').⁶³⁸ The named Irish kings collectively delineate the early 1040s to the early 1060s.⁶³⁹ Finally, allusion is potentially made to Flann having been authorised by a scholarly community; in the *LGÉ* version of the poem, he is 'Flann feidbind romben bríg breath'.⁶⁴⁰ The retrospective feel of some of these remarks might suggest that the poem's conclusion is not Flann's own self-assessment but a later addition in his honour, although firm proof either way does not seem attainable.

In *LGÉ Lb* and D's 'Réidig dam, a Dé, do nim', in its totality, Flann is presented as both knowledgeable and eloquent concerning world-history, which is interestingly reminiscent of his chronicle obits' unique conjunction of *léigenn* and *filidecht* (1:2.2.7). At the poem's opening, he is bereft of such attributes, as far as the task at hand is concerned, and seeks them from God but, in the conclusion, he is praised for possessing both. He also has a distinctive historical identity: a profession, an institutional affiliation, an era, a reputation. This is a succinct and pious thumbnail sketch of him as a character, although its provenance is somewhat uncertain.

This focus on Flann's own struggles and circumstances effectively makes him the text's human originator, in contrast to some of the more circumspect presentations of his role that we have encountered. The resulting poem can indeed be

⁶³⁷ MacNeill (ed. and trans.), 'Irish Historical Tract', p. 138: 'his voice through his work hath made clear the explanation of each king's time'.

⁶³⁸ MacNeill (ed. and trans.), 'Irish Historical Tract', p. 138.

⁶³⁹ Byrne, 'Ireland', pp. 866–67.

⁶⁴⁰ MacNeill (ed. and trans.), 'Irish Historical Tract', p. 138: 'Flann, sweet of voice, the strength of judgements hath sounded him'.

shown to have been influential on material surviving in pre-1200 manuscripts (2:6.3) and on material appearing later (4:3.2–3). Its constructed foundational status may thus have been reflected in real intellectual practice. Again, we see Flann’s author-figure implicated in rhetoric specific to its textual situation.

4 Flann’s poems in context

Considering the role and treatment of Flann’s work in the contexts in which it appears in *LGÉ*, a number of general and specific observations can be made. First, *LGÉ* is an integrated prosimetric text, so Flann’s poetry is invariably cited to conform or expand upon its information or wider structure. The points made in relation to his texts in pre-1200 manuscripts and their presentation as components of wider textual networks are thus also applicable here (2:5.1).

Specifically in *LGÉ*, Flann often provides the kind of material previously lacked by the recension in which it appears. α needed to be ‘rescued’ from a self-contradictory and obsolete chronology; Flann’s poetry is integral to the synchronistic Appendix and embedded apparatus added, to this end, in *b*. Interestingly, ‘Réidig dam, a Dé, do nim’ re-appears anonymously in *LGÉ* B as part of the revision of *b*’s chronological tract. μ ’s comparatively basic regnal chronicle was consistently supplemented throughout the tradition with narrative and sundry data; the poems attributed to Flann in *mac* play this role. Their role here is less pivotal than in *b*, however, as many sources enriched *mac*. Also, as I have argued elsewhere, lists of *aideda* can have a chronological function.⁶⁴¹

Lc has a particular tendency to introduce poems with particularly lavish prefaces.⁶⁴² Such treatment is given, in this version, to ‘Toisich na llongse tar ller’ and ‘Anmann na toisech delm tenn’. The poems require some contextualisation, since the fifth reign in the *réim rígráide* is not their natural narrational context.⁶⁴³ *Lc*’s introductions not only provide this but catalogue in detail the information they

⁶⁴¹ Thanisch, ‘Götterdämmerung’, pp. 85–89.

⁶⁴² For example, ‘A chóemu cláir cuind come-find’, attr. Eochaid úa Flainn (*LGÉ*, III, §222 (pp. 22–23)); ‘Dene mo resnis, a mic’, attr. Colum Cille (*LGÉ*, IV, §§283, 299 (pp. 12–13, 38–39)); ‘Ériu árd, inis na rígh’, attr. Gilla Cóemáin (*LGÉ*, V, §§613, 614 (pp. 350–51 354–55)).

⁶⁴³ Recension *c* also includes the passage (*LGÉ*, V, §385 (pp. 20–27)) naming Túan and Fintan as the revenant eyewitness sources for information concerning the *toisich*. The same points could thus be made here as in 2:5.2.2.

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themselves provide. For example, where *a*'s prefaces simply identify *aideda* and *anmanna* (D only) in 'Toisich na llongse tar ller', *Lc*'s preface identifies their *aideda*, *anmanna*, and places of death, the battles in which they died, and their killers' identities. Its prefaces promote the poems as rich sources of information and may have a pedagogic function. They set out what the reader – or audience – will learn from the poem and how the data might be structured. Indeed, the categories could almost be arranged in the arcade-like medieval mnemonic model explored by Mary Carruthers.⁶⁴⁴

This treatment of the verse contrasts interestingly with that in *LGÉ R*. *R*'s practice of reducing poems to their first quatrain implies either that corroborative verse's mere existence is all that need be noted or that the verse was expected be readily known by the reader. *Lc*, meanwhile, sets out some poetry as a learning opportunity in its own right. A parallel from Flann's pre-1200 corpus is the attribution to Flann, by *LU*'s scribe *M*, of 'Mugain ingen Choncraid cháin' (2:3.2), where Flann's role is presented as memorialising the narrative. Again, the focus is on the content, not the medium nor the author.

The author might be of more relevance in *F*'s attribution to Flann of 'Éstid a eolchu cen ón', in which Flann's *dúan* is 'ga foirgeall' ('providing authoritative testimony on [the deaths of the Túatha Dé Danann]').⁶⁴⁵ However, it is difficult to unpack what *F* means by this. Is the poem's testimony authoritative because it is by Flann or in its own right? There is more immediate evidence for the latter. As we have seen (2:5.1), the poem constitutes a formidable corpus of names, not to mention *aideda*, compared to *N*'s prose and seems to have a similar relationship with *F* (Appendix 11). It could thus easily come across as based upon superior knowledge of the Túatha Dé Danann. Alternatively, since *F* actually cites the poem while arguing that the Túatha Dé Danann were demons with human bodies, Flann might be providing a useful intervention by verifying their mortality.⁶⁴⁶ The extent to which he imputes authority to the text in this instance is unclear.

⁶⁴⁴ Carruthers, *Book*, pp. 89–98, 118–22.

⁶⁴⁵ My translation; see *eDIL s.v.* *forgeall*.

⁶⁴⁶ Thanisch, 'Götterdämmerung', pp. 81–83.

5 Conclusion: *Lebor Gabála Érenn*

In the course of the *LGÉ* project, we can identify a number of characteristics of Flann's treatment. His poetry, or attributions to him, can be shown to enter *LGÉ*'s recensions at different points in their development, implying that he was an authority-figure across medieval Gaelic historiographical culture, not simply fossilised within the *LGÉ* tradition. Indeed, there are specific indications that his work was drawn upon when revising the compilation. However, little interest in Flann as an author-figure is detectable in his texts' external apparatus beyond his identification by name. More interest is shown in the texts themselves and their contribution to *LGÉ*'s account; this is particularly exemplified in the tendency of some, especially 'Éstid a eolchu cen ón', to change context in different recensions. The compilers' text-focused approach contrasts with the particularly intense interest in Flann's author-figure that opens and concludes 'Réidig dam, a Dé, do nim'. In some ways, his presentation therein parallels that in materials we have examined from pre-1200 manuscripts, in that he is a tertiary author elucidating an existing tradition. Yet the absence of human collaboration or actual sources, the emphasis on piety and eloquence alongside learning, and the inclusion of biographical data, combine to present Flann's authority in way that focuses on him particularly strongly as an individual.

Chapter 4

'Tell me, Flann...': Flann Mainistrech in the Later Middle Ages (c. 1200–1600)

1 Introduction

1.1 Historical overview

The later twelfth century has traditionally been considered a watershed in Irish political and intellectual history.⁶⁴⁷ During this period, Norman invasions led to the foundation of permanent English colonies, particularly in the east and south, and aborted various Gaelic dynasties' efforts to unify Ireland. Church reforms distanced ecclesiastical centres from secular politics and thus from the study and production of associated literature and historiography.

Yet this was not the end. English colonisation stalled and stagnated until the later sixteenth century and the remaining Gaelic lordships' power and confidence revived. Serving their ideological, propagandistic, and administrative needs were hereditary learned families, often patronised by noble dynasties, and specialising in history, poetry, law and so forth.⁶⁴⁸ For example, the Meic Fhirbisigh, particularly prominent in this chapter, supplied historians to Uí Dhubhda, the ruling house of Uí Fhiachrach Mhuaidhe in north Connacht.⁶⁴⁹

The period's intellectual culture and literary output reflect its professionals' gravitation towards particularist secular politics and their sense of the early medieval Gaelic past and its authorising power in their present. The period's manuscripts preserve numerous Old and Middle Gaelic texts and older manuscripts were prized in

⁶⁴⁷ John A. Watt, 'Approaches to the history of fourteenth-century Ireland', in *A New History of Ireland II: Medieval Ireland*, ed. by Art Cosgrove (Oxford: OUP, 1987), pp. 303–13; James Carney, 'Literature in Irish, 1169–1534', in *New History: II*, ed. by Cosgrove, pp. 688–706; Kenneth W. Nicholls, *Gaelic and Gaelicized Ireland in the Middle Ages*, 2nd ed. (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 2003), 18–22; Marc Caball and Kaarina Hollo, 'The literature of later medieval Ireland 1200–1600: from the Normans to the Tudors', in *Cambridge History*, ed. by Kelleher and O'Leary, I, 74–129.

⁶⁴⁸ Paul Walsh, *Irish Men of Learning: Studies*, ed. by Colm Ó Lochlainn (Dublin: At the Sign of the Three Candles, 1947).

⁶⁴⁹ Ó Muraíle, *Celebrated Antiquary*, pp. 1–56.

both intellectual and material terms.⁶⁵⁰ However, later medieval codices have been recognised as not simply repositories for texts but as creative and purposeful in their arrangement,⁶⁵¹ while later medieval compositions show a similar tendency to re-work their literary inheritance.⁶⁵² Bardic poetry, rich in apologies from the historic and legendary past, was used to articulate dynasts' and politics' aspirations and tensions,⁶⁵³ although this genre and social function may well have also existed in pre-Norman Ireland.⁶⁵⁴ Old and Middle Gaelic material was sometimes overhauled according to underlying contemporary political needs.⁶⁵⁵ Chronicles from before 1200 were adapted and continued, again often tracing the fortunes of a certain dynasty. Indeed, this is how the majority of extant chronicle material even concerning the earlier period is preserved (1:2.1).⁶⁵⁶

Not all late medieval literary activity was overtly political. For instance, works synchronising the Gaelic past with world history and adaptations of Latin texts into Gaelic continued to be produced, the latter coming to include other medieval European vernaculars.⁶⁵⁷ Furthermore, despite the Hiberno-Norman presence having rendered unachievable the already problematic aspiration towards a kingdom of Ireland, *LGÉ* and similar pseudo-histories, presenting a unified history of Ireland, continued to be studied and developed (3:1.2), and the unified history they set out still provided other literature with a wider framework.

1.2 A new Flann? Continuity and development

In this chapter, I consider extant later medieval manuscripts' presentations of Flann Mainistrech's corpus and of his textual persona. That is, I consider his perceived role

⁶⁵⁰ For example, Cunningham and Gillespie, 'Uí Dhomhnaill', pp. 495–501.

⁶⁵¹ Nollaig Ó Muraíle, 'Aois ná lámhscríbhinní móra', *Maynooth Review* 9 (December 1983), 49–72; Ruairí Ó hUiginn, 'Adapting Myth and Making History' in *Authorities*, ed. by Boyle and Hayden, pp. 1–23 (4–10).

⁶⁵² For a parallel study of the Middle Gaelic treatment of Old Gaelic literature, see Herbert, 'Crossing'.

⁶⁵³ Katherine Simms, 'Bardic Poetry as a Historical Source', in *Historical Studies XVI: The Writer as Witness*, ed. by Tom Dunne (Cork: Cork University Press, 1987), pp. 58–75; O Riordan, *Irish Bardic Poetry*.

⁶⁵⁴ Mac Cana, 'Later Schools'; Breatnach, 'Satire'; Dumville, 'What is medieval Gaelic poetry?'; Alex Woolf, 'The Court Poet in Early Ireland', in *Princes*, ed. by Duffy, pp. 377–88.

⁶⁵⁵ Caoimhin Breatnach, *Patronage, Politics, and Prose: Ceasacht Inghine Guile, Sgéala muice Meic Dha Thó, Oidheadh Chuinn Chéadchathaigh* (Maynooth: An Sagart, 1996).

⁶⁵⁶ McCarthy, *Irish Annals*, pp. 304–41.

⁶⁵⁷ For example, Erich Poppe, 'The early modern Irish version of Beves of Hamtoun', *CMCS* 23 (Summer 1992), 77–98.

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and significance in a period characterised both by intense study of the established literary tradition of which he was part and by its highly purposeful application to contemporary circumstances. Compared with the earlier materials we have considered in **Chapters 1 to 3**, there are distinctive points of continuity in the overall genres in which Flann is implicated and in his characterisation. However, his later medieval persona also differs significantly in multiple respects.

In terms of subject-matter, for instance, he is still a historian of specific Irish polities, of their origins and continuity, but the polities have changed. Material is attributed to him on world history, but it has become more plentiful and more varied than ‘Réidig dam, a Dé, do nim’, while the latter’s Middle Gaelic textual history is itself uncertain (**2:6.3.2**). Multiple late medieval sources assume, in passing, that Flann is an authority on genealogies, something nowhere directly stated in earlier manuscripts.

This variance could have come about for a variety of reasons. His changed corpus of texts and areas of expertise might be the product of appropriation, adaptation and erroneous attribution by subsequent compilers and composers, who have long since departed from historicity. Indeed, as we have seen, the authenticity and veracity of many of the attributions to Flann found in earlier manuscripts are not unquestionable (**2:4**). Furthermore, we rely on one scribe (*LL*’s U) for most of his pre-1200 material (**2:2.2**). Alternatively, different corpora of manuscript evidence or different sources might provide perspectives that are generally accurate but ever partially, never completely, true to historical reality. Despite its profound implications for how we understand what might have produced the evidence relating to Flann, this cannot be resolved within the present study and the evidence need not be all of one nature anyway. Yet this is what is potentially at stake when we consider material relating to Flann from different eras.

Beyond specific areas of expertise, how one might access Flann is presented differently. Other than the sources discussed in **Chapter 1**, Flann’s purported work, in pre-1200 manuscripts and in *LGÉ*, is generally presented to us ostensibly as his own preserved speech via simple attributions (**MR:3.1.1**). This form is still well-attested in later medieval manuscripts but, specifically in three poems in the late fourteenth-century *Book of Uí Maine* (*UM*), Flann is instead cited as a character,

sometimes even framed within a social setting, as if it is possible to bypass his textual existence and engage with him directly (4:2.1.6.1–2, 4:2.3.3). In contrast, however, there are also instances of Flann being cited explicitly via a text (4:2.1.4, 4:2.2.2, 4:2.2.4). These varied presentations of Flann imply a creative interest on the part of medieval scholars in his identity as an author-figure and in how he is to be accessed.

1.3 Late medieval manuscript material

Much relevant material in later medieval manuscripts is unedited, partially edited, or, as I demonstrate, poorly understood. For this reason, the present chapter necessarily devotes more attention to basic textual interpretation (4:2) prior to discussing the material's contribution to the thesis' central questions (4:3). Also, the increased frequency of allusions or citations in our corpus blurs the distinction between internal and external references to Flann made in previous chapters. Finally, it has not been possible within this doctoral project to edit the relevant texts or date them with much certainty. This being the case, a text's presence in this chapter should not be taken as implying that it was composed post-1200 (see also MR:3.2). As discussed, while Flann's overall profile in later medieval manuscripts might be distinctive, in any given case, a text could be derived from much earlier sources. We are interested in their selection for inclusion in this period's manuscripts and in their intracodical connections therein, not in their origins.

2 Flann in late medieval manuscript material

Some historical poems attributed to Flann in pre-1200 manuscripts or *LGÉ* – including 'Mide maigen clainne Cuinn', material from the *Cenél nÉogain Suite*, and 'Cruithnig cid dosfarclam' – continue to appear in later medieval and modern manuscripts but without any further attributions to Flann.⁶⁵⁸ 'Druim Cetta, cette na noem', complete with the reference to Flann and Echthigern (2:2.2.1), appears in two sixteenth-century manuscripts, that is, in RIA C.iii.2's preface to *Amra Choluim*

⁶⁵⁸ *MD*, V, 44–45; van Hamel (ed.), *Lebor Bretnach*, §7 (pp. 9–14); Smith (ed.), 'Mide', pp. 110–11; 2:2.2.1, 3:2.1.

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Chille and independently in a collection on Colum Cille in Laud Misc. 615.⁶⁵⁹ Where it appears independent of *LGÉ*, ‘Réidig dam, a Dé, do nim’ (4:2.2.1) also retains its internal attribution to Flann. *ANÍ* retains its association with him in later medieval manuscripts but under complex circumstances requiring detailed analysis (4:2.1.5).

Otherwise, the texts attributed to him during this period are hitherto unattested in his pre-1200 corpus, although they often echo it in genre, style, or approach. The late medieval corpus of material attributed to or otherwise associated with Flann is surveyed below. It has been categorised according to the polity, dynasty, region, or ethnic group to which the material pertains. This subdivision is guided by the material’s subject-matter, its contexts in manuscript, and current understandings of late medieval scholarship’s social context (4:1.1).

2.1 Histories of Irish kingdoms

Many of the texts that are attributed to Flann or that cite him in later medieval manuscripts are directly concerned with the history of a particular kingdom or dynasty. This, indeed, was the case for much of Flann’s pre-1200 corpus. However, in the present corpus, his work is of relevance to a different, although overlapping, series of kingdoms and, in some cases, has potentially been adapted to strengthen its relevance.

2.1.1 Continuing interest in the history of the kings of Ireland

First, despite the Tara Diptych apparently having been superseded within a century of its composition (2:6.1), two references preserved in later medieval manuscripts imply that Flann retained reputed expertise on pseudo-historical kings of Ireland. The historiographical distinction between the king of Tara and the kingship of Ireland, incidentally, appears to have dissolved in the course of the eleventh century.⁶⁶⁰

⁶⁵⁹ Dublin, RIA, MS C.iii.2 (1236), *saec.* XVI, fol. 10^{rb}1–51; Breatnach, ‘Aspects’, pp. 22–26. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud Misc. 615, *saec.* XVI, pp. 111.1–12.12; Anne O’Sullivan and Máire Herbert, ‘The Provenance of Laud Misc. 615’, *Celtica*, 10 (1973), 174–92 (p. 177).

⁶⁶⁰ Byrne, *Irish Kings*, pp. 268–71; Jaski, *Irish Kingship*, pp. 227–28.

2.1.1.1 More aideda of Tara's kings?

A quatrain attributed to Flann on the death of Diarmait mac Cerbaill (*ob.* 565), an early Uí Néill king of Tara, corroborates the account of his death in *Aided Diarmata meic Cerbaill II*, preserved in the late fifteenth-century *Book of Lismore (Lis.)*.⁶⁶¹

[...] amail ro gheall Brénainn do Fhlann mainisdrech. Ut dixit:

Aed dubh mac Suibhne na sreath
ba rí Ulad airmiteach
is e sin gan diamair daill
do marbh Diarmaid mac Cerbhaill.⁶⁶²

Naturally, the idea of a sixth-century saint ‘prophesying’ about sixth-century events to Flann Mainistrech has proved unacceptable among modern commentators.⁶⁶³ Carey amends the prose’s conclusion to ‘[...] amail ro gheall Brénuinn dó. Ut Flann Mainisdrech dixit’.⁶⁶⁴ Nonetheless, if *Lis.*’s anonymous scribe believed that Brendan could have prophesied to Flann Mainistrech, then it implies that Flann Mainistrech was not universally recognisable, as when he is mistaken for Flann Fina in *BB* (4:2.1.2).

The quatrain’s original context is unclear. That Diarmait’s entire killing fits into one quatrain suggests it is from a catalogue poem akin to the Tara Diptych. Both Áed Dub and Diarmait receive equal attention, so it may concern either the kings of the Ulaid or the kings of Tara (or Ireland). Diarmait dies under basically the same circumstances in the Tara Diptych, but the quatrains are completely different.⁶⁶⁵

⁶⁶¹ ‘Stair ar Aed Baclámh’, ed. and trans. by Standish H. O’Grady in *SG*, I, 66–72; II, 70–76; ‘Stories about Diarmait mac Cerbaill from the Book of Lismore’, trans. by Dan M. Wiley, *Emania*, 19 (2002), 53–59. Untitled in *Lis.*, its only witness (fols. 135^{ra}1–137^{ra}46), O’Grady’s title (‘A tale concerning Aed Baclámh’) is his own creation, with no medieval basis, and gives undue emphasis to the eponymous character, while Wiley’s ‘Lismore Collection’ is useless in a wider context. *Aided Diarmata meic Cerbaill II*, as used on *Stichtung A. G. van Hamel voor Keltische Studies*, seems accurate and concise: <http://www.vanhamel.nl/wiki/Aided_Diarmata_meic_Cerbaill_II> [accessed 2 September 2013]. Wiley (‘Stories’, p. 53) describes *Aided Diarmata meic Cerbaill II* as ‘late Middle Irish’.

⁶⁶² *SG*, I, 72; II, 76: ‘[...] according as Brendan prognosticated to Flann of the Monastery. As one said: “Black Aedh of the impostos, Suibhne’s son, | was Ulidia’s honourable king: | he it was (and this is no blind darling mystery) | that slew Dermot son of Cerbhall”’; cf. Wiley (trans.), ‘Stories’, p. 58.

⁶⁶³ Wiley, ‘Stories’, p. 59; *The Celtic Heroic Age: Literary Sources for Ancient Celtic Europe and Early Ireland and Wales*, trans. by John Carey and John T. Koch, 4th ed. (Aberystwyth: Celtic Studies Publications, 2003), p. 214.

⁶⁶⁴ Carey (trans.), *Celtic Heroic Age*, p. 214: ‘[...] as Brendan prophesied to him [Diarmait]. As Flann Mainistrech said [...]’.

⁶⁶⁵ *LL*, III, ll. 15806–09 (p. 509).

2.1.1.2 *Cú Chulainn's life in heroic saga and Irish regnal history*

We find Flann, on one occasion, cited as an authority on the pseudo-historical context for Cú Chulainn. In a fifteenth- or sixteenth-century section of the composite TCD 1336, within an unedited genealogical collection on the Gailenga,⁶⁶⁶ a quatrain mentions Cú Chulainn's presence at the Battle of Leitir Ruibhe, in which Eochaid Feidlech slew Fachtna Fathach, the previous king of Ireland.⁶⁶⁷ This creates problems, as the battle otherwise involves personnel from the generation previous to Cú Chulainn. Fachtna, for example, is Conchobar mac Nessa's father, in some sources, while Eochaid is Medb's father.⁶⁶⁸ The tract (itself of uncertain date) thus sets about elaborating a compliant chronology for Cú Chulainn.⁶⁶⁹ It begins with the Battle of Druim Criaich, which must post-date Leitir Ruibhe, as Eochaid Feidlech is, by then, king of Ireland; Cú Chulainn, it is asserted, was twelve at the time. The tract continues to give Cú Chulainn's age at certain historical events, correlated with the likely time elapsed between them. While, as O'Curry points out, he dies at twenty-seven in other sources,⁶⁷⁰ in this extended biography, Cú Chulainn dies at the age of seventy-one, in Conaire Mór's twenty-sixth regnal year. In support, two authorities are cited, Neide Úa Maelchonaire and Flann Mainistrech ('conad amail sin imurro, do reir Neide hi Maoilchonaire agus Flainn Mainisdreach').⁶⁷¹ This maverick tract contains varied data from saga tradition and the regnal history of the kings of Ireland, so it is not obvious what Flann's specific contribution was understood to have been, although it is tempting to associate him with the material on the kings of Ireland (see also 6:3.2.2).

⁶⁶⁶ Dublin, TCD, MS 1336 (*olim* H.3.17), *saec.* XV/XVI, cols. 761–67; Thomas K. Abbott and Edward J. Gwynn, *Catalogue of Irish Manuscripts in the Library of Trinity College Dublin* (Dublin: Hodges and Figgis, 1921) [hereafter, *TCD Cat.*], p. 134.

⁶⁶⁷ TCD 1336, col. 764.41–43. I am indebted to Dr Fangzhe Qiu (DIAS) for kindly providing me with images of the relevant section of this manuscript. For the battle, see 'La bataille de Leitir Ruibhe', ed. and trans. [French] by Margaret Dobbs, *Revue Celtique*, 39 (1922), 1–32; Edel Bhreathnach, 'Tales of Connacht: *Cath Airtig*, *Táin Bó Flidais*, *Cath Leitreach Ruibhe*, and *Cath Cumair*', *CMCS*, 45 (Summer 2003), 21–42 (p. 24).

⁶⁶⁸ 'Anecdota from the Stowe MS. No. 992', ed. by Kuno Meyer, *Revue Celtique*, 6 (1884), 173–186 (p. 173); Dobbs, 'La bataille', p. 3.

⁶⁶⁹ TCD 1336, col. 765.1–31; O'Curry (ed. and trans.), *Manuscript Materials*, pp. 507–08.

⁶⁷⁰ O'Curry, *Manuscript Materials*, pp. 506–08; MacCarthy (ed. and trans.), *Codex*, §§p–q (pp. 302–05); Toner, 'Ulster Cycle', p. 7.

⁶⁷¹ O'Curry (ed. and trans.), *Manuscript Materials*, pp. 507–08: 'So that that such is the fact, according to Neidlu [*sic*] O'Maoilchonairé, and Flann of the Monastery'. Several poets named Neide Úa Maelchonaire appear in medieval sources. The one whose interests most closely match those of the TCD 1336 tract died in 1136 (Ó Cróinín, '*Eól dam*', p. 211).

2.1.2 Cenél nÉogain's kings of Ireland

'Cetrí ro gabh Éirinn uile' lists the sixteen kings of Cenél nÉogain who were also kings of Ireland, first giving their names (qq. 1–6) and then their *aideda* (qq. 7–14),⁶⁷² from Muirchertach mac Erca (*ob.* 536) to Domnall úa Neill (*ob.* 980). As we have seen, in Rawl.B.502, this poem introduces a series of metrical histories of Irish kingdoms, including several items attributed to Flann in *LL* (2:2.2.1; Appendix 5). There, like the others, it is anonymous.

In the later Middle Ages, the poem appears in *UM* and *BB*.⁶⁷³ In *UM*, the poem (still anonymous) concludes a collection of Uí Néill genealogies.⁶⁷⁴ These are described in a note as the 'recenti genealogia' ('new genealogies') and apparently near-contemporary with *UM* itself, ending with Níall Mór mac Áedha Ó Néill (*ob.* 1398), king of Tír Éogain, the successor kingdom to Cenél nÉogain.⁶⁷⁵ In *BB*, the poem concludes *Catha Cenél Éogain*,⁶⁷⁶ the tract concluded by 'Aní doronsat do chalmu' in *Lec.* (2:4.2.1.2). In *BB*, the poem is attributed to 'Flann Fina', the Gaelic name for Aldfrith son of Oswiu (*ob.* 704/5), king of Northumbria. While anachronistic, this is not inappropriate, as Aldfrith's mother was of the Cenél nÉogain.⁶⁷⁷ It seems legitimate to postulate 'Flann cecinit', in an exemplar pre-dating *BB*, being expanded to 'Flann Fina'. 'Flann Mainistrech' may well have originally been intended, particularly as the poem is attributed to Flann Mainistrech in the seventeenth-century *Ó Cléirigh Book of Genealogies* (5:2.1.3).⁶⁷⁸

As a king-list with *aideda*, 'Cetrí ro gabh Éirinn uile' resembles multiple texts in Flann's pre-1200 corpus and is similar in topic and outlook to *LL*'s Cenél nÉogain Suite. Indeed, an identical list of Cenél nÉogain kings of Ireland concludes the Suite's 'Cind cethri ndfni iar Frigrind'.⁶⁷⁹ However, the present poem cannot simply be derived from the Suite (or vice-a-versa); the latter omits *aideda*, the former omits regnal years.

⁶⁷² Currently unedited; for diplomatic transcripts from Rawl.B.502, *UM*, and *BB*, see Appendix 12.

⁶⁷³ Dublin, RIA, MS D.ii.1 (1225), *Book of Uí Maine, saec.* XIV [hereafter, *UM*], fol. 2^{ra}1–28; *BB*, fol. 49^{ra}23–54.

⁶⁷⁴ *UM*, fol. 1va1–1vc62; William O'Sullivan, 'The *Book of Uí Maine*, formerly the Book of Ó Dubhagáin: Scripts and Structure', *Éigse*, 23 (1989), 151–66 (pp. 156–57).

⁶⁷⁵ Mulchrone, *RIA Cat.*, fasc. XXVI, 3315–16.

⁶⁷⁶ *BB*, fols 48th1–49^{ra}22.

⁶⁷⁷ Colin Ireland, 'Aldfrith of Northumbria and the Irish Genealogies', *Celtica*, 22 (1991), 64–78.

⁶⁷⁸ Pender (ed.), 'O Clery Book', §§407–455 (pp. 27–37).

⁶⁷⁹ MacNeill (ed. and trans.), 'Poems', pp. 49–50, 53–54 (qq. 28–31).

The scribe behind *BB*'s version of 'Cetrí ro gabh Éirinn uile', Robeartus mac Sithigh, apparently planned to update it. He left space for two more quatrains between those listing the kings' names and those listing their *aideda* (i.e. between qq. 5 and 6; **Appendix 12.2**).⁶⁸⁰ In addition, his q. 6 counts 'tri fir deg is coigiur' ('eighteen men') in the preceding list where other manuscripts count sixteen (e.g. *UM*: 'da fer dheg is ceathrar').⁶⁸¹ Indeed, a later hand has added the line from the other witnesses above q. 6 in *BB*. The gap was thus perhaps to make room for two additional kings. Two twelfth-century Cenél nÉogain *ríg co fressarba* ('kings [of Ireland] with opposition') suggest themselves, Domnall (*ob.* 1121) and Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn (*ob.* 1166),⁶⁸² with whom *Catha Cenél Éogain* ends. We have seen that metrical regnal lists can be extended subsequent to their composition (**2:4.1**). Here, we catch the process in action. Furthermore, this particular extension was apparently due to take place during *BB*'s very compilation in the late fourteenth century, implying active engagement in this sort of text on the part of the manuscript's compilers. It is also interesting that Mac Sithigh still includes an attribution, despite planning on altering the text.

2.1.3 Conall Gulbán's battles

Cenél nÉogain are joined in the corpus of texts attributed to Flann in the later Middle Ages by at least one work concerning the other major northern Uí Néill kingdom, Cenél Conaill. This polity had supplied some early kings of Tara, before being eclipsed by Cenél nÉogain, then gradually re-emerging in the eleventh century.⁶⁸³ In the thirteenth century, it became the lordship of the Uí Dhonnaill, rulers of Tír Conaill and purported descendants from Cenél Conaill.⁶⁸⁴ Cenél Conaill is not particularly prominent in Flann's pre-1200 corpus. His Tara Diptych duly notes their kings of Tara,⁶⁸⁵ while 'Druim Cetta, cette na noem' involves both their venerated

⁶⁸⁰ Mulchrone, *RIA Cat.*, fasc. XIII, 1627.

⁶⁸¹ *BB*, fol. 49^{ra}38.

⁶⁸² Marie Therese Flanagan, 'High-kings with opposition, 1072–1166' in *New History: I*, ed. by Ó Cróinín, pp. 899–933 (907–17, 925–33).

⁶⁸³ Katherine Simms, 'Late Medieval Donegal' in *Donegal: History and Society*, ed. by William Nolan, Liam Ronayne, and Mairead Dunlevy (Dublin: Geography Publications, 1995), pp. 183–202 (183–85).

⁶⁸⁴ Brian Lacey, *Lug's Forgotten Donegal Kingdom: The Archaeology, History, and Folklore of the Síl Lugdach of Cloghaneely* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2012), pp. 28–54.

⁶⁸⁵ *LL*, III, ll. 15818–29, 15841–45, 15850–61, 15866–69, 15870–74, 15878–85, 15898–901 (pp. 510–12).

relative, Colum Cille, and the convention of Druim Cett, held under the auspices of a Cenél Conaill king.⁶⁸⁶

Yet this changes in the *Book of Fenagh* (*Fen.*) and Rawl.B.514.⁶⁸⁷ *Fen.* was compiled in 1516 by Muirgheas mac Paidin Ó Maoilchonaire (*ob.* 1543) for Tadhg Ó Rodaighe, *comarb* of the church of Fenagh in Breifne. It contains a prosimetric Life of St Caillín, Fenagh's founding saint, and was based on an older, disintegrating collection of poems about him, the *Senlebor Caillín* (now lost).⁶⁸⁸ Rawl.B.514, written in 1532 by Giolla Riabhach Mór Ó Cléirigh,⁶⁸⁹ contains *Beatha Colaim Chille*, the new life of Colum Cille compiled under the direction of Magnus Ó Domhnaill (*ob.* 1564), lord of Tír Conaill.⁶⁹⁰ In both manuscripts, the hagiography is followed by a malleable series of poems on the history of Cenél Conaill and the northern Uí Néill more generally, which, both manuscripts imply, were also in the *Senlebor*.⁶⁹¹ This I designate the Donegal Series.⁶⁹² Its poems invariably favour Cenél Conaill and, specifically, Uí Dhomhnaill's ancestors.⁶⁹³ Indeed, Rawl.B.514's poems follow the Uí Dhomhnaill down to the sixteenth century (this extension I designate the Ó Domhnaill *Dúanaire*).⁶⁹⁴

In both manuscripts, Flann appears in association with the Series' opening poem, 'Conall cuingid clainne Néill'.⁶⁹⁵ This poem narrates the war of the sons of Níall Noígiallach against the Ulaid and their conquest of what then became the northern Uí Néill heartlands, led by Conall Gulbán (ancestor of Cenél Conaill). It

⁶⁸⁶ Jaski, 'Druim Cett'.

⁶⁸⁷ Dublin, RIA, MS 23.P.26 (479), the *Book of Fenagh*, *saec.* XVI [hereafter *Fen.*]; Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawl.B.514, *saec.* XVI.

⁶⁸⁸ Katherine Simms, 'The Donegal Poems in the Book of Fenagh', *Ériu*, 58 (2008), 37–53 (pp. 37–38).

⁶⁸⁹ Ó Cuív, *Catalogue*, I, 261–69; Cunningham and Gillespie, 'Uí Dhomhnaill', pp. 493–94.

⁶⁹⁰ *Betha Colaim Chille: Life of Columcille*, ed. and trans. by Andrew O'Kelleher, Gertrude Schoepperle, and Richard Henebry (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1918).

⁶⁹¹ Simms, 'Donegal poems', p. 39; Bernadette Cunningham and Raymond Gillespie, 'Muirgheas Ó Maoilchonaire of Cluain Plocáin: an early sixteenth-century Connacht scribe at work', *Studia Hibernica*, 35 (2008–09), 17–43 (pp. 37–39).

⁶⁹² *Fen.*, fol. 39^{rb}1–48^{va}32; Rawl.B.514, fol. 61^r1–66^v16. For later manuscripts, see 5:2.2, 6:4.1. Only the Donegal Series from *Fen.* has been edited: Hennessy and Kelly (ed. and trans.), *Book of Fenagh*, pp. 312–415. For discussion and corrigenda, see Robert A. S. Macalister, *Book of Fenagh: Supplementary Volume* (Dublin: The Stationery Office, 1939), on the basis of which citations have been amended, where necessary. See also Paul Walsh, *The Book of Fenagh* (Dublin: Richview Press, 1940).

⁶⁹³ Simms, 'Donegal poems'; Cunningham and Gillespie, 'Uí Dhomhnaill', pp. 493–94.

⁶⁹⁴ Ó Cuív, *Catalogue*, I, 271–74.

⁶⁹⁵ *Fen.*, fols 39^{rb}1–40^{va}28; Rawl.B.514, fol. 61^r1–61^v13; Hennessy and Kelly (ed. and trans.), *Book of Fenagh*, pp. 312–31; **Appendix 13**.

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also argues that Conall was Níall's rightful successor at Tara but that he was usurped by Conall's brother, Lóegaire. The poem concludes with a *caithréim* ('battle-list') of Conall's victories throughout Ireland.

Deich catha agus da chet sin,
ar na rim a Manistir,
d'Oengus maraen is do Fhlann,
ro chom in gres do Chonall.⁶⁹⁶

Rawl.B.514 adds a simple attribution to Flann Mainistrech at the poem's commencement.

Much might seem familiar to us here. Flann is based at Monasterboice, he is collaborating with another scholar (Óengus is otherwise unidentifiable), and their work is defined as *rím* and comprises the cataloguing of martial deeds while narrating a kingdom's origins (2:2.2.1, 2:3.2, 2:3.3.2, 2:5.3). Yet the poem's explicit support for Cenél Conaill is a new departure for Flann.

Flann possibly appears in another Donegal Series poem, 'A liubair atá ar do lár',⁶⁹⁷ found in both *Fen.* and Rawl.B.514, as well as in the sixteenth- or potentially fifteenth-century NLS Adv. 72.1.28 alongside two other Donegal Series poems.⁶⁹⁸ This poem prescribes the stipends and services owed by Cenél nÉogain and Cenél Conaill to one another in the event of either holding the kingships of Ailech or of Ireland. Ailech now represents not just the kingship of Cenél nÉogain but the overlordship of the northern Uí Néill. Should either hold the kingship of Ireland, they should privilege, in this order, the other northern Uí Néill faction, then Clann Cholmáin, the rest of Dál Cuinn (i.e. the Connachta, the Airgialla, and any remaining Uí Néill septs), the Ulaid, and the kings of Munster and Leinster. This is all said to have been inscribed by 'Flann', or 'Fland fili' (Rawl.B.514), in what is presented as

⁶⁹⁶ Hennessy and Kelly (ed. and trans. [amended]), *Book of Fenagh*, pp. 330–31: 'Ten battles and two hundred are these, | as counted in Manister, | by Oengus, together with Flann, | who composed the work concerning Conall'. The editors prefer forty ('da fichet') over two-hundred ('da chet'); indeed, this is the Rawl.B.514 (fol. 61^v13) reading.

⁶⁹⁷ Edinburgh, NLS Adv., MS 72.1.28, *saec.XV/XVI*, fol. 4^v1–16; *Fen.*, fols 43^{ra}19–43^{va}13; Rawl.B.514, fol. 63^r25–63^r41; Hennessy and Kelly (ed. and trans.), *Book of Fenagh*, pp. 358–65;

Appendix 14.

⁶⁹⁸ Donald MacKinnon, *A Descriptive Catalogue of Gaelic Manuscripts in the Advocate's Library, Edinburgh, and Elsewhere in Scotland* (Edinburgh: Brown, 1912), pp. 113–14; Ronald Black, 'Catalogue of Gaelic manuscripts in the National Library of Scotland', (unpublished catalogue, 2011, available for selected manuscripts on *ISOS* <<https://www.isos.dias.ie>> [accessed 14 August 2015]).

a supremely authoritative book containing ‘senchus comuaige comlan’.⁶⁹⁹ In *Fen.*, the northern Uí Néill kings owe the book honour, while, in Rawl.B.514, those so obliged are ‘ughdair eolaid’.⁷⁰⁰ It is not clear if this is to be taken as attributing the poem to Flann or as describing a source upon which the poem is based.

While a legitimate interpretation in light of ‘Conall cuingid clainne Néill’, this may not be Flann Mainistrech. *Flann fili*, as we have seen (3:2.2), can indicate a variety of poets, including Flann mac Lonáin, who is also associated with several other poems in Rawl.B.514’s Ó Domhnaill *Dúanaire*.⁷⁰¹ An unidentified Flann is also attested commenting on northern politics.⁷⁰² If *Flann fili* were here taken as Flann Mainistrech, however, this poem would constitute a distinctive presentation of his author-figure. He would emerge not simply as an authority on tacitly politicised history but as openly setting the terms of diplomatic relationships. Furthermore, this would constitute an unusual portrayal of his work as an act of physical inscription. Books’ authority is a somewhat distinctive interest of the Donegal Series: ‘A éolcha Chonaill cheólaigh’ cites ‘Lebar Cilli Mic nEnan’ in similarly reverential terms and ‘Atá sund senchas nach súaill’ apparently cites *Lebor na Cert*.⁷⁰³

The history and provenance of ‘Conall cuingid clainne Néill’ and ‘A liubair atá ar do lár’ are unclear. Katherine Simms dates most of the Donegal Series to the late twelfth or thirteenth century, based on the implied political context.⁷⁰⁴ References in other material supposedly derived from it imply that the *Senlebor Caillín* cannot date from before the thirteenth century.⁷⁰⁵ Due to references to the *Senlebor* in *Fen.* and Rawl.B.514, it has been taken as the archetype of both manuscripts’ versions of the Donegal Series.⁷⁰⁶ Furthermore, Bernadette Cunningham and Raymond Gillespie have stated that Rawl.B.514’s Series was derived from

⁶⁹⁹ Hennessy and Kelly (ed. and trans.), *Book of Fenagh*, pp. 364–65: ‘a complete perfect history’.

⁷⁰⁰ Rawl.B.514, fol. 63^r25: ‘learned authors’ (my translation).

⁷⁰¹ Ó Cuív, *Catalogue*, I, 271.

⁷⁰² *The Banquet of Dun na nGedh and the Battle of Mag Rath*, ed. and trans. by John O’Donovan (Dublin: Irish Archaeological Society, 1849), pp. 250–53; ‘A New Version of the Battle of Mag Rath’, ed. and trans. by Carl Marstrander, *Ériu*, 5 (1911), 226–47 (pp. 226–27); Knott (ed. and trans.), *Bardic Poems*, I, 168; II, 254.

⁷⁰³ Hennessy and Kelly (ed. and trans.), *Book of Fenagh*, pp. 346–47, 354–55; Simms, ‘Donegal poems’, pp. 46–47.

⁷⁰⁴ Simms, ‘Donegal poems’, p. 42.

⁷⁰⁵ Simms, ‘Donegal poems’, p. 38.

⁷⁰⁶ Macalister, *Book of Fenagh*, p. 31; Simms, ‘Donegal poems’, p. 39.

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*Fen.*⁷⁰⁷ However, this reconstruction cannot be accepted in the case of the two poems under discussion, given the serious textual variants that distinguish their respective versions in *Fen.* and Rawl.B.514 (**Appendices 13 and 14**). There is thus no reason at present to postulate a thirteenth-century archetype. Beyond the antiquated semi-diplomatic edition from *Fen.*,⁷⁰⁸ the Series has never been edited, so discussion of its textual history, the date of the archetype, and thus the true provenance of its reference to Flann must be deferred until such work's completion.

2.1.4 Uí Dhiarmata's genealogies

Flann is also cited via a physical codex elsewhere. Within their closely related genealogical collections (hereafter designated, by incipit, as *Diluuium factum est*⁷⁰⁹), both *Lec.* and *BB* include a tract on Síl Muiredaig, the ancestral kindred of several royal dynasties of medieval Connacht.⁷¹⁰ This includes genealogies and sundry historical matter on the Uí Dhiarmata, the descendants of a Síl Muiredaig king of Connacht, Diarmait Finn mac Tomaltaig (*ob.* 833).⁷¹¹ Towards this tract's conclusion, there occurs a colophon, printed from both manuscripts in **Appendix 15**.⁷¹² It states that the Uí Dhiarmata genealogies have been collected from a variety of ancient manuscripts, including the 'books of Flann Mainistrech' (*Lec.* only), and carried back to Noah (*Lec.*) or Gáedel Glas (*BB*).

The *Lec.* colophon seems to imply that books associated with Flann,⁷¹³ among others, were mined for information on Uí Dhiarmata. Yet the genealogical matter specifically pertaining to Uí Dhiarmata in *Diluuium factum est* does not extend nearly as far back as the colophon claims. Even its tract on Síl Muiredaig as a whole only traces the eponymous Muiredach Muillethan (*ob.* 702) back to Eochu Muigmedón.⁷¹⁴ The colophon is only accurate if read in the context of *Diluuium factum est* overall,⁷¹⁵ whose introduction indeed traces Muiredach Muillethan back,

⁷⁰⁷ Cunningham and Gillespie, 'Muirgheas', p. 42; Cunningham and Gillespie, 'Uí Dhomhnaill', p. 492.

⁷⁰⁸ Hennessy and Kelly (ed. and trans.), *Book of Fenagh*, pp. 312–415.

⁷⁰⁹ Bart Jaski, 'The Irish Origin Legend: Seven Unexplained Sources', in *Lebor Gabála*, ed. by Carey, pp. 48–76 (49–50). See also Jaski, 'Genealogical section', p. 302.

⁷¹⁰ *Lec.*, fols 63^{ra}1–69^{ra}24; *BB*, fols 56^{ra}6–61^{rb}18.

⁷¹¹ Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship*, pp. 199–200.

⁷¹² Mulchrone (part. ed.), *RIA Cat.*, fasc. XIII, 1565 [*Lec.*], 1630 [*BB*].

⁷¹³ For discussion of what 'the books of x' might denote, see Bhreathnach, 'World', pp. 392–95.

⁷¹⁴ Byrne, *Irish Kings*, pp. 245–53, 300.

⁷¹⁵ *Lec.*, fols 53^{ra}1–124^{rb}5; *BB*, fols 43^{ra}1–96^{ra}2.

ultimately, to Noah, via the apical figures the colophon names.⁷¹⁶ Primarily concerned with *Diluuium factum est* itself, the colophon's material was potentially adapted and moved so as to focus on Uí Dhiarmata. We might consequently postulate that this recension of *Diluuium factum est* was made for an Úa Diarmata patron, a leading candidate being Domnall mac Uatach (*ob.* 1316), king of Uí Dhiarmata, whose pedigree follows the colophon in both manuscripts.⁷¹⁷ This politicised bibliography may be meant to enhance Uí Dhiarmata's prestige by implying that the kingdom featured in great historical codices of the past. I know of no work attributed to Flann that mentions them.

The 'books of Flann Mainistrech' (in *Lec.*'s reading) were probably cited originally to trace the provenance of *Diluuium factum est* in its entirety, a compilation of such vast historiographical scope that it is not easy to determine what specific information they provided. If, as Jaski tentatively suggests,⁷¹⁸ Flann was involved in redacting the *Saltair Caisil*'s genealogical material – this codex also appears in the colophon – then his books may have been reputed as a major source for genealogies in general. Otherwise, either his metrical regnal histories or matter relating to *LGÉ* could potentially have been relevant to genealogists.

Yet only *Lec.* even mentions the 'books of Flann Mainistrech'; *BB* has the 'books of Monasterboice'. With the testimony evenly split, this cannot be resolved. Reference is made to the 'books of Monasterboice' in unrelated contexts in two other manuscripts,⁷¹⁹ while this is the sole attestation of 'the books of Flann Mainistrech' other than in an abbreviated version of the same colophon in Dubhaltach Óg Mac Firbhisigh's (*ob.* 1671) *Leabhar Mór na nGenealach*.⁷²⁰ At the very least, however, Giolla Íosa Mór Mac Firbisigh (*ob.* 1418), the *Lec.* scribe and compiler, as well as Dubhaltach Óg, did not find the concept of 'the books of Flann Mainistrech' unacceptable.

⁷¹⁶ *Lec.*, fols.53^{ra}1–53^{vb}44; *BB*, fols 43^{ra}1–43^{vb}25.

⁷¹⁷ *ALC* 1316.6; *Lec.*, fol. 68^{vb}38–56; *BB*, fol. 61^{ra}18–36. *Lec.* (fol. 68^{vb}38–41) leaves space for four more names.

⁷¹⁸ Jaski, 'Genealogical section', pp. 331–32.

⁷¹⁹ *Lives of the Saints from the Book of Lismore*, ed. and trans. by Whitley Stokes (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1890), ll. 3297–302 (p. 98); *LU*, I, 2920 (p. 94).

⁷²⁰ *Leabhar Mór na nGenealach*, ed. and trans. by Nollaig Ó Muraíle, 5 vols (Dublin: De Búrca, 2004) [hereafter, *LMG*], I, §239.13 (pp. 540–41).

2.1.5 ANÍ and the kingdom of Connacht

Concerning as it does the ancestor of Uí Fhiachrach, a major dynasty of medieval Connacht, and his tomb at Cruachu, Connacht's ancient centre (2:2.2.3), ANÍ is inherently about Connacht. Yet, in three later medieval manuscripts (*YBL*,⁷²¹ *Lec.*, *BB*), the basic story of Nath Í's death and burial is integrated into the history of Uí Fhiachrach, where it seems to articulate the dynasty's place within this regional kingdom. This might always have been ANÍ's intention, but its arrangement and that of related material in these manuscripts emphasises such an intention yet further. Flann's involvement fares differently in different contexts, raising questions concerning both the nature of his original work and his later medieval reception.

Although their exact relationships have been debated (2:4.2.2), the versions of ANÍ in *LU*, *YBL*, and *BB* have been recognised as ultimately belonging to a definable textual tradition. There are, however, further texts in *YBL*, *Lec.*, and *BB* that narrate Nath Í's death and burial that include multiple components of ANÍ.⁷²² Again, ANÍ awaits a full edition that might elucidate all these texts' relationships, although the core material's apparent adaptability might well frustrate such an undertaking.⁷²³

Of the recognised versions of ANÍ, we have already discussed the *LU* version (2:5.2.1; termed U here). There are two others.⁷²⁴

- Y, the *YBL* text of ANÍ, is in the hand of Giolla Íosa Mór Mac Fírbisigh and is entitled *Suidigud Tellaig Cruachna* ('the establishing of the demesne of Cruachu'). The colophon attributing the compilation to Flann and Eochaid follows 'Atá fotsu rí fer Fail', Torna Éces' second poem, but the tract then continues, broadly as in U. Y is followed by a martially orientated account of the reigns of Nath Í and his son, Ailill Molt (Evans' 'The reigns of Nath Í and Ailill Molt').⁷²⁵

⁷²¹ Dublin, TCD, MS 1318 (*olim* H.2.16), the *Yellow Book of Lecan*, *saec.* XIV [hereafter, *YBL*]. See Heinrich P. A. Oskamp, 'The Yellow Book of Lecan Proper', *Ériu*, 26 (1975), 102–21.

⁷²² In what follows, I refer to all this material in general as ANÍ.

⁷²³ For a comparable situation, see Helen Imhoff, 'The different versions of *Aided Chonchobair*', *Ériu*, 62 (2012), 43–99 (pp. 90–95).

⁷²⁴ Bănăţeanu (ed. and trans. [German]), 'Die Legende', pp. 178–88; Ó Concheanainn (ed.), 'Scribes', pp. 148–57.

⁷²⁵ *YBL*, col. 911.25–48; Evans, 'Circin', pp. 10–14.

- B¹, the *BB* text, is in the hand of Maghnus Ó Duibgeanainn, one of the manuscript's main scribes. Its title is *Oidhid Dathi* ('the violent death of Nath Í'). The colophon is omitted.

U's glossing, marginalia, and emendations are either unrepresented or part of the main text in Y and B¹.⁷²⁶

Two unedited texts are comparable to UYB¹ in content, although often not in language:⁷²⁷

- L, in *Lec.*,⁷²⁸ is part of the Uí Fhiachrach section of *Diluuium factum est* (4:2.1.4).⁷²⁹ It is also in the hand of Giolla Íosa Mór Mac Firisigh. Its heading seems to refer to the Uí Fhiachrach genealogies overall: *Síl Dathi andso* ('Nath Í's seed, here'). 'The reigns of Nath Í and Ailill Molt', appended to Y, is integrated into L.⁷³⁰
- B² (**Appendix 16**) introduces a tract, distinctive to *BB*,⁷³¹ within the Uí Fhiachrach section of *Diluuium factum est*.⁷³² This tract lacks any cognate in *Lec.* It is also in the hand of Maghnus Ó Duibgeanainn. It is titled *Geinealaig Ua Fiachrach do reir Flaind* ('the genealogies of Uí Fhiachrach according to Flann'), whom both Ó Concheanainn and Ó Muraíle cautiously identify as Flann Mainistrech.⁷³³

UYB¹LB² have in common the basic narrative of Nath Í's death in the Alps, his burial at Cruachu, and the poems 'Celis cach a Chruacho chroderg' and 'Atá fotsu rí

⁷²⁶ Ó Concheanainn, 'Scribes', pp. 157–59.

⁷²⁷ A full survey would also include: *LGÉ*, V, §613 (pp. 350–53); *Cóir Anmann: A Late Middle Irish Treatise on Personal Names*, ed. and trans. by Sharon Arbuthnot, 2 vols (London: ITS 2005 and 2007), II, §150 (pp. 42–3, 116–7).

⁷²⁸ *Lec.*, fol. 70^{va}1–70^{vb}51. A text identical in content, with only slight differences in language and phrasing, can be found at *LMG*, II, §§249–51.13 (pp. 570–77). Dubhaltach Mac Firisigh seems to have had indirect access to material from *Lec.* when compiling *LMG* (Ó Muraíle, *Celebrated Antiquary*, pp. 177–78).

⁷²⁹ *Lec.*, fols 69^{vb}1–76^{tb}45.

⁷³⁰ *Lec.*, fol. 70^{va}5–8.

⁷³¹ *BB*, fol. 63^{ra}1–33.

⁷³² *BB*, fol. 63^{ra}1–63^{va}54.

⁷³³ Tomás Ó Concheanainn, 'Scríobhaithe Leacáin', *Celtica*, 19 (1987), 141–75 (p. 157); Ó Muraíle, *Celebrated Antiquary*, p. 29.

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fer Fail’, attributed to Torna Éces; only UYB¹ include surveys of other Irish cemeteries. In terms of this core narrative centred around Nath Í, L is the most lavish, containing much information absent from other versions, while B² is extremely terse.

YLB² are, in their own ways, pivoted towards Connacht and its history, as opposed to showing a general, literary interest in royal *aideda* or burial sites, for example. LB² are aetiological narratives that introduce the genealogies of Uí Fhiachrach and so, naturally, they include only material relevant to Nath Í and Cruachu. Furthermore, L uniquely stresses the importance of Cruachu as a burial site, stating that Nath Í was buried ‘a reilic na Cruachna i fail i rabadur rigraid Sil Erimon durmor’.⁷³⁴ Y’s distinctive title also gives its text a Connacht focus, relating it to Cruachu’s foundation or layout, unlike UB¹’s titles, which link to Nath Í.

Giolla Íosa, whose hand produced both Y and L, had a particular interest in connecting Nath Í to Connacht via Cruachu. He was hereditary historian to the Uí Dhubhda, Uí Fhiachrach’s ruling dynasty in the later Middle Ages, who, naturally, claimed descent from Nath Í, as, in fact, did the Meic Fhirbisigh themselves.⁷³⁵ Cruachu, however, had long lain in the territory of Uí Briuin Aí, then of their offshoot, Síl Muiredaig, and subsequently of their offshoot, the Uí Conchobuir.⁷³⁶ Presenting Uí Fhiachrach’s ancestor, even in death, as somehow foundational to Cruachu is an assertion of Uí Fhiachrach’s continued relevance in Connacht politics. At the same time, Nath Í’s prestige is enhanced by his burial alongside his fellow kings of Ireland.

Indeed, an allusion to Nath Í appears in ‘Iomdha gabhlán do chloinn Chuinn’, composed by Giolla Íosa for the 1417 inauguration of Tadhg Riabhach Ó Dubhda as king of Uí Fhiachrach.⁷³⁷ It is preserved among the genealogies introduced by L.⁷³⁸ As Ó Muraíle has pointed out,⁷³⁹ Giolla Íosa specifically notes the discovery of Nath Í’s story via textual study.

⁷³⁴ *Lec.*, fol. 70^{vb}1–2: ‘in the cemetery at Cruachu, where the kings of hardy Érimón’s seed were buried’.

⁷³⁵ Ó Concheanainn, ‘Genealogies’, pp. 14–15.

⁷³⁶ Byrne, *Irish Kings*, pp. 250–51; Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, pp. 473–74;

⁷³⁷ Ó Muraíle, *Celebrated Antiquary*, pp. 25–30.

⁷³⁸ *Lec.*, fols 74^{rb}11–76^{rb}9.

⁷³⁹ Ó Muraíle, *Celebrated Antiquary*, p. 28.

Ní dúdcha dhuit Magh Muaidhe
 'na fonn Teamhra taobhúaine –
 frith ag mo sgoil 'na sgreaptra –
 'sa crích sair go sen-Ealpa.⁷⁴⁰

Here, Nath Í is a king of Tara, but Giolla Íosa goes on to urge Tadhg Riabhach to occupy Cruachu while still remembering Uí Fhiachrach's heartlands in Magh Muaidhe.⁷⁴¹ Nath Í, as a proto-Uí Fhiachrach king of Tara buried at Cruachu, is an apologue for every level of this political idealism. In this poem, interestingly, Giolla Íosa never names Flann, instead emphasising written sources.

Given this material's evident politicisation, it is interesting that we find Flann's area of authorial responsibility also focused on Cruachu. Assuming that a colophon refers to text just passed, rather than text to come, its position in Y implies that Flann and Eochaid only compiled the information on Nath Í and Cruachu, the section of the text also designated by Y's title. This is also the section corresponding in basic content to L and B², the latter likewise appearing under Flann's name.

We might read this as appropriation of Flann's authority in line with late medieval political interests: Flann and Eochaid originally had no particular interest in Uí Fhiachrach's place in Connacht politics and compiled a text about royal cemeteries. Yet we return, again, to *ANÍ*'s intractable textual history. For Oskamp and West, Y's colophon marks the original extent of the text being attributed to Flann and Eochaid and it focuses on Nath Í.⁷⁴² YB² thus give a more accurate impression of Flann's work than U. Ó Concheanainn, meanwhile, understands U to be the archetype and U does not divide the material on Cruachu from the rest of the text.⁷⁴³ As far as I know, he never explained why the colophon would then have moved to its position in Y. Under his interpretation, it would require a secondary intervention, perhaps motivated by the political interests discussed above.

B² potentially yields insights into what could previously have been attributed to Flann (and Eochaid), although these insights offer anything but resolution. Ó

⁷⁴⁰ *LMG*, I, §294.7 (pp. 672–73): 'No more native to you is Magh Muaidhe | than the land of green-sided Tara | – as has been found by my school in its manuscripts – | and the territory eastward to the old Alps'. Ó Muraíle edits from *LMG* but this stanza is in *Lec.* (fol. 76^{ra}25–26) without significant variants.

⁷⁴¹ *LMG*, I, §§293.8, 293.10–11 (pp. 670–71), 294.8–9 (pp. 672–73); *Lec.*, fol. 76^{ra}1–2, 5–9, 27–30.

⁷⁴² Oskamp, 'Notes', pp. 121–22; West, 'Leabhar', pp. 85–89.

⁷⁴³ Ó Concheanainn, 'Scribes'.

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Concheanainn has described B² as an ‘abridged version (generally related to [L])’ of *ANÍ*.⁷⁴⁴ It is definitely terser than other versions but it does not particularly resemble L; it lacks L’s distinctive additional material and barely overlaps in phraseology. Instead, it seems to represent an independent branch of the wider *ANÍ* tradition. B² describes Amalgaid as Nath Í’s brother, whereas he is Nath Í’s son in all other versions. However, as Ó Concheanainn demonstrates, he is only Nath Í’s son in U via scribe H[1]’s interventions.⁷⁴⁵ Amalgaid, he argues, was originally Nath Í’s brother but, for various political reasons, the eleventh- or twelfth-century Meic Fhirbhisigh promoted the doctrine that he was his son, which somehow influenced H[1]. B² may thus derive from a version independent of YLB¹U, which all present us with Amalgaid mac Nath Í. B² cannot be eleventh-century in its present form, however, as the tract it introduces includes a pedigree of Ruaidhri Ó Dubhda (*ob.* 1417), Tadhg Riabhach’s predecessor as king of Uí Fhiachrach.⁷⁴⁶

If B² is a developmentally early witness to what Flann produced, then his work might simply have focused on Cruachu and Nath Í. However, B²’s superscription associates with Flann not just the *ANÍ* narrative but ‘Geinealaig Ua Fiachrach’ (‘the genealogies of Uí Fhiachrach’), the entire Uí Fhiachrach genealogical tract that is distinctive to *BB*’s version of *Diluuium factum est*. Indeed, B² not only introduces a genealogical tract but itself begins with genealogical data.⁷⁴⁷ Given the other evidence for Flann being regarded as an authority on genealogies (4:2.1.4, 4:2.1.6.1–2), this reading seems supportable. If Flann’s – and perhaps Eochaid’s – original, purported compilation was a genealogical tract, perhaps covering much more than Uí Fhiachrach, with a brief, embedded narrative that became *ANÍ*, then U, Y, and L represent substantial secondary elaborations.

What is appropriation and what is authentic in the textual tradition, let alone what Flann and Eochaid actually did, is thus not apparent and, as we have seen, could be far from what it seems. This is partly because the material preserved in *ANÍ*, often under Flann’s name, was of interest in later medieval Connacht for specific political reasons and seems to have been re-worked and re-used intensively. In YB²,

⁷⁴⁴ Ó Concheanainn, ‘Genealogies’, p. 4.

⁷⁴⁵ *LU*, ll. 2797–98 (p. 90); Ó Concheanainn, ‘Genealogies’, pp. 1–17.

⁷⁴⁶ *BB*, fols 63^{ra}1–63^{rb}15; Ó Concheanainn, ‘Genealogies’, pp. 4–5. For background, see Ó Concheanainn, ‘Scríobhaithe’, pp. 157–58; Ó Concheanainn, ‘Genealogies’, p. 5.

⁷⁴⁷ *BB*, fol. 63^{ra}1–5; **Appendix 16**.

Flann's authority was considered relevant to this articulation of contemporary concerns.

2.1.6 Airgialla: family, faith, and fatherland

In *UM*, Flann appears in two texts providing scholarly testimony relevant to the affairs of Airgialla. Airgialla was a fractious federation of polities in central Ulster, mostly attested, in the early Middle Ages, as privileged vassals of the Uí Néill, especially Cenél nÉogain,⁷⁴⁸ with whom they nonetheless engaged in a lengthy power-struggle for influence at Armagh.⁷⁴⁹ In the later twelfth century, shortly before the Norman invasions, Airgialla achieved relative unity and regional influence under Donnchad Úa Cerbaill (1125–68),⁷⁵⁰ spawning various late medieval successor dynasties and factions.⁷⁵¹

Many of eleventh-century Armagh's senior personnel, among whom 'Úasalepscop Érenn Áed' (1:3) presents Flann, were from Airgialla,⁷⁵² while the Tara Diptych includes one of their legendary ancestors, Colla Uais.⁷⁵³ Otherwise, Flann is not previously attested as having any interest in this kingdom and, indeed, the two texts to which we now turn are somewhat distant in their citations of him.

UM, which is of some importance in this chapter, was compiled in the 1390s for Muirchertach Ó Ceallaigh (*ob.* 1407), Bishop of Clonfert (1378–93) and then Archbishop of Tuam (1393–1407).⁷⁵⁴ It is the work of multiple scribes but Adam Cusin conducted the bulk of the writing and the overall compilation.⁷⁵⁵ Over the following centuries, numerous folios were lost.⁷⁵⁶ Of what remains, a corpus of material relates to the patron's Ó Ceallaigh dynasty, rulers of the east Connacht

⁷⁴⁸ Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, pp. 511–18; Byrne, *Irish Kings*, pp. 114–19.

⁷⁴⁹ Tomás Ó Fiaich, 'The Church of Armagh under Lay Control', *Seanchas Ardmacha*, 5:1 (1969), 75–127; Jaski, *Irish Kingship*, pp. 221–25.

⁷⁵⁰ Brendan Smith, *Colonisation and Conquest in Medieval Ireland: The English in Louth, 1170–1330* (Cambridge: CUP, 1999), pp. 10–27.

⁷⁵¹ For example, Katherine Simms, 'The Medieval Kingdom of Lough Erne', *Clogher Record*, 9:2 (1977), 126–41.

⁷⁵² Murphy (ed. and trans.), 'Poem'.

⁷⁵³ *LL*, III, ll. 15754–55 (p. 507).

⁷⁵⁴ O'Sullivan, 'Book', pp. 151–52.

⁷⁵⁵ Ó Muraíle, 'Aois', pp. 57–59; O'Sullivan, 'Book', pp. 155–58.

⁷⁵⁶ O'Sullivan, 'Book', pp. 158–61.

kingdom of Uí Maine. This includes texts asserting the prerogatives of Airgialla, from whom Uí Maine's ruling houses claimed descent.⁷⁵⁷

2.1.6.1 Airgialla's birth

Our first citation of Flann occurs in 'Airgialla ardmóra uaisli' (**Appendix 17**),⁷⁵⁸ a poem on the war against the Ulaid by Airgialla's legendary ancestors, the three Collas, in which Airgialla was carved out as a kingdom. It also asserts Airgialla's medieval status in the north of Ireland, claiming parity for the kingdom with the Uí Néill and the Connachta. A thorough linguistic study has not been conducted but the poem seems to be in later Middle Gaelic. For example, it contains no infixed pronouns but almost no independent object pronouns (but see q. 15).

In *UM*, the poem appears among a series of poems on both Airgialla and the Uí Cheallaigh.⁷⁵⁹ Otherwise, another version is preserved, with numerous variants, in the seventeenth-century *Tinnakill Duanaire (TD)*.⁷⁶⁰ In addition, several quatrains appear in Dubhaltach Mac Fírhisigh's *LMG*.⁷⁶¹ Despite their variants, the *UM* and *TD* texts are sufficiently similar for separate analyses to be redundant. As this chapter is concerned with later medieval manuscripts, the text will thus be discussed here with reference to both versions, while its context in *UM* and *TD* will be discussed here and in **Chapter 5 (5:2.2)** respectively.

The three Collas' story appears in multiple sources.⁷⁶² In most versions, they are exiled after assassinating their uncle, Fiachu Sraiptine, the king of Ireland and son of Cairbre Lifechair, and seizing the kingship. Muiredach Tírech, Fiachu's son and successor, choosing not emulate the Collas' kin-slaying by avenging his father, pardons them and permits their conquest of a new homeland from the Ulaid. They

⁷⁵⁷ Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Nósa Ua Maine: fact or fiction?', in *The Welsh King and his Court*, ed. by Thomas M. Charles-Edwards, Morfydd E. Owen, and Paul Russell (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), pp. 362–81 (364–66, 376).

⁷⁵⁸ London, BL, MS Egerton 90, *saec.* XIV, XV, XVI, fol. 18^{rb}46–18^{va}42. For the original location of the *UM* fragment bound in Egerton 90 (fols. 17–19), see Mulchrone, *RIA Cat.*, fasc. XXVI, 3327; O'Sullivan, 'Book', p. 162.

⁷⁵⁹ Standish H. O'Grady, Robin Flower, and Myles Dillon, *Catalogue of Irish Manuscripts in the British Museum*, 3 vols (London: British Museum, 1926–53) [hereafter, *BL Cat.*], I, pp. 82–85.

⁷⁶⁰ Dublin, TCD MS, 1340 (*olim* H.3.19), the *Tinnakill Duanaire*, *saec.* XVII, fol. 36^f1–22; Anne O'Sullivan, 'The Tinnakill Duanaire', *Celtica* 11 (1976), 214–228.

⁷⁶¹ *LMG*, II, §§303.6 (pp. 6–7), 332.2–5 (pp. 70–73).

⁷⁶² Donald M. Schlegel, 'The origin of the three Collas and the fall of Emain', *Clogher Record*, 16:2 (1998), 159–181 (pp. 160–66); Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, pp. 512–18; Dan M. Wiley, 'An introduction to the early Irish king tales' in *Essays*, ed. by Wiley, pp. 13–68 (45–47).

are thereafter barred from the kingship of Ireland and are subjugated, with privileges, to Muiredach's descendants (i.e. the Uí Néill).

Our poem begins by proclaiming the Collas' victory over the Ulaid (q. 1) and then details their background and upbringing (qq. 2–14), before narrating their conquest of Ulster (qq. 16–22).⁷⁶³ This is all presented in a very positive light. Mention is made neither of their kin-slaying, nor of Muiredach's authorisation of their campaign, although the Airgialla are said to be from Tara (q. 1). Interwoven into the poem's account is an assertion of Airgialla's parity with other northern kingdoms. Airgialla is heir by conquest to the Ulaid's ancient kingdom. In an apparent reference to events of *Táin Bó Cúailnge*,⁷⁶⁴ the Collas' defeat of the Ulaid is presented as a defeat by proxy of the Connachta (q. 17) and, presumably, their offshoot, the Uí Néill. This is buttressed by the common descent of the Connachta, Uí Néill, and Airgialla from Conn Cétcathach (qq. 16–18). Just as the poem's language apparently implies a twelfth-century date, this exuberant assessment of Airgialla's place in the political firmament could perhaps be associated with their rise to regional hegemony during the same century. Interestingly, the century prior to *UM*'s compilation also witnessed significant gains by Uí Maine at the expense of the Ó Conchubair kings of Connacht,⁷⁶⁵ so the Collas' defeat by proxy of the Connachta might also speak to the manuscript's context.

Where the focus switches from the Collas' background information to the war against the Ulaid (q. 15), Flann is identified as a source.

Table 3: Flann cited in 'Airgialla ardmóra uaisli'

<i>UM</i> q. 15.	<i>TD</i> q.15.
Ag sin dib seancas na saercland do ger an glanaistreach, mar do cuala me, in cland cliarach, le Fland miadach Mainistreach.	As e sin sencus na saorclann fir na gcaolcrann nglainescreach, mar do cualus, in chlann cliarach, re Flann miadach Maineisdreach.
'That, for you, is the noble offspring's history that shortens the complete journey, as I heard, the poet-frequented sons, from noble Flann Mainistrech'.	'That is the noble offspring's history, men of the narrow branches of the pure growth, as I heard, the poet-frequented sons, from noble Flann Mainistrech'.

⁷⁶³ Quatrains numbered as in **Appendix 17**.

⁷⁶⁴ In general, see Katherine Simms, 'Propaganda use of the *Táin* in the later Middle Ages', *Celtica*, 15 (1983), 142–49.

⁷⁶⁵ Ní Mhaonaigh, '*Nósa*', pp. 371–73.

Flann is thus not the poem's author. Rather, its author claims to be summarising what Flann imparted during a personal encounter. The *UM* text's preface also fronts Flann's testimony as an interlocutor, not an author: 'mar adeir Flann Mainistrech andsa duain seo sis' (**Appendix 17**).⁷⁶⁶ Indeed, the first part of the poem, giving the three Collas' background information, takes the form of questions (qq. 3–5) and answers (qq. 6–14), the answers being introduced in the first-person singular. No speakers are marked in the manuscript but it seems plausible that this dialogue is being described in q. 15.

However, as with *ANÍ* (**4:2.1.5**), it is not certain what Flann is understood to provide. He could be a general source for the poem overall, or for the invasion narrative and assertion of Airgialla's prerogatives that follows q. 15, or for the information on the Collas that precedes it. Different interpretations are possible, but I am inclined towards the lattermost. This correlates with the apparent dialogue structure before q. 15. Furthermore, q. 15's 'sin' generally refers to material already mentioned.⁷⁶⁷ Finally, the *UM* text's preface specifically cites Flann Mainistrech for his testimony on the Collas' maternity, which appears in q. 7. It would be interesting, particularly in light of 'A liubair atá ar do lár' (**4:2.1.3**), if Flann was being treated as an authority on Airgialla's rights, but it seems more likely that he is being treated as an authority on their legendary ancestors. Incidentally, the questions' respondent, whom we are taking to be Flann, refers to himself as tracing their genealogy (q. 7). The Collas' are said to descend from Conn Céctachach but only in q. 16. Nonetheless, this is interesting, given the tendency of other texts in late medieval manuscripts to associate Flann with genealogies (**4:2.1.4**, **4:2.1.5**, **4:2.1.6.2**).

2.1.6.2. *St Tigernach's genealogy*

Flann appears again in *UM* in relation to matters of interest to Airgialla. 'Scela cluana clog mbind' (**Appendix 18**) is an otherwise unknown poem's acephalous conclusion, consisting of only one couplet and eight full quatrains beginning *UM*'s eleventh gathering's last and sole surviving leaf (**4:3.2**).⁷⁶⁸ What survives of the poem concerns St Tigernach of Clones, although the poem's overall purpose remains

⁷⁶⁶ 'as Flann Mainistrech says in this poem'.

⁷⁶⁷ *eDIL* s.v. sin.

⁷⁶⁸ *UM*, fol. 56^{ra}1–19; O'Sullivan, 'Book', p. 159.

unknown. The opening line, repeated as a *dúnad*,⁷⁶⁹ mentions a *clúain* ('meadow'). This is a common component of ecclesiastical toponyms, but it could refer to Tigernach's main foundation at Clúain Eois (Clones).

Tigernach was the son of a Leinster mercenary and the daughter of the king of Uí Chremthainn, a kingdom in western Airgialla. In his mother's homeland, he supposedly founded three churches at Kiltierney, Galloon, and Clones. The latter was prominent in the early Middle Ages as Uí Chremthainn's main ecclesiastical centre and as a counter-weight to influence from Armagh, which was controlled by Uí Chremthainn's eastern Airgialla rivals, the Airthir, in tense alliance with the Uí Néill.⁷⁷⁰

Our poem, as extant, provides sundry data on Tigernach. For example, it alludes to the 'tri fuind dob andsa leis riam' (q. 2),⁷⁷¹ perhaps the three aforementioned churches. It lists the 'se minna Ailligh' (q. 4), which Tigernach apparently venerated.⁷⁷² Flann Mainistrech appears (q. 8) following Tigernach's patrilineal lineage, traced back to Cathair Már, king of Ireland and ancestor of Leinster's royal dynasties (qq. 6–7). Strikingly, he is described by the same adjective as in 'Airgialla ardmóra uaisli' ('miadach'; 4:2.1.6.1).

berar in duan sa maseach
gu Fland miadach Manistrech
Is se scribha do dena
mar do sil in soiscela⁷⁷³

The poet then reveals himself to be Dallán Forgaill (q. 9), better known as the eulogist of Senán and Colum Cille.⁷⁷⁴ Obviously, it makes no sense for Dallán Forgaill to be citing Flann Mainistrech; this perhaps implies that the poem is composed of previously separate elements.

⁷⁶⁹ *UM*, fol. 56^{ra}16–17.

⁷⁷⁰ Kim McCone, 'Clones and Her Neighbours in the Early Period: Hints from Some Airgialla Saints' Lives', *Clogher Record*, 11:3 (1984), 305–25 (pp. 307–08, 313–15); Pádraig Ó Riain, *Dictionary of Irish Saints* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2011), pp. 572–74.

⁷⁷¹ 'three foundations ever dear to him'. Quatrains are numbered as in **Appendix 18**.

⁷⁷² 'six relics of *Ailech*'.

⁷⁷³ 'May this poem be carried, in turn, | to the noble Flann Mainistrech. | It is he who drew boundaries | as he spread the Gospel'. Tigernach, slightly confusingly, must surely be the second couplet's subject.

⁷⁷⁴ 'An Edition of *Amra Senáin*', ed. and trans. by Liam Breatnach in *Sages*, ed. by Breatnach et al., pp. 7–31 (20–23); Thomas M. Charles-Edwards, 'Dallán Forgaill (*fl.* 597)', *ODNB* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/7031>> [accessed 22 November 2014].

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Like ‘Airgialla ardmóra uaisli’, this poem seems to be in later Middle Gaelic. The interest in relics also implies a twelfth-century date, as these rose in prominence in the medieval Irish church during this period.⁷⁷⁵ Furthermore, the poem (q. 1) refers to households that Patrick gave to Tigernach, as if Clones is subordinate to Armagh. Such a relationship was resisted by Clones until Clones was placed within Armagh’s province in 1111 at the Synod of Ráith Bresail.⁷⁷⁶

In terms of Flann’s relevance, it is not made obvious what is being ‘carried’ to him and whether he is expected to corroborate it, oppose it, or let it enhance his own work. This cannot be answered for certain without the rest of the poem. However, as it follows Tigernach’s genealogy, and as Flann appears as an authority on genealogies elsewhere (4:2.1.4, 4:2.1.5, 4:2.1.6.1), this might be a roundabout way of claiming his approbation for this component. What we can state with more certainty is that Tigernach was closely associated with Airgialla and that this poem’s citation of Flann in relation to him implicates Flann, again, in some sort of articulation of the kingdom’s communal past.

2.1.6.3 Flann, Airgialla, and Uí Maine

The provenance of both these poems is obscure. Both relate to Airgialla and thus to a major concern of *UM*’s compilers. Despite their possibly later date, both also invoke a curiously personal and familiar relationship with Flann Mainistrech. Once again, he is being used, in *UM*, to support a late medieval Gaelic polity’s historico-political assertions. As we will see, however, Flann also appears elsewhere in *UM* and not in relation to Airgialla. This codex had access to a range of texts in which Flann was a key authority.

2.2 Local affairs: The Ciannachta, the north Midlands, Armagh

Late medieval manuscripts thus associate Flann with works concerning kingdoms and dynasties with which he has little connection in earlier manuscripts. Yet we also find Flann associated with topics that correlate with aspects of his identity, as explored in **Chapter 1**. The conclusions to ‘Conall cuingid clainne Néill’ (4:2.1.3) and ‘Réidig dam, a Dé, do nim’ (3:3) locate him at Monasterboice, for example.

⁷⁷⁵ Flanagan, *Transformation*, pp. 220–24.

⁷⁷⁶ Flanagan, *Transformation*, pp. 34–35.

Other texts attributed to him are connected to his genealogical and geographical identity and his association with Armagh. This is perhaps cause to regard these attributions as ultimately authentic, but it also shows that the historical Flann's biography was reflected in what was ascribed to his author-figure.

2.2.1 The Ciannachta's ancestors

Material is twice attributed to Flann concerning two legendary ancestors of his own kin-group, the Ciannachta (see also 5:2.1.4).

2.2.1.1 *Tadg mac Céin's height*

First, 'Coica traighedh tólaibh tlacht' is an excerpt from an otherwise unattested poem that apparently gave the height of certain literary characters. Only quatrains measuring Tadg mac Céin and Conchobar mac Nessa survive. Its extant versions are summarised in **Table 4**.

Table 4: 'Coica traighedh tólaibh tlacht': summary

MS.	Ref.	Characters	Attribution	Context
Dublin, RIA, MS D.iv.2 (1223), <i>saec.</i> XV	qq. 1–2; fol. 52 ^{rb} 11–16.	Tadg mac Céin, Conchobar mac Nessa	'[...] ut dixit poeta .i. Flann'.	<i>Aided Chonchobuir</i> (version D)
Edinburgh, NLS Adv., MS 72.1.5, <i>saec.</i> XV	q.2; fol. 8 ^{ra} 8–12.	Conchobar mac Nessa	'[...] agus is de itbert Fland Mainistrech'.	<i>Aided Chonchobuir</i> (version A)
Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud Misc. 610, <i>saec.</i> XV	q.1; fol. 74 ^{ra} 1–3.	Tadg mac Céin	None.	Independent

In RIA D.iv.2 and NLS Adv. 72.1.5, the poem appears as part of versions D and A respectively of *Aided Chonchobair*.⁷⁷⁷ Laud Misc. 610's *Aided Chonchobair* is closely related to version D, although the quatrain on Tadg occurs independently within the same manuscript.⁷⁷⁸

D, as Imhoff observes, focuses on the history of Mesgegra's brain, the weapon by which Conchobar was slain.⁷⁷⁹ It culminates with 'A chloch thall for

⁷⁷⁷ *The Death-Tales of the Ulster Heroes*, ed. and trans. by Kuno Meyer (Dublin: RIA, 1906), pp. 5–11 [A], 18–21 [D]. Meyer did not use NLS Adv. 72.1.5 in his version A; for its assignment to A, see Imhoff, 'Different versions', pp. 51–52.

⁷⁷⁸ Jaski, 'Genealogical section', pp. 328–29; Imhoff, 'Different versions', p. 61.

⁷⁷⁹ Imhoff, 'Different versions', pp. 61–62.

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elaíid úair’, attributed to Cínaed úa hArtacáin (*ob.* 975) in *LL*,⁷⁸⁰ describing the brain’s re-discovery by St Buite, Monasterboice’s founder, and his re-use of it as a pillow; it subsequently became a holy relic.⁷⁸¹ Tadg mac Céin’s only potential relevance to *Aided Chonchobair* is via his descendants, the Ciannachta. They supposedly included St Buite himself and had come to control Monasterboice by the eleventh century (1:4). Whatever the original purpose and intended context of ‘Coica traighedh tólaibh tlach’, under Flann’s name, it not only involved the Ciannachta’s ancestor but was cited in a text focusing on one of their leading churches.

2.2.1.2 Tadg’s son and the lapdog’s skull

The second text associated with Flann on the Ciannachta appears in two manuscripts of *Sanas Cormaic*, the famous glossary. Its entry on ‘mug éme’ (‘blade’s bondsman’) provides an extended account of how Coipre Musc, son of Conaire Mór, acquired a lapdog from the Britons in compensation for a ruined knife (hence ‘blade’s bondsman’). This became the ancestor of all Ireland’s lapdogs. Its skull was later found by Tadg mac Céin’s son, Connla (also ancestor to the Ciannachta),⁷⁸² who learned of its significance from a poet.⁷⁸³

In two manuscripts, this is succinctly summarised in the four-quatrain poem, ‘Mug Éme a h-ainm, érim nglé’ (**Appendix 19**), which has been added in the margins by the main scribe in each instance. These are BL Harley 5280 (sixteenth-century) and the older section of TCD 1317.⁷⁸⁴ In each case, it bears the simple attribution, ‘Fland cecinit’. Robin Flower identifies this as Flann Mainistrech.⁷⁸⁵ The only positive evidence for the identification seems to be the connection to the Ciannachta. Paul Russell has suggested that the whole story is a parody of pseudo-

⁷⁸⁰ *LL*, III, ll. 19324–68 (pp. 633–34).

⁷⁸¹ Thomas O. Clancy, ‘Lethal weapon/means of grace: Mess-gegra’s brain in the death of Conchobar’, *Æstel*, 4 (1997), 87–115 (pp. 91–92); Imhoff, ‘Different versions’, p. 62.

⁷⁸² *CGH*, p. 246 (Rawl. B. 502, 153b51).

⁷⁸³ ‘Sanas Cormaic. An Old-Irish Glossary’, ed. [from Harley 5280 and *YBL*] by Kuno Meyer in *Anecdota from Irish Manuscripts*, ed. by Osborn Bergin, Richard I. Best, Kuno Meyer, and James G. O’Keeffe, 5 vols (Halle: Niemeyer, 1912), IV, xi–xiii, 75–77; Paul Russell (trans. [from *YBL*]), ‘Poets, Power and Possessions in Medieval Ireland: Some Stories from *Sanas Cormaic*’, in *CSANA Yearbook 7: Law, Literature and Society*, ed. by Joseph F. Eska (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2008), pp. 9–45 (37–39).

⁷⁸⁴ London, BL, MS Harley 5280, *saec.* XVI, fol. 75^r: Flower, *BL Cat.*, II, 321.

Dublin, TCD, MS 1317 (*olim* H.2.15b), *saec.* ?, XVII, p. 31: *TCD Cat.*, pp. 92–94. I am yet to encounter a dating of the older section (for the younger, see Ó Muraíle, *Celebrated Antiquary*, p. 82).

⁷⁸⁵ Flower, *BL Cat.*, II, 321.

historical origin legends.⁷⁸⁶ If so, an allusion to Flann Mainistrech (if that it be) might be part of the pastiche of this genre, but it is also possible that the historical Flann was in on the joke originally.

2.2.1.3 *Tadg's discovery of the history of the kings of Ireland*

Another text, which is in no way associated with Flann explicitly, tells how Tadg, the Ciannachta's ancestor, came to possess special insights into Ireland's regnal and national pseudo-history. While not directly implied in the text, it is very tempting to read this as an origin legend for Tadg's descendants' historiographical careers at Monasterboice. This would suggest that the learning and expertise of Flann, Monasterboice's best-attested scholar, were sometimes interpreted in the context of his kin-group and institution, rather than in that of his own achievements.

Echtra Thaidg Mheic Chein is an Early Modern Gaelic romance preserved uniquely in *Lis*.⁷⁸⁷ Set before his migration to north Brega, it is about Tadg mac Céin's expedition from Munster to rescue members of his local community from captivity overseas. While on this expedition, he encounters an otherworldly island, Inis Derglocha ('the island of the red lake'), where Ireland's past kings reside, with space reserved for those to come.⁷⁸⁸ While no full lists are provided, the island's arrangement constitutes an impressionistic outline of Ireland's regnal history, as familiar from *LGÉ* and related works (**Appendix 20**). It does not particularly resemble Flann's Tara Diptych, however, as the regnal history is carried back to Sláinge mac Dela, as in the work of Gilla Cóemáin and *LGÉ mac* (**2:6.1, 3:2.1**). Nonetheless, the general allusion to medieval Gaelic pseudo-history is unmistakable.

The following text in *Lis* is *Cath Crinna*,⁷⁸⁹ which relates Tadg's role in Cormac mac Airt's war against the Ulaid and his resulting acquisition of territory in north Brega that would become the medieval kingdom of Ciannachta Breg, where Monasterboice would be founded. This might hint that *Echtra Thaidg* also makes

⁷⁸⁶ Russell, 'Poets', pp. 10–11.

⁷⁸⁷ *SG*, I, 342–59; II, 385–401; Gerard Murphy, *The Ossianic Lore and Romantic Tales of Medieval Ireland* (Dublin: At the Sign of the Three Candles, 1955), p. 32; Alan Bruford, *Gaelic Folktales and Medieval Romances* (Dublin: Folklore of Ireland Society, 1969), p. 190; Carey, *Single Ray*, p. 36. Other such late medieval works of *rómansaíocht* have been shown to engage closely earlier literature:

Joseph F. Nagy 'In defence of *rómansaíocht*', *Ériu*, 38 (1987), 9–26.

⁷⁸⁸ *SG*, I, 346–53; II, 390–95.

⁷⁸⁹ *SG*, I, 319–26; II, 359–68.

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reference to his descendants' future. If this admittedly speculative reading is accepted, then these two texts express an interlinked sense of the Ciannachta's identity, encompassing historiography, genealogy, and relationships with royal power. Indeed, Connla, in *Sanas Cormaic's* 'mug éme' narrative (4:2.2.1.2), also plays the role of historical investigator on a matter of national relevance, even if his topic is somewhat absurd. This has all been associated with Flann in other sources, but these texts imply that such associations were made with his kin-group in general.

2.2.2 North Brega

Two sources potentially associate Flann with the Fir Arda Ciannachta's wider region of north Brega, without immediate reference to his genealogy. One is an anecdote preserved in 'The Lecan Miscellany', a compilation in *Lec.* of genealogical and sundry historical material.⁷⁹⁰ It relates how Finmaith, daughter of the king of Corcu Duibne and a noted mother of sixth-century saints and royalty,⁷⁹¹ also came to be known as Cumain ('favour') from the love she showed to her foster-father, Dallbronach. In her journeys to visit him, she is said to have gone 'co hairm iraiibi Fland Manistrach'.⁷⁹²

This seems to indicate the north Brega region but not precisely Monasterboice. In various sources, Dallbronach belongs to the Dál Conchubair, a sept of the Déisi Breg, whose territory was on the upper Boyne and their church at Ardraccan (modern Co. Meath), about 20 miles south-west of Monasterboice.⁷⁹³ Dallbronach might have had links with Monasterboice, Flann might have had links with Ardraccan,⁷⁹⁴ or 'the place in which Flann was' might simply have been the

⁷⁹⁰ *Genealogical Tracts I*, ed. and trans. by Toirdhealbhach Ó Raithbheartaigh (Dublin: The Stationery Office, 1932), pp. 133–203 (§169 (pp. 181–82)); Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'Corrigenda to the Lecan Miscellany', *Éigse*, 17 (1978), 393–402.

⁷⁹¹ Stokes (ed. and trans.), *Lives*, pp. 35, 183; *Corpus Genealogiarum Sanctorum Hiberniae*, ed. by Pádraig Ó Riain (Dublin: DIAS, 1985) [hereafter, *CGSH*], §§2.1 (p. 3), 722.4 (pp. 169–70); Anne Connon, 'Prosopography II: A Prosopography of the Early Queens of Tara', in *The Kingship and Landscape of Tara*, ed. by Edel Bhreathnach (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2005), pp. 225–360 (275–78).

⁷⁹² Ó Raithbheartaigh (ed. and trans.), *Genealogical Tracts I*, §169 (pp. 181–82): 'to the place where Fland Mainistrech was'.

⁷⁹³ *CGSH*, p. 321. Anne Connon has helpfully provided me with her unpublished study of the Ardraccan area: Anne Connon, 'The barony of Lower Navan' (unpublished report submitted to Meath County Council/National Roads Authority, 2010).

⁷⁹⁴ *The Martyrology of Óengus* ascribes Ardraccan's founder, St Ultán, a genealogy among the Ciannachta, implying some sort of medieval connection between the two foundations: *Féilire Óengusso Céili Dé: The Martyrology of Oengus the Culdee*, ed. and trans. by Whitley Stokes (London: The Henry Bradshaw Society, 1905), p. 202; Connon, 'Barony'.

wider region. In any case, his only relevance to the anecdote seems to be as a geographic indicator.

The second text relating Flann to this region is ‘Búa, ingen Rúadrach rúaid’,⁷⁹⁵ which appears in some *dindshenchas* collections.⁷⁹⁶ The poem comprises two aetiological narratives for Cnogba (Knowth) and one for Dubad (Dowth);⁷⁹⁷ one set among the early Gaídil, the others among the Túatha Dé Danann. Both places are Neolithic tumuli in the Boyne Valley, not far from Monasterboice. Cnogba was the kingdom of Brega’s titular centre under Síl nÁedo Sláine.⁷⁹⁸ The poem has an internal attribution to ‘Flann’ and simple attributions to ‘Flann file’ (*YBL*; Gwynn’s Y) and Flann mac Lonáin (later manuscripts).⁷⁹⁹ The latter attribution has met with scepticism, as the poem is in Middle Gaelic,⁸⁰⁰ and Carey has suggested that this ‘Flann’ is to be understood as Flann Mainistrech.⁸⁰¹ While the genre is not alien to him (2:2.2.1), this emendation remains speculative. If it is accepted, then Flann at some point came to be associated with north Brega’s legends and toponymy, although he was later to become disassociated from them again.

2.2.3 Armagh politics

Flann’s association with Armagh is celebrated in a probably near-contemporary poem (1:3), hinted at in his chronicle obits (1.2), and corroborated by historical context. In *Lec.*, we find a poem attributed to ‘Fland’ which seems to arise out of a dispute between Armagh and Emly, one of Munster’s leading ecclesiastical centres.

‘Muintir Pádraig na paiter’ lists St Patrick’s seventy-two companions and their various roles in his household.⁸⁰² In *Lec.*, it is part of the *Senchas Naem Érenn*,⁸⁰³ a collection of genealogies and other materials relating to Irish saints, following a much shorter prose list of twenty-four individuals,⁸⁰⁴ several versions of

⁷⁹⁵ *MD*, III, 40–47; Carey, *Celtic Heroic Age*, p. 133.

⁷⁹⁶ *MD*, V, 36–37.

⁷⁹⁷ The text only mentions Dubad after emendation: Byrne, ‘Historical Note’, p. 387.

⁷⁹⁸ Byrne, ‘Historical Note’, pp. 383–440.

⁷⁹⁹ *MD*, III, 488.

⁸⁰⁰ *IHK*, p. 406; Byrne, ‘Historical Note’, p. 386.

⁸⁰¹ Carey, *Celtic Heroic Age*, p. 133.

⁸⁰² *CGSH*, §672 (pp. 119–22).

⁸⁰³ *Lec.*, fols 34^{ra}1–52^{vb}10; this is the compilation edited, from various recensions and manuscripts, in Ó Riain (ed.), *CGSH*.

⁸⁰⁴ *CGSH*, §671 (pp. 118–19).

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which appear elsewhere.⁸⁰⁵ It is introduced, ‘conad do chuimnedad na n-anmand sin 7 aesa uird Phatraic adbert Flann,’ an internal attribution to ‘Flann’ appears in the final quatrain,⁸⁰⁶ and the poem appears in later manuscripts attributed explicitly to Flann Mainistrech (5:2.1.2).

Ó Riain rejected this attribution for no clear reason, suggesting instead that a ‘clue to the real poet’s period may be contained in the allusions in [q.] 2 but, unfortunately, these are obscure’.⁸⁰⁷ Q. 2 addresses the poem to Clothna mac Máil Enaig. Byrne has since proposed identifying this individual with Clothna Muimnech, St Ailbe’s *comarba* at Emly (1046 – *ob.* 1048),⁸⁰⁸ corroborating Flann’s authorship. Yet Byrne also rejects the attribution, branding the poem a ‘pedestrian list [...] hardly worthy of Flann’.⁸⁰⁹ It is unclear why both scholars are so certain that Flann Mainistrech was not the author.

For Byrne, the poem was composed in response to Clothna’s ‘aspersions on the abbatial court at Armagh’.⁸¹⁰ Indeed, information on Patrick’s household is relevant to Armagh’s relations with Munster elsewhere. A list appended to the late ninth-century *Vita Tripartita Patrici* in Egerton 93 places the information in exactly this context.⁸¹¹

Ocus is íat sin lín dlegar i n-óentaíd Iosep 7 is é lín dlegar im méis ríg Caisil o re Feidlimid maicc Crimthain ille .i. rí da chóicced Mumun 7 rl.⁸¹²

Stokes identifies Joseph as the abbot of Armagh who died in 945 (*recte* 936).⁸¹³ Feidlimid mac Crimthainn (*ob.* 847), king of Munster, was heavily involved in

⁸⁰⁵ *LL*, VI, p. 1584; *RIA* 23.P.16, p. 23.6–17; *UM*, fol. 53ra22; *Bethu Phátraic: The Tripartite Life of Patrick*, ed. by Kathleen Mulchrone (Dublin: RIA, 1939), ll. 3122–46 (p. 155). See also James F. Kenney, *Sources for the Early History of Ireland: Ecclesiastical* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1929), p. 346; *CGSH*, p. 213.

⁸⁰⁶ *CGSH*, §§672, 672.30 (pp. 119, 122): ‘so it is to remember those names and the ordained companies of Patrick that Flann said’ (my translation).

⁸⁰⁷ *CGSH*, p. 213.

⁸⁰⁸ Byrne, ‘Ireland’, p. 865; *AI* 1046.2, 1048.3; *AU* 1048.3.

⁸⁰⁹ Byrne, ‘Ireland’, p. 865.

⁸¹⁰ Byrne, ‘Ireland’, p. 865.

⁸¹¹ London, BL, MS Egerton 93, *saec.* XV.

⁸¹² *The Tripartite Life of Patrick*, ed. and trans. by Whitley Stokes (H. M. Stationery Office: London, 1887), pp. 264–67: ‘And that is the number that should be in Joseph’s company, and it is the number that should be at the King of Cashel’s table down from the time of Feidlimid son of Crimthann, king of the two provinces of Munster &c’; Mulchrone (ed.), *Bethu*, ll. 3144–46 (p. 155).

⁸¹³ Stokes, *Tripartite Life*, p. 367 (n. 7), although see Frederic Mac Donncha, ‘Dáta Vita Tripartita Sancti Patricii’, *Éigse*, 18 (1980), 125–42 (p. 125).

ecclesiastical politics and seems to have allied with Armagh or certain factions therein.⁸¹⁴ The modelling of the king of Munster's court on Patrick's household, perhaps implying that he is equal to Patrick's *comarba* in status, may have arisen out of such a context.

Meanwhile, in 'Muintir Pádraig na paiter', the implied relationship with Munster has changed. Patrick's (much-expanded) household is apparently more impressive than anything Clothna can muster.

Ge dagne tolach am' thig,
a Chlothna meic Mail Enaig,
mo sa munter sa, ni brég
do Deochain mac Britniet.⁸¹⁵

Thus, if this is Flann Mainistrech, and he can be legitimately read as such, then we find him playing his familiar role of cataloguing and versifying information concerning a defined set of historical characters. On the other hand, the poem is deeply embedded in the context of Armagh politics, addressing a specific institutional relationship and employing and possibly adapting the discourse in which that relationship had traditionally been articulated. Such a close interest on Flann's part in Armagh's affairs is corroboratable by early evidence but attested here in the form of a text under his name for the first time.

2.3 World history

Expertise is ascribed to Flann on matters beyond Ireland entirely and concerned with the classical and biblical past. This expertise embraces not only Eusebian world-history, through 'Réidig dam, a Dé, do nim' (4:2.3.1), but also classical literature (4:2.3.2) and biblical apocrypha (4:2.3.3). In addition, not only does the subject-matter vary but also the contexts in which it is associated with Flann.

⁸¹⁴ Damian Bracken, 'Feidlimid mac Crimthainn (d. 847)', *ODNB*

<<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/50110>> [accessed 18 November 2014].

⁸¹⁵ *CGSH*, §672.2 (p. 119): 'Although you make [your] house multitudinous, | Clothna mac Mail Enaig, | greater this household here, no lie, | of Deochan mac Britneit' (my translation). Ó Riain (*CGSH*, p. 213) suggests that '.h. Deochain' ('the descendant of the deacon'; §672.3 (p. 119)), in the following quatrain, is Patrick. Patrick's father, Calpurnius, was indeed a deacon, although why this should be Calpurnius' household is not clear. Also, Calpurnius' father was Potitus (Gaelic: Fotach).

2.3.1 ‘Réidig dam, a Dé, do nim’: independent versions

‘Réidig dam, a Dé, do nim’ appears independently of *LGÉ* in *UM* and *Lec.* (Mac Airt’s H and, partially, L; Schmidt’s *UM* and *Lc2*; see **Appendix 9**),⁸¹⁶ as part of collections of material on world history in each case. Pointing out these versions’ similarities and their shared readings with *AI*’s citations (**2:6.3.2**), Schmidt suggests that they belong to an earlier independent recension.⁸¹⁷ I am not in a position to discuss every variant, but some do relate directly to the poem’s presentation of Flann’s author-figure. For the independent versions’ wider context, see **4:3.2**.

The *UM* version – transcribed by Adam Cusin – adds the superscription ‘Fland Mainisdreach cecinit’ (in Cusin’s hand) at the poem’s commencement.⁸¹⁸ The two independent versions also contain internal attributions to Flann Mainistrech within their conclusions, similar overall to those in *D* and *Lc1* (**3:2.1**, **Appendix 10.1**). They do, however, vary slightly. As we have discussed, *D* and *Lc1*’s line, ‘Flann feidbind romben bríg breath’, is taken by MacNeill as referring to the scholarly community’s approbation of Flann.⁸¹⁹ Hinging on the nasalising relative clause’s absence, this line, in *UM* and *Lc2*, could acclaim his discernment as a historian or as a compiler: ‘Flann féigbind ro-ben bríg mbreth’, which Thurneysen translates ‘der scharfsinnig-gesangreiche Flann, der wuchtige Urteile gefällt hat (?)’.⁸²⁰ There might be no difference between the readings, given Middle Gaelic’s loss of nasalising relatives, but this possibly meaningful variant illustrates the burden of interpretation that fell to later medieval scribes.

Otherwise, the conclusions to *UM* and *Lc2* include an extra quatrain.

Tri chét bliadan brethaib blat
is a cethair cethrachat
ó chond – is mórglicc in mod –
cen chronic do réidiugud.⁸²¹

⁸¹⁶ Schmidt, ‘Zu *Réidig*’, p. 212. Schmidt’s sigla are employed for the purposes of this discussion. For Mac Airt’s sigla, see **Appendix 9**.

⁸¹⁷ Schmidt, ‘Zu *Réidig*’, pp. 215–16.

⁸¹⁸ *UM*, fol. 44^{vb}1.

⁸¹⁹ MacNeill (ed. and trans.), ‘Irish historical tract’, p. 138: ‘Flann, sweet of voice, the strength of judgements hath sounded him’.

⁸²⁰ Thurneysen (ed. and trans.), ‘Flann Manistrech’s Gedicht’, p. 272: ‘the perceptive, rich-voiced Flann who passes mighty judgements’ (my translation of Thurneysen’s German; Thurneysen’s uncertainty).

⁸²¹ Thurneysen (ed. and trans.), ‘Flann Manistrech’s Gedicht’, q. X (pp. 271–72): ‘Three hundred years, by judgements of strengths, and forty-four from then onwards – the method is very cunning – without the elucidation of chronicling’ (my translation, based on Thurneysen).

This has generally been interpreted as dating the poem's composition to three hundred and forty-four years after its end. The poem ascribes nine years to its last world-king, Leo III. This comes to AD 726 in most Irish sources, giving 1070. However, it has been suggested that the poet may instead have taken Leo III's ninth year as 712, as Bede states that he is writing in Leo III's ninth year in *Chronica Maiora* and this work's completion is sometimes dated to 712, giving 1056, Flann's final year.⁸²² We have already discussed how the poem's conclusion locates its composition within Flann's professional life and historical context (3:3); the independent recension's extra quatrain attempts to take this to an even greater level of exactitude. It also tacitly establishes a specific relationship with Bede's *Chronica Maiora*, which we will discuss further below (4:3.1).

Finally, 'Réidig dam, a Dé, do nim' is cited in *In Cath Catharda*, the medieval Gaelic translation of Lucan's *Pharsalia*.⁸²³ This text is dated to the twelfth century but it is extant only in later medieval manuscripts. In an opening summary of the world-kingdoms, a quatrain from 'Réidig dam, a Dé, do nim' decorates its account of the Assyrians. Interestingly, as in *AI* and *LGÉ B* (2:6.3.2, 3:2.1), it is attributed to 'in fili'.

2.3.2 Classical studies: 'Luid Iasón ina luing lóir'

In terms of world history, elsewhere in late medieval manuscript tradition, we find Flann associated not just with Eusebian history but with adaptations and translations of classical literature. The sole copy of 'Luid Iasón ina luing lóir', in the fourteenth or fifteenth-century NLS Adv. 72.1.19,⁸²⁴ bears the simple superscription, 'Flann Mainistreach cecinit'. The poem narrates Jason's quest for the Golden Fleece and the various Trojan wars.⁸²⁵ It is related to the complex *Togail Troí* tradition,⁸²⁶ some

⁸²² Thurneysen, 'Flann Manistrech's Gedicht', pp. 396–97; O'Rahilly, *Early Irish History*, pp. 411–12; Schmidt, 'Zu Réidig', pp. 213–14; Evans, *Present*, p. 223.

⁸²³ 'In Cath Catharda: The Civil War of the Romans', ed. and trans. by Whitley Stokes in *Irische Texte*, ed. by Windisch and Stokes, IV:2, ll. 5–8 (pp. 2–3); Cillian O'Hogan, 'Reading Lucan with scholia in medieval Ireland: In Cath Catharda and its sources', *CMCS*, 68 (Winter 2014), 21–49 (p. 24). I am grateful to Ms Mariamne Briggs for alerting me to O'Hogan's article and to Diane-Myrick's comments both on the present poem (2:6.3) and on 'Luid Iasón ina luing lóir' (4:2.3.2).

⁸²⁴ Edinburgh, NLS Adv., MS 72.1.19, *saec.* XIV/XV.

⁸²⁵ Mac Eoin (ed. and trans.), 'Dán'.

⁸²⁶ Mac Eoin, 'Dán', pp. 20–27, 49; Diane-Myrick, *From the De Excidio*, p. 83; Miles, *Heroic Saga*, pp. 53–55, 73–74.

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recensions of which cite it.⁸²⁷ Its editor, Mac Eoin, rejects the attribution to Flann on linguistic and stylistic grounds, instead dating its composition to the twelfth century.⁸²⁸

Yet it is interesting that the attribution was made at all, as it implies that Flann gained a reputation in the interconnected literary and historical approach to classical texts and history that Miles has termed ‘medieval Irish classical studies’.⁸²⁹ Such interconnection is also evidenced in *In Cath Catharda*’s use of ‘Réidig dam, a Dé, do nim’ (4:2.3.1). ‘Luid Iasón ina luing lóir’, while technically about world history, makes no mention of the world-kingships and shows no interest in chronology. It is a narrative, with some embedded data (qq. 37–46), although this is normal for the *Togail Troí* tradition.⁸³⁰ Thus, ‘Réidig dam, a Dé, do nim’ does not constitute a close analogy for the attribution, as if it were based on a broader conception of Flann’s expertise that extended beyond regnal histories.⁸³¹ Alternatively, his expertise may have remained focused on history, in the citator’s mind, and the attribution to him might be intended to imply that the material contained within the poem is indeed history (*historia* rather than *fabula*), since Flann composed it.⁸³²

The provenance and basis of the attribution of ‘Luid Iasón ina luing lóir’ to Flann can never be known for certain. It is possible, however, that the poem once appeared in *UM*. This would be significant, as the poem would then have been in the same codex as ‘Réidig dam, a Dé, do nim’. If ‘Luid Iasón ina luing lóir’ was attributed to Flann there too (this cannot be known), then *UM* would have presented two approaches to world history as taken by the same author-figure.

UM shed folios throughout its history, even after the manuscript entered Sir James Ware’s library in the seventeenth century.⁸³³ An anonymous Gaelic-language

⁸²⁷ Mac Eoin, ‘Dán’, pp. 25–29, 35; **LR:3.2.2**.

⁸²⁸ Mac Eoin, ‘Dán’, pp. 27–28.

⁸²⁹ Miles, *Heroic Saga*, pp. 245–49.

⁸³⁰ Miles, *Heroic Saga*, pp. 102–05.

⁸³¹ Cf. Ní Mhaonaigh, ‘Flann’, p. 304.

⁸³² For a summary of discussion on the critical categorisation of Classical material as *historia* in medieval Ireland, see Burnyeat “Wrenching”, pp. 206–07; Erich Poppe, ‘*Imtheachta Aeniasa* and its place in medieval Irish textual history’, in *Classical Literature*, ed. by O’Connor, pp. 25–39 (25).

⁸³³ *Roderick O’Flaherty’s Letters to William Molyneux, Edward Lhuyd and Samuel Molyneux 1676–1709*, ed. by Richard Sharpe (Dublin: RIA, 2013), p. 36.

catalogue of its contents was made before this further loss occurred.⁸³⁴ This was translated into Latin, with additional notes, by Fr John Colgan (*ob.* 1658),⁸³⁵ although without direct access to the manuscript.⁸³⁶ Among the now-lost folios at the end of the manuscript, we find mention of an account of the quest for the Golden Fleece: ‘Sgéul an Chroicinn Órdha’ (‘Narratio ceu fabula Velleris Aurei’). This might be ‘Luid Iasón ina luing lóir’. Even though the poem is largely concerned with the Trojan wars, it opens with the quest for the Golden Fleece. *UM*’s cataloguer elsewhere judges a poem’s subject-matter by its opening when he lists ‘Clanna Israél uli’ as ‘Imthechta no eachtra chloinne hIsraehel’;⁸³⁷ it is actually about the beheading of John the Baptist.⁸³⁸ He also fails to distinguish prose and verse: ‘Atá sund senchas na seang’, a poem attributed to Benen (St Benignus), is listed as ‘Senchus Bhinéin ar shocharaibh Átha Clíath 7 ar imthechtaibh Padruig 7 créd uma ttugadh Áth Clíath ar an mbaile’.⁸³⁹ Furthermore, *UM* contains all four other poems recognisable within NLS Adv. 72.1.19, a badly damaged, isolated gathering.⁸⁴⁰ Future close editorial work would show whether they are actually closely related to their *UM* counterparts.

On the whole, a *UM* version of ‘Luid Iasón ina luing lóir’ closely related to the version in NLS Adv. 72.1.19 seems quite likely. If the *UM* version was also attributed to Flann Mainistrech, then the manuscript would have presented him as a widely-read authority on world history, both in the Eusebian tradition and through literary works, if, indeed, such a distinction was made at all.

2.3.3 Tara and society’s universalised foundations

Within another text, uniquely preserved in *UM*, we encounter Flann discoursing on yet another aspect of world history. In ‘Aenach Teamra na n-ocht n-ech’ (**Appendix 21**), he is a source of biblical apocrypha, specifically ‘foundational history’, that is,

⁸³⁴ Flower (ed.), *BL Cat.*, II, 602.

⁸³⁵ Charles MacNeill (ed.), ‘Rawlinson Manuscripts: Class B.’, *Analecta Hibernica*, 1 (1930), 118–78 (pp. 145–46).

⁸³⁶ O’Sullivan, ‘Book’, p. 154.

⁸³⁷ ‘the travels or the journey of the children of Israel’ (my translation).

⁸³⁸ ‘The Beheading of John the Baptist by Mog Ruith’, ed. and trans. by Annie M. Scarre, *Ériu*, 4 (1910), 173–81.

⁸³⁹ ‘Benén’s history of the revenues of Dublin and of the adventures of Patrick and how the town came to be called Áth Clíath’ (my translation); *Lebor na Cert: The Book of Rights*, ed. and trans. by Myles Dillon (Dublin: ITS, 1962), pp. 114–19.

⁸⁴⁰ Black, ‘Catalogue’.

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the first examples of particular crafts, constructions, acts, or institutions.⁸⁴¹ Also, as in ‘Airgialla ardmóra uaisli’ and ‘Scela cluana clog mbind’ (4:2.1.6.1–2), he is an interlocutor within the text, rather than the purported author of it. In this particular dialogic encounter with Flann, however, a relatively detailed setting is provided.

‘Aenach Teamra na n-ocht n-ech’ follows on immediately from ‘Scela cluana clog mbind’ in fol. 56^r;⁸⁴² the potential relevance of this context is discussed below (4:3.2). It bears no superscription but has thrice been described as being by Flann Mainistrech.⁸⁴³ This is unlikely. The language seems like a later form of Middle Gaelic; there are no infixed pronouns, for example. Also, as far as I am aware, there are no other examples of a medieval Gaelic poet including themselves by name as a third-person character in their work.

The poem is in three parts. In Part 1 (qq. 1–7), Flann delivers a series of quatrains on customs associated with the *oenach Temra* (‘assembly of Tara’). In Part 2 (qq. 8–20), he is asked seventeen questions on foundational history. In Part 3 (qq. 21–35), he responds to all seventeen questions,⁸⁴⁴ and then names himself and a certain Máel Sechnaill as interlocutors (q. 36). Given Flann Mainistrech’s involvement and the Tara material, this is probably Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill (*ob.* 1022), the ‘last’ king of Ireland without oppositon. Furthermore, q. 1 is addressed ‘a rí’ (‘o king’). There is, however, no apparatus designating speakers in the manuscript. In one exception, Part 1 ends on a marked *dúnad* (q. 7) and q. 8’s initial ‘M’ is slightly emphasised. Part 3’s beginning is unmarked but q. 36 ends on ‘aenach’, meaning that the poem was transcribed as one work.

⁸⁴¹ Martha Bayless, ‘The *Collectanea* and Medieval Dialogue and Riddles’, in *Collectanea Pseudo-Bedae*, ed. by Martha Bayless and Michael Lapidge, *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae* 14 (Dublin: DIAS, 1998), 13–24 (p. 23).

⁸⁴² Currently unedited; *UM*, fol. 56^{ra}27–56^{rb}20.

⁸⁴³ *The Book of Uí Maine, with Introduction and Indexes: Collotype Facsimile*, facs. ed. by Robert A. S. Macalister (Dublin: RIA, 1941), p. 10; Mulchrone, *RIA Cat.*, fasc. XXVI, 3337; Carey, ‘Flann’.

⁸⁴⁴ Two marginal notes closely resembling his responses in qq. 23 and 25 occur in BL Harley 5280 (Flower, *BL Cat.*, II, 322–23). Furthermore, a quatrain closely akin to q. 30 appears in the unedited, anonymous, apparently late medieval poem, ‘Fuarus i Saltair Chaisil’ (RIA D.iv.2, fol. 1^v6 and in later manuscripts); the same quatrain is also quoted, from ‘Fuarus i Saltair Chaisil’, by Keating (⁸⁴⁴ *The History of Ireland by Geoffrey Keating*, ed. and trans. by David Comyn and Patrick S. Dineen, 4 vols (London: ITS, 1902–1914), I, 138–39). For this poem, see Ó Riain, ‘Psalter’, p. 107. The appearance of a quatrain from this poem in the mouth of Flann Mainistrech in ‘Aenach Temra na n-ocht n-ech’ is surely relevant to the question of whether the historical Flann used *Saltair Caisil* (1:4, 4:2.14, 6:3.2.2).

The point being made in Part 1 is not obvious. It seems to offer pseudo-historical fragments concerning the relationship between the king of Tara, the *oenach Temra*, and Ireland's provincial kings: qq. 1–3 are about the horses traditionally brought by the latter to the *oenach*, which had been established by Túathal Techtmar, while qq. 4–7 mention the birth of Tuathal's great-great-grandson, Cormac mac Airt, his exile from Tara in Achall, and a confrontation with Medb Lethderg that prevented him from entering the *oenach Temra*. In less laconic accounts elsewhere, this Medb is one of Art's wives. She seizes the kingship of Tara after Art's death on behalf of the Laigin, defeating Cormac and driving him into exile. He is only able to claim Tara through marrying her (possibly referenced in q. 5).⁸⁴⁵ His exile at Achall, in other sources,⁸⁴⁶ concludes his reign, so the quatrains do not appear to track events chronologically.

Máel Sechnaill then asks Flann seventeen questions, mostly concerning the first example of a particular type of craftsman or the first occasion something was made or built. All of Flann's answers come from the Book of Genesis or associated apocrypha and commentary. In the only question of specifically Irish interest, Máel Sechnaill asks who was the first to visit Ireland and Flann replies that it was Cain's three daughters, accompanied by Seth (qq. 18, 30). The poem is akin in form and topic to other metrical Middle Gaelic question-and-answer dialogues on apocrypha,⁸⁴⁷ although both the focus on foundational history and the explicit setting are distinctive features.

The expertise attributed to Flann in this text is presented explicitly as world history. Both Máel Sechnaill and Flann repeatedly emphasise that they are speaking in terms of 'the east' ('tair'), 'the world' ('doman'), and 'the seed of Adam' ('do shíl Adaim'). Yet it is world history distinct, again, from 'Réidig dam, a Dé, do nim' (3:2.1, 4:2.3.1) and 'Luid Iasón ina luing lóir' (4:2.4.2) and closer to Ireland's early medieval traditions of literal biblical exegesis.⁸⁴⁸ The aspects of the universal past on

⁸⁴⁵ Tomás Ó Cathasaigh, *The Heroic Biography of Cormac Mac Airt* (Dublin: DIAS, 1977), pp. 72–85; Byrnes, 'Edition', pp. 96–98.

⁸⁴⁶ Ó Cathasaigh, *Heroic Biography*, p. 69.

⁸⁴⁷ 'Das Gedicht der vierzig Fragen von Eochaid ua Céirín', ed. and trans. by Rudolf Thurneysen, *ZCP*, 13 (1921), 130–36; Tristram, *Sex Aetates Mundi*, pp. 285–93; *LL*, III, ll. 17735–86 (pp. 574–75); Miles, *Heroic Saga*, p. 48; Burnyeat, "'Wrenching,'" pp. 203–05.

⁸⁴⁸ For which, see Bernhard Bischoff, 'Turning-Points in the History of Latin Exegesis in the Early Middle Ages', trans. by Colm O'Grady in *Biblical Studies: The Medieval Irish Contribution*, ed. by

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which Flann comes to be presented as an authority have thus grown more diverse still.

The setting for Flann and Máel Sechnaill's dialogue is traditional in many respects. In medieval Gaelic literature and beyond, a question-and-answer dialogue between a king and a sage often frames legal and gnomic material,⁸⁴⁹ although Máel Sechnaill is better known for his somewhat more testy confrontations with Mac Coise.⁸⁵⁰ The scope of the dialogue's subject-matter might be universal, but it is also potentially rooted in the traditions of its Irish geographical setting. Tara is frequently presented as a gathering place for professionals and craftsmen, almost a microcosm of society, and as a venue for formative, aetiological dialogues.⁸⁵¹

Yet, despite the presence of generic elements, the text also hints at a specific context for these characters' dialogue. Máel Sechnaill makes much of Flann, repeatedly addressing him by name and using honorifics, such as 'senchaid gan go' (q. 14; 'unlying historian'). In the final quatrain, Flann describes himself as 'ard-ollam Eireann' ('Ireland's arch-*ollam*') and states that he has entered the 'aenach' (q. 36), presumably the *oenach Temra* from Part 1. The impression is that the dialogue is taking place at a public occasion at Tara, Flann's presence possibly being related to his success in answering the king's questions. Thus, the poem does not just embed learned apocrypha within a traditional setting but seems to imply a narrative context involving Flann that the reader is expected to appreciate. This raises the intriguing possibility that some medieval scholars felt they had a detailed and specific understanding of Flann's biography or at least some conception of the settings in which he might appropriately be placed.

Indeed, aspects of this poem's narrative setting echo material related to Flann in pre-1200 manuscripts. Not only does the Tara Diptych imply a special relationship between Flann and Máel Sechnaill (2:3.3.3) but 'Druim Cetta, cette na noem' ultimately asserts the Ciannachta's right to enter Tara (2:2.3) and this is what Flann seems to have accomplished in the present poem. Furthermore, *Echtra Thaidg mheic*

Martin McNamara (Dublin: Irish Biblical Association, 1976; first publ. 1954 [German]), 74–160;

Claire Stancliffe, 'Early "Irish" Biblical Exegesis', *Studia Patristica*, 12 (1975), 361–70.

⁸⁴⁹ Yocum, 'Wisdom' pp. 43–51.

⁸⁵⁰ O'Leary, 'Identities', pp. 61–63.

⁸⁵¹ *MD*, I, 14–27 (qq. 3–7 (pp. 14–17)); Tomás Ó Maille, 'Medb Chruachna', *ZCP*, 17 (1928), 129–46 (pp. 137–38); Downey, 'Life', pp. 58–60; Clodagh Downey, 'Dindshenchas and the Tech Midchúarta', *Ériu*, 60 (2010), 1–35; Nagy, *Conversing*, pp. 4–7.

Chein appears to bind the Ciannachta to the proto-Uí Néill via Tadhg's insights into the dynasty's transcendent legitimacy (4:2.2.1.3). The poem might thus derive from specific traditions concerning Flann's career. It could also be placed alongside the evidence we have surveyed (4:2.2.1) for Flann maintaining a lasting association with the history and politics of the Ciannachta.

2.4 Flann's late medieval manuscript material: conclusion

When we consider the topics covered by texts directly attributed to Flann or the expertise indirectly associated with him in later medieval manuscripts, they are evidently much wider than what is attested in the four pre-1200 manuscripts or in *LGÉ*. The material does not necessarily need to be divided the way it is here, according to political factions and geography. Categories could instead have been created based on manuscript or on genre, 'the Ulster Cycle' or 'Hagiography', for example. Nonetheless, however they are divided up, these materials give an impression of more diverse work and points of relevance being imputed to Flann.

It should thus perhaps be of concern that later medieval manuscript materials have received significantly less attention in modern studies relating to Flann (LR:3.2.2), particularly those not directly attributed to him. We have identified some instances where Flann's testimony seems to have been manipulated or contextualised according to the agenda of a later poet or compiler (e.g. 4:2.1.5–6). However, we have also identified material attributed to Flann that correlates so well with early sources relating to him that its faithful derivation from much earlier traditions should be considered (e.g. 4:2.2, 4:2.3.3). Yet its ultimate provenance is uncertain.

3 The late medieval Flann

We will now consider, as in previous chapters, Flann's author-figure, the interaction of texts associated with him with their manuscript contexts, and his influence on compositions preserved in later medieval manuscripts. Given the quantity and diversity of the material covered in this chapter, this not a comprehensive survey but an exploration of points of particular interest.

3.1 Flann's author-figure

As presented in later medieval manuscript materials, Flann's author-figure is in several respects recognisable, as compared to some of the sources analysed in **Chapters 1–3**. Given the number of references to Flann which do not involve the attribution to him of specific texts, 'author-figure' here also covers how he is presented under such circumstances.

Just as *fer léiginn* is one of the most enduring elements across his chronicle obits (**1:2.2.1**), we still find Flann presented as a reader or a compiler. Indeed, the *ANÍ* colophon, one of the most detailed such depictions, continued to be of relevance, as we have seen (**4:2.1.5**). This is also a feature of his presentation in some texts appearing for the first time in later medieval manuscripts.

As discussed (**4:2.1.3**), the reference to Flann in 'Conall cuingid clainne Néill' resembles the *ANÍ* colophon particularly closely, in that Flann is at Monasterboice, gathering information alongside a colleague. The sources they used are not actually mentioned. However, they are counting ('rim') Conall's battles, so it is implied that they used multiple sources, which, given the ecclesiastical setting, are probably to be taken as texts. In the section on Conall's battles, the information is stated to be 'mar indisit na hugdair'.⁸⁵² Who the *ugdair* might be depends on how one interprets the reference to Flann and Óengus. If they composed the poem, as Rawl.B.514's simple attribution partially implies, these could be the authorities that they used as sources. If they composed a battle-list later used by the poem's composer, they themselves might be the *ugdair*. Either way, the poem is framed as the synthesis of multiple authorities.

In 'Aenach Teamra na n-ocht n-ech' (**4:2.3.3**), Flann breaks off from answering Máel Sechnaill's questions for one quatrain to allude to the intellectual context out of which his responses arise (q. 29).

Dim-sa dlear anois
ni ceasta and dindnisin
mar fuilgeas in scribt gan ceas
.i. fuilleis in seancas.⁸⁵³

⁸⁵² Hennessy and Kelly (ed. and trans), *Book of Fenagh*, pp. 330–31: 'as the authors do relate'.

⁸⁵³ 'I am now obliged | to relate some problems here, | just as the writing ceaselessly endures, | that is, as the *senchas* increases' (my translation).

Flann appears to state that his knowledge of foundational history is derived from texts and that study of such texts expands communal historical knowledge ('seancas'). Thus, despite the quasi-oral dialogue setting and Máel Sechnaill's references to Flann's personal prowess, in this literary portrayal, he is presented as a reader.

Finally, I have suggested (3:3) that *LGÉ*'s recension of 'Réidig dam, a Dé, do nim' isolates Flann as the text's originator in order to underline the poem's foundational status. The extra quatrain (4:2.3.1) within the independent recension's conclusion somewhat qualifies this reading. The three hundred and forty-four years from Bede's supposed completion of *Chronica Maiora* to Flann's composition of the poem are described therein as 'cen chronic do réidiugud'.⁸⁵⁴ This presents Flann as Bede's epitomiser and commentator or as elucidator of chronicling in general.⁸⁵⁵ His task is still difficult and, as supposedly the first to undertake such work in some time, he is still important. However, his importance now derives from successfully interpreting and summarising an existing text or wider tradition and thus empowering future scholars.⁸⁵⁶

Reference continues to be made to the relevance of Flann's work to wider society. This is portrayed most dramatically in Flann's apparently public scholarly duet with Máel Sechnaill at Tara in 'Aenach Teamra na n-ocht n-ech'. Of more questionable pertinence to Flann Mainistrech (4:2.2.2), 'Búa, ingen Rúadrach rúaid' twice calls for the *dindsenchas* it contains to be publicised widely.⁸⁵⁷ 'A liubair atá ar do lár', also of questionable pertinence (4:2.1.3), directly prescribes political and diplomatic arrangements and thus invites interest from wider elite society. Finally, although without mentioning Flann, Giolla Íosa Mór Mac Fírbisigh references *ANÍ*'s content in 'Iomdha gabhlán do chloinn Chuinn', which was quite possibly actually performed in public (4:2.1.5).

⁸⁵⁴ Thurneysen (ed.), 'Flann Manistrech's Gedicht', q. X (pp. 271–72): 'without the elucidation of chronicling' (my translation).

⁸⁵⁵ For a later association of Flann with *croinic*, see 5:3.1.

⁸⁵⁶ For the justification derived by Anglo-Norman writers from the post-Bedan 'historiographical sleep', see Antonia Gransden, *Legends, Traditions and History in Medieval England* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1992), pp. 148–49.

⁸⁵⁷ *MD*, III, pp. 42–47 (qq. 11, 22).

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As we have discussed, much of Flann's material here is highly politicised but this is often less to do with statements made within texts attributed to him, as in pre-1200 manuscripts (2:3.3), but rather with how the material is presented and used. For example, the 'books of Flann Mainistrech' were probably not as supportive of Uí Dhiarmata as is made out (4:2.1.4), and Flann's apparent contribution to 'Airgialla ardmóra uaisli' itself consists of fairly neutral background information (4:2.1.6.1). On the other hand, in 'Muintir Pádraig na paiter', Flann does not simply assert Armagh's general status but engages with an apparently very specific, contentious, if also opaque, issue (4:2.2.3).

In another dimension, Flann is not just a reader but also someone who is read, an audience member that has indeed become an *auctor*.⁸⁵⁸ 'Réidig dam, a Dé, do nim' presents Flann as both facing the task of elucidating the history of the world-kingship and performing that elucidation for others. In three poems in *UM* – 'Airgialla ardmóra uaisli', 'Scela cluana na clog mbind', and 'Aenach Teamra na nocht n-ech' (4:2.1.6.1–2, 4:2.3.3) – no specific text is attributed to Flann. Instead, he is presented to us already being consulted as an authority, although something more complex might be going on in the latter poem. Also relevant in this regard are the two instances in which Flann is cited via the *do réir* ('according to') construction (4:2.1.1.2, 4:2.1.5; see also 3:2.2), as if it is not his exact words that are being supplied but his ideas or principles, which can circulate independent of his texts.

Both types of evidence suggest that a conception existed of Flann, behind his direct work, as an identifiable intellectual entity. His name was not just a piece of information that travelled with some texts; it denoted a commonly understood set of interests and expertises. Indeed, the quantity of material we have examined that correlates with the historical Flann's known connections suggests that his identity was biographical, as well as intellectual.

In contrast, the Uí Dhiarmata colophon and, possibly, 'A liubair atá ar do lár' present Flann's work within physical books. These references seem to emphasise that he is to be accessed precisely through his physically preserved texts and implicitly call into question whether he can be accessed as a personality, as the *UM* poems imply. In a further complication, what it might have meant for Flann to be preserved

⁸⁵⁸ Cf. Scowcroft, 'Leabhar Gabhála II', p. 65 (n. 173).

in a book is also ambiguous. On the one hand, ‘A liubair atá ar do lár’ presents its book as highly authoritative. On the other, from the Uí Dhiarmata colophon (*Lec.*), our first impression might be that the ‘books of Flann Mainistrech’ have joined a library of venerable, ancient codices. Yet the books alongside which they appear actually meet with a mixed reception elsewhere. Toner observes that one, *Cín Dromma Snechtai*, often appears supplying variant versions rather than main narratives,⁸⁵⁹ although the frequency of its citations by name imply it still carried prestige. Citations of another item from the colophon, *Saltair Caisil*, appear throughout medieval and immediately post-medieval Irish sources.⁸⁶⁰ However, Jaski has shown that it too often provoked dissent.⁸⁶¹ *Lebor Dúin Dá Leathglas* (‘the book of Downpatrick’) is otherwise unknown. Two out of the four codices are thus famous and citable, but also debatable, suggesting that Flann Mainistrech’s books might also have been approached critically.

The contrast between these different types of citation suggests that medieval Gaelic scholars engaged in active, critical consideration of engagement with author-figures. It is also worth recalling that most of the medieval Irish chronicles, as now extant, were physically compiled during this period (1:2.1). Flann’s obits therein have been shown to be based on earlier material, but later medieval chroniclers still decided to reproduce the complex variety of terminology describing Flann that we have already examined.

3.2 References to Flann in context

Many of the items considered here appear within prosimetric works or consist of citations of Flann within other texts. They thus play the role of supporting and illustrating subsequent compositions, as in *LGÉ* (3:4). Independent material associated with Flann is also often set thematically within a wider manuscript context. For example, ‘Airgialla ardmóra uaisli’ appears as part of *UM*’s interlocking series of poems on the history, recent and ancient, of the Ó Ceallaigh dynasty, the manuscript’s patrons, back to their purported ancestors, the Airgialla (4:2.1.6).

⁸⁵⁹ Toner, ‘Authority’, p. 71.

⁸⁶⁰ Ó Riain, ‘Psalter’.

⁸⁶¹ Jaski, ‘Genealogical section’, pp. 304–17.

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Similarly, in Rawl.B.514, ‘Conall cuingid clainne Néill’ initiates an extended historical *dúanaire* on that manuscript’s patrons, the Uí Dhomhnaill (4:2.1.3). While containing less material explicitly about them, the Donegal Series in *Fen.* is also related to Ó Domhnaill interests.⁸⁶² *ANÍ B*², under Flann’s name, supplies a pseudo-historical introduction to Uí Fhiachrach or Uí Dhubhda’s genealogies (4:2.1.5). In each case, the running theme is an elite dynasty’s history, with Flann’s contribution specifically concerning that dynasty’s ultimate ancestor-figure(s).

We have considered the significance of ‘Réidig dam, a Dé, do nim’ (3:3, 4:2.3.1), ‘Scela cluana clog mbind’ (4:2.1.6.2), and ‘Aenach Teamra na n-ocht n-ech’ (4:2.3.3) as individual texts. All three also interlink with their manuscript context in a scheme seemingly orchestrated by Adam Cusin, the manuscript’s ‘architect’.⁸⁶³ They appear within gatherings 9–11 (fols 39–56); the first two are quaternions, the latter a bifolium of which only the latter folio remains. These are summarised in **Appendix 22**.

Concentrating on the two quaternions for now, gathering 9 was written by Adam Cusin, gathering 10 by Faelán Mac a Gabann na Scél (*ob.* 1423). Faelán seems to have written slightly earlier (1378x1392) than Adam (1392x1407), who integrated Faelán’s quaternion (gathering 10) into the manuscript via the addition of a catchword.⁸⁶⁴ Each quaternion includes material on medieval universal history, among which is found Flann’s ‘Réidig dam, a Dé, do nim’ (gathering 9; 4:2.3.1). Each also includes material on famous women from various historical traditions. Indeed, this seems to have been a particular interest of Faelán’s, as a simple superscription names him as the author of ‘Adham ar n-athair uile’, as transcribed by Adam, within gathering 9. Faelán’s poem is introduced as a response to the *Banshenchas*,⁸⁶⁵ which also appears in its metrical form in gathering 9.⁸⁶⁶ While the metrical *Banshenchas* mostly concentrates on women from Irish history, Faelán’s poem is about biblical and classical women.

⁸⁶² Simms, ‘Donegal poems’, p. 39.

⁸⁶³ O’Sullivan, ‘Book’, p. 156.

⁸⁶⁴ O’Sullivan, ‘Book’, pp. 155, 159.

⁸⁶⁵ *UM*, fol. 47^{rb}11–13.

⁸⁶⁶ Muireann Ní Bhrolcháin, ‘The manuscript tradition of the *Banshenchas*’, *Ériu*, 33 (1982), 109–35 (pp. 109–18).

‘Réidig dam, a Dé, do nim’ includes some diversions on women, such as the Amazons, Esther, and Judith.⁸⁶⁷ It might be included here for those diversions but it seems more likely that it is meant to constitute a parallel, masculine history of the world-kingship, which is its central theme and which is also followed consistently in *Adam primus pater* (gathering 10; **6:3.1.1**).⁸⁶⁸ Indeed, many of these catalogue and chronicle texts seem to form an interconnected network. *Adam primus pater* synchronises Ireland’s kings and other characters from Irish history with the world-kings and selected events in sacred history, the series of world-kings corroborated in ‘Réidig dam, a Dé, do nim’. One could thus synchronise an Irish king’s wife in the *Banshenchas* with a world-king, for example. In addition, two tracts in Faelán’s gathering 10 concern mothers from Irish and world history.

Even though they are technically presented independently in the manuscript, the synchronistic use of these texts in conjunction with one another is very inviting. Flann’s account of the world-kingship is thus one of several catalogues of characters that *UM*’s compilers read as an interconnected history and, in at least one case, supplemented with their own work. Flann’s contribution is important therein, but, alone, it far from satisfied the compilers’ curiosity and ambitions.

‘Scela cluana clog mbind’ and ‘Aenacha Teamra na n-ocht n-ech’ might also relate to this section of *UM*. The last item in Faelán’s gathering 10 is the *Senchas Naem Érenn* (**4:2.2.3**). His version thereof is apparently complete, as it ends on fol. 55^v with a short colophon in which Faelán names himself as the gathering’s scribe.⁸⁶⁹ After that comes a bifolium inserted by Adam (gathering 11), of which only fol. 56 (containing both our poems) remains. However, as O’Sullivan points out,⁸⁷⁰ Adam’s catchword on fol. 55^v links to fol. 76^{ra}1 (i.e. gathering 15). Gatherings 11 to 14 (fols 56–75), which are all either by Adam or scribes clearly post-dating him, seem to be a later insertion. It is not clear how late an insertion they are, although they had taken this position before the seventeenth-century foliation was added; O’Sullivan hints

⁸⁶⁷ Mac Airt (ed. and trans.), ‘Poem [part 1]’, I:47–59 (pp. 275–79); ‘Poem [part 2]’, III:14–15 (pp. 34–35), III:26–29 (pp. 40–41); Sarah Sheehan, ‘Gender and Sexuality in Early Irish Saga’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Toronto, 2009), pp. 64–66.

⁸⁶⁸ MacCarthy (ed. [from *BB*] and trans.), *Codex*, pp. 286–317; Schmidt, ‘Zu Réidig’, pp. 249–50.

⁸⁶⁹ *UM*, fol. 55^{vb}59–60.

⁸⁷⁰ O’Sullivan, ‘Book’, p. 159.

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that he does not believe that they were placed here by Adam himself.⁸⁷¹ This, combined with the loss of the other folio of Adam's bifolium, makes the context of our two poems difficult to assess. Gatherings 11 to 14 are otherwise almost entirely religious in theme, so our poems, on hagiography and biblical apocrypha, are not utterly incongruous therein.

However, Adam seems to have intended his bifolium (gathering 11), up to the end of fol. 56^r, as a continuation of Faelán's quaternion (gathering 10). This would mean, incidentally, that Adam himself assigned 11 to 14 to their present location, presumably after inscribing the catchwords. First, on fol. 56^{va}, he adds the heading 'Sequitur do Dhunaibh Diadhachta. Gofraid Ó Cl[éirigh] cecinit',⁸⁷² introducing four poems by this author, implying that what comes before is of another genre and provenance. Secondly, at the foot of fol. 56^{ra}, Adam has added a list of saints called Brigit, a list that appears in other manuscripts of the *Senchas Naem Éirenn*.⁸⁷³ Finally, our poems' interests correlate more closely with those of gatherings 9 and 10, which, as we have seen, contain much material on hagiography, saints' genealogies, and Christian history. Specifically, *Adam primus pater* opens with a passage on foundational history,⁸⁷⁴ a topic amplified in 'Aenach Teamra na n-ocht n-ech'.

The loss of the folio prior to fol. 56^r frustrates definite conclusions but a good case can be made for 'Scela cluana clog mbind' and 'Aenacha Teamra na n-ocht n-ech' constituting a concluding supplement not just for the *Senchas Naem Éirenn* but perhaps for Faelán and Adam's wider project in gatherings 9 and 10. The fact that both not only contain appropriate material but also present this material being sought after and transmitted by recognised figures from political and cultural history might have been intended to in some way authorise their own work.

3.3 Flann's influence

As ever, it is difficult to reach any overall conclusions regarding Flann's influence on later medieval Gaelic manuscript materials. Much of the material we have considered in this chapter is in the form of an extract of a poem attributed to Flann embedded in

⁸⁷¹ O'Sullivan, 'Book', p. 155

⁸⁷² Mulchrone (ed.), *RIA Cat.*, fasc. XXVI, 3338: 'there follows, from religious poems. Gofraidh Ó Cléirigh sang' (my translation).

⁸⁷³ *CGSH*, §708.1–13.

⁸⁷⁴ *UM* fol. 48^{ra} 1–24; MacCarthy (ed. [from *BB*] and trans.), *Codex*, §a (pp. 286–87).

a prosimetric text or a direct citation of him. In such situations, we are witnessing Flann's influence on subsequent compositions but, in most cases, we do not have access to the work whose influence is being felt. For example, for all the maelstrom of textual activity around *ANÍ* in north Connacht at the end of the fourteenth century, we have concluded by questioning the very nature of the text at its heart (4:2.1.5).

Otherwise, some interesting examples of the influence of texts we can access in full do present themselves. Flann still sometimes comes across as able to access unmatched quantities of data.⁸⁷⁵ In 'Muintir Pádraig na paiter', seventy-two individuals are named as members of Patrick's household, while only twenty-four appear in the widely circulated prose list which it follows in the *Lec.* text of *Senchas Naem Érenn* (4:2.2.3). *UM*'s preface to 'Airgialla ardmóra uaisli' states that Flann provides an alternative view on the three Collas' maternity, a view towards which the prefator seems to lean (Appendix 17). The relationship of 'Cetrí ro gabh Érinne uile' with *BB*'s *Catha Cenél Éogain* is more complex. In one respect, the poem offers a fuller Cenél nÉogain king-list than the prose. Between Domnall and Fergus (both *ob.* 566), who have a joint reign in *Catha Cenél nÉogain* but not in the poem, and Níall Frossach (*abd.* 770; *ob.* 778), the poem has seven kings (qq. 2–4) while *Catha Cenél nÉogain* has two.⁸⁷⁶ However, *Catha Cenél Éogain* extends much further, to Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn (*ob.* 1166), in terms of coverage, while 'Cetrí ro gabh Érinne uile' ends with Domnall Úa Néill (*ob.* 980). As we have seen, the *BB* scribe, Robeartus Mac Sithigh, may have been moved to try reconcile the two by extending the poem (4:2.1.2).

'Réidig dam, a Dé, do nim' continues to attract attention and usage. As we have seen, it is cited in *In Cath Catharda* and played a significant role in Adam and Faelán's historical compilation in *UM* (4:2.3.1, 4:3.2). It also appears to have influenced the historical and synchronistic studies of Giolla Íosa Mór Mac Fírbisigh. *Lec.* includes an unedited poem beginning 'Reidig dam a De do nim | cindead coir ar chomaimsir', attributed to 'Mac Fírbisig',⁸⁷⁷ whom Ó Concheanainn and Ó Muraíle believe to be Giolla Íosa.⁸⁷⁸ This incipit again connotes global scope (2:6.3.1), as the

⁸⁷⁵ For example, Diane-Myrick, *From the De Excidio*, p. 83 n. 12.

⁸⁷⁶ *BB*, fol.48rb32–48; *Lec.*, fol.58vc2–22; Pender (ed.), 'O Clery Book', §§424–25 (p. 29).

⁸⁷⁷ *Lec.*, fols 190^{ra}33–191^{ra}52.

⁸⁷⁸ Tomás Ó Concheanainn, 'Lebor Gabála in the Book of Lecan' in 'A Miracle of Learning': *Studies in Manuscripts and Irish Learning. Essays in Honour of William O'Sullivan*, ed. by Toby C. Barnard,

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poem synchronises Ireland's kings down to Lóegaire mac Néill with Roman Emperors and with key events in Christian history. It is thus more complex, although less extensive, than Flann's poem, to which it appears to pay homage.

The relationship of Flann's 'Réidig dam, a Dé, do nim' to certain synchronistic tracts preserved in later medieval manuscripts but potentially Middle Gaelic in date has been the subject of some discussion. Giolla Íosa's 'Réidig dam, a Dé, do nim' is regarded as a partial metrical counterpart, in *Lec.*, to *Comaimser ríge Asar re rígaib Éirind* (Schmidt's S-Lc; my *Assyrian Synchronisms* (6:3.1.4)),⁸⁷⁹ which synchronises Irish history with the world-kingships from Cessair's immediately pre-diluvian in Ireland arrival to Lóegaire mac Néill. Scowcroft, Ó Concheanainn, and Jaski regard the *Assyrian Synchronisms* as closely related to *Adam primus pater* (Schmidt's S-UM/S-BB).⁸⁸⁰ In addition, Scowcroft demonstrates that these tracts represent the synchronistic principles that underlie the chronological overhaul of *LGÉ* in *Lc.* Meanwhile, both Scowcroft and Schmidt, as we have seen (3:2.1), view Flann's 'Réidig dam, a Dé, do nim' as closely related to the *Invasion Synchronisms* and the chronological overhaul of *LGÉ b.*⁸⁸¹ While Schmidt believes that all these materials ultimately have a common source,⁸⁸² as far as I can tell, there has been no discussion of how Flann's 'Réidig dam, a Dé, do nim' relates to *Adam primus pater*, the *Assyrian Synchronisms*, and to Giolla Íosa's poem that bears its *incipit*. As things stand, however, Giolla Íosa seems to have re-used Flann's *incipit* in the absence of the direct influence of the text involved.

Finally, the narratives and assertions in 'Conall cuingid clainne Néill' (4:2.1.3) seem to have been of particular interest in the thirteenth century. The story of Conall Gulbán's conquest of the north seems similar, from Brian Lacey's summary, to that of *Echtra Conaill Gulbain*, an unedited prose history that Lacey dates to the mid-thirteenth century.⁸⁸³ During the same period, Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe (*ob.* 1272?) – sometime poet to Ó Domhnaill – composed a poem with an

Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, and K. Simms (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), pp. 68–90 (73); Ó Muraíle, *Celebrated Antiquary*, p. 30; Schmidt, 'Zu Réidig', p. 258.

⁸⁷⁹ *Lec.*, fol. 186^{vb}47–190^{ra}32; Schmidt, 'Zu Réidig', p. 250.

⁸⁸⁰ Scowcroft, 'Leabhar Gabhála Part 1', p. 128; Ó Concheanainn, 'Lebor Gabála', p. 72; Jaski, 'Irish Origin Legend', pp. 70–72.

⁸⁸¹ Scowcroft, 'Leabhar Gabhála Part 1', p. 126; Schmidt, 'Zu Réidig', pp. 245–56.

⁸⁸² Schmidt, 'Zu Réidig', p. 251.

⁸⁸³ Brian Lacey, *Cenél Conaill and the Donegal Kingdoms, AD 500–800* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2006), pp. 31–48.

identical incipit recounting essentially the same narrative while explicitly referencing contemporary northern politics; he omits mention of Flann and Oengus and does not include Conall's *caithréim*.⁸⁸⁴ The *Senlebor Caillín*, as we have seen (4:2.1.3.1), apparently also dates from the thirteenth century.

Thus, in both the thirteenth and the sixteenth centuries (when *Fen.* and Rawl.B.514 were produced), close interest was taken in the material embodied in 'Conall cuingid clainne Neill', perhaps due to the contemporary expansion of Ó Domhnaill power.⁸⁸⁵ At what point Flann's authoritative presence became involved depends on this text's history and one's interpretation of its internal reference, and of that in 'A liubair atá ar do lár' (4:2.1.3). Whatever the nature of his involvement, he became a named authority for a matter that was of clear political import.

4 Conclusion: the late medieval Flann

How Flann is described and how he is treated within materials preserved in later medieval manuscripts is in many ways recognisable compared to materials we have examined previously. We have encountered Flann being presented as a reader and compiler, as a collaborator, and as a historian whose work has wider social import and pertinence to elite politics. This is reflected in the use of him or his work in later medieval manuscripts as part of compilers' articulations of contemporary political agendas, even when this does not seem to have been the original nature of his contribution. In **Chapters 2** and **3**, we also encountered examples of Flann's corpus being consolidated and re-contextualised in manuscript (e.g. 2:4.2.1.2, 3:2.1).

Indeed, one of the more distinctive features of the materials examined in this chapter is the frequency with which Flann is cited or used within another context, either via the prosimetric presentation of his texts or in the citation of him not via a specified text. Some of his appearances seem to be derived from awareness of his status as an authority-figure. He is presented, in the three poems in *UM*, as someone who is to be deferentially consulted (4:1.2.6.1–2, 4:2.3.3). Elsewhere, he is

⁸⁸⁴ Nicholas Williams (ed. and trans.), *The Poems of Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe* (Dublin: ITS, 1980), pp. 30–39; Simms, 'Donegal poems', pp. 44–45.

⁸⁸⁵ Darren Mac Eiteagáin, 'The Renaissance and the Late Medieval Lordship of Tír Chonaill; 1461–1555' in *Donegal*, ed. by Nolan et al., pp. 203–228.

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accessible as literature, via inscribed codices (4:2.2.2–4, 4:2.3.3). It is perhaps significant that the section of ‘Airgialla ardmóra uaisli’ (4:2.1.6.1) placed in Flann’s mouth consists of learned lore on the Collas rather than charged narrative or political argument; his role is to provide information out of which others can make meaning. In ‘Muintir Padraig na paiter’ (4:2.2.3), on the other hand, he is as responsible for making political meaning out of his information as he is for providing it.

Material associated with Flann might have been re-contextualised, appropriated, and perhaps misattributed, but we have also encountered attributions to him or material about him that correlate with what is known of his biography. Whether or not these are true, they imply that Flann’s existence as an author-figure and his biography were not separate. On the other hand, we have also encountered instances where a medieval compiler has failed to recognise Flann Mainistrech as an eleventh-century scholar (4:2.1.1.1) or conflated him with another Flann (4:2.1.2). His identity did not remain perfectly stable.

Alongside ongoing issues with specific texts’ interpretation, this chapter raises some wider questions about the extant material relating to Flann. As we have discussed, it is unclear to what extent the variation between his corpora in pre-1200 and late medieval manuscripts is due to diachronic changes in how he was understood and presented or to imperfect preservation, for our perusal, of material in each period. The widespread assumption that Flann is an authority on genealogies is particularly striking in this regard: it is nowhere attested in pre-1200 manuscripts but may be a historical fact.⁸⁸⁶ The matter remains uncertain, although the continuing appearance of new, credible attributions to Flann in material considered in **Chapters 5 and 6** seems to support the latter hypothesis. It is also to be noted that a large proportion of the material discussed in the present chapter is either in *UM* or from the hand of Giolla Íosa Mór Mac Fírbisigh; these two sources certainly account for the majority of the most interesting material. This raises questions concerning the nature of the material’s transmission and availability and thus whether our analysis can relate to medieval Gaelic manuscript culture as a whole or only to specific scholarly circles.

⁸⁸⁶ Jaski, ‘Genealogical section’, pp. 331–32.

Chapter 5

Who preserved *senchas*?
 The Post-Medieval Flann Mainistrech (1):
 The Gaelic Manuscript Tradition, c. 1600–1850

1 Introduction

1.1 Post-medieval Ireland: a historical overview

Ireland's conquest and subjugation during the seventeenth century and the circumstances of the Protestant Ascendancy that followed bequeathed to Ireland, among much else, a complex relationship with the medieval Gaelic past and its literary and historiographical traditions. Gaelic learned culture during this period responded in a number of ways.

The seventeenth century saw major, influential endeavours from various Catholic Irish scholars that aimed to refine, adapt, and renew medieval Gaelic sources through new historiographical and investigatory methodologies established during the Renaissance.⁸⁸⁷ Such scholars included the collectively prolific team known as the Four Masters, whose work in the 1630s and 1640s embraced history, genealogy, hagiography, and more.⁸⁸⁸ Dubhaltach Mac Fírhisigh (*ob.* 1671) produced in *LMG* a grand synthesis of the Irish genealogical tradition. Roderick O'Flaherty (*c.* 1629–1718) provided in his Latin monograph, *Ogygia*, a closely synchronised account of Irish history in the medieval Gaelic learned tradition, unprecedented in its close referencing of medieval manuscripts.⁸⁸⁹ Geoffrey Keating (*c.* 1569–1644), in *Forus Feasa air Éirinn*, presented another account that also

⁸⁸⁷ Nollaig Ó Muraíle, 'Aspects of intellectual life in seventeenth-century Galway' in *Galway: History and Society*, ed. by Gerard Moran and Raymond Gillespie (Dublin: Geography Publications, 1996), pp. 149–211; Leerssen, *Remembrance*, pp. 68–156.

⁸⁸⁸ Although I retain the term for the sake of brevity, the circle of scholars known as 'the Four Masters' comprised substantially more than four people and changed in composition over time: Cunningham, *Annals*, pp. 142–59; Pádraig A. Breatnach, *The Four Masters and their Manuscripts: Studies in Palaeography and Text* (Dublin: DIAS, 2013), pp. 1–10. In practice, the two members of the group of particular interest to this study, Míchéal Ó Cléirigh and Cú Chóigriche Ó Cléirigh, are also two of the most active members of the group overall.

⁸⁸⁹ Sharpe, *Letters*, pp. 55–63.

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preserved a trove of medieval Gaelic literature.⁸⁹⁰ Much of this work was motivated by the perceived need to defend Ireland's 'honour' in a European context by showing that Ireland had a long and credible history as a pious Christian nation (LR:2.3).⁸⁹¹

All of these scholars were immersed in medieval Gaelic source materials. However, they were also working to validate Irish history in the sceptical historiographical context of early modern Europe, particularly given the political and social pressures on Catholic Ireland. Contemporary historical practice required that accounts be given of how ancient sources had been accessed, of their claims to authenticity, and of the authors that had produced them.⁸⁹² Open reliance on single authorities, however prestigious, was not acceptable; instead, points of consensus and superior testimony were to be identified via comparison.

After this boom in historiography, Gaelic manuscript culture continued into the nineteenth century, perpetuated by composers, scholars, and scribes working in modest, often adverse, socio-economic circumstances,⁸⁹³ manuscripts being transcribed for fellow enthusiasts and in response to occasional patronage or custom from clergy and gentry.⁸⁹⁴ Yet, while some new literary works were composed, very little new historical scholarship was conducted, although many relevant medieval texts continued to be copied and circulated.

The Gaelic manuscript tradition finally drew to a close during the nineteenth century. However, since O'Flaherty, the Gaelic past and its physical and textual remains had also been the subject of sporadic printed publications (LR:2.1; 6:1.2). In the course of the nineteenth century, with increasing organisation and sponsorship, individuals, learned societies, and academic institutions began to widen access to

⁸⁹⁰ Bernadette Cunningham, *The World of Geoffrey Keating: History, Myth and Religion in Seventeenth-Century Ireland* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000).

⁸⁹¹ Cunningham, *Annals*, pp. 22–44.

⁸⁹² Peter Burke, *The Renaissance Sense of the Past* (London: Arnold, 1969), pp. 50–69; Ernst Breisach, *Historiography: Ancient, Medieval and Modern*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 201–03; Gerald E. Aylmer, 'Introductory Survey: From the Renaissance to the Eighteenth Century', in *Companion to Historiography*, ed. by Michael Bentley (Abingdon: Routledge, 1997), pp. 249–80.

⁸⁹³ Ristead A. Breatnach, 'The End of a Tradition: A Survey of Eighteenth Century Gaelic Literature', *Studia Hibernica*, 1 (1961), 128–50; Brían Ó Cuív, 'Irish Language and Literature, 1691–1845', in *A New History of Ireland IV: Eighteenth-Century Ireland 1691–1800*, ed. by Terence W. Moody and William E. Vaughan (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), pp. 374–423 (398, 414–19); Nessa Ní Sheaghda, 'Irish scholars and scribes in eighteenth-century Dublin', *Eighteenth-Century Ireland: Iris an Dá Chultúr*, 4 (1989), 41–54.

⁸⁹⁴ Meidhbhín Ní Úrdail, *The Scribe in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Ireland: Motivations and Milieu* (Münster: Nodus Publikationen, 2000).

Gaelic manuscripts through the expansion of archives, the publication of catalogues, and early editions of texts.

1.2 The post-medieval Flann Mainistrech

Texts attributed to Flann appear in Gaelic manuscripts throughout this period and he is referenced quite frequently in printed historical works. Given the political and cultural potency of the medieval Irish past and contemporary historical practice's demands for authentic, reputable sources, medieval authors like Flann and the provenance of the Gaelic historiographical tradition as a whole seem to have been objects of close interest among scholars sympathetic to Gaelic Ireland. Multiple scholars implicitly or explicitly contextualise Flann within narratives or models of Gaelic historiography's development, responding both to medieval sources and contemporary needs. Echoes of medieval presentations of Flann examined in previous chapters can certainly be heard, often distinctly, but new ideas emerge too. Also, during this period, the corpus of texts attributed to Flann undergoes further expansion, even compared to later medieval manuscripts. The expansion is particularly bewildering in printed works, potentially reflecting manuscript sources not now extant, inferences drawn from extant evidence, or the post-medieval need for a particular kind of historian.

In the present chapter, I consider Flann as he appears in the post-medieval Gaelic manuscript tradition, surveying the works attributed to him in context (5:2) and then the critical approaches taken to him and his purported corpus (5:3), including the treatment of individual texts and his place in accounts of Gaelic historiography overall. **Chapter 6**, meanwhile, is concerned with references to Flann in printed works in Latin or English over the same period. This is mainly for convenience and should not be taken as implying that the two media represent utterly distinctive intellectual milieux. Although published works potentially faced a much more sceptical audience and were sometimes framed accordingly, scholars who published in languages other than Gaelic, like O'Flaherty,⁸⁹⁵ could still be immersed in the traditional Gaelic historiographical framework, while those whose work

⁸⁹⁵ Sharpe, *Letters*, p. 1; Ó Cróinín, 'Eól dam', pp. 205–06.

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remained in Gaelic and in manuscript, like the Four Masters,⁸⁹⁶ were still influenced by contemporary scholarly methodologies or by the aspiration ultimately to have their work translated and printed.

2 Texts attributed to Flann in post-medieval manuscripts

Many of the texts attributed to Flann in post-medieval manuscripts are familiar from medieval manuscripts. The Four Masters' *LGÉ d* includes many of the poems discussed in **Chapter 3**. The Tara Diptych (**2:2.2.1**), 'Conall cuingid clainne Néill' (**4:2.1.3**), and 'Cetrí ro gabh Éirinn uile' (**4:2.1.2**) all also appear in manuscripts associated with their circle, while a version of 'Muintir Pádraig na paiter' (**4:2.2.3**) and another poem on St Patrick have been added under Flann's name to one of the manuscripts of *AFM*. *LMG* provides a version of *ANÍ* (**2:2.2.3**), with colophon, as well as occasional other references to Flann and his work. Some of these poems, plus 'Airgialla ardmóra uaisli' (**Appendix 17**), continue to appear in post-seventeenth-century compilations.

2.1 Seventeenth-century historical compositions

We begin by considering texts attributed to Flann in seventeenth-century Gaelic-language historical compilations. Relevant material appears in works associated with the Four Masters, particularly with their two leading members, Míchéal Ó Cléirigh (c. 1590–1643) and Cú Chóigcríche mac Diarmada Ó Cléirigh (also known as Peregrine; *ob. post* 1664). A smaller but useful collection of references is also to be found in *LMG*. Keating makes no mention of Flann, although his work is relevant to our study in one important respect (**5:2.1.1**).⁸⁹⁷

⁸⁹⁶ Cunningham, *Annals*, pp. 40–44.

⁸⁹⁷ For background, see Anne Cronin 'Sources of Keating's *Foras Feasa*: 1. The Printed Sources', *Éigse*, 4 (1943–44), 235–79; 'Sources of Keating's *Foras Feasa* 2. The Manuscript Sources', *Éigse*, 5 (1948), 122–35.

2.1.1 *Lebor Gabála Éirenn*: recension *d*

The Four Masters' new recension of *LGÉ*, recension *d*, is extant in both autograph and later manuscripts.⁸⁹⁸ Nonetheless, the manuscripts' interrelationships and how they relate to the Four Masters' intellectual agenda are still the subject of discussion and study.⁸⁹⁹ Since the manuscripts' differences have been interpreted as reflecting distinctive purposes and approaches, they are worth considering alongside the different versions' treatments of Flann and his work.

Pádraig Breatnach has suggested the extant manuscripts represent two distinct treatments of the Four Masters' original work.⁹⁰⁰ The fragmentary RIA 23.M.70 – better represented by its derivative RIA D.iii.3 – is, he argues, Míchéal Ó Cléirigh's version of the Four Masters' original compilation (it is in his hand), destined ultimately for publication in Louvain, a centre for exiled Irish scholars at the time.⁹⁰¹ This he infers from RIA 23.M.70's layout, wider-ranging glossing, and a possible instruction to the printer preserved in text. Meanwhile, RIA 23.K.32 (from which derives RIA C.iv.3) is Cú Chóigcríche Ó Cléirigh's own, later redaction of the Four Masters' text, which came to remain in his own private library.⁹⁰² Where the RIA 23.M.70 version has been adapted for a more general audience, the RIA 23.K.32 version is more ambitious 'in learned terms'.⁹⁰³ It is characterised by extra, more contentious material in prose and verse, glossing focused on obscure vocabulary, extra material in the *réim rígraide*, a more elaborate chronology, and fewer ascriptions of verse to named authors. Thus, the version Breatnach believes was intended for publication is generally more cautious, except when it comes to authorial attributions. We can perhaps speculate that the published version was felt to need more grounding in named authorities, which experienced Irish scholars would either not require or treat with scepticism. Flahive, however, cautions both against

⁸⁹⁸ MacNeill and Macalister (partial ed. and trans. [from RIA 23.K.32]), *Leabhar Gabhála*. For this edition's backstory, see Joseph J. F. Flahive, 'Macalister and the Ó Cléirigh *Leabhar Gabhála*', in *Lebor Gabála*, ed. by Carey, pp. 76–93.

⁸⁹⁹ The most recent detailed study is Pádraig A. Breatnach, 'On the Ó Cléirigh Recension of *Leabhar Gabhála*', *Éigse*, 37 (2010), 1–58. However, Dr Joseph Flahive informs me that, in a forthcoming article ('Observations on the Ó Cléirigh *Leabhar Gabhála*'), he will present a very different interpretation of the evidence. I am very grateful to Dr Flahive for sharing his article with me in draft.

⁹⁰⁰ Breatnach, 'Ó Cléirigh Recension', pp. 29–45.

⁹⁰¹ Dublin, RIA, MS 23.M.70 (uncatalogued; purchased 1986), *saec.* XVII; Dublin, RIA, MS D.iii.3 (777), *saec.* XVII.

⁹⁰² Dublin, RIA, MS 23.K.32 (617), *saec.* XVII; Dublin, RIA, MS C.iv.3 (1192), *saec.* XVII; Breatnach, *Four Masters*, p. 14.

⁹⁰³ Breatnach, 'Ó Cléirigh Recension', p. 35.

taking RIA 23.M.70 as representative of the original compilation and against taking RIA 23.K.32 as Cú Chóigcríche's personal adaptation; he sees both as originating from the Four Masters collaborative compilation of *AFM* and representing different phases of this project.⁹⁰⁴ RIA 23.M.70 is earlier, 23.K.32 later. He also suggests that certain subsequent, non-autograph manuscripts, which Breatnach dismisses,⁹⁰⁵ might actually be more representative of the Four Masters' final product.

Addressing this complex issue is far from the current study's purpose. My discussion of Flann's role within *LGÉ d* is largely based on Breatnach's published study and I have not been able to consult the later manuscripts in detail, as Flahive advises. However, it is important to note that our understanding of *d*'s textual situation is provisional.

Overall, *LGÉ d* basically resembles the medieval compilation, in its various forms (3:1.2), while containing important innovations.⁹⁰⁶ That Flann is cited is, of course, hardly innovative and *d* adds no new texts to his corpus as compared to *mabc* (3:2.1). However, the configuration of Flann-associated texts and their contexts in *d* do not derive from any one medieval recension and their attributional apparatus can differ quite markedly. This reflects the Four Masters' wide-ranging consultation of manuscript witnesses to the medieval *LGÉ*,⁹⁰⁷ as well as their active interest in the author-figures on which the medieval *LGÉ* itself was based.

Material attributed to Flann in *LGÉ d*'s various manuscripts is summarised in **Appendix 23**. 'Éstid a eolchu cen ón', in *d*, is broadly the same as in *LGÉ ac*.⁹⁰⁸ *m*'s quatrains on the damnation of the Túatha Dé Danann are absent. Its context most closely resembles that in *N* or *m*, as it concludes the section on the Túatha Dé Danann and is not implicated in any debates regarding their humanity. 'Suibne go sloghadh dia soí', an extract from the Tara Diptych, also accompanies *d*'s account of Suibne Mend's reign, as in *Lc*, but is actually attributed to Flann in *d*.⁹⁰⁹

The Tara Diptych proper is embedded within *d*'s *réim rígraide*, as in *b*, but it has been split into its two parts, to conclude, respectively, pre-Patrician regnal history

⁹⁰⁴ Flahive, 'Observations'.

⁹⁰⁵ Breatnach, 'Ó Cléirigh Recension', pp. 15–18.

⁹⁰⁶ Scowcroft, 'Leabhar Gabhála I', p. 84 (n. 10); Breatnach, 'Ó Cléirigh Recension', p. 3 (n. 7).

⁹⁰⁷ Cunningham, *Annals*, pp. 42–44.

⁹⁰⁸ MacNeill and Macalister (ed. and trans.), *Leabhar Gabhála*, pp. 170–89, give a broad impression of the poem's context in most *d* manuscripts.

⁹⁰⁹ *LGÉ*, V, §628 (pp. 376–77), pp. 536–37.

and post-Patrician regnal history down to Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill. The latter folios of RIA 23.M.70 are lost and with them the post-Patrician regnal history and the second poem in the Diptych. However, the text of *LGÉ d* in RIA 23.M.70's supposed derivative, RIA D.iii.3 is complete; its *réim rígraide* concludes with the second part of the Diptych, followed by a brief prose account of the *ríg co fressarba* (c. 1072–1169) and then a short colophon relating to the compilation overall.⁹¹⁰ Here, the Tara Diptych is the main metrical counter-part to the *réim rígraide*. Meanwhile, in RIA 23.K.32 and its derivative, RIA C.iv.3, the Tara Diptych occupies the same positions but the *réim rígraide* overall concludes with chronological poetry from the likes of Gilla Cóemáin and Gilla Mo Dutu.⁹¹¹ Thus, in what seems to be an earlier version of *LGÉ d* (according to both Breatnach and Flahive), assuming RIA D.iii.3 accurately reflects RIA 23.M.70 in this respect, Flann is the main authority for the *réim rígraide*'s king-list but, in a subsequent, more elaborate version, his Diptych has been implicitly displaced (as in *LGÉ R* and *c* (3:2.1)) from providing the main synchronistic overview and instead seems to form a metrical counter-part to the narrational accounts of the kings' reigns.

On the other hand, the prefaces to the Tara Diptych's two components (**Appendix 23**) describe Flann's work as *áirem* ('enumeration'), which is particularly stressed in RIA D.iii.3, and ascribe him skill in *croinic* (Lat. *chronica*), translatable as 'chronicling' or 'history' but with clear etymological links to chronology.⁹¹² Thus, despite the Diptych's position in RIA 23.K.32 and C.iv.3 and its lack of chronological detail relative to the other poetry included in these versions, the Four Masters still seem to relate his work to the *réim rígraide*'s overall structure.

Beyond *LGÉ d*, in the composite and highly varied UCD A.33, the second half of the Tara Diptych is apparently cited in a codicologically discrete, doubly acephalous prose historical tract in Míchéal Ó Cléirigh's hand.⁹¹³ This fragment is concerned with events of the eleventh century and the reigns of Brían Bóruma, Máel Sechnaill, and the major kings from the interregnum that followed. It is yet to be the subject of any study or edition that I know of and I have no immediate means of

⁹¹⁰ RIA D.iii.3, pp. 102.23–103.24.

⁹¹¹ RIA 23.K.32, pp. 230.11–247.14; RIA C.iv.3, fol. 111^r–121^r.

⁹¹² *eDIL* s.v. *croinic*.

⁹¹³ Dublin, UCD, MS A.33, *saec.* XVII, pp. 55–86; Myles Dillon, Canice Mooney and Pádraig De Brún, *Catalogue of Irish Manuscripts in the Franciscan Library Killiney* (Dublin: DIAS, 1969), p. 71.

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determining whether the text is Ó Cléirigh's own composition or what its provenance might otherwise be. Following Máel Sechnaill's death, Ó Cléirigh intended to add 'Ríg Themra toebaige iar ttain', attributed to Flann Mainistrech, but the remainder of the page is blank. The extended introduction to the poem closely resembles that from *LGÉ d* and is printed in **Appendix 23**.

Attributed to Flann only in RIA 23.K.32 and C.iv.3 in *d*,⁹¹⁴ 'Toisich na llongse tar ller' presents a complex situation. It occurs as part of *d*'s account of the Goidelic invasion, although the arrangement is different from that in *b* (**3:2.1**). *d*'s poem has virtually the same opening as in the medieval recensions but is, thereafter, a different and much shorter text, consisting of only five quatrains rather than the medieval recensions' seventeen or eighteen. Forty-one *toisich* are still named but their *aideda* are omitted. Different chevilles are employed and the *toisich* appear in a different order. No reference is made to 'mac meic Fhlainn' (**2:2.3**).

The short version might be either a later abbreviation or the long version's original kernel. I favour the latter hypothesis. First, a possible *dúnad* occurs in the long version at the point corresponding to the end of the short version.⁹¹⁵ Secondly, Keating includes the short version in *Forus Feasa air Éirinn* as the work of Eochaid úa Flainn.⁹¹⁶ Eochaid úa Flainn could have composed the shorter version, which was then re-worked and supplemented with *aideda*, quite possibly by Flann Mainistrech, to become the long version. The two versions and their authors then inevitably became confused in *d*'s sources. An adaptor working with a text attributed to Eochaid úa Flainn would also provide a background for the invocation of prayers for 'mac meic Fhlainn' in some texts of the long version (**2:2.3**, **3:2.1**), as if it were a tribute to the original poet. If this hypothesis is accepted, then the two versions of 'Toisich na llongse tar ller' usefully provide a worked-out example of the historical Flann's re-working of an earlier text. Interestingly, 'Cetrí ro gabh Éirinn uile' is also split by a *dúnad* (q. 6) into quatrains on names and quatrains on *aideda* (**Appendix 12.1**). Since its coverage ends in the late tenth-century, it might also be an example of an augmented work, perhaps even also by Eochaid úa Flainn.

⁹¹⁴ MacNeill and Macalister (ed. and trans.), *Leabhar Gabhála*, pp. 246–49.

⁹¹⁵ *LGÉ*, V, pp. 106–07 (q. 5).

⁹¹⁶ Dineen (ed. and trans.) *History of Ireland by Geoffrey Keating*, II, 80–81.

2.1.2 The *Annals of the Four Masters*: marginal additions

With the exception of his own obit,⁹¹⁷ neither Flann nor any texts attributed to him appear in the Ó Gadhra or Louvain sets of autograph manuscripts of *AFM*.⁹¹⁸ However, in one manuscript of the Ó Gadhra set, RIA C.iii.3,⁹¹⁹ there are a number of additions signed by ‘Henry Burc’ and dated, in his hand, to various years in the 1640s and 1650s. They include a charm against headaches, an extract from a Hiberno-Latin hymn, and an obituary for Oliver Cromwell. While they have been noted and catalogued,⁹²⁰ Burc has not been identified.

Under AD 432, following *AFM*’s account of Patrick’s foundation of Áth Truim, Burc added the five-quatrain poem, ‘Pádraig abb Érenn uili’, on Patrick’s genealogy, with a simple attribution to Flann Mainistrech.⁹²¹ He also added a shorter, eleven-quatrain version of ‘Muintir Pádraig na paiter’ (4:2.2.3) under the otherwise blank AD 448.⁹²² A note in Burc’s hand following the former poem states that they are each two parts of the same poem, which Burc calls ‘Muintir Padruig na paiter’.⁹²³ Nothing resembling ‘Pádraig abb Érenn uili’ occurs in the longer version of ‘Muintir Pádraig na paiter’ in *Lec*.⁹²⁴ O’Donovan, supplied with imprecise transcriptions, included both poems in his edition without distinguishing them from the Four Masters’ original material.⁹²⁵

Burc’s rendition of these poems yields interesting insights into the potential diversity of their medieval textual traditions. His text of ‘Muintir Pádraig na paiter’ differs in form and context from the *Lec*. version. First, his note implies that his source had amalgamated it with ‘Pádraig abb Érenn uili’, unless the note is based on his own assumption. Secondly, Burc’s text of ‘Muintir Pádraig na paiter’ lists only thirty-one of the seventy-two individuals in the *Lec*. version and introduces eleven new individuals in three unique quatrains. It also omits all mention of Flann and Clothna.

⁹¹⁷ *AFM* 1056.3.

⁹¹⁸ Nollaig Ó Muraíle, ‘The Autograph Manuscripts of the Annals of the Four Masters’, *Celtica*, 19 (1987), 75–96; Cunningham, *Annals*, pp. 136–38.

⁹¹⁹ Dublin, RIA, MS C.iii.3 (1220), *saec.* XVII.

⁹²⁰ Mulchrone, *RIA Cat.*, fasc. XXVI, 3278, 3280–81; Cunningham, *Annals*, pp. 168 (n. 86), 219–20.

⁹²¹ *AFM* 432.3; RIA C.iii.3, fol. 218^v14–22.

⁹²² *AFM* 448.2; RIA C.iii.3, fol. 220^v11–23.

⁹²³ RIA C.iii.3, fol. 218^v22–23; *AFM*, I, 131–32.

⁹²⁴ *CGSH*, §672 (pp. 119–22).

⁹²⁵ Cunningham, *Annals*, p. 164.

In ‘Pádraig abb Érenn uili’, meanwhile, Patrick’s lineage is traced back to ‘Britan’, ancestor of the Britons. O’Curry has stated that it forms part of ‘Naemsenchas naem Insi Fáil’,⁹²⁶ an extensive metrical catalogue of saints’ genealogies found *BB* and *Lec.* as a metrical counter-part to *Senchas Naomh Érenn* and also extant in a seventeenth-century recension by Cú Chóigcríche Ó Cléirigh.⁹²⁷ On the basis of Burc’s attribution in RIA C.iii.3, O’Curry has described Flann Mainistrech as the author of ‘Naemsenchas naem Insi Fáil’. There is no other evidence supporting this proposition. Various authors are named in the textual tradition of ‘Naemsenchas naem Insi Fáil’, with Ó Riain favouring Mac Raith Mac a’ Gabann (fourteenth-century) and ruling out a date as early as the eleventh century.⁹²⁸

It thus seems unlikely that Flann composed ‘Naemsenchas naem Insi Fáil’. Indeed, ‘Pádraig abb Érenn uili’ is not very similar to the corresponding quatrains in that poem anyway (**Appendix 24**). Thirteen generations separate Patrick from Britan in ‘Pádraig abb Érenn uili’, sixteen in ‘Naemsenchas naem Insi Fáil’. The two poems vary considerably in orthography.⁹²⁹ Each poem’s supporting chevilles and conclusions are completely different. ‘Naemsenchas naem Insi Fáil’ details Britan’s ancestry, whereas ‘Padraig abb Érenn uili’ names Patrick’s mother and hometown and notes Munster’s devotion to him, echoing the opening reference to ‘all Ireland’. ‘Pádraig abb Érenn uili’, having a *dúmad*, is technically complete.

In short, they are different poems about ultimately related pedigrees. The background of the attribution to Flann is, naturally, unknown. However, given that the *Lec.* version of ‘Muintir Pádraig na paiter’ is set within the context of Armagh’s relations with Munster (**4:2.2.3**), it is noteworthy that Burc’s ‘Padraig abb Érenn uili’ is both attributed to Flann and interested in the same relationship. The sources whence Burc drew them might be discernible though future study of his other

⁹²⁶ O’Curry, *Manners*, II, 166–67.

⁹²⁷ For Cú Chóigcríche Ó Cléirigh’s recension, see ‘Naemsenchus Náemh nÉrenn’, ed. by Paul Grosjean in *Irish Texts*, ed. by John Fraser, Paul Grosjean, and James G. O’Keeffe, 5 vols (London: Sheed and Ward, 1931–1934), IV, pp. 40–78. In his edition of ‘Naemsenchas naem Insi Fáil’, Ó Riain reprints Cú Chóigcríche’s recension with variants from *BB* and *Lec.*: *CGSH*, §662 (pp. 79–108). The quatrains O’Curry has in mind are located at Grosjean (ed.), ‘Naemsenchus’, qq. 8–11 (p. 12); *CGSH*, §662.8–11 (p. 80).

⁹²⁸ *CGSH*, p. xli. cf. Breatnach ‘Ó Cléirigh Recension’, p. 50.

⁹²⁹ Such issues in ‘Pádraig abb Érenn uili’ (but not ‘Naemsenchas naem Insi Fáil’) are discussed by Anscombe, ‘Pedigrees’.

additions to RIA C.iii.3. Unfortunately, for now, like Burc's own identity, they remain obscure.

2.1.3 *The Ó Cléirigh Book of Genealogies*

The *Ó Cléirigh Book of Genealogies* is an extensive compilation, written sometime before 1660 and preserved in RIA 23.D.17 in the hand of Cú Chóigcriche Ó Cléirigh.⁹³⁰ Embedded in the section on Cenél nÉogain is *Catha Cenél Éogain* (2:4.2.1.2; 4:2.1.2).⁹³¹ In the RIA 23.D.17 version, each reign-by-reign battle-list is augmented by information on the lineages descended from each king.⁹³² As in *BB*, RIA 23.D.17's *Catha Cenél Éogain* is followed by 'Cetrí ro gabh Éirinn uile'.⁹³³ Again, their king-lists and the extent of their coverage do not match (4:2.1.2). Here, however, the poem is attributed explicitly to Flann Mainistrech. *BB*'s text of the poem was evidently not RIA 23.D.17's exclusive source, as its omissions and variants are not repeated (Appendix 12). After the ambiguities of *BB*'s attribution to 'Flann Fina', this provides reassuring evidence of an independent textual tradition in which the poem was attributed to Flann Mainistrech and perhaps a common source misinterpreted in *BB*'s version.

2.1.4 *Leabhar Mór na nGenealach*

Compiled during the 1640s and 1650s, *LMG*, Dubhaltach Mac Fírhisigh's even more extensive compilation of genealogies makes a number of references to Flann. As we have seen (4:2.1.6.1), he cites a number of quatrains from 'Airgialla ardmóra uaisli', although without mentioning Flann as their author, and includes in a comparable context a more concise version of the Uí Dhiarmata colophon from *Lec.*, including the reference to the 'books of Flann Mainistrech' (4:2.1.4).⁹³⁴ Mac Fírhisigh seems to have had access to much material taken from *Lec.* but not the manuscript itself.⁹³⁵

Otherwise, Mac Fírhisigh emphasises that sizeable communities of the Fir Bolg have survived in Ireland down to his own time and cites evidence of their

⁹³⁰ Dublin, RIA, MS 23.D.17 (790), *saec.* XVII; Pender (ed.), 'O Clery Book'; Ó Muraíle, *Celebrated Antiquary*, pp. 155–56; Cunningham, *Annals*, p. 72; Breatnach, *Four Masters*, p. 20.

⁹³¹ Pender (ed.), 'O Clery Book', §§407–455 (pp. 27–37).

⁹³² A sample entry from these three manuscripts is printed in Appendix 25.

⁹³³ Pender (ed.), 'O Clery Book', §455 (pp. 35–38).

⁹³⁴ *LMG*, I, §239.13 (pp. 540–41).

⁹³⁵ Ó Muraíle, *Celebrated Antiquary*, pp. 172–73.

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involvement in various historical events.⁹³⁶ In one such event, one of their number, Forgha mac Feradaich, fell alongside Art mac Cuinn at the Battle of Mag Muccrama.⁹³⁷ By way of corroboration, Mac Firbhisigh cites a quatrain, ‘amhail ro raidh Flann’.

Teora Connacht na ccosdadh,
o thairnigh a ttochosdal,
teagaid um Chian sa chath chain,
's um Fhorga mac Fearadhoigh.⁹³⁸

Both this Flann’s identity and the quatrain’s provenance are obscure. Neither this incident nor Forgha appears in the best-known literary account of the battle, *Cath Maige Muccrama*.⁹³⁹ However, it is credible chronologically for Cían to be Cían mac Ailill Aulom, the Ciannachta’s eponymous ancestor, fighting alongside Art just as Tadhg, his son, would fight alongside Art’s son, Cormac (1:4, 4:2.2.1.3), although Cían’s filial relationship to Ailill meant he had his own stake.⁹⁴⁰ Yet our Flann (if it be he) may, once again, be testifying on his own people’s ancient history.

Finally, Mac Firbhisigh includes an account of Nath Í’s death, cognate with that in *ANÍ* and including material from the colophon. He uses the story of Nath Í’s European wars and death to illustrate both the achievements of the Gaídil and the pride and covetousness that had been their downfall in his own time. Its sagely preservation by the learned is described via material from the *ANÍ* colophon.⁹⁴¹ This entire passage was added to *LMG* in 1664, Mac Firbhisigh states, and based on a manuscript written by Lughaidh Ó Cléirigh (*fl.* 1603–16).⁹⁴² The nature of Lughaidh’s compilation is not otherwise known. Ó Muraíle points out that *LU* was in Donegal for the duration of Lughaidh’s likely career, meaning that his *ANÍ* material could ultimately derive thence.⁹⁴³

⁹³⁶ Ó Muraíle, *Celebrated Antiquary*, p. 161.

⁹³⁷ *LMG*, I, §§61.5–7 (pp. 236–37).

⁹³⁸ *LMG*, I, §61.6 (pp. 236–37): ‘The three Connachta of the feastings, | when their assembling is completed, | come along with Cian and his fair battalion | and along with Forgha son of Fearadhach’.

⁹³⁹ *Cath Maige Muccrama: The Battle of Mag Muccrama*, ed. and trans. by Máirín O’Daly (London: ITS, 1975).

⁹⁴⁰ Byrne, *Irish Kings*, p. 202.

⁹⁴¹ *LMG*, I, §§299.5–6 (pp. 684–85).

⁹⁴² Elizabeth Schoales, ‘Ó Cléirigh [O’Clery], Lughaidh (*fl.* 1603–1616)’, *ODNB* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/20497>> [accessed 16 December 2014].

⁹⁴³ Ó Muraíle, *Celebrated Antiquary*, pp. 234–42.

2.2 Manuscript collections

As well as being cited within more integrated seventeenth-century works, independent poems appear attributed to Flann in manuscript collections of texts throughout the post-medieval tradition. Almost all these texts are already familiar to us from earlier manuscripts, although it is interesting to note which texts remain circulation in the manuscript traditions later stages, as far as they are extant.

Two such collections are extant in the hands, respectively, of Míchéal Ó Cléirigh (RIA B.iv.2) and Cú Chóigriche Ó Cléirigh (NLI G.131).⁹⁴⁴ These were apparently compiled as sourcebooks to be used in further work.⁹⁴⁵ Given their overlaps in content and their compilers' close collaboration, it is thought that they have multiple sources in common.⁹⁴⁶ Míchéal included a version of the Donegal Series, opening with 'Conall cuingid clainne Néill', which is attributed to Flann Mainistrech and is followed by an extended Ó Domhnaill *Dúanaire* (4:2.1.3, 6:4.1).⁹⁴⁷ He also included the Tara Diptych, also attributed to Flann Mainistrech and explicitly stated to be from *LL*.⁹⁴⁸ Finally, RIA B.iv.2 is the sole witness for 'Úsalepscop Érenn Áed' (1:3), whose quatrain on Flann seems to have interested the Four Masters (5:3.1). NLI G.131 contains the same Donegal Series and Ó Domhnaill *Dúanaire* poems in the same order.⁹⁴⁹ 'Conall cuingid clainne Néill' is preceded by a detailed attribution to Flann, examined further in 5:3.1. The presence of the Donegal Series and the Ó Domhnaill *Dúanaire* in both collections is quite possibly related to the Uí Chléirigh having been hereditary historians to the Uí Dhomhnaill.⁹⁵⁰

Versions of the Donegal Series appear in other post-medieval manuscript collections. However, 'Conall cuingid clainne Néill' is only otherwise attributed to Flann Mainistrech by a manuscript's scribe in the seventeenth-century *Book of the*

⁹⁴⁴ Fitzpatrick, *RIA Cat.*, fasc. XXIV, 3021–29. Dublin, NLI, MS G.131, *saec.* XVII; Nessa Ní Shéaghdha and Pádraig Ó Macháin, *Catalogue of Irish manuscripts in the National Library of Ireland*, 13 fascs (Dublin: DIAS, 1961–1996) [hereafter, *NLI Cat.*], fasc. IV, 51–56.

⁹⁴⁵ Cunningham, *Annals*, pp. 69, 72.

⁹⁴⁶ Ní Shéaghdha, *NLI Cat.*, fasc. IV, 52.

⁹⁴⁷ RIA B.iv.2, fols 53^r–68^r.

⁹⁴⁸ RIA B.iv.2, fols 112^r–15^v.

⁹⁴⁹ NLI G.131, pp. 108–38, 177–8.

⁹⁵⁰ Cunningham, *Annals*, pp. 176–214.

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O’Conor Don (hereafter, *BOCD*).⁹⁵¹ Nonetheless, in the nineteenth century, up to eight further Donegal Series poems come to be attributed to Flann in published works by Edward O’Reilly and Eugene O’Curry. These scholars occasionally intervene in earlier manuscripts to add such attributions to Donegal Series poems. This impulse and the collections affected are discussed in detail in **6:4**.

As already mentioned (**4:2.1.6.1**), ‘Airgialla ardmóra uaisli’ appears in the seventeenth-century *TD*,⁹⁵² lacking any sort of preface and any external attribution but retaining the internal citation of Flann Mainistrech (**Appendix 17**). The manuscript largely contains religious poetry, but it concludes with a short collection of items on the Antrim Meic Dhomhnaill, among which are several poems on the Airgialla’s legendary history.⁹⁵³ The Meic Dhomhnaill claimed descent from Somerled Mac Gille Brigte (*ob.* 1164), king of the Hebrides, whose lineage some late medieval sources trace to a branch of the Airgialla.⁹⁵⁴ Again, Flann’s testimony has been adapted to corroborate the identity of a much later dynasty.

Seón Mac Solaidh and Áodh Ó Dálaigh, two of the scholars who gathered around Tadhg Ó Neachtain (*ob. c.* 1752) in Dublin,⁹⁵⁵ both include ‘Muintir Pádraig na paiter’ in three apparently closely related manuscripts and always attribute it to Flann Mainistrech.⁹⁵⁶ Their text of the poem is much more like the *Lec.* version than the text Burc interpolates into *AFM* in RIA C.iii.3 (**5:2.1.2**). Ó Riain believes that their version could derive ultimately from *Lec.* itself.⁹⁵⁷ In addition, Áodh Ó Dálaigh is one of several scribes during this period to reproduce versions of *LGÉ*, including poetry attributed to Flann. These were not restricted to *d* but also copies of some medieval recensions.⁹⁵⁸

⁹⁵¹ Roscrea, Clonalis House, MS, *The Book of the O’Conor Don* [hereafter *BOCD*], fol.157r18. For this manuscript, see *The Book of the O’Conor Don: Essays on an Irish Manuscript*, ed. by Pádraig Ó Macháin (Dublin: DIAS, 2010).

⁹⁵² TCD 1340, fol. 36^r1–22.

⁹⁵³ O’Sullivan, ‘*Tinnakill Duanaire*’, p. 215.

⁹⁵⁴ Alex Woolf, ‘The origins and ancestry of Somerled: Gofraid mac Fergusa and the Annals of the Four Masters’, *Medieval Scandinavia*, 15 (2005), 199–213 (pp. 206–07).

⁹⁵⁵ Ní Shéaghdha, ‘Scholars’, pp. 42–46.

⁹⁵⁶ Dublin, RIA, MS 23.E.26 (756), *saec.* XVIII; Dublin, RIA, MS 24.A.2 (757), *saec.* XVIII; Mulchrone, *RIA Cat.*, fasc. XIX, 2327–39. Dublin, TCD, MS 1345 (*olim.* H.4.1–3), *saec.* XVIII; *TCD Cat.*, pp. 168–69. See also Abbotsford, Abbotsford House Library MS E.2, *saec.* XVIII, fols 48^r18–49^r24 (Pádraig Ó Macháin, ‘Sir Walter Scott’s Irish Manuscript’, *Scottish Gaelic Studies*, 20 (2000), 146–55 (p. 150).

⁹⁵⁷ *CGSH*, p. 213.

⁹⁵⁸ Scowcroft, ‘*Leabhar Gabhála Part 1*’, pp. 85–87; Breatnach, ‘Ó Cléirigh Recension’, p. 5 (n. 14).

Seán Ó Cléirigh (1778–1846), possibly a descendant of Cú Chóigriche,⁹⁵⁹ includes ‘Cetrí ro gabh Éirinn uili’, with an attribution to Flann Mainistrech, in RIA 23.G.12,⁹⁶⁰ a collection of genealogies and bardic and historical poetry structured around the regions of Ireland. It was compiled sometime after 1831.⁹⁶¹ Seán possessed various manuscripts from Cú Chóigriche’s library when he moved to Dublin in 1817 from Co. Cavan. These apparently included RIA 23.D.17 (the *Ó Cléirigh Book of Genealogies*),⁹⁶² probably Seán’s source for both poem and attribution, as some other poems from RIA 23.D.17 also appear in RIA 23.G.12.⁹⁶³ Seán parted with the older manuscript shortly after arriving in Dublin,⁹⁶⁴ implying that he used an intermediate copy. RIA 23.D.17 thereafter passed through the hands of Edward O’Reilly but he makes no mention of ‘Cetrí ro gabh Éirinn uili’ as Flann’s work (**Appendix 1; 6:2**).

2.3 Flann’s texts in post-medieval manuscripts: conclusion

Surveying material attributed to Flann in manuscripts from the seventeenth century onwards, we find, as in **Chapter 4**, some items not previously associated with him and, in fact, not previously attested at all. We also find some previously attested items in different forms. This amplifies questions raised in **Chapter 4 (4:4)** concerning the medieval manuscript tradition’s diversity, or the inventiveness of compilers, with respect to Flann’s corpus. In terms of subject-matter, however, the interests ascribed to Flann overall remain recognisable, if wide-ranging, consisting of histories of Irish kingdoms, Armagh’s past and politics, literature on the Ciannachta, and contributions to *LGÉ*.

⁹⁵⁹ Pender, ‘O Clery Book’, pp. xi–xii.

⁹⁶⁰ Dublin, RIA, MS 23.G.12 (12), *saec.* XIX.

⁹⁶¹ O’Rahilly, *RIA Cat.*, fasc. I, 58–60.

⁹⁶² Pender, ‘O Clery Book’, p. xii.

⁹⁶³ For example: ‘Sé rígh decc ó Éoghain a nall’ (RIA 23.G.12, p. 182; RIA 23.D.17, p. 79), ‘Ga máid ngabháil fuair Éire’ (RIA 23.G.12, p. 186; RIA 23.D.17, p. 243).

⁹⁶⁴ Pender, ‘O Clery Book’, pp. xiii–xiv.

3 Critical treatments of Flann and his work

3.1 The Four Masters: attributions, annotations, and analysis

Looking at the attributions to Flann across *LGÉ d* (**Appendix 23**), it is interesting that each recurs so uniformly, given Breatnach's postulation of distinctive approaches and audiences for the various versions (**5:2.1.1**). The attributions to him, including his extended laureation in the superscription to 'Ríg Themra toebaige iar ttain', were both considered worth setting before the published version's wider readership but also acceptable in Cú Chóigriche's more stringent, scholarly version. As for the differences, the omission of 'Suibne go sloghadh dia soí' in RIA D.iii.3 and presumably RIA 23.M.70 (lacunose at this point) is commensurate with this version's terser *réim rígraide*.⁹⁶⁵ The lack of any ascription to Flann of 'Toisich na llongse tar ller' in RIA 23.M.70 and RIA D.iii.3 is less explicable and goes against this version's tendency to include more attributions.⁹⁶⁶ This might be an indication of confusion surrounding this attribution prompted by the longer and shorter versions' differences (**3:2.1, 5:2.1.1**).

A particularly detailed superscription introduces 'Ríg Themra toebaige iar ttain' in *LGÉ d* as well as in other, presumably related manuscripts. Since it appears across *LGÉ d* (RIA 23.M.70 lacunose) it can be assumed to be an early feature in the Four Masters' work. Meanwhile, another detailed superscription introduces 'Conall cuingid clainne Néill' in NLI G.131 (**Appendix 26**). Each superscription both summarises the respective poem's content, 'Conall cuingid clainne Néill' being catalogued in particular detail, but also provides relatively detailed information on Flann himself. Through both their content and their context, these superscriptions provide particularly detailed evidence of how the Four Masters conceived of Flann and his work.

Resembling Flann's chronicle obits in style but surpassing them in enthusiasm, the Four Masters' superscription to 'Ríg Themra toebaige iar ttain' describes Flann as 'an t-ughdar oirrderc',⁹⁶⁷ as *fer léiginn* of Monasterboice, and as

⁹⁶⁵ Breatnach, 'Ó Cléirigh Recension', pp. 12–14.

⁹⁶⁶ Breatnach, 'Ó Cléirigh Recension', p. 36.

⁹⁶⁷ 'the famous author' (my translation).

‘saoi eagna 7 cronice 7 filidechttae Gaedel na aimsir’.⁹⁶⁸ Much of this terminology is familiar from his chronicle obits (1:2.2) but it is worth revisiting it in the context of the Four Masters’ usage.

Ugdair, as we have seen, can denote a text’s composer, an expert, or, more impersonally, an authoritative source (1:2.2.6). We have also seen it used to denote scholars learned in inherited, shared historiography (2:5.3). Its usage, specifically, by the Four Masters is quite varied, which somewhat obscures its meaning in this superscription. In *Genealogiae Regum et Sanctorum Hiberniae* (*GRSH*), a collection of Irish saints’ genealogies framed by a *réim rígraide* that was an early product of the Four Masters’ researches,⁹⁶⁹ a long list of *ugdair* (including Flann) is drawn from throughout the history of the Gaídil (5:3.2).⁹⁷⁰ On the other hand, *LGÉ d*’s prefatory material refers to Irish and foreign authors on universal history with a chronological focus, in a tradition traced back to the Septuagint, as *ugdair*.⁹⁷¹ As a term, it can denote a source of specific historical testimony or the source of an overall chronological framework and seems to be highly dependent on context.

It seems to be used both sparingly and ambiguously in reference to other authors in *LGÉ d*. In RIA 23.K.32, Cínaed úa hArtacáin is described as ‘an senughdar’ and Gilla Cóemáin as ‘an senauctor oirrderc’.⁹⁷² These two authors, plus Flann, are broadly similar in *floruit*. Both Flann and Gilla Cóemáin are known as authors of regnal histories of Ireland but how their work is also similar to Cínaed’s is unclear.⁹⁷³ Also, others who contribute large-scale regnal histories, like Gilla Mo Dutu or Seán Ó Dubhagáin, are not called *ugdair* in *LGÉ d*.⁹⁷⁴ It is also unclear what makes Cínaed and Gilla Cóemáin ‘ancient’ or why Cínaed is not as ‘famous’. These terms’ usage here seems rhetorical rather than closely historiographical.

⁹⁶⁸ ‘master of learning and history and of the poetry of the Gaídil in his time’ (my translation).

⁹⁶⁹ Cunningham, *Annals*, pp. 65–71; Breatnach, *Four Masters*, pp. 32–39.

⁹⁷⁰ *Genealogiae Regum et Sanctorum Hiberniae*, ed. by Paul Walsh (Dublin: Record Society, St. Patrick’s College, Maynooth, 1918) [hereafter, *GRSH*], p. 10; Breatnach, *Four Masters*, pp. 32–39.

⁹⁷¹ MacNeill and Macalister (ed. and trans.), *Leabhar Gabhála*, §§2–4 (pp. 2–3); Breatnach, ‘Ó Cléirigh Recension’, pp. 8–9 (n. 24).

⁹⁷² RIA 23.K.32, pp. 153.28–30 (‘the ancient authority’), 164.8–10 (‘the famous ancient authority’; my translations).

⁹⁷³ John Carey, ‘Cínaed ua hArtacáin [Cineth O’Hartagain] (d. 975)’, *ODNB* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/20636>> [accessed 1 February 2015].

⁹⁷⁴ RIA 23.K.32, pp. 230.11, 238.13.

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Another term applied to Flann's work in this passage is *croinic* (5:2.1.1). This very rarely describes scholarly expertise in chronicle obits,⁹⁷⁵ but it is familiar to us from 'Réidig dam, a Dé, do nim' (4:2.3.1). True to its Latin etymology, it often denotes synchronistic historical writing in a universal context, not unlike one apparent sense of *ugdar* in *LGÉ d.*⁹⁷⁶ In *Lebor Bretnach* it refers to the works of Eusebius, Jerome, and Isidore.⁹⁷⁷ In *AT*, where it is glossed 'lebur oirisen' ('book of events'), it apparently refers to a historical work by Bede;⁹⁷⁸ it may also refer to Bede's *Chronica Maioria* in Flann's own 'Réidig dam, a Dé, do nim' (4:4.2.1). Dubhaltach Mac Firbhisigh uses it to designate *CS*.⁹⁷⁹ Yet Máel Muire Othna (*ob.* 887) uses it to describe 'Can a mbunadus na nGáedel',⁹⁸⁰ even though this poem is about the Gaídil's genealogical origins; relevance to universal history might be key.

Perhaps most significantly, Míchéal Ó Cléirigh describes himself as skilled in *croinic* in his address to the reader in *GRSH*.⁹⁸¹ Indeed, chronological structure, based on common-era dating, is an important aspect of *GRSH*, *LGÉ d*, and *AFM*.⁹⁸² Furthermore, *AFM* ascribes expertise in *croinic* to Míchéal's recent forebear, Tadhg Cam Ó Cléirigh (*ob.* 1565).⁹⁸³ Thus, while it had history as a term, *croinic* was also associated by the Four Masters with their own activities. That Flann is not only praised as a scholar but described via such a term implies a sense of connection and continuity with his perceived work.

This is touching, but also problematic. The description occurs in the context of the Tara Diptych. While, as we have seen (5:2.1.1), the Four Masters seem to have regarded this as pertaining to the *réim rígráide*'s chronological structure, they also came to include multiple historical poems that render a more extensive *réim rígráide* in greater chronological detail. Their authors – Gilla Cóemáin, Gilla Mo Dutu, and Seán Úa Dubhagáin – are introduced in markedly more modest terms (**Appendix**

⁹⁷⁵ Cunningham, *Annals*, pp. 177–78.

⁹⁷⁶ Breatnach's translation, 'traditional historiography' ('Ó Cléirigh Recension', p. 34), is thus potentially misleading.

⁹⁷⁷ van Hamel (ed.), *Lebor Bretnach*, §1 (p. 2); Todd (ed. and trans.), *Leabhar Breatnach*, pp. 26–27.

⁹⁷⁸ *CI*, I, p. 202 (n. 4); this may be Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* or his *Chronica Maiora*. For *Lebor Airissen* as a term for chronicling, see Evans, *Present*, p. 226.

⁹⁷⁹ *CS*, p. 2.

⁹⁸⁰ *LL*, III, l. 16153 (p. 523).

⁹⁸¹ *GRSH*, p. 7; Cunningham, *Annals*, pp. 177–78; Breatnach, 'Ó Cléirigh Recension', p. 34.

⁹⁸² Cunningham, *Annals*, pp. 65–66.

⁹⁸³ *AFM* 1565.6; Cunningham, *Annals*, p. 178.

27).⁹⁸⁴ Given that both *ugdar* and *croinic* could connote universal history, we may be once again be seeing the influence of Flann's authorship of 'Réidig dam, a Dé, do nim' here. It was also possibly noted that Flann pre-dated these authors of more elaborate works, so he might have been interpreted as the ultimate originator of Irish national regnal history.⁹⁸⁵ Alternatively, as we will see in **Chapter 6 (6:3)**, Flann eventually came to be cited regularly in early printed works as an author of the 'Synchronisms of Flann'. While all such citations post-date the Four Masters, whatever was their basis might have influenced Flann's depiction here.

NLI G.131's detailed superscription to 'Conall cuingid clainne Néill' says less about Flann himself, merely describing him (incorrectly) as the abbot of Monasterboice and citing 'Flann a prímhíll Buiti binn' (**1:3, Appendix 4**). A later hand has helpfully added the year of his death. In what it does say, this superscription seems more distant from Flann. Rather than emphasising his utility as an authority and the continuity between his and the Four Masters' work, he is described via a quatrain from a historical source, as in his *AFM* obit. The quatrain is described as a 'teist' ('evidence, testimony'; Lat. *testis*).⁹⁸⁶ Here, Flann is partly a historian and partly another character within history, discerned via evidence. One of the stated objectives of *AFM* is, after all, the recovery of 'fios sendachta na senughdar'.⁹⁸⁷ The quatrain perhaps reinforces this sense of separation with its description of Flann as *tiugsuí* ('final scholar'; **1:2.2.6**). Indeed, any sense of continuity with Flann in the superscription to 'Ríg Themra toebaige íar ttain' is also qualified by him being all the things he is 'na aimsir' ('in his time'). The Four Masters' attitude to Flann was complex, involving both recognition and high estimation of his scholarly activities and a consciousness of his antiquity, obscurity, and their reliance on others' testimony in order to understand him.

Whatever these superscriptions' composers feel they know about Flann, it does not inform how the two poems themselves are presented. In each case, the superscriptions simply present the topics on which they seem to provide historical information (cf. **3:4**), implying that they are being taken as factual sources. This is

⁹⁸⁴ The superscriptions are from RIA 23.K.32, RIA 23.M.70 having lost the relevant folios.

⁹⁸⁵ Indeed, more recent scholars have credited him with such a role: Byrne, 'Ireland', p. 866; Smith, 'Historical Verse', p. 341.

⁹⁸⁶ *eDIL* s.v. teist.

⁹⁸⁷ *AFM*, I, lv: 'knowledge of the antiquity of ancient authors'; Cunningham, *Annals*, p. 26.

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qualified, in the superscriptions, neither by the Tara Diptych's open celebration of Máel Sechnaill's return (2:3.3.3) nor by the favour shown to Cenél Conaill in 'Conall cungid clainne Néill' (4:2.1.3). An illustrative comparison is provided by Míchéal Óg Ó Longain (1766–1837), in his superscription to 'Conall cungid clainne Néill' in RIA F.vi.2. He identifies no author but recognises the poem's political impetus: 'File d'Aoibh Néill cecinit, ag foillsioga mórdhachta Chlainne Néill 7 créad rug go cóige Uladh iad'.⁹⁸⁸ The Four Masters are more interested in the information – and thus in bolstering Flann as its source – than in critiquing its perspective.

3.2 The history of Gaelic historiography

The traditional medieval Gaelic history of Ireland and its various peoples rivalled the Bible in span and arguably surpassed it in detail. Both the Four Masters and Dubhaltach Mac Fírhisigh provided prefaces to some of their works designed to make credible, for the benefit of sceptics, the authentic transmission of such ancient information down to their own time.⁹⁸⁹ Two such accounts name, categorise, and periodise the personnel responsible, including Flann Mainistrech, who is thus situated within the development of Gaelic historiography overall.

As we have seen (2:5.2), medieval scholars were capable of providing aetiologies for pseudo-historical compilations. Furthermore, there are Old and Middle Gaelic texts extant that chart the legendary development of the Gaelic language and catalogue its major authors,⁹⁹⁰ who are also often legendary or semi-legendary. The centre of gravity of Gaelic language and literature here seems to have been located in the distant past, although the chronicles note culturally significant individuals throughout the Middle Ages.⁹⁹¹ Seventeenth-century scholars, needing to draw lines of continuity down to themselves, pay more attention to medieval authors like Flann.

⁹⁸⁸ Dublin, RIA, MS F.vi.2 (253), *saec.* XVIII, p. 302; Mulchrone (ed.), *RIA Cat*, fasc. VI, 659: 'A poet of the Uí Néill sang [this], proclaiming the grandeur of the sons of Níall and why they went to the fifth of the Ulaid' (my translation).

⁹⁸⁹ Ó Muraíle, *Celebrated Antiquary*, pp. 218–19; Cunningham, *Annals*, pp. 39–42.

⁹⁹⁰ For example: 'A list of ancient Irish authors', ed. by Whitley Stokes, *ZCP*, 3 (1901), 15–16; *Auraceipt na n-Éces: The Scholar's Primer*, ed. and trans. by George Calder (Edinburgh: Grant, 1917); Smith (ed. and trans.), 'Aimirgein'; Roisin McLaughlin, 'Fénius Farsaid and the alphabets', *Ériu*, 59 (2009), 1–24 (pp. 3–11).

⁹⁹¹ Richter, 'Personnel'.

Many of the Four Masters' accounts of their sources focus on the physical codices to which they had access.⁹⁹² *GRSH*, however, provides lists of individual human authorities, the 'ughdair choimheda seanchois na hErenn', from the pre-Christian and Christian eras respectively, back to the arrival of the Gaídil in Ireland.⁹⁹³ It is not actually stated that these *ugdair* were each used individually; the lists may simply be to provide an overview of tradition. Indeed, the definition of *ugdar* is quite inclusive. The term is applied equally to pre-Christian and Christian figures. Flann, listed, naturally, in the Christian era, appears alongside numerous other historians with ecclesiastical connections, such as Dub Dá Leithe, Gilla Cóemáin, and Eochaid úa Flainn, but the *ugdair* of the Christian era also include figures like Dallán Forgaill, Colum Cille's eulogist, or Urard Mac Coise, an ill-defined *ollam*-adventurer known for manipulating Uí Néill kings.⁹⁹⁴

Yet the second list, of the Christian era's *ugdair*, does not extend beyond the twelfth century. The Four Masters were certainly aware of the later medieval learned tradition and their own ancestors' leading roles in it.⁹⁹⁵ *GRSH*'s *réim rígraide* also ends in the twelfth century, so it might be that the existence of scholarly *ugdair*, by this definition, was thought to require a corresponding political structure. On the other hand, a point stressed in *AFM*, originally titled *Annála Ríoghachta Éireann* ('annals of the kingdom of Ireland'), is Ireland's basic permanence as a political unit,⁹⁹⁶ which would, in general, render problematic the presentation of later twelfth-century events as bringing about cataclysmic discontinuity. It is also possible that *ugdair* were expected to provide quasi-eyewitness testimony on contemporary events, hence they were not sought after the end of the period of interest.

For whatever reason, *GRSH*'s lists place Flann within a historiographical era that stretches back to the arrival either of Christianity or of the Gaídil but which, for the Four Masters, has long ended. Within this era, few distinctions are made. The *ugdair* listed are all in some way responsible for the structure and details of the

⁹⁹² MacNeill and Macalister (ed. and trans.), *Leabhar Gabhála*, §5 (pp. 4–5); *GRSH*, p. 9; Cunningham, *Annals*, pp. 42–46.

⁹⁹³ Walsh (ed.), *Genealogiae*, p. 10.

⁹⁹⁴ Charles-Edwards, 'Dallán Forgaill'; O'Leary, 'Identities'.

⁹⁹⁵ Cunningham, *Annals*, pp. 244–82.

⁹⁹⁶ Cunningham, *Annals*, p. 80.

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history compiled by the Four Masters. Conclusions drawn from a terse list of names, however, must remain cautious.

Dubhaltach Mac Fírhisigh's preface to *LMG* analyses the history of the Gaelic historiographical tradition in much greater detail. Additionally, Mac Fírhisigh began, but did not complete, *Ughdair Éireann* ('Ireland's authorities'), a history of Irish authors in various disciplines, including history (*seanchas*) itself,⁹⁹⁷ although Flann himself is mentioned by name only in *LMG*. In each account, Mac Fírhisigh sets out how Irish history has been transmitted via two parallel, interacting routes: through an ecclesiastical literary tradition and through the continuous existence of a dedicated learned class.

The latter, he demonstrates, had existed among every people that had come to inhabit Ireland.⁹⁹⁸ In an interesting parallel to what might underlie *GRSH*'s lists of *ugdair*, he stresses that the function of this learned class is not only to perpetuate memory of the past but to record contemporary events. The system, established at Druim Cetta by Colum Cille, of embedding a *fili* within each *túath*, for example, facilitates such a function.⁹⁹⁹ This socially-embedded learned class employed writing, which is thus not presented as distinctively ecclesiastical. The earliest text cited in the *LMG* preface is the *Saltair Temrach* ('Psalter of Tara'), which was begun by Ollam Fodla, a very early Goidelic king of Ireland, as a record of the conclusions reached at the triennial *Feis Temrach*.¹⁰⁰⁰ In *Ughdair Éireann*, he goes further and states that the Gaídil have always kept a written historical record.¹⁰⁰¹

Yet Mac Fírhisigh also notes an ecclesiastical tradition of historiography based on direct access to authentic, revenant knowledge rather than on inherited memory. His main source for this tradition is a passage from a not immediately recognisable version of *LGÉ*, cognate with Macalister's §385 and the conclusion to 'Éitset áes ecna aibind' (2:5.3).¹⁰⁰² Again, Colum Cille and other saints receive and transcribe testimony on Ireland's past from long-lived eyewitnesses, here unnamed,

⁹⁹⁷ 'De scriptoribus Hibernicis', ed. by James Carney, *Celtica*, 1 (1950), 86–110; Ó Muraíle, *Celebrated Antiquary*, pp. 218–20.

⁹⁹⁸ *LMG*, I, §§3.3–4.6 (pp. 162–65). Mac Fírhisigh explicitly conceives of a multi-ethnic Ireland (Ó Muraíle, *Celebrated Antiquary*, pp. 179–82).

⁹⁹⁹ *LMG*, I, §4.7 (pp. 166–67).

¹⁰⁰⁰ *LMG*, I, §4.5 (pp. 164–65). See also Ó Riain, 'Psalter', pp. 108–112.

¹⁰⁰¹ Carney (ed.), 'De scriptoribus', ll. 7–13 (p. 88).

¹⁰⁰² *LMG*, I, §§2.2–3.2 (pp. 162–65); cf. *LGÉ*, V, §385 (pp. 22–23); Smith (ed. and trans.), *Politics*, qq. 68–77 (pp. 86–93).

their writings being reproduced thereafter by ecclesiastical scholars. While Eochaid's poem and medieval versions of *LGÉ* describe the latter's role in terms of refinement and discussion, the emphasis in Mac Fírbhisigh's *LGÉ* and in his own account is solely on preservation. *Ughdair Éireann* presents a similar role for the church and names some of the codices that were the result.¹⁰⁰³

Mac Fírbhisigh is ultimately not interested in promoting either form of transmission over the other but in demonstrating the Gaelic historiographical tradition's continuity and collective coherence. In his account, both professional poets and ecclesiastical scholars can claim direct or indirect access to the events or social institutions that are the subjects of their records. However, he does seem to present national Irish history as a specifically literary endeavour.

While we might expect to find Flann as part of this endeavour, this is not so straightforward. He appears within a list of the 'rígh agus naoimh agus eaglais Ereann' by whom history was also transmitted.¹⁰⁰⁴ They are to be distinguished from professional, socially embedded poets, yet they are not purely textual ecclesiastical scholars. The list includes several other Middle Gaelic historical poets but also semi-legendary poets of the early Christian era and sagely characters, like Cormac mac Airt, from what we know to be the legendary past.¹⁰⁰⁵ The particular nature, if any, of this eclectic group's contribution is left unspecified.

We then find what we might have expected to be Flann's contribution being attributed specifically to later medieval learned families. Mac Fírbhisigh relates that, with the emergence of surnames, kings and lords were able to take on specific lineages of historians to interpret the literature of the past, write their polity's history, and preserve it in poetry.¹⁰⁰⁶ This, he states, is still the practice in his own time. He does not state that these functions are very different from those of earlier scholars, but the emphasis up to this point has been on observation and preservation, not literary creation or compilation. Like, perhaps, the Four Masters in *GRSH*, Mac Fírbhisigh perceives important changes in the later twelfth century.¹⁰⁰⁷ Again, Flann

¹⁰⁰³ Carney (ed.), 'De scriptoribus', ll. 99–106 (p. 91)..

¹⁰⁰⁴ *LMG*, I, §5.2 (pp. 166–67): 'the kings and saints and church of Ireland'.

¹⁰⁰⁵ *LMG*, I, §5.2 (pp. 166–67).

¹⁰⁰⁶ *LMG*, I, §§5.3–6.2 (pp. 166–69); cf. Carney (ed.), 'De scriptoribus', ll. 107–25 (p. 91).

¹⁰⁰⁷ See also Mac Cana, 'Later schools', pp. 126–28; Dumville, 'What is medieval Gaelic poetry?', pp. 81–83.

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is placed in a prior era, mentioned in the same breath as ancient sages from pseudo-history, and, in this instance, disassociated from the tertiary authorship that seems to be his function elsewhere (2:5.2, 4:3.1). He has joined the ancient authorities we once found him elucidating.

This loss of distinction between Flann and more ancient authorities might be a consequence of emphasising continuity in Gaelic historiography. On the other hand, Mac Fírbhisigh's later addition to *LMG*, based on *ANÍ* (5:2.1.4), to an extent revives the idea of tertiary authorship. Flann and Eochaid memorialise Nath Í's story ('do chuirsiod eoluigh ele an ccedna i ccuimhne') but the story's ultimate source is Torna Éces, the colophon material stating that they accessed Torna's account in multiple manuscripts.¹⁰⁰⁸ Flann is still a receiver and interpreter, as distinct from an original witness. However, even here, Mac Fírbhisigh emphasises his and Eochaid's preservation and memorialisation of a consistently coherent account, rather than their work's creative, reconstructive, or quasi-originate aspects (2:5.2.1).

Flann's position in these two accounts of Gaelic historiography is ambiguous, as it is in the widely circulated detailed superscription to 'Ríg Themra toebaige íar ttain' (5:2.1.1). On the one hand, he is assigned a social and historical context within a specific era and, in the superscription, areas of expertise. On the other, both Mac Fírbhisigh and the Four Masters are more interested in the Gaelic historiographical tradition's integrity and in what it collectively bequeaths than in isolating and analysing specific contributors. For both, a wide range of identifiable authors are *ugdair* ('authorities'), in that they provide useful, apparently authentic information and not necessarily on account of anything particular about them as individuals. For this and perhaps other reasons, Flann merges in these sources with authors and eras from which he was once distinguished.

3.3 Glossing and glossaries

Another aspect of the Four Masters' relationship with Flann's work is expressed by the glossing of his various poems in *LGÉ d*, in both RIA 23.M.70 and 23.K.32. Both manuscripts contain a common corpus of mainly lexicographical or linguistic

¹⁰⁰⁸ *LMG*, I, §§299.5–6 (pp. 684–85): 'other learned men have preserved the memory of the same thing'.

glosses, although their exact formulation often varies.¹⁰⁰⁹ For Breatnach, RIA 23.M.70's glosses, by Míchéal Ó Cléirigh, were to be included in the printed edition to aid the less advanced reader, while those in RIA 23.K.32 by Cú Cóigriche were for experienced scholars in Ireland (5:2.1.1).¹⁰¹⁰ Many of RIA 23.M.70's glosses in particular correspond to entries in *Foclóir no Sanasan Nua* (hereafter, *Foclóir*), a glossary published by Míchéal in Louvain in 1643.¹⁰¹¹ Breatnach suggests that this manuscript was one of the 'leabhair chruaidhe' on which he based the glossary.¹⁰¹²

Of the poems attributed to Flann in *LGÉ d*, 'Ríg Themra dia tesbann tnú' receives the most glossing in both RIA 23.M.70 and RIA 23.K.32. Sporadic glossing also occurs in 'Éstid a eolchu cen ón' and 'Toisich na llongse tar ller'.¹⁰¹³ The examples in **Appendix 28**, taken from all three poems, all fit Breatnach's interpretation. They are about explicating vocabulary and their definitions correspond with entries in *Foclóir*. I have provided only a sample of the glosses on these three poems. It should be noted that there are also many that bear no relation to entries in *Foclóir*.

The Four Masters thus believed that Flann's poems merited explication and that they were suitable as a source of vocabulary. That is not to say that they were considered particularly obscure. Míchéal states that *Foclóir* avoids the esoteric and concentrates on standard, learned Gaelic vocabulary 'don aos óg agas don aos ainbfis',¹⁰¹⁴ although the glossary has been compiled 'ar fhoclaibh cruaidhe ar dteangtha mathardha', collected 'do sheinleabhraibh'.¹⁰¹⁵

Flann (alongside other glossed contributions to *LGÉ d*) is not simply considered an authority on history but a reliable source for the learned yet approachable Gaelic of old books; he is, after all, also 'saoi [...] filidhechta'.¹⁰¹⁶

¹⁰⁰⁹ Breatnach, 'Ó Cléirigh Recension', p. 17. Smith's (*Politics*) edition of Eochaid úa Flainn's 'Éitset áes ecna aibind' includes the text and glosses from RIA 23.K.32.

¹⁰¹⁰ Breatnach, 'Ó Cléirigh Recension', pp. 19–28.

¹⁰¹¹ Míchéal Ó Cléirigh, *Foclóir nó Sanasán nua* (Louvain: [n. pub.] 1643); '*Foclóir no Sanasan Nua* [Part 1]', ed. and trans. by Arthur W. K. Miller, *Revue Celtique*, 4 (1879–80), 349–428; '*Foclóir no Sanasan Nua* [Part 2]', *Revue Celtique* 5 (81–1883), 1–69; Breatnach, 'Ó Cléirigh Recension', pp. 30–34. However, see also Flahive, 'Observations'.

¹⁰¹² Miller (ed. and trans.), '*Foclóir* [1]', p. 354: 'difficult books'.

¹⁰¹³ Texts (with glosses) of these poems from RIA 23.K.32 can be found at MacNeill and Macalister (ed. and trans.), *Leabhar Gabhála*, pp. 176–89, 246–49.

¹⁰¹⁴ Miller (ed. and trans.), '*Foclóir* [part. 1]', p. 352: 'to the young and ignorant'.

¹⁰¹⁵ Miller (ed. and trans.), '*Foclóir* [part. 1]', p. 351: 'on the difficult words of our mother tongue'; 'from old books'.

¹⁰¹⁶ *AFM* 1056.3.

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When considering why he is so highly regarded by the Four Masters when more accurate chronological poetry was also available, his literary eloquence may also have been important. Indeed, in RIA 23.K.32, the more advanced chronological poems by Gilla Cóemáin, Gilla Mo Dutu, and Seán Ó Dubhagáin that conclude *LGÉ d* are not glossed.¹⁰¹⁷

3.4 Ethical readings

Medieval authorship had an ethical, as well as a scholarly, dimension.¹⁰¹⁸ While there is no direct medieval evidence for Flann's work having been read for ethical insights, such evidence is occasionally presented in post-medieval manuscripts. As we have seen, Mac Fírbhisigh uses Flann and Eochaid's *ANÍ* as a warning against pride and greed among the Gaelic aristocracy.¹⁰¹⁹ The popularity of the name Nath Í/Dathí among the seventeenth-century Uí Dhubhda may have added force to such a usage.¹⁰²⁰

In the sixteenth-century Donegal manuscript, *Leabhar Chlainne Suibhne* (Section C),¹⁰²¹ there appear several later additions by the late seventeenth-century scholar and poet, Tadhg Ó Rodaighe (*ob.* 1706).¹⁰²² In the midst of a *Mac Suibhne dúanaire*,¹⁰²³ he inscribes, in prominent display script, two quatrains from the conclusion of 'Ríg Themra toebaige íar ttain' contrasting human kings' mortality with the eternity of God's kingdom.¹⁰²⁴ These are introduced 'Flann Mainistreach cecinit as an duain darab tosach Ríg Temhra dia tteasbann tnú ad feassam a n-aidhedha' (*sic*).¹⁰²⁵ Implying that this is a personal statement, he then inscribes his own genealogy.¹⁰²⁶ His other major intervention in the manuscript also concerns

¹⁰¹⁷ RIA 23.K.32, pp. 230.11–247.14. RIA 23.M.70 has lost its final folios and RIA D.iii.3 dispenses with glossing (Breatnach, 'Ó Cléirigh Recension', p. 17).

¹⁰¹⁸ Minnis, *Medieval Theory*, pp. 73–117.

¹⁰¹⁹ *LMG*, I, §§299.5–6 (pp. 684–85).

¹⁰²⁰ Ó Muraíle, *Celebrated Antiquary*, p. 216.

¹⁰²¹ Dublin, RIA, MS 24.P.25 (475), *Leabhar Chlainne Suibhne*, *saec.* XVI, pp. 139–60.

¹⁰²² Pádraig Ó Macháin, 'Tadhg Ó Rodaighe and his school: aspects of patronage and poetic practice at the close of the bardic era', in *Princes*, ed. by Duffy, pp. 538–51 (549–50).

¹⁰²³ RIA 24.P.25, p. 143b8–19.

¹⁰²⁴ *LL*, III, ll. 15978–85 (p. 515).

¹⁰²⁵ RIA 24.P.25, p. 143b8–11: 'Flann Mainistreach sang, from the poem beginning "Ríg Themra dia tesbann tnú |ad-fessam a n-aideda"' (my translation).

¹⁰²⁶ RIA 24.P.25, p. 143b19–23.

mutability.¹⁰²⁷ The same quatrains appear with an identical introduction in BL Egerton 127, produced in 1775 by Muiris Ó Gormáin (also ‘Mac Gormáin’; *ob.* 1794),¹⁰²⁸ who was in contact with Ó Rodaighe.¹⁰²⁹ Ó Gormáin presents Flann’s quatrains alongside a series of proverbs in Irish and English and an English-only set attributed to Marcus Aurelius.¹⁰³⁰

In these three cases, Flann’s work provides more than the facts of worldly affairs but insights into underlying philosophical truths. It is debateable whether ethical insight is being sought from Flann in particular or from history in general, Flann being regarded simply as providing history. Potential ethical readings could certainly be identified elsewhere in the corpus attributed to him. However, it is only in these late manuscripts that we find such readings made explicit.

4 Conclusion: Flann in post-medieval manuscripts

In terms of the texts attributed to him, the post-medieval Flann enjoys quite a high degree of continuity with his former manifestations. Some previously unattested attributions are made, which yield interesting insights into the varied forms in which texts circulated under his name. However, they are broadly similar in subject-matter to attributions made in older manuscripts while, in genre and topic, the texts attributed to Flann remain quite varied. We also find explicit evidence of Flann’s texts being put to previously unattested lexicographical and moralising uses, although there is no evidence against them having been used these ways in the Middle Ages.

In the post-Renaissance historical compilations that we have examined, more interest is taken in describing historiography’s provenance, although often in legendary terms, and in providing basic identification and historical context for cited authors. This material, where it relates directly to Flann, is quite ambiguous. He is placed in a prior age that was defined socio-politically and intellectually and projected into the distant past but differentiated from recent history, in the perspective of seventeenth-century compilers. *GRSH* and *LMG*, in particular, are

¹⁰²⁷ RIA 24.P.25, p. 143b30–39; Ó Macháin, ‘Tadhg’, p. 536.

¹⁰²⁸ Ní Shéaghdah, ‘Scholars’, pp. 50–52.

¹⁰²⁹ Flower, *BL Cat.*, II, 52.

¹⁰³⁰ London, BL, MS Egerton 127, *saec.* XVIII, fol.48b1–19; Flower, *BL Cat.*, II, 69.

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both presented as deriving from Gaelic historiography as a whole, its individual author-figures subordinated to a tradition characterised by transmission rather than re-invention or origination. At the same time, the Four Masters' ascription to him of expertise in *croinic* implies that he was understood to contribute more than information but to offer structure and coherency to history, as he, indeed, he would offer abundantly within early printed historiography (6:3). The lexicographical and moralistic uses of his work, meanwhile, suggest that his occupation of a prior era did not render his work pedagogically irrelevant.

Chapter 6

'One accurate numerical system' and the Uí Néill's Glory.¹⁰³¹

The Post-Medieval Flann Mainistrech (2): Early Printed Works, c. 1600–1870

1 Introduction

1.1 Two new attributions

The texts attributed to Flann in early printed English and Latin works on Irish history include several poems found under his name in the manuscript tradition. However, this corpus is dominated by two new groups of texts: the mostly prose 'Synchronisms of Flann', which correlate Ireland's ancient past with universal history, and the majority of the Donegal Series (4:2.1.3, 5:2.2), which asserts the rights and prestige of the Uí Dhomhnaill. The 'Synchronisms', specifically, not only dominate printed references to Flann but constitute a source of major importance for the writers involved overall, propelling Flann to the forefront of medieval Ireland's perceived intellectual culture, as we have seen (LR:2.3).

There is little evidence of the association of any of these texts with Flann in the medieval manuscript tradition, let alone of his actual authorship of them. Their association with him in early printed scholarship thus raises questions concerning the sources and methodologies employed by the scholars who cite them. Again, these attributions may have been generated by post-Renaissance historiographical needs and approaches or by otherwise unattested medieval evidence accessible to the relevant scholars. In addition, whatever their provenance, each group of texts' association with Flann, from our perspective, presents him in a distinctive way. As author-figure of the 'Synchronisms', Flann engages with historical frameworks at a national or universal level, whereas the Donegal Series has him adopt a very particular political perspective. Yet it is also unclear if the scholars who associate these works with him actually read the texts in this way.

¹⁰³¹ 6:3.2.3; 5:3.1.

1.2 Early printed works on Irish history

As already discussed (**LR:2.1; 5:1**), post-medieval historical works by those immersed in Gaelic historiography or sympathetic to Irish nationhood or Catholic Emancipation were very often orientated towards asserting Ireland's validity as a nation via its medieval and pre-medieval history. Such enterprises were not only highly-charged politically but also controversial historiographically. Gaelic sources and the traditional pseudo-historical narrative around which they were based regularly fell short of post-Renaissance standards of credibility and accountability. Fr Thomas Innes (1662–1744) expressed the opinions of multiple foreign historians when he complained that traditional Gaelic history was derived from 'anonymous, obscure or credulous authors'.¹⁰³² In addition, the seventeenth century saw European scholars' elaboration of a scheme of absolute chronology, meaning that synchronicity became a key test of historical material's validity.¹⁰³³ Apologists for Gaelic historiography aiming to publish in print thus not only faced practical and financial challenges, especially before the nineteenth century, but were also under pressure, in the face of a sceptical audience, to render their histories rational and accountable.

2 Overview of Flann's corpus in early print

In the seventeenth century, Flann Mainistrech was not universally known. As we have seen, he is not mentioned by Keating (**5:2.1**), nor is he to be found in James Ware's *De Scriptoribus Hibernicis* (1639). The earliest explicit reference to him in print is in Fr John Lynch's (*ob. c. 1677*) *Cambrensis Eversus* (1657).¹⁰³⁴ Thereafter, he is cited or referenced in some form by most major writers on Irish history with access to medieval Gaelic materials, including Roderick O'Flaherty, Charles

¹⁰³² Thomas Innes, *A Critical Essay on the Ancient Inhabitants of the Northern Parts of Britain, or Scotland* (London: Innys, 1729); repr. in *The Historians of Scotland* 8 (Edinburgh: Paterson, 1879), p. 370, cf. p. 227 (citations from repr.).

See also: Edward D. Stillingfleet, *Origines Britannicae, or Antiquities of the British Churches* (London: Flesher, 1685), pp. 35–36; George MacKenzie, *The Antiquity of the Royal Line of Scotland* (London: Swalle, 1686), pp. 1–7.

¹⁰³³ Anthony Grafton, *Defenders of the Text: The Traditions of Scholarship in an Age of Science, 1450–1800* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), pp. 104–44; Breisach, *Historiography*, pp. 177–85; Aylmer, 'Introductory Survey', pp. 266–67;

¹⁰³⁴ Lynch, *Cambrensis Eversus*, III:i, 264–65.

O’Conor of Belanagare (1710–91; O’Conor I),¹⁰³⁵ his grandson, Rev. Charles O’Conor (O’Conor II), Edward O’Reilly, John O’Donovan (1806–61), and Eugene O’Curry (**LR:2.1–2**). Interest was expressed in his work by writers outside Ireland, such as the aforementioned Thomas Innes and Edward Stillingfleet (1635–99),¹⁰³⁶ who both probably encountered Flann indirectly via O’Flaherty. Although some of these citations include very terse biographical information emphasising Flann’s scholarly eminence, the first published efforts to establish Flann’s corpus and comment on his overall significance did not appear until O’Reilly and O’Curry’s two bio-bibliographies.

The issues with the attributions to Flann of the ‘Synchronisms of Flann’ and the Donegal Series are complex and are discussed in detail below (**6:3**). Otherwise, the poems associated with Flann in early printed works largely overlap with those that appear in manuscripts of the same period (**5:2**). The most frequently occurring poems in the works of Lynch, O’Flaherty, and O’Conor II, are the Tara Diptych and ‘Éstid a eolchu cen ón’.¹⁰³⁷ Specifically in *Rerum Hibernicarum Scriptores*, O’Conor II’s heavily annotated editions and Latin translations of major Irish chronicles, we find citations, under Flann’s name, of ‘Réidig dam, a Dé, do nim’,¹⁰³⁸ ‘Pádraig abb Érenn uile’ (**5:2.1.2**),¹⁰³⁹ and ‘Erimón is Éber ard’ (**3:2.1**), the latter included within the Tara Diptych.¹⁰⁴⁰

These citations appear in various contexts. O’Flaherty references the Tara Diptych in relation to regnal succession on one occasion,¹⁰⁴¹ to topography on another.¹⁰⁴² Meanwhile, Lynch cites the Diptych to show – *pace* Giraldus Cambrensis (*ob. c.* 1223) – that a certain ‘Turgesius’ was never a king of Ireland, expressing confidence in Flann’s king-list.¹⁰⁴³ O’Flaherty cites ‘Éstid a eolchu cen

¹⁰³⁵ Charles O’Conor of Balinagare 1710–91: *Life and Works*, ed. by Luke Gibbons and Kieran D. O’Conor (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2015).

¹⁰³⁶ Stillingfleet, *Origines*, p. xlvii; Innes, *Critical Essay*, pp. 227–28.

¹⁰³⁷ Tara Diptych: Lynch, *Cambrensis Eversus*, III:i, 264–65; [O’Flaherty] Sharpe, *Letters*, pp. 412–13; O’Conor [II], *Rerum Hibernicarum*, II, pp. 33, 37, 39. ‘Éstid a eolchu cen ón’: [O’Flaherty] Sharpe, *Letters*, p. 412; O’Conor [II], *Rerum Hibernicarum*, III, p. xxix.

¹⁰³⁸ O’Conor [II], *Rerum Hibernicarum*, I, p. 35.

¹⁰³⁹ O’Conor [II], *Rerum Hibernicarum*, III, p. 99.

¹⁰⁴⁰ O’Conor [II], *Rerum Hibernicarum*, II, p. 36 (n. 1).

¹⁰⁴¹ O’Flaherty, *Ogygia*, p. 151; Hely (trans.), *Ogygia*, I, 214.

¹⁰⁴² O’Flaherty, *Ogygia*, p. 189; Hely (trans.), *Ogygia*, II, 39–40.

¹⁰⁴³ Lynch, *Cambrensis Eversus*, III:i, 264–65; Benjamin T. Hudson, ‘Turges (*d.* 845)’, *ODNB* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/27402>> [accessed 12 May 2015].

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ón' while profiling Manannán.¹⁰⁴⁴ Most of O'Conor II's citations are to do with the corroboration or fine tuning of details from the various chronicles under scrutiny. Excluding 'Pádraig abb Érenn uile' but including 'Toisich na llongse tar Iler', all these had also appeared attributed to Flann in O'Conor II's catalogue entry on the manuscript containing *LGÉ D* (now RIA D.iv.3).¹⁰⁴⁵ He is named there simply because these poems are attributed to him in this manuscript.

Two citations cannot be linked with any texts attributed to Flann in extant manuscripts, but involve poems treated as accurate sources of chronological data. First, O'Flaherty cites 'Flann de Monasterio in Synchronismi Poemate' when ascribing Conaire Mór a reign of sixty years,¹⁰⁴⁶ apparently a metrical regnal list of the kings of Tara or Ireland. Sharpe treats this as a citation of the prose 'Synchronisms of Flann' (*Adam primus pater*; **6:3.1.1**) but O'Flaherty specifies a metrical text.¹⁰⁴⁷ It cannot be the Tara Diptych, as this omits reign-lengths. One poem that does contain the datum in question is Giolla Íosa Mór Mac Firisigh's 'Réidig dam, a Dé, do nim' (**4:3.3, 6:3.2.2**). Secondly, O'Conor II ascribes reign-lengths to two kings of Alba on the basis of an otherwise unspecified poem attributed to 'Flann'.¹⁰⁴⁸ One corresponds precisely to the same king's reign-length in 'A éolcha Alban uile' (the *Dúan Albanach*), the other varies by only one year.¹⁰⁴⁹ O'Conor II, who transcribed and translated this poem,¹⁰⁵⁰ may thus have believed it to be Flann's work.¹⁰⁵¹

On the whole, therefore, Flann's poems were cited as useful historical sources. Yet Flann is not always regarded as authoritative in early printed scholarship. Very often, he is but one of several sources cited, the period's historical practice ostensibly eschewing reliance on single authorities. Furthermore, O'Flaherty and O'Conor I both openly expressed reservations about some of Flann's purported

¹⁰⁴⁴ O'Flaherty, *Ogygia*, p. 179–80; Hely (trans.), *Ogygia*, II, 26–27.

¹⁰⁴⁵ Dublin, RIA, MS D.iv.3 (1224), *saec.* XVI; O'Conor [II], *Bibliotheca*, I, 22, 29, 35–36; Scowcroft, 'Leabhar Gabhála I', p. 86.

¹⁰⁴⁶ O'Flaherty, *Ogygia*, p. 131; Hely (trans.), *Ogygia*, I, 185: 'Flann Mainistrech, in his metrical synchronisms'.

¹⁰⁴⁷ Sharpe, *Letters*, p. 412.

¹⁰⁴⁸ O'Conor [II], *Rerum Hibernicarum*, IV, p. 241 (n. 2).

¹⁰⁴⁹ 'The Poem *A Eolcha Alban Uile*', ed. and trans. Kenneth H. Jackson, *Celtica*, 3 (1956), 149–67 (pp. 162–63).

¹⁰⁵⁰ Jackson, 'Poem', pp. 152–53.

¹⁰⁵¹ Its anonymous author is unlikely to be Flann: Jackson, 'Poem', p. 150; Zumbuhl, 'Contextualising'.

work, particularly on ancient history. For O’Flaherty, writing began in Ireland in the reign of Cyrus, the first Persian world-king, whom he synchronised with Ireland’s early Goidelic kings, rendering coverage by the ‘Synchronisms of Flann’ of pre-Goidelic Irish history in need of corroboration.¹⁰⁵² O’Conor I was even more cautious, urging that all Flann’s material on pre-Christian Ireland be treated with scepticism.¹⁰⁵³ He suggested in print that Flann had dangerously mixed ‘the uncertain and authentic, in our antient history’.¹⁰⁵⁴ In private correspondence, he admitted to disillusionment with Flann’s entire chronological scheme.¹⁰⁵⁵

3 The ‘Synchronisms’: Flann’s apotheosis?

3.1 Overview

The ‘Synchronisms of Flann’, as a title, generally refers to four identifiable medieval tracts, in various combinations. To facilitate discussion of their attributions to Flann, it is necessary to discuss the tracts themselves and their patterns of inclusion within the ‘Synchronisms’. In what follows, ‘the Synchronisms of Flann’ refers both to the four tracts collectively and to the hypothetical single work that scholars tacitly invoke via various English and Latin titles that employ the basic elements of ‘Flann’ and ‘Synchronisms’, without making further distinctions.

Appendix 29 presents the four main tracts cited as the ‘Synchronisms of Flann’, their medieval titles, and references to their citations as such in early printed scholarship. Also listed are instances in which one of the component tracts is cited but without Flann as the author or where the ‘Synchronisms of Flann’ is cited as a title but the referenced tract is not identifiable.¹⁰⁵⁶

¹⁰⁵² O’Flaherty, *Ogygia*, p. 94; Hely (trans.), *Ogygia*, I, 136.

¹⁰⁵³ Roderick O’Flaherty, *The Ogygia Vindicated* [...]: *A Posthumous Work by Roderic O’Flaherty*, ed. by Charles O’Conor [I] (Dublin: Faulkner, 1775), p. xxviii

¹⁰⁵⁴ O’Conor, *Ogygia Vindicated*, p. xi

¹⁰⁵⁵ *Letters of Charles O’Conor of Belanagare: A Catholic Voice in Eighteenth-century Ireland*, ed. by Robert E. Ward, John F. Wrynn, and Catherine C. Ward (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1988), pp. 459–60, 466–67.

¹⁰⁵⁶ Much of this data has been gathered through database and index searches for the terms ‘Flann’ and ‘Synchronisms’. Citations that do not use one of these terms thus may not be exhaustively listed.

3.1.1 Adam primus pater (Schmidt's S-BB and S-UM)

Adam primus pater (my title, from the tract's incipit) is a Middle Gaelic prose tract in *BB*, *UM*, and, abridged and acephalous, in NLI G.6.¹⁰⁵⁷ It has no attested medieval title, although O'Connor I added the titles 'Leabhar Comhaimsireachda Flainn Mainistreach' and 'Synchronism of Flan' in *BB*.¹⁰⁵⁸ Any basis he had for this, beyond O'Flaherty's citations of the *UM* version as such, was already unknown by O'Curry's time.¹⁰⁵⁹

The tract begins with an unsynchronised history of Adam's immediate descendants, their foundation of human society, the Flood, and the descent of post-Diluvian humanity from Noah. Upon reaching Ninus, Eusebian tradition's first world-king,¹⁰⁶⁰ the tract employs the five world-kingships (Assyrian, Median, Persian, 'Greek', and Roman) as eras and the world-kings' regnal years as a chronological framework. Within this framework is set the standard pseudo-historical invasions of Ireland and the *réim rígraide*, alongside other notable events, such as the Táin,¹⁰⁶¹ and assorted information on Mediterranean and Christian history. This is all dated relative to the relevant world-king's reign. The *BB* text ends with the Battle of Mag Muccrama and Art mac Cuinn's death, while the *UM* text ends slightly earlier with the Battle of Cenn Abrad, both in the reign of the Emperor Caracalla (*ob.* AD 217).¹⁰⁶²

As discussed (4:3.3), *Adam primus pater* has been shown to push Irish history substantially further back in time relative to the world-kingships when compared to *LGÉ mab*, meaning most pre-Goidelic Irish history occurs during the Assyrian world-kingship, as in *LGÉ c.* Scowcroft believes that *Adam primus pater* was used in this recension.¹⁰⁶³ In addition, the tract is in some way related to *SAM*, as the initial section covering Adam to Ninus (*BB* version) appears therein.¹⁰⁶⁴

¹⁰⁵⁷ *BB*, fols 6^{ra}1–7^{va}5; *UM*, fols 48^{ra}1–49^{rb}64; Dublin, NLI, MS G.6, *saec.* XVI, fols 32^v4–45^v26. For the latter, see Jaski, 'Irish Origin Legend', pp. 72–74. The *BB* text has been edited and translated by MacCarthy (*Codex*, pp. 286–317). See also Schmidt, 'Zu Réidig', pp. 249–50, who is alone in noticing the existence of the *UM* version.

¹⁰⁵⁸ Scowcroft, 'Leabhar Gabhála I', p. 128 (n. 135).

¹⁰⁵⁹ O'Curry, *Manuscript Materials*, p. 522.

¹⁰⁶⁰ McKitterick, *Perceptions*, pp. 9–11.

¹⁰⁶¹ MacCarthy, *Codex*, §§p–r (pp. 302–07).

¹⁰⁶² Schmidt, 'Zu Réidig dam', pp. 249–50. For these battles, see *Cath Maige Muccrama* ed. and trans. by O'Daly.

¹⁰⁶³ Scowcroft, 'Leabhar Gabhála I', pp. 128–29; Ó Concheanainn, 'Lebor Gabála', p. 74.

¹⁰⁶⁴ MacCarthy (ed. and trans.), *Codex*, §a (pp. 286–87); *SAM*, §13 (pp. 69, 112).

3.1.2 Assyrian Synchronisms (Schmidt's S-Lc)

The *Assyrian Synchronisms* (currently unedited) are preserved solely and without attribution in *Lec.*, where they bear the scribal title ‘Comaimser rig Asar re rigaib Erind’.¹⁰⁶⁵ As discussed (4:3.3), the tract is accompanied in *Lec.* by a partial metrical counterpart, Mac Fírbisigh’s ‘Reidig dam, a Dé, do nim’. On this basis and because he oversaw *Lec.*’s production and transcribed most of the tract and poem, Ó Concheanainn has suggested that Giolla Íosa also compiled the *Assyrian Synchronisms*.¹⁰⁶⁶ The tract resembles *Adam primus pater* structurally and in synchronistic doctrine, although its range is slightly greater, running from the Flood to the Emperor Theodosius (*ob.* AD 395) and Lóegaire mac Néill. The *Assyrian Synchronisms* have been identified as another text of *Adam primus pater*,¹⁰⁶⁷ but this is an over-simplification. Their overall chronological schemes correspond but they vary considerably in detail.¹⁰⁶⁸

It is not certain whether O’Flaherty intended to cite the *Assyrian Synchronisms* as the ‘Synchronisms of Flann’. Other than the reference to Mac Fírbisigh’s ‘Réidig dam, a Dé, do nim’, only one of his side-notes implies as much.¹⁰⁶⁹ There are others in which the *Assyrian Synchronisms* and *Adam primus pater* are presented as separate works, the former lacking an author.¹⁰⁷⁰

3.1.3 Invasion Synchronisms (Scowcroft’s s/Tract IV; Schmidt’s S-LG-A)

The *Invasion Synchronisms* are interspersed throughout *LGÉ b* and its Appendix and recur again in *LGÉ B (3:2.1)*.¹⁰⁷¹ Within *LGÉ b*, the tract is given the title ‘Comaimserad rig in domain ocus Gabál nÉrenn’.¹⁰⁷² It was originally independent, but reconstructions of this original tract differ.¹⁰⁷³ It seems to have begun with the

¹⁰⁶⁵ *Lec.*, fols 186v–190r: ‘synchronism of the kings of the Assyrians with the kings of Ireland’; Schmidt, ‘Zu Réidig’, p. 250. Despite the title, the Assyrians do not predominate more than in *Adam primus pater*.

¹⁰⁶⁶ Ó Concheanainn, ‘*Lebor Gabála*’, p. 73.

¹⁰⁶⁷ Scowcroft, ‘*Leabhar Gabhála* Part 1’, p. 128; Ó Concheanainn, ‘*Lebor Gabála*’, p. 72; Jaski, ‘Irish Origin Legend’, pp. 70–72.

¹⁰⁶⁸ Jaski, ‘Irish Origin Legend’, p. 71.

¹⁰⁶⁹ O’Flaherty, *Ogygia*, p. 139; Hely (trans.), *Ogygia*, I, 196; Sharpe, *Letters*, p. 397.

¹⁰⁷⁰ O’Flaherty, *Ogygia*, pp. 12, 151; Hely (trans.), *Ogygia*, I, 160, 213–14.

¹⁰⁷¹ The tract has been partially edited by Macalister. For details, see Scowcroft, ‘*Leabhar Gabhála I*’, pp. 125–29. See also Schmidt, ‘Zu Réidig’, pp. 245–48.

¹⁰⁷² *LGÉ*, V, §666 (pp. 566–67): ‘synchronism of the kings of the world with the settlements of Ireland’.

¹⁰⁷³ MacNeill, ‘Irish Historical Tract’; Scowcroft, ‘*Leabhar Gabhála I*’, pp. 125–27; Schmidt, ‘Zu Réidig’, pp. 245–48.

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first settlement of Ireland by Partholón, synchronised with Ninus. Placing the settlements and kings of Ireland within world-reigns, it runs up to the Byzantine Emperor, Leo III (*ob.* AD 741), and the Irish king, Fergal Mac Máele Dúin (*ob.* AD 722), the end-point of Flann's 'Réidig dam, a Dé, do nim'.¹⁰⁷⁴ It includes Irish history more sporadically than the previous two tracts and places it further forward in time relative to world history. Scowcroft suggests that this represents an earlier synchronistic scheme, later revised due to internal contradictions to produce *Adam primus pater*, the *Assyrian Synchronisms*, and *LGÉ c.*¹⁰⁷⁵

As discussed (3:2.1), the *LGÉ b* Appendix also includes Flann's 'Réidig dam, a Dé, do nim', the Tara Diptych and 'Érimón is Éber ard',¹⁰⁷⁶ *Ind Áirem Cetach* (another synchronistic tract), and the *Provisional Synchronisms* (6:3.1.4). A particularly close relationship exists between the *Invasion Synchronisms* and Flann's 'Réidig dam, a Dé, do nim'.¹⁰⁷⁷

3.1.4 Provincial Synchronisms

Another component of the *LGÉ b* Appendix is the *Provincial Synchronisms*.¹⁰⁷⁸ The tract sometimes bears the title 'Comaimserad rig n-Erenn 7 rig na coiced iar cretim'.¹⁰⁷⁹ Unlike the previous three tracts, the *Provincial Synchronisms* derive their basic framework solely from Irish history. Extremely terse, they give the years elapsed between major events, usually deaths of kings of Ireland, but beginning with St Patrick's arrival.¹⁰⁸⁰ For each period, they give the kings of Ireland and the kings of Alba, Ulster, Leinster, Munster, and Connacht. During the final period, from Brían Bóruma's death in 1014 to Muirchertach úa Bríain's death in 1119, the high-kingship ceases and 'comflaithius' ('joint-rule') prevails (Máel Sechnaill's second reign, celebrated in the Tara Diptych, is apparently ignored).¹⁰⁸¹

¹⁰⁷⁴ Schmidt, 'Zu Réidig', p. 248.

¹⁰⁷⁵ Scowcroft, 'Leabhar Gabhála I', p. 126.

¹⁰⁷⁶ Anton G. van Hamel, 'On Lebor Gabála', *ZCP*, 10 (1912), 97–116 (p. 103); Scowcroft, 'Leabhar Gabhála I', pp. 125–28; Schmidt, 'Zu Réidig', pp. 216–19.

¹⁰⁷⁷ Scowcroft, 'Leabhar Gabhála Part 1', p. 126; Schmidt, 'Zu Réidig', p. 250.

¹⁰⁷⁸ Thurneysen (ed.), 'Synchronismen'; Boyle (ed.), 'Edinburgh Synchronisms'.

¹⁰⁷⁹ 'a synchronism of the kings of Ireland and the kings of the provinces after the [coming of the] Faith' (my translation).

¹⁰⁸⁰ Thurneysen (ed.), 'Synchronismen', p. 85.

¹⁰⁸¹ Thurneysen (ed.), 'Synchronismen', p. 94.

Broun has argued that the tract, in its current form, was composed as a single work shortly after 1119 (**LR:3.2.1**).¹⁰⁸² Thurneysen had argued that the original ended in the mid-eleventh-century, as only the lines of the kings of Ireland and Alba properly run to 1119; no provincial king appears who was alive less than fifty years prior to that date.¹⁰⁸³ Thurneysen, and Scowcroft, thus take the longer version as a secondary extension. Broun, however, points out that this does not necessarily date the Alban king-list, which may have been added in the post-1119 version.¹⁰⁸⁴ An independent text of the *Provincial Synchronisms* in NLS Adv. 72.1.28,¹⁰⁸⁵ which Thurneysen did not use, ends in 1014, but it too has its textual problems.¹⁰⁸⁶

3.2 The ‘Synchronisms’: historiography and evidence

In all these tracts, Irish reigns and events are ordered and dated relative to a single, continuous kingship, whether of the world or of Ireland. However, they are far from compatible with each other. *Adam primus pater* and the *Assyrian Synchronisms* differ in basic chronological scheme from the *Invasion Synchronisms* and all three differ from the *Provincial Synchronisms* in their global scope. *Adam primus pater* never even appears in the same manuscript as the *Invasion* or the *Provincial Synchronisms*. Furthermore, some of the tracts come to be known as the ‘Synchronisms of Flann’ much earlier than others (**Appendix 29**). Nonetheless, these four tracts are often not distinguished in terms of titlature, implying that they are components of the same work by Flann or operate under a common chronological scheme.

O’Curry is particularly explicit in conceiving of the ‘Synchronisms’ as a single text, describing *Adam primus pater* as ‘the first part’ of the *Provincial Synchronisms*, an interpretation to which William Skene and Rev. Thomas McLauchlan also subscribed.¹⁰⁸⁷ MacNeill, meanwhile, is happy to consider the

¹⁰⁸² Broun, *Irish Identity*, pp. 170–71; see also Smith, *Three Historical Poems*, p. 81.

¹⁰⁸³ Thurneysen, ‘Synchronismen’, pp. 81–85; Scowcroft, ‘*Leabhar Gabhála I*’, pp. 130–31; cf.

Skene, *Chronicles*, pp. xxx–xxxii.

¹⁰⁸⁴ Broun, *Irish Identity*, p. 171 (n. 23).

¹⁰⁸⁵ Skene (ed. and trans.), *Chronicles*, pp. 18–22, 119; Boyle (ed.), ‘Edinburgh Synchronisms’.

¹⁰⁸⁶ Broun, *Irish Identity*, p. 171 (n. 23).

¹⁰⁸⁷ O’Curry, *Manuscript Materials*, pp. 53–55; Thomas McLauchlan, *Celtic Gleanings, or Notices of the Scottish Gael in Four Lectures* (Edinburgh: Maclachlan and Stewart, 1857), p. 93; William F. Skene, ‘Scroll Catalogue of the Gaelic Manuscripts in the Library of the Faculty of Advocates,

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Invasion Synchronisms and *Adam primus pater* to be separate conceptually but maintains Flann's authorship of both (LR:3.2.1).¹⁰⁸⁸ By their era, the textual or, at least, conceptual unity of the 'Synchronisms of Flann' under a single author appears to have become virtually axiomatic.

3.2.1 Historiographical origins

As discussed (LR:2.3), in the post-medieval period, not only were the 'Synchronisms' understood to represent a fundamental contribution to medieval Gaelic historiography, but Flann, as their author-figure, became an icon of medieval Irish learning. The attention they attracted is understandable, given contemporary historiography's values and the particular pressures facing Catholic and Gaelic Ireland. The 'Synchronisms of Flann' constitute a source, supposedly traceable to an identifiable author of good standing, in which the Gaelic past and Ireland's long history as a kingdom were synchronised with other sources within a rational and coherent framework. In three cases, this was Eusebian universal history, a point of contact with external, European historiographical tradition.¹⁰⁸⁹ O'Conor II even saw their compilation as making possible universal, common-era dates for Irish history.¹⁰⁹⁰ All this perhaps explains the positive reception of the 'Synchronisms', even among those normally critical of Gaelic sources.¹⁰⁹¹

In a separate strand of reception, the *Provincial Synchronisms*, among other medieval Gaelic texts, provided controversial evidence for the relatively recent, fifth-century origins of the kingdom of Alba. When this tract was first published by O'Flaherty (it was not associated with Flann until the early nineteenth century),¹⁰⁹² it naturally had a considerable impact in Scotland and across Britain (due to the Stuart dynasty's Scottish origins), where historical orthodoxy had held that the kingdom of Scotland was much more ancient.¹⁰⁹³

compiled 1861 by W. F. Skene, LLD', unpublished catalogue, held at the National Library of Scotland [consulted 27 November 2013], p. 30.

¹⁰⁸⁸ MacNeill, 'Irish Historical Tract', p. 148; cf. Scowcroft, '*Leabhar Gabhála I*', p. 125; Schmidt, '*Zu Réidig*', pp. 213–14.

¹⁰⁸⁹ Grafton, *Defenders*, pp. 96–102; Aylmer, 'Introductory Survey', pp. 266–67.

¹⁰⁹⁰ O'Conor [II], *Rerum Hibernicarum*, II, 67; LR:2.3.

¹⁰⁹¹ Stillingfleet, *Origines Britannicae*, p. xlvi; Innes, *Critical Essay*, pp. 227–28.

¹⁰⁹² O'Flaherty, *Ogygia*, pp. 427–29; Hely (trans.), *Ogygia*, II, 368–71.

¹⁰⁹³ Sharpe, *Letters*, pp. 146–48. In general, see Broun, *Irish Identity*.

In post-Renaissance historical practice, these tracts' importance may well have been incompatible with uncertain authorship and provenance, creating centripetal forces that unified them as a single work under a single author-figure by the nineteenth century. As a result, Flann, the single author-figure, became a historian who was not simply learned in questionable facts and narratives but in logically verifiable interconnections and underlying structures and who was conversant with mainstream universal history. Of Flann and Gilla Cóemáin, whose chronological poetry was also acclaimed, O'Curry surmised that 'they were familiar with a large and extensive range of general history; and their chronological computations, parallels and synchronisms, prove that they must have industriously examined every possible available source of the chief great nations of antiquity'.¹⁰⁹⁴

3.2.2 Evidential origins

While such a context might have provided a general impetus, the precise reasoning and evidence that led to the 'Synchronisms of Flann' taking on their eventual, extensive form are more complex. The four main tracts came to be considered components of the 'Synchronisms' at different points in time and for different reasons, while some scholars broadened the definition still further (**Appendix 29**).

The earliest attested components are *Adam primus pater* and its close relative, the *Assyrian Synchronisms*, first associated with Flann by O'Flaherty in *Ogygia* (1685). *Adam primus pater* generally dominates the corpus of citations of the 'Synchronisms' thereafter. The *Invasion* and *Provincial Synchronisms*, meanwhile, first appear under Flann's name in O'Conor II's *Bibliotheca MS. Stowensis*, published in 1816, apparently due to their manuscript context in the *LGÉ b* Appendix. This entire Appendix, for O'Conor II, apparently constituted the 'Synchronisms of Flann', despite the absence of *Adam primus pater*. In his catalogue entry on *LGÉ D* (recension *b*),¹⁰⁹⁵ concluding the entry on the Appendix's last text ('Ríg Themra toebaige íar ttain'), he notes that 'Ussher mentions these *Synchronisms* with great respect, styling Flann a valuable and not a modern author'.¹⁰⁹⁶ In the cited approbation, James Ussher (1581–1656), Archbishop of Armagh, refers to the

¹⁰⁹⁴ O'Curry, *Manuscript Materials*, p. 56.

¹⁰⁹⁵ RIA D.iv.3; For O'Conor II, the manuscript was Stowe MS No.1, *saec.*XII: O'Conor [II], *Bibliotheca*, I, 22.

¹⁰⁹⁶ O'Conor [III], *Bibliotheca*, I, 36 (O'Conor's italics).

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Provincial Synchronisms and does not mention Flann.¹⁰⁹⁷ O’Conor II also attributes ‘Érimón is Éber ard’ to Flann in the absence of any medieval ascription,¹⁰⁹⁸ presumably also by virtue of its manuscript context. This poem and the Tara Diptych proper extend much further back in time than the *Provincial Synchronisms*. Both chronologically and textually, therefore, O’Conor II defined the ‘Synchronisms’ quite broadly.

Despite their proximity within *LGÉ D*’s Appendix, O’Conor II’s view on the authorship of the *Invasion Synchronisms* is ambiguous. He also refers to ‘Flann’s synchronisms, beginning *Rhi Temhra dia tesband tnu*’,¹⁰⁹⁹ cutting off everything except the Tara Diptych, and describes the *Invasion Synchronisms* only as the work of ‘the ancient collector of these compositions’,¹¹⁰⁰ possibly meaning the Appendix’s compiler, or *LGÉ b*’s compiler, or Flann. Thus, even with a manuscript in front of him, O’Conor II does not express a clear policy on what the ‘Synchronisms’ contain. Nonetheless, from this point onwards, the *Invasion* and *Provincial Synchronisms* emerge fitfully as components of the ‘Synchronisms of Flann’; O’Curry is the first to describe them unambiguously as such.¹¹⁰¹

Pre-O’Conor II, neither the *Invasion* nor the *Provincial Synchronisms* were regarded as the work of Flann. The *Provincial Synchronisms*, as we have seen, were a much cited and debated document. Yet no one who encounters them during the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries considers them to be Flann’s work and O’Flaherty explicitly states that their authorship is unknown.¹¹⁰² More radically, Gaelic sources imply that the compilation of comparable synchronisms long pre-dates even the eleventh century. In *AFM*, for example, a text particularly reminiscent of the *Invasion* and *Provincial Synchronisms* in the *LGÉ b* Appendix is part of the legendary *Saltair Temrach*, here associated with Cormac mac Airt: ‘ba h-isiñ liubar-sin batar coimgneadha 7 comhaimsera rioghraidhe Ereann fri ríoghaibh 7 impireadha

¹⁰⁹⁷ James Ussher, *Brittanicarum Ecclesiarum Antiquitates* (Dublin: Societas Bibliopolarum, 1639), pp. 1028–29; *The Whole Works of the Most Rev. James Ussher*, trans. by Charles R. Elrington and James H. Todd, 17 vols (Dublin: Hodges and Smith, 1847), VI, 145.

¹⁰⁹⁸ O’Conor, *Rerum Hibernicarum*, III, p. 36 (n. 1).

¹⁰⁹⁹ O’Conor [II], *Bibliotheca*, I, 94.

¹¹⁰⁰ O’Conor [II], *Bibliotheca*, I, 25.

¹¹⁰¹ O’Curry, *Manuscript Materials*, pp. 53–56.

¹¹⁰² O’Flaherty, *Ogygia*, pp. 427–29; Hely (trans.), *Ogygia*, II, 368–71.

an domhain, 7 ríogh na c-coicceadh frí ríoghaibh Ereann'.¹¹⁰³ Cúan úa Lothcháin (*ob.* 1024) alludes to the *Saltair Temrach* containing something particularly resembling the *Provincial Synchronisms* in 'Temair toga na tulach': 'coimngned, comamserad cáich, | cech rígh diaraile do ráith'.¹¹⁰⁴ In fact, if the *Saltair Temrach* was but Cúan's poetic fiction,¹¹⁰⁵ Cúan's description may well be *AFM*'s ultimate source. Thus, material resembling the *Invasion* and *Provincial Synchronisms*, in medieval tradition, seems to have acquired an archaising frame-tale, obscuring its real medieval authorship and transmission, which were conjectured and reconstructed by post-medieval scholars.

Flann's authorship of the *Invasion* and *Provincial Synchronisms* seems to have been deduced by O'Connor II on the basis of the tracts' context in RIA D.iv.2. Using similar reasoning but a different manuscript, Skene describes the *Provincial Synchronisms* as Flann's work on the basis of their context in NLS Adv. 72.1.28.¹¹⁰⁶ Here, the tract appears alongside poems from the Donegal Series, 'which are the undoubted works of Flann himself'.¹¹⁰⁷ As we shall see (6:4), his authorship of these works itself ought to be anything but undoubted.

Scholars sometimes seem to make deductions relating to the 'Synchronisms' on the basis of contexts other than those presented in extant codices. Perplexingly, McLauchlan describes the *Provincial Synchronisms* in NLS Adv. 72.1.28 as 'a transcript of a very curious and interesting MS known in Ireland as "The Synchronisms of Flann of Bute", forming part of what is called "the Book of Ballymote"',¹¹⁰⁸ presumably referring to *BB*'s *Adam primus pater*. Both he and Skene, like O'Curry, whom Skene cites,¹¹⁰⁹ believed the *Provincial Synchronisms* to

¹¹⁰³ *AFM* 266.1: 'In that book were entered the coeval exploits and synchronisms of the kings of Ireland with the kings and emperors of the world, and of the kings of the provinces with the monarchs of Ireland'.

¹¹⁰⁴ *MD*, I, q. 6 (pp. 14–15): 'the correlation, the synchronising of every man, | of each king one with another together'. By way of context, q. 5 states that the *Saltair* stipulates the legal relationship between the king of Tara and the provincial kings. For potential issues with Gwynn's translation of *coimngne*, see Mac Airt, 'Filidecht'. 'Comamserad' ('synchronising'), however, verifies this particular work's nature.

¹¹⁰⁵ Ó Riain, 'Psalter', pp. 108–12; Smith, 'Historical Verse', p. 328 (n. 20).

¹¹⁰⁶ MacKinnon, *Descriptive Catalogue*, pp. 113–14; Black, 'Catalogue'.

¹¹⁰⁷ Skene, *Chronicles*, p. xxxi. This argument is repeated, with hints of scepticism, by Boyle, 'Edinburgh Synchronisms', p. 170.

¹¹⁰⁸ McLauchlan, *Celtic Gleanings*, p. 93.

¹¹⁰⁹ O'Curry, *Manuscript Materials*, pp. 53–5; Skene, *Chronicles*, p. xxxi.

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have been originally ‘part’ of something greater, something self-evidently the work of Flann.

While the entry of the *Invasion and Provincial Synchronisms* into the ‘Synchronisms of Flann’ has at least left a paper trail, the basis for O’Flaherty’s original citation in these terms of *Adam primus pater* and its relative, the *Assyrian Synchronisms* is even more obscure. In a letter to Lynch dated September 1665, published as a preface to *Ogygia*, O’Flaherty mentions his first discovery of *Adam primus pater* in *UM* and emphasises its value to his investigations into Irish historical chronology.

Postquam haec ita concinnavi in manus incidit Synchronismus, qui dictis multum roboris addit, Regum nostratum cum 4 orbis Monarchiis. Habetur in O Duvegani O Kelliorum Hymaniae dominorum Antiquarii codice mebraneo [...]¹¹¹⁰

This text was clearly important to O’Flaherty, who carefully details the codex in which it was found.¹¹¹¹ The absence of any reference to an author suggests that this information was unavailable. Indeed, none is named in a medieval hand in *UM* or in any other manuscript. However, in *Ogygia* (1685), the text is cited as the work of Flann, although still specifically referenced via *UM*.

It is possible that, between 1665 and 1685, O’Flaherty deduced Flann’s authorship of *Adam primus pater* on the basis of medieval manuscript evidence. ‘Réidig dam, a Dé, do nim’ is actually attributed to Flann in *UM* (4:2.3.1) and, since Flann is thereby designated as expert on Eusebian world-kingship, O’Flaherty could have inferred that he is the most likely to have authored the ‘Synchronisms’. In addition, as Ó Concheanainn suggests,¹¹¹² the connection could be based on Giolla Íosa’s re-use of Flann’s poem’s incipit for his partial metrical counterpart to the closely-related *Assyrian Synchronisms* (4:3.3, 6:3.1.2). Indeed, O’Flaherty believed that this poem was by Flann (6:2). Finally, *Adam primus pater*, in both *BB* and *UM*, begins with material on foundational history of the sort articulated by Flann in

¹¹¹⁰ O’Flaherty, *Ogygia*, p. 18; Hely (trans.), *Ogygia*, I, xlvi: ‘After proceeding thus far, I meet with a synchronism of [our] kings with the four monarchies of the world, which added very great weight to preceding accounts. It is to be found in a parchment book of O’Duvegan, antiquarian to the O’Kellys, lords of Hymania’.

¹¹¹¹ For *UM*’s multiple titles, see Nollaig Ó Muraíle, ‘Leabhar Ua Maine *alias* Leabhar Uí Dhubhagáin’, *Éigse*, 23 (1989), 167–95.

¹¹¹² Ó Concheanainn, ‘*Lebor Gabála*’, p. 73.

‘Aenach Temra na n-ocht n-ech’ (4:2.3.3),¹¹¹³ although only overlapping slightly in terms of specific information. This poem, also in *UM*, could have further informed O’Flaherty’s deduction.

It is also possible that a synchronistic tract closely akin to *Adam primus pater* and the *Assyrian Synchronisms* genuinely existed under Flann’s name in the manuscript tradition and was known to O’Flaherty. Indeed, the historical Flann could have actually compiled such a tract. Pre-O’Flaherty, we encounter sporadic instances in which a connection is made between Flann and material akin to that in these two tracts. His presentation in ‘Aenach Teamra na n-ocht n-ech’ and Giolla Íosa’s re-use of ‘Réidig dam, a Dé, do nim’ in his counterpart to the *Assyrian Synchronisms* are such instances.

Another is the tract on the chronology of Cú Chulainn’s life in TCD 1336, for which Flann Mainistrech and Neide Úa Maelchonaire are cited as authorities (4:2.1.1.2). While their respective contributions to this tract’s off-beam account are not made clear, Cú Chulainn’s death in the twenty-seventh year of the reign of Conaire Mór in the TCD 1336 tract is paralleled approximately by his death in Conaire’s twenty-sixth year in *Adam primus pater*.¹¹¹⁴ Extant sources’ widely varying chronologies of Conaire’s reign mean that any assertion on this matter cannot be described as commonplace.¹¹¹⁵ In any case, the TCD 1336 tract is essentially a collection of chronological factoids relating to Cú Chulainn, so whatever source it employed that appeared under Flann’s name must have contained some sort of chronological data.

Finally, various scholars have cited evidence linking the historical Flann to a northern redaction of the now-lost, but apparently real, late tenth-century *Saltair Caisil* (1:4).¹¹¹⁶ Citations and descriptions of this *Saltair* continued to be made into the seventeenth century,¹¹¹⁷ several of which attest to its containing synchronistic

¹¹¹³ MacCarthy (ed. and trans.), *Codex*, §§a–b (pp. 286–87).

¹¹¹⁴ O’Curry (ed. and trans.), *Manuscript Materials*, pp. 507–08; MacCarthy (ed. and trans.), *Codex*, §q (pp. 304–05).

¹¹¹⁵ Kelleher, ‘*Táin*’, pp. 108–11.

¹¹¹⁶ Ó Muraíle, *Celebrated Antiquary*, p. 150; Jaski, ‘Genealogical Section’, pp. 329 (n. 117), 331–32; McCarthy, *Irish Annals*, pp. 271–73.

¹¹¹⁷ Ó Riain, ‘Psalter’.

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material.¹¹¹⁸ In one description, David Rothe (*ob.* 1650), Bishop of Ossory, includes an item that Ó Riain identifies as genealogies and synchronisms: ‘the pedigree of our kings as Well the prouinciall kings as the monarchs, together with the forrain’.¹¹¹⁹ ‘Pedigree’ may potentially mean king-list here. In terms of the ‘Synchronisms of Flann’, this best resembles the *Invasion* and *Provincial Synchronisms*. Indeed, Ó Riain suggested that Cúan úa Lothcháin invented the idea of the *Saltair Temrach* to counter the all too real *Saltair Caisil* and that his description of its contents (see above) directly reflects those of the southern codex.¹¹²⁰ As we have seen, similar synchronistic material appears in Cúan’s depiction of *Saltair Temrach*, even more so in *AFM*’s description.

Therefore, if the historical Flann did help redact *Saltair Caisil*, then synchronisms therefrom could then have circulated under his name and influenced scholars like O’Flaherty. However, the synchronisms in the *Saltair Caisil* are consistently described as resembling more closely the *Invasion* and *Provincial Synchronisms*, as conjoined in *LGÉ b*, than *Adam primus pater* and the former only come to be associated with Flann by O’Conor II, apparently on the basis of his work with RIA D.iv.2. It is thus difficult to argue that Flann’s redaction of the synchronisms in the *Saltair Caisil* was the text that led O’Flaherty to make this initial attribution, unless it was made from superficial resemblance only.

Fragmentary and equivocal evidence thus shows that Flann could have been associated, in the Middle Ages, with prose synchronisms broadly resembling the ‘Synchronisms of Flann’, as cited in early printed scholarship. It is also possible to reconstruct lines of reasoning that led scholars to attribute the various tracts involved to Flann on the basis of extant manuscript evidence. Aside from the potential influence of a now-lost medieval synchronistic tract attributed to Flann, the ‘Synchronisms of Flann’ seem to have evolved out of deductions based on manuscript materials and post-Renaissance historiography’s need for that sort of source with a named, identifiable author.

¹¹¹⁸ This material is thought to be the source of the so-called *Laud Synchronisms*, preserved in *Laud Misc.* 610: Meyer (ed.), ‘Laud Synchronisms’; Eoin MacNeill, ‘On the reconstruction and date of the *Laud Synchronisms*’, *ZCP* 10 (1915), 81–96; Ó Riain, ‘Psalter’, pp. 117–20; Jaski, ‘Genealogical section’, pp. 329–30.

¹¹¹⁹ Ó Riain (ed.), ‘Psalter’, p. 122.

¹¹²⁰ Ó Riain, ‘Psalter’, pp. 108–12.

3.2.3 Are the ‘Synchronisms’ texts?

The ‘Synchronisms of Flann’ are often referenced as if this title represents a single text with an authorial original.¹¹²¹ This is difficult to reconcile with the medieval manuscript evidence. To add further complexity, some scholars hint that they do not in fact regard the ‘Synchronisms’ as a single text or even as a set of texts but as an abstract intellectual work that could take on a variety of textual manifestations. This may explain their relatively liberal application of this title.

The ‘Synchronisms of Flann’ are sometimes said to constitute a system. This is stated by O’Conor I, for whom Flann and unnamed others produced ‘one accurate numerical system’ out of regnal lists.¹¹²² He implies that Irish historical chronology’s full systemisation was a collective work and does not attribute it to any one author, although Flann is his only named example. The non-textuality of the ‘Synchronisms’ is also implied by O’Conor II, although he does seem to see Flann as their creator. ‘Atá sunn senchas ríge Éirenn’ is a metrical list of the kings of Ireland widely attributed to Seán Ó Dubhagáin (*ob.* 1372).¹¹²³ O’Conor II ascribes it to Ó Dubhagáin but states that ‘this [the poem] is a system of metrical chronology written before the year 1050 [*sic*], when its author, Flann, died’, adding a citation of *Adam primus pater*.¹¹²⁴ As we have seen, elsewhere, he extends the term ‘Synchronisms’ to include the Tara Diptych, despite it having no synchronistic function itself.¹¹²⁵ Both he and O’Curry imply that the ‘Synchronisms of Flann’ were used in *AT*’s compilation, O’Curry stating that ‘it is, in fact, the synchronism [*sic*] of Flann, now imperfect, which we find at the commencement of Tigernach’.¹¹²⁶

The ‘Synchronisms of Flann’ here seem to be understood not so much as a fragmented text but as a set of data and principles that can be made manifest, more or less, in a variety of textual forms by authors other than their original deviser. Disinterest in their textual form might have been encouraged by the unavailability of

¹¹²¹ For example: O’Flaherty, *Ogygia*, p. 92; Hely (trans.), I, 133; O’Conor [II], *Bibliotheca*, I, 10; O’Curry, *Manuscript Materials*, pp. 53–55.

¹¹²² Charles O’Conor [I], *Dissertations on the Antient History of Ireland* (Dublin: Faulkner, 1753; 2nd ed. 1764), p. 156. I was not aware of the second edition until a late stage of my research and have not been able to compare its coverage of Flann with that of the first edition.

¹¹²³ Currently unedited: *UM*, fols 81^{ra}–82^{va}31; RIA B.iv.2, fols. 16–20.

¹¹²⁴ O’Conor [II], *Bibliotheca*, I, 87.

¹¹²⁵ O’Conor [II], *Bibliotheca*, I, 36.

¹¹²⁶ O’Conor [II], *Rerum Hibernicarum*, II, 67; O’Curry, *Manuscript Materials*, p. 55.

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printed editions of any of the ‘Synchronisms’ before 1892,¹¹²⁷ with the exception of O’Flaherty’s heavily amended and unattributed version of the *Provincial Synchronisms*.¹¹²⁸ If this is how the ‘Synchronisms of Flann’ were conceived, then citations using this title have more to do with texts’ form and content than with their direct authorship or provenance. The proposition that the ‘Synchronisms of Flann’ were literally authored by the historical Flann Mainistrech becomes unfalsifiable, as it might not even be being claimed that texts cited as such derive directly from him.

3.3 The ‘Synchronisms of Flann’: conclusion

To scholars engaged in the critical reconstruction of Irish and Scottish history, the ‘Synchronisms of Flann’ were of considerable practical utility. Their author-figure was lauded as a supreme historian and chronologist and was used to illustrate the calibre of medieval Irish intellectual culture. The textual process behind all this was complex and opaque. It seems to have involved the nature of the synchronistic tracts themselves; post-Renaissance historiography’s needs and values; deductions from medieval evidence; and possibly a *deus ex machina* in the form of now-lost manuscripts. Flann the master-synchronist may not have been entirely a modern manufacture and the ‘Synchronisms’, as individual tracts, certainly were not. However, this interpretation of Flann’s role, hardly emphasised in the manuscript tradition, came dramatically to the forefront of scholarly attention in print.

4. The Donegal Series: Flann made explicit?

4.1 Introduction: Donegal Series and Ó Domhnaill *Dúanairi*

In the Donegal Series, we have another example of the purview of Flann’s author-figure expanding in early printed scholarship, possibly based on medieval evidence. To recapitulate (4:2.1.3, 5:2.2), the Donegal Series is a metrical collection on the northern Uí Néill’s history, rights, claims, and interrelationships.¹¹²⁹ It shows virtually unwavering support for Cenél Conaill from the perspective of their self-

¹¹²⁷ MacCarthy, *Codex*.

¹¹²⁸ O’Flaherty, *Ogygia*, pp. 427–29; Hely (trans.), II, 368–71.

¹¹²⁹ Simms, ‘Donegal poems’.

proclaimed late medieval heirs, the Uí Dhomhnaill.¹¹³⁰ In some manuscripts, an Ó Domhnaill *Dúanaire* follows this dynasty and their interests down to the sixteenth century and beyond.¹¹³¹ Both the Donegal Series and the Ó Domhnaill *Dúanaire* vary in structure and composition in different manuscripts.¹¹³²

‘Conall cuingid clainne Néill’ is attributed via superscription to Flann Mainistrech in various sixteenth- and seventeenth-century manuscripts and contains an internal reference to him collaborating with ‘Óengus’. This internal reference may not have originally been meant as an attribution but as a citation. Nonetheless, multiple manuscripts present Flann as the poem’s author. In most manuscripts, ‘Conall cuingid clainne Néill’ is part of, and often initiates, the Donegal Series. Another Donegal Series poem, ‘A liubair atá ar do lár’, contains an ambiguous reference to ‘Flann’, which is reproduced as a simple attribution in some manuscripts.

4.2 Flann’s authorship of the Donegal Series

O’Reilly, via interventions in certain manuscripts and in his published *Chronological Account of Irish Writers*, attributed nine poems from the Donegal Series to Flann Mainistrech, including ‘Conall cuingid clainne Néill’ and ‘A liubair atá ar do lár’. O’Curry, in five cases, favoured manuscript attributions to other poets but retained three of O’Reilly’s attributions to Flann (including the two just specified) and withheld judgement on a fourth.

Appendix 30 summarises the manuscript versions of these nine Donegal Series poems and their attributions both in manuscript and in printed scholarship. None are attributed to Flann Mainistrech in the manuscript tradition in any primary hands except ‘Conall cuingid clainne Néill’ and this only in some manuscripts. A

¹¹³⁰ Simms, ‘Late Medieval Donegal’, pp. 183–85; Lacey, *Lug’s Forgotten Donegal*, pp. 28–54.

¹¹³¹ For some of these manuscripts, see Tomás Ó Cléirigh, ‘A Poem Book of the O Donnells’, *Éigse*, 1 (1939–40), 51–61, 130–42.

¹¹³² Other than *Fen.* and Rawl.B.514 (for which, see **4:2.1.3**), examples can be found at: *BOCD*, fol. 141^v15–210^v28 (Katherine Simms, ‘The Selection of Poems for Inclusion in the Book of the O’Conor Don’, in *Book*, ed. by Ó Macháin, pp. 32–60 (36–37, 49–52); Cambridge, University Library, MS Add. 3084 (9), *saec.* XVII, pp. 52–71, 79–91, pp. 124–26 (Pádraig de Brún and Máire Herbert, *Catalogue of Irish Manuscripts in Cambridge Libraries* (Cambridge: CUP, 1986), pp. 13–15); NLI G.131, pp. 108–38 (Ní Shéaghda, *NLI Cat.*, fasc. IV, pp. 54–55; RIA B.iv.2, fol. 53^r–69r (Fitzpatrick, *RIA Cat.*, fasc. XXIV, 3024–25); Dublin, RIA, MS 24.P.27 (4), *saec.* XVII, pp. 24–170 (O’Rahilly, *RIA Cat.*, fasc. I, 28–30); Dublin, NLI, MS G.167, *saec.* XVIII, pp. 41–402 (Ó Cléirigh, ‘Poem Book’, p. 55; Ní Shéaghda, *NLI Cat.*, fasc. V, 9–15).

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variety of other poets are cited as alternative authors for the Series' poems, ranging from the legendary Caílte mac Ronáin to the very late Lochlainn mac Taidhg Óig Ó Dálaigh (*fl.* 1624–38). Most popular, however, is Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe (*ob.* 1272). O'Reilly notes these attributions without detailed discussion.¹¹³³ Nicholas Williams, editor of Giolla Brighde's works, has rejected his involvement.¹¹³⁴

These nine Donegal Series poems make for a striking addition to Flann's corpus. They consist, in Simms' words, of 'propaganda pieces from a period of intense political competition'.¹¹³⁵ That period is, for Simms, in most cases the twelfth- or thirteenth-century.¹¹³⁶ Although they justify their assertions with reference to pseudo-historical events, these poems are primarily and prescriptively concerned with political interrelationships among the northern Uí Néill and Uí Dhomhnaill's rise to power in that context. They are, in many cases, much more direct and open in their purposes than 'Conall cuingid clainne Néill'. As their author-figure, therefore, Flann takes a distinctively explicit political position, as compared to his position in other texts attributed to him. The 'Synchronisms', the major feature of the corpus attributed to Flann in print, are particularly far removed from factional politics, with their universal perspective on ancient, largely canonical pseudo-history. While other texts attributed to him may well have implicit political meaning or contain some sort of endorsement of particular factions or individuals, little even comes close to matching the Donegal Series' detailed, explicit advocacy and historicisation of Ó Domhnaill supremacy.

Given the apparent lack of any evidence from the manuscript tradition and the contrast between the Donegal Series and Flann's other texts' approach and tone, O'Reilly's attribution of these nine Donegal Series poems to Flann is quite surprising. It is not clear what source, if any, prompted him to do so. He refers obliquely to different manuscript versions of each text that he has accessed but does not indicate the version that contains the authoritative attribution. As with the 'Synchronisms', some codex, now lost or obscure, may be the source but I have been unable to identify any positive clues in this direction.

¹¹³³ O'Reilly, 'Chronological Account', p. lxxviii.

¹¹³⁴ Williams, *Poems*, pp. 10–11.

¹¹³⁵ Simms, 'Donegal poems', p. 50.

¹¹³⁶ 'Enna dalta Cairpri crúaid' might date from as early as the eleventh century: Boyle, 'Poem'; Simms, 'Donegal poems', pp. 45–46.

How he has reached this conclusion remains unclear even when more indirect approaches are considered. Considering extant evidence, ‘Conall cuingid clainne Néill’ provides the best argument for attributing all nine poems to Flann. Its external attributions to Flann are corroborated by the, admittedly ambiguous, internal reference. As demonstrated in **Appendix 31**, such external attributions’ arrangement in Rawl.B.514, RIA B.iv.2, and NLI G.131 could be read as attributing to Flann not only this poem but also the Series’ subsequent poems, which lack superscriptions, although *BOCD* presents a striking counter-example.

As a modern parallel, Simms appears to have accepted this approach and conclusion as valid in relation to Rawl.B.514. She states that ‘Conall cuingid clainne Néill’, ‘Atá sunn rolla na rí’, ‘A éolcha Chonaill cheólaigh’, and ‘Enna dalta Cairpri crúaid’ are all attributed to Flann Mainistrech there.¹¹³⁷ As the latter three are not attributed individually in any way in this manuscript, Simms is presumably referring to the superscription over ‘Conall cuingid clainne Néill’. All three poems she understands as attributed to Flann appear, in this manuscript, between ‘Conall cuingid clainne Néill’ and the first poem bearing a superscription specifying that it is from the *Senlebor Caillín* (**Appendix 29**). Simms seems to have assumed, perhaps justifiably, that no poem would have been regarded as both by Flann and from the supposedly sixth-century (but actually thirteenth-century) *Senlebor*.¹¹³⁸

‘Conall cuingid clainne Néill’ thus provides the crucial link between the Donegal Series and Flann. However, in his interventions in the seventeenth-century RIA 24.P.27, O’Reilly leaves unaltered the attribution of this poem to Flann mac Lonáin, while inserting Flann Mainistrech’s name into several subsequent Donegal Series superscriptions (**Appendix 30**). The initial attribution is still unaltered in O’Reilly’s transcription, RIA 23.N.26.¹¹³⁹ Indeed, according to O’Reilly’s *Chronological Account*, ‘some writers’ attributed ‘Conall cuingid clainne Néill’ to Flann mac Lonáin and the text is listed under his entry for Flann mac Lonáin in only slightly more cautious terms than in the entry for Flann Mainistrech.¹¹⁴⁰ Were this poem O’Reilly’s crucial piece of evidence for determining the Donegal Series’

¹¹³⁷ Simms, ‘Donegal poems’, pp. 50–51; cf. Katherine Simms *Bardic Poetry Database* [n.d.], poem 268 <<http://bardic.celt.dias.ie/>> [accessed 29 January 2015].

¹¹³⁸ Simms, ‘Donegal poems’, p. 38.

¹¹³⁹ Dublin, RIA, MS 23.N.26 (564), *saec.* XIX.

¹¹⁴⁰ O’Reilly, ‘Chronological Account’, pp. lx, lxxvii..

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authorship, we might expect him to handle the matter somewhat more decisively. Indeed, textual evidence does not seem to be of much relevance to O'Reilly. While he attributes 'A liubair atá ar do lár' to Flann Mainistrech in RIA 24.P.27, RIA 23.N.26, and in print,¹¹⁴¹ he makes no mention, unlike O'Curry,¹¹⁴² of the final quatrain's 'Flann file'.

A few decades later, O'Curry was able to cite substantive reasons why Flann could not have authored five of the Donegal Series poems uniquely attributed to him by O'Reilly, citing anachronistic historical and literary references alongside 'style and diction'.¹¹⁴³ Given his lack of comment on this sort of evidence, we are brought back to the proposition that O'Reilly's attributions are from some other, yet-to-be-identified manuscript source(s).

4.3 Flann and the Donegal Series pre-O'Reilly

Pre-O'Reilly, there are indirect indications that Flann was already associated with other poems in the Donegal Series beyond 'Conall cuingid clainne Néill', rendering it possible that O'Reilly's attributions derived from manuscript evidence. In a secondary attribution to 'Atá sund rolla na rígh' in RIA B.iv.2, despite there being no pre-existing superscription, O'Conor I designates the poem 'Dán bregach nár chum Flann ná Pátraic'.¹¹⁴⁴ The same poem is attributed in pencil to Flann Mainistrech in O'Curry's 1848 transcription of *BOCD* (RIA 3.C.12);¹¹⁴⁵ this could be from O'Reilly's *Chronological Account*, although no other attributions have been imported from the latter, raising the possibility of an independent source. O'Curry, unfortunately, seems to have subsequently forgotten making this transcription and attribution, as well as his source for it, as he later claimed that he could not comment on the poem's authorship, having never encountered it before.¹¹⁴⁶

¹¹⁴¹ O'Reilly, 'Chronological Account', pp. lxxvi–lxxvii.

¹¹⁴² O'Curry, *Manners*, II, 160–61.

¹¹⁴³ O'Curry, *Manners*, II, 162–66; Simms, 'Donegal poems', p. 46.

¹¹⁴⁴ RIA B.iv.2, fol. 55^r5: 'a deceptive poem that neither Flann nor Patrick composed' (my translation). The poem claims that its stipulations were confirmed and inscribed by St Patrick: *A Bardic Miscellany*, ed. by Damian McManus and Eoghan Ó Raghallaigh, Léann na Tríonóide 2 (Dublin: TCD, 2010), §55 (pp. 57–59) (q. 30 (p. 59)).

¹¹⁴⁵ Dublin, RIA, MS 3.C.12 (625), *saec.* XIX; Mulchrone, *RIA Cat.*, fasc. XVI, 1965. The transcription continues in Dublin, RIA, MS 23.C.13 (626), *saec.* XIX.

¹¹⁴⁶ O'Curry, *Manners*, II, 165.

While O'Reilly appears to be the first to make Flann the explicit author of a plurality of items from the Donegal Series, someone must have attributed 'Atá sund rolla na rígh' to Flann by the eighteenth century in order for O'Conor I to disagree so strongly with the idea. Nonetheless, no examples survive of this attribution being positively recognised by a scribe, while two manuscript versions provide alternative authors for this poem (**Appendix 30**). Even if manuscript evidence attributing Donegal Series poems to Flann was available to O'Conor I and O'Reilly, it was either unknown or not accepted in wider scribal culture.

4.4 Flann's authorship: consequences and implications

Alongside much material attributed to Flann, the Donegal Series is significantly more politicised and prescriptive. It may be that the Series' overt political agenda prompted O'Conor I's opposition to Flann's involvement. He also twice contests the attribution to him of 'Conall cuingid clainne Néill' via manuscript interventions.¹¹⁴⁷ In RIA B.iv.2, he challenges Míchéal Ó Cléirigh's simple attribution with the assertion, 'nior can Flann focal don dán bregach'.¹¹⁴⁸ In *BOCD*, he qualifies the same simple attribution with 'madh fíor'.¹¹⁴⁹

He thus twice designates a Donegal Series poem attributed to Flann as *brégach* ('counterfeit, deceptive, lying').¹¹⁵⁰ This could simply mean pseudonymous, but could also relate to the content's veracity, particularly as RIA B.iv.2's 'Atá sund rolla na rígh' lacks a 'counterfeit' written attribution for O'Conor I to attack. Interestingly, O'Conor I was also moved to designate *BB*'s *Adam primus pater* as the 'Synchronisms of Flann' (**6:3.1.1**). It is as if Flann, who had 'endeavoured to digest the regal successions into one accurate numerical system',¹¹⁵¹ could not be suspected of having turned his powers to propaganda. This is despite O'Conor I also standing out, within his era, as more critical of Flann's work (**6:4.3**). He perhaps distinguished purposeful manipulation from mixing 'the uncertain and authentic'.¹¹⁵²

¹¹⁴⁷ For O'Conor's interventions in manuscripts generally, see Smith, *Three Historical Poems*, p. 42; Nollaig Ó Muraíle, 'The role of Charles O'Conor of Belanagare in the Irish manuscript tradition', in *Book*, ed. by Ó Macháin, pp. 235–42.

¹¹⁴⁸ RIA B.iv.2, fol. 53^r; 'Flann did not chant a word of this deceptive poem' (my translation).

¹¹⁴⁹ *BOCD*, fol. 157^r18: 'if it is true' (my translation).

¹¹⁵⁰ *eDIL* s.v. bréach.

¹¹⁵¹ O'Conor, *Dissertations*, p. 156.

¹¹⁵² O'Conor, *Ogygia Vindicated*, p. xi.

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Whether O'Reilly saw his own attribution of the Donegal Series to Flann as rendering Flann a propagandist and compromising his status as a historian is unclear. He is, for his period, distinctly uninterested in the 'Synchronisms': in relation to *Adam primus pater*, he merely notes O'Conor I's *BB* superscription and looks elsewhere for the author of the *Invasion Synchronisms*.¹¹⁵³ He is thus not committed to interpreting Flann as a macro-level master-synchronist. Yet he may not have read the Donegal Series as distinct from history. He refers to Flann's 'Conall cuingid clainne Néill' as being 'in praise of Conall Gulban' but otherwise uses no such formulations.¹¹⁵⁴ He makes little comment on Flann's social role and his descriptions of the poems are mostly summaries of their contents. Without more contextualisation, this implies that he regarded them as straightforward historical sources.

O'Curry is slightly more open about how he categorised texts. In his coverage of the Donegal Series poems, the adjectives 'curious', 'valuable', and 'historical' tend to recur in various combinations, whoever O'Curry ultimately maintains the author to be. One poem ('Éstid re Conaill calma') is 'of no great value'.¹¹⁵⁵ Again, the overall impression is that he considers the Donegal Series to be factual history. Indeed, this is how texts attributed to Flann were generally treated during this period (6:2). Therefore, however we might read the Donegal Series, neither of the scholars primarily responsible for associating it with Flann seem to have seen it as risking despoiling him of his status as a historian. This may have been O'Conor I's view, but he never elaborates sufficiently for us to be sure.

O'Reilly's attribution of these poems to Flann, in print and in manuscript, and O'Curry's only partial revision wreak havoc with subsequent scholars' understanding of these texts' attributional situation. Tomás Ó Cléirigh lists both 'A éolcha Chonaill cheólaigh' and 'A liubair atá ar do lár' as attributed to Flann in NLI G.167.¹¹⁵⁶ The former is not attributed in this manuscript, the latter is attributed only to 'Flann' via O'Curry's intervention. John McKechnie apparently believed that 'A liubair atá ar do

¹¹⁵³ O'Reilly, 'Chronological Account', pp. cviii, cxiv–cxv.

¹¹⁵⁴ O'Reilly, 'Chronological Account', p. lxxvii.

¹¹⁵⁵ O'Curry, *Manners*, II, 164–65.

¹¹⁵⁶ Ó Cléirigh, 'Poem Book', p. 55.

lár' is 'found in many mss. ascribed to Flann Mainistrech'.¹¹⁵⁷ He treats 'Atá sunn senchas nach súaill' more cautiously, mentioning an attribution to Flann but citing only O'Curry's authority.¹¹⁵⁸ Gearoid Mac Eoin refers to a plurality of attributions to Flann in *Fen.*¹¹⁵⁹ There are no external attributions, only two ambiguous internal references. Boyle was under the impression that 'Enna dalta Cairpri crúaid' is genuinely attributed to Flann in the manuscript tradition.¹¹⁶⁰ It should be noted, incidentally, that none of these studies is materially undone through overestimating the manuscript evidence for Flann's authorship of these texts.

4.5 The Donegal Series: conclusion

The bases and implications of O'Reilly's attribution of nine Donegal Series poems to Flann Mainistrech are all unclear. As with the 'Synchronisms', a now-lost manuscript's influence cannot be ruled out. Likewise, again, printed editions of the poems that took into account a representative range of manuscripts were (and still are) unavailable, the poems only being published in 1875 from *Fen.*,¹¹⁶¹ although manuscripts of the Donegal Series are much more plentiful than those of the 'Synchronisms'. The Donegal Series poems might arguably present Flann as a particularly hard-nosed, politically engaged *fili*, but the scholars who attributed them to him may well not have drawn such conclusions.

5 Conclusion: Flann in early print

The attributions, in early printed scholarship, of the 'Synchronisms of Flann' and of much of the Donegal Series to Flann Mainistrech are dramatic. Yet both bodies of material correlate loosely with actual texts attributed to Flann in medieval manuscript tradition. Furthermore, both are arguably but extreme manifestations of themes we have encountered previously when considering his corpus. In the *LGÉ b* Appendix

¹¹⁵⁷ John McKechnie, *Catalogue of Gaelic Manuscripts in Selected Libraries in Great Britain and Ireland*, 2 vols (Boston MA: Hall, 1973), I, 169.

¹¹⁵⁸ McKechnie, *Catalogue*, I, 169.

¹¹⁵⁹ Mac Eoin, 'Dating', pp. 124–25.

¹¹⁶⁰ Boyle, 'Poem', p. 11.

¹¹⁶¹ Hennessy and Kelly ed. and trans., *Book of Fenagh*, pp. 312–405; cf. 'Der Tribut des Königs von Ess Rúaid', ed. by Kuno Meyer, *ZCP* 8 (1912), 115–16.

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(3:2.1) or in *UM*'s gendered world history (4:3.2), Flann's work forms part of compilations structuring accounts of Ireland's past in a universal context. The difference with the 'Synchronisms' is that he is no longer a contributing authority but the scheme's supreme genius. His aetiologies and regnal histories of medieval Irish kingdoms, meanwhile, inherently relate to those kingdoms' diplomatic interrelationships (2:2.2.1, 4:2.1), although not in the explicit manner of the Donegal Series. Even the controversy hinted at by O'Connor I's manuscript interventions is perhaps mirrored in Flann's chronicle obits and their repeated disagreements over whether to associate him with the powers of persuasion (*filidecht*; 1:2.2.4). I do not suggest that these attributions were prompted directly by these particular medieval materials but that they might reflect tensions arising from the corpus associated with Flann generally.

It is also worth noting that the attributions to Flann in early printed works once again call into question how well extant manuscripts reflect the range and quantity of material associated with him. In each case discussed in this chapter, it is possible that evidence still extant formed the basis for the attribution made, but it is also possible, particularly in relation to the Donegal Series, that manuscript sources, now lost or obscure, influenced published scholars.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have considered what Flann Mainistrech might have invoked for subsequent readers, composers, and compilers in terms of his understood historical context and his backstory. I have also examined responses to and uses of textual material attributed to him. This line of inquiry was taken in order to understand the relevance of Flann's individual identity to his power when referenced as an author-figure, which it is hoped will contribute to future considerations of historiographical authority's nature and dynamics in medieval Gaelic learned culture.

On the basis of the material examined herein, Flann and his textual output were interpreted, by at least some medieval readers, within a definable theoretical and a biographical context. While avoiding comment on whether Flann was perceived or presented as unique, as this would require much additional comparative work, there is sufficiently widespread evidence that Flann's author-figure meant something specific for us to be able to postulate that he had a commonly understood identity that may have framed readings of his texts. The model of the medieval *auctor* as a mere function of their texts' literal meanings may thus not be the most useful for understanding him, particularly given that author-figures appear to have brought extrinsic meaning to texts elsewhere in medieval Gaelic literature (**LR:4.2**). It is more difficult to reach firm conclusions on the extent to which this mattered for how his texts were read and used. While authors like Flann have been interpreted, particularly in prosimetric contexts, as providing authoritative corroboration, we have encountered multiple examples of Flann's texts being supplemented or re-contextualised and of his testimony being brought to bear on anachronistic historico-political issues. While Flann's integrity as an author-figure might have been discussed theoretically or used rhetorically, on the basis of this evidence, it did not materially restrict subsequent compilers and composers from using his texts and identity.

Conclusion

1 Flann's author-figure: contexts and back-stories

Both within texts attributed to Flann and in medieval material about him, we have seen certain themes recur whenever his compositional activity is discussed in any sort of detail. His role was widely perceived to be the interpretation and elucidation of historiography, generally in specifically textual form; I have termed this tertiary authorship. There are references to him in multiple contexts as a *fer léiginn*. In *LU*'s *ANÍ* and in *LGÉ*'s implied context for 'Toisich na llongse tar ller' (2:5.2), the content of the texts with which Flann worked is traced back to direct experience; his work of *compilatio* is distinguished from each. 'Réidig dam, a Dé, do nim' is mysterious, perhaps intentionally, regarding Flann's sources but presents the work as having rendered accessible the previously intractable tradition of universal chronicling (3:3, 4:2.3.1). Appearing in 'Aenach Teamra na n-ocht n-ech', Flann seems to make reference not only to his knowledge's textual basis but to his active augmentation of historical knowledge through textual study (4:2.3.3). His personal epithet, *tiugsuí*, could imply an overall command of scholarship's strands and traditions (1:2.2.6). These descriptions correlate with the types of texts that consistently tend to be associated with him: regnal histories drawing on narrative *aideda* and catalogues of names and events. Such texts appear to select and order characters and incidents chronologically or thematically from pre-existing written sources, although we have seen that this may not always have been their origin (LR:3.2.1, 5:2.1.1). The recurrence of *rím*-based terms in authorial self-representation in texts attributed to Flann and the Cenél nÉogain Suite's particularly intense meditations on this concept (2:3.3.2) openly emphasise this as the nature of his work. Indeed, in several cases, texts attributed to Flann contain more extensive data than all other known sources (2:6.2, 3:4, 4:2.1.2).

Flann's tertiary authorship is, on several occasions, presented as occurring in the context of collaboration with other named scholars. He compiles *ANÍ* with Eochaid Éolach úa Céirin (2:2.2.3), Druim Cetta's *dindsenchas* with Echthigern (2:2.2.1), and Conall Gulbán's *caithréim* (or perhaps all of 'Conall cuingid clainne Néill') with Óengus (4:2.1.3). 'Eochaid', in 'Cía tríallaid nech aisnis senchais' (2:3.2), could be taken as a collaborator, although he is more probably a source. While general references to a learned community are common in Middle Gaelic

historical poetry, the open presentation of Flann engaging in specific collaborative relationships is a very distinctive aspect of the material about him; in fact, I know of no other comparable examples from any other medieval Gaelic source. Unfortunately, no further details are provided as to what these relationships were thought to have involved, the circumstances in which they were thought to have occurred, or whether collaborative authorship particularly enhanced or qualified the textual product's status among medieval readers. These are matters for future study, perhaps drawing on analogies from other medieval literatures, particularly if no further examples from medieval Gaelic sources emerge.

The ecclesiastical nature of Flann's role as *fer léiginn* is not very heavily emphasised in descriptions of his work. However, his compositions, including his collaborative compilations (*ANÍ*, 'Druim Cetta, cetta na noem', and 'Conall cuingid clainne Néill'), are quite often presented as occurring within ecclesiastical centres (Monasterboice or Armagh). Furthermore, most of his chronicle obits mention his position at Monasterboice (1:2.2) and two poems attributed to him are specifically of Armagh interest (5:2.1.2). Alongside collegial relationships with individuals, he is thus also regularly associated with ecclesiastical communities and institutions.

Collaboration does not end, for Flann, with a text's production. His work is also presented as empowering subsequent composers who encounter it. This is set out explicitly within 'Réidig dam, a Dé, do nim' (4:2.3.1). It is also implied in the three *UM* poems in which Flann is both an approachable character and an authoritative source of information (4:2.1.6.1–2, 4:2.3.3). These poems present Flann as revered but also used, as not inertly authoritative but enabling others' historical investigations and historicised arguments. 'Airgialla ardmóra uaisli' (4.2.1.6.1) is particularly interesting in this regard, as Flann's imparted testimony itself constitutes well-ordered, finely-detailed background information, while the unnamed poet takes command of the narrative and political argument within which Flann's material is made to function. As Irvine has discussed in another context, medieval composition is often actually commentary on pre-existing texts.¹¹⁶² While the insight it might yield into the medieval tradition is debatable, O'Connor II's identification of the

¹¹⁶² Irvine, *Making*, pp. 405–60.

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‘Synchronisms of Flann’ as having enabled common-era dating in medieval Gaelic historiography envisages a similar dynamic (**LR:2.3**).

From this evidence, we can say that Flann did not present himself and was not subsequently understood simply as a learned and capable individual, but that he was presented as operating within networks that embraced the authorities and texts which he interpreted, his contemporary colleagues, and future scholars to whom he made historical tradition accessible and useable. If we seek the context invoked by Flann’s author-figure for material attributed to him, then we might conclude that that context comprised scholarly relationships and a communal ethos. It might have been imagined that material under Flann’s name was a collective product of multiple source-texts and multiple contributors’ dialogic relationships and, indeed, that it should continue to exist in such a context. Such a collective, discursive origin for the material might have played a corroborative or verificatory role. It may also have had some basis in reality, whether in the historical Flann’s working practices or in more widespread norms, although there would still need to have been reasons why such details were sufficiently compelling to be preserved in Flann’s case in particular.

If his role as a tertiary author was a key characteristic of Flann’s textual persona, then this may have conflicted with other conceptions of him and other aspects of medieval Gaelic textual culture. Simple attributions (‘Flann Mainistrech cecinit’ and similar), which constitute the bulk of all descriptions of Flann’s authorial activity, leave no room for collaborative relationships or sources but trace the work back to a named individual. Indeed, a simple attribution can introduce a poem that goes on to present itself as the product of collaboration or source interpretation (e.g. **4:2.1.3**, **5:2.1.1**). Flann’s singular status as an authoritative scholar is also promoted by terms like *ugdar*, and perhaps *tiugsuí*, and the panegyric tone of Flann’s chronicle obits and some detailed attributions to him (**1:2**, **5:3.1**). Alongside conceptions of Flann in which he was contextualised in relation to his sources and wider networks and invoked a whole scholarly culture, conceptions also seem to have existed in which he was a kind of solitary, originative genius (e.g. **3:3**). In a further dimension, as we have seen (**5:3.2**), in the seventeenth-century, the emphasis was on Flann not as originator or compiler but as preserver, in order to demonstrate the Gaelic tradition’s capacity to provide authentically ancient information. Indeed, medieval

compilers by no means always express interest in Flann as author-figure but often present poems attributed to him primarily on the basis of their content (3:4).

Different ideas concerning scholarly authority may well have existed in medieval Gaelic learned discourse, as they did in learned discourse throughout medieval Europe.¹¹⁶³ Yet we need not frame the material we have examined in terms of conflict. Flann's presentations as tertiary author may enlarge upon and explain his presentations as a singular authority figure rather than counter them. Reading and collaborating may be what made Flann authoritative. Indeed, for Eochaid úa Flainn and *LGE*'s compilers, *ugdair* ('authorities') are precisely those that study, discuss, and refine literary tradition (2:3.4). Furthermore, the compositional narratives in response to which I have elaborated the concept of tertiary authorship can be read as, ultimately, making unified, authored works out of the products of *compilatio*, as we have discussed. Their sources lost, it is implied that there is no comparable *ANÍ* beyond Flann and Eochaid's version (2:5.2.1). 'Réidig dam, a Dé, do nim' is presented as the gift of God through Flann's piety, not a human work of interpretation and construction (3:3). Simple attributions' critical meaning is yet to be analysed in modern scholarship and they need not denote some kind of absolute authorial responsibility that excludes collaboration and *compilatio*, but could embrace a range of compositional backstories. Medieval Gaelic concepts of scholarly authority and pre-eminence may have gone beyond great individuals to embrace the author's social and cultural context and historiographical era.

Flann's theoretical place within the history of historiography was not the only aspect of his existence that seems to have been preserved, although it is perhaps the most clearly and widely attested. We also find hints and fragments of an understood political persona and even of a perceived biography. In terms of the texts attributed to him, he retained associations into the post-medieval era with the Ciannachta and with Armagh, which correlate with what is known of the historical Flann's background and career. In both cases, we find Flann directly asserting the relevant entities' rights and prestige, often in relation to quite particular issues (2:2.2.1, 4:2.2.3, 5.2.1.2). The same might also be said of the Tara Diptych's proclamation of the Uí Néill's unbreakable hold on the kingship as a celebration of Máel Sechnaill's

¹¹⁶³ Ziolkowski, 'Cultures'.

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return (2:3.3.3). In these often much-recopied texts, Flann is identifiable not just by his theoretical function as tertiary author, although some contain evidence to support that, but by agendas within historical situations sometimes so specific and technical as to be now obscure, from our perspective. This has the potential to disrupt characterisation of him as a generic authority on the past and to locate his texts within actual circumstances.

Yet there is no evidence that these details interested later compilers. The Tara Diptych is only ever preserved in contexts focusing on ‘national’ and universal history (2:5.1, 3:2.1, 5:2.1.1). The other texts happen to be preserved through being cited in relation to hagiography, for some reason. For example, ‘Druim Cetta, cette na noem’ is treated as primarily of Columban interest (2:2.2.3, 4:2), while ‘Muintir Pádraig na paiter’, in its earliest manuscripts, supports either *CGSH* or *AFM*’s account of St Patrick (4:2.2.3, 5:2.1.2). Neither Flann nor the ultimate point being made in each poem is directly relevant to these contexts. O’Reilly’s apparent lack of interest in the implications of his wholesale ascription of the highly partisan Donegal Series to Flann (6:4.2) finds precedent in such approaches. At some point, whether during the historical Flann’s career or thereafter, a textual or attributional record was created that was tied closely to something resembling his career but this political Flann generally did not gain traction in medieval textual culture beyond these chance survivals.

One possible exception is ‘Aenach Teamra na n-ocht n-ech’ (4:2.3.3). This, we have assumed, is a later composition about Flann, although its date is uncertain. I have argued that Flann and Máel Sechnaill do not simply fill the conventional roles of sage and king but that their dialogue seems to be framed by some specific incident in Flann’s imagined career involving his relationship with Máel Sechnaill and his status in the king’s assembly (4:2.3.3), which it is tempting to relate to the issue of the rights of the Ciannachta in ‘Druim Cetta, cette na noem’ (2:2.2.1). Also implicated, by this poem, are his connection to Monasterboice and tertiary authorship. That the poem’s audience is expected to appreciate whatever this incident is about, despite the lack of detail, implies, tantalisingly, that information about Flann’s career was in circulation, whatever its provenance. If this information could be supplied in response to such a poem, it could be supplied in response to an

attribution or a citation. Unfortunately, what it actually constituted in detail remains conjectural.

Thus, our search for what Flann meant or invoked as an author-figure has yielded rich, varied, complex, possibly stratified, fragmentary material that need not ultimately be reconcilable into a single implied context, particularly when we recall the disparate manuscript and printed sources that have been consulted. This material's interpretation will hopefully be refined or even revolutionised through closer studies of the texts involved or through wider-ranging comparative work. For now, we can conclude that, in terms of his biography and, to a greater extent, his theoretical function, there is evidence that Flann's identity as an author-figure was actively interpreted, presented, and formulated in particular ways in medieval Gaelic manuscript culture. In short, he mattered.

2 Flann's author-figure: reception

In considering poems attributed to Flann in their manuscript or prosimetric contexts, we have seen that subsequent compilers used material attributed to Flann relatively freely. It appears to have been the subject of secondary expansion (2:4.1, 4:2.1.2), unitisation (2:4.2.1.2), re-contextualisation (4:2.1.5), and appropriation (4:2.1.4). Misattribution is invariably an alternative explanation in each case, although this shows a similar impulse towards manipulating Flann's corpus.

We might conclude from this evidence that Flann did not really matter as an author-figure after all. His authority was discussed and promoted but fidelity to his intentions, perspective, and corpus, if these were even known, was not a high priority compared to compilers' other concerns. In fact, his authority may have been promoted in the manner we have discussed partly because material attributed to him could prove so useful.

This is valid to an extent, based on the evidence considered in this thesis. Yet, as we have partly discussed, if what Flann invoked in subsequent textual culture was the elucidation of historiography and scholarly collaboration, then this might partly explain how his work came to be used. Flann is presented reading, ordering and

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categorising information, and finding lines of continuity in the records of the past. This active approach to texts perhaps provides a model for how his texts were then treated.¹¹⁶⁴ If the club can be taken from Hercules' hand (2:3.2), then it can theoretically also be taken from the one who overcame him, following his example. Indeed, we have encountered a couple of medieval instances of Flann being explicitly accessed via a physical text (4:2.1.3–4). That Flann's texts were re-interpreted and appropriated may actually be evidence of close engagement with his presented author-figure. The moments of political subjectivity within Flann's corpus may have further enhanced him as a model author, these expressing the kinds of agendas and relationships that generally became only more pressing in the later Middle Ages. In contrast, in the seventeenth century, Flann sometimes seems to have been regarded as an ancient author distinct from his ostensive later medieval counterparts (5:3.2).

We may also encounter echoes of Flann's author-figure in how material attributed to him interacts with its context. Just as Flann's compositional work was described in terms of networks of sources and people, texts attributed to him are rarely presented as complete unto themselves but as components within prosimetric compilations or manuscript clusters linked thematically or through more direct suppletive and corroborative relationships (e.g. 4:3.2). Sometimes, his texts are treated as authoritative. In the *LGÉ b* Appendix, for instance, poems attributed to Flann articulate the chronological basis for the entire recension (3:2.1, 3:2.3). Yet, in most cases, the relationship is complex. His poems can supply variant versions of narratives (2:6.2), corroborate information (2:5.2.2, 3:2.1), or supply one strand of data among several provided by other texts (2:5.1). They are not always easy for compilers to reconcile with their other material or with the main text at hand. In *LGÉ*, Flann more than once supplies more data than the cognate prose (2:6.2, 3:2.1), while *AI*'s compiler only employs 'Réidig dam, a Dé, do nim' as a corroborative supplement, apparently unable or unwilling to integrate its material wholesale (2:6.3.2). There is also evidence that the Tara Diptych did not enjoy its authoritative status universally or indefinitely but was regarded in some quarters as superseded (2:6.1, 3:2.1, 5:2.1.1). In all these instances, Flann's texts, as presented in

¹¹⁶⁴ Cf. Lerer, *Chaucer*, pp. 22–56.

manuscript, are in assistive or contrastive relationships with other texts out of which history is collectively and dialogically imparted. In the work of later compilers, therefore, we perhaps find numerous further examples of Flann engaging in a kind of virtual collaboration. Yet, again, there are counter-examples. For instance, *LL*'s Uí Néill Series appears to be the product of an attempt to unify a diverse range of material with Flann as its single authority, undisputed by any neighbouring texts (2:4.2.1.2).

Indeed, the similarity between Flann's presented author-figure and those that adapt and re-contextualise material attributed to him is not perfect. Many texts attributed to Flann can be suspected or even shown to be adaptations of or compilations out of earlier texts (2:3.2, 5:2.1.1). Those earlier texts' purported authors are rarely now apparent or identifiable. On the other hand, when texts attributed to Flann are extended or adapted in some way (e.g. 2:4.2.1.2), he, sometimes anachronistically, retains their authorship, while his adaptors again remain largely obscure. Thus, while methodological continuity may exist in practice between him and his adaptors, Flann retains some kind of foundational, authorial integrity and identity that the latter do not. What might lie at this integrity's heart, like what might be behind the sense running through our sources that Flann is very important, if it is anything more than a medieval structural need for an *auctor*, remains ultimately conjectural.

3 Implications for future author-centred studies

As well as exploring the dynamics of Flann Mainistrech's own textual afterlife, it is also hoped that this thesis provides some insights into general issues related to the study of medieval Gaelic authors and perhaps medieval authors more widely.

Troublingly, my diachronic analysis of texts attributed to Flann by manuscript date reveals cause for scepticism over whether the manuscript tradition ever gives a complete or even representative impression of what was associated with him. The material associated with him in later medieval manuscripts (4:2) is quite different from what appears in manuscripts pre-1200 (2:2). For example, he at some point acquired a reputation as a genealogist but his material in pre-1200 manuscripts

Conclusion

implies nothing of the sort. At the same time, many pre-1200 attributions cease to be attested in later manuscripts. Until the mid-nineteenth century, new material continues to be attributed to Flann (**5:1.2**, **6:2**). Some could be the product of secondary extrapolation from medieval evidence known to us but some could be taken directly from now-lost medieval testimony and much cannot be ruled out as the work of the historical Flann. All this suggests either frequent re-analysis of author-figures and their corpora in the course of the manuscript tradition or fragmentation of the tradition and widespread lacunae in what is extant or a mixture of the two. Each scenario has problematic implications for what we can know about medieval Gaelic authors, in terms both of their historical careers and of their textual afterlives. We have encountered a similar situation regarding the existence of a commonly understood biography for Flann in later learned culture. There is just enough evidence to suggest such an understood biography existed but very little is certain thereafter. Other material evidently circulated in some form but it is not accessible to us. It can be reasonably assumed that such issues would be encountered if one was to conduct similar studies of other authors.

Collating and analysing all available references to Flann throughout Gaelic learned culture has led us to a wide range of texts, genres, and topics. For example, all four of the traditional (in modern terms), but now questionable,¹¹⁶⁵ ‘cycles’ have been touched upon, even, surprisingly, the Finn-cycle (**2:3.3.1**). We have encountered Flann being treated as relevant not only to the regnal histories, kingdom-based catalogue poetry, and national pseudo-history most commonly associated with him but also to hagiography, genealogies, saga tradition, glossaries, classical literature, and biblical apocrypha. It is not clear, without further comparative study, whether Middle Gaelic authors generally end up being related to this many areas of learning or whether this is something peculiar to Flann.¹¹⁶⁶ Regardless, if an author or authors could be held responsible for such a wide range of activity, this might suggest that medieval Gaelic learned culture was or aspired to be more interconnected than is implied by some of the material it produced. Indeed, recent

¹¹⁶⁵ Poppe, *On Cycles*, pp. 16–20.

¹¹⁶⁶ In terms of the latter, it is interesting that some of Flann’s chronicle obits present him as particularly inter-disciplinary in their unique combination, in his case, of *flidecht* and *léigenn* (**1:2.2.7**).

work on the historicization of literature and on the concept of medieval Irish classicism seems to support this interpretation.¹¹⁶⁷ If interconnected learned culture reflected back onto perceptions of its author-figures, then author-figures other than Flann may be far from predictable in terms of their textual afterlives.

In another form of unpredictability, if tertiary authorship was a key aspect of Flann's author-figure's medieval significance, then this suggests that multiple models of authorship existed in medieval Gaelic learned culture. It has, of course, long been acknowledged in modern scholarship that much medieval Gaelic literature was produced through the collation and re-working of pre-existing sources.¹¹⁶⁸ Less prominent is the fact that such activity, alongside collaboration and multiple authorship, could be celebrated, via actual historical characters, within the Middle Ages.¹¹⁶⁹ As explored above (**Conclusion: 1–2**), that such complex conceptions of authorship could inform medieval reading should be taken into account when interpreting medieval writing and compilation.

The major conclusion arising from this case study on Flann Mainistrech is that authors mattered in medieval Gaelic learned culture and were enduring objects of interest. As a result, from our perspective, they have multiple dimensions: their historical activity and intentions, their self-construction according to commonly-held categories and conventions, and the various interpretations and uses of them thereafter as author-figures. Multiple distinctive and divergent author-figures may exist or they may be characterised by a commonly understood persona, itself of mixed provenance. These later interpretations and uses are in many cases not the product of confusion but of the priorities of the times that produced them and can thus be meaningful. Therefore, while there are perfectly good reasons to go in search of the historical author and their corpus, it is not sufficient overall simply to differentiate between an author's confirmed works and troublesome pseudepigraphy and then focus only on the former. Any given study on medieval Gaelic authors must needs identify the dimension with which it is concerned, the author as he was or the author as he is perceived and received, and consider the latter's varied, sometimes impersonal, origins and manifestations.

¹¹⁶⁷ Toner, 'Ulster Cycle'; Miles, *Heroic Saga*; Burnyeat "'Wrenching'", pp. 206–07.

¹¹⁶⁸ Boyle and Hayden (eds), *Authorities*; **LR:3.2.1**.

¹¹⁶⁹ Although see Burnyeat, 'Early Irish', p. 216.