

## The Notes of the Book of Armagh: A Ninth-Century Witness to North Munster Affairs?

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Feidlimid mac Crimthainn (†847), who reigned at a time when the achievements of Charlemagne (†814) and his children were causing ripples all over Europe, was arguably the most powerful and ambitious ruler of Munster in the period before Brian Boru (†1014). In 834, he raided Mag Aí, where Cruachain, the seat of Connacht kingship, was located; in 840, he invaded Mide and Brega, encamping at Tara; a year later he marched as far as Carman, a site symbolically associated with the exercise of Leinster kingship. Feidlimid was also the first southern provincial king to be associated by name with the promulgation of Patrick's law in Munster by the abbot of Armagh. It is argued in this paper that the notes (*notulae*) added to the Book of Armagh by its scribe Ferdornach are based on jottings of names made during a journey (or journeys) undertaken by the abbot of Armagh with a view to providing authentic background for the journey supposed to have been made by St Patrick in north Munster, as recorded in the saint's ninth-century Tripartite Life.\*

Hagiography, as Kathleen Hughes stated, is not history.<sup>1</sup> Yet, historians are often required to assess the value of its witness, not least because it relates to a period for which almost all other documentation is lacking. How well historians have come to terms with this kind of material, so often devoid of conventional historical form, is a matter for debate. In this paper, an attempt is made to assess the significance of a single episode of Patrician history, the story of Patrick's travels in north Munster. From its earliest, very brief, mention in the seventh-century Life of the saint written by Tírechán until its reception in modern works of scholarship dealing with Patrick, this story has undergone many transformations. I propose here to add yet another, and, by putting forward a novel interpretation of notes written into the ninth-century Book of Armagh, the earliest and most important of our manuscript sources of knowledge concerning Patrick, I hope to add to a debate that has been ongoing since a facsimile of this book was published by John Gwynn in 1913.<sup>2</sup>

John Canon O'Hanlon, historian of County Laois and biographer of the Irish saints, was not a man to hold back in his estimate of the extent of St Patrick's travels. In the third of his ten-volume *Lives of the Irish Saints*, he stated that 'almost every Irish region and district' had been illuminated by Patrick's presence, and sanctified by his footsteps.<sup>3</sup> Few if any of his late nineteenth-century readers would have questioned this assessment,

\* This is a revised version of a lecture previously twice given at Limerick venues under the title of 'St Patrick in Munster; the journey that never was', first in 1989 in Kilfinane, at the invitation of the late Mainchín Seoighe, then Secretary of The Joyce Brothers' School, secondly in Limerick city on 23 March 1990, at the invitation of the Thomond Archaeological Society.

<sup>1</sup> K. Hughes, *Early Christian Ireland: Introduction to the Sources* (London, 1972) p. 219.

<sup>2</sup> J. Gwynn (ed.), *Liber Ardmachanus: The Book of Armagh* (Dublin, 1913).

<sup>3</sup> J. O'Hanlon, *The Lives of the Irish Saints*, (10 vols, Dublin, 1875-1903), iii, p. 831.

backed up by a list of dedications to the saint even more extensive than that provided by O'Hanlon's role model, John Colgan, the celebrated seventeenth-century hagiographer and first modern editor of Patrick's several Lives.<sup>4</sup> Yet, especially as far as the province of Munster is concerned, O'Hanlon's appraisal has been much less enthusiastically received by subsequent commentators, beginning with Eoin Mac Neill. In an article on the subject of the saint's Tripartite Life, a ninth-century text in which Patrick is provided with an extended itinerary in all four provinces, Mac Neill described its account of Patrick's stay in Munster as devoid of any 'historical validity'.<sup>5</sup> To say that Mac Neill's findings excited much interest, inside or outside Munster, would be to overstate the case. In fact, some thirty years were to pass before Daniel Binchy, his much younger contemporary, fellow-scholar and, in many ways, disciple, returned to the subject. In the course of a comprehensive study of Patrick's biographers, ancient and modern, published as an *envoi* to the Patrician Year of 1961, Binchy endorsed Mac Neill's dismissal of the story of Patrick's visit to Munster, using far stronger terms. Although conceding that the story was 'brimful of interest' for those concerned with the ecclesiastical, social and political condition of Ireland in the ninth century, he described Patrick's circuit of Munster as a fable. Indeed, as he went on to state categorically: 'In this as in other matters the Tripartite Life represents the final triumph of legend over history'.<sup>6</sup>

By using the word 'final' Binchy lost sight of the many such triumphs yet to come. St Dobheóg, now principally recalled by the botanical name, *dabeocia polifolia* or *cantabrica* (Dobheóg's heath), found mainly on boggy ground in the West of Ireland, had not yet been dislodged from his perch on a remote island in the lake of Loch Geirg, now better known as Lough Derg in south-east Donegal, to make way for St Patrick. This local adjustment of devotion, which was to have profound consequences far beyond the locality, followed the arrival there in the twelfth century of Augustinian canons, who built a priory on the island, a dependency of SS. Peter and Paul in Armagh.<sup>7</sup> With that, the scene was set for the emergence of Patrick's Purgatory, possibly the most widely known Irish ecclesiastical site throughout the late Middle Ages and even today an integral part of the fabric of Irish pilgrimage.

Also yet to unfold were the circumstances surrounding Patrick's visit to Dublin, now recalled by his well and church there, which are first set down in twelfth-century texts, one vernacular and secular – *Lebor na Cert*, 'the Book of Rights' – the other Latin and hagiographical – Jocelyn's *Vita Patricii*.<sup>8</sup> The increasing influence of Dublin in both secular and ecclesiastical matters from the late tenth century onwards had created the need for an accommodation with the church authorities in Armagh. This first came to a head after 1074 when bishops of Dublin, now consecrated at Canterbury, began to challenge Armagh's claims to primacy.<sup>9</sup> The story of Patrick's sojourn in the town was one of several responses to this lasting bone of contention.

Even in Munster, the Tripartite Life had left many loose ends, one of which was the conspicuous absence from the ninth-century text of Declan, a supposed pre-Patrician

<sup>4</sup> J. Colgan, *Triadis Thaumaturgae seu Divorum Patricii, Columbae et Brigidae, Trium Veteris et Maioris Scotiae seu Hiberniae, Sanctorum Insulae, Communium Patronorum Acta* (Louvain, 1647; repr. Dublin, 1997), pp 270-2.

<sup>5</sup> E. Mac Neill, 'The Vita Tripartita of St. Patrick', *Ériu*, 11 (1930) pp 1-41; at p. 9; idem, 'The Origin of the Tripartite Life', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, 59 (1929) pp 1-15.

<sup>6</sup> D.A. Binchy, 'Patrick and his Biographers: Ancient and Modern', *Studia Hibernica*, 2 (1962) pp 7-173; at p. 69.

<sup>7</sup> A. Gwynn & R.N. Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses: Ireland* (London, 1970) p. 193.

<sup>8</sup> M. Dillon (ed.), *Lebor na Cert: The Book of Rights*, Irish Texts Society 46 (London, 1962) p. 116; Colgan, *Triadis Thaumaturgae*, pp 90-1. Dillon (p. 117n) asserts that the passage in *Lebor na Cert* derives from Jocelyn, who wrote about 1186.

<sup>9</sup> See H.B. Clarke, *Conversion, Church and Cathedral: The Diocese of Dublin to 1152*, in J. Kelly & D. Keogh (eds), *History of the Archdiocese of Dublin* (Dublin, 2000) pp 19-50.

saint and later patron of the diocese of Waterford and Lismore. His absence was no doubt due to the lack of importance of his church, Ardmore, at that time, and of his people, the Déise, who scarcely figure in the annals of the ninth century. However, by the late twelfth century, following the reform of the Irish Church, Ardmore had begun to nurture an aspiration to cathedral status, which, if it were to be implemented, required the acquiescence and active support of the metropolitan see at Armagh.<sup>10</sup> In order to create a fitting precedent for this support – of a kind considered to be binding in perpetuity – it was deemed necessary to bring together in Declan's Life the patrons of the two churches. In fact, two meetings were arranged for the saints, one on the road to Rome – Declan on his way back, Patrick on the way out – the other at home in Munster.

The first meeting was a model of hagiographical invention. At that time, we are told, Ailbe, patron of the archdiocese of Cashel and Emly and, historically, Munster's chief saint, was in Rome to receive episcopal orders from the Pope. Declan's subsequent arrival, described as an occasion of great joy, was followed *post multos dies* by his ordination as bishop, again by the Pope.<sup>11</sup> Thus far, the author's purpose is clear; he was concerned with establishing a precedent for the presence at Ardmore of episcopal insignia, obtained from the highest possible authority with the accord of the archiepiscopal see at Cashel, whose precedence is duly conceded. Declan's subsequent encounter with Patrick, who is described as 'arch-patron of all Ireland', provided the hagiographer with the opportunity of arranging between the two saints a *fraternitas* that was probably intended to serve as a model for relations between supplicant Ardmore and metropolitan Armagh in the late twelfth century.<sup>12</sup>

Nor was Armagh to be deprived of the tribute collection due to it from the aspirant diocesan authorities. The home encounter between the two saints is presented as a sequel to Patrick's visit to Cashel – thus underlining once more the supremacy in Munster of the archiepiscopal see – which brought him due south-east to the area about Clonmel, on the margins of the territory of the Déise, then and now the northern boundary of the diocese of Waterford and Lismore. And there, following a meeting with Declan, some lands, the usual source of revenue, are said to have been handed over to the primatial saint at a place suitably named *Fons Patricii* or *Tobar Phádraig*, 'Saint Patrick's Well'.<sup>13</sup> We have no record here of a dispossessed saint but the spectacular well, with its unusually large expanse and constantly bubbling crystal water, could scarcely have failed to attract an earlier patron.

With its well-maintained ruins, which include a cross, a small medieval oratory, and a seventeenth-century tomb inside the oratory, removed in 1805 from a Clonmel church undergoing demolition, this site is surely one of the most impressive relics of Patrician expansion in the whole of Ireland. Furthermore, it has many features conducive to yet another triumph of legend over history. The presence within the oratory of an ugly modern painting of St Patrick – the only evidence in the place of lack of taste – recently led to an enquiry as to whether the tomb underneath it might contain the physical remains of our national saint.<sup>14</sup> Parts of the saint's legend have been pieced together from much less promising material.

<sup>10</sup> Gwynn & Hadoock, *Medieval Religious Houses*, pp 29-62.

<sup>11</sup> C. Plummer (ed.), *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae*, (2 vols, Oxford, 1910, repr. 1968), i, p. 39 §9.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 45-7 §§19.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*; cf. P. Power (ed.), *Life of St. Declan of Ardmore and Life of St. Mochuda of Lismore*, Irish Texts Society 16 (London, 1914) pp 40, 172.

<sup>14</sup> The enquiry was made of the writer some years ago, while on a visit to the well.

Plainly, *pace* Binchy, the Munster episode of Patrick's Tripartite Life can have no pretence to finality in the very sizeable Patrician record of legend's triumph over history. But what it may lack in finality is amply put right by the light it throws on ninth-century Munster, a period during which the province is otherwise not well served by the documentary record. Although Patrick's itinerary may have no historical validity in terms of fifth-century Ireland, it serves in my view as a reliable record of the route followed by one or more of his successors at Armagh during the first half of the ninth century.

Extended itineraries were nothing new in the Patrician record. The two seventh-century Lives of the saint, by Muirchú and Tírechán, had already attributed to Patrick triumphal journeys that brought him to the Midlands and west of Ireland, in the process both aggrandizing the church of Armagh and promoting the interests of the hereditary ecclesiastical families to which the two authors would have belonged.<sup>15</sup> Probably because Armagh's influence had not yet extended very far southwards, neither of the seventh-century biographers showed much interest in the churches of Leth Moga, the area lying roughly south of a line extending from Dublin to Galway. Muirchú failed altogether to mention Munster; Tírechán made a token gesture towards it in the very last sentence of his text, which reads: *Et baptizavit filios Nioth Fruich i tír Mumae super petram hi Coithrigi hi Caissiul.*

From the first modern editor of this text (Whitley Stokes) to the most recent (Ludwig Bieler), the tendency has been to emend *petram hi Coithrigi* to *petram Coithrigi* and translate: 'Patrick's Rock'.<sup>16</sup> Following a lead given by Anthony Harvey, I have argued elsewhere that this translation does more justice to the construction put on the sentence by the ninth-century author of Patrick's Tripartite Life – who substituted *Lecc Phátraic*, 'Patrick's Rock', for Tírechán's *petra hi Coithrigi* – than to the intentions of his seventh-century predecessor.<sup>17</sup> Tírechán was indeed referring to the rock at Cashel, now known as St Patrick's Rock, but when describing it as *petra hi Coithrigi* he does not appear to have had Patrick in mind. What evidence there is would suggest that he was speaking of a hereditary family of that name, with a vested interest, sometimes of an ecclesiastical character, in this part of Munster, not to mention other localities. For his part, the later author of the Tripartite Life appears to have opportunistically taken the name *Coithrigi* to reflect a form of Patrick's own name, supposedly generated by a well-attested Irish tendency to convert the sound *p-* in words and names into *c-*. It was certainly in the interests of his church to do so; by attaching Patrick's name to the rock, he provided what could be seen as proof of the saint's historical presence at the very centre of Munster kingship. In his own time this would have been of considerable benefit to Armagh's promotion of its interests in the southern province. Moreover, that the audacious invention, if such it was, also appealed to the southern authorities can be inferred from the fact that the name has since adhered to the rock.<sup>18</sup>

The conditions that may have given rise to this less than innocent but lasting deception first become apparent in the annals of the early ninth century, which, although they tell us nothing of Patrick himself, have a good deal to say about the activities of his

<sup>15</sup> L. Bieler (ed.), *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh*, *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae* 10 (Dublin, 1979) pp 62-166.

<sup>16</sup> W. Stokes (ed.), *The Tripartite Life of St Patrick with Other Documents Relating to that Saint*, *Rolls Series* 89 (2 vols. London 1887), ii, p. 331; Bieler, *The Patrician Texts*, pp 162-3.

<sup>17</sup> A. Harvey, 'The Significance of Cothraige', *Ériu*, 36 (1985) pp 1-9; P. Ó Riain, 'When and Why Cothraige was First Equated with Patricius', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie*, 49-50 (1997) pp 698-711; K. Mulchrone (ed.), *Bethu Phátraic. The Tripartite Life of Patrick* (Dublin & London, 1939) p. 118.

<sup>18</sup> The parish containing the rock is now known as St. Patrick's Rock.

successors. For the first time ever, as far as the annals are concerned, abbots of Armagh can be seen to have become closely involved in Munster affairs. The timing was no accident; the then king of Cashel, Feidlimid mac Crimthainn, was arguably the most powerful and ambitious ruler of Munster in the period before Brian Boru. The impact of the reign of this many-sided man, which lasted twenty-seven years, from 820-47, has been skilfully summarized by F. J. Byrne:<sup>19</sup>

In Feidlimid mac Crimthainn we meet one of the most enigmatic figures in Irish history. King and ecclesiastic, overlord of Leth Moga and aspirant to the high-kingship of Ireland, a pious ruler who solemnly proclaimed the Law of Patrick in Munster and who is gratefully remembered in the *Vita Tripartita*, a friend of the Céili Dé ascetics, even a member of their order and regarded later as a saint, a renowned warrior, at a most critical era in Irish history, when devastating Viking raids were succeeded by permanent base-camps and settlements, Feidlimid never once devoted his arms to attacking these heathen foreigners but distinguished his martial career by burning and plundering some of the greatest of Irish monasteries – Kildare, Gallen, Durrow, Clonfert, and above all Clonmacnoise – captured and maltreated the abbot of Armagh, allowed the abbot of Cork to die without the comforts of religion in his prison at Cashel, and was finally struck down by the vengeance of St Ciarán.

Feidlimid reigned at a time when the achievements and policies of Charlemagne and his children were causing ripples all over Europe, including Ireland. The church in Ireland was in the course of change, centred on the foundations – many of them new – of the ascetic *Céili Dé*. It is difficult to believe that Feidlimid would have been unaffected by the momentous external political developments of his time. The year after his death, following a great victory over the Northmen by his successor in Munster, Ólchobar, in alliance with the king of Leinster, an embassy was sent to Charles the Bald to acquaint him of the victory ‘in token of peace and friendship’, and to request safe passage to Rome for one of the victorious kings.<sup>20</sup> There is no record of Feidlimid going on pilgrimage to Rome but he is likely to have seen his own kingship, however limited its compass, in terms of the new models thrown up by events on the Continent.

Feidlimid’s persistent burning and plundering of monasteries, however repugnant to modern ears, was arguably consistent with the pursuit of his objective of gaining dominance over other provincial kings, and especially over the Uí Néill.<sup>21</sup> Both his inaugural foray outside Munster, which led to the burning of the church of Gallen of the Britons, and his subsequent assault on the surrounding territory of Delbna Ethra, were directed at Clonmacnoise which controlled both church and territory.<sup>22</sup> With up to forty recorded plunderings in the period between the ninth and twelfth centuries, Clonmacnoise has the dubious distinction of being one of the most frequently attacked of all Irish churches. However, Feidlimid’s hostility towards it, fittingly described by Byrne as unremitting, was probably directed at one of his main political rivals, Conchobar mac Donnchada of

<sup>19</sup> F.J. Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings* (London, 1973) pp 211-2. Cf. Ailbhe Mac Shamhráin, ‘Fedelmid’, in J. McGuire & J. Quinn (eds), *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Dublin and Cambridge) iii, pp 735-7.

<sup>20</sup> R. Flower, *The Irish Tradition* (Oxford, 1947) p. 35. G. Waitz (ed.), *Scriptores rerum germanicarum in usum scholarum ex monumentis historicis recusi: annales Bertiniani* (Hannover, 1883), p. 36.

<sup>21</sup> Mac Shamhráin, ‘Fedelmid’, p. 736.

<sup>22</sup> AU 823.9, 826.8. For Clonmacnoise’s role in Delbna Ethra, see Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, p. 221.

the Clann Cholmáin of the midland territory of Mide (now mainly Westmeath), who succeeded Áed Oirdnide as claimant to the over-kingship of the Northern Half of Ireland in 820.<sup>23</sup>

The annal entries for 823, Feidlimid's first year in office, already announce his plan of campaign. The assault on the church of Gallen coincided with the resignation from the abbacy of Clonmacnoise of Rónán, who, we are told elsewhere, belonged to the Luigne of Tara, an association whose symbolism would have sent out an unmistakeable signal.<sup>24</sup> It identified Rónán as an ally of the king of Mide, probably intruded into the abbot's seat, where his association with Tara would neatly reflect Conchobar's claim to high-kingship. Simultaneously, however, this association would have turned both the abbot and his church into legitimate targets for Conchobar's rivals. Feidlimid's aim at this point may have been to wean Clonmacnoise from its support of Conchobar. The immediate replacement for the retired abbot, Cétadach of the Uí Chormaic of Máenmag, on the other side of the river Shannon, whose loyalty would have lain with the Uí Briúin of Connacht, then also beginning to nurture hopes of over-kingship, may have been as little to his liking. But Feidlimid was nothing if not persistent and, although nowhere included in the official list of abbots, the *prioir* of Clonmacnoise, unceremoniously 'cast into the Shannon, and killed' by the king of Connacht in 834 (AFM), is said to have belonged to the Uí Fhorga of Ormond in north Munster, which would indicate that he was a southern appointee.<sup>25</sup>

At several other points of his career, Feidlimid's actions reveal his awareness of the power of symbolic associations. In 834 (AFM) he raided Mag Aí, where Cruachain, the seat of Connacht kingship, was located, only to suffer defeat. In 840 (AU) he invaded Mide and Brega, encamping at Tara, then of purely symbolic importance, where he took hostages. A year later he marched as far as Carman in Leinster, the site of a celebrated and much-sung fair, Óenach Carmain, symbolically associated with the exercise of Leinster kingship.<sup>26</sup> And although he met defeat there, his purpose in going to Carman in the first place would have been to present himself as effective ruler of Leinster at its symbolic centre.

Feidlimid's relations with Armagh likewise arose from his recognition of the need to be closely associated not only with secular but also with ecclesiastical centres of power. By the early ninth century Armagh's claims to primacy were being heard and acknowledged throughout Ireland. The law of its patron saint, *Cáin Phátraic*, which appears to have been designed to create a system of tribute collection that went hand in hand with primatial status, was promulgated no fewer than ten times between 734 and 836.<sup>27</sup> Munster was one of the last kingdoms to appreciate the potential benefits to be derived from association with Armagh's primacy, and it says a great deal about Feidlimid's appetite for power that he was the first southern provincial king to be associated by name with the promulgation of Patrick's law.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, p. 221.

<sup>24</sup> AFM 842. As J. Ryan points out, it is remarkable that a predecessor of this man (d. 764) shared the same name and tribal affiliation: J. Ryan, 'The Abbatial Succession at Clonmacnoise', in idem (ed.), *Féil-sgríbhinn Eóin Mhic Néill: Essays and Studies presented to Professor Eoin MacNeill D.Litt. on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday* (Dublin, 1940) pp 490-507; at p. 503.

<sup>25</sup> Mac Shamhráin, 'Fedelmíde', 737.

<sup>26</sup> AU 841.5. Here Niall of the Northern Uí Néill, by now the main rival for over-kingship, marched against Feidlimid and defeated him in battle, the king 'abandoning his crozier in the blackthorns'.

<sup>27</sup> AU 734.3, 737.10, 767.10, 783.9, 799.9, 806.5, 811.1, 823.5, 825.14, 836.4. Cf. P. Ó Riain, 'A Misunderstood Annal: A Hitherto Unnoticed *Cáin*', *Celtica*, 21 (1990) pp 561-6.

<sup>28</sup> While it is commonly held that a meeting between Áed Allán, king of the Uí Néill, and Cathal, king of Munster, in 737 was connected with the promulgation in the same year of Patrick's law 'all over Ireland', there is no evidence of an Armagh presence in Munster between then and the beginning of Feidlimid's reign.

In all, five annal entries touch on the contacts between Feidlimid and Patrick's successors at Armagh. The first of these, dated 823 (AU), notes the promulgation over Munster by Feidlimid, together with Artri, the acting abbot of Armagh, of the law of Patrick.<sup>29</sup> The abbot of Armagh, the most powerful ecclesiastic in Ireland, was now Feidlimid's ally, at least temporarily, and in a position to help rather than hinder the king's expansionist policies. The initial rapprochement between king and abbot, which was doubtless sealed at Cashel, may not have lasted long. Within two years, the abbot of Armagh had taken Patrick's law to the province of Connacht, where it was duly proclaimed in 825 (AU). Indeed, the law was not again proclaimed in Munster for almost twenty years, and in the meantime relations appear to have soured. An entry for 836 (AU) describes how Feidlimid 'disrespectfully blockaded' the abbot of Armagh and his congregation at Kildare. However, the mistreated abbot returned to Munster six years later, in 842 (AI), to proclaim his saint's law once more, and this time the arrangement appears to have been more enduring. Certainly, the abbot was again (or still) in Munster in 845 (AU), only to be further mistreated, this time by the 'heathens', who made him captive at Colman's Well in Co. Limerick 'with his halidoms and followers', and brought him to the boats at Limerick. This was followed a year later by the abbot's release and return to Armagh. In another year, Feidlimid, king of Munster, had died and no more mention is made of the abbot of Armagh in a southern context for over a century.

At this period, tribute or revenue collection appears to have engaged the personal attention of the abbot of Armagh who, as the annals show, spent a great deal of his time on circuit. On these occasions, Patrick's successor was accustomed to carry with him his church's principal relics, *ad legem perficiendam*, 'to fulfil the law', which might be used for solemn testimony when enforcing it. An annal entry for the year 734 (AU) states that not only Patrick's relics but also those of Peter and Paul, the twin symbols of Armagh's primacy, were taken on circuit. When speaking of these relics, the annals use such terms as *martyres* (AU 734), *cum armario* (AU 811), *cum vexillis* (AU 836), *cona mindaibh* (AU 845). From the early ninth century onwards, Patrick's insignia at Armagh included what is now known as the Book of Armagh, begun about 810 and containing among other items St Matthew's Gospel and the earliest surviving copies of Patrick's own writings as well as other Patrician texts.<sup>30</sup> F.J. Byrne has suggested that this may have been among the saint's insignia taken on tour, and there is arguably at least one tangible connexion between the make-up of the book and the abbatial circuits of this period.<sup>31</sup>

One partly blank folio of the Book of Armagh contains jottings, usually referred to as *Notulae*.<sup>32</sup> Consisting mainly of personal names and place names written in the scribe's smallest hand, sometimes in full, often radically abbreviated, these notes have puzzled scholars greatly. The editor of the facsimile of the book, John Gwynn, considered them to be 'a transcript of notes' that had come into the hands of its scribe Ferdornach, which he deemed worthy of preservation.<sup>33</sup> Mac Neill took them to be a copy of 'preparatory notes' made by Tírechán in the seventh century, and this view was largely shared by Paul Grosjean.<sup>34</sup> Kathleen Mulchrone held them to be a 'table of contents' made by Ferdornach,

<sup>29</sup> F.J. Byrne, *Succession Lists. Heads of Churches to c.1200*, in T. W. Moody, F. X. Martin & F.J. Byrne (eds), *A New History of Ireland* (Oxford, 1984), ix, pp 237-263; at pp 238, 240n.

<sup>30</sup> Gwynn, *Liber Ardmachanus*.

<sup>31</sup> Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, p. 222.

<sup>32</sup> Bieler, *The Patrician Texts*, pp 180-3.

<sup>33</sup> Gwynn, *Liber Ardmachanus*, pp lxxiv-v. Gwynn went on to suggest, less convincingly, that the notes had been dictated by Torbach, abbot of Armagh (†810).

<sup>34</sup> Mac Neill, 'The Vita Tripartita of St. Patrick', p. 1; P. Grosjean, 'Analyse du Livre d'Armagh', *Analecta Bollandiana*, 62 (1949) pp 33-73; at pp 66-70. Grosjean considered Tírechán to be the author of the original version of the Tripartite Life.

only to have her opinion rejected by Bieler who attached them, again as a form of index, to the files that led to the seventh- or early eighth-century 'Latin-Irish' Life he postulated as an ancestor of the Tripartite Life.<sup>35</sup> In a brief comment Thomas Charles-Edwards also saw a close correspondence between them and the Tripartite Life.<sup>36</sup> Finally, in a contribution to the *New History of Ireland*, F.J. Byrne described the *Notulae* as a 'draft-index' to a projected text similar to the Tripartite Life.<sup>37</sup> The consensus that has emerged among scholars is that the *Notulae* are to be read in conjunction with the Tripartite Life, and I also subscribe to this view. More precisely, I take the *Notulae* to be a transcript of notes made in the field, *in situ*, during tribute-collecting circuits undertaken, probably in the period 835 to 845, by the abbot of Armagh. During that time the abbot was in north Leinster (836), Connacht (836), and twice in Munster (842, 845). In those circumstances, as I understand them, some member of his retinue would have been delegated to take notes, first roughly on wax tablets or the like, which would then have been given a more permanent form by Ferdornach on previously blank space in the Book of Armagh.

This reading of the *Notulae* has several advantages: it explains their position in the book on blank space; the occurrence in them of misplacements and other irregularities, normal when rough notes are being written up; and, above all, their contents, which accord closely with the detail of the previously unrecorded itineraries in Munster and Leinster attributed to Patrick by the author of the Tripartite Life. The apparent time-lag between the recording of the names and the process of working them into the narrative form of the Tripartite Life could have been the result of the death in 846 of Ferdornach *sapiens et scriba optimus*, the scribe of the Book of Armagh, including its *Notulae*, and possibly the intended author of the saint's new Life.<sup>38</sup> This was followed a year later by the death of Feidlimid, king of Munster, which not only put the quest of the southern province for greater authority outside its own borders temporarily on hold, but doubtless also rendered less urgent the need for a new Life of the patron of Armagh. Whatever the circumstances, any form of time-lag between the entering of the *Notulae* in the Book of Armagh and the composition of the Tripartite Life would explain the occasional lack of correspondence between the two. Some names in the *Notulae* are absent from the Tripartite Life and vice-versa. Thus, of some 40 names of individuals or places in the Munster section of the *Notulae*, four, all place or tribal names, are omitted from the Tripartite Life.<sup>39</sup> Of these, three can be identified: *Fetambir*, now Fedamore, *Cuillen*, now Cullen, and *Orbrige*, now Orrery. And however irrelevant these may have become for the author of the Tripartite Life, it is important to note that each place is located along or near the route provided by this text for Patrick.

The saint's southern itinerary began at Cashel, where no pre-1100 journey of this kind could have failed to begin, not because it lay anywhere near a pass into the province, but because Munster sovereignty could only be breached, symbolically, through it. In that

<sup>35</sup> K. Mulchrone, 'What are the Armagh *Notulae*', *Ériu*, 16 (1952) pp 140-44; eadem, 'Ferdornach and the Armagh *Notulae*', *Ériu*, 18 (1958) pp 160-3; Bieler, *The Patrician Texts*, pp 49-52; idem, 'The *Notulae* in the Book of Armagh', *Scriptorium*, 8 (1954) pp 89-97, reprinted in R. Sharpe (ed.), *Ludwig Bieler: Studies on the Life and Legend of St Patrick*, Variorum Reprint CS244 (London, 1986) XIII.

<sup>36</sup> Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 11.

<sup>37</sup> F.J. Byrne, 'Church and Politics, c.750-c.1100', in D. Ó Cróinín (ed.), *A New History of Ireland*, i, *Prehistoric and Early Ireland* (Oxford, 2005), i, pp 657-79; at pp 662-3.

<sup>38</sup> I subscribe to the view taken by T.F. O'Rahilly (*Early Irish History and Mythology* (Dublin, 1946) p. 410), among others, that the text dates to the second half of the ninth century. However, while O'Rahilly seems to have favoured a date of about 870-80, I would place the text earlier still, towards the middle of the century.

<sup>39</sup> Bieler, *The Patrician Texts*, p. 182 (§§49-51, 53-9).



sense, it was the gateway to Munster, and its king the gatekeeper. The author of the Tripartite Life would have had no immediate need, therefore, to begin his Munster section by consulting and expanding on the last sentence of Tírechán's seventh-century Life of Patrick; an opening scene on the Rock of Cashel was all but foreordained.<sup>40</sup> That he nevertheless did so, provided him, as we have seen, with an opportunity of displaying his skill as a propagandist. Through his equation of the tribal name Cothraige with the hibernicized form of Patrick, he set the scene for the saint's extended tour of Munster by showing how the saint's memory had already become part of local topography.<sup>41</sup>

The text is otherwise rife with echoes of the conditions that led to its composition. Not only do its episodes reflect the geographical distribution of the *Notulae*, individually they correspond to what little is otherwise known of ninth-century Munster ecclesiastical and secular politics. A case in point is the saint's first station at Kilfeakle among the Múscraige Bregoin, along the route from Cashel to Emly. This episode is unsurprising because, as is shown by other ninth- and tenth-century texts, the Múscraige had what amounted to most favoured nation status with the Eoganacht of Cashel.<sup>42</sup> The first hostage taken by the king of Cashel – in other words, the first token of his authority – was from the Múscraige. And all else being equal, the Múscraige king was entitled to sit at table beside the king of Cashel, a major privilege indeed. By bringing the saint to Kilfeakle, Patrick's biographer gave expression, vicariously, to the pecking-order that obtained locally in the late ninth century.

The topicality of the circumstances surrounding Patrick's visit to Emly, historically Munster's chief church, also quickly become apparent. The saint was now in the territory of Araid, just over the modern border between Tipperary and Limerick, which was then dominated by the Eoganacht of Airthir Cliach. The list of ninth-century abbots of the church of Emly shows that this political grouping then effectively controlled the abbacy. Indeed, one abbot, Ólchobar (†851), combined his high office with the kingship of Munster.<sup>43</sup> The author of the Tripartite Life must have been keenly aware of this situation because he singled out the dynasty for particular praise. Furthermore, in typical hagiographical style, he all but stated explicitly that the then abbot of Emly belonged to the dynasty. Patrick, helped by Ailbe, resuscitated a son of the family who, we are told, then preached to the hosts, thus singling him out as an ecclesiastic. Moreover, in commemoration of the miracle, his *suide*, in this case perhaps shorthand for the *suide apad*, 'abbot's chair', was still to be seen locally.<sup>44</sup> The author could have been more explicit but there was no need; his audience would have been just as fluent as he in the highly coded language of the text.

Similarly coded language is used in settling local scores. Where a person or family is presented as having incurred the saint's displeasure, we may safely infer that either the abbot of Armagh or the abbot of Emly, or both, had reason to be offended. Some such offence may underlie, for instance, the alleged rejection of the saint by the Dál Modula, who held lands near Pallas Grean.<sup>45</sup> This family could claim an ancestral relationship with Ailbe, patron of Emly, which, by hereditary law, entitled it to high office in the

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. p. 162 §51 (4).

<sup>41</sup> Harvey, 'The Significance of Cothraige'; Ó Riain, 'When and Why Cothraige was First Equated with Patricius'.

<sup>42</sup> J.G. O'Keefe, 'Dál Caladbuig', in J. Fraser, P. Grosjean & J.G. O'Keefe (eds), *Irish Texts*, i (1931) pp 19-21 (§§1, 9). Cf. Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, pp 197-9; Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, pp 542-4.

<sup>43</sup> Byrne, *Succession Lists*, pp 252-3; idem, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, p. 293.

<sup>44</sup> Mulchrone, *Bethu Phátraic*, ll. 2330-39.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. ll. 2361-6.

church. The fact that they are supposed to have rejected Patrick, therefore, may simply mean that they were then in dispute with the abbot of Emly, who would have had Armagh's support. Their condemnation by Patrick meant little to the family in any case; three hundred or more years later, when the Life of St Finbarr was written, a prelate of the Dál Modula was given the distinction of consecrating the Cork saint as bishop, which shows that the family was then still capable of representing the archiepiscopal church of Emly.<sup>46</sup> The hereditary professional families were nothing if not resilient.

Before leaving this part of Limerick, Patrick needed to attend to another important item of business, namely the underwriting of Armagh's entitlements in the area. This was done by bringing the saint to Kiltteely, an unpretentious place, destined, nevertheless, to become one of the termon-lands held by Armagh in Limerick until late medieval times.<sup>47</sup> The history of the foundation of Kiltteely, as presented in the Tripartite Life, was effectively its charter.

The next setting for the saint's activities was the important territory of Uí Fhidgeinte, which was roughly equivalent to the extent of the present diocese of Limerick. Here Patrick was met and entertained by a local king named Lonán mac Maicc Eirgg. Again the name seems coded; the dominant group in Uí Fhidgeinte throughout the ninth century were the Uí Chonail Gabra, whose leading line traced its descent to Flann mac Eirc (†762).<sup>48</sup> In this case, therefore, as in other episodes, the Armagh writer of Patrick's Life was arguably doing no more than respecting the demands of political correctness. Furthermore, although Uí Fhidgeinte lands were to become roughly coterminous with the diocese of Limerick, Mungret, the principal church of the territory and the second most important church in mid-Munster after Emly, with its abbots and other officials regularly recorded in the annals from the eighth century onwards, was never to attain cathedral status. Mungret's misfortune was its proximity to Limerick, which saw it lose out to the new foundation of St Mary's in the early twelfth century. Mainly through Uí Briain influence, this church, now St Mary's cathedral, was accorded the pre-eminence it still enjoys. However, in the ninth century, there was no challenge to Mungret's authority from the town of Limerick, then still in its infancy. Consequently, Patrick is presented as a friend and counsellor of the local patron, Nessán, whom he baptized, before going on, allegedly, to found Mungret, which is as much as to claim, in hagiographical terms, that it was a dependency of Armagh.<sup>49</sup>

The aim may also have been to strengthen Mungret, because events in the territory just north of Uí Fhidgeinte at this time must already have had an unsettling effect. By the middle of the tenth century, the Dál Cais of Thomond had succeeded in wresting the sovereignty of Munster from the Eoganacht of Caisel, so that when the abbot of Armagh quarrelled with the abbot of Emly while on circuit in Munster in 973 (AI), it was their king, Mathgamain, who negotiated a settlement. A hundred years before this, the signs must already have been there to read, to judge by the meeting arranged for Patrick with the people of Thomond immediately after he departed from Mungret. Present at this meeting was Cáerthann mac Blait, head of the Clann Tairdelbaig, the branch of the Dál Cais to which Brian Boru and his successors later belonged.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, Saingel, now

<sup>46</sup> P. Ó Riain, *The Making of a Saint: Finbarr of Cork 600-1200*, Irish Texts Society Subsidiary Series 5 (London, 1997) pp 108-11.

<sup>47</sup> Mulchrone, *Bethu Phátraic*, ll. 2374-8; J. Begley, 'The Termons of St Patrick in the County of Limerick', *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, 5th Series, 6 (1915), pp 236-47.

<sup>48</sup> Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, p. 296.

<sup>49</sup> Mulchrone, *Bethu Phátraic*, ll. 2400-6. The church already figures in eighth-century annals (AU 757).

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* ll. 2407-21.

Singland, in the parish of St Patrick's, where the meeting was held, lay south of the Shannon, which means that Dál Cais encroachment south of the river was probably already well underway.<sup>51</sup>

Before departing from this area, Patrick was allowed to prophesy the births of two notable saints, Senán and Brénainn. Although the peoples connected with these saints, the Corca Baiscinn and the Ciarraige, are not named, both were later to be staunch allies of the Dál Cais, flourishing so much under their patronage that the saints' churches, at Scattery and Ardfert, developed into diocesan centres. It is probably no accident, therefore, that their blessing by Patrick should have taken place in the context of his encounter with the Dál Cais.<sup>52</sup>

Patrick's circuit of mid-Munster ended in south Limerick, where a local group, the Déis Deiscirt, allegedly gave the saint cause for offence. Had they possibly been a party to the capture by Vikings of Patrick's successor at Colman's Well in this general area in 845? We cannot say, but Armagh's ire found its way into a prophecy of the saint that the people would 'be peeled every seventh year like an onion'.<sup>53</sup> There were, however, also those in the area wise enough to conciliate Armagh and provide it with the base it needed for tribute-collecting. It was then, according to the Life, that the hill of Ardpatrik, just south of Kilmallock, which, like Kiltelly in East Limerick, was destined to be a termon of the northern metropolitan church for centuries to come, was granted to Patrick.<sup>54</sup> By taking the saint to Ardpatrik, the Tripartite Life would have provided Armagh with written title to the site.

At this point, the southern limit of Armagh influence in Munster in the ninth century appears to have been reached. Entirely omitted from mention are the large territories south of the Ballyhoura Hills and the Eoganacht dynasties that lorded over them, at Glanworth, for instance, which had provided earlier kings of Munster, and at Raithlenn, which was beginning to assert its authority. The lack of Armagh penetration in these areas was probably due to the failure of successive kings of Cashel to impose on them anything more than nominal authority. In their turn, the territories of Desmuma rarely presented a threat to the more ambitious peoples of north Munster. Accordingly, Patrick's law in Munster, promulgated for the first time in 823, would have been enforceable in the areas effectively under the control of the Cashel/Emly axis – roughly the area covered by the narrative of the Tripartite Life.

Having thus brought his official business in mid-Munster to a successful conclusion, Patrick – or arguably one of his ninth-century successors – headed north towards the Múscraige Tíre lands of north-west Tipperary. And it is surely no coincidence that, just as the saint was about to leave the southern province, the author of the Life introduced to his narrative a poem on the saint's law.<sup>55</sup> In this way, he evoked in a most appropriate way the very transaction that had marked, in 823, the probable beginning of a close Armagh involvement in Munster affairs.

<sup>51</sup> Finnine, now probably the hill of Ballysheedy in the civil parish of St. Nicholas, from where the saint is said to have blessed Thomond, may then have formed the southern limit of Dál Cais territory.

<sup>52</sup> Mulchrone, *Bethu Phátraic*, II. 2422-32.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.* II. 2433-43.

<sup>54</sup> It was here, for instance, that Cellach, better known as Celsus, successor of St Patrick and reforming archbishop of Armagh, died on the kalends of April, 1129, before being buried on 3 April, 'according to his own will' at Lismore, then the centre in Munster of ecclesiastical reform (AU 1129.3). Cf. Begley, 'The Termons of St Patrick'.

<sup>55</sup> Mulchrone, *Bethu Phátraic*, II. 2501-40.