

# Connections: the *Cath Maige Tuired* and the *Völuspá*

*Convergence of cultures, history and myth*

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Master's Thesis  
History of Religion

UNIVERSITY OF OSLO

Autumn 2015

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2015

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Trykk: Reprosentralen, Universitetet i Oslo



# Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor, Jens Braarvig, for having the patience to deal with me and my strange ways of doing things.

Thank you to Jan Erik Rekdal and Karl Johansson for giving me the idea for this thesis and to my fellow students for great discussions.

To all my friends and my amazing family, you know who you are, I love you more and more each day. And to the artists and musicians that make my life bearable, you do not know who you are, but without you I would truly go insane.

A special thanks goes to my sister, Monica, for being my co-conspirator and for helping me bore every other member of our family with our academic discussions. May we continue to do so in the future!

To Rita, whom I miss beyond words.

I dedicate all my triumphs to you



# Introduction

The topic of the thesis is the Irish myth *Cath Maige Tuired* - "The Second Battle of Mag Tuired", which is the story about the battle between the Túatha Dé Danann, the gods of pagan Ireland, and their enemies the Fomoiré. What I wish to focus upon in the *Cath Maige Tuired* is not the battle in itself, which has been compared to the war between the Aesir and the Vanir in Scandinavian mythology<sup>1</sup>, but a passage at the end of this myth, where the goddess Mórrigan (here in the form of a mortal) comes with a prediction of the end of the world. This text has many qualities that I find similar to the Norse text *Völuspá*. I wish to explore the relationship between the prophecies of the *Cath Maige Tuired* and the *Völuspá* to see if there is some connection between them or if the similarities are purely coincidental.

The paper will have two main "axes" of study: One axis on time, and another on place.

Time: From orality to literacy (the oral tradition to the written, the pagan to the Christian). How time has affected the stories and their content.

Space: How the Norse and Celtic traditions are both alike and different. How did the intermingling of the two cultures in the Viking Age affect the content of the myths as well as the culture.

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<sup>1</sup>

Gray, 1982, p 1 (see "3. Sources.doc")

# Table of contents

About philology	p. 8
Main sources for Völuspá	p. 10
Main sources for Cath Maighe Tuireadh	p. 12
The roots of Irish culture: Terminology and definitions of the term "Celtic"	p. 15
The roots of Irish culture: Irish language	p. 19
The development of Celticity and idealism	p. 22
Origin of the Vikings	p. 24
Norse invasion of the British and Irish Isles	p. 27
The term Laithlinde or Lochlann in the Irish sources	p. 29
The term 'Ostman' referring to the Vikings	p. 32
Scholarship in Iceland	p. 33
Scholarship in Ireland: Saints, heroes and goddesses	p. 35
The Leabhar Gabhála na hÉireann	p. 36
Hagiographies	p. 38
Ogham	p. 43
The sovereignty Goddess in Irish literature	p. 46
The Táin	p. 49
Cath Maighe Tuireadh as a response to the Vikings	p. 51
The role of Bres in Irish literature	p. 56
The sibylline connection	p. 66
The common Christian background Interpretation	p. 69
Interpretation	p. 72
Intermingling of the two cultures in the Viking Age	p. 74
Eddic oral-formulaic structure	p. 75
Conclusion	p. 87

# About philology

Within philology, Thomassen argues that the purpose of the philological interpretation is to reach a better understanding of the text in its cultural and historical context. It is therefore necessary to control the interpretation of the utterances we want to use as the grounds for our claims.

There are numerous reasons for the failure in the correct interpretation of a text. Errors in philological interpretation is often caused by the researcher. Thomassen mentions several ways a researcher may interpret a text with error. This could be because:

- A word or a phrase meaning something different in a given text than given in dictionaries, grammars or knowledge of languages.
- The researcher is not familiar with the vocabulary
- The researcher is not familiar with the ways of expression within a particular genre
- The researcher is not familiar with an ideological context such as a religion or philosophy
- The researcher is not familiar with specific allusions in the text<sup>2</sup>
- The researcher is not familiar with the particular author of the text
- The researcher is not familiar with the time period of the text<sup>3</sup>

August Boeckh talks about languages, genre, person and historical situation that form the background of every text.<sup>4</sup> For Thomassen, the criteria of Boeckh only becomes meaningful in a concrete research situation, and only a careful contextual reading can bring out the connotations the word may have in a given context. For this, we need to look at which words are used in the original text, or earliest extant text, in which nuances can be found in the way the information is presented. As academics, we therefore always have to be careful to check the texts, and know their background, before we can find the source of and evidence for what we want to argue.<sup>5</sup>

Text criticism within philology relies on studying how texts change over time, knowing if there

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<sup>2</sup> Intercontextuality is especially common in religious texts

<sup>3</sup> Thomassen 85 - 86

<sup>4</sup> Thomassen 85.2

<sup>5</sup> Thomassen 76.1



are any typographical errors, but first and foremost find out who wrote the texts we have before us. The two prime questions philologists ask when studying a text is the question of criticism, or how reliable a text is, and the question of hermeneutics, or how a text should be interpreted.<sup>6</sup>

First, a philologist tries to place a text in their proper textual and historical contexts, through the critique of the form and content.<sup>7</sup>

All texts, including those in oral traditions, follow certain genre rules, and the genre of the text determines how the intent of the text is expressed. Therefore, to interpret a text, you must know the rules and rhetorical significance of the different genres.<sup>8</sup>

Further, through the critique of the editorial process, where the text is dissected into its component parts, the author's use of sources can be revealed. Schleiermacher is concerned about how the author uses language for their own purposes, the psychological interpretation of a text.<sup>9</sup> Understanding the overarching purpose an author or editor may have had is the main aim for this critique, as a conglomerate of different sources can have had an effect on the reading of a text.<sup>10</sup>

Finally, philological hermeneutics, practice and experience, personal reading practices, reflection and discussion are the tools for the study of texts. Within the field of philology, not all interpretations are equally valid, no matter how meaningful they may be subjectively for the individual.<sup>11</sup> Therefore the scholar must be educated within various fields to genuinely be able to grasp the linguistic, literary, cultural and historical dimensions of a text. Thomassen argues that "a text is an individual language action but performed by help of special rules".<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Thomassen, 2006: 77

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. 82

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. 83

<sup>9</sup> Schleiermacher talks here about the personal way of writing, or style

<sup>10</sup> Thomassen, 2006: 83

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. 86

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. 84 (my translation)

# Main sources for Völuspá

## Codex Regius, GKS 2365 4to (1270s)

The Codex Regius of the Elder Edda is an Icelandic manuscript written around the 1270s which comprises of 29 Old Norse poetic works. Ten of these, including Völuspá, are mythological works, and the other material deals with Scandinavian heroic material.<sup>13</sup>

## Hauksbók (AM 371 4to, AM 544 4to, AM 675 4to)

Hauksbók is one of the sources to the Icelandic Sagas. From the Middle Ages it is rare to find a document where we can trace the authorship to a specific person, but in this case we know the name of one of the redactors of Hauksbók, Haukr Erlendsson. In 1964, palaeographical evidence allowed Stefán Karlsson to date the manuscript to between 1302 and 1310<sup>14</sup>

AM 544 and AM 675 of Hauksbók is kept at the Arnamagnæanske Collection in Copenhagen, and AM 371 at the Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum<sup>15</sup> in Reykjavík, Iceland.<sup>16</sup>

## **Other sources for early Scandinavian history**

### De Origine Actibusque Getarum (C. 551)

In De Origine Actibusque Getarum, or the Getica, we find one of the oldest written sources about the people of Scandinavia. It describes geographical places such as Schythia, Pannonia, the Danube, and finally Scandza, or Scandia: the Scandinavian peninsula<sup>17</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Terry Gunnell (McTurk, ed.) 2005

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.gutenberg.us/articles/Hauksb%C3%B3k>  
Aldur Hauksbókar, 'Fróðskaparrit', 13 (1964), 114–21

<sup>15</sup> Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies

<sup>16</sup> <http://handrit.is/en/manuscript/view/AM04-0544>

<sup>17</sup> Mierow, 1915: 36

It was written by a Roman historian named Jordanes in the sixth century. Mierow presumes that Jordanes wrote the *Getica* in 555 based on the mention of the death of Germanus the Roman who died in 550, and the fact that no later event than this is mentioned in the manuscript.<sup>18</sup>

Mierow says that even though the *Getica* is an historical work, he finds it evident that it must have been heavily influenced by the political surroundings of his time, as Jordanes often refers to the hope of the future lying both with the Roman as well with what he refers to as the Gothic race.<sup>19</sup>

### Orosius (C. 890)

Orosius' work *Historiarum adversum Paganos Libri Septem* (the seven books of history against the pagans) were written by request from bishop Augustine of Hippo to refute the arguments that Rome was falling apart due to apostasy against the Pagan gods.<sup>20</sup>

Orosius contains the chronicles of the traders Ohthere (Ottar) and Wulfstan, two of the earliest written materials about the Scandinavians. The account of Ohthere in Orosius is one of the most known text from this period.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Mierow, 1915: 13

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* 16

<sup>20</sup> Orosius, 1984: 5

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* 5

# Main sources for Cath Maighe Tuireadh

Cath Maighe Tuireadh is only preserved in a 16th century manuscript, Harleian (MS 5280, 63a-70b), kept in the British Library. Other than this sole document, we have other sources that back up what is written about the Cath Maighe Tuireadh in the Harleian manuscript, such as the Leabhar Gabhála na hÉireann.

## Harleian (MS 5280, 63a-70b)

The Harleian manuscript of the Cath Maighe Tuireadh expands on references to the battle in Lebor Gabála Érenn and the Irish Annals

According to Gerard Murphy, "the story under consideration is indeed the product of an eleventh or twelfth-century redactor working mainly upon ninth-century material"

## Lebor Gabála Érenn

Lebor Gabála Érenn, often translated as "The Book of Invasions", can best be translated as "the book of the taking of Ireland". It was written as a pseudo-historical mythological product, and it is a compilation narrating the various fractions that has taken over Ireland, both in myth and in historical times.<sup>22</sup>

This compilation has been handed down in fifteen different manuscripts, where some are copies of others.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Macalister, 1938: ix

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. ix

## **Other sources for early Celtic history**

### Commentarii de Bello Gallico

Commentarii de Bello Gallico is one of the earliest sources we have concerning the Celts, written by Julius Caesar in the first century B.C. We need to take some precautions regarding the description of the Gauls because it was written by a ruler fighting them. We cannot necessarily see Caesar as the most trustworthy source of how these people lived, but we can derive some points from him. It also is one of the few surviving sources from this period, so it cannot be ignored.

### The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (787 – 1098)

In the Middle Ages both the secular administrative bodies and the clerical community in the monasteries kept records and annals of local events. To some extent the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle is the most important document discussing some aspects of Anglo-Saxon history that are not found in any other source. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle is a collection of source documents, where most of the documents are secondary sources, although it does contain some firsthand accounts. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle is an important source because it brings together a number of chronicles and annals from the Middle Ages, but because so much of the material collected in these documents is based on legends and stories we must see it as a relatively unreliable source.

### The Annals of Ulster (799 – 1130)

The transcriptions of the Annals would ordinarily come from abbeys in the region, and the transcripts in the Annals were edited down or lengthened depending on the discretion of the transcriber. The events were most likely edited down or lengthened in accordance with the perceived importance of the happening being chronicled.

Most of the material is made up of simple references to events happening in Ireland, and the

Annals describe important events chronologically. Some years are simply skipped over, and most events are not elaborated upon. A certain degree of editing was also presumably done depending on the assessment of the author documenting the events, and some events are left out altogether. This probably indicates that the events were documented not long after they took place.

The different sources overlap only partially or in some cases not at all, and in the case of the Annals of Ulster, especially in regard to later events in the chronicles, they bear evidence of being edited in some degree. Where the different sources overlap the references that are made to the various events described are largely identical, and seeing as the Annals are such vital references to the history of Ireland, and other sources are lost to us, we must assume that there is some fidelity to the original author.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Mac Airt, 1983

# The roots of Irish culture: Terminology and definitions of the term "Celtic"

There are many concerns when using terminology such as "Celtic". Following the example of Patrick Sims-Williams in his article *Celtomania and Celtoscepticism*, I do agree that "schizophrenic signals are being sent out to the general public",<sup>25</sup> and that the term Celtic is overused. Simon Rodway urges us to be cautious when combining evidence from different disciplines to build the picture of the Celtic civilisation.<sup>26</sup>

## Some problems with the terminology

One of the main problems is when the same word is used within different academic disciplines to describe different things. The Celts of an historian is not necessarily the Celts of a linguist. If we put linguistic standards up against historical where we use the definition given to us by the Roman sources, the inhabitants of the British and Irish Isles are part of Celtic culture by linguistic criteria, though they were not names such by the classical sources.<sup>27</sup>

This difference in meaning becomes even larger when you add the fact that people use the term "Celtic" to sell various items. As soon as you throw on the descriptor "Celtic" (or "Viking" for that matter) onto a book, pendant, coffee mug, the list goes on ad nauseam, it will sell more. In this context the terminology becomes a joke, and this is my main issue with using the word Celtic.

I do, however, still find "Celtic" to be a valid and useful term, but the term cannot be used frivolously because there are vast differences in what is considered Celtic. I have some reservations regarding the use of the term; we need to keep our definitions clear and precise, and used in the correct context.

As different disciplines use the same terminology with great diversity, the term Celtic can have

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<sup>25</sup> Sims-Williams, 1998: 1

<sup>26</sup> Rodway, 2010: 31

<sup>27</sup> Maier, 1997: 67

quite divergent interpretations depending on the field of study. Historical sources, classical ethnography, archaeology and linguistics all use the term "Celtic" differently.

### Classical ethnography

Within the field of classical ethnography the Celts are defined as a "succession of peoples in western central Europe",<sup>28</sup> while in the Roman sources the Celts are defined by geographical criteria. Caesar tells us that

"...the Celtae were separated from the Germani by the Rhine, from the Aquitanians by the Garonne and the Belgae by the Seine and the Marne."<sup>29</sup>

Here we see that the Romans defined who the Celts were based on geographic criteria. Linguistically, George Buchanan was one of the first to discover the link between the Celtic languages on the continent and the insular Celtic languages. This was an important and groundbreaking discovery, as the Celtic languages do not possess the same internal cohesion as for example the Germanic or the Romance languages do.<sup>30</sup>

### Caesar as a classical source to Celticism

In one way, it seems like Caesar admired at least some parts of Celtic society, yet it is quite clear that *Commentarii de Bello Gallico* was written as a propaganda piece as the Celts are depicted as a savage warrior society. It's easy to understand why the peoples that were not conquered easily by the Roman Empire had to be depicted as fierce warriors; if they were not great warriors they should have fallen to the great Roman armies quite quickly, and become Roman citizens like all the conquered peoples of Rome.

On the other hand, if you analyse the relationship between the Celts of *Commentarii de Bello Gallico* and the source, you see that much of it is Caesar's way of trying to explain the society of

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<sup>28</sup> Maier, 1997: 67

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. 67

<sup>30</sup> Sims-Williams, 1998: 13



the Druids using Roman society as the foundation. Caesar writes about the druids, the Celtic priests, who according to him "are said to commit to memory a great number of verses. And they remain some 20 years in training". I would argue that the Druids we see here are Caesar's way of connecting the two worlds in a way that the Roman mind could understand. The Druids then became Celtic versions of the Roman pontifices,<sup>31</sup> who were the priests of Roman society and advised the Roman Senate much like the Druids advise the young warriors of Gaul.<sup>32</sup> It is also worth notice that the British and Irish peoples are never called Celtic in the classical sources.<sup>33</sup>

### The term Celtic in archaeology

During the latter half of the 19th century archaeology, having its origin in antiquarianism, became a separate field of study; eventually also contributing to the emergence of modern Celtic studies, and a "more informed knowledge about Celtic culture".<sup>34</sup> The Celts of the Continent, according to archaeology, are the people who inhabited Hallstatt and La Tène.<sup>35</sup>

There are about 2000 burial sites found by lake Hallstatt in Austria. We know that the people who lived there were mining for salt around the 8th to 4th century B.C. The presence of salt mines in this time period meant that Hallstatt must have been a centre of commerce. Some of the graves found had richly decorated grave goods such as four wheeled chariots that may have been used as funeral carriages, harnesses for horses and long swords. Archaeologists interpret this as signs that an elite could have become more prominent in the Hallstatt society during the 8th and 7th centuries.<sup>36</sup>

La Tène culture is named after the discovery site of La Tène just north of Lake Neuchatel in Switzerland. In the later Iron Age, during the La Tène period, Celtic culture stretched over an extensive territory, which covered much of central Europe (right down to today's Turkey), Ireland and Scotland. Artifacts found at the La Tène site are mostly small swords, shields and

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<sup>31</sup> The title Pontifex Maximus was one of the titles of the Pope of the Roman Catholic Church in the Renaissance. This was done in order to confirm that the Catholic Church was somewhat of a continuation of the Roman Empire of the past.

<sup>32</sup> Koch, 2003: 21

<sup>33</sup> Rodway, 2010: 33

<sup>34</sup> Maier, 1997: 65

<sup>35</sup> Rodway, 2010: 37

<sup>36</sup> Cunliffe, 1999: 47-48

spears made of iron, and the characteristic necklaces called torcs. These are richly decorated with intricate, distinctive braid patterns. We clearly see the influence of the Germanic "animal style" ornaments in addition to Scythian, Anglo-Saxon and Pictish traditional art.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Maier, 2003: 3; 27- 28  
Cunliffe, 2003: 96- 97  
Maier, 1997: 166

# The roots of Irish culture: Irish language

There are both epistemological and methodological reasons to study languages. To dig deeper into the background of the Irish penchant for telling stories, we must first look at the background of the Irish language.

Modern Irish is an Indo-European language belonging to the Insular branch of the Celtic languages. The connection internally between the Celtic languages were unidentified for a very long time until Franz Bopp made the connection between the Celtic languages and their Indo-European origin. After Bopp discovered that the Celtic languages are part of the Indo-European family of languages, the publication of Johann Kaspar Zeuss's "Grammatica Celtica" in 1853 became the authoritative publication on Celtic languages and a pillar in Celtic philology. "Grammatica Celtica" made Zeuss a founder of what is now known as modern Celtic studies.<sup>38</sup>

The reason it took so long to recognise the similarities between the different Celtic languages may be because of the nonuniformity within the language group<sup>39</sup>.

Some of the more easily distinguishable features of the Celtic languages are:

- The disappearance of initial p
- The disappearance of p before a vowel
- Change from ē to ī

We divide the Celtic languages into two groups: Insular and Continental Celtic. Among the Continental Celtic languages are Celtiberian, Galatian, Gaulish, Lepontic and Noric.

The earliest sources we have of Celtic language are from inscriptions on the Continent, along with names of people, gods and places.<sup>40</sup> Because the Celtic languages on the European mainland were spoken much earlier and at a different location than their insular counterparts, the division between Insular and Continental Celtic is based not on linguistic criteria, but more on

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<sup>38</sup> Maier, 1997: 66

<sup>39</sup> Sims-Williams, 1998: 12-13

<sup>40</sup> Greene, 1966: 8

geographical and chronological concerns.<sup>41</sup>

We furthermore divide the Insular Celtic languages into Brythonic and Goedelic, based on the historical development of specific speech sounds, such as the Proto-Celtic kw-sound, which becomes two distinctive sounds in the Goedelic and Brythonic languages over time. This is how we distinguish between the Q- and P-Celtic branches of Insular Celtic. An example of this is the word son, which in Welsh, which is a Brythonic, or P-Celtic language, the word for son is mab (in Early Welsh it was map), whereas in Irish, which is a Goedelic, or Q-Celtic language, the word son is mac (in the Ogham inscriptions it takes the form maqq).

Irish language is part of the Goedelic subgroup. Modern Irish is closely related to the Scots Gaelic and Manx languages, as they all developed from Old Irish, which was spoken and written in Ireland, and subsequently spread to the Isle of Man and most of Scotland. In linguistic terms we speak about the Goedelic and not the Irish languages, even though all the Goedelic languages sprung out from Old Irish.

Welsh is part of the Brythonic languages, which includes Cornish, Breton, Cumbric. Of these languages only Breton and Welsh survives together with a revived version of Cornish (no native speakers survive). Even though Breton is spoken on the Continent, it is still part of the Insular Celtic languages because it was brought back to the continent by emigrants from Britannia in the 5th Century.

The people who spoke a Celtic language on the continent lived several hundred years before the Celtic languages developed on the British and Irish Isles. Consequently we do not know if the language that came from the continent already was a distinctive Celtic language, or if it developed into a separate language after its arrival in Ireland<sup>42</sup>

### Dál Riata and the migration of Irish language to Britain

Dál Riata was a kingdom in modern day Scotland which was established around 500 A.D. The first kings of Dál Riata came from the northeast part of Ireland, and probably migrated towards

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<sup>41</sup> Maier, 1997: 165

<sup>42</sup> Ó Murchú, 1985: 14

Argyll in modern day Scotland towards the end of the 5th century. Under Aedan mac Gabráin, who became king in 574, the power centre of Dál Riata shifted from Ireland to Scotland, and during his kingship Irish language became stronger in the Scottish parts of Dál Riata. He was defeated by the Northumbrian king Æthelfrith in 603, but the influence the Dál Riata kingdom and the Irish language had on the region lasted beyond the kingdom itself. Even though the kingdom itself was effectively captured by the Picts, it ended up being the culturally dominant part. We see that in the ninth century the Picts seem to have been completely absorbed into Gaelic culture and language. This is exemplified by the first king of the unified Picts being Cináedh mac Ailpín, who was the king of the Irish-speaking peoples of northern Britain. He gained accession to the throne in 843 A.D. (Ó Murchú, 1985, p. 18).

In Roman times Gaul was seen as the main realm of the Celts. This had repercussions in 16th century France, and the sentiment that the Gauls were the true forefathers of the French thus developed there in that time. With little or no knowledge of the pre-Roman past, the foundation of the attitudes and opinions that was formed and formulated at the time was based more on the religious, political and ideological sentiments of the time, and not necessarily anything based on historical or archaeological evidence.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Maier, 1997: 65-67

# The development of Celticity and idealism

Caesar projected much of his own society into his depiction of the Celts, and so have many people after him. We see the same thing being done when trying to put the Celts of continental Europe into context with the living Celts of the contemporary world. Several have created a very skewed image of the Celtic culture(s), some for ideological reasons, some for political gain. Many take the connections too far and into the realm of what Maier calls "erronious attribution" to Celtic studies.<sup>44</sup>

For some, finding Celtic art is direct proof that the same culture, language and people must have stretched over vast amounts of time, which presupposes a altogether unbelievable "cultural continuity, spanning millennia".<sup>45</sup>

"All too often, in fact, specialists have used term 'Celtic art' in a woolly, almost meaningless way, as if it were axiomatic that art is a manifestation of ethnicity."<sup>46</sup>

This quote from Patrick Sims-Williams quite effectively challenges the notion that art has a direct link to culture and ethnicity. This quote can also be used to describe how language is used to define ethnicity and belonging. Since the 19th century the view that there is a connection between the peoples that have been named Celtic which is based mostly on the discovery of objects of art.<sup>47</sup>

If we follow the ethnographical description where the Celts are the succession of peoples, and in addition take into account the fact that we cannot prove or disprove that the people who spoke the Celtic languages belonged to any specific ethnic group, it further demonstrates the point of Sims-Williams when he says that Celtic studies needs to pull away from Romanticism and start questioning the old stereotypes.<sup>48</sup>

Authors such as William Stukeley and Henry Rowlands popularised the notion that the neolithic

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<sup>44</sup> Maier, 1997: 65

<sup>45</sup> Rodway, 2010: 38

<sup>46</sup> Sims-Williams, 1998: 4

<sup>47</sup> Rodway, 2010: 1

<sup>48</sup> Sims-Williams, 1998: 9

and Bronze Age stone monuments of Ireland and what is now Great Britain were of Celtic origin and important to the Celtic culture. In their works these monuments were closely connected to the Celtic religion, especially that of the Druids.<sup>49</sup> These thoughts were usually based on ideological misconception (of who the Celts were).

The "translation" Ossian poetry of authors like Scottish James Macpherson made an audience outside of the Celtic speaking nations aware of and interested in that these cultures had to offer, and he inspired many other writers and poets in their works, most notably the German poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe who used some of Macpherson's "translations" to create his work "Die Leiden des jungen Werthers" (1774).<sup>50</sup>

### The term Celtic in academia

I would argue that there definitely is a reason to use the term Celtic within the discipline of linguistics, because there is a definite connection internally between the languages that fall within that category. Because of the special importance of language associated with the forming of personal and ethnic individuality, it is in my opinion one of the most important factors to consider when speaking about identity, though it may not be tangible or quantifiable.<sup>51</sup>

Within academic circles we can at least try to be aware of the pitfalls of utilising the same descriptors within our respective disciplines. Simon Rodway makes a good point when he writes that we should exercise caution when combining terminology.<sup>52</sup> As soon as the word falls into the realm of popular use, we lose control over the connotations that follow, sometimes with catastrophic consequences; you will not see me shouting "Germanic pride!" in a bar any time soon, but it is as valid a term as its Celtic counterpart.

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<sup>49</sup> Maier, 1997: 27

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. 183

<sup>51</sup> Rodway, 2010: 35

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. 31

# Origin of the Vikings

When historians refer to the place of origin of the Vikings, the points of reference are the geographical areas that make sense to a modern reader. In a European perspective, these correspond to modern day Norway, Sweden and Denmark.<sup>53</sup> The problem with this definition is the fact that what is now modern day Scandinavia was not gathered in kingdoms at the beginning of the Viking Age, with the exception of Denmark. When we consider Norway or Sweden, we must look to other sources to reveal what kind of national identities we are dealing with in the Viking Age.

I will look at the earliest traces of the identities of those men that would later become the Viking kings of Dublin. I would argue that looking at possible identities of the Vikings that finally made their way to Ireland will further elucidate the connections between the Norse and Irish world and worldview.

## The oldest accounts of the identity marker "Norsemen"

The two accounts of Wulfstan and Ohthere in Orosius grants us the opportunity to shed some light on the various ethnic groups of Scandinavia at the time, which allows us to further the analysis of the nobilities, authority and identities of the region. We can be relatively sure of a growing Norwegian identity from the 1100s onwards, but any conjectures made here on conditions earlier than the 1100s have been an exercise in theorising around a number of hypothetical conditions.

The story of Ohthere in Orosius' work *Historiarum adversum Paganos Libri Septem* provides us with some very important information about the "land of the Northmen", as it is called in this source. It is written that Ohthere is from a region called Halgoland<sup>54</sup>, a name that is used to describe a region in Northern Norway, Hålogaland, to this day. Mierow refers to Muellenhoff's belief that "Adogif" is a corruption of "Alogii", "Halogii" or "Håleygir", referring of course to

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<sup>53</sup> Haliday, 1884: 15

<sup>54</sup> Orosius, 1984: 21



Hålogaland in Northern Norway.<sup>55</sup> Ohthere tells us of his king Alfred, and how he lives on the northernmost area of the Norwegian land, probably somewhere around Tromsø<sup>56</sup>

The two accounts of Wulfstan and Ohthere in Orosius grants us the opportunity to shed some light on the various ethnic groups of Scandinavia at the time, which allows us to further the analysis of the nobilities, authority and identities of the region. The two accounts in Orosius lists the tribes of Scandinavia at this time, that is, in verse 22-24 it refers to 27 tribal names<sup>57</sup> that presumably is the listing of names of northern regions in order, starting with the areas around the Oslo fjord and up along the coast of Norway.<sup>58</sup>

Ohthere had travelled far and wide, to the north of Norway, where he describes the land of the Finnas, the Terfinnas, and the Beormas<sup>59</sup> and to the south the two towns of Kaupang and Sciringesheal (Sciringes heal or Sikringssal)<sup>60</sup>

*Ohthere sæde his hlaforde, Ælfrede cyninge, þæt he ealra Norðmonna norþest  
bude*

Ohthere told his lord, King Alfred, that he lives the furthest north of all  
Norwegians

*He sæde ðæt Norðmanna land wære swyþe lang & swyðe smæl*

He said that the land of the Norwegians is very long and narrow<sup>61</sup>

Here we see that the words Norðmonna or Norðmanna is used to describe Norwegians, and the word Norðweg is used to describe Norway.<sup>62</sup>

Ireland is also mentioned in this source, being to the starboard when sailing south from Halgoland, having Norway to the port<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Mierow, 1915: 146

<sup>56</sup> Orosius, 1984: 5

<sup>57</sup> Theustes, Vagoth, Bergio, Hallin, Liothida, Ahelmil, Finnaiþæ, Fervir, Gauthigoth, Mixi, Evagre, Otingis, Ostrogoths, Raumarici, Aeragnaricii, Finns, Vinovilith, Suetidi, Dani, Heruli, Grannii, Augandzi, Eunixi, Taetel, Rugi, Arochi and Ranii

<sup>58</sup> Mierow, 1915: 146

<sup>59</sup> Orosius, 1984: 19

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. 21

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. 20

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. 22

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. 21

Denmark is also mentioned in verse 89:

*Wið suðan þone Sciringesheal fylð swyðe mycel sæ up in on ðæt land, seo is  
bradre þonne ænig man ofer seon mæge, & is Gotland on oðre healfe ongean &  
siððan Sillende. Seo sæ lið mænig hund mila up in on þæt land: & of  
Sciringesheale he cwæð þæt he seglode on fif dagan to þæm porte þe mon hætt æt  
Hæþum, se stent betuh Winedum & Seaxum & Angle & hyrð in on Dene.*

To the south of Sciringes heal a great sea penetrates the land; it is too far to see across. Jutland is on the far side and after that Sillende. This sea floats into the land for many hundred miles. From Sciringes heal he said that he sailed in five days to the trading-town called Hedeby, which is situated among Wends, Saxons and Angles and belongs to the Danes.<sup>64</sup>

The names used in this account does not definitely mean the existence of a firm national Norwegian identity this early. We may however see some traces of the infancy of such an identity, upon which an overarching national identity could be formed. A look at the Irish sources give more information about the possible Viking identities.

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<sup>64</sup> Orosius, 1984: 22

# Norse invasion of the British and Irish Isles

*"In pre-Norse times, all wars, inter-tribal and inter-provincial alike, followed a curiously ritual pattern. They were hedged around with taboos; one did not continue to fight after one's king had been slain; one did not annex the enemy's territory or confiscate any of their land; one did not dethrone the 'sacred' tribal dynasty; one refrained from attacking a number of 'neutral zones' on enemy soil—the monastic settlements, the property of the learned castes (áes dána), and so on. Now, however, the Irish found themselves faced with an alien foe who respected none of the traditional conventions"* <sup>65</sup>

Ó Corráin, 1998

Much has been said about the people of Ireland before the Viking Age. Valante describes pre-Viking Ireland in the seventh and eighth centuries as a community was largely dependent on kinship, and trade was mostly conducted locally through family ties.<sup>66</sup>

Charles Doherty is critical of the interpretation of pre-Viking Ireland and argues that "too much was said in the past about the alleged backwardness and retarded political system of Ireland before the Viking period"<sup>67</sup> and Ó Corráin's notion that Ireland before the Viking Age Ireland was ruled by an "an aggressive and confident upper class with a well-developed ideology of kingship and a keen historical awareness".<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Ó Corráin, 1998: 1-2

<sup>66</sup> Valante, 2008: 15

<sup>67</sup> Ó Corráin, 1998: 1

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. 2

Both Irish native and Christian concepts contributed to the Irish idea of kingship:

- sovereignty goddess/kingship, native ideas intermingled with
- kingship ideology from the Old Testament
- churchmen that were also the "advisers and confidants of kings"<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid. 2

# The term Laithlinde or Lochlann in the Irish sources

In the Irish source material from the 9th century we see the names Laithlinn or Lothlinn appearing four times.<sup>70</sup> In the Annals of Ulster the terms "northmen" and lochlannaidh seem to have been complementary terms for people from the coastal land of Norway.

From 837 the Annals of Ulster link the designations "Norwegian" and "lochlannaidh" together,<sup>71</sup> and from the eleventh century onwards, the term Lochla(i)nn refers to the kingdom of Norway in the Irish Annals.<sup>72</sup>

Downham argues that the perceived ethnic division between the Danish and Norwegian peoples may have been established from the ninth or tenth centuries onwards, and that there is a possibility that the division did not exist before that time.<sup>73</sup>

From the Annals we learn that "the son of the king of Lochlann" comes to Dublin in 853 and takes control of the Vikings in Ireland.<sup>74</sup> Óláfr, "the son of the king of Lochlann" and the "people of the coast" are connected to Lochlann or Laithlinde. In the Annals of Ulster it is written that

*Amlaíb, son of the king of Laithlinn, came to Ireland, and the foreigners of Ireland submitted to him, and tribute (was rendered) by the Irish.*<sup>75</sup>

This son has widely been interpreted as Óláfr, a Viking king of Dublin in the years 853-73, who is called Amlaíb Conung in the Irish sources.

Since the unification of the Norwegian coastal land was in its infancy at the time, we may call Óláfr more Danish than Norwegian, based on contemporary political geography. We can draw

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<sup>70</sup> Etchingham, 2005: 80  
Mac Airt & Mac Niocaill, 1983

<sup>71</sup> AU, year 841  
see Mac Airt & Mac Niocaill, 1983

<sup>72</sup> Etchingham, 2005: 81

<sup>73</sup> Downham, 2007: 15

<sup>74</sup> Ibid. 14

<sup>75</sup> Etchingham, 2005: 81

his ancestry back to Vestfold in modern day Norway, but this background is far from definite. Considering the Danish territory the southeastern boundary of this territory would probably be somewhere in Vestfold, and we know that Vestfold was at that time under the region of power of the Danish king.<sup>76</sup>

If we interpret that the land that is spoken of is Norway, the existence of a "king of the coastal land" in the Annals points to the Irish having a concept of Norway, or at least parts of the Norwegian coast, as being subsumed under some type of unified kingship in this period.

There are many conflicting views on the interpretation of the words referring to the Vikings in the various Irish Annals. Smyth<sup>77</sup> says that in the Irish annals, the Finngaill, or Fair Foreigners, were the Norwegian Vikings of Dublin, and the Dubgaill, or Dark Foreigners were the Danish Vikings of York. Thus we see the interpretation of the terms fíngaill and dubgaill as Norwegians and Danes respectively.

Downham suggests that the terms dubgaill and fíngaill distinguished between Viking groups under different leadership, not an ethnic distinction. Therefore, we can refer to those under the leadership of Ívarr, together with his companions Ólafr, Ásl and Hálfðan as the "dubgaill".<sup>78</sup>

Greene says that the names may not specifically mean Norway or Scandinavia, but "some maritime centre of Viking power", presumably Scotland or the Isle of Man.<sup>79</sup> Ó Córrain says that there is no specific linguistic evidence that Laithlinn is Norway, but proposes that it was the Viking territory in Scotland.<sup>80</sup>

The Annals of Tigernach<sup>81</sup> similarly distinguished between the Viking territories of Scotland and Man, and Norway, describing Magnús, son of Haraldr Harðráði. Here Magnús is depicted as the son of the king of Lochlann, and Haraldr as rí Lochlainne.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Haliday, 1884: 15

<sup>77</sup> Smyth 1975-6

<sup>78</sup> See Carey about the three fomorian kings

<sup>79</sup> Etchingham, 2005: 80

Greene 1976

<sup>80</sup> Ó Córrain, 1998

<sup>81</sup> ATIG 1058

<sup>82</sup> Etchingham, 2005: 80

The use of these terms Lochlainn or Laithlinde and the various version of these identity markers in connection with the large fleets of ships that came from the east from the year 837 and onwards suggests a richer and more integrated organisational area than those found in Scotland, the Hebrides, Orkneys and the Isle of Man at the time. Based on the resources needed to mount these attacks Valante asserts that the Vikings of Lochlann had to be based in Norway or Denmark, and not Scotland. They also needed to have strong bonds with trading sites such as Kaupang in order to sell the goods that Viking raids provided.

Looking at archaeological evidence from sites such as Kaupang in Vestfold, we can see that there is clear verification that these commercial sites relied heavily on trade with Ireland. Vikings from other parts of the coast probably operated in alliance with the dominant party of Norsemen from the west coast, probably aided the spread of this sense of Norwegian identity along the coast during the 800s.

Valante also puts forth that the Vikings in Ireland were from the southwest of Norway, as evidence from grave goods in this area, in Sognefjord and especially Rogaland, is of a specific Irish origin. Houses built in Dublin from also suggests that the Vikings were from Norway<sup>83</sup>

Etchingham mentions two references to Magnus Barefoot in the Annals of Ulster<sup>84</sup> and in the Annals of Tigernach<sup>85</sup>, and here the references are clearly meant to be understood as the king of Norway. There is no way of knowing exactly when and where the national Norwegian identity started out with the existing source material, so this analysis forms only a model of understanding of how the phenomena of a Norwegian identity could have arisen in this time period.

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<sup>83</sup> Valante, 2008: 63

<sup>84</sup> Annals of Ulster, 1102: "rí Lochlainni"

<sup>85</sup> Annals of Tigernach, 1103: "rí Lochlann"

# The term 'Ostman' referring to the Vikings

The earliest mention of the word Ostman is found in the Irish language from after the Anglo-Norman invasion. Norse was still spoken in Ireland by the 11th century<sup>86</sup> and the word is possibly derived from the Old Norse word *austmaðr*, meaning man from the East. This is also found in the place name Oxmantown, or Ostmanby.<sup>87</sup>

There are no references specifically to the term "Norwegians" in the scaldic poems of the Kings' Sagas. For example, in the tale of the Battle of Hafrsfjord, the skald Hornklove calls Harald Fairhair an Ostmann king, and not a Norwegian king.<sup>88</sup>

If we compare sources, we see that the term "Norwegian" does not appear until the 900s in the Saga material, but both the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and the Annals of Ulster use the term "northmen" before the time of Harald Fairhair, which means that there had to be some form of an "Norwegian" identity even before unification under one king, at least in the eyes of the Irish.

This is also supported by the account of Ottar in Orosius. Norwegians are first mentioned in the story of Håkon the Good, who reigned from 934 to 961. Håkon the Good is also the only ruler called the King of the Norwegians in the skaldic poems in *Heimskringla*.

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<sup>86</sup> Abrams, 2005: 8

<sup>87</sup> Ibid. 8

<sup>88</sup> Helle, 2001: 28-30



# Scholarship in Iceland

The understanding of the relationship between the early Icelandic literature and how it was transmitted to us is important for the understanding of the texts.

Those who penned the Icelandic tales would most likely have interpreted the texts typologically using the same model of interpretation that was used in the exegesis of the Old and New Testaments, as the Bible had an important influence on the perception of the world.

During the time of conversion, the Icelanders became familiar with the Christian understanding of the world. Through this process of conversion, the dating of the pre-Christian events and characters into the new Christian linear time concept became a priority.

Johansson proposes a possible social setting for the creation of *Völuspá*. Traditionally, most scholars have set the time of composition of *Völuspá* at the time of formal conversion, which would be around the year 1000, and the place of composition somewhere in Iceland.

Johansson begins his study with the mention that Steinsland has recently rejected the idea of a "pagan" who has learned about Christian customs and beliefs, and is advocating the time of composition to be around the mid 12th century in a Christian environment. This is the starting point for his analysis. He continues by suggesting that the social setting could then either be a vernacular or a clerical milieu, and most likely this milieu is situated in Iceland.<sup>89</sup>

Gro Steinsland, Karl Gunnar Johansson wrote about a connection between the sibylline oracles and *Völuspá*.

From recent literary research we have found that the use of writing and the knowledge of reading in the 12th century were practically restricted to the clerical milieu at larger church sites or monasteries. Johansson suggests that it would not be implausible to indicate that the most convincing social setting of the first versions of the poem was a church, probably either Skálholt or Hólar, a few churches with established schools in Iceland (that we already established from the first half of the 12th century), or perhaps the earliest benedictine monasteries Þingeyrar and

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<sup>89</sup> Johansson, 2013: 1

Munkaþverá.

The composition of the poem is implied in the discussion of the social setting since the most probable setting would be the clerical milieu suggested above. Johansson suggests that the monastic milieu, represented by the two benedictine monasteries Þingeyrar and Munkaþverá, is the most likely setting for the compositional setting.

Since Vǫluspá has no known source in Latin literature, it would therefore represent an original composition in the vernacular, Johansson says it is relevant here to relate Vǫluspá to Merlinuspá. In the translation of Latin prose by Gunnlaugr Leifsson the Eddic form in metre and imagery is used in Merlinuspá. It is in the monastic milieu at Þingeyrar possible to use the vernacular form in this kind of work.

Codex Regius (GKS 2365 4to) is possibly the product of the scriptorium in Þingeyrar. The hand that copied the other version of Vǫluspá in Hauksbók has also been related to Þingeyrar. This isn't evidence for the composition of Vǫluspá in the same scriptorium, but Johansson advertises the need to closer examine the literate milieu of these monasteries to further our understanding of the origin of these documents.

The literary function of Vǫluspá

If Vǫluspá is considered as part of the apocalyptic genre of the 12th and 13th centuries, the literary function of this poem may provide some useful new insights. Johansson says that also here it is relevant to relate Vǫluspá to the translation of Merlinuspá by Gunnlaugr Leifsson. It is also necessary to examine the use of apocalyptic material in the social and compositional settings suggested by these two poems. (V and merlin)

One important question is the incentive (or possible incentive) of a benedictine brother or a Christian cleric to compare a poem like Vǫluspá in the vernacular, and with vernacular tradition as a source for form and content at the same time as the material is gathered from European sources.

# Scholarship in Ireland: Saints, heroes and goddesses

The monks who penned the legends would then function as intermediaries between the pre-Christian beliefs and their own world view. This led to some changes in the stories, one of the most important being the euhemerisation of the gods. Many of the old gods would take on the shape of humans in the early Irish sagas. They became more human-like figures, yet still larger than life, keeping their origin as divinities an allusion only.

The stories about the Irish heroes may have been preexisting in Irish culture, but through this rewriting of perceived Irish history, but they were now being brought into a whole new contexts. This was most likely done by the monks so they could detach from the pagan material, yet still use the stories as a pre-history of the Christian culture of Ireland. We see that the monks preserved and presented this material in their manuscripts, building a bridge between the older Celtic culture and their own, yet at the same time keeping their distance.

When the monks began the work of writing down the old tales they had recently been introduced to some new external influences: Christian and classical traditions. The monks interpreted all the material, the classical, Christian and Irish, within a framework marked by the meeting of internal and external cultures. One way of interpreting the traditional pagan stories was to adapt them into this new framework.

# The Leabhar Gabhála na hÉireann

The text of the Leabhar Gabhála na hÉireann demonstrated that Ireland was closely related to the new tradition that arose with the coming of Christianity, and that the old dominance of pagan society was presumably completely replaced by the new power structures and hierarchy of Biblical authority.<sup>90</sup>

"The corpus of historical verse became the common reservoir of knowledge upon which the prose compilers drew; and the selections made therefrom dictated the selection of fact which they set forth in the several redactions"<sup>91</sup>

The Leabhar Gabhála na hÉireann links the Gaels to Irish tradition, and presents a narrative built upon the scheme of the Bible. Leabhar Gabhála na hÉireann presents an account of all the events from the events of Genesis to the to Irish (then) present-day history. By linking the Irish tradition to the Christian, Leabhar Gabhála na hÉireann is considered by many to be the prime example of the Irish works attempting to connect the biblical tradition to the past and present people of Ireland.<sup>92</sup>

The Leabhar Gabhála na hÉireann was presumably written as a pedagogic piece, originally to be learned by heart, by way of easily memorable verses and formulaic language. Macalister writes that to the modern reader of the Leabhar Gabhála na hÉireann the verses of the text can be perceived as "an unmitigated nuisance" but argues that there is evidence that the verses are the oldest surviving parts of the LGE, and that the text in its present form is more than likely written around the verses.

Macalister says that the redactors of these manuscripts often wrote down only parts of the verse compositions instead of recording the whole verse, as their contemporaries would presumably already know the full verses by heart and would therefore not need a full transcription.

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<sup>90</sup>

Carey, 1994: 3

<sup>91</sup> Macalister, 1938: x

<sup>92</sup> Ibid. ix

Macalister writes about the Leabhar Gabhála na hÉireann that "it is conceivable that this is not merely the shirking of a lazy scribe, but that it is an actual survival of a traditional custom" <sup>93</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Macalister, 1938: x

# Hagiographies

The hagiographies, or Vitae, were important documents for the Irish. The earliest Vitae of Patrick, Colum Cille and Brigit helped to secure their position of their large monastic communities. In the eighth century the Celi Dé movement rose. They would gather in groups often living not far from the monasteries themselves, or even live as hermits. It was no longer a goal to go on pilgrimage to Rome. According to the Celi Dé one could live according to God's will where you were.

Nowadays we primarily view the Vitae and the stories about the pre-Christian heroes as literature, but when they were written the purpose of the biographies and hagiographies was presumably to tell the story of actual historical people and their lives.

One of the main problems when reading the Vitae as historical accounts is that the events that are mentioned do not in any way match the dates found in the Annals. So we cannot utilise the Vitae as historical accounts.

The problem is that some of the characters appearing in the Vitae belong to a completely different time period than the saint. It is quite clear that the Vitae were made not as historical accounts but as parables, and term pseudo-historical may be appropriate to apply in this context, and both the Vitae and the legends are perhaps more suitable to use as tools to understand the time they were written in, and their contemporary culture and beliefs.

## Colum Cille and the Abbey of Iona

Colum Cille (name meaning the Dove of the Church) was a catholic missionary and founder of the Abbey of Iona. He was born into the Uí Neill clan, a royal family, and he was trained in Moville. The dating of the events in his early life is difficult, but according to Bede he left Ireland in 563 to go to Scotland, and the kingdom of Dál Riada. We do know that he settled at the monastery of Glasnevin for a while, and that he spent around 15 years of preaching around Ireland.

Colum Cille founded monasteries in Durrow, Derry, and perhaps also in Kells. In 563 he founded a monestary at the island of Iona.<sup>94</sup> Iona developed as a centre of Christian mission and culture, and it also played a role in the Christianisation of the Anglo-Saxons in the north of England.

Many of the Vitae were written to promote the spiritual living symbolised by the saints to a religious audience. Betha Colum Cille,<sup>95</sup> written in the 9th century, was probably intended for an audience of the monasteries as the texts reads as an instruction to the faithful. It was written to be read aloud on the 9th of June, the day of the saints' death. This Vita begins with a homily on pilgrimages, and in this text Colum Cille is portrayed as the Irish answer to a ideal pilgrim.

### Columbanus, the monastery at Bangor, and Europe

There are many monasteries in Europe that owe their existence to Columbanus. He was an Irish missionary who left Ireland for the Continent in 591 with twelve disciples. Before this he lived at the monastery of Bangor, and for this he is called Columbanus of Bangor.

The exodus from Ireland in 591 was the peregrinatio, leaving of their homeland, of Columbanus and his twelve followers. In Europe he founded many monasteries. One of these was the Luxeuil Abbey in present-day France which became a learning centre in Europe. He also founded the Bobbio Abbey in present-day Italy where he died at in 615. At Bobbio, Irish traditions were kept alive for some time. A good example of this is the Bobbio Orosius or Ambrosiana Orosius, which is an early 7th century manuscript. It is called the Bobbio Orosuis because it most likely originated in the scriptorium at Bobbio Abbey, and is held at the Bibliotheca Ambrosiana of Cardinal Frederico Borromeo in Milan. (Bieler, 1966, p. 92).

Adomnán was an abbot of Iona Abbey on the west coast of Scotland. He wrote Vita Columbae (the life of Columbra) somewhere between 688 and 704, about the founder of Iona Abbey, Saint Columba.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>94</sup>

Clancy and Márkus, 1995: 9

<sup>95</sup> Life of Colum Cille

<sup>96</sup> Hughes, 1972: 220; 222

Cogitosus wrote the *Vita Sanctae Brigidae* around 650. The *Vitae* of Brigit is full of descriptions of fantastic stories about miracles that supposedly were witnessed by Cogitosus himself. These descriptions are full of details about the contemporary world around the saint, and the saint herself is linked to a pre-Christian goddess of the same name. In this *Vita*, Brigit is linked to nature, showing a link to the pagan goddess. A direct link between the two has not been verified however.

These stories are often connected to mythological scenes taken from folklore. She was supposedly born at sunrise, but mystically not inside or outside, she could hang her cloak on a beam of light, and she made sure that everyone who came to her got properly nourished. In this *Vita* we also see that her powers prevent "heathen grain" to be ground with a millstone she made.<sup>97</sup>

Muirchú moccu Machtheni (known simply as Muirchú) wrote *Vita Tripartita Sancti Patricii* (the life of Saint Patrick) somewhere between 680 and 700. When describing Cogitosus, Muirchú uses the word "father" which points towards Cogitosus belonging to an older generation, having already become an authority in Muirchú's time<sup>98</sup>

Proving that the hagiographies have basis in actual historical facts is empirically impossible, because none of the events mentioned in the *Vitae* have matching dates in the *Annals*.

For example, if we are to interpret the *Vitae* as historical facts the saints must have had the ability to time travel because we see them present at important historical events performing miracles, and it is not uncommon for the saints to encounter characters from the early Irish narrative tradition.

This presents us with a chronological problem. This does not prove unequivocally that the *Vitae* do not have some basis in history, again, this can not be proven unequivocally untrue either.

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<sup>97</sup> Connolly & Picard, 1987: 25

<sup>98</sup> Hughes, 1972: 227



## Patrick

The Confession of St. Patrick is a document purportedly written by the saint himself, in Latin, around the year 450, offers us some information of life in the British Isles during those times.<sup>99</sup>

This autobiographical confession is claimed to have been written by Patrick himself to explain the life and mission of Patrick himself. The Patrick of the Confessio is very human, describing himself in a very personal manner, with human characteristics and flaws. He commences his confession saying:

My name is Patrick. I am a sinner, a simple country person, and the least of all believers. I am looked down upon by many <sup>100</sup>

Saint Patrick was born in Britain, supposedly somewhere in England or Scotland, again, the accounts cannot be verified completely. As a teenager, according to the Confessio at age 16, Patrick is kidnapped with a group of other people and sold into slavery in Ireland. In the Confessio, Patrick writes that

we deserved this, because we had gone away from God, and did not keep his commandments. We would not listen to our priests, who advised us about how we could be saved.<sup>101</sup>

After escaping his capture and fleeing, probably to northern France, Patrick returns to Ireland as a missionary after having a prophetic dream.

Later, in the works of Muirchú, and also in the works of Tírechán, another Patrick biographer, the character of Patrick has been shaped by contemporary events and has become a political figure. Patrick is now a character that is used in the advancement of the legitimacy of the paruchia Patricii, Patrick's convent province, and the work to keep the church a unity in Ireland, especially

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<sup>99</sup> Hughes, 1972: 227

<sup>100</sup> [http://www.confessio.ie/etexts/confessio\\_english#](http://www.confessio.ie/etexts/confessio_english#)

<sup>101</sup> [http://www.confessio.ie/etexts/confessio\\_english#](http://www.confessio.ie/etexts/confessio_english#)

under the leadership of Armagh.<sup>102</sup>

The Vita Tripartite from the 900s portray a different Patrick than the Confessio. This Patrick is portrayed more as a warrior than a saint. The point of this Vita was probably not a lecture about Christian conduct, but a homily to be read at the saint's feast day, and the character of Patrick serves as a rallying point to the Irish people. We also see that the figure of Patrick has been shaped by the Irish folk tradition. This way of portraying the saint was probably written this way to gain supporters, secure interests of ecclesiastical primacy, and intimidate those opposing the church at that time. In this Vita, we meet a Patrick who is "protecting his own, extracting privileges, quick to revenge injuries, a devastating curser".<sup>103</sup>

Sometime during the 8th century the focus seemed to have shifted from the monastic asceticism to maintaining power in the larger community. The Celi Dé movement rose as a countermovement to what they thought was the abandonment of the most important aspect of monastic life. The people belonging to the movement promoted the belief that it was no longer need for pilgrimages to Rome for example, but one could find God where you were. This can be seen reflected in some of the Vitae.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Hughes, 1972: 239

<sup>103</sup> Hughes, 1972: 239

<sup>104</sup> Hughes, 1972

# Ogham

The first trace we have of Celts being in Ireland can seem to stem from as early as the third century B.C., but we do not know for certain if they were speakers of a Celtic language (Greene, 1966, p. 7).

In Ireland, the Ogham stones, dating from the fifth century, are our earliest evidence of Irish language, and from it we derive knowledge of the pre-history of Irish and the form that we call Primitive Irish. We later see glosses in the margins of Latin manuscripts from the 7th century, but at that time the language seems to have gone through some changes. The island itself also went through a transformation during these years, because of the Christianisation of Ireland. During these centuries Latin had come to Ireland with Christianity, and the Latin alphabet was being used to write in the Old Irish language. When we talk about language in Ireland in the 7th century, we start speaking about Old Irish which is the earliest form of Irish in historical times (Greene, 1966, p. 10).

One problem with the study of Norse oral culture is that we have evidence of there being Runic writing dating back to the 5th c so even in the 12th c there would be no such thing as a "purely oral" culture in Iceland.

As I mentioned the presence of Runic writing in the Norse culture predates the "written word" by several centuries we also have older writing in Ireland, the Ogham.

There are about 400 ogham stones in the Irish and British Isles, most of them in Ireland, and most from the fifth and sixth centuries. It is thought that in the fifth and sixth centuries Ogham was used not only to make inscriptions on stone but also on wood, but none of this material survives<sup>105</sup>. What survives from this period are the stone monuments. Since there is no way of dating stone like we date organic material, we are left to determine the age of these inscriptions by the form of language that is used, or by finding a reference in other sources that correspond with what is written on the stone. In Ireland we find ogham stones predominantly in County Kerry, Cork and Waterford<sup>106</sup>, and there are also occurrences in Wales, Scotland, Cornwall and the Isle of Man.

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<sup>105</sup> Greene, 1966: 9

<sup>106</sup> Ó Murchú, 1985: 12

These stone monoliths were erected in the landscape, and ogham was mainly used to record personal names, names of tribes and forefathers, and are mostly of a genealogical nature. We do not have a completely clear understanding of why these stones were erected. One possibility is that ogham stones inscribed with the names of persons and tribal affiliation was some form of boundary markers, or it could simply have been a way of recording ones existence on a permanent medium.

The inscription were written from bottom to top, with longer dedications reaching over the head of the stone and down the other side. Ogham, unlike its Greek, Roman and runic counterparts, were formed as sets of simple lines or cavities along a line in the stone<sup>107</sup>. The Roman and runic inscriptions on the continent are simple in origin, but lack the same kind of simplicity that the ogham script does. The theory that runes is the origin of ogham has had its followers, but it is far more likely that the Roman script was the inspiration, as runes date to a later period than ogham.

The grouping of letters does not directly correspond neither to Roman, Greek nor runic letters, but have a unique arrangement. The ordering of the letters in ogham seem to have some phonetic basis, which is why it is widely accepted that some knowledge of phonetics must have been the foundation of how ogham was structured. For example, the fourth group consists only of vowels (A, O, U, E, I) and the order seems to be based on their articulation place: first the back vowels A, O, U (open to closed) and then the front vowels E, I (mid-open to closed). This is also seen in the second group (H, D, T, C, Q) where all the consonants except H are stop consonants. At this point in time we know that such knowledge existed in the Roman and Greek world, so it is natural to theorise that Ogham is at least partly based on this knowledge, possibly through the Romans in Britain. In the 6th century a fifth group of letters called forfeda appear, mostly preserved in later manuscripts. These new signs probably represent new sounds appearing in the Irish language during this century.

The use of Ogham waned after the sixth century, but it did not disappear completely. We have the knowledge on how to decode the Ogham script from a chapter of the *Leabhar Bhaile an Mhóta* (RIA MS 23 P 12, 275 foll.), a manuscript from the 15th century, which means that the knowledge of Ogham survived both the coming of Christianity and the Latin script that came to

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<sup>107</sup> Sometimes an edge or naturally occuring line in the stone, but some stones do not have a visible line.

Ireland in the fifth century<sup>108</sup>. In the manuscripts the vowels were represented by vertical lines, and the inscriptions were read in the conventional left to right, making the first set under the line, the second over and so forth. There is also a much more extensive use of the forfeda letters in the manuscripts.

The language of the Ogham inscriptions are predominantly primitive Irish, but some are Brythonic (early Welsh), and some in Scotland may be in the Pictish language, but scholars lack the same kind of documentation and attestation in other sources that the inscriptions written in primitive Irish and Welsh have. Some Ogham stones in Wales feature the same dedication in Latin and the vernacular, giving us the unique opportunity to study the language of the Ogham stones in both languages. We therefore gain little knowledge of history in this period, but we can study a very early form of Irish, and the inscriptions give us much insight into the development of the language in this time period.

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<sup>108</sup> Greene, 1966: 8

# The sovereignty Goddess in Irish literature

Did the Cath Maighe Tuireadh turn into an allegory of the Viking invasion during the ninth or tenth century? <sup>109</sup>

How does this tie in with the sovereignty goddess/king connection

Gray: Sexual irresponsibility vs Carey: important political allegory <sup>110</sup>

Carey is not aware of another king/goddess story where the king is not from Ireland

"Most of the details in the episode between Tuatha Dé Danann Ériu and Fom Elatha can be seen in parallels from medieval Irish literature", <sup>111</sup> but Carey notes that The name Ériu is significant, and that it is important for the understanding of the myth that the man who seduces Ireland personified is a foreigner, something that has not, as far as Carey is concerned, happened before in Irish mythology.

So what characterizes a sovereignty goddess? In Celtic mythological texts there is a direct connection between a ruler and the queen of a land who in Celtic mythology is referred to as a sovereignty goddess. The king is wedded to the land in a sacred marriage (hieros gamos) with a sovereignty goddess.

Then the Morrigan the daughter of Ernmas came, and she was strengthening the Tuatha De to fight the battle resolutely and fiercely. She then chanted the following poem:

"Kings arise to the battle!

Proinsias Mac Cana writes in his essay Celtic Goddesses og Sovereignty Goddesses <sup>112</sup> about the

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<sup>109</sup> Carey, 1989: 55

<sup>110</sup> Ibid. 55

<sup>111</sup> Ibid. 55

<sup>112</sup> Mac Cana, 2000: 85

role of the sovereignty goddess in continental and insular Celtic myth. There he mentions a multitude of traits of a sovereignty goddess inspired by a passage from the myth *Noínden Ulad* (The Debility of the Ulstermen) dating from the ninth century that I would like to base my characterization of the sovereignty goddess upon. Here we meet the goddess Macha and hear about how she courts her mate Crunnchu Mac Agnomain, a wealthy farmer. Mac Cana derives traits from this passage which in my mind form a sovereignty goddess "blueprint". He mentions:

- An initiatory role characteristic of a sovereignty goddess.
- The connotation of action and movement highlighted by the absence of speech
- The evocation of the symbolic values of the fire and the hearth.
- Ritual significance of going for *deisiul* (righthandwise movement)
- The succinct conjunction of pregnancy <sup>113</sup>

The first trait I would like to point out is the fertility aspect of a sovereignty goddess, which I would say is a symbol of her connection with the land. First and foremost, I would argue that the sovereignty goddess is a goddess of the land, but she also has aspects of being a goddess of house and hearth. This is represented in the passage from the *Noínden Ulad* through her housekeeping skills: she kindles the fire, prepares food and milk the cows. This connotes a goddess of the house and hearth, but also of a mother figure giving comfort. She also becomes pregnant with Mac Agnomain's child, further bringing the fertility aspect to the surface.

The second prominent trait is the action she partakes in, by choosing her own partner with a very direct approach. Mac Cana describes this as an initiatory role, an active rather than a passive trait. This action is furthered by the fact that she does not speak during this courtship procedure, which is a way of showing her action orientated stance.

The third trait is her turning righthandwise (for *deisiul*), which is considered lucky <sup>114</sup> before joining with Crunnchu under his covering and putting her hand on his body. This action is another one indicating an active choosing of him. <sup>115</sup>

Lastly I would like to mention Mac Agnomain's material gain after joining with her. I would also like to add a special trait that is often mentioned in myths, which is the pouring of wine to a

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<sup>113</sup> Mac Cana, 2000: 89

<sup>114</sup> Maier, 1998: 93

<sup>115</sup> Mac Cana, 2000: 89

potential mate of a sovereignty goddess. This is again a fertility symbol, the "pouring of fertility" into the kingship.

Carey puts it very eloquently when he says that the "appropriation of the queen" of the land symbolises the "alienation of sovereignty" <sup>116</sup>

Emhain Macha (now called Navan Fort) near Armagh, was named for Macha who, according to legend, was forced while pregnant to race against the king's horses to save her husband from shame and dishonour. She won the race, gave birth to twins immediately and died cursing the men of Ulster to suffer the pains of childbirth at times of greatest difficulty.

This is also seen in the relationship between a father of a sovereignty goddess and the new king. When the old king has given away the land, represented by the daughter, he has no place in the world of the living anymore. This could be seen as a metaphor on the fertility aspect of a kingship, the old having to die to give way for a new generation, like an old crop has to be harvested and the land renewed for life to go on. Again we see the woman of the myth being connected to the land in a very direct manner.

A sovereignty goddess embodies the power of the sovereign and rules through her husband. In other words, a sovereignty goddess can not be the sovereign, but this does not necessarily mean that a queen doesn't have any power. This can be exemplified through queen Medb's role in *Táin Bó Cúailnge*. Here she brags that she had great wealth even before her marriage to Ailill, and she even takes charge in the raid. She also says that she "never had one man without another waiting in his shadow", telling us that the reason that she chose Ailill as a husband is because of her personal preferences and not because she needs him in particular.

*Then his mother gave him land, and he had a fortress built on the land, Dun mBrese. And it was the Dagda who built that fortress.*

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<sup>116</sup> Carey 1989: 55



# The Táin

In medieval times storytellers divided the material according to different types of genre they belonged. Examples of this are: táin - cattle theft, immram - voyage to fantastical islands, and baile - the vision or prophecy <sup>117</sup>

Since the 1800s it became common to classify the many stories from Old and Middle Irish times into four major cycles based on the subject matter. These are the Ulster Cycle, Finn Cycle, the Historical Cycle and the Mythological Cycle. Many stories may have elements from several cycles and some other works are not included in any of the four cycles. <sup>118</sup>

Táin Bó Cúailnge (The Cattle Raid of Cúailnge), commonly known as the Táin, is set in a pre-Christian context and includes Celtic Pagan religion mythology, folk tales and early medieval traditions. An Rúraíocht (The Ulster Cycle) is a collection of Old and Middle Irish narratives that deal with the heroes of Ulster province of Northern Ireland, and the Táin, is the central narrative in this cycle. In the Ulster Cycle we find stories related to the Ulster Province as the seat of the protagonists, King Conchobor mac Nessa, his warriors and his nephew Cú Chulainn, with King Ailill and Queen Medb of Connacht as antagonists <sup>119</sup>

Valante explains how archaeological excavations correspond well with what we find in old Irish law tracts. The power structures of this time, where men of fláith status gave loans, especially in the form of the lending of bulls, and received interest and dues over a number of years. <sup>120</sup> Cattle Theft (Táin Bó) also plays a central role in the Irish narrative depicting how theft of bulls are an important way of showing their opponents their strength. The bull as a symbol of wealth originated as early back as late Halstatt period <sup>121</sup>

Another important Celtic trait is the strong female character. Tain acting the Celtic goddess Morrighan in a halfway mythological, halfway human form, though she is not acting as deity, she has at least the power to heal with the help of a cow. Another strong female character is Queen Medb.

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<sup>117</sup> Maier 2003: 241; 156; 30

<sup>118</sup> Ibid. 138

<sup>119</sup> Ibid. 138

<sup>120</sup> Valante, 2008: 18-9; 20; 24

<sup>121</sup> Maier, 2003: 51

In the Táin Medb and her husband play the main antagonists, though she is not always portrayed as such. The power of Medb is for example described quite differently in the Cattle Raid of Froech. This view of Medb as an antagonistic figure might be due to her promiscuous nature, which could not have fared well with the monks that interpreted and wrote down the ancient myths. A promiscuous nature in a society that centers on fertility can be argued to be a good thing, securing the fertility through the sovereignty goddess mating often and replenishing nature.

# Cath Maighe Tuireadh as a response to the Vikings

*The champion Balor, grandson of Net, the king of the Hebrides, and to Indech mac De Domnann, the king of the Fomoiré; and these gathered all the forces from Lochlainn westwards to Ireland, to impose their tribute and their rule upon them by force, and they made a single bridge of ships from the Hebrides to Ireland.*

Carey's synchronic reading of the Cath Maighe Tuireadh provides us with valuable insight and another interesting aspect of textual history of the Irish material. There is general consensus that it was written in the ninth century, and according to Carey the story must have been redacted in the Middle Irish period".<sup>122</sup>

A contemporary Irishman would, according to Carey, read the Cath Maighe Tuireadh in light of the Viking raids and the "deflowering" of Ireland (30) personified would to him have clear significance.<sup>123</sup>

Carey writes that the Cath Maighe Tuireadh has for the last century been almost solely interpreted as an Indo-European myth within the field of comparative studies of religion, and within this field of study the reading of George Dumézil has been the most authoritative.

Elizabeth Gray's reading of the Cath Maighe Tuireadh is centered around an Irish interpretation of the text, in a cultural and literary context.<sup>124</sup> Carey argues that "archaism and innovation must constantly be weighed against each other in appreciating Irish text"<sup>125</sup> and for a new reading from an Irish viewpoint rather than solely as an Indo-European myth. He is however careful to state that his reading does not necessarily negate some indication and information about pagan remnants in the text, but states that a different angle of approach needs to be added, and suggest a synchronic reading of the Cath Maighe Tuireadh.

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<sup>122</sup> Carey, 1989: 53

<sup>123</sup> Ibid. 56

<sup>124</sup> Ibid. 53

<sup>125</sup> Ibid. 53

No host ever came to Ireland which was more terrifying or dreadful than that host of the Fomoiré.

Carey still argues that the reading of the myth by Elizabeth Gray is still read with an Indo-European viewpoint, rather than an Irish. Carey is sceptical of the treatment of the text when read diachronically, and argues that some vital aspects of the text goes missing when read solely as an Indo-European myth.<sup>126</sup>

While the Cath Maighe Tuireadh is older than the Völuspá, it only survives in a 16th C manuscript, which, according to Carey, has a "notoriously idiosyncratic ortography"<sup>127</sup>

Paragraph 1-7 is directly from the Leabhar Gabhála na hÉireann, and most of the introductory section was also inserted from the Leabhar Gabhála na hÉireann (Carey notes that it was presumably inserted into the poem by the redactor) (8). It is interesting to consider that we have here the inserted material from the Leabhar Gabhála na hÉireann, attempting to make chronological something that perhaps wasn't very chronological to begin with. Carey notes that "if we accept that the Cath Maighe Tuireadh was fought "once upon a time" in chronological order proposed by the addition to the text from the Leabhar Gabhála na hÉireann, there is a discrepancy between the birth of Bres and his taking over the kingship of Ireland".<sup>128</sup>

Although the material in Cath Maighe Tuireadh that evidently has been inserted from the Leabhar Gabhála na hÉireann does not correspond directly with any known MS, Carey argues that further studies into the style of the redactor(s) of the Leabhar Gabhála na hÉireann, as well as evidence found in the language, more specifically the lateness if their language relative to the rest of the Cath Maighe Tuireadh, the evidence of insertion from the Leabhar Gabhála na hÉireann is apparent.<sup>129</sup>

In the ninth century, we first see the use of the word Érennach meaning "Irishman", whereas before the Irish identity is connected to terms like the Féni or the Goídil.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid. 53

<sup>127</sup> Ibid. 53

<sup>128</sup> Ibid. 53

<sup>129</sup> Ibid. 54

<sup>130</sup> Ibid. 55

Carey also connects the themes of the story to the ambitions of some of the royalty of Tara at the time of the Viking raids and general ideological shifts in the mentality of the Irish people in reaction to these two circumstances.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid. 55

From Gorias was brought the spear which Lug had. No battle was ever sustained against it, or against the man who held it in his hand.

From Findias was brought the sword of Nuadu. No one ever escaped from it once it was drawn from its deadly sheath, and no one could resist it.

From Murias was brought the Dagda's cauldron. No company ever went away from it unsatisfied.

The Tuatha De then made an alliance with the Fomoiré, and Balor the grandson of Net gave his daughter Ethne to Cian the son of Dian Cecht. And she bore the glorious child, Lug.

Nuadu's hand was cut off in that battle--Sreng mac Sengainn struck it from him. Dian Cecht the physician put on him a silver hand that moved as well as any other hand.

Nuadu was not eligible for kingship after his hand had been cut off

Eriu the daughter of Delbaeth

Elatha mac Delbaith, king of the Fomoiré

The Dagdae and the Mac Oc is shown to be the superiors of Bres twice, after tricking the giant Cridenbel to eat golden coins, they conspire together to fool Bres again

Dagda went to his work the next morning, and the Mac Oc came to him and said, 'Soon you will finish your work, but do not seek payment until the cattle of Ireland are brought to you. Choose from among them the dark, black-maned, trained, spirited heifer'.

Samildanach - all arts

Lug Lormansleach is here, the son of Cian son of Dian Cecht and of Ethne daughter of Balor. He is the foster son of Tailtiu, the daughter of Magmor, the king of Spain, and of Eochaid Garb mac Duach.

"You are the Dagda ['the Good God']!" said everyone, and "Dagda" stuck to him from that time on.

Good meaning good at doing things

And you, Morrigan," said Lug, "what power?"

"Not hard to say," she said. "I have stood fast; I shall pursue what was watched; I will be able to kill; I will be able to destroy those who might be subdued."

# The role of Bres in Irish literature

*Every beautiful thing that is seen in Ireland--both plain and fortress, ale and candle, woman and man and horse--will be judged in relation to that boy, so that people will then say of it, 'It is a Bres'*

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There are many different accounts of Bres and his role in the Irish mythological corpus.<sup>132</sup> Bres' role as a villain is best attested in *Leabhar Gabhála na hÉireann*. Bres also appears as a villain figure in other sources that most likely were influenced by the *Cath Maighe Tuireadh*. Carey suggests that the emergence of these figures "reflect ideological shifts" happening in Ireland in the ninth century due to the Viking incursion, which must have contributed a great deal to the "growing awareness of the people of Ireland of themselves and their country as a distinct entity".<sup>133</sup>

*the warriors of Ireland were reduced to serving him: Oghma beneath a bundle of firewood and the Dagda as a rampart-builder, and he constructed the earthwork around Bres's fort.*

Bres is called the adopted son of the Tuatha Dé after we are shown that he is not fit to be their king. He then goes to his mother to ask after his father's kin, to perhaps persuade them to help him in keeping the kingship.

"Nothing brought me except my own injustice and arrogance. I deprived them of their valuables and possessions and their own food. Neither tribute nor payment was ever taken from them until now."

"Bres [is] mentioned in the introduction of the Ogham tract of the Book of Ballymote as the brother of the alphabet's inventor Oghmae, and king of Ireland at the time of its invention".<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>132</sup>

Carey, 1989: 56

<sup>133</sup> Ibid. 55

<sup>134</sup> Ibid. 57



As the time of Book of Ballymote is unknown, his role here as a brother, and not a villain suggests that it has not been inspired by the Bres of the Cath Maighe Tuireadh.<sup>135</sup>

In the Cath Maighe Tuireadh:

- Bres and Ogmæ "share a patronymic but are not brothers" like they are in Book of Ballymote
- Ogmæ is called a champion (trénfer of) the Tuatha Dé Danann"
- Bres has Ogmæ carrying firewood, which is not befitting such a character
- "In the BoB ogham tract Ogmæ is the inventor of an alphabet which can be compared to the function of the Gaulish counterpart Ogmios, god of speech" <sup>136</sup>

He then adds that these characters also show to the "ambitions and conquests of the dynasts of Tara". <sup>137</sup>

Past references to Ériu <sup>138</sup>

"It is probably no coincidence that the "sovereignty goddess per se is also first attested in a ninth century work" Flaith Érenn in Baile in Scáil <sup>139</sup>

Ériu: Leabhar Gabhála na hÉireann, Dindschenchas, Banschenchas <sup>140</sup>

A poem in the Leabhar Gabhála na hÉireann:

- The descendants of Magog son of Japhet

Clann Eladan is here used as a designation of the Tuatha Dé Danann (which Carey finds significant) <sup>141</sup>

- The poem "traces the ancestry of Bres son of Elatha

Here he is, according to Carey, the "prime example of the Tuatha Dé Danann", not an "illegitimate intruder" as he is in the Cath Maighe Tuireadh <sup>142</sup>

Carey traces this as due to his connection with the gods of the áes dána <sup>143</sup>

This leads Carey to conclude that Bres was, before his introduction as the villain of the Cath

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid. 57

<sup>136</sup> Ibid. 57

<sup>137</sup> Ibid. 55

<sup>138</sup> Ibid. 55

<sup>139</sup> Ibid. 55

<sup>140</sup> Ibid. 55

<sup>141</sup> Ibid. 57

<sup>142</sup> Ibid. 57

<sup>143</sup> Ibid. 57

Maighe Tuireadh, an important figure to those men who were developing the system of Irish synthetic history <sup>144</sup>

There is also a reference to Bres at the beginning of Tochmarc Étaíne

The Wooing of Étaín (WoÉ):

The Dagdae sends Elcmar away to Bres (son of Elatha) to sleep with Bóand. He also casts spells so Elcmar won't return quickly. From this union their son Óengus. (Elcmar, being away, doesn't notice this). Bóand then goes back to Elcmar.

1st section:

Echu tells Mider that he has chosen Elcmar's land for Óengus to rule (which is the Bruig na Bóinde, Óengus' mother's land). Elcmar will be at Cnoc Síde in the Bruig with no weapon ("but a fork of white hazel in his hand"), so Echu tells Mider to tell Óengus to go into the Bruig armed and threaten Elcmar's life to force him to give Óengus kingship of the Bruig for a day and a night, but then not give the land back before Elcmar receives Echu's judgement. Echu's argument (that Óengus is to argue) is that the land is Óengus' because he spared Elcmar's life. The argument is further that the kingship is of day and night till the world passes.

Óengus gains possession of Bruig na Bóinde (his mother's land) at Samhain. He borrows it for a day and a night, and when Elcmar tries to get it back, Óengus keeps it.

Óengus will not yield the Bruig until Elcmar had out the question before the Dagdae before the men of Ériu. Dagda: "Since your life was dearer to you than your land" (42). Dagda gives Elcmar another land: Cletech and the three lands about it + the boys from the Bruig playing before you every day + the fruit of the Bóand for your enjoyment. Elcmar then goes to Cletech and builds a fort there.

One year after, when Mider comes to the Bruig, Elcmar watches the boys playing before the Macc Óc on the mound of the Bruig, from the mound of Cletech.

This information is less informative but not at odds with Bres' role as a contemporary with the Dagdae, who in this story is the king of the whole of Ireland. In this story there is no "suggestion

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid. 57

of the scenario" we find in the Cath Maighe Tuireadh <sup>145</sup> (47)

Carey shows us that the Bres we meet in the Cath Maighe Tuireadh is probably "isolated and anomalous" (for the early period (48) <sup>146</sup>

- In most sources he is a "legitimate member of the Tuatha Dé Danann and not a matrilinear interloper" <sup>147</sup>

[so why then was he chosen to be the villain of the Cath Maighe Tuireadh. Was he appropriated by the writers of the Cath Maighe Tuireadh as a symbol for an Irishman who betrayed his clan? ]  
Bres is "closely associated with the dramatis personae of poetic lore: Brigit, Ogmæ, the three gods of skill, Dagdae" <sup>148</sup>

Another interesting question is the poem's depiction of Bres as an inferior ruler, and "his failure to perform his kingly duties" <sup>149</sup>

Carey emphasises that the important question is what "the learned class perceived the Viking attacks had". <sup>150</sup> Given the fact that Bres means beauty, this may allude to a local king, or several of the local kings, being the inspiration for the character of Bres, aligning himself with the Vikings, and thus being "cast out" of the pantheon of the Tuatha Dé Danann.

Carey suggests that "bres" is a common noun, not necessarily a personal name, and thus Bres' role as villain stems from a misinterpretation of a poetic phrase, or kenning. <sup>151</sup> He further notes that the opposition is a "product of Irish historiography" due to the succession of Nuadu to Bres  
No earlier than a century before the author of Cath Maighe Tuireadh (57)

"Deliberate manipulation" of tradition by a ninth century author, which Carey notes is strongly indicated by evidence. The poem itself symbolises a surrendering of the Irish to foreign influence, where the character of Bres is automatically relegated to the role of the villain due to his affiliation with the invading foreigners <sup>152</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid. 57

<sup>146</sup> Ibid. 57

<sup>147</sup> Ibid. 57

<sup>148</sup> Ibid. 57

<sup>149</sup> Ibid. 58

<sup>150</sup> Ibid. 58

<sup>151</sup> Ibid. 58

<sup>152</sup> Ibid. 58

Indeed, the Viking raids were probably seen with contemporary eyes as a monumental event, perhaps even an apocalyptic one (59)<sup>153</sup> and Daniel Binchy describes it as the "passing of the old order"<sup>154</sup>

Carey talks about the "apocalyptic mentality" that

Annals of Ulster 842:

The murder of the abbot of Linn Duachail by "o gennlibh 7 Goidhelaibh"<sup>155</sup>

The coming of the Vikings also has a profound effect on the inner conflicts of the Irish.<sup>156</sup>

Carey draws a picture that seems to suggest that the coming of the Vikings sets off a chain reaction in the inner workings of Irish society.<sup>157</sup>

[something was wrong to begin with → viking raids → people take advantage of the situation]

[it would suggest that the tapestry of Irish society wasn't so well constructed that it would unravel...

"a disastrous change was perceived to have taken place"<sup>158</sup>

"sense of breakdown of the old ways"<sup>159</sup>

"such a climate of feeling<sup>160</sup> provides the perfect context for Cath Maighe Tuireadh, a tale of the calamitous perversion of the social order by a king with foreign allies and connections"<sup>161</sup>

"The Scandinavian nature of the Fomoiri"<sup>162</sup>

"associated with the "islands of the foreigners" Insi Gall<sup>163</sup>

associated with Norway "Lochlann" [the history of the word Lochlann]<sup>164</sup>

Also Lochlann in the annals, cause they are only later used to describe Norway, and earlier.... but this can be taken as an indication that the Cath Maighe Tuireadh influenced how history was

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid. 58

<sup>154</sup> Ibid. 58

<sup>155</sup> Ibid. 58

<sup>156</sup> Ibid. 59

<sup>157</sup> Ibid. 59

<sup>158</sup> Ibid. 59

<sup>159</sup> Ibid. 59

<sup>160</sup> my emphasis

<sup>161</sup> Ibid. 59

<sup>162</sup> Ibid. 59

<sup>163</sup> Ibid. 59

<sup>164</sup> Ibid. 59

written, although more research must be done before there can be grounds to say this. <sup>165</sup>

Annals: The foreigners have three kings <sup>166</sup>

"event so closely analogous to the oppression of the Tuatha Dé Danann at the hands of Bres and his trio of foreign protectors that I am strongly tempted to posit a direct link between the two" <sup>167</sup>

Carey is "strongly tempted to post a direct link between the two" [and I will, at least partly, be so bold] <sup>168</sup>

Dating the Cath Maighe Tuireadh "tentatively" <sup>169</sup>

"inclines me to think that it was written for the edification of an Uí Neill king" (71) <sup>170</sup>

- "Foreign intrusion" <sup>171</sup>

- "cultural decline" <sup>172</sup>

Carey: "the author as the defender of traditions which he perceived to be endangered [...the author] wove many ancient themes and figures into his account" <sup>173</sup>

"the old gods are actors in a new myth" <sup>174</sup>

- "a disastrous new reality" <sup>175</sup>

- "reinterpretations and transformations of inherited lore" <sup>176</sup>

"Under Bres' rule the Dagdae [is] reduced to serving as a digger of embankments". <sup>177</sup>

The differences in the text are due to the text being written down in different times, not to presume anything but the original texts (Cath Maighe Tuireadh and Völuspá) must've been more alike.

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid. 59

<sup>166</sup> Ibid. 59

<sup>167</sup> Ibid. 60

<sup>168</sup> Ibid. 60

<sup>169</sup> Ibid. 60

<sup>170</sup> Ibid. 60

<sup>171</sup> Ibid. 60

<sup>172</sup> Ibid. 60

<sup>173</sup> Ibid. 60

<sup>174</sup> Ibid. 60

<sup>175</sup> Ibid. 60

<sup>176</sup> Ibid. 60

<sup>177</sup> Ibid. 60

The Tuatha De Danann were in the northern islands of the world, studying occult lore and sorcery, druidic arts and witchcraft and magical skill, until they surpassed the sages of the pagan arts. They studied occult lore and secret knowledge and diabolic arts in four cities: Falias, Gorias, Murias, and Findias.

the boy had two weeks' growth; and he maintained that increase for seven years, until he had reached the growth of fourteen years.

The prophecies: <sup>178</sup>

- One of good fortune
- One presumably about the end of the world
- takes the form of a roscad
- "foretells natural disaster and social collapse" <sup>179</sup>

*I shall not see a world  
Which will be dear to me:  
Summer without blossoms,  
Cattle will be without milk,  
Women without modesty,  
Men without valor.  
Conquests without a king . . .  
Woods without mast.  
Sea without produce . . .*

- *Cath Maige Tuired*

*Brother shall strike brother and both fall,  
Parents shall defile their kin;ǫ̆  
Evil be on earth,  
an age of adultery,ǫ̆  
Axe time, sword time,ǫ̆  
Of split shields, ǫ̆  
A wind-age,  
a wolf-age till the world caves in;ǫ̆  
No man shall show mercy to another.*

- *Vǫluspá*

This simple connection made between these two great works was the beginning of this jour

Carey: Line 832 "seem to refer directly to the Viking raids" <sup>180</sup>

An alliteration "suggests that the piece is not particularly old" <sup>181</sup>

Other prophecies concerned with the Vikings are Immram Snédgusa 7 Maic Riagala, which Carey dates to approximately the tenth century. This prophecy seems more directly associated with the Viking invasion (88). Another contemporary prophecy is Immacallam in Dá Thuarad which also is a Cath Maighe Tuireadh contemporary. <sup>182</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid. 61

<sup>179</sup> Ibid. 61

<sup>180</sup> Ibid. 61

<sup>181</sup> Ibid. 61

<sup>182</sup> Ibid. 61

"Apocalyptic genre"

- "first appearing in the ninth century"

- "associated with ecclesiastical reform" <sup>183</sup>

Carey notes that all these poems have in common a reflection of the same unease about the state of Ireland at that time which Carey argues "motivated the composition of *Cath Maighe Tuireadh* as a whole" <sup>184</sup>

The *Cath Maighe Tuireadh* does not end with the final defeat of the Fomoiri, but the "remission of tribute for as long as Lug lived" <sup>185</sup>

[what does this mean, is he a warning to the Irishmen not to fall for the newcomers? That thing with money being unknown to them]

Carey notes that "*Cath Maighe Tuireadh* is a parable of Ireland's state in the second half of the ninth century, concerned primarily with the erosion of traditional values" <sup>186</sup>

Where *Völuspá* can be read as a prequel to the coming of Christ, the ending of *Cath Maighe Tuireadh* is a portent, Carey writes: "At the very moment of triumph, the war-goddess looks into the future and sees the same dangers resurgent in the Ireland of the author" <sup>187</sup>

Then after the battle was won and the slaughter had been cleaned away, the Morrigan, the daughter of Ernmas, proceeded to announce the battle and the great victory which had occurred there to the royal heights of Ireland and to its sid-hosts, to its chief waters and to its rivermouths. And that is the reason Badb still relates great deeds. "Have you any news?" everyone asked her then.

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid. 61

<sup>184</sup> Ibid. 61

<sup>185</sup> Ibid. 61

<sup>186</sup> Ibid. 62

<sup>187</sup> Ibid. 62



"Peace up to heaven.  
Heaven down to earth.  
Earth beneath heaven,  
Strength in each,  
A cup very full,  
Full of honey;  
Mead in abundance.  
Summer in winter. . . .  
Peace up to heaven . . ."

"Numerous literary examples of Lochla(i)nn refer more loosely to the Viking world in general, or a supernatural underworld" <sup>188</sup>

Bres is called the adopted son of the Tuatha Dé after we are shown that he is not fit to be their king. He then goes to his mother to ask after his father's kin, to perhaps persuade them to help him in keeping the kingship.

"Nothing brought me except my own injustice and arrogance. I deprived them of their valuables and possessions and their own food. Neither tribute nor payment was ever taken from them until now."

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<sup>188</sup> Etchingam, 2005: 81

# The sibylline connection

Gunnlaugr's transfer of *Prophetia Merlini* can provide relevant material for comparison.

But the function of the two works is still difficult to define closer:

- The illocutionary or perlocutionary aspects of the speech act of composition and transfer
- The performance and reception in the 12th and 13th centuries.

These two aspects are important in the elucidation of V

A literary function:

“The function of eddic poetry in its Christian aspect

Johansson proposes a possible social setting for the creation of *Völuspá*

Traditionally, most scholars have set the time of composition of *Völuspá* at the time of formal conversion, which would be around the year 1000, and the place of composition somewhere in Iceland.

Johansson begins his study with the mention that Steinsland has recently rejected the idea of a "pagan" who has learned about Christian customs and beliefs, and is advocating the time of composition to be around the mid 12th century in a Christian environment (2009). This is the starting point for his analysis. He continues by suggesting that the social setting could then either be a vernacular or a clerical milieu, and most likely this milieu is situated in Iceland.

From recent literary research we have found that the use of writing and the knowledge of reading in the 12th century were practically restricted to the clerical milieu at larger church sites or monasteries. Johansson suggests that it would not be implausible to indicate that the most convincing social setting of the first versions of the poem was a church, probably either Skálholt or Hólar, a few churches with established schools in Iceland (that we already established from the first half of the 12th century), or perhaps the earliest benedictine monasteries Þingeyrar and Munkaþverá.

The composition of the poem is implied in the discussion of the social setting since the most probable setting would be the clerical milieu suggested above.

Johansson suggests that the monastic milieu, represented by the two benedictine monasteries Þingeyrar and Munkaþverá, is the most likely setting for the compositional setting.

Since *Völuspá* has no known source in Latin literature, it would therefore represent an original composition in the vernacular (see Steinsland 2009).

Johansson says it is relevant here to relate *Völuspá* to *Merlinuspá*. In the translation of Latin prose by Gunnlaugr Leifsson the Eddic form in metre and imagery is used in *Merlinuspá*. It is in the monastic milieu at Þingeyrar possible to use the vernacular form in this kind of work.

Codex Regius (GKS 2365 4to) is possibly the product of the scriptorium in Þingeyrar. The hand that copied the other version of *Völuspá* in *Hauksbók* has also been related to Þingeyrar. This isn't evidence for the composition of *Völuspá* in the same scriptorium, but Johansson advertises the need to closer examine the literate milieu of these monasteries to further our understanding of the origin of these documents.

The literary function of *Völuspá*

If *Völuspá* is considered as part of the apocalyptic genre of the 12th and 13th centuries, the literary function of this poem may provide some useful new insights. Johansson says that also here the it is relevant to relate *Völuspá* to the translation of *Merlinuspá* by Gunnlaugr Leifsson. It is also necessary to examine the use of apocalyptic material in the social and compositional settings suggested by these two poems.

One important question is the incentive (or possible incentive) of a benedictine brother or a Christian cleric to compare a poem like *Völuspá* in the vernacular, and with vernacular tradition as a source for form and content sat the same time as the material is gathered from European sources.

Gunnlaugr's transfer of *Prophetia Merlini* can provide relevant material for comparison. But the function of the two works is still difficult to define closer:

- The illocutionary or perlocutionary aspects of the speech act of composition and transfer
- The performance and reception in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

These two aspects are important in the elucidation of *Völuspá*

A literary function:

“The function of eddic poetry in its Christian aspect

# The common Christian background

because the oral tradition of the past cannot be accessed directly by us, one can argue that there is [nothing from that past that we can access to]

But although the past is clouded by the later additions (later nedskriving) to the text, there is still some information to find through the written material (and indeed all the info we can get, except for archeology).

Christian thought

Many scholars have: finding the original document

The culture of Iceland in the 12th and 13th c can be said to have been a culture in transformation from a purely oral culture to becoming a culture affected by the arrival of a literate culture.

Christianity, and subsequently, the written word.

It is interesting to note that the [monastic] culture in Iceland at this point used both the memorisation of text and the nedskriving

Here, when I talk about Icelandic culture, it is important to note that I am talking about the learned classes, the monks and those associated with the church and monastic centres of Iceland.

These were the only ones who had knowledge of reading and writing at this point in time.

It would be correct to assume that the rest of the people of Iceland would tell these stories through song or through verse form that could be easily remembered.

The telling of tales through song is a tradition that is still alive in the Nordic countries today.

In most of Europe the term literacy would refer to the ability to read and understand Latin.

Through the knowledge of Latin modern scholars have [much info about the past]

Although the fact that they wrote shit down in Latin [somethingaboutLatin] is a [good tool] for modern scholars, it does present us with a narrow starting point for the definition of literacy.

Language is important for the deeper understanding of a culture and because we do not necessarily have the same sources in the vernacular, some of the meaning and flare is lost.

the investigation of Icelandic and Scandinavian writings specifically

Looking at the interaction of oral and literate culture is key here for the understanding, not only of the Norse source material, but also the Irish

I will not go into the deeper study of orality and literacy, but only present some central features of the discussion.

The first key problem would be our modern worldview, which is permeated by and controlled by our ability to read and write. In modern society, and especially after the technological revolution, our key to understanding lie within the written word, and it is hard to comprehend or even imagine a world where it is not so.

In pre-literate societies they used a different set of tools for remembering. In the conversion from an oral to a written understanding of the world, we see in both the Irish and the Icelandic material that there are traces of the tools they used before the onset of writing.

### Synthetic Pseudohistory

The most famous example of pseudo-historical material within the early Irish tradition is in *Lebor Gabála Éirenn*.

When the work depicts how the Gaels came to Ireland, it is possibly the closest thing we get to an Irish origin tale.

But unlike a lot of origin tales of other mythology, this origin story was written in a time that rooted it directly into the Christian understanding of history.

Professor John Carey argues that most of the pseudo-historical literature we have preserved from tenth and eleventh centuries, are long didactic poems belonging to the *Lebor Gabála Éirenn*.

Further, he argues that the concept of pseudo-history first and foremost should be applied to origin myths.

There might have existed pseudo-historical works in prose, but these are not preserved. He

further theorises that if we still had these sources they would most likely have originated in the Leabhar Gabhála na hÉireann as well.<sup>189</sup>

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189

Carey, 1994: 17

# Interpretation

The development of the history of Ireland's legends, and the legenda of Iceland.

We can be almost completely sure that the monks who wrote down the old stories were aware of how to edit the past to fit into the Christian tradition, that they were aware of the modifications they brought with them and for what purpose. I would argue that those who wrote down the old stories were very attentive to the perceptions affiliated with the Judeo-Christian noesis.

This would follow the example of the Jewish narratives of the Old Testament being used as the pre-history of Christianity, and it also resembles the process where the works of Homer were used to construct the story of pre-historic Greece.<sup>190</sup>

Through the conversion to Christianity the Icelanders came into contact with the Christian concept of time being linear.

This led to the need for connecting the Irish pre-Christian tradition with the Biblical stories.

Within the field of Bible studies, the typological way of reading the Old Testament was to interpret it through the canon of the New Testament.

Events and characters in the Old Testament was explained as prophecies that would be fulfilled in the New Testament.

The Irish interpreted the ancient Irish myths in the same way.

## Cú Chulainn

Later the tradition of making heroic biographies arose. The stories of the heroes were originally isolated reports put together to form a biography. These so-called heroic biographies arose as a

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190

Jackson, 1964



result of this need to link Irene's own heroes and gods up to the Christian tradition. Narratives about the Irish heroes, their birth, life, and death were authored to create a frame around the stories so that they could fit into the larger picture. A good example of this is the formation of the Irish national hero, Cú Chulainn. He is presented as a mythical figure; all his qualities are exaggerated, almost to the limits of humanity, again giving the allusion to divinity but never stepping outside the boundaries of humanity into the godly.<sup>191</sup>

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191

Jackson, 1964: 14

With Christianity two new literary genres, annals and hagiography, were introduced to the Irish people. The Christian tradition also brought with it a new way of narrating; new techniques on telling stories which could serve as the models upon which the reconstructed and emended past could be built.

In this context we have to consider the concepts of synthetic history along with synchronic and chronological concerns.

The monks made Celtic components part of the Christian culture, and later the basis for additions in modern times. Much later, Irish mythology crystallised itself around the hero Cú Chulainn; Irish nationalists used stories of the Irish heroes to create a national identity in the formation of the Irish state. The *Vitae* can be described as synthetic history, in them we see that the "characters" of Colm Cille, Patrick and Brigit change characteristics depending on the purpose of the *Vita* in question. All these characters are still relevant in our interpretation and understanding of the Irish past, and present.

# How the intermingling of the two cultures in the Viking Age affected the content of the culture

Gray explains that the conflict between the Túatha Dé Danann and the Fomoiré is set within the framework of the Irish pseudo-history of Lebor Gabála Éirenn.<sup>192</sup>

The Túatha Dé Danann have, according to Gray, defended Ireland throughout history within the mythological narrative.<sup>193</sup>

This battle has been compared to other battles in the Indo-European mythos, for example the battle between the Devas and Asuras in the Hindu tradition and the battle between the Æsir and the Vanir, which I will give closer attention to later.<sup>194</sup>

The two battles of Moytura, the first fought between the Túatha Dé and the Fir Bolg and the second between the Túatha Dé and the Fomoiré.....<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> Gray, 1982: 1

<sup>193</sup> Ibid. 1

<sup>194</sup> Ibid. 1

<sup>195</sup> Ibid. 1

# Eddic oral-formulaic structure

In the chapter of the book called Flexible formulas, systems, strategies, and themes in Old Icelandic Eddic Verse, Acker presents us with an analysis of the Old Icelandic verse form on several levels, from the half-line to the stanza, through what he calls mechanical repetition.<sup>196</sup>

According to Acker, all Eddic poems we know of display an inclination towards the stanzaic form, although the poetry of Vsp has a inclination towards irregularities in the divisions of its stanzas. compared to poems "in the ljóðahátt measure that follow a regular pattern of two alliterating half-lines, followed by a "full line" with internal alliteration"<sup>197</sup>

The occurrence of the various prophetic, historic and dreamlike elements, presented through the different aspects of the vǫlva, does not follow a regular pattern the order in which they appear in the poem.

Concerning the prophecy, whenever a new element of the prediction is presented, the poet uses what is known as introductory formulas.<sup>198</sup>

19: Ask veit ek standa

35: Haft sá hon liggja

38: Sal sá hon standa

64: Sal sér hon standa

There is also reason to consider that these forms may not necessarily have been fixed to begin with, as we see that the forms could be interchanged by other forms. We see this most clearly in some versions of VSP where stanza 38 feature the forms "veit ec" and "sér hon".<sup>199</sup>

Einar Ólafur Sveinsson points out that it is normal for a medium to speak of themselves in the third person. He then suggests that the poet then added the alteration between and that the poet of V must have been aware of such a phenomenon existing in his own time, thus simply adding the

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<sup>196</sup> Acker, 1996: 61

<sup>197</sup> Ibid. 61

<sup>198</sup> Ibid. 67; 72

<sup>199</sup> Ibid. 68

alteration between the pronouns ek and hon into the poem

comes into the poem through the poet's experience of this happening.<sup>200</sup>

I don't think that Sveinsson suggests that the alteration between ek and hon is simply because the poet heard a medium in his time referring to herself in the third person....<sup>201</sup> ]]]]

Lönnroth and Sigurður Nordal (den dubbla scenen 1978 and classical study of V)

Nordal's tormented poet, crisis of faith in volcanic millennial Iceland vs Lönnroth's "prophetic persona through which the dominant ideology (of the powerful chieftains and their clerical allies) authenticates itself in myth".<sup>202</sup>

The evolution of Germanic heroic poetry "from improvised formulaic compositions to the stanzaic, dramatic, less formulaic, and memorially transmitted poems of the Edda".<sup>203</sup>

"there was no longer need for ready-made formulas".<sup>204</sup>

Lönnroth suggests that some concepts and formulations found in the Eddas may have originated from the aesthetic requirements of the poem. In his book (den dubbla scenen) we find the examples

Ginnugagap (something that begins with a G)<sup>205</sup>

Sól varp sunnan (S)<sup>206</sup>

hendi inni hægri (H)<sup>207</sup>

Lönnroth presents what he calls a "ceremonial formula", which is "repeated three times in V"<sup>208</sup>

Þá gengu regin öll

á rökstóla

"each time a connection that emphasizes the holiness and indispensability of the legislative assembly".<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> Dronke, 1997 28

<sup>201</sup> Ibid. 28

<sup>202</sup> Acker, 1996: 98

<sup>203</sup> Ibid. 98-99

<sup>204</sup> Ibid. 99

<sup>205</sup> Ibid. 99

<sup>206</sup> Ibid. 99

<sup>207</sup> Ibid. 99

<sup>208</sup> Ibid. 99

<sup>209</sup> Ibid. 99

"Parry and Lord's formulaic theory", "the interplay between the reciter/sybil and a thirteenth century Icelandic audience", "why complicate matters by postulating a several hundred year old oral textual tradition which can never be verified".<sup>210</sup>

Acker interprets this statement from Lönnroth as a "shift in emphasis from his earlier claims of memorial transmission", and that Lönnroth is in fact suggesting a thirteenth century poet creating this poem for a certain audience.

Lönnroth 1982

The element of improvisation in an oral performance<sup>211</sup> and "left-overs from... an earlier, more fluid stage in the oral tradition."<sup>212</sup>

Preben Meulengracht Sørensen: argued for a "contemporary reception of a text, and may therefore have been attracted to a view of transmission that emphasizes continual updating rather than conservative preservation".<sup>213</sup>

"Arguments against strictly memorial transmission, in conjunction with methods of dating texts".<sup>214</sup>

Preben Meulengracht Sørensen: offers some interesting scenarios for the period of Eddic transcription.<sup>215</sup>

In den dubbla scenen, Lönnroth suggests that each text must be understood from how it was once performed. Furthermore, this also implies that performance by its very nature involves sensory experience that we simple cannot get through reading a text, at lest not explicitly.

Through performance, we are exposed to the sstory through sounds, through music, and through the experience of both the performer, and those around us experiencing the performance with us. In short, there is a fundamental difference between performance of a text and the reading of it.

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<sup>210</sup> Acker, 1996: 100

<sup>211</sup> Lönnroth, 1982: 311

<sup>212</sup> Lönnroth, 1982: 312

<sup>213</sup> Acker, 1996: 100

<sup>214</sup> Ibid. 100

<sup>215</sup> Ibid. 101

It is also important to note that experiencing a text through the written medium was limited to those who received an education, *id est* not the general population, but only those few who belonged to the higher classes, and even within this social strata not all learned to read and write, and the clergy.

For the purpose of this study, the word text refers to all texts both oral and literal, performance as text.

Dronke gives us the framework of the poem in part I, a tracing of the poet's sequence of thought though every stanza in part II, and a detailed comparison of the three main sources, R, H and SnE, in part III.

The temporal arrangement of the poem gives us a glimpse into its oral history.

Dronke also explains that the temporal arrangement of the poem will not line up with what we as contemporary readers are used to. Therefore, the structure of the poem will not necessarily give unambiguous meaning.<sup>216</sup>

#### I. - The structure of the poem

Dronke first introduces the manner in which Völuspá is written. She explains that similar to many other visionary poems, it is "allusive and enigmatic, with abrupt, unexplained transitions of scene and thought".<sup>217</sup>

Dronke also explains that the temporal arrangement of the poem will not line up with what we as contemporary readers are used to, and therefore, the structure of the poem will not necessarily give unambiguous meaning<sup>218</sup>.

Völuspá has three main sources, and Dronke reminds us of the fact that the sources do not always agree on the ordering of the chronological sequence of events and content or of the poem. Dronke argues that "without a conception of the structure of the poem we have no basis for determining the best text".<sup>219</sup> Therefore she argues that we have to evaluate the different texts concurrently to determine the structure, and consequently advise that the poetical and textual studies must be parallel and mutually influential.<sup>220</sup>

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Dronke, 1997: 25

<sup>217</sup> Ibid. 25

<sup>218</sup> Ibid. 25

<sup>219</sup> Ibid. 25

<sup>220</sup> Ibid. 25



## I.A - The grand architecture of Völuspá (1-20, 43-62)

Dronke describes what she calls the grand architecture of the poem. According to Dronke this grand architecture is confirmed in both R, H and SnE.<sup>221</sup>

R and H present an almost identical text. In these two sources the opening and the end of the poem.<sup>222</sup>

Dronke remarks upon a difference between R and H that is hard to interpret and changes the meaning of the poem depending on how it is read and interpreted. In H there is a four line stanza included before the very last stanza (62), and this stanza does not occur in R. She mentions that other scholars have viewed the stanzas as the Christian keystone of the poem, because in this stanza there is a description of an unnamed "'Powerful One', all-ruling, from above", one who is to come to the regindómr. This word, regindómr, is also a unique word that does not occur anywhere else in the manuscripts.<sup>223</sup> Dronke omits this Hauksbók stanza from her translation because she considers it an interpolation.<sup>224</sup>

The sequence of events in Völuspá follows a chronological pattern where the inception of the world comes at the beginning, and the destruction and resurrection of it comes at the end of the poem.

To the contemporary mind this may seem obvious, but Dronke points out that with the exception of some lines from Vafþrúðnismál, this episodic succession of events is unique among the Norse poems.

In SnE, the third source of Völuspá in Gylfaginning, Snorri paraphrases, or quotes, over forty stanzas, indicating that Snorri knew the poem well. This could also imply that Snorri had a version of the poem in front of him when he wrote his Edda, though this cannot be verified with

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<sup>221</sup>

Ibid. 25

<sup>222</sup> Ibid. 25

<sup>223</sup> Ibid. 26

<sup>224</sup> Ibid. 26

certainty. The chronological pattern of V is preserved in Gylfaginning.<sup>225</sup>

He does not reproduce the striking thematic links between the old world and the new, but he had them before him when he wrote it.

he plans his opening cosmology over Genesis, not V with the supreme god creator of all things as the instigator of the world's being.

On that opening he plunders V for cosmological info, and grafts it upon his work. He also uses other Eddic sources, and together with V he selects some parts, interweaving it with his "colloquy schema".

(Snorri imparts us with some wisdom concerning the beliefs of his ancestors.)

From the last third he uses nine stanzas from V (the sounding of the horn of Heimdallr to the sinking of the earth into the sea).

Here, Snorris version is less interrupted by other material, which suggests (also suggested through judging by extant texts) that there is less detailed material to be gathered from elsewhere.

Refrain I

occurs in SnE 20 47, 73

Refrain II

occurs in SnE (cited)

Refrain III

echoed in the prose narrative SnE 72

Snorri shows no knowledge of the penultimate stanza in H

Dronke says that there is no reason to think that the text that was omitted where the interpolation of the dwarf stanzas occur (between 9 and 17) would have altered the structure of the poem significantly.

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<sup>225</sup> Ibid. 26

## I.B - The progress to Ragnarok (21-42)

The central third of the poem:

Selected events in the life of the gods are told with acute brevity

These events lead to the first portents of Ragnarok (the destiny of the gods)

This central section shows the greatest divergence between R and H

R: 22 stanzas

H: 14 stanzas

H also omits any reference to Baldr's death.

Dronke argues that the logic underlying the sequence of selected events in R is clear.

24: The stalemate of the Æsir-Vanir war arises from the fact that the Vanir can return from the dead. She thinks that this foreshadows the return of Baldr.

25: The plot of the giants: Freyja has the power through her magic to maintain the terrestrial cycle of rebirth. If the giants keep the power this will put an end to the regeneration of light, and of Baldr.

In outwitting the giants the gods become involved in a comedy of errors in which they break their oath, and THIS leads to the killing of Baldr.

If Loki wasn't smart enough to realise that the mistletoe is the only thing that could harm Baldr, Baldr would never have died, and his death being the sacrifice necessary for the renewal of the world after it goes under in Ragnarok.

H omits and rearranges the events of this part of the poem. This motivation which is so important for the progression of the story, and which according to Dronke is evident in R, she argues that H is inferior to R in regards to this part of the poem.

Snorri cites wholly or partially 7 stanzas of this part of the poem.

This includes 28, which H omits.

He paraphrases 36, which H also omits.

Dronke argues that he through doing this, confirms the text of R, as against H, on these two

points.

The four stanzas that mention the Æsir-Vanir war (21-24) exist in both R and H. Dronke remarks upon the fact that Snorri does not refer to any of these stanzas, possibly indicating that Snorri did not understand the particular aspect of this part of the story.<sup>226</sup>

## I.C - The Sibylline voices

A single speaker

Conversing with the spirit world

The speaker is I

the "other" always she

The poet warns us that the I is not necessarily a stable human being,

she is alive

ostensibly human

she addresses a human audience in the first stanza

in stanza 2 she remembers being a primordial forsterling in the giant world of death

In this poem, in which the world is a poetic world with more elaborate imagery, the vǫlur are reincarnated, and remembering their past lives.<sup>227</sup>

The vǫlur have insight, through a trance, into the enigmatic secrets of the cosmos.<sup>228</sup>

They speak with spirits under the night sky.<sup>229</sup>

Close to the vǫlur is "she", a second self, a being who communicates her own experiences.<sup>230</sup>

The alternation of pronouns

Dronke sets forth that the poet who wrote Vǫluspá had himself experienced mediums of his time referring to themselves in the third person in a trance state, and that the alteration between ek and hon could have come from this occurrence.<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>226</sup> Dronke, 1997: 27

<sup>227</sup> Ibid. 27

<sup>228</sup> Ibid. 27

<sup>229</sup> Ibid. 27

<sup>230</sup> Ibid. 27

<sup>231</sup> Ibid. 28

She further suggests that because of the poet's advanced skill in the use of this literary technique, that he must have learned this skill from earlier masterful poets.<sup>232</sup>

Dronke also proposes that the poet's use of a sibylline structure in V suggest a high degree of knowledge in the poetics because of his use of two pre-existing sibylline frameworks.<sup>233</sup>

One of Dronke's suggestions of a sibylline framework in the poem is the use of the didactic vǫlva. She has the same task as a sibyl in an Oracle, which is to teach and instruct mankind.<sup>234</sup>

The second sibylline framework in V comes in the form of the prophetic vǫlva who is not present in the Norse body of literature except for the vǫlva in Baldrs Draumar who tells Oðinn of the coming death of Baldr.<sup>235</sup>

Dronke suggests that the poet of V has interlocked these two guises of the vǫlva together through the alteration of the pronouns ek and hon. In V, the I is a living person, the first vǫlva-character who is the teacher of mankind, and the second characterisation of the vǫlva is the She, the prophetic seeress, the old one from primeval times.<sup>236</sup>

This interlocking of the two versions of the vǫlva gives her a dual character

If we follow Dronke's line of argument, the poet has used the characterisation of prophesiers in his own time, and in his poem given them a second role, that of

The chronology of G is not found in any other Norse mythological poem, though Oðinn's questions in Vafþrúðnismál 20-54 follow a similar but more intricate pattern.

The thematic links between the old and new word is not in Snorris concern (Dronke names stanzas 5 and 58) but Dronjke says he un all probability had the words in front of him when he wrote G and was aware of these themes.

Snirro plans his opennig cosmology along Genesis rather than Vsp with his supreme god that sets in motion the beginning of the workld

Snorri takes from V cosmological info that he grafts onto his story with mstter from other Eddic sources.

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<sup>232</sup> Dronke, 1997: 28

<sup>233</sup> Ibid. 28

<sup>234</sup> Ibid. 28

<sup>235</sup> Ibid. 28

<sup>236</sup> Ibid. 28

Dronke indicates that she thinks the lack of interruption from other material in the third part of the rendering of V is due to the lack of detailed material from other sources. She bases this assumption on extant texts.

"The antique Sibyls were known as god-inspired pagan prophetesses with the ability to look into past and future. They became channels of revelation in an antique, pagan oracle genre that was accorded great authority by the Christian church as well" <sup>237</sup>

"The Church Fathers saw an apologetic meaning in the old pagan oracles: through the frightening Sibyls, paganism had realised its own downfall. The Sibyls, though pagan, were inspired to reveal the breakthrough of a new cosmic order which was interpreted by the Church as the coming of Christianity" <sup>238</sup>

Steinsland mentions that recent research has led to Bang's thesis sounding less far fetched than it did a century ago. In the Viking Age we find some Sibylline oracle writings being used in the liturgical communities in England and Spain.

"Notwithstanding, recent research has established that some Latin Sibylline oracles were in use in Anglo-Saxon England during the Viking Age, in the liturgical traditions of the Anglo-Saxon Church. The then Norse people might have come to know elements of the Sibylline prophetic traditions through contacts with the Anglo-Saxons or through Irish or Spanish channels" <sup>239</sup>

"The future-myth seems to be difficult to defend as a genuine pagan Norse creation" <sup>240</sup>

"To the question of how *Völuspá* should then be looked upon as a source to pagan mythology and world view, I would dare to answer that the broad picture of the pagan cosmology transferred in the poem might be reliable to some degree. But there are obvious medieval innovations, such as the anthropogenic myth with *Ask* and *Embla* resembling the biblical Adam and Eve; the *imago dei*-motif of the creation myth, alluding to the creation myth of the Bible; the role of the world-

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<sup>237</sup> Steinsland, 2011: 99

<sup>238</sup> Ibid. 99

<sup>239</sup> Ibid. 99

<sup>240</sup> Ibid. 100

tree embracing cosmic history as in the Bible, and not least the myth of the Future as argued here. Thus Vǫluspá is a modified source to pagan mythology and a master- piece of Christian revelation in disguise as well" <sup>241</sup>

Anton Christian Bang hypothesised that the volva was a Norse version of a Sibylline prophetess. The Sibylline oracle was a part of a long tradition spanning from antiquity to Christian times. Steinsland follows Bang's thesis and gives us examples of how Vsp follows the structure proposed by Bang <sup>242</sup>

The Sibylline oracles foretold the end of the world with terrifying imagery. Because of the nature of the eschatology of the oracles, their stories could easily be adapted into a Christian worldview as they were essentially foretelling the end of the pagan world itself. <sup>243</sup>

- Female figure foretelling the end of the world through visions
- Nine worlds
- Elements heavily influenced by Christian eschatology, such as an apocalypse resulting in the rebirth of a savior type <sup>244</sup>

With the coming of Christian in the Scandinavian countries, it brought with it a fully developed eschatological mythos grounded in the Judeo-Chr universe. There are traces of end time within the Norse universe but JCHR brought with it a fully developed idea about end times

Steinsland argues that the cyclical time of the pagan universe versus the linear time of the Christian universe shows that there is evidence of some pre-Christian material. Steinsland argues that it is not known if there was sufficient material about end times to constitute a fully developed ideacomplex, or mythology (of end times), based on heathen material. <sup>245</sup>

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<sup>241</sup> Ibid. 100

<sup>242</sup> Ibid. 98

<sup>243</sup> Ibid. 99

<sup>244</sup> Ibid. 100

<sup>245</sup> Ibid. 93

# Conclusion

The conversion of Ireland to Christianity occurred in the fifth century, which is at a relatively early point in time compared to most of Northern Europe. This new religion brought with it the Latin language, and at the end of the sixth century onwards, the Irish began writing down their own history and myths. This was done not only in Latin, but, utilising the Latin alphabet, in their own language as well.

Since Ireland was never conquered by the Roman empire they stood outside the bureaucratic administration that came with the Empire, this led to the church in Ireland developing somewhat differently from the British church in that it centered around monasteries with the abbot, rather than the bishop, as the leader. These Irish monasteries were key centres of knowledge, and would spread the faith, along with the language, far beyond the borders of Ireland.

Despite much contact between the insular churches and the churches of the larger European Catholic community, some issues were hotly debated. One of these was the calculation of Easter. Church meetings in Ireland, Gaul and Britain was held, for example the Synod of Whitby, where the question of the correct way of calculating Easter was determined.<sup>246</sup>

When considering Scandinavian, and by extension Icelandic, literacy we have to consider the fact that we have Runic material, some as early as the second century, and therefore can not consider the Scandinavian pre-Latin culture a "purely oral" culture. This is also true about Irish culture, and very important in terms of defining what is, and what is not, a literate culture.<sup>247</sup>

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<sup>246</sup>

Bieler, 1966: 93

<sup>247</sup> Andersen, 1995: 41



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