

Native tradition and the limits of collective identity of the Insular Celts



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The argument

- **Current historiography:** teleological approach; tendency to look upon collective identities of medieval Europe through the lens of practices and realities of the 19th-20th centuries
- **Our suggestion:** to take into account regional specifics, contemporaneous mechanisms, and the role of native institutions.
- As far as “**native institutions**” of Insular Celts are concerned, we define them as a set of practices originating from pan-Celtic tradition which regulated daily activities of insular or Western Celts until early modern time.

The argument

- Celtic native institutions were aimed at the maintenance and at the reproduction of gentile-centred model of social relationships
- First layer ensured and regulated mechanisms of land inheritance. Confined to one family. Welsh *gwely* and Irish *fine*
- The second layer of the model, ensuring the mechanism of joint responsibility, was applicable to all male members of four (Wales) or five (Ireland) generations of kindred. The connections between free members of four (Wales) or five (Ireland) generations united by collateral line determined the repertoire of exclusively external relationships of *gwely* and *fine* (disputes and conflicts arising between different unrelated groups). Collective - *gwelygordd* (Wales) and *tuath* (Ireland)

The argument

- The jurisdiction with regard to common *gwely or fine* was of purely **territorial** nature (~~seigneurial or patrimonial~~)
- Gentile-centred model of social relationships and corresponding territorial segmentation and as a logical consequence – political segmentation in the Celtic society impeded the formation of **supragentile** identity necessary for the development of the “nationally” oriented forms of consciousness.

Cymry

- *kombroges (bahuvrihi¹ relation) - having/ belonging to particular land and later to particular country

¹ bahuvrihi is a type of compound that denotes a referent by specifying a certain characteristic, or a quality, the referent possesses

*kom (co); *brog- (disrict) = Welsh bro, Irish mruig and Gaulish brog-
the 5th-7th cc.: *mr- > br-*



Compatriots; homeland in the narrow meaning

- ≠ *allfro* (al(l)-fro) - person from another bro, foreigner

“Moliant Cadwallon” (Praise of Cadwallon) (7th c.)

*Tewid rhiau crawn rhag udd roestlawn, / Garddai er pan
aned dyn dyfneddawn — **Cymru** Pan rygreas Crist
Cadwallawn*

They have groaned since the birth of a profoundly gifted /
champion of the **Cymry** (Britons/Welsh people?) / when
Christ created Cadwallon)

Llyfr Iorwerth (the 13th c.)

- § 81/9: *ny eyn em **bro** ny radho guyr,*
“there is no room in a **bro** for one who does not concede justice”

Early Welsh poetry

- a personal name: *bra Gaduan*, (*Gwaith Llywarch ap Llywelyn 'Prydydd y Moch'*, ed. E.M. Jones and N.A. Jones (Cardiff, 1991), no. 12, line 36);
- a place-name: *Carno bro*, “district of Carno”, *ibid.* no. 28, line 3;
- preceded by a possessive pronoun: *hydir y wir in y bro*, 'whose justice was strong in his land' (*Llyfr Du Caerfyrddin*, ed. Jarman, 18. 147).

Cymry

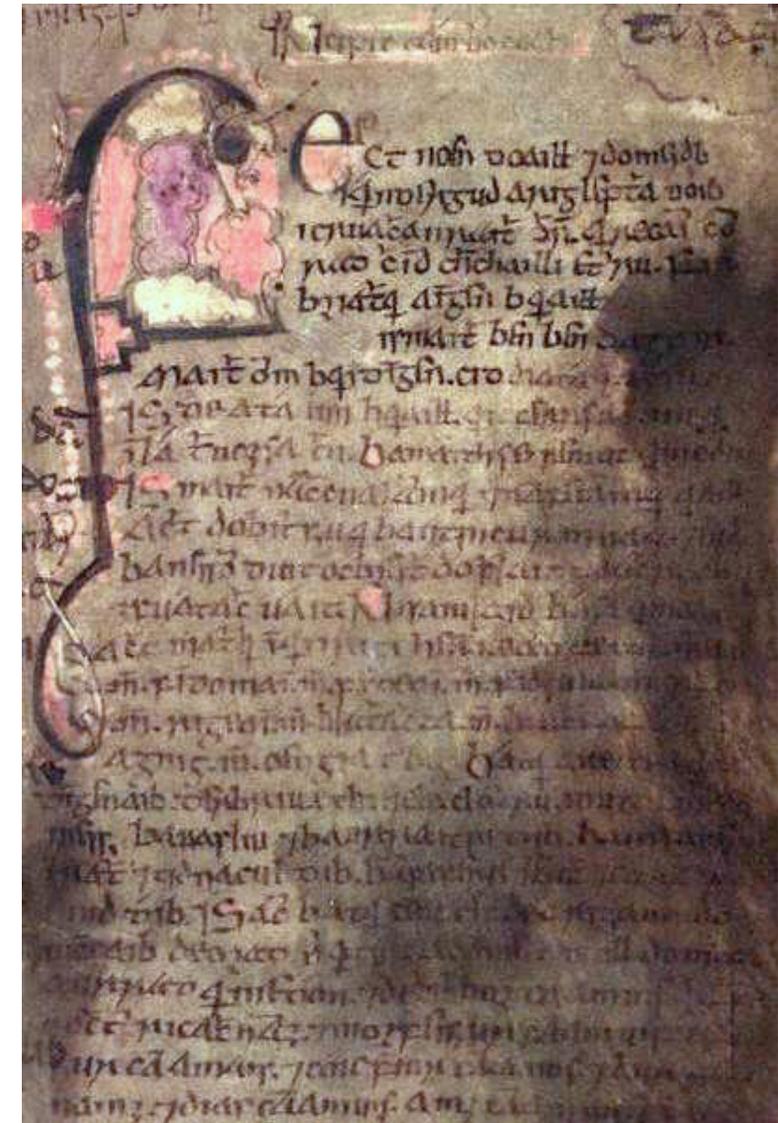
- **Bro** denoted a unit narrower than the entire nation of a recognized relationship.
- **Diffroed** - “exile”, (*Armes Prydein Fawr* (The Prophecy of Britain, mid-10th c.)
 - *dëksbrogijo/ä and
 - “having/belonging to another or exiled tribe”
- **Alltud/allfro** (foreigner); **bre(h)yr** (noble) < **brogorix** (king of a bro);
 - *mrogi-rix.

Pre Anglo-Norman Ireland

- **Contemporary interpretation:** discrepancy between **cultural oneness** (shared past, tradition of high-kingship (even though invented), distinctive language and customs) and **political segmentation**
- Crucial position of nationality since the 10th c. Sources: genealogies, poems and pseudohistorical narratives in the 10th-12th centuries, particularly *Lebor Gabala Érenn* (Book of the Invasions of Ireland)
- **Our suggestion:** there was no discrepancy; ethnic discourse reinforced segmentation.

Lebor Gabála Érenn

- *Origo gentis* of the Gaels bore an imprint of a gentile-centered model
- The Gaels were imagined as a large kin-group of collateral lineages having distant relations between one another and descending from the eponymous ancestor — Goídel Glas, who in his turn stemmed from Homer, son of Japheth.
- The medieval Gaels descended from the sons of Mil of Spain
- Gaelic identity was defined **biologically**



Outsiders in Irish tradition

- Difference between foreigners arriving from overseas and foreigners residing in Ireland (*Gaill*)
- Foreigners could be functionally integrated into Irish society but could not be naturalized.
- Gentilism inhibited the formation of supragentile identity as a result of cultural exchange

Vocabulary of ethnicity in Irish tradition

- *Cenél* and *cinid* (descendants and race) were applicable to larger ethnic groups and lesser kin groups
- *Náision* - the 17th century
- Ethnicity was not separated from other categories of kinship and was perceived only as a variation of gentile-centered relations.

Gaelic genealogies

- **Individual genealogies**

Gabais Fiacha Finscothach mac Setna Airt meic Airt meic Ebir meic Ír meic Míled ríge nHerend iar marbad dó a athar féin. (R.I. Best, ed., *Book of Leinster, formerly Lebar na Núachongbála*, i (Dublin, 1954), l.2316

Fiachna Finscothach, son of Setna Airt, son of Art, son of Eber son of Ir son of Míled, took power over Ireland after the death of his father.

- **Group genealogies (cróeba coibnesa)**

Eber Find in is dia chlaind Dál Cais & Dál Cén. & Delmna & na Desi Tuascirt. & Dal Moscorp ut quidam putant. Dál Mathra & Hui Derduib. & Cathraige & Éli & Tuath Turbi. & Eoganacht Casil. & Eoganacht Áne. & Eoganacht Locha Léin. & Eoganacht Rathlind. Eoganacht Glennamnach & Eoganacht Árand & Eoganacht Ruis Argit. (Ibid, ll.1740-1744)

Eber Find of his progeny is Dál Cais & Dál Cén. & Delmna & na Desi Tuascirt. & Dal Moscorp as some think Dál Mathra & Hui Derduib. & Cathraige & Éli & Tuath Turbi. & Eoganacht Casil. & Eoganacht Áne. & Eoganacht Locha Léin. & Eoganacht Rathlind. Eoganacht Glennamnach & Eoganacht Árand & Eoganacht Ruis Argit)

Dúchas and *duthaigh*

- hereditary land;
- native land, native place and native country;
- land, estate;
- region, territory;
- hereditary right or claim, birthright, ancestral estate;
- native place or country, ancestral home;
- Kindred, affection;
- heredity

Cogadh Gáedel re Gallaib (The War of the Irish with the Foreigners, the 12th c.)

Is annsin asbert mac Briain conárbh iongnadh Maoilmhuadh agus Desmhumha d'iarraidh braighdedh agus a sealaighechta ar Dal cCais; agus rob iongnadh leo Mac Giolla Patraicc d'iarraidh ne sealaigheachta nar **dhuthchas** dó d'fagbail

(J.H.Todd, ed., Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh: The war of the Gaedhil with the Gaill, or The invasions of Ireland by the Danes and other Norsemen (London, 1867), 216)

Asbert dno nirbo miad menman doib in ferand ro-cosainset a n-athri agus shenathri ... a lecun can cath can cliathaig do Gallaib... Asbert Mathgamain imorro ba hi comarli ba coir doib do denaib .i.teacht i Casiul na rig...; degbir on ar ba he Aealach Mumhan agus Temair Lethi Moga. Ba he dna a m[b]unadus agus a **senducus** badein. Asbert ba fearr a fír catha agus comlaind sin inna **nduthaig**... innas im an ferand forgabala agus claidim.

(ibid, 68)

It was then that the son of Brian that it was no surprise that the son of Maolmhuaidh and the men of Desmond were seeking hostages and a share of the kingship from the Dál gCais, as they were of the same blood; but they were amazed that Mac Giolla Phádraig was seeking a share of the kingship which was not **natural** to him to obtain.

He said indeed that it was not honourable for them to give up to foreigners without a battle ... the land that their fathers and ancestors had earned... Then Mathgamhain said that the advice they should take was to go to Cashel of the Kings... that was fitting since it was the Aileach of Munster and the Tara of southern Ireland. It was their (place of) origin and their own **ancestral land**. He maintained that their cause was more just in their **native land**...that territory taken by the conquest and by the sword.

Emergence of protonational discourse

- Early variants of ‘protonational’ consciousness coincided with the attack on native institutions launched during Tudor and Stuart reconquest of Ireland
- The Kingship Act of **1541**: Henry VIII- king of Ireland
- Renunciation of Gaelic surnames; recognition of patrimonial power of the monarch; expansion of Common law; abolition of native Brehon law and of native practices of inheritance

James FitzMaurice and Hugh O'Neill

- **James FitzMaurice (d.1579)**

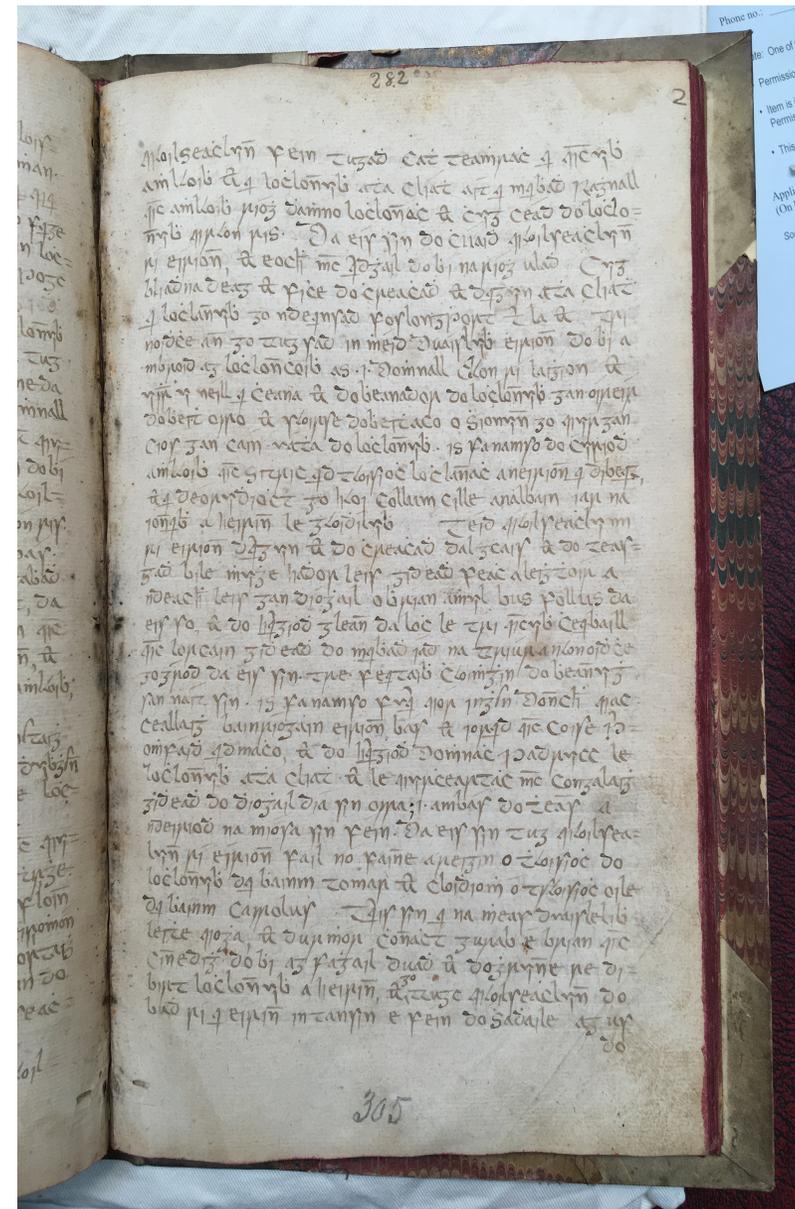
In Irish: local interests - dúthaige (patrimony),

In English: 'God's honour', 'the health of our country and for the restoring of the Catholic religion again', 'the common good and weal of this noble Ireland, ' dear country', 'zeal for God's honour and their own country'

- **Hugh O'Neill (1550-1616)** referred to the Catholic population of Ireland as "Irishmen"

Irish protonational discourse' and 'Foras Feasa ar Éirinn' (Foundation of Knowledge on Ireland, Geoffrey Keating, 1634)

- **Éireannach** – territorial designation, no gentile connotations
- “Rogab X **ríge** hÉrenn” (The King took the authority over Ireland) → Do gabh X **ríoghacht** Éireann) (The King took the kingdom of Ireland)
- Éireannach – the Gaels + Old English, descendants of the first Anglo-Norman colonists (implicit message of the narrative of FFÉ)
- Imprints of gentile-centered model in FFÉ: traditional gentile designations - Gaels (*Gaedheal*), Old English (*Seanghall*), and New English (*nuaGhall*); the word *cined*



Conclusion

- Gentile-centred model of social relationships and corresponding territorial segmentation and as a logical consequence – political segmentation in the Celtic society impeded acquisition of supragentile identities.
- When native institutions dominated, larger identities were secondary to commitment to certain kin and lesser patria.
- Territorial identification cannot unfold until the emergence of patrimonial monarchical power.
- Larger identities emerged only in the situation of state-building that launched an attack on native institutions