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Early Partitions of Ireland.

FROM LEABAR GABALA AND KEATING.

There is no tradition recorded of any division of territory having been made between Fintan Beth and Ladhra, who accompanied Cesair in her taking possession of Ireland before the Deluge.

FIRST DIVISION. Partholan, the first settler after the Deluge made a four-fold division of the country for his four sons :—

1. From Aileach in Derry to Dublin, a north-east province.
2. From Dublin to Cork—Oilean Mor an Bharraigh, Barrymore Island in Cork Harbour, a south-east province.
3. From Cork to Galway—to Maaree, now Clarin-bridge, a south-west province.
4. From Galway to Aileach, a north-west province.—(*Keating ; not given in L. Gabala*).

SECOND DIVISION. Of the Nemedians. Made by the children of Neimhedh, a three-part division :—

1. From Tory Island to the Boyne. O Tornis co Boinn mBraein-sreabhaigh mbruthaigh, ccaoimhslemain coir cclothhaigh—"from Tor Inis to the Boyne of swirling water, eddying, fair smooth, comely, famous.
(*Poem of Eochaid O Floind in the Leabar Gabala.*)
the territory of Beothach, grandson of Neimhedh.
2. From the Boyne to Cork—Bealach Conglais.
3. From Cork to Tory Island—the whole west.

THIRD DIVISION. Of the Firbolgs. Five provinces.

1. Leinster, from Drogheda to Waterford. "From Inbher Colpa to the meeting of the three rivers."—(*Leabar Gabala*)—the kingdom of Slainge from whom Slane took its name.
2. North Munster (more correctly east Munster) from Waterford to Cork.
3. South Munster (more correctly west Munster) from Cork to Limerick.
4. A Western Province. Limerick to the river Drowes, the boundary between Leitrim and Donegal, just south of Bundoran.
5. Ulster, from the Drowes to the Boyne, O Drobaois co Boinn mbraenaigh, "from Drowes to the dewy Boyne," the kingdom of Rughraidh.—(*Poem of Tanaidhe O Mael Conaire in Leabar Gabala*).

FOURTH DIVISION. Of the Milesians.

The *Leabar Gabala* gives a two part division between Eremon and Eber :—

1. North Ireland, from Sruh Brain to the Boyne—the kingdom of Eremon.
2. South Ireland, “from the eternal Boyne” to the wave of Cliodna (Kinsale)—the kingdom of Eber.—(*Poem in Leabar Gabala*).

Keating relates this division as the opinion of some antiquaries, but favours the version of other historians of great authority, of a three-part division:

1. Ulster, apparently the Firbolg province—the modern province with the inclusion of Louth, from the Drowes to the Boyne, the kingdom of Eber, the son of Ir, brother of Eremon and Eber Fionn.
2. Leinster and Connacht, from the Boyne, to Eremon.
3. The two Munsters to Eber Fionn, the cantred of Corcaluighe in Cork being reserved for Lughaidh, son of Ith.

Keating adds that some historians tell of a division of Ireland by Eremon after his defeat of Eber at Gusiol (Geashill) into four parts among four of his commanders—Leinster, the two Munsters, Connacht and Ulster, but of course without any curtailment of his own sovereignty over the whole island.

FIFTH DIVISION, that of Cearmna and Sobhairce, A.M. 2870, about 130 years after Eremon, brothers, great-grandsons of Eber son of Ir, first Milesian king of Ulster and great great grand-nephews of Eremon. They were the first of the Ulster line of Ir to obtain the throne of Ireland, which they held jointly for 40 years ; they made a division of the kingdom :—

1. The northern half from Inbher Colpa, the mouth of the Boyne to Limerick for Sobhairce, who built the fortress of Dun Sobhairce-Dunseverick in Antrim.
2. The southern half, south of this line from Drogheda to Limerick for Cearmna.

DIVISION OF UGAINE MOR, KING OF IRELAND A.M. 3586 into 25 parts for his 22 sons and 3 daughters, Muirtheimhne (boundaries not defined) being one part and assigned to Cobhthach Mian.

THE DIVISION OF EOCHADH FEIDHLIOCH A.M. 3940, the father of Queen Medhbh of Connacht.

Of him Keating says : *ir é ro do roinn ir do orduis cuiseoidis ar éirinn ar roir.*

O'Connor translated this “was the first that laid out the division of the Irish provinces.” Dineen : “first divided Ireland into provinces and instituted provincials.”

In face of Keating's previous accounts of the many earlier divisions of the country, including the five previous partitions of the Firbolgs, this statement seems ridiculous unless we take it to mean, what the words and the subsequent list of the chiefs to whom he gave territory, suggest—a sub-division of some of the existing provinces and the appointment of different chiefs to each area.

The sentence that follows is “For he divided the province of Connacht into three parts between three, namely—

“He gave moreover the province of Ulster to Fearghus Mac Leide,” Leinster to another and the two Munsters each to one chief.

There is no definition of the boundaries given except the sub-division of Connacht, which show Drowes still its northern limit, so the earlier ones cannot have been altered.

The formation of the royal territory of Meath by Tuathal Teachtmhar, out of a portion of each of the provinces of Leinster the territory about Tara, of Munster that about Flachtgha of Connacht that around Uisneach, and of Ulster that around Tailte.

THE DIVISION OF CONN CEAD CATHACH AND MOGH NUADHAT—a two-part division, made by the Eiscar Riadha line of sandhills from Dublin to Galway—the northern half Leath Cuinn being Conn's kingdom and southern Ireland—Leath Mogha—the kingdom of Mogh.

Professor Eoin MacNeill's version of the actual divisions of territory that existed at different periods in ancient Ireland and of the history of their alterations will be fresh in the minds of readers of his recent study, and his argument, built so carefully with native tradition extracted from the literature, is original and convincing.

He accepts the division into five states or fifths,—Cuigidhe—narrated by the official historians as in truth of every ancient origin, and as prevailing at the time of our Lord and up to a hundred and fifty years after. But he discredits the traditional account of the contemporaneous existence of an over kingship of all Ireland, and regards the five kingdoms as separate states with no over-ruling Ard Ri till the reign of Cormac Mac Airt in the third century A.D. He also shows grounds for rejecting the usual enumeration of the five kingdoms of the Pentarchy as Ulster, Leinster, Connacht and the two Munsters, and classifies them instead into (1) Ulster, extending, of course, to the Boyne; (2) North Leinster or the Tara kingdom, from the Boyne to the south of Co. Dublin and Co. Kildare; (3) South Leinster thence to the Blackwater, with Dun Riogh at Leighlin Bridge Carlow, as its royal seat, and comprising the dioceses of Ferns, Ossory and Leighlin, along with most of Co. Tipperary and Waterford and a bit of Limerick; (4) Munster—the reputed two Munsters—a small part of Waterford and Tipperary, the most of Limerick, and the whole of Cork and Kerry; and (5) Connacht from the Drowes, along the Shannon to its mouth, including Co. Clare.

Ossory was afterwards transferred to Munster in penalty for the slaying of King Ederscel, the father of Conaire Mor, in the first century A.D.

The first stage in the break up of this long-established Pentarchy and in the development of an all-Ireland monarchy was Tuathal Teachtmhar's (a Connacht king) securing a part of the North Leinster kingdom about Uisneagh. This is recounted by historians as the formation for himself as Ard Ri of a new kingdom of Meath.

Cormac Mac Airt, his great-great grandson, practically founded the single monarchy of all Ireland by winning Tara over a hundred years later. The disintegration of the other provinces followed in the century after from the uprise of new families and from conquest, and at the coming of St. Patrick the old Pentarchy had been replaced by a system of seven distinct kingdoms with a national over-kingship of the Ard Ri.

This heptarchy, which lasted for many centuries, is detailed in the Book of Rights and consisted of Aileach, Oirghialla, Ulaidh, Meath, Leinster, Connacht and Munster. The earlier Ulster province had been carved or formed into the three kingdoms of Aileach, Oirghialla and Ulaidh by the invasion of the Three Collas and by the settlement of the sons of Niall Naoi Ngiallach.

In earlier numbers of this JOURNAL the question has been discussed whether Co. Louth or parts of it belonged to the kingdom of Oirghialla or Ulaidh, or Breagh. The previous opinion, which O'Donovan seems to have accepted was that the Oirghialla included the whole country. Father O'Murray put forward another view

in the 1912 number, that only the portion around the town of Louth belonged to Oirghialla,—that the greater part of the territory of the county formed the sub-kingdom of Conaille, more or less independent of, but admitting a suzerainty in Ulaidh of County Down.

Professor MacNeill supports this view—(p. 185) “The eastern side of Ulster [occupied by the Clann Ruraigh of Conor MacNessa’s race on their expulsion from central Ulster by the Three Collas], nominally constituted another chief kingdom, which was regarded as the remnant of the ancient Ulster. It seems, however, to have consisted of four practically independent kingdoms :—Dal Riada, on the Antrim seaboard, Ulaidh on the Down seaboard, Dal Araidhe (the inland parts of Down and Antrim and the Derry side of the Bann valley), and Conaille, a Pictish kingdom in the north of county Louth.”

The boundary of ancient Ulster of the Emain kingdom from the sea at Donegal Bay [the river Drowse] to the head of the Shannon from Lough Bo Derg through the southern part of Co. Leitrim, thence in the direction of Granard and on by the present boundary of Ulster (Cavan) eastward to the Blackwater at Trim, along the Blackwater to Navan, and from Navan along the Boyne to the Irish Sea—(p. 112).

The formation of the kingdom of Meath by the Connacht kings, Tuathal Teachtmhar and Cormac Mac Airt’s gradual conquest of North Leinster and by the latter’s defeat of Ulster at the Battle of Crinna, left the Boyne no longer the southern boundary of Ulster, but annexed to Meath, Tadhg Mac Cein’s new chieftaincy of Fer Ard Ciannachta—the southern part of Louth from Dromiskin to the Boyne. Professor MacNeill speaks of this area as the district from Ardee to the Boyne, but Fer Ard Ciannachta does not seem to have come so far west. “Meath,” he says (p. 113), “had a northern boundary nearly the same as the present northern boundary of Leinster, but it took in part of Co. Cavan and excluded the northern part of Co. Louth north of Ardee.” (p. 129): “The Connacht dynasty and its branches [of which the Oirghialla, the Colla clan were one] now (A.D. 400) ruled over the northern half of Ireland with the exception of the eastern seaboard region from Ardee to the Giant’s Causeway”—that is, the kingdom of Conaille and Ulaidh.

The kingdom of Aileach, apparently founded or at least secured by the Ui Neill, the immediate descendants of Niall of the Nine Hostages, consisted in the fourth century of the County of Donegal and probably also Cairbre’s County—the northern limb of County Sligo—the present County Tyrone and most of County Derry then belonged to Oirghialla, but were afterwards annexed to the kingdom of Aileach (p. 185).

Of Ulaidh, the part of the old Ulster kingdom of the Clann Ruraigh which was not absorbed in Oirghialla or Aileach, MacNeill says (p. 185)—“The eastern side of Ulster nominally constituted another chief kingdom which was regarded as the remnant of the ancient Ulster, and so is sometimes called by chroniclers the Fifth or Conchobar’s Fifth. It seems, however, to have consisted of four practically independent kingdoms, no one of which held any permanent authority over the others. These were Dal Riada, in the north-east on the Antrim seaboard, Ulaidh on the Down seaboard, Dal Ardidhe at the head of a Pictish people, occupying the inland parts of Down and Antrim, and also the Derry side of the Bann valley from Lough Neagh northward to the sea, and Conaille, likewise a Pictish kingdom, in the north of County Louth.”

But in the half century before the Norman invasion the O Carrolls, kings of Oirghialla, had obtained power over at least a great part of Conaille Muirtheimhne or southern Louth, as is shown by Donough O Carroll’s lordship of the district of Mellifont and Termonfechin in 1140-1150.

Yet Father Murray quotes a sentence from the annals at 1154 A.D., which enumerates Conaille as a territory coequal in status with Oirghialla, Ulaidh, Meath, Breifne and Tir Eogain. [Or could this be Conaille in Derry as it occurs in their list between Ulaidh and Tir Eogain?]. The people of the district itself must have applied the name Oirghialla to the whole south of the county at the coming of the Normans, for the latter used the name Uriel immediately for the whole county, inclusive of the part adjoining Drogheda.

p. 122 : The territory that fell to Tadhg Mac Cein's share extended along the coast from Ardee to Dublin, and inland along the northern frontier of Meath to Loch Ramor.

BREGIA, BREAGH.

Bregia, a part of the kingdom of Meath, would seem to coincide with and to be the now prevailing name for the Ciannachta with the addition of Tara, ("Temair Breg," Tara of Breagh), which was artificially excluded from Tadhg Mac Cein's chieftaincy. The name seems to be more a geographical description than a political division. Its only occurrence in a partition of territory that I find is at the Ard Ri Dearmait O Cearbhaill's division of the kingdom of Meath between his two sons : "Midhe proper, i.e., Westmeath and most of King's County and County Longford" to Colman, and "Bregia—County Meath and parts of Louth and Dublin" to Aidh—(MacNeill, p. 235).

The Ciannachta as a chieftaincy cannot have remained for many generations in the hands of the descendants of Tadhg. Bregia was not apparently terminated on the north by the Slieve Breagh hills that run from County Meath, by Smarmore, Collon and Fieldstown to the sea. Two fragments descriptive of the territory of the kingdom of Meath, used but badly misread by Keating were published by Father Paul Walsh in the *Archivium* for 1912, which gives additional proof of the inclusion of south Louth in the kingdom of Meath.

In the first Bregia ends at Annagassan. "The territory of Meath I shall describe to you and the territory of powerful Breagh. . . . the men of Breagh as far as the Casan."

The second extract runs :—

"The following is the border of Meath as Tuathal Teachtmhar ordained—as the river Liffey goes from Dublin to the river Rye (at Leixlip) (a detailed list of boundary points to the Shannon, and thence north to Lough Bo Derg and east by Mohill to Mucshnamh [Muckno, Castleblayney], thence to Slieve Fuaid, to Meigh at Killevy on E. slope of Slieve Gullion "and from that to the harbour of Snamh Aighnech" (Carlingford) and from that to the sea, and from that to the river Liffey again."

"Thirteen tribes are in Meath and five tribes in Breagh outside."

The extension of Breagh to Slieve Gullion and Carlingford seems less accurate than the first version, which bounds it at Annagassan. Both are evidence that Breagh, a province of the kingdom of Meath, included a large part of Co. Louth.

It would be of interest if some competent student would compare these statements with the references to the kingdom of Conaille and to the territories of Oirghialla during the same centuries, and suggest an interpretation that would reconcile them.

Σεορίη ὁ Ὀόλιν.