

**DIVINITIES AND ANCESTORS**  
**IN ENCOUNTER WITH CHRISTIANITY:**  
In the Experience and Religious History of the Early Irish  
and the Akan People of Ghana.

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This effort is dedicated to my husband

Norman Christopher Macrae,  
minister of religion.

I hereby declare that all the material in this thesis, except where otherwise stated, has been composed by myself and is my own work.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

**Clare Macrae**

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**DIVINITIES AND ANCESTORS IN ENCOUNTER WITH CHRISTIANITY:**  
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 Ghana.

**CONTENTS**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....iv

**CONTENTS** ..... v

**ABSTRACT** .....viii

**ABBREVIATIONS**.....ix

**CHAPTER ONE:INTRODUCING THE SOURCES** ..... 1

PART ONE: THE WAY IN ..... 1

PART TWO: INTRODUCING LUGH ..... 7

    Lugh, a Pan-Celtic Divinity. .... 7

    Lugh Samildánach in *Cath Maige Tuired*. The Second Battle of Moytura..... 10

    The Arrival of Lugh at Tara's Gate..... 16

    The Battle itself and its Consequences..... 19

PART THREE: INTRODUCING THE AKAN..... 26

    Setting the historical “scene”.: Who are the Akan from the historians point of view?..... 26

    Who are the Akan in relationship with their total environment: that is as a people “whose understanding of life discloses a universe conceived as a unified cosmic system, essentially spiritual”?..... 29

    Akan “primal religion as dynamic and able to adapt to new situations and human needs in society.” ..... 38

PART FOUR: COMPARATIVE COMMENTS..... 49

**CHAPTER TWO** ..... 53

PART ONE: EARLY ENCOUNTERS WITH CHRISTIANITY AMONG THE IRISH CELTS AND THE AKAN..... 53

*The Irish Material* ..... 53

*Early Encounters With Christianity Among The Akan*..... 61

*Early Encounters: Some Further Comments*..... 77

        The “Great Commission” felt to be equally imperative across the centuries..... 77

        The Gospel “a good and sweet word” ..... 79

*Postscript; Encounter as seen by an English Anglican missionary monk, Diocese of Accra 192584*

PART TWO: ENCOUNTER AS CONFRONTATION..... 89

<i>Encounter as Confrontation in Ireland</i> .....	89
Tara as Babylon .....	91
Tara as Babylon (ii).....	101
<i>The Akan Encountering Christianity as Confrontation</i> .....	108
Salem and Palace .....	108
Encounter of Christianity and the Gods of Larteh.....	114
“The Shattered Microcosm”?.....	120
<i>Further Comparative Comments on ‘Encountering Christianity’ arising from the foregoing. ...</i>	123
<b>CHAPTER THREE: THE SACRAL RULER.....</b>	<b>136</b>
PART ONE: KINSHIP AND KINGSHIP .....	136
PART TWO: THE SACRAL RULER .....	151
The Role of Lugh as Primordial Sacral King : Further Evidence.....	157
The “Oath” in the traditions of the Akan and early mediaeval Ireland.....	159
What are the Sources of the Authority and Power of the “Sacral Ruler”?.....	162
The Sacred Tree and the Sacral Ruler in Irish and Akan Tradition .....	171
PART THREE. - MYTH, RITUAL AND THEOLOGY OF POWER .....	180
Introduction.....	180
<i>Baile in Scáil</i> .....	186
The Golden Stool of the Asante Nation.....	200
PART FOUR THE IRISH FESTIVAL OF LUGHNASA AND THE AKAN ODWIRA .....	205
Introduction.....	205
The Festival of Lughnasa as Celebration of Kingship.....	206
The Festival of Lughnasa as Celebration of the First Fruits of the Harvest .....	209
The Odwira Festival among the Akan.....	215
Some Comparative Comments.....	225
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: THE ‘FEMALE PRINCIPLE’ IN THE RELIGIOUS HISTORY AND EXPERIENCE OF THE IRISH CELTS AND THE AKAN PEOPLE OF GHANA.....</b>	<b>230</b>
PART ONE : “LUGH WON THE FLOWER OF GRACIOUS QUEENS” .....	230
Cnogba, the Hill of Buí and the Excavations at Knowth.....	238
PART TWO: THE ‘FEMALE’ IN THE RELIGIOUS HISTORY AND EXPERIENCE OF THE AKAN.....	250
PART THREE: SOME COMPARATIVE COMMENT .....	258
And their Encounter with Christianity?.....	261
<b>CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>266</b>
<b>GLOSSARIES OF IRISH AND TWI WORDS USED .....</b>	<b>284</b>
<i>Irish Words</i> .....	284
<i>Words in the Akan Language (Twi)</i> .....	287

<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b> .....	<b>291</b>
MAIN SOURCES FOR LUGH and LUGHNASA .....	291
IRISH AND GENERAL MATERIAL .....	292
WEST AFRICAN MATERIAL, MAINLY AKAN.....	301
ORAL SOURCES /INTERVIEWS INFORMING THE MATERIAL ON THE AKAN.....	307

## Abstract

An initial interest in understanding the surviving traditions relating to the pan-celtic divinity Lugh in his Irish guise, and some personal acquaintance with West Africa suggested this comparative study. I soon found that the institution of the Akan traditional chieftaincy, still functioning as integral to the socio-religious identity of the modern Akan people of Ghana, provided illuminating insights into the paradigmatic role of Lugh in relation to early Irish sacral kingship. Although early mediaeval Ireland and 19th and 20th century Gold Coast, now Ghana, are divided both in historical time and geographical space, other similarities in the “Universe of meaning” proper to each culture emerged during the study of their own specific ‘encounters with Christianity’. Chap.1 first introduces Lugh through the Irish tale *Cath Maige Tuired*, and then the Akan, both in their historical and geographical context and, tentatively, through varied clues, within their world of meaning and self-understanding. Chap.2 has two parts: Early Encounters with Christianity among the Irish and the Akan and Encounter as Confrontation. Chap.3 is a comparative study of the Sacral ruler in 4 parts: covering (a) the relationship of kinship to kingship; (b) the sacral ruler in theory and in action; (c) the myth/ritual conveying, enacting, and authenticating the union with the ‘transcendent power’ informing sacral rule, (centering on *Baile in Scáil* the other main Lugh source) and (d) The Festival of Lughnasa and Akan Odwira, each celebrating both Harvest and the centripetal function of kingship. Chap.4 explores and compares the presence and importance of the Female Principle for both, and Chap.5 collates the main conclusions of the study. Although Early Irish society was essentially aristocratic and the Akan a gerontocracy, the parallels are remarkable. The material in Chap.2 reveals the tension experienced by both peoples between a recognition of being on “familiar ground” as the judaic/christian scriptures were opened up, and the inevitable confrontation between the demands of the “new faith” and ancient ritual patterns and allegiances, the latter becoming acute in relation to the traditional sacral rulers.. The manifold similarities discovered during research for Chap.3 are mutually illuminating, suggesting conclusions which go beyond the remit of this particular comparative study. Chap.4 shows the essential presence of the ‘female principle’ in the religio-social experience and history (especially in relation to the sacral kingship and its authority) of the matrilineal Akan, and the early Irish, the one mainly imaged as mother and the other mainly as bride/wife. In the consciousness of both, she is the Spirit of the Earth, and a source of wisdom and guardian of truth. There are some signs that the marginalisation of female power, both cosmic and terrestrial, may have preceded, as well as accompanying, the encounter with Christianity in both cultures.



## Abbreviations

- 2MT: *Cath Maige Tuired : The Battle of Moytura*, ed.and trans., E.A Gray. 1982
- BIS: *Baile in Scáil*. (the vision or ecstasy, or prophetic frenzy of the *Scál*)
- DAFL: *Dictionary of the Ashanti and Fante Language called Tshi*, ed. A.G Christaller 1888 (2nd ed. 1933)
- DIL: *Dictionary of the Irish Language*, gen. ed. E.G.Quin. 1913-1976
- Ds: *Dindshenchas: The Lore of Places*,
- HWA: *The History of West Africa* Vol.1, edd. J.F.A.Ajayi and M.Crowder. 1971
- ITS LII:*Irish Text Society* Vol LII. (Text of 2MT, see above)
- LGE: *Lebor Gabála Éirenn: The Book of the Taking of Ireland*, ed. R.A.S Macalister. 1938
- MetDs: *The Metrical Dindshenchas*, ed. and trans. E.J.Gwynn.1906 and 1924
- MM: *The Festival of Lughnasa. A Study of the Survival of the Celtic Festival of the Beginning of the Harvest*, M. MacNeill. 1962
- PCG: Presbyterian Church of Ghana.
- RC: *Revue Celtique*
- TBDD: *Togail Bruidne Da Derga: The Burning of Da Derga's Hostel*.
- ZCP: *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie*

# CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCING THE SOURCES

## PART ONE: THE WAY IN

The original remit for this thesis was “A comparative study of Celtic and West African divinities and their encounter with Christianity”. The present title represents a necessary limitation of field of study, but could itself, become unmanageably wide in its potential scope. Moreover in attempting a comparative study of the religious history and experience of the two peoples chosen, - the early Irish and the Akan people of Ghana “in encounter with Christianity”, - peoples who are so widely separated by geographical space and historical time, I must be exposing myself and my material to all kinds of difficulties.

The centuries of change from ‘mediaeval’ to ‘modern’, separating 20th century Ghana from 9th century Ireland mean that the genres of the sources used for comparative study, do appear to be strikingly dissimilar. Many of my sources, though not all, reach me in written form, and for historical reasons the African written material is in a foreign tongue, (for Ghana the medium being English), some of it indeed written by Europeans.<sup>1</sup> Consequently these sources must be some removed away from from the ‘discourse’, (defined as “the culturally evolved way of making meaning”), of the people whose religious and social responses to, and understanding of, life-experience, they are attempting to describe. The bulk of the early Irish written sources being used for this study are in the mother tongue of the writers and are intended for an audience who share that medium; and yet as written literature these *literati*, deeply learned in their traditional orally preserved lore, must have had their small literate readership in mind in the first place. Thus both groups of written sources are governed by their ‘epistemology’, that is by “culturally evolved ways of expressing knowledge in writing”.<sup>2</sup> Consequently the Irish written texts can

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<sup>1</sup> Some of the rich early Irish sources, are written in Latin, the language regarded similarly as essentially ‘literary’.

<sup>2</sup> These two working definitions were given me by Catherine Macrae, a research student in linguistics.

themselves be regarded as being at one remove from the discourse which their writers share with the non-literate community at large. Be that as it may, and although a development of the practice of expressing knowledge in writing was for both the Irish and the Akan a product of their respective encounters with Christianity, and with the Christian Scriptures, which for both was their 'primer', the dissimilarity of the genres of these two groups of writings remains.

What 'methodology' then can appropriately be employed in making this a valid and fruitful comparative study? The basic and appropriate answer would be to approach all phenomena with religious connotations, observable in the sources, with respectful interest and empathetic attention, attempting to enter into their context, and the world view within which they find expression. "The phenomenologist wants to observe the phenomena of religion as they appear rather than as they are understood through opinions formed prior to observation",<sup>3</sup> which indeed is what I have tried to do. However it seems to me that while the methodology of the phenomenological study of religion does indeed have considerable validity, it must be generally recognised that it is no more free than is any other 'scientific' investigation from the influence of the investigator's personal quest: his/her desire to make sense of the mythic world he or she inhabits, in terms of the epistemology proper to that world. It seems therefore that some account of what led me to embark on this topic is probably necessary at this point and I make no apology for its autobiographical nature.

Emerging from a sheltered childhood world of myths and 'historical' legends particularly those associated with the 'celtic fringe' I encountered, as a student, the horror of war and holocaust. This precipitated an encounter with Christianity involving a healing recognition of the 'Christian Myth', incorporating as it does historical events (and Jesus Christ as the 'name' of that which is beyond all images) which has, together with frequent participation in its central ritual, satisfied for me that basic human thirst to make holistic sense of life experience. Since then fifty years of engagement with a variety of Christian mystics, (and some acquaintance in passing

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<sup>3</sup> James L.Cox: *Expressing the Sacred, An Introduction to the Phenomenology of Religion* (Univ. of Zimbabwe 1992) p24. Dr Cox is currently lecturing on the staff of the Centre for the Study of Christianity in the Non-Western World in the Edinburgh University Faculty of Divinity.

with Islamic Sufi writings) resting finally in *The Cloud of Unknowing* with its sequel, and the works of St John of the Cross, has left me with a 'world view' which suggests that all experience of the real is mediated in some sense, and could be designated as hierophantic and also mythological<sup>4</sup>. As the three areas or 'scenes' of enquiry, the early Irish, the West African, and the Judaic-Christian Scriptures in which this study is operating, share a *milieu* of a world of spirits, in which the dichotomies which govern our western epistemologies and dominate our perceptions have only a limited operation, such an approach should facilitate comparison.

While attending Professor J.P.Mackey's Celtic Christianity class I became interested by a remarkably comprehensive survey of local survivals of custom, legend and folklore in Ireland connected with the last Sunday in July and the first Sunday in August. They are thus related to the festival of Lughnasa,<sup>5</sup> the fourth of the immemorial quarterly Celtic seasonal feasts which falls on the first of August, and consequently to the pan-Celtic divinity **Lugh**, as he appears in the surviving mediaeval Irish literary texts. However as I found myself initially drawn deeper into the study of these sources, in particular the tale which is the subject of exegetical study in Part Two of this first chapter, the hope arose that by exploring the notion of 'primal religion', these traditions would become less opaque; and indeed this has proved to be the case for me. The richness of the evidence of similarities in the worlds of meaning in many cultures often designated as 'primal' provided in the Centre for the Study of Christianity in the non-Western World and in the classes then being offered on Primal Religions was impressive.<sup>6</sup> An influential contribution to the development of this concept was provided in H.W. Turner's article, "The primal religions of the world and their study", including as it does a "six-feature analysis" or "framework for understanding primal religions as authentically religious".<sup>7</sup> However, any attempt to

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<sup>4</sup> Raimon Pannikar in an early little book, long out of print called *The Trinity and the Religious History of Man* defines the word myth as "The ultimate frame of reference which we take for granted".

<sup>5</sup> Máire MacNeill, *The Festival of Lughnasa. A Study of the Survival of the Celtic Festival of the Beginning of Harvest*, (Oxford 1962) This work is hereafter designated as MM.

<sup>6</sup> I had also spent ten years in Nigeria in the fifties as a missionary's wife.

generalise in terms of this approach is not part of my remit for this specific comparative study, as I see it, nor is it within my competence.

In choosing the study of the divinities and ancestors of the Akan people in encounter with Christianity out of all West Africa for comparison with the Irish material on Lugh the Many-skilled, it might be argued that I am adding to my difficulties. For instance there is no recognisable Akan *obosom*, often translated as “god” or “lesser deity”, with characteristics comparable to those of Lugh. Among the (Nigerian) Yoruba *orisha*, many of whom are both divinities and ancestors, a parallel would be more likely: - for instance the still potent *Shango* could have made an interesting candidate.<sup>8</sup> However the choice of the Akan, which was made initially for a complex of reasons, has, I believe, proved itself to be a very valuable one, not least because the very absence of obvious typological categories on which to base a comparison between Lugh and any recognised Akan (subordinate) divinities has forced the enquiry to go deeper.

Very early in my enquiry I became aware of some ‘landmarks’ - or rather, more generally, some aspects of the scenery, as it were, in the separate worlds of the religious history and experience of the Irish and the Akan peoples encountering Christianity which are strikingly similar. And it became apparent that if one were to pursue all such similarities in detail the cogency of a ‘thesis’ would suffer. I had already chosen to base the whole study on the surviving sources and traditions relating to the pan-Celtic divinity Lugh in his Irish guise, An early recognition that the institution of the Akan traditional chieftaincy, still functioning as integral to the socio-religious identity of the modern Akan people of Ghana, provides illuminating insights into the paradigmatic role of Lugh in relation to early Irish sacral kingship, gave me both a practical basis and a satisfying, if limited, focus, with which to

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<sup>7</sup> “The Primal Religions of the World and their Study” In Victor Hayes (ed.) *Australian Essays in World Religions* (Bedford Park: Australian Association for World Religions, 1977); pp.27-50 cf. K.Bediako, *Christianity in Africa. The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*. (Edinburgh 1995) pp.93-96

<sup>8</sup> *Shango* is an example of the divinities of the Yoruba (*orisha*) with a powerful cult, who is also a royal ancestor (in contrast to the *abosom*) as well as being connected or “identified with aspects of nature.” See P.J Ryan, “‘Arise O God!’ The problem of ‘gods’ in West Africa”, *Journal of Religion in Africa* XI 3 (Leiden 1980) p.166

proceed. Thus the four-part third chapter with the overall title “The Sacral Ruler” is central (in both senses) to the whole.

I must admit, however, that it was partly a lecture with the generalising title: “The Primal Imagination and the opportunity for a new theological idiom” given by Kwame Bediako, the Ghanaian theologian and Duff lecturer as the first of his 1990 series of lectures, and his promised availability as teacher for one term of each year which had led me to choose the Akan people of Ghana, to whom Dr Bediako belongs, as a subject for this comparative study. An often quoted dictum of Professor Andrew Walls, founder and director of the Centre mentioned above, runs as follows: “We (the human race) are all primalists at heart”. The profound truth of this seems to me to be increasingly evident, as much in the West, partially hidden under the prevailing epistemological structures of our contemporary western culture, as anywhere. This and the complementary truth encapsulated in the title Gustavo Gutierrez, the great liberation theologian, gave to one of his books; *We Drink From Our Own Wells: The Spiritual Journey of a People*<sup>9</sup> suggested the possibility that my study might throw some light for me on my own contemporary world.

It is notoriously difficult to discern precisely, within surviving Irish literature what are normally called “pre-Christian beliefs”. It will become apparent in subsequent chapters that the paucity of direct information about pre-Christian ritual practices and the beliefs which they represent in early Irish literature, such as are available for those studying the Akan,<sup>10</sup> has obscured, and might be said almost to inhibit, the study of ‘the encounter with Christianity’ in early mediaeval Ireland.<sup>11</sup> However, among the possible sources providing hints regarding such beliefs, *Cath Maige Tuired*, the tale of the (second) Battle of Moytura, referred to henceforward

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<sup>9</sup> translated by M.J.O’Connell (London 1984)

<sup>10</sup>One must, however, be constantly aware of the fact, already referred to obliquely where written sources are concerned, that many of the sources used for the study of the Akan, are likely also to have been affected by contacts with Christendom. “ ... as a result of Christianity’s becoming part of Europe’s culture, African man after colonialism acquired laws, learning art, and a concept of the state that was shaped by Christendom.” J.Pobee, *Toward and African Theology*, (1979) in extract in ed. J Parratt, *A Reader in African Christian Theology* (London 1987) pp.29-36 at p.29 .

<sup>11</sup> Illustrated by the current debate between the so-called “nativists” and “antinativists” among Celtic scholars.

as 2MT, in which Lugh is the central character, is generally regarded even by modern scholars most sceptical in this matter, as “a text that comes as close as any to the genre of (pagan) mythology”<sup>12</sup> Thus the exegetical exposition of this remarkable text which I attempt in the next section of this chapter under the heading “Introducing Lugh” offers, I believe, an appropriate and illuminating “way in” to this study.

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<sup>12</sup> M.R.Scowcroft “Leabhar Gabhála, part 2: the growth of the text” *Eriu* XXXVII (1988) p.35

## PART TWO: INTRODUCING LUGH

### Lugh, a Pan-Celtic Divinity.

“What seems mainly brought out by iconographic and epigraphic studies (in the Gaulish area) is the enormous diversity and parochiality that the aspects of the Celtic deities could assume and the impossibility of trying to reduce to a system a scheme where no system need have existed”. This quotable judgement by Professor Stewart Piggott, is not perhaps likely to be seriously challenged these days. The difficulty of interpreting these cult objects and inscriptions in Europe and Britain in terms of the mythological material in the Irish literary sources is notorious. A few connections have been made with individual members of the *Tíúatha Dé Danaan* (often translated as the tribes or peoples of the goddess Danu) such as Nodens with Núadu, Ogmios with Ogma, perhaps between the “god with the mallet” and the Dagda, and most notably between Brigantia and Brigit.

There is however considerable evidence on which to base a claim that a cult of Lugh/Lugus (Lleu Llaw Gyffes in The Mabinogion), perhaps the most impressive and vividly portrayed of the divine mythological figures in the Irish literary sources, was present in many parts of Iron Age Celtic Europe and in Britain.

First, there is the evidence from place names; a figure of more than a dozen has been mentioned, throughout Gaul and beyond.<sup>13</sup> Examples are Laon and Loudon in France, Leiden in Holland, Leignitz in Silesia, and Luguvalium, the British name for Carlisle, probably deriving from Luguvalos “strong in (the god) Lugus”.<sup>14</sup> The most significant perhaps is Lugudunum or Lugudunum from which the modern Lyon grew.<sup>15</sup> The French Celticist D'Arbois de Joubainville was apparently the first<sup>16</sup> to

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<sup>13</sup> A.Tovar, “The God Lugus in Spain”, *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, vol.XXIX, (1982) p.593

<sup>14</sup> A Ross p.319. See next note..

<sup>15</sup> See A Ross, *Pagan Celtic Britain* (London 1967) pp.318-322 for comments on Pseudo-Plutarch's account in *De Fluviiis* of the founding of Lugudunum (Lyon) connecting the word *lugos* (in Greek) with what he claims to be the meaning of the word in Gaulish, “raven”. Ross mentions some 1st and



note the significance of the annual festival held in honour of the divinised Emperor Augustus in Lyon (chosen as the capital for the Roman Province,) on August 1st, the date of the fourth of the ancient Celtic seasonal festivals, - that celebrating the beginning of the Harvest -, which in Ireland was the Festival of Lughnasa. Moreover, the often cited remains of a bronze Gaulish Calendar found at Coligny not far away indicates that a great feast was held in the month of Rivros which is equated with August.

Tovar's article "Lugus in Spain" just cited gives an account of several inscriptions in Spain, in addition to the well-known dedication to *Lugoves* in Osma on behalf of a guild of shoemakers, indicating the presence of the divine Lugus in characteristic triple form. These are of special interest to linguists with reference to the shared characteristics of Goidelic with Celtiberian indicating a similar form ('q-celtic') of the Celtic tongue earlier than Gaulish and Brittonic. Tovar also regards the epigraphic evidence both in Celtiberian and in Galicia as supporting "the deep-rooted Spanish Celticity of the god."<sup>17</sup> It is not surprising perhaps that inscriptions naming Lugus are very scarce in Gaul, as most of the many hundreds of examples of religious epigraphy must be post Roman conquest. It has however been generally accepted that Caesar's famous statement about the Gaulish Mercury in *The Gallic War* provides a significant connection between the 'genius' of Lyon and many other *oppida* and the Irish Lugh called *Samildánach*, "the many skilled":-

**Of the gods they worship Mercury most of all, he has the greatest number of images; they hold that he is the inventor of all the arts and a guide on the roads and journeys, and they believe him the most influential for money making and commerce.<sup>18</sup>**

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2nd century iconographic evidence linking Lugus, "the youthful genius of the city" in Mercury-like guise with ravens.

<sup>16</sup> Cited by M. MacNeill, *The Festival of Lughnasa*, (Hereafter MM) (Oxford 1962) p.1 from D'Arbois de Joubainville,; *Etudes sur le Droit Celtique* ( 1881) p.92.

<sup>17</sup> op.cit.p.596, n.3

<sup>18</sup> *The Gallic War*, H.J.Edwards trans.BkVI, (London 1917) p.343. I intend to use bold type throughout for quotations from the original sources used. In the case of the Irish material these will be almost entirely in translation

The images and inscriptions of this Gaulish Mercury which have survived support Caesar's observation. Moreover, as has often been pointed out, the Roman Mercury was not "the inventor of all the arts", nor of course was he the most popular in the Roman pantheon. This connection does open up the possibility of some interesting cross references between some of the Romano-Celtic iconographic dedications to Mercury and stories of Lugh and his Welsh counterpart Llew Llaw Gyffes, ("of the skilful hand")<sup>19</sup>.

Lugh's name appears often in Irish literature. He is important to the tradition which produced *Lebor Gabála Éirenn*, (The Book of the Takings of Ireland). He figures in the Sagas<sup>20</sup> and in the Fenian tradition and in the *Dindshenchas*. He is frequently mentioned in Bardic poetry mainly as a type of the patriotic Hero. There is a strong folk tradition relating to Lugh's birth and his confrontation with his maternal grandfather. However there are three 'places' in the early Irish literature where Lugh is present, as it were, with especial clarity, power and lasting influence. These are (a) in the 16th century vellum manuscript, based on Old Irish materials, Harleian 5280, telling the tale of the Second Battle of Mag Tuired; and (b) in the *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* passages designating him the first who invented Assembly or *óenach* in Ireland, and as the inaugurator of *Óenach Tailten* the great Assembly and Fair at Tailtiu (Teltown) apparently the most prestigious of the provincial assemblies held annually at Lughnasad. And (c) Lugh appears significantly in the tale called *Baile in Scáil*.

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<sup>19</sup> P. Ó Riain, "Celtic Mythology and Religion" *Geschichte und Kultur der Kelten* ed Schmidt (Heidelberg 1986) p.244. Cf A. Ross, *Pagan Celtic Britain*, (London 1968) pp.346-350.

<sup>20</sup> See A.G.von Hamel, *Compert Con Culainn and Other Stories* (1933) 5,& 30. where he appears as the Otherworld father of the quintessential Hero, *Cú Chullain*, and his *banfeis ríghí* is mentioned as taking place in "*Taillne*" in *Tochmarc Emire* (idem p.4): cf MM p.6. He brings healing and support to *Cú Chullain* at a crisis in his struggle. in *Táin Bó Cúlaighe*, Rescension 1. ed. C.O'Rahilly, (Dublin 1976) lines:II 2138-2204.

## Lugh Samildánach in *Cath Maige Tuired*. The Second Battle of Moytura.

This profound and complex tale, as we have it in Harleian 5280 is, by common consent, the work of an eleventh or twelfth century redactor of Early Irish, mainly ninth century, material. It is also generally acknowledged that the Battle is at one level a myth of a theomachy, a “war of the gods”, such as is characteristic within other “Indo-European” mythologies. Not surprisingly *Cath Maige Tuired* has attracted considerable scholarly attention of recent years. Notable amongst these scholars are Georges Dumézil, and others, including Celticists who have found some of the categories provided by Dumézil as a result of his comparative studies in the myths and social structures of Indo-European peoples with common linguistic roots, a useful tool for the understanding of their material. The most generally acceptable of these categories are found in Dumézil's model of a traditional “tri-partite” structure of social functions common among the Indo-European peoples he has studied. A detailed and valuable structural study of the Tale, in three parts has been made by E.A.Gray,<sup>21</sup> who is also responsible for the Irish Text Society 1982 edition and translation, which I have used throughout this chapter.<sup>22</sup> An article by Tomas Ó Cathasaigh entitled “*Cath Maige Tuired* as Exemplary Myth,”<sup>23</sup> is especially illuminating.

The story in Harley 5280 is headed: **This tale is the Battle of Mag Tuired and the Birth of Bres son of Elatha and his Reign.** Its introductory fourteen verses are clearly intended by the redactor to fit the whole into the framework of the learned compilers of the “synthetic” History preserved in the *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* (LGE). It tells of the arrival of the People of the Goddess, the *Túatha Dé Danaan*, in Ireland from the northern islands of the world where they had become proficient in occult lore and magical or druidic skills, in secret knowledge (*éolais*) and diabolic arts, bringing

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<sup>21</sup> E.A.Gray, “*Cath Maige Tuired*: Myth and Structure” (1) *Éigse* XVIII, ( 1981,) pp.183-209. (2) *Éigse* XIX,(1982-83 pp.1-34& 230-62. (3) *Éigse* XX, pp. 230-262.

<sup>22</sup> E.A.Gray ed. & trans.*Cath Maige Tuired: The Second Battle of Mag Tuired*. ITS LII (Kildare 1982).

<sup>23</sup> T. Ó Cathasaigh “*Cath Maige Tuired* as Exemplary Myth”. in *Folia Gadelica: Essays presented to R.A.Breatnach* edd. P.de Brun et al. (Cork 1983) pp. 1-19.

with them the four treasures: the Stone of Fál, the spear of Lugh, the sword of Núadu and the Dagda's Cauldron.<sup>24</sup> Before defeating the holders of the land, the *Firbolg*, in battle, (also called the battle of Mag Tuired) the *Túatha Dé* (para.8) made an alliance with the *Fomoiré*, and Balor the grandson of Nét gave his **daughter to Cian the son of Dian Cécht. And she bore the glorious child, Lugh.** This paragraph has no known parallels.<sup>25</sup> However para.9 describing the *Túatha Dé* landing their great fleet in Ireland and at once burning their boats, has several references in LGE ; and in the present text there is a hint of learned disagreement:

**The smoke and the mist which came from the ships filled the land and the air which was near them. For that reason it has been thought that they arrived in clouds of mist.**

There are several references in the literature to a magic or “druidical” mist connected with the *Túatha Dé Danaan* including one heralding Lugh's epiphany to Conn in *Baile in Scáil*. The next four paragraphs summarise the story of a battle against the *Firbolg*<sup>26</sup>.

Paragraph 14 neatly links this introduction with the main tale, referring as it does to aspects of its main themes, both mythological and didactic, to do with authoritative traditions with regard to the sacral Kingship, and their proper application: the ritual ineligibility of Núadu the King of the *Túatha Dé Danaan*, after his loss of an arm, in the battle with the *Firbolg*, the responsibility of the “Men of Ireland” to choose their king wisely, that is on the basis of patrilineal kinship, and the danger of listening to women's advice. I quote from Gray's translation:

**There was a contention regarding the sovereignty of the men of Ireland between the Túatha Dé and their wives, since Núadu was not eligible for kingship after his hand was cut off. They said that it would be**

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<sup>24</sup> These verses (4-6) strike me as a good example of what might be called mythological shorthand, encapsulating four basic essentials of the ‘tradition’, perhaps in order of importance, not diachronic. See later references in this paper to the interrelationship of Fál and Lugh Longarm, of the latter's spear with the short Celtic sword of his predecessor, and of the on-going necessity of the Cauldron of Plenty with Lugh's role in the feast of First Fruits at Lughnasa

<sup>25</sup> Gerald Murphy “Notes on Cath Maige Tuired”, *Éigse* vol.VII (1953-55), p.195 note.

<sup>26</sup> The article just cited by Murphy in *Éigse* VII proves to the satisfaction of scholars that it was not until the 11th century that it became part of learned teaching that there had been two battles of Moytura, the first being fought between the *Túatha Dé Danaan* and the *Firbolg*, people of the previous “invasion” of Ireland.

**appropriate for them to give the kingship to Bres the son of Elatha, to their adopted son, and that giving him the kingship would knit the Fomorians' alliance with them since his father Elatha mac Delbáith was king of the Fomoiré.**

We are subsequently told that the women won the argument with disastrous consequences.

The Tale proper, as we have been promised, is concerned first with **The birth of Bres son of Eletha and his reign**. Gray tells us that, in contrast to the preceding section: “an examination of both the language of the text and the plot suggests that an early account of the conception of Bres has been joined to a fairly early description of his reign, including his personal failure as a sovereign and his flight to his Fomorian kinsmen followed by the battle at Mag Tuired.” As the Tale proceeds we become aware that the bulk of it is firmly set in “that other time”, the primordial time of the gods. The scholarly studies referred to above have provided enough evidence to indicate that this device, if it is indeed a device, has enabled the sage responsible, probably in the early ninth century, to organise traditional lore around a basic Indo-European Myth of a primordial cosmic theomachy resulting both in the victory of the powers of Order over Chaos, and in the bringing into unity and harmony of the three orders or functions making up the structure of divine society on which human society is modelled. Its sacred character is assured and we have already seen indications that this carefully preserved Tale has woven into it didactic and exemplary themes which would add to its undoubted popularity and influence.

The tale of the seduction of Ériu the woman of the Túatha Dé Danaan by the shining and beautiful stranger arriving on a calm sea in a silver boat, and who reveals himself to be Elatha mac Dalbáith, king of the *Fomoiré*, is according to Gray, not found elsewhere, though there are “stylistic correspondences” in the Burning of Da Derga's Hostel in the dialogue between the lovers (Eochaid and Étain)<sup>27</sup>. There is no trace of the LGE tradition of the Fomoiré as sinister one-eyed one-legged, one-armed

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<sup>27</sup>ITS LII. p. 79.

monsters here.<sup>28</sup> Contextual messages of this preliminary tale within 2MT seem to be (a) the contrast between the formal intertribal alliance of Lugh's parents and the untrusted unrecognised union described here, which in its consequences, emphasises the importance of the patrilineal link as basis of an ordered social structure and (b) the heroic characteristics which Lugh and Bres share emphasising their contrasting behaviour as prototype otherworld kings.

In his article on 2MT already cited,<sup>29</sup> Ó Cathasaigh isolates two accounts, which are collated in the text, of the reign of Bres as exemplary of failure in kingship. In one, the election of Bres, intended to cement the alliance with the *Fomoir* (begun in terms of a formal marriage between the parents of Lugh) leads to the oppression of the *Túatha Dé Danaan* whereby they had to pay tribute to the *Fomoir* and the “warriors of Ireland” reduced to humiliating service: Ogma beneath a bundle of firewood and the Dagda as a rampart builder..(par.25) thus disrupting the true order of society. As Bres himself admits to his father when the latter asks: **What force brought you out of the land you ruled?** he replies, **Nothing but my own arrogance and injustice (*anfír*)**. The Dagda and his son the Mac Óg use an example of the personal oppression endured by the Dagda himself to trick Bres into making a false judgement in public, thus revealing his unfitness for the sovereignty. The other account of the inadequacies of Bres isolated by Ó Cathasaigh, shows Bres as failing to perform the king's role of generous feast giving and hospitality, which should also include the entertainments and contests of excellence provided by the *aes dána*, the people of the arts. Para.36 reads:

**There was great murmuring against him (Bres) among his maternal kinsmen the Túatha Dé, for their knives were not greased by him. However frequently they might come, their breaths did not smell of ale; and they did not see their poets nor their bards nor their satirists nor their harpists nor their pipers nor their horn blowers nor their jugglers nor their fools entertaining them in the household. They did not go to**

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<sup>28</sup> Bres' birth, phenomenal early growth, his archetypal beauty, prophesied by his father who is a Fomorian prince, his skill as a swordsman etc. are all in accordance with the 'hero' and hero-king; see paras16-23 and 42,43.of ITS.LII. Para.41 interestingly and anomalously equates the *Fomoir* with the “warriors of the *sid*” !

<sup>29</sup>1983. p.2f

**contests of those pre-eminent in the arts, nor did they see their warriors proving their skill at arms before the king...**

This situation is the background for a mini-myth as it were, providing the authority for the place of Satire in the structure of early Irish Society.

Coipre son of Étaín, the poet of the *Túatha Dé Danaan* came to the house of Bres seeking hospitality. It was so mean and inadequate that the poet was moved to utter a satire upon it and upon king Bres. At its end he said, **Bres' prosperity no longer exists....There was only blight on him from that hour; and that is the first satire that was made in Ireland**<sup>30</sup>. The *Túatha Dé Danaan* withdraw **all payment and tribute**. (par.39,40.) Ó Cathasaigh quotes Dumézil, who interprets the story at this point in terms of the social contract. The bond between the king and his people had been broken:- “le circuit vital - impots montant du peuple au roi; générosités alimentaires, descendant du roi au peuple - ne se ferme pas.” But it requires the *fili* to intervene. Only the poet by the power of his own truth-telling word can make effective the judgement due for Bres' second failure as a king. The *Túatha Dé Danaan* no longer accept him as king; he is required to abdicate.

Although Bres manages to negotiate a temporary reprieve with the *Túatha Dé Danaan*, he has indeed lost the sovereignty of Ireland and in true Celtic fashion he has lost it three times over:- by pronouncing in public a false judgement, a sin against *fir flaith* - the King's Truth: by being justly satirised by a poet, as a result of which Bres' prosperity no longer exists; by his persistent breaking of the reciprocal relationship between king and people, leading to their refusal of client support rent and tribute. He goes therefore to his father to ask for help. And although Bres' father disapproves of his decision to take the “land” back by force: **You ought not to gain it by injustice if you do not gain it by justice**, he still helps his son to collect support from his kin, the *Fomoiré*. They agree to impose their rule and tribute by force and we are told that: **No host ever came to Ireland more terrifying than that host of the Fomoiré.**

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<sup>30</sup> cf D.A..Binchy, *Críth Gablach* ed. *Mediaeval and Modern Series vol 11* (Dublin 1941) p.86 re. legal effect of just satire.

But, as we shall see, the threefold judgement on Bres' failed kingship is finally confirmed by the Truth of Battle: the total defeat of himself and his paternal kin.

Meanwhile Núadu's arm has been healed, first by Dían Cécht who makes him a silver one **which had the movement of any other hand**, and then by his son Míach using spells and 'manipulation' and herbs, a method of cure which the former rejects, killing his son. Gray discusses briefly the possibility that this is a struggle between "second function and third function" healing.<sup>31</sup> The remarkable paragraph 35 which follows brings us into touch with a myth not only of the origin of crop growing which would include the cultivation of healing herbs, but also of life-giving knowledge sacred to hunter gatherer peoples. There are also clear echoes of a necessary death and dismemberment of a divine being common to many creation myths:

**....Míach was buried by Dían Cécht and 365 herbs grew through his grave, corresponding to the number of his joints and sinews. Then Airmed spread her cloak and uprooted those herbs according to their properties. Dían Cécht came to her and mixed the herbs, so that noone knows their proper healing qualities unless the Holy Spirit taught them afterwards. And Dían Cécht said: "Though Míach no longer lives, Airmed shall remain".**

The implication seems to be that while comprehensive knowledge of the healing qualities of herbs has been lost, because of the exercise of power by the "warrior" god of healing punishing unfilial competition from his son Míach<sup>32</sup>, this knowledge is to some extent open to women, for the mythological "she-leech" Airmed still remains; and knowledge which is moreover, as the gloss **unless the Holy Spirit taught them afterwards** suggests, desirable divine knowledge. This whole incident will be seen to be relevant to the consideration of the role of Lugh in 2MT in the context of the latter's winning from Bres the knowledge of, and powers over, agriculture, as one result of his leading the *Túatha Dé Danaan* to victory in the Battle.

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<sup>31</sup> "Cath Maige Tuired: myth and structure", *Éigse XIX* 1982pp.11f

<sup>32</sup> See Gray loc.cit.



## The Arrival of Lugh at Tara's Gate.

After Bres, **Núadu was once more in the kingship over the Túatha Dé; and at that time he held a great feast (*mórfled*) for the Túatha Dé in Tara**, clearly signifying a move towards the return to true kingship. There is no suggestion that this *fled* is also the *Feis Temrach* or ritual marriage feast of Tara establishing a king of Tara in his sacral function in union with the Land. One might assume that the acute social and cosmic breakdown brought on by Bres' travesty of kingship would rule that out. And meanwhile the hosting for Bres of the *Fomoiré* and their allies, "more terrifying and dreadful" than any that ever came to Ireland, goes on. Into this situation comes Lugh *Samildánach* a handsome unknown warrior with a king's diadem on his head, introduced by his entourage as grandson of both Dían Cécht, and, through his mother, of the *Fomoiré* Champion Balor; and as foster son of Tailtiu, the daughter of Magmór the king of Spain and Eochaid Garb mac Dúach of the *Túatha Dé Danaan*. The dialogue between Lugh and the Doorkeeper of Tara is often quoted. We learn from it that for this great Tara Feast no one who does not practise an "Art" can enter Tara. Lugh claims in succession to be : a builder, a smith, a champion, a harper, a warrior, a poet and an historian, a sorcerer, a physician, a cupbearer, a good brazier. And the doorkeeper answers each claim: We do not need you, mentioning by name the representatives of each art. Lugh then says: **Ask the king whether he has one man who possesses all these arts: if he has I will not enter Tara.** The doorkeeper does so, saying: All the arts which help your people, he practises them all. Lugh calls for the *fidchell*<sup>33</sup> boards and proves his superiority there too by winning all the stakes. As Ó Cathasaigh has shown,<sup>34</sup> Lugh, by establishing his right to enter Tara on the grounds of his omnicompetence has made "a true judgement, verbally expressed," the significance of which Núadu recognises in what follows. On entering Tara's hall Lugh sits down in the Sage's seat because he was a sage in every art, thus claiming pre-eminence in the first function of Dumézil's tripartite Indo-European system,- that of sacred power and knowledge. When Ogma the Champion (par.72)

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<sup>33</sup> See Éoin MacWhite, "Early Irish Board Games", *Éigse* V-VI (1944-52) pp.24-35.

<sup>34</sup> 1983 p.7

representing the second function,- physical and martial force, challenges him by throwing the huge flagstone (*márlicc*) through the side of the hall so that it lay outside the sacred precincts, Lugh not only emulates this brute force by tossing the flagstone back to its central place, but also throws the piece of the wall **it had carried away back into the side of the royal hall so that it was whole again**, healing and restoring the integrity of Tara itself, and exhibiting not only the physical strength of the second function, but also the ability to control its manifestations and repair the destruction it can cause. As a further test of his mastery of the essential arts, Lugh takes the harp and plays the three sacred strains (the sleep music, the sorrowful and the joyful strains) with total effect. And Núadu, when he had seen the warrior's many powers, considered whether he could release them from the bondage they suffered at the hands of the *Fomoiré*. So they held a council and the decision which Núadu reached was to exchange seats with the warrior. So *Samildánach* went to the king's seat, and the king arose before him until thirteen days had passed<sup>35</sup>.

Lugh proceeds to make his preparations over a period of years for the struggle with the *Fomoiré*, which mainly take the form of detailed consultations with and encouragement of the Men of Art of the *Tíatha Dé* so that each could bring their individual specialist contributions towards a corporate victorious outcome: (paras 73-83, 96-120). His first action is to consult with the Dagda and Ogma, (the Champion Warrior) who are brothers.

Something must be said at this point about the Dagda who was not part of the list of the *áes dána* within Tara; indeed he and his 'mate' the Morrígan could be said to precede, or possibly transcend such specialisms. In his part in 2MT alone the Dagda appears as a considerable divinity. in the context of a mainly pastoral (and warrior) community. His is the cauldron of inexhaustible hospitality and the giant

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<sup>35</sup> There is a striking parallel here within that seminal work, Muirchu's Latin Life of Patrick. In L.Beiler, *The Patrician Texts of the Book of Armagh*, (Dublin 1979,) 1 17(16) Muirchu writes: **And holy Patrick was summoned to the presence of the king..and the druids said to their people : "Let us not arise when he comes, for whosoever arises at his coming will believe afterwards and reverence him"** The possible multiple significance of the parallels in this and the rest of this passage with 2MT will be discussed fully in Chap.Two.The meaning of the thirteen days does not appear to be known; it is presumably connected with the gap between the solar and the lunar calendar.

wooden club. When the sorcerer, the cupbearer and the druid promise Lugh that they will use each their specialist power over the twelve chief mountains, over the twelve chief loughs and the power to manipulate both fire and the bodies and psyches of men and horses, to harass the enemy, the Dagda declares: **The power which you boast, I will wield it all myself.** You are the Dagda ('the Good God') said everyone; and Dagda stuck to him from then on.<sup>36</sup> When Lugh sent the Dagda to spy on the *Fomoirie* and delay them until the men of Ireland came to the battle his eventual success in his mission is connected with his enormous appetite symbolic of his role as owner of the cauldron of inexhaustible hospitality, and with his great sexual potency (paras 89-93) His control over cattle figures in paras 163-165. His mating with the Morrigan, the giant woman straddling the river "the Unshin of Connacht" (84f) won her and all her mysterious powers to the aid of the *Túatha Dé Danaan*. He is the father of the great Bríg, or Brigit the "most excellent goddess", no doubt mainly in terms of her nourishing role as a patroness of lactating ewes and cattle, who is the wife of Bres, and of Mac ic Óg, both characters in 2MT. The name *Ollathair* or All-Father (not used in 2MT) seems appropriate in such a cultural context. In this tale the Dagda seems to accept Lugh's leadership, without in any way appearing less formidable. It would be hard indeed to accommodate him within the commentators' tripartate "structure"!

A third name for the Dagda, also not used in 2MT is *Ríad Rofhesa* meaning "Lord of Great Knowledge". In an illuminating passage in her *Gods and Heroes of the Celts* Marie-Louise Sjoestedt<sup>37</sup> contrasts this name for the Dagda, which she suggests implies "knowledge, one and undifferentiated" with Lugh's name *Samildánach*:- "expert in the various specialities into which the unity of primitive culture is separated with the advance of technical ingenuity." and she adds, "Lugh and the Dagda are opposed not as having different functions (both are masters of knowledge) but inasmuch as they represent different and certainly successive conceptions of that

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<sup>36</sup> P.MacCana *Celtic Mythology*, (London 1970) p.66

<sup>37</sup> (London 1949) Trans. M.Dillon.p.45

knowledge from which man expects the mastery of the world, and which he regards as the first attribute of his gods and the source of their power”.

To return to Lugh’s preparations: Goibniu the Smith and Dían Cécht, the physician are summoned to join Ogma and the Dagda in conference with Lugh. The three former divine “men of art” are of course the most essential for warfare. This conference lasts for a year. Three further reviews by Lugh of the power and skills wielded by those quintessentially sacred (*nemed*) leaders, the “gods of the *Túatha Dé*”,- including the Morrígan and two female witches - are described, (possibly from various sources), the last of which, on the eve of the Battle, being the most comprehensive. Lugh further questions Goibniu “his smith” who first pledges that:

**Even if the men of Ireland continue the battle for seven years, for every spear that separates from its shaft or sword that will break in battle, I will provide a new weapon in its place, no spear point which my hand forges will make a missing cast...Dolb, the Fomorian smith cannot do that. I am now concerned with my preparation for the battle of Mag Tuired. (para.97)**

When each had promised his or her contribution Lugh, we are told,

**addressed each of them in turn concerning their arts, strengthening them in such a way that every man had the courage of a king or a great lord. (para.120)**

### **The Battle itself and its Consequences.**

Paragraphs 122 and 123 give a striking description of some of the fruits of this careful orchestration of all the “arts” professed and practised with consummate and disciplined skill by members of the *Túatha Dé Danaan*. We are told that during the preliminary combats the *Fomoiré* were amazed that mortally wounded opponents would appear next day healed and invigorated and with their blunted weapons repaired.

**This was because Goibniu the smith was in the smithy making swords and spears and javelins...with three strokes...Luchta the carpenter would make the spearshafts in three chippings, and the third chipping was a finish that would set them in the socket of the spear...Then Crédne the brazier would make the rivets in three strokes, and he would throw**

**the sockets of the spears at them, and it was not necessary to drill holes for them; and they stayed together this way<sup>38</sup>.**

Similarly four physicians, Dían Cécht and his three children, (including both Airmed and Míach ) restore the *Túatha Dé Danaan* battle casualties by a combination of immersion in a well and their incantations around it<sup>39</sup>; and yet when the *Fomoiré* discover the well they can frustrate the healer's art by filling the well with stones. There is no recognised dividing line between what we would call the exercise of natural skill and the 'magical'; they are assumed to interact, as equally parts of empirical reality.

When the *Túatha Dé* are ready for full battle to commence at the time planned by Lugh, at *Samhain*, the first of the four seasonal feasts, - the boundary time, when changes can more easily be made to happen, - (preserved for us as "Hallowe'en"), the *Túatha Dé* had called Lugh's nine foster fathers to keep him from the Battle itself. **They feared an early death for the warrior because of the great number of his arts.** In para. 129 we are told that after the battle ensued, Lugh escaped from the guard set over him, and joined the battle as a chariot fighter, and it was **he that was in the front of the battalion of the *Túatha Dé*.** It begins to become clear that Lugh's actual presence is necessary for their deliverance from bondage through the defeat of the *Fomoiré*.

Lugh's contribution to the course of the battle itself is threefold. First, as we are told in Para 95. he encourages the warriors and their followers to fight fiercely in defence of their land risking an honourable death. (Para.127 contains a graphic description of the "strong indestructible battalions" ranged against them.) Lugh then chanted the spell which follows, going round the men of Ireland on one foot and with one eye closed... The spell is not translated but as we have seen, it would certainly

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<sup>38</sup> In par.83 it is stated that Lug and the Dagda and Ogma went to the "three gods of Danu" for their weapons. See O'Rahilly's well-supported theory that *na tri dee Dána* ( the three gods of craftsmanship) began at an early date to be corrupted to (na) *tri deo Danonn*. T.F.O'Rahilly *Early Irish History and Mythology* (1946) pp.308ff

<sup>39</sup> In Para.126 a reference is made to Loch Luibne as a name for the well **because Dían Cécht put into it every herb that grew in Ireland**, thus including Airmed's skills with those of the rest of the family. See also *Dindshenchas* traditions under *Lusmag*: Gray ITS 1983 p105.

have reminded the Tale's 'audience' of Lugh's double heredity, and could give another dimension to the essentially unifying role Lugh plays in this complex and profound mythography. His third contribution certainly has strong literary, mythical, legendary and perhaps ritual reference:- his contest with his maternal grandfather, Balor, the giant Champion of the *Fomoiré*. Balor has already killed Núadu Silverhand the reigning king of the *Túatha Dé*, which, according to accepted custom would mean the defeat of his people. Lugh confronts his maternal grandfather who calls for his evil eye to be opened on the enemy so that the warriors of the *Túatha Dé* who looked on it would become helpless. But Lugh casts a sling stone<sup>40</sup> at the eye which drives it through Balor's head so that there is the treble effect on the enemy (135): the paralysing effect of the evil eye; the death of twenty seven of the Fomorian warriors under his giant's body; and the damaging effect on the Fomorian king, Indech mac Dé Domnann, whose protecting champion Balor is, when Balor's head **struck his breast, so that a gush of blood spouted over his lips**. Indech has already been weakened, or perhaps slain in principle, by the Morrigan, in accordance with her promise to the Dagda - that she would **take from him the blood of his heart and the kidneys of his valour**<sup>41</sup>. (85) The final rout when the *Fomoiré* were driven into the sea was precipitated (137) apparently by the appearance of the Morrigan chanting her encouragement to the TDD.

There follow then what Gray calls "various negotiations between victors and vanquished" some of them quite obscure. In all of them Lugh acts as king, though in this story there has been no election by the *Túatha Dé*. First Lugh is in negotiation with Lóch Lethglas (half-green) the Poet of the king of the *Fomoiré*, with whom he has already been in dialogue, apparently untranslatable. The poet is shown to have

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<sup>40</sup> Lugh is described as a warrior; and has the soubriquet "Longarm"; both the sling-stone and the spear are good examples of intermediate technology, giving some advantage over close combat weapons such as the Dagda's wooden club and even the short Celtic sword. McCone notes the use of the sling-stone against the giant Balor, together with Lugh's other characteristics, - his youthful beauty etc - as indicating a deliberate recall of the biblical David. (1991, p159). Mac Cana 1970. p.29, compares *Lámfada* with the similar epithet of the Indian god Savitar, of the wide hand, who "stretches out his hand to control sun, moon and stars and to regulate the succession of day and night".

<sup>41</sup> This indirect result from Lugh's slingstone may represent Indech's "second death", the third coming in single combat with Ogma, the *Túatha Dé Danaan* champion.(138)

considerable power: mostly the characteristic power of the *fili*, that of the Creative Word. In return for his life he promises to remove the need to guard against the Fomoiré from Ireland forever and that **whatever judgement your tongue will deliver in any difficult case, it will resolve the matter until the end of life.** He chants a “decree of fastening” (again not translated ), and presumably as a third “boon” in return for his life, bestows “names” on Lugh’s chariots, charioteers, swords and horses and answers his question about the number of slain. All this, though obscure to us, would presumably be understood by the learned, and very likely by some at least of the audience at ‘royal’ occasions.

The account of Bres' bargaining for his life when they find an opportunity to kill him is however quite straight forward..(149-161). Lugh is apparently functioning as a king according to law and custom.. To Bres' first offer: **The cows of Ireland will always be in milk**, Lugh replies: **I will tell that to our wise men.** He consults one Máeltne Mórbrethach “juriconsult”<sup>42</sup>:

**Shall Bres be spared for giving constant milk to the cows of Ireland?  
(who replies:) He shall not be spared. He has no power over their age or  
their calving, even if he controls their milk as long as they are alive..**

Bres' second offer: **Tell your lawyer that they will reap a harvest every quarter in return for sparing me**, was also taken to Máeltne by Lugh who gives the moving reply:

**This has suited us. Spring for plowing and sowing, and the beginnings of  
summer for maturing the strength of the grain, and the beginnings of  
autumn for the full ripeness of the grain, and for reaping it. Winter for  
consuming it. That does not save you said Lug to Bres.**

Lugh having consulted the judge/lawyer/wise man and acted on his advice proceeds to proclaim his judgement to Bres : that in return for his life Bres shall hand over the secrets of good agriculture which the latter does in a charm-like formula involving the appropriateness and power of the choice of Day: **Say to them, on**

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<sup>42</sup> See Gray ITS LII p. 128.

**Tuesday their ploughing ; on Tuesday their sowing seed in their field; on Tuesday their reaping.**<sup>43</sup>

There are some further clues here to Lugh's status among the contemporary learned / theological establishment: the "monastically oriented men of letters" of Kim McCone or the "mythographers of Christian Ireland" of R.Mark Scowcroft<sup>44</sup>. When negotiating with the King of the *Fomoiré's* Poet and representative which results in a **decree of fastenings** Lugh is performing the role proper to every *rí-túaithe* in the relationship of the *túath* with its neighbours. Bres on the other hand is a demoted king of the *Túatha dé Danaan*. Lugh is therefore acting as the reigning king in consulting the lawyer, Máeltne Mórbrethach for a proper judgement of Bres, a suppliant for his life,-or for what might be called a suitable *éiric*. However it is Lugh, as king, who actually gives the judgement.<sup>45</sup>

Bres' association with milk is emphasised in the Metrical *Dindshenchas* tale of *Carn Húí Néit*<sup>46</sup> ( the site of course of his "grave".) where he is described as **gifted with excellencies, master of love-spells and the brave ancestor of our gatherings. and the flower of the Túatha Dé.** Through the trickery of Lugh and because of the workings of Bres' *Geis*<sup>47</sup> instead of drinking his usual three hundred buckets of milk from a herd of dun-coloured kine he swallows similar quantities of bog water and dies. One remembers that he was the husband of Brig, whose power over the supply of milk both as goddess and saint are well-known, and who is daughter of the Dagda. Whether or not his power to control the supply of milk from living cows, but inability

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<sup>43</sup> Gray cites M.M.Banks "Na Tri Mairt, the Three Marts and the Man with the Wither" in *Etudes Celtiques* III (1938) showing that "this advice for the best days for beginning agricultural work survives in Scottish Gaelic tradition". This belief in 'Good and Bad Days' was and is strongly held in traditional Akan land. See especially article by P.F.W Bartle: "Forty Days: the Akan Calendar" *Africa XLVIII* (1978 ) pp.81-84.

<sup>44</sup> K.McCone op.cit.passim and R.M. Scowcroft "Leabhar Gabhála, part II: the growth of the tradition," *Ériu XXXVIII*, (1988) p.34.

<sup>45</sup> See discussion in Chap Three and Kelly 1988, pp. 23f

<sup>46</sup> E.Gwynn ed.and trans.*The Metrical Dindshenchas*, Part III. (Royal Irish Academy Tod Lecture Series, vol.X, Dublin 1913) pp.216-223

<sup>47</sup> In this case a personal taboo ; there are several *geissi* associated with the sacral king "by virtue of his office" ( MacCana1970.p.119 ) As we shall see, this is characteristic of Akan sacral rulers also. Interestingly I have not come across any *geissi* associated with Lugh.



to control their life-span or their calving, is in contrast with the powers of the Dagda, or an implicit reference to the Christian God the Creator is not clear. (Bres can also, it would seem, claim to control the harvest of grain) Two things are clear however:- Bres' connection with what Dumézil called the third function, and the importance to the dramatic portrayal of Lugh in 2MT of both Lugh's triumph over Bres and of the fruits of that triumph.

Thus in defeat, Bres, who is clearly depicted as belonging to the transpersonal area of fertility, abundance, and prosperity, yet negating this role in terms of his failure in royal generosity essential to the reciprocal social contract, has to yield to Lugh,- who is pre-eminently in control of the powers of both the other functions of sacred wisdom and the arts, and of physical and martial force,- the secrets of agriculture and the powers of the third function. Here we are in touch with the irrefutable connection of Lugh's cult with Lughnasa, the Festival of the first fruits of the harvest at the beginning of August. The picture of Lugh as the totally effective, paradigmatic sacral king, the 'king-pin', as it were, of the social structure, is now complete.<sup>48</sup>

The text of the saga ends with an unfinished *roscaid*<sup>49</sup> delivered by the Morrígan. First she proclaims the battle and the great victory to the royal heights of Ireland and to its *sid*-hosts, to its chief waters and to its river-mouths, and describes the peace and harmony between heaven and a fruitful earth which will result from the victory and Lugh's kingship in words which have recognisable Christian feeling. But then, as befits the 'Scald Crow', she prophesies a future return to Chaos, describing it in terms which imply (in the context of Early Christian Ireland) total moral, social, ecological and cosmic breakdown. This second poem is introduced as a prophecy of 'the end of the world', but its imagery is not recognisably biblical, and, as has been

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<sup>48</sup> The possibility that in the passage in 2MT in which Lugh is seated in the presumably, hitherto empty, seat of the "sage of all the arts", while the king of the *Túatha Dé* rises before him for a clearly symbolic 13 days contains hints that Lugh is being given a more comprehensive status than that of "king-god" will be discussed in the context of Patrick's role in the parallel scene in Muirchú's Life.

<sup>49</sup> For an account of the current discussion of this literary genre see McCone op.cit.42ff. At one point in this linguistic tour de force, he kindly quotes Breatnach: "Old Irish texts appear in three forms: prose, rhyming syllabic verse and *rosca*. The simplest definition of *rosca* is that it is neither of the other two."

argued in an impressive recent article by John Carey<sup>50</sup>, the language “is not particularly old” and could be read as expressing the ninth century poet's judgement on the erosion of traditional values in his time. We will be returning to this theme when exploring the significance of the Lugh, to whom we have been introduced in 2MT, from the point of view of his ‘encounter with Christianity’.

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<sup>50</sup> “Myth and Mythography in *Cath Maige Tuired*”. *Studia Celtica*, XXIV-XXV (Cardiff 1989/90) pp.52-69, at p.61.

## **PART THREE: INTRODUCING THE AKAN**

In this section we are meeting the Akan people of Ghana for the first time. What follows is an attempt to answer the question “Who are the Akan?” First I shall attempt a brief historical sketch setting the scene as it were for the arrival of the 19th century Christian missionaries. This, though necessary, will not of course provide the answer to more important questions such as “Who are the Akan in their self-understanding in relation with their total environment?” Providing an answer to that question is surely not strictly a possible task for someone who has not shared the nurture provided for the Akan by their mother earth, their mother's milk, their mother tongue and their spiritual environment. It would perhaps be safer to choose some apparently less pretentious wording as “What are the traditional religious beliefs of the Akan?”; but here one has a semantic problem: the language of the Akan (Twi) has no word for “religion”. To try to separate out what is ‘religious’ from what is ‘cultural’ and what is ‘Christian’ from what is ‘pagan’, will be misleading and perhaps irrelevant at this stage of enquiry. However “it may be said, without fear of exaggeration. that life in the Akan world is religion and religion is life, and to understand the Akan a thorough knowledge of his religion is imperative”<sup>51</sup>.

### **Setting the historical “scene”.: Who are the Akan from the historians point of view?**

The Akan-speaking people are reckoned to comprise approximately 64% of the total population of Ghana mainly living in the southern forest areas of the country, and are also found in Côte d'Ivoire and Togo. They have had a restless and complicated past history. To quote from a leading historian, Ivor Wilks, in *History of West Africa*:<sup>52</sup> “The period of the sixteenth to the eighteenth century was one of far-

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<sup>51</sup> Kofi Asare Opoku “Aspects of Akan Worship”, in *Ghana Bulletin of Theology* 4 (2) June (Ghana 1972) pp.1-13. The writer is now Associate Professor in the Institute of African Studies in the University of Ghana.

<sup>52</sup> I. Wilks “The Mossi and Akan States 1500-1800 “ in J.F.A Ajahi and M.Crowder edd *History of West Africa* Vol.1.especially pp. 364-381

reaching economic, political and social change in the hinterland of the Guinea coast lying between the Kom and Volta rivers. It was marked in particular by the emergence and consolidation of such southern Akan forest states as those of the Denkyra, Akwamu, Fante and most powerful of all, Asante.<sup>53</sup> The wealth and power of the northern Akan peoples on the edge of the savannah in the area now forming the region of Brong-Ahafo had been established as early as the 14th century from their share in the richly lucrative trading connection with North Africa in kola nut, gold and slaves. The restless flux and movement of Akan population groups from there and within the forest and from the coastland which characterised this period coincided with, and was fuelled by the development of European trading posts on the Coast from the foundation of the Portugese Elmina fort in 1482. By 1800 there were about 45 establishments containing merchants from seven European countries.

The written sources for the historian provided through this trade have of recent years been enriched by oral material from the lore of the court historians of the chieftaincies, by archaeology, and by linguistic and ethnographic studies under the auspices of the universities. Origin stories, as we shall see form part of the lore of the official court historians of every chieftaincy, and are referred to in ancient drum language sequences and orations and prayers on ritual occasions. Some indicate early migration from the north ; others, notably the tradition of emerging from a sacred hole in the ground, suggest autochthonous origins. These will be discussed further under the heading of “kinship and kingship” in Chapter Three. There is plenty of evidence for the continual movement and resettlement of kin-groups to which Wilks refers.<sup>54</sup>

In spite of all this movement and some local differences, the Akan traditionally exhibit recognisable and distinctive, if complex, beliefs, cultural norms and socio-political structure, held together by their membership of “a number of highly extended

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<sup>53</sup> The so-called Asante Empire, or Union was the last and most powerful of these. The British spelled it “Ashanti” in colonial times, and it is spelled thus in many quotations in this text. Otherwise the modern spelling “Asante” will be used.

<sup>54</sup> A useful overview of recent archaeological discoveries combined with references to linguistic and ethnographic studies, and including such oral sources, was published in 1982. This is *Rediscovering Ghana's Past* by James Anaquandah of the Department of Archaeology in the University of Ghana. (Accra 1982)

exogamous matrilineal or *abusua*,” which Wilks believes to have become widely dispersed at an early date, and certainly long before 1600.... “A high degree of ideological conformity enforced by clan elders,” he adds, “is designed to achieve subscription to a common tradition throughout the clan, and so obscures the fact that parts of the same *abusua* are frequently of quite different origins. The matrilineal system has, in other words been used as a device for integrating diverse elements into southern Akan society.”<sup>55</sup> By the time missionaries began to arrive in the interior, not only had the Asante sphere of power and influence centred on Kumasi been long established (being finally destroyed when the British annexed it to the Gold Coast Colony in 1900), but also the typical sophisticated socio-political structures of the territorial districts based on a ‘military’ model, had become to some extent assimilated (together with the language) by patrilineal peoples, notably the Guan, about whose history, origins and language not much seems to be known at present.<sup>56</sup> The Danish “vague protectorate” ( for trade purposes) over the areas to which the Basel missionaries were sent ended in 1850, and passed to the British. With considerable hesitation because of the earlier British “Ashanti wars”, supported from the Dutch coastal forts, the British, after the total withdrawal of the Dutch and the take-over of their forts, finally declared the “Gold Coast” to be a separate Colony, to which the areas of the British Protectorate, including Akuapem and Akyem and other districts of long term British influence and indeed the entire area south of Asante were formally annexed in 1895. Thus from 1850 until Independence in 1957, the British were the main European influence and after 1895 the British Colonial Government was in place. Five years later, as we have seen, Asante was annexed to the Colony.

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<sup>55</sup> Wilks in HWA1.p.364.

<sup>56</sup> For an example, a summary account of the foundation of the Akuapem taken from the Brochure for the *Odwira* Festival 1991 issued by the Akuapem Traditional Council, Akropong -Akuapem discussed in Chapter Two.

**Who are the Akan in relationship with their total environment: that is as a people “whose understanding of life discloses a universe conceived as a unified cosmic system, essentially spiritual”?<sup>57</sup>**

As noted above, any attempt to answer this question in the context of this study can only be tentative. The sources on which it is based must, like the Celtic ones, be mainly written, - and written in a ‘secondary’ language. Moreover literacy, in the usual limited sense of that word, for both the Irish and the Akan, came (generally speaking) with Christianity and with the Judaic-Christian Scriptures as its ‘primer’. Some of the multiple and very varied consequences of this fact will emerge as this study proceeds. One aspect, for West Africa, which will be discussed more fully below, is that those Protestant missionaries who were dominating the exegesis of their Scriptures until well into this century were unconscious that they were filtering them through the dogmatically believed epistemology of the European Enlightenment, which was shared by the colonial power. The educated christianised ‘elites’ were not, generally speaking, equipped or motivated for the task of conscious acculturation. But as the end of the colonial dominance approached this slowly began to change. It gradually became a matter of deep concern among African scholars to understand and conceptualise their own inherited world view and basic beliefs and customs. For obvious historical reasons the results of these studies have usually had to be written in a European language. And all were written (like the Irish written sources for this thesis) by products of Christian-founded educational establishments.

The first of these studies by an Akan published as early as 1944, *The Akan Doctrine of God, A Fragment of Gold Coast Ethics and Religion* by the learned and highly respected lawyer and patriot Dr J.B. Danquah, who contributed so much to the transformation of the Gold Coast into Ghana, was openly intended to prove to the outside world that the Akan people had as profound a belief in God, One and

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<sup>57</sup> K Bediako, *Christianity in Africa The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*, (Edinburgh 1995) p.97. Originally heard in Dr Bediako’s Edinburgh University Duff Lectures 1990, on which the book is based.. He is Founder and Director of the Akrofi-Christaller Memorial Centre for Mission Studies and Applied Theology, Akropong-Akuapem, Ghana.

Supreme, as any European.<sup>58</sup> The sources he used for advancing his main thesis, in addition to his own early nurture as a native of Akyem Abuakwa, and indeed as a member of the Stool (royal) lineage of that state were the great *Dictionary of the Ashanti and Fanti language called Tshi* by the Basel missionary J.G. Christaller completed in 1881 and the latter's collection of Twi proverbs and maxims, 3500 of them, which Danquah referred to with deep gratitude as “the Testament of the Akan”. and which do indeed supply convincing evidence that Akan (in common with most Africans) have from time immemorial acknowledged a ‘Supreme Being’.

There are two other writers whose works have been used as the basis of theses and dissertations by Ghanaian students on their own traditions. These are the colonial servant R.S.Rattray who was the founder and first Director of the Anthropological Department for “Ashanti” in the twenties of this century, whose four great detailed works on the Asante,<sup>59</sup> the fruit of loving, faithful field study with the aid of a deep understanding of the language, have been acknowledged by all as having saved much oral knowledge from being lost,<sup>60</sup> and, secondly, the sociologist and statesman, Dr A.K.Busia, studying and writing between the wars, who himself makes reference to Rattray’s evidence.<sup>61</sup>

Intense interest in Ghanaian culture and traditional religion, including specific aspects of “Akan culture” at all sorts of levels and with various motivations is

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<sup>58</sup> It is the only surviving part of a three-volumed study of Gold Coast Ethics and Religion. It was a pioneering book and cannot be ignored in spite of its special pleading, complexity, frequent obscurity, “erratic etymologising” and deliberate omissions. See especially Kwesi Dickson’s “Introduction” to the Second Edition 1968 of Danquah’s *The Akan Doctrine of God*. See also C.A.Ackah, *Akan Ethics* (Accra 1988) pp.7-9.

<sup>59</sup> *Ashanti* 1923; *Religion and Art* 1927; *Proverbs* 1916; *Ashanti Law and Constitution* 1929; hereafter designated by date of publication. Apparent anomaly of both spellings of Asante here deliberate.

<sup>60</sup> See Rattray *Ashanti* (London 1923) p. 87f for his surprise that no “practical” use had been made in the Basel Mission schools of “such a store of ethnological learning” as had been amassed by Christaller, by his fellow missionaries, nor of the “great truths which will be found common to the West African and Christian religion.” He adds a note of his belief that the Scottish missionaries sent to help when the German Basel staff had been sent home in the last year of the War, had a different policy. If so there does not seem to be much evidence that its effects reached the content of school or seminary teaching in colonial times..

<sup>61</sup> K.A.Busia, *The Position of the Chief in the Modern Political system of the Ashanti* (London 1968) and “The Ashanti of the Gold Coast” in ed.D.Forde *African Worlds* (Oxford 1954).

continuing.<sup>62</sup> Scholarly study is being made of the complex imagery of word- in sacred oral tradition and song, in drum language, in dramatic dance, in artefact, custom and ritual, expressing the response of the Ancestors to reality as they experienced it, and still formative, as many believe, of all African persons consciously or unconsciously, whether they are Moslem, Christian ( whether adhering to mission founded Churches or to one of the innumerable 'independent churches') or openly and consciously 'Traditional Believers'.

It would be useful at this stage, if it were possible, to give some kind of summary description of the main ingredients of Akan "traditional religion"; there are models available in the writings of reputable secondary authorities both Akan and expatriate. To reproduce such a summary might give the misleading impression that African religions are static and unchanging. As Kwame Bediako said in his Duff lectures: "Historical studies of African primal religions have shown that these religions, far from being 'passive traditional cosmologies', have in fact, been dynamic institutions, able to adapt to new situations and human needs in society".<sup>63</sup> As we shall see this is evidently true of the Akans; as for instance, what Busia, in his article on the Asante (most of which applies generally to the Akan) calls the very "hospitable" nature of "Ashanti religion", taking over "the beliefs, the gods, and the rites of conquered (peoples) as well as those of neighbouring tribes", such as "were believed to give more power and protection against the spirits and forces of the world."<sup>64</sup> The urge felt by African Christian scholars ( most notably for West Africa, and for the Yoruba in particular, Bolaji Idowu, in his seminal book *Olodumare*<sup>65</sup> and other writings) to discern and present their people's 'primal' beliefs as a coherent whole in which the notion of a 'Supreme Being', the source of all life and power, undoubtedly present in tradition, is the dominating essential factor providing continuity with the Christian faith, is understandable and had its own validity in the context of post-

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<sup>62</sup> There is quite a widespread movement called *sankofa*, named after a bird depicted as looking backward: indicating one who picks up what is valuable in the past.

<sup>63</sup> K. Bediako 1995.p.212.

<sup>64</sup> 1951.p.191.

<sup>65</sup> *Olodumare; God in Yoruba Belief* ( London1962)



colonial theological thinking; and indeed can be said to be itself part of that providential dynamic to which Bediako refers. The latter, however, comments: "What is less satisfying is the way this vindication of a religious and spiritual continuity has been used to buttress a presumed African monotheism. A misreading of the spiritual realities of the African primal world has often resulted from this process, for example the failure to engage adequately with the dimension of multiplicity... What goes on in actual daily religious life and practice - in the company of divinities, ubiquitous spirits, ancestors - is left virtually untouched." This unease is widely shared, and has been a matter of some debate in the last two decades.

That the Akan, in common with African peoples generally, do have a fundamental sense of an ultimate Spiritual Power who is the source of all power, and the final authority is undeniable<sup>66</sup>. The two main Names of this Power among the Akan are *Onyame* and *Onyankopon*, (often used without the prefix O ) This latter name is also used as *Nana*<sup>67</sup> *Nyankopon Kwame* translated as: "Grandfather (*Nyame*) who is the only Great One, (of) Saturday." There are about a dozen further "praise names" used in prayers etc., conveying the general beneficence of God as the Giver of rain and sun and all sufficiency, all-knowing and all-seeing, who is both Creator and *Nana* (Grandfather) and the Dependable One (lit. "lean on a tree and do not fall") There are numerous sayings and proverbs illustrating the pervasiveness of the consciousness of this Supreme Being such as: **If you want to talk to *Onyame*, tell it to the wind; no one points out *Nyame* to the child; if *Nyankopon* does not kill you, you do not die.** Others express a sense of God's providential care: eg. **It is *Onyame* who pounds fufu for the one-armed person.** *Onyame* is invoked in daily greetings such as the reply *Onyame adom me ho ye-*: **By the grace of God, I am well,** and before any new undertaking, a prayer may be made to *Onyame/Onyankopon*. Rattray gives detailed evidence that during the ritual of the *Adae*, the veneration of the state royal Ancestors, normally observed twice in the

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<sup>66</sup> See John Mbiti *Concepts of God in Africa* ( London 1970,) Akan names are listed p.329.

<sup>67</sup> Possibly used here in much the same way as the word 'Father' is used by Christians in addressing God and not in the sense of 'ancestor' in Akan thought..

basic 42 day division of the traditional Akan Calendar, *Onyame/ Onyankopon* is usually (though not always<sup>68</sup>) invoked first of all before other appropriate divinities. Sometimes that place is given to a powerful spirit or 'goddess', who tends to be ignored by theologians:- known in Twi as *Asaase Yaa* (or the Earth,- "she of Thursday") and in Fante as *Asaase Efua* (whose day is Friday.); otherwise she would be called on second.

The Earth Spirit is obviously important to farmers, but, as we shall see, she was very much respected by chiefs and elders. Two other characteristics of *Asaase* should be mentioned here: she has no 'cult', no priests; "she is not an *obosom*: she does not divine". and so can be compared with *Onyame/Onyankopon*; and secondly, she has a name associated with a day of the seven day week, as does every Akan, - her day of birth - so to speak, as does also *Onyankopon* but not *Onyame*. As is well-known Rattray always refers to *Nyame/ Nyankopon* as "the sky-god"; while Busia equally consistently uses the title "Supreme Being" in preference to either name.<sup>69</sup> A good case can be made for the validity of both usages, as in the Judaic-Christian scriptures. Some further study in connection with *Asaase Yaa* will be made in Chap. Four in comparison with her Celtic parallels.

We must return now to the fact, which, as we have seen was uncomfortable to those pioneering West African writers in English, that in spite of these well used proverbs and habits of speech, the visual references to these in *Adinkra* cloth patterns, the ancient weights for measuring gold dust, dance gestures, and in prayers - both public, and in times of special stress, personal, - indicating the liveliness of this awareness of a Supreme Being who is both far 'above', and yet accessible to all, it is the *Abosom* (singular *obosom*) or "lesser deities" and the *asuman* sometimes rendered as charms<sup>70</sup>, who are cultivated, propitiated, and consulted in all matters of daily life.

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<sup>68</sup> See Mampon drum sequence (Rattray.1923,pp. 266-286 ) discussed in Chap.Four part Two.

<sup>69</sup> Danquah found the term "sky god" unacceptable.

<sup>70</sup> M.J.Field, *The Search for Security* ( London 1960) p. 18 describes them as "talismans, amulets or apparatus containing magical medicine or operative power...may be for prophylaxis and cure of disease, protection from enemies, help in hunting,etc, but may also be bad *suman* supplied by a bad medicine- man for killing enemies".

The awareness of the ancestors, the *asamanfo*, is also still a deep-seated influence and in many still a preoccupation, whether it is in the context of the matrilineal lineage, or the relationship with the father's spirit, as we shall discuss shortly. Professor Opoku in the context of a short article entitled "Aspects of Akan Worship" written 20 years ago, divides the *abosom* into two groups: the ancient tutelary deities the *tete bosom*, whose main function is to protect the villages, towns and states from harm: they belong to the whole community and are believed to be children of the Supreme Being; and those of more recent origin, having been brought in originally from outside as providing additional protection, and whose shrines are privately owned: these are the *abosom brafo* (a word often translated as "executioner") and these sometimes shade into *asuman brafo*.<sup>71</sup> The "ancient deities" vary greatly in prestige. Bishop Sarpong<sup>72</sup> subdivides them into three. The first category are those few who were spirits of such numinous natural features as great rivers and lakes and the sea (sometimes associated with great rocks or caves), some of which were adopted as "state gods". The most notable and written up of these last was the Spirit of the Tano River, whom under the name *Ta Kora*, Rattray called "the greatest of Ashanti gods on earth". There is a mythological tale showing that all rivers (or their spirits) are sons of *Onyame* with Tano as the second, while tributaries are, in turn their children. Rattray comments further "... waters in Ashanti, some in a greater, others in a lesser degree, are all looked upon as containing the power of the divine Creator, and thus as being a great life-giving force."<sup>73</sup> And he quotes a local priest :"**As a woman gives birth to a child, so may water to a god**".

Connected with this strand of the complex web of custom and belief making up what is now called Akan Traditional Religion is the *Ntoro* system of relationship, through which the Akan person traditionally received the *sunsum*, sometimes translated as "personality soul". A striking characteristic of the Akan understanding of

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<sup>71</sup>K.A.Opoku, "Aspects of Akan Worship", *The Ghana Bulletin of Theology*, (Legon 1972) p.2.

<sup>72</sup> P. Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect* (Ghana 1974) p.14. The Rt Rev.Dr Peter Sarpong is Catholic Bishop of Kumasi.

<sup>73</sup> 1923 pp.54 & 146

the human being, which has prompted a number of learned studies, is not only that the human person is “encapsulated spirit” rather than “animated body” (as in one of the two Genesis creation myths)<sup>74</sup> but is also thought of as being made up of more than the two components familiar to us, and all of them “spiritual”.

Before going any further with this attempt to answer the question - ‘Who are the Akan?’, a quotation from Tempels’ seminal book *La Philosophie Bantou* (1948) in Parrinder’s *West African Psychology* which the latter claims applies equally to much of West Africa, should be helpful. In this passage Fr Tempels urges westerners who wish to research into “what words correspond in Bantu dialects to our notions of soul, spirit, will, feeling etc...to make a tabula rasa of our own conceptions in psychological matters, and prepare ourselves for the eventuality of ending up with a very different conception of man from that which we hold in honour.”<sup>75</sup> In an attempt to follow this advice, I began my research on the Akan for this thesis by making a study of all the *Twi* words used among the Akan relating to “the human being”, in the course of which I was shown not only what Tempels promised, but also something of the profundity of the consequences of what Busia called the “hospitable” quality of the religion of the Akan. For instance, it is possible to argue that what is sometimes described as the “three souls” concept, (though the authorities consulted on this theme vary in their choice of terms for each of these spiritual components or principles), hides an accommodation between patrilineal and matrilineal experience of corporate social reality and of personal identity within it; an accommodation which, presumably, was the hidden work of innumerable nameless ‘elders’, not least the senior women of the lineages, *akyeame* (“spokesmen”), some priests and priestesses and all other guardians of the oral traditional wisdom over many years and many changes. Any attempt to make a summary account of these terms will inevitably be inadequate, so fluid and changing, are their use. What follows is based mainly on the

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<sup>74</sup> W.R.Abraham, *The Mind of Africa* (London 1962) p.51.

<sup>75</sup> G.Parrinder, *West African Psychology*, ( London 1978) p.2

account given by the Akan sociologist, the late Dr A.K Busia, of the “Ashanti” in *African Worlds* ed. Daryll Forde published 1954.<sup>76</sup>

(a) the *kra*, the breath of life, the birth gift from God, which conveys that “small bit of the Creator which is in every person’s body”, and is accompanied by the *nkrabea* the person’s general “destiny”, and which returns to God at death ; and (b) what is sometimes called the “blood soul” (*mogyia*) and identified with the *saman* often translated “ghost”. The latter belongs to the *abusua* the matrilineal clan as in the proverb *abusua bako mogya bako*, One clan one blood, and (if not disqualified) will join the *asamanfo* in the world of the *samando*, of the “living-dead”, still part of the *abusua*, and from which he or she can be re-incarnated. The third spiritual component of every Akan ( though it seems some of Rattray’s male informants doubted whether a woman can have it! ) is the *sunsum* which Busia interprets as “a man's ego, his personality, his distinctive character”; and while the child derives its blood from the mother which can only be transmitted through her daughter, its *sunsum* comes from the father. In the past (and Busia is writing in 1950) the word *ntoro* (spirit) would be used, “ of which *sunsum* is a specific instance”, for then every Akan was thought to belong to an *Ntoro* category, the members of which were thought to have similar *sunsum*, and were linked in a kind of parallel to the matrilineal *abusua* system. Just as the great *Abosom* are children of *Onyame*, so the *Ntoro* are their children, and the *Sunsum* of a man is the child of the *Ntoro* and shares in its nature. While the *Ntoro* rituals may be forgotten the “spiritual bond between father and son” is remembered in the naming of the child by the father or paternal grandfather, (taking place at the Outdooring ceremony of the eight day old child,-still almost universally observed,) and the father's responsibility for the moral behaviour of his son and also nowadays for his education.

At this point, the approach to the subject of Akan religion made by Professor K. Asare Opoku in his book *West African Traditional Religion*<sup>77</sup> is a helpful one:

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<sup>76</sup>. pp.196-200.

<sup>77</sup> K.A.Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, (Ghana 1978)

“...the wisest course on the available evidence”, he wrote, “is not to attempt to estimate the relative importance of the various strands of belief. It would appear proper to recognise two lines of belief which are held in delicate balance. There is on the one hand Akan apprehension of a living universe, a universe as seen from without of God and man and things, a universe instinct with spirit power, man himself being one of the spirits...Spirit powers are both good and evil. Among the good powers may be listed *Onyame*, and deriving from him, *abosom*. The evil powers are seen as *sasabonsam*, - mythical forest monster, and certain of the *mmoatia*, - dwarf-like spirits in the forest “and man experiences this evil as *bayi* witchcraft. Against such evils certain kind of *asuman* are a possible defence; though the *abosom*, the *asamanfo*, *Onyame* himself may be called on for help. On the other side there is the *abusua* system which enshrines sociological and political values. The *abusua* includes the *asamanfo* (the spirit ancestors) “ as well as the living. The *abusua* and the relation of the lineages to the state provide for the individual the divinely appointed pattern, sociological, economic and political for his society. Its continued life and prosperity is the summum bonum of Akan ethics.” The “high degree of ideological uniformity enforced by clan elders” throughout the widely extended and dispersed Akan (matrilineal) clans or *abusua* (noted by Wilks) was strengthened by the development of “stool” chieftaincy with its quasi military organisation, and more vitally and essentially, its ritually maintained contact with the chief’s royal Ancestors, the *Nananom* the Spirit Grandfathers, whose wisdom and power the Chief embodies by virtue of his enstoolment.

Perhaps the best brief, though inevitably superficial, overview of Akan religion I have come across is provided by S.G Williamson <sup>78</sup>: from “ the Akan's firm belief that his life is dominated by the presence of spirit activity at every level...issue beliefs and practices which have a life-affirming quality and direction: the concern of the Akan is so to manage his world of spirit-powers that vital forces will increase and not diminish...This belief in ‘spirit’ activity and its wise management has the end of providing practical benefits of a this-worldly kind, the desirable minimum (money,

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<sup>78</sup> S.G. Williamson *Akan Religion and the Christian Faith*, (Accra 1965) pp110f.

children, good crops, etc.) for the maintenance of traditional society. This basic minimum is, however, conceived as within the power of spirit-ancestors and gods to grant or withhold. It can suffer at the hands of witches and evil spirits. Finally, the society within which such beliefs are held and such ends sought is characterised by corporateness...The Akan's security and status as an individual, his right as a citizen, arose from his membership of a blood-group within the State. Furthermore, group welfare was the concern of the spirit-ancestors who upheld its authority." As has often been asked, is there any need for a Supreme Being in the daily life and concerns of a people with this world view?

### **Akan "primal religion as dynamic and able to adapt to new situations and human needs in society."**

Field in the chapter on "The Ideological Background" of her field study, comments on the enormous variety of religious expressions making up "a heterogeneous conglomerate" of "religious fragments" throughout West Africa and adds : "Yet everywhere we find that, however diverse the original concourse of deities, a process of levelling...has gone on, and is indeed still going on, whereby the final hierarchy consists of one supreme sky-god, or rain-god, who is the ultimate giver and destroyer of all power and life, and a great number of his deputies or 'sons'...It matters little how humbly or how loftily a lesser deity originated, it is ultimately adapted to this bold and simple pattern."<sup>79</sup> She comments that movement in status of named divinities "can happen in both directions, as it were". (Even a limited and superficial acquaintance with other West African divinities will suggest other examples of this overview). As for the Akan, Busia's often quoted dictum comes to mind that "the gods are treated with respect if they deliver the goods, and with contempt if they fail; it is the Supreme Being and the ancestors that are always treated with reverence and awe". The more one reflects on both these comments together the more illuminating they become, providing one can retain (having first "recovered" it)

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<sup>79</sup> op.cit p.47

what might be called a holistic approach to the phenomena of human experience. In the following paragraphs I will tentatively suggest possible examples of “named divinities” among the Akan which/who, in the past may have changed their “place” in what Field calls this “bold and simple pattern” in response to the dynamic of a communal participation in, and shared understanding and expression of, contextual religious experience.

The word *Onyame* which is, as we have seen, accepted by all the Akan-speaking Ghanaians as the immemorial name of the Supreme Being, has not an undisputed etymology. Unusually, that given by Christaller in his dictionary: as connected with a word for “sky” involving “brightness”<sup>80</sup> is not now universally accepted. One preferred by some, is from *nya* to have, and *mee* to be satisfied; Professor K.A. Dickson traces both *0-nyame* and *0-nyankopon* (regarded as an alternative name of God and used as such generally, including in Christian worship) to a word for “rain” *nyankom*<sup>81</sup>. I was told in Akropong that it was the “fetish” priest-head of a neighbouring Guan town (Abirwu) who gave the first Basel missionaries the name *Onyame* which is, of course, that used for the vernacular Bible, and that it is a Guan word. He translated it as “the one who is greater than I.”<sup>82</sup> Any and all of these meanings would be appropriate and worshipful for the Supreme Being, the ultimate providence and source of power both for hunter gatherer communities, and, together with the Earth Spirit, for communities developing farming skills sometime in the second or first millennium B.C.<sup>83</sup> We cannot presume that there had never been a cult

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<sup>80</sup> J.G.Christaller, *Dictionary of the Ashanti and Fante Language called Tshi* Second Edition 1933 p.356

<sup>81</sup> Ackah op.cit. 131; Abraham op.cit. 54; Dickson in his Introduction to Danquah op.cit. 2nd edition 1968

<sup>82</sup>This information was given us by the Revd T.A.Osei, a distinguished retired leader in the Presbyterian Church of Ghana. The Paramount Chief of Akuapem in his Lectures at the PCG seminary at Legon, gives the Guan phrase “*Anyame*” on which, according to local tradition the name *Onyame* is based, adding the tale, that a “Guan Fetish Priest informed his adherents that on a certain day in the rainy season, the ‘medium’ (*okomfo*) would be possessed by the god and the medium would perform in the open air and that during the course of the performance, there would be no rains..But just as the medium was entered into by the deity and he started to perform it rained. The Fetish Priest, after gazing at the skies for some time, uttered the phrase *Ele Akpomo, Anyame* “ indicating that “the sky god which sent down the rains”,defying the priest’s orders, was more powerful than his own god.

<sup>83</sup> Anquandah op..cit p..88



of 'Nyame with temple and priest, for Rattray records seeing one example still in action<sup>84</sup>. Its absence is now regarded as a sign of his omnipresence..<sup>85</sup> More recently the *Nyamedua* or God's tree, which in Rattray's time was to be seen in every compound has been disappearing. This was the three forked branch of the tree ( also called *nyame dua*) stuck in the ground with a basin fixed in the forks containing amongst other offerings some water and a ground and polished stone axe called *Nyame akuma*, God's axe. These axes together with stone hoes are still found in archaeological diggings of farming sites in Asante and Brong.<sup>86</sup> Rattray noticed some protruding from mounds in the sacred area of the shrine at Santemanso, near Kumasi the centre of what is now known to be the remains of a large stone age settlement.

Rattray supplies the result of some research on these "Neolithic" tools, (which were being unearthed in large numbers), in his book *Ashanti*.<sup>87</sup> The widespread popular belief in his time, was that they fall from the sky during thunderstorms and bury themselves in the earth, thus coming from *Nyame*, and contain some of his power, and were not only placed in the *Nyame dua* but were used as "appurtenances" for *abosom*<sup>88</sup> and *asuman*. This belief, Rattray adds was encouraged by the *akomfo*, and any deviance from it would have been regarded as heterodox.. These stone celts are still evident as potent emblems of the powerful cult of the *Orisha, Shango*, which flourishes, not only among the indigenous Yoruba people of Nigeria, but also in Latin America and the West Indies, who amongst his roles and functions is wielder of thunder<sup>89</sup>. However Rattray queries the autochthonous origin of this current orthodoxy on the evidence of oral traditions obtained from "untaught old Ashanti farmers" that these *Nyame dua* or *Nyame asoso* (hoes) originally "very long" were used by their ancestors for cultivating the land. It may be legitimate to speculate on

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<sup>84</sup> Rattray, 1923 pp.144f

<sup>85</sup> e.g. Opoku "Aspects of Akan Worship" in *Ghana Bulletin of Theology* (1972) p.2

<sup>86</sup> Anquandah loc.cit.

<sup>87</sup> 1923, pp322-331.

<sup>88</sup> The etymology of the word *obosom* (pl. *abosom*) combining the word for "stone/rock" and *som* worship/service is disliked as misleading, as indeed it was for westerners who saw it in the context of the hymn line "The heathen in his blindness bows down to wood and stone", and to whom the "world of spirits" was closed in the early years of Protestant missions.

<sup>89</sup> P.R.McKenzie in *Africana Marburgensia* IX, 1. 1976 (Leiden) pp. 3-29.

the basis, both on the longevity of this oral memory with its built-in authority from the Ancestors, and on the noticeably life-enhancing results of the making and the use of these tools for the exploitation of the earth's fertility, using the eminently numinous material, stone, and infer that they and the skill in making them, could well have been recognised as an epiphany and a gift from the divine Giver of Satisfaction. These tools were after all, with the permission of the Earth Spirit, used to prepare the ground for the advent of one of the characteristic manifestations of *Onyame*, - the essential rain.

The evidence of the proverbs and greetings and customary expressions touched on above indicate that the name *Onyankopon* has been interchangeable with *Onyame* in Akan country for some considerable time, and that it would be unprofitable to attempt to get behind the identification of the Twi/Akan name *Onyankopon Kwame*, (translatable as "The Only Great One Saturday") with *Onyame*, the name used by Guan speakers as applied to a recognisable Supreme Being/Sky God, or indeed to try to trace some kind of diachronic process.

However the often quoted mythological tale telling how long long ago *Onyankopon* lived very near to humans, is obviously full of significance. The tale continues: "There was a certain old woman *aberewa* who used to pound her fufu ( a meal of mashed yam or plantain), and the long pestle she used knocked against 'Nyankopon who lived just above in the sky. So one day 'Nyankopon said: 'Because of what you have been doing to me, I am taking myself away far up into the sky where humans cannot reach me.' So he went up and up into the sky, and people could not reach him."<sup>90</sup> This tale has sometimes been used by Christian apologists to illustrate that the Akan had their own understanding of a 'Fall' by which the aboriginal closeness between God and his human creatures was lost through human fault (and by a woman at that!). The sequel to the tale about the unsuccessful efforts of *aberewa*, (sometimes used as a name for *Asaase Yaa*, the Earth Spirit,) and her children to reach him will be discussed in Chapter Four, in the course of a study of the Earth Spirit, together with the possible significance of the fact that both *Asaase* and

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<sup>90</sup> Busia in *African Worlds* ed. Forde p.191

*Onyankopon* carry a name associated with one of the days of the seven day week, while *Onyame* does not.<sup>91</sup>

Studies of the Supreme Being in the context of various African peoples have shown, as one would expect, rich use of “praise names”, which illuminate theological understanding.<sup>92</sup> Of special interest in the present context, is a name attached to God in Akan usage: *Odomankoma*, whose meaning has been interpreted to me as “Giver of all graces” with the implication that God gives “to the lonely person” ( a pitiable person in African society) used in that sense occasionally in Christian prayer and praise.<sup>93</sup> Others told me that it was not in common use<sup>94</sup>. This Name is however, normally rendered in English as “Creator” or “Maker of the thing,” with the appellation *borebore* with various meanings including Excavator, Hewer, Architect, Inventor, Carver<sup>95</sup>. Christaller gives “a name of God or a mythical deity” under *borebore*.<sup>96</sup> The name *Odomankoma* appears frequently in the extracts from the “Drum Language” which were recorded on his phonograph by Rattray early in this century, together with their meaning in *Twi* (provided by the court drummer whose drumming was being recorded). However for those learned in Court Oral tradition, and consequently familiar with the language of the drums, there must be a rich area of meaning behind this name. As we shall see in the next chapter, those Akan first being provided with a literate form of their vernacular, were given it in schools founded by foreign missionaries, and for various reasons gradually lost their knowledge of drum language. (There are however, enthusiastic attempts being made to revive this knowledge, in which some leaders in the mission founded churches, are taking an active part.) Consequently the glimpses provided by Rattray who provided English renderings of his material are of great value for foreign researchers, and for most early Akan writers as well!

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<sup>91</sup> I am informed that nowadays *Kwame* is sometimes heard as a suffix to *Onyame* in ordinary speech.

<sup>92</sup> See Mbiti 1970, passim

<sup>93</sup> Information given me by a fellow student who is an experienced pastor in the Presbyterian Church of Ghana: the Revd Charles Gyang-Duah.

<sup>94</sup> Both Professor Opoku and the Revd Osei mentioned this.

<sup>95</sup> .Mbiti, loc.cit.

<sup>96</sup> DAFL. p. 40

We owe to Rattray also, a fascinating account of two highly privileged visits to the sacred grove of Santemanso (not far from present-day Kumasi), “which the Ashanti perhaps hold to be the most hallowed spot in all their territory”<sup>97</sup>. This is the site of the emergence from the ground “very long ago” of the ancestors of the “blood clan” of the Aduana, together with a leopard and a dog, the latter finding fire for them on which they experimented with cooking. Rattray was given this information, together with the addition that the “Owoko (Oyoko), the clan that was later to sit upon the stool of Coomassie (sic), also came up from the ground at Santemanso,” by the aged local Queenmother, the custodian of the sacred grove, in the presence of the chief, the herald and other “grey beards”. before she conducted him to the secret rites at the foot of a huge fig-tree. She also told him that *Odomankoma* on his journey about the earth “making things” met these people already settled there and took “one of our ancestors” as his spokesman, (*Okyeame*); “and we had his staff until the reign of Kakari, when it was lost”. *Odomankoma's* work is here, as it were, subsequent to the origins of both the world, the earth and people, and even of fire and the art of cooking.

The main example of drum language recorded by Rattray<sup>98</sup> is headed **History of Mampon in the Drum Language**, written in his own notation and transposed into Akan (*Twi*) in a column beside this. Stanza XV includes a passage which he renders:

**The Creator made something / What did he make? / He made the Herald, / He made the Drummer, / He made Kwakwuaka, the Chief Executioner,**

“They all declare that they came from one Ate pod”. The word translated “Creator” is *Odomankoma*. Professor Opoku translates what is presumably the same sequence, as follows: “*Odomankoma* created the *Esen* (court crier); then the... *Odomankoma kyerema* (the Creator’s own drummer) lastly *Kwaho Kwabrafo* (death);” and interprets this as : “the *Esen* represents order, for it is his duty... to keep order at the chief’s court. The *Okyerema* symbolises Knowledge, for he knows the history and lore

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<sup>97</sup> 1923 pp.121-132

<sup>98</sup> 1923 pp.266-286

of society and can recite it on his own drum. *Kwawu Kwabrafo* is the executioner, or Death”<sup>99</sup>. This also has the character of a cosmic myth, showing the divine origins of the sacral ‘kingship’ of the Akan as establishing order and wisdom and physical force and power to inflict death.<sup>100</sup>

The words *Odomankoma kyerema* quoted by Opoku appear frequently in Rattray’s archaic drum “set pieces”. He normally translates them as “divine drummer”, where Opoku uses “the Creator’s drummer” The appellation, creator, does of course include the meaning “maker of things”, which is unarguable in its authenticity when applied to *Odomankoma*. In contemporary Akan usage when the word *Odomankoma* is used (rarely as we have seen), it will be assumed to be referring to God as Creator in a generalised way, a usage having acquired authenticity by the same dynamic process we are discussing under the heading of this section. I would like to suggest, however, that the clue to this mysterious phrase *Odomankoma kyerema* may be found in the sacred lore surrounding the drums and their language, and therefore in the origins of the development of the sacral rulers and the blackened stools.

This is of course an area beyond my capacity to explore: I do not have even the rudiments of any West African tonal language; it must await the attentions of a Ghanaian scholar learned in several disciplines. However, I can, at least mention what seem to me to be small clues derived from the secondary sources in English to which I have access. First then there is Rattray’s precious “History of Mampon”, especially the first seven stanzas which “precede every drum piece”. Each of these stanzas begins with an address to a different power important to a drummer: first to the spirit of the *tweneboa* tree (a powerful and dangerous tree) which had been cut down to make the drum; second to *Asaase*, the Earth, then to the elephant the skin of whose ear had formed the membrane, to the spirits of the fibre and the pegs used, to the bird,

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<sup>99</sup> There is also a somewhat enigmatic proverb about *Odomankoma*: ***Odomankoma* created Death which also killed him.**

<sup>100</sup> The power to give the death sentence under the constitution of the Asante Union was reserved for the *Asantehene*; this was attributed to *Okomfo Anokye*, see ch.3 pt 4.

which is the protective “totem” of all drummers and their kin, and finally to the “witch” having power to destroy. And in each stanza there is this basic refrain;

***Odomankoma kyerema* announces that, / Had he gone elsewhere (in sleep), / he has now made himself to arise; / ...Very early, very early. / We are addressing you; / And you will understand;...**

Stanzas VIII- XXIX contain the history of the Mampon Division itself including the sacred names of the Stool Ancestors and their deeds: the whole proper to such occasions as the six-weekly *Adae* ceremonies, the performance of which is the foremost responsibility of the reigning *Omanhene*.<sup>101</sup>

In his book *The Panoply of Ghana*,<sup>102</sup> A.A.Y.Kyerematen, the custodian of the Asante treasures in Kumasi, makes the following statement: “According to the Akan, craftsmen and musicians are the linguists or spokesmen of the Supreme Deity, the Creator of the Universe, of man and all things: *odomankoma akyerema*” Here we have the plural of the word *kyerema* used in juxtaposition with *Odomankoma*, indicating that all of those who would come under the Irish category of “men of art” are included in the phrase, familiar in the refrain of the basic drumming sequence used in royal sacral occasions. If the word *kyere* which Rattray translates as “to address” above, and in a footnote, as “to relate” or “to tell” and which, (he tells us) basically means “to show” or “to instruct” is at the root of *kyerema*, we have an interesting situation where the drummer’s ancient set piece is apparently claiming that the drummer as such is supremely the spokesman or *okyeame* of the divine. There is however the further implication, in Rattray’s text, or so it seems to me, that the drummers who play this introductory sequence, are claiming to convey a greeting etc. on behalf of *Odomankoma kyerema*. Returning to the first drumming passage quoted above describing the threefold “making” by *Odomankoma* of the court herald, the *Odomankoma kyerema*, and the chief executioner, providing these three essential functions for the ordering of society, it must be significant that the first royal Ancestors, the king-pins as it were of the socio-religious structures are apparently

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<sup>101</sup> Rattray provides fascinating detail of the rituals followed by the craftsmen responsible for making the drum, as well as those required before the drummer can use it: idem 258-266

<sup>102</sup> (London 1964) p.118.

already in existence. The foregoing would seem to me to indicate that *Odomankoma borebore* originally functioned like an *obosom*, - a “named divinity” of great potency.

A possible further clue is to be found in one of those stool histories written up in English, in this case, of the Asona stool of Kyebi<sup>103</sup>. Having told of the tradition that this Stool was inaugurated as a result of the migration of a section of the Asona clan from the far north ( in the Niger Bend south of Timbuctu in the 11th century), a group of which under their leader Kuntunkununku moved in the 14th century further south and came down to the forest. “They had a shrine with an appellation, *Bona*, or *Odomankoma*.” This last name is not used again, but under the name *Bona* and during the reign of the third Chief, Damran, who has the longest description of all the early chiefs, *Bona*’s high priest established her/his shrine on a “range of high rocky hills which they later named Bonaso” near which the whole tribe settled, forming the town of Akrokyere. We are told that “the power of Damran was gained by enlightenment and the fame of the oracle at Akrokyere”. The “enlightenment” that Damram “brought to his people and made the Asona great” seems to have been due to his being “a clever inventor” who “discovered” how to make or melt gold and make gold ornaments. He grew rich and powerful and made golden horns.”<sup>104</sup> (He also dug his own gold mines,<sup>105</sup> in itself, presumably, an act of power in relation to the power of the Earth Spirit.) “Many people thought” (at first) “ that his wisdom was due to his dealings in magic and black arts”; his sculptures of granite “statues” also implied more than human power, and “people began to fear and hate him” However their attitude changed with the development of the trade between the Portuguese and the Bono kingdom in the north which revealed the “greatness” which Damram's numinous skill in “making things” from the sacred metal, gold, had brought to the Asona people, as they took advantage of their nearness to the Elmina-Tekyman trade route. This brought added prestige to the oracle at Bonaso and “people from the Kingdom of

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<sup>103</sup> Kumi Attobrah, *The Kings of Akyem Abuakwa and the Ninety Nine Wars against Asante*. (Ghana Publishing Corp.1976)

<sup>104</sup> Elephant tusks were apparently normally used for the sacral horns, which had their honoured place in all usual royal observances . e.g. Rattray 1929 p.91

<sup>105</sup> Christaller’s entry in his Dictionary for *bore* includes “hew out, excavate”.

Bono and the Guan peoples on the coast came to consult it.” This text, it seems to me, conveys the corporate revelatory experience of life-enhancement through what it aptly calls the “enlightenment” of the natural ruler whereby he received his numinously innovative gifts and executive powers, which are strikingly similar to those attached to the appellation *borebore* which traditionally belongs, as we have seen to *Odomankoma*: “Excavator, Hewer, Architect, Inventor Carver.” The implication, surely, of this whole text including the mention of *Odomankoma* as an original alternative name of what later became the powerful Bonaso *obosom* and oracle is that such life-enhancing, empowering, community-building skills, must come directly from the ultimate transcendent power and source of all wisdom. I believe that putting the whole foregoing evidence together we have an example of the expansion of the understanding of the “Supreme Being”, involving what one might call the apotheosis of a potent *obosom*, “named” *Odomankoma*, now the epithet of God seen as Creator.<sup>106</sup>

Rattray gives a lot of space to his intensive field study of *Tano*: who is the River of that name and is identified with the “greatest of the Ashanti gods on earth” under the name *Ta Kora* and is, as we have seen, on the authority of a well documented myth, one of two sons of *Onyame*, with many “sons” derived from him with their own cults, all connected with water (see above). He/she, according to the evidence supplied by Rattray, seems to have had characteristics and powers, which might be said to bring him closer to *Onyame* than most *abosom*. It is possible that *Tano* may qualify as an example of a constellation of the experience of ultimate power and meaning, originally in the context of the Bron northern Akan kingdom, now represented by Tekyiman,<sup>107</sup> (and at sometime extending into what is (now Côte d’Ivoire) which could have been “demoted” in favour of *Onyame/Onyankopon*, in terms of the myth just mentioned, in accordance with the “process” suggested in

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<sup>106</sup> That Christaller adds to his Dictionary entry for *o-nyame*, (2) *the Supreme Being, the Deity, God, the Creator of all things*, citing a proverb which he translates *God (Onyame) never ceases to create things*, does not in my judgment invalidate the argument.

<sup>107</sup> see Wilks HWA pp 157ff and Eva Meyerowitz, *The Akan People of Ghana: their ancient beliefs* (London 1958) *passim*.



Field's hypothesis. However the time and space involved in marshalling these hints and instances would overload this section of the comparative study.

## PART FOUR: COMPARATIVE COMMENTS

The overall heading of this chapter is “Introduction to the Sources”. And in spite of the dissimilarity of the genres of the material used in each of Parts Two and Three, I believe some hints of a common ground can already be discerned.

Not only is the evidence of that dynamic character of ‘primal religion’, and indeed of all living religion, which I have sought to illustrate in Part Three with reference to the Akan visible in the dramatic development of the narrative of 2MT, but it is also clear to me that this remarkable work, composed entirely in the language of myth, can be classified as ‘contextual theology’. As I hope to argue, supported by some recent commentary by Celtic scholars, it represents an attempt by some anonymous member, or school, of the *filid* or Order of Poets, learned in traditional lore, to respond to a contemporary (9th Century) need for restoration of confidence in Cosmic Moral Order and in the contemporary this-worldly institutions which are still required to reflect and embody it.<sup>108</sup> I do not see it, as some have done, as a nostalgic escapist reversion to a static “pagan” past. Reference to parallel situations and responses in the last hundred years of the religious history of the Akan will be made in subsequent chapters.

Meanwhile there are several glimpsed similarities to mention under the heading above. First, there is *Odomankoma*, the Maker of Things, whose agents are the craftsmen and all those with skills to enrich and enhance the life of the community. His spokesmen or *akyeame* (that untranslatable word) are the drummers who like the Irish poets are the guardians of knowledge and of the power to communicate it, and for whom it is a primary duty within the context of the centripetal “court” of the sacral ruler, to give the latter creative praise, laced with proverbial wisdom. Just as *Odomankoma* “created” not the Chief himself, who ‘preceded’ the creative activity of *Odomankoma*, but the agents of the ‘beginnings’ of Order centred on the Chief, so

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<sup>108</sup> It seems highly likely that the spate of Lives of Irish saints datable to the 9th and 10th centuries is at least partly in response to the same need.

Lugh, the “king-god”, uniting in himself all the creative skills, coordinated the victory of the forces of Order over those of Chaos in that same ‘other’, or primordial, time. It seems impossible to deny the affinity between *Odomankoma* and Lugh *Samildánach*.

There is an interesting analogy to be suggested between Danquah’s planned three volume study of Akan culture of which only the tentative *Akan Doctrine of God* survives and the grand design of the school of literati responsible for the *Lebor Gabála Éirenn*, The Book of the Invasions of Ireland, into the framework of which the 11th century redactor had contrived to fit 2MT. In those early centuries of Irish literary learning, - the 7th to the 12th, during which the LGE “synthesis” was being formed,- this process was of course in terms of ‘historical’ narrative in a mixture of verse, carrying the authority of the *filid* the guardians and transmitters of hallowed tradition, and prose commentary (with glosses) by the historians, the whole fitting the “history of the Irish” into the history of Christendom.<sup>109</sup> Danquah on the other hand, was attempting to fulfil his chosen task, in terms of the categories of contemporary European philosophy. He clearly desired to represent the religio-cultural heritage of his people, though it had developed independently, as yet being of equal value to that powerfully prevailing in the world outside, (of which the Gold Coast would soon, he believed, become a fully contributing part), and capable of being recognised as such in terms of the discourse of that world. Both, after all, had the aim of bringing their own cultural world into the larger world, which for both was more or less identified with ‘Christendom’.

In the course of these two introductory sections it is already apparent that for both early Irish and for the traditional Akan, the ideology of sacral kingship informs and integrates society in all its aspects. The bulk of what follows will take the form of an exploration of this state of affairs in the context of the encounter with Christianity.

The influence of nationalist feeling and Christian commitment certainly continued to be evident in the work of those who have been called “theologians of continuity”, who dominated the first quarter century of post-colonial African

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<sup>109</sup> R M.Scowcroft, “Leabhar Gabhala, part 1: the growth of the text”, *Eriu* Vol.XXXVIII, (1987) pp. 90f

scholarship<sup>110</sup>; and it is “God who represents this continuity”. Thus for instance for these scholars the phrase ‘ancestor worship’ has to be rejected; “man’s worship of God is qualitatively so different from the relationship between man and his ancestors, that the latter must be called by some other term”.<sup>111</sup> This last comment is of particular significance in the context of the Akan. For in the usage of their language (*Twi*) the suffix *som*, meaning worship/service, is not only used with *Onyame* (*onyamesom*) for Christian ritual worship, but is also used for all kinds of respectful actions such as those directed to an elder, as in *opanyinsom*. The careful distinction made by African scholars (as well as by some Europeans) in English is quite meaningless for the Akan.<sup>112</sup> The publication of a book by the Ugandan writer and anthropologist Okot p’Bitek in 1970 who describes himself as an atheist, entitled *African Religions in Western Scholarship*, highly critical of the “Christian bias” of such writers as Mbiti, sparked off some more independent-minded studies by both African and European scholars. This kind of development, whatever its degree of validity, was not open to the poet-sages of 9th century Ireland; it had to wait for the careful scholarly agnosticism of some leading modern Celticists.

Part of the difficulty here is due to the retention as normative in most people’s minds of the categorising terms ‘monotheist’, ‘polytheist’ and ‘animist’, particularly the first two. Present-day students of comparative religion no longer find the use of these terms helpful. The discovery that a sense of the existence of a Supreme Being as ultimate source of being and power etc. is present in the world view of very many African peoples, enabling the use of a vernacular ‘name’ in the translation of the Judaic-Christian scriptures has been used to point a contrast with the lack of such a name in the translation into European languages. This is a huge subject, beyond my scope. Suffice it to say that it is clear to me that those responsible for 2MT and for its careful preservation did not find that their work called in question the reality and power of the One who, among the Goedelic-speaking peoples of these islands, has

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<sup>110</sup> See David Westerlund *African Religion in African Scholarship*, (Stockholm 1985,).

<sup>111</sup> *idem* pp.44f

<sup>112</sup> But see the genesis of the word *onyamesom* discussed in chap. 2.



from Early Irish usage onwards, and in living memory, been distinctively named as “Lord of the Elements” and “King of the Universe”.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> For two examples from the late 8th century: Prologue of *Félire Óengusso* ed. W.Stokes (London 1905) p.22 stanza 157, quoted in Ch.2 pt.2, and in “*Cáin Adomnáin*”, *Anecdota Oxoniensa* vol.XII, K.Meyer ed. and trans (Oxford 1905) “the elements of God” are invoked first in the list of guarantors

## CHAPTER TWO

### PART ONE: EARLY ENCOUNTERS WITH CHRISTIANITY AMONG THE IRISH CELTS AND THE AKAN

#### **The Irish Material**

The nature and extent of the earliest contacts of the people of Ireland with Christianity are largely opaque to historical investigation. And yet by the 7th century it is apparent that the *nemed* - sacred/privileged classes - in Ireland had embraced Christianity, or at least accepted it as a mighty spiritual power making demands upon them.

That Pope Celestine ordained a deacon called Palladius to go to Ireland as bishop in 431 to minister to the Irish “believing in Christ”<sup>114</sup> is firmly documented. No actual detail of Palladius’ work is known, apart from the late mention in the Middle Irish life of Patrick of Palladius having founded three churches in Leinster, in one of which he left his books and relics of Peter and Paul and the board on which he used to write, but the mission of Germanus of Auxerre to Britain to combat the teachings of the British monk Pelagius (declared a heretic in 418) had begun two years earlier<sup>115</sup>. Richter summarises the evidence of contact and interaction between Christian Wales and the Laigin (of Leinster) including settlements of the latter in north Wales during the 5th century and collates the more linguistic evidence of general interchange through a study of “numerous Latin loan words of mostly Christian content” a group of which indicate borrowing into the Irish language, probably during the first half of

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<sup>114</sup> J.F.Kenny, *The Sources of the Early History of Ireland*, (New York 1929) p.165

<sup>115</sup> M.Richter, *Mediaeval Ireland, The Enduring Tradition*, ( London 1988) p. 43.

the 4th century.<sup>116</sup> This together with the general coming and going on the sea-lanes between Britain and Gaul and mainly southern ports in Ireland would account for the presence of Christians in sufficient numbers to justify the appointment of a bishop. It is now, I believe, generally assumed on these and other grounds,<sup>117</sup> that Christianity had an earlier establishment presence in southern Ireland, later to be called *Leth Mog*, than in the north and midlands though records are almost completely absent in both.

What has survived, of course, are the two mainly authentic writings of St Patrick providing insights of very great interest, written some time in the second half of the fifth century.<sup>118</sup> They are the *Confessio*, written as he says, when he was old, and which is evidently an *apologia pro vita sua* in response to criticism from the Church authorities in Britain responsible for his ordination as a bishop and for sending him to Ireland, and his Letter to the followers of Coroticus. The latter is an extremely powerful attack on a British chieftain and his followers, whom he refuses to address as his **fellow citizens** or **fellow citizens of the holy Romans**, but, as **fellow citizens of the demons**, because of their **evil works**. who in a raid into Ireland had killed some of a large group of Patrick's converts whom he describes as

**newly baptised, anointed with chrism, in white garments and captured others both men and women and sold them as slaves to Scots (sic) and the abominable and apostate Picts (Cor. 2,3.)**

Together they provide some insight into Patrick's motivation, or vocation, and into what might be called his methods, and perhaps into some of the causes of the success of his mission.

As a source for the beliefs of the 'pagan' Irish, on the other hand, Patrick's Confession is no more revealing than are the reports the 19th century missionaries to Africa made to their sending bodies<sup>119</sup>. There are only two relevant references, both in

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<sup>116</sup> *idem*, pp.7f

<sup>117</sup> e.g. the early acceptance of the Roman Easter in the south and the tradition of "prince bishops" in Cashel.

<sup>118</sup> Texts used for these: the translation by C.H.H.Wright of St Patrick's *Confessio* in N.D O'Donoghue ODC. *Patrick of Ireland*, (Delaware1987) 101-118; and for the *Letter* to the followers of Coroticus, the translation in L. Beiler *The Works of St Patrick*, (London 1953) pp. 41-47

<sup>119</sup> See ch2 pt 2: the section on "Encounter (with Christianity) as Confrontation among the Akan".

the *Confession*. One is in Paragraph 41, clearly intended to proffer the success of Patrick's mission as proof of his right to episcopal orders which reads:

**Whence, then, has it come to pass that in Ireland they who never had any knowledge, and until now have only worshipped idols and unclean things, have lately become a people of the Lord, and are called the sons of God? Sons of the Scots and daughters of chieftains<sup>120</sup>: are seen to be monks and virgins of Christ.**

The other reference to indigenous religious practices and beliefs is in the context of Patrick's favourite sun-imagery when his longing for martyrdom leads to the thought of resurrection **in the brightness of the sun, that is, in the glory of Jesus Christ, our Redeemer**, recalling an early dream experience so important that his account must be quoted in full:(59)

**But the same night while I was sleeping, and Satan clearly tempted me in a way which I shall remember as long as I am in the body. And he fell on me like a huge rock, and I had no power in my limbs, save that it came to me, into my mind that I should call out "helias". And at that moment I saw the sun rise in the heaven; and while I was crying out "Helias" with all my might, behold the splendour of that sun fell upon me, and at once removed the weight from me. And I believe I was aided by Christ my Lord, and his Spirit was then crying for me, and I hope likewise that it will be thus in the days of my oppression, as the Lord says in the Gospel, "It is not you that speak, but the Spirit of your Father, which speaketh in you."<sup>121</sup>**

This thought in turn prompts a reference (60) in passing, to what has proved something of a red herring to earlier Celticists:

**For that sun which we behold, at God's command, rises daily for us - but it shall never reign, nor shall its splendour continue; but all even that worship it, miserable beings, shall wretchedly come to punishment.**

This is not the place to revive an old controversy about Celts and "sun-worship". The text of the extracts quoted suggests merely that this British Celt of "noble birth" (37) the son of a deacon and grandson of a priest who was also a decurion<sup>122</sup> (Cor.10)

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<sup>120</sup> *regulus*: -suggesting *ri-túaithe* or king of one *túath*.

<sup>121</sup> This has a typically trinitarian form.

<sup>122</sup> That is one "holding an obligatory civil office that implies he was a Roman citizen of standing and wealth". See Thomas op.cit. p. 124.



could naturally feel no interest in and indeed nothing but contempt for pagan (in the original sense of that word) worship and belief. He twice uses the word “Roman” : Roman Christians and “holy Romans” (14, and 1.) in implied contrast to the “barbarians” living in the island on the outer edge of the world.

And yet these written texts can be regarded as in themselves conveying the experience of encounter of a fifth century ‘Celt’ with Christianity. Patrick's behaviour and ministry as bishop in Ireland seems to have been unusual, to say the least, for a bishop of the time, and he clearly realises that himself. And while he is most obsessively conscious of his inferior education interrupted by his six years as a captive slave in Ireland, and frequently refers to those who “despise him” he defends the authenticity of his onerous episcopacy vigorously. The wording of the introductory sentences of the Letter is precise:

**I, Patrick, a sinner, unlearned, resident in Ireland, declare myself to be a bishop. Most assuredly I believe that what I am I have received from God.**

He cannot write from any Romanised episcopal ‘seat’ from which he could function with proper episcopal dignity (as even St Martin could). Fifth century Ireland in spite of its dominating ‘provincial’ Iron Age duns, had nothing resembling urban centres. He seems to have been constantly on the move, preaching and baptising and confirming huge numbers and ordaining clergy,

**so that a copious multitude and crowd may be taken for God, and that everywhere there may be clergy, who shall baptise and exhort a people needy and anxious...**

Not surprisingly he was constantly uncertain of his reception as he passed from *tíath* to *tíath*: **I daily expect either murder, or to be circumvented, or to be reduced to slavery, or mishap of some kind.**

It seems to me that the texts themselves yield some clues at several levels both to the immediate and to the lasting effect of Patrick's mission. He had, it appears, been accused of profiting personally from his work. On the contrary, he declares that

he has accepted nothing not even from those he ordained.<sup>123</sup> He caused offence indeed by returning the small gifts of **the virgins of Christ, and religious women...who have cast off some of their ornaments upon the altar.** (49,50) Not only has he received nothing but he has given presents to the kings and to their sons who “escorted him” These young scions of local royal lineages may have been some of those “sons of kings” who were “monks” (Cor.12) ; they might have been formally “fosterlings”, making Patrick responsible for their education and proper training, and for their upkeep, or possibly quasi- clients, and the gifts ( “pay”?) given them in that context. Patrick adds (53)

**But you know how much I gave to those who acted as judges throughout all the regions which I more frequently visited. For I think that I distributed among them not less than the price of fifteen men.**

What was the reason for this largesse? Bieler assumes that: Patrick “often had to bribe local rulers..”<sup>124</sup> This suggestion seems anachronistic:- contrary to the obligation of hospitality and a misunderstanding of the normal courtesies towards the local ruler whether in Ghana or in mediaeval Ireland. Hughes' comment is that “generosity was essential to prestige in a heroic society”.<sup>125</sup> One might go further and refer to *Cath Maige Tuired* in which generosity is seen as a sign and an expression of the king's sacral power. Patrick as he travels from one little kingdom to another is claiming as a Christian bishop authority and sacral power from the supreme source of power and wisdom, the one God in the Holy Trinity of the Sacred Name. It is interesting that the text apparently indicates that Patrick expected that his colleagues in his home church, also with Celtic cultural background, would understand the appropriateness of this generosity. We do not know what were the criteria by which Patrick chose those numerous ordinands from amongst the thousands of baptised converts. In the rigidly hierarchical society of Ireland evident in the lore of the *brithem* as written up in the

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<sup>123</sup> In Coroticus para.6, Patrick refers to one aspect of the powers conferred by Christian ordination:- **the highest and sublime power, that whom they (the priests) should bind on earth should be bound in heaven.** His motive here is presumably to repudiate any suspicion of simony.

<sup>124</sup>Beiler 1953 p. 89 n.

<sup>125</sup> K.Hughes *The Church in Early Christian Ireland* (London 1966) p.35. See a comparison with Freeman's gift of a carriage to the *Asantehene* below in Akan section following .

surviving seventh century Legal Tracts, it is likely that they would belong to one of the higher grades. Patrick's references to the "sons and daughters of *reguli*" who responded to his call for the more total dedication required for those living as "monks and virgins of the Lord" makes sense, in the context of his 'apologia'. But in describing the vocation of one beautiful noble woman (42), he does refer to the persecution the dedicated women suffer, especially the enslaved women, for whom Patrick has a deep concern, as can be seen from his especial horror at the behaviour of the Christian Coroticus with his **rebels against Christ...they who distribute baptised women as prizes.**" (Cor.19)

But there are more clues than these in the Confession to the success of Patrick's mission. His simple vivid account of his inner conversion and passionate strenuous life of developing prayer,- day and night in the woods and in the mountain; - and of some significant dreams, waking visions and locutions during his life as a slave, has a movingly authentic ring.<sup>126</sup> He reveals however that it was a few years on before the he heard the dream call from **the voice of the Irish** to come and **walk among them**. It seems relevant that he could understand the voice of the Irish: speaking the Goidelic language was presumably of far more use to him as their bishop than fluency in elegant Latin would have been! And it was after very many further years of training, and apparently humiliating and painful criticism and doubt till he was **almost worn out** (28) that he was ready for Ireland. Paragraph 30 reads:

**Therefore I gave thanks to Him, who comforted me in all things, that he did not hinder me from the journey on which I had resolved, and also from my work which I had learned of Christ my Lord. But the more from that (time) I felt in myself no little power, and my faith was approved before God and men.**

This last sentence is, I think, important. That this openly vulnerable man conveyed very great spiritual strength and power cannot be doubted, and a selfless love and concern for his converts,- to the extent of identifying himself with them as one of the despised Irish in his letter to Coroticus.(Cor16) One suspects that the generous trust with which he shared with so many the powers which he believed ordination to the

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<sup>126</sup> c.f. N.D. O'Donoghue, *Patrick of Ireland* op.cit.passim.

priesthood to convey, would in itself be a challenge to the long established druid caste, and bring an intoxicating liberation.<sup>127</sup>

In trying to estimate the lasting impact of Patrick's mission on the ongoing encounter of the Irish with Christianity, I think one must take account of the fact that his original communication of the Christian Gospel was entirely oral and personal. The least one can assume about the traditional learning and wisdom of the sages of "prehistoric" Ireland is that the people had a highly developed capacity to understand, to retain and to respond creatively to such communication. R.P.C. Hanson<sup>128</sup> points to the notable "missionary spirit" and the "peculiar self abandonment of the Irish monks of the sixth and seventh centuries", and the forms the latter took, including their extra severe "ascetic rules and practices" as possible fruits of Patrick's example and spirit. This ardour reminds one of the vivid picture in the writings of Polybius<sup>129</sup> of naked Celtic warriors in the vanguard of their armies striking terror into the Roman troops in the 2nd century BC, suggesting perhaps a temperamental characteristic, - "in the blood" - as it were, of both Patrick and his converts. Hanson assumes that the achievements of Irish monastic learning is not part of Patrick's "legacy". Rather one would expect that the very high value Patrick undoubtedly put on Latinity might possibly have encouraged early hunger for "Roman" learning in the areas of his influence. The Confession does include a credal statement (4) **of faith of the Trinity (14)** and Hanson<sup>130</sup> lists the basic doctrinal themes in the two documents as follows: "our redemption through Christ, the dwelling of the holy Spirit in our hearts, our duty of continual praise to God, God's love and providence, the necessity of faith, the hope of, and in the case of those murdered by the agency of Coroticus, the certainty of heaven, the call to imitate Christ, the judgement to come." It is customary to comment on the contrast between the Patrick of these writings and the Patrick of

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<sup>127</sup> I find it surprising that there is no overt mention of the power of the priest in relation to the Eucharist.

<sup>128</sup> op.cit. p. 42f

<sup>129</sup> See W.Dinan, *Monumenta Historica Celtica* (The Celts in the writings of Greek and Latin authors from the 10th century BC) Vol 1, ( London 1911) pp.209-213. Polybius whose dates are 202-121 BC.

<sup>130</sup> op.cit. 40

Muirchú's Life of two centuries later, and the impossibility of ever filling the gap in between. However we do have at least the beautifully accessible "*Alphabet of Devotion*", *Aipgitur Chrábaid*<sup>131</sup>, now ascribed to Colmán of Lann Elo and therefore dated before 611, which is thoroughly Irish, and as direct from the heart and as true both to authentic contemporary Christian experience and perennial in its appeal as are the Latin writings of Patrick. The career and spirituality of Columbanus, (543-615) available in his extant writings<sup>132</sup>, also gives evidence of continuity with Patrick of the Confession, mediated no doubt through the Christian literature available to the former. Perhaps more striking still is the evidence of the early Irish "praise poem" or *Amra*, composed for Colum Cille on his death.<sup>133</sup> Herbert comments that the poet having related the noble ancestry of his hero and while using of him the epithet "champion" yet "eulogises a life of Christian commitment rather than one of secular glory", emphasising his "inner life, his virtue and his learning." There is enough here, especially when reinforced by traditions of the community life around Colum Cille preserved and recorded in Adomnán's Latin Life of Columba<sup>134</sup>, to suggest some continuity with the atmosphere among those peripatetic disciples of Patrick, and the zeal and dedication of the "sons and daughters of *reguli* living the lives as "monks and virgins of the Lord".

There is plenty of evidence in the sources for the 7th century onwards of the interacting and interlocking of the characteristically Irish monastic structures of the Christian establishment with the power structures of kings and over-kings, within which the specifically ecclesiastical function of the bishop essential to contemporary Christendom found its place, though usually in the "Northern Half", a subordinate one. How naturally and inevitably this came about has been recently revealed by Máire Herbert through her research into "the history and hagiography of the monastic

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<sup>131</sup> ed: Vernam Hull in *Celtica* VIII 1968 pp.44-89 . c.f. T.O.Clancy and G.Márkus, *Iona The Earliest Poetry of a Celtic Monastery*, (Edinburgh 1995) pp195-207.

<sup>132</sup> *Sancti Columbani Opera* ed.& trans.G.S.M.Walker (Dublin 1957).

<sup>133</sup> Linguistic evidence provides appropriate evidence concurring with content. See M.Herbert *Iona, Kells and Derry* ( Oxford 1988 ), p.10.

<sup>134</sup> *idem* in p.15 Table 1 section 4.

*familia* of Columba”<sup>135</sup> This situation will provide the background for the Irish section of Part Two of this chapter: “Encounter as confrontation”.

In the context of confrontation and as an addendum to this slight study of Patrick’s writings, further comment on Coroticus is relevant. We know that the Confession was well known to and used by Muirchú, passages in whose 7th century Life of Patrick will be used as a main source in Part Two of this chapter.<sup>136</sup> There is a passage in the Letter, already referred to, which may have been treasured as providing Patrician precedent for those early times of struggle of the Church, or churches with the power of kings which become evident in the texts used in Part Two. Patrick claims that “the enemy” shows his jealousy of Patrick's calling from God through the tyranny of Coroticus,

**a man who has no respect for God nor for his priests whom He (God) chose giving them the highest and sublime power, that whom they should bind upon earth should be bound also in heaven,**

and proceeds to use his devastating armoury of Scriptural quotations to condemn Coroticus. In view of the reverence for and also fear of the power of the spoken word when wielded by poet and druid and king alike, this dominical promise to the apostolic forerunners of the “clerics” must have had real significance.

## **Early Encounters With Christianity Among The Akan**

The earliest direct contacts with Christianity in what is now Ghana came through the arrival of Portuguese sea-traders in the 1470's, and after a decade in which quantities of gold from the hinterland reached Portugal, the building of the castle at Elmina. True to the inspiration of Prince Henry the Navigator they were committed to bringing the Faith to the far-distant lands they reached. They had crossed the seas as one of their number expressed it : “to serve God and His Majesty,

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<sup>135</sup> idem especially pp.10-31 “The Saint and his times.”

<sup>136</sup> Only part of it was preserved in the Book of Armagh: “a text which suppresses those passages in which Patrick told of his fears, adversities and difficulties.” Richter op.cit.p.98.

to give light to those who are in darkness, and to grow rich, as all men desire to do.”<sup>137</sup> The persistence of the efforts of missionaries, by Capuchins and others religious orders, sustaining this tradition was remarkable, but with no lasting effect. Their converts, “including a few scheming rulers and trading clients, became infected with African suspicions of European intentions” and in consequence fell away.<sup>138</sup> Some subsequent attempts were made by chaplains and others serving in the forts founded by the other European trading companies, who replaced the Portuguese monopoly, to communicate the Christian Gospel to those locals with whom they came in contact, but they laboured under the same difficulties, aggravated by the degradation and cynicism produced in both sides by the trade in slaves (paid for largely in guns and gin) which had grown hugely since the foundation of “new world” plantations. Two attempts by Moravian Brethren in response to an appeal made by the Danish Guinea Company to start mission stations within reach of Christianborgs Castle were aborted by the rapid death from fever of all those involved. However some of the chaplains had gained some knowledge of local languages (Ga and Fante) and some understanding of the religious and social life of the people, which as Noel Smith<sup>139</sup> significantly adds, provided information “which was available to Protestant missionary groups in Europe”. The Chaplains also ran schools within the trading stations for the sons of unions between traders and local women and some others and also produced some notable scholars who went to Europe to study further. Among these was Philip Quaque, a pupil of the school in Cape Coast Castle staffed by the SPG (Society for the Propagation of the Gospel) from 1752-1824 who was ordained in the Church of England and returned to Cape Coast as teacher and missionary. A request for bibles in 1831 from former pupils from the same school who had organised themselves into a “Bible Band” (or SPCK after the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge) perhaps under his influence, had reached the Wesleyan Missionary Society in England and as a result the first Wesleyan missionary was sent to the country in 1834. He only survived five active months, but his flock

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<sup>137</sup>Lamin Sanneh, *West African Christianity*, (London 1983) p. 21

<sup>138</sup> *idem loc.cit.*

<sup>139</sup> Noel Smith, *The Presbyterian Church of Ghana 1835-1960*, (Accra 1966 ) p22-26

were undeterred for “though the missionary was dead, God lived.”<sup>140</sup> In spite of four more missionary deaths, numbers grew and were strengthened by the arrival of Thomas Birch Freeman,<sup>141</sup> the son of an African father<sup>142</sup> and an English mother in January 1838, with 52 years of creative and phenomenally active service ahead. Freeman first visited Kumasi then at the height of its power in April 1839, being welcomed by the *Asantehene* in the enormously impressive context of a “royal durbar”,<sup>143</sup> and he and the Cape Coast Church began work in Kumasi in July 1841.<sup>144</sup>

The roots and motivation of the 19th century Protestant missionary movement in West Africa are well-known: a composite vision of bringing “Christianity, Commerce and Civilisation” to the “Dark Continent” accompanying the amazing popularity and spreading success of the anti-slavery and anti-slave trade campaigns. The horrors of the Slave trade and its corrupting effects on society especially in its final years were great.<sup>145</sup> A deep and genuine desire to atone for this corporate sin was undoubtedly a powerful motivating force in the early days of the spectacular missionary effort which followed the ban on the Slave trade proclaimed successively by all the European nations involved, and the abolition of slavery itself in 1833.

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<sup>140</sup> Sanneh op.cit p.120

<sup>141</sup> Thomas Birch Freeman, *Journal of Various visits to The Kingdoms of Ashanti, Aku, and Dahomi in Western Africa*, First published in book form in 1844. (London 1968)

<sup>142</sup> Little is known of him; T.B.Freeman was himself born and brought up in England. idem p.10

<sup>143</sup> idem pp.36-51. (T.E. Bowdich’s report of his journey to Kumasi which appeared in English under the title *Mission from Cape Coast to Ashantee* (London 1819), was well-known to all those interested in West Africa..)

<sup>144</sup>“ On his return to Kumasi in 1841, Freeman brought with him, not only 340 people including “two Ashanti princes”, but also an English carriage as a present to the *Asantehene* from the Committee of the Wesleyan Missionary Society This puts Patrick’s gifts to kings and his entourage of young “princes” in the shade! It may not be coincidental that Freeman was half African and Patrick a British Celt.

<sup>145</sup> Perhaps one of the most spectacular examples of this can be found in the story of the effects of the trade in the areas around the Calabar River in eastern Nigeria Perhaps partly because it was controlled not by traditional chiefs functioning within a highly sophisticated religious/ moral / social structure as in southern Ghana, but by leaders of trading “houses” whose raw power was the result of the wealth they had acquired, backed up by a controlling secret society called *Ekpo*. See Hope M Waddell, *Twenty -nine years in the West Indies and Central Africa* Hope M. Waddell ( Edinburgh 1863) pp. 206-660.and D.M McFarlan, *Calabar The Church of Scotland Mission, 1846-1946*, (Edinburgh 1947)



An attempt to assess early encounters with Christianity among the Akan requires further selection not only because of the degree of autonomy exercised within each traditional state, constituent sub-chieftaincies, village and lineage, and indeed the differing tensions caused by local politics, but also because of the differences of ethos, custom and theological emphases among the incoming mission bodies.<sup>146</sup> Because of these factors, and of course because of my own very limited knowledge, it seems sensible to select for study in the first instance, one traditional state or paramountcy and the dominant mission-founded Christian ‘denomination’ in that area. There are a variety of reasons for choosing Akuapem in the Eastern Region of Ghana, and the Presbyterian Church of Ghana which owes its origin to the work of agents sent out by the Basel Evangelical Missionary Society whose first station was at Akropong where the *Omanhene* or “Paramount Chief” of Akuapem has his official residence.

The Basel Missionary Society had founded a Seminary in Basel in 1815 to provide training for missionaries enlisting for service with any of the European Protestant missionary societies; drawing its support from both Lutheran and Reformed Confessions, and the majority of its recruits from Germany. “The pietism which characterised the Basel Mission was of the Württemberg variety, a combination of religious emotion and deep thought, of individual conversion and strong Christian fellowship, its life rooted in a profound reverence for the Bible...From the beginning it showed a biblical, evangelical, ecumenical and international character which it never lost.”<sup>147</sup> In spite of its reaction to the prevailing contemporary rationalistic, deistic climate of the *Aufklärung*, there can be no doubt that the latter did have its inevitable

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<sup>146</sup> The Christian Council of Ghana’s publication *The Rise of Independent Churches in Ghana* (Asempa Publishers Ghana 1990), pp.7f contains a list of earlier missions in order of entry, as follows. 1828 Basel Mission resulting in the Presbyterian Church (autonomous from 1920’s); 1835 Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society; the Methodist Church (independent Conference in 1961); 1880 Society of African Missions, followed later by other missions: Roman Catholic Church; 1896 Seventh Day Adventist; 1904 Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (Anglican): Church of the Province of West Africa, Accra and Kumasi Dioceses. (Note also Philip Quaque, the Fanti schoolmaster, catechist and missionary, working from Cape Coast Fort 1765-1816 educated and ordained in England.); 1914 Prophet Harris, the Liberian Evangelist “whose preaching turned thousands away from fetishism: miscellaneous Pentecostal and ‘spiritual’ or African Christian churches.”; 1922 Salvation Army; 1931 Assemblies of God; 1935 Apostolic Church (from Bradford, England) : Apostolic Church and Church of Pentecost. See sample of non- protestant (SPG Anglican Catholic) encounter with Akan at close of this Part One of Chapter Two.

<sup>147</sup> N.Smith op.cit.20ff

effect on the missionaries' attitude to African belief systems and world view leading them to dismiss them as ignorant superstition. This attitude also, it would seem, affected their reading of the Bible, blinding them to the presence within it (in the New Testament as in the Old) of that world of spiritual beings and powers familiar to those to whom they brought the Bible texts.

Noel Smith in his admirable history of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana uses as a main "primary source" the collection of records preserved in Basel, relating to the work of the Missionary Society in the Gold Coast. He refers to "the carefully thought out priorities" in the instructions given to the missionary agents sent in response to the invitation from the Governor of the Danish Christiansborg (and the King of Denmark) to the Gold Coast in 1827 and 1831: to become acclimatised, to take time over the selection of a permanent site for the mission, to master the language at all cost, to begin actual mission activity by founding a school and lastly, to present the Gospel with love and patience." These would all seem to have reference to the experience gained in the context of the trading forts sketched above. Of the two groups of four and three, only the Dane, Andreas Riis, survived a serious fever attack, and it was only in 1835, that he was able to begin his mission on the Akuapem Ridge, a project he had had in mind for some time. Smith sums up the reasons for his choice of base as follows. "First the need for a healthier, higher location in view of the six deaths; secondly to work among a truly indigenous people as yet largely unaffected by the demoralising influence of Europeans on the coast; and, thirdly, to be free of the suspicion in the native mind that the mission was a Danish political agency." There was also an encouraging precedent for the choice of Akuapem.

In 1788 an attempt had been made to set up an agricultural and "Christian colony...among Africans unspoiled by the worst features of European life at the coast" by Dr.P.E.Isert a doctor, botanist and natural scientist employed by the Danish Guinea Company, who shared with its Directors the current enthusiasm for Rousseau's belief in the "noble savage". During an exploratory trip along the Akuapem Ridge he had been impressed by what he saw of "the dignity, humanity and

grace of indigenous African life.”<sup>148</sup> His book on his ideas, published in Copenhagen in German, was widely read with two editions in Germany and in Danish, Swedish, French and Dutch translations. Dr Isert was empowered to found a “plantation colony”, under the direct authority of the Danish King and the guidance of the Danish Guinea Company, which should “aim at becoming self-supporting by the introduction of West Indian crops; former slaves should be given their own piece of land; no European should be allowed to acquire land for himself.” and Moravian missionaries should be invited to join the community. Land for this settlement had been willingly allotted to Dr Isert; on the cool heights of the Akuapem ridge near Akropong itself by the *Omanhene* of Akuapem, Nana Obuobi Atiemo and his Elders. Dr Isert took his first report to Christiansborg six weeks after the venture began and suddenly died there; and although it continued under a new leader for a while, it was abandoned in 1794.<sup>149</sup> There can be no doubt that this provided an encouraging precedent for both Riis and the *Okuapehene* (the *Omanhene* of Akuapem) Nana Addo Dankwa who warmly welcomed Riis, still without a colleague, to Akropong in 1835. The chief requested only that Riis would not bring dogs into the town, would observe taboos on farming on certain days and on killing the python and black monkey. The Chief arranged for assistance to be given to Riis to build a stone house, and with the promised reinforcement of colleagues (including a bride for Riis himself) everything must have seemed set fair. And yet when early in 1840 Riis reported in person to the Mission Committee in Basel after four years at Akropong there had not been one convert.

For meanwhile Riis and his patron, Addo Dankwa I and the town of Akropong had become involved in the volatile politics of the European trading companies and of the Akuapem state itself. The brochure of the *Odwira* at Akropong in 1993 (the public aspects of which I saw) includes the palace official account of the foundation of the Akuapem Stool, which is of comparatively recent origin. The seeds

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<sup>148</sup> A quotation from Isert cited from the text of an address by Nana Addo Dankwa III, reigning paramount chief of Akuapem, printed in *Mission in Context* (privately printed account of the official launching of The Akrofi-Christaller Memorial Centre for Mission Research and Applied Theology in Akropong-Akuapem, 1992)

<sup>149</sup> Smith loc.cit.

of the chronic tension, between the Guan-speaking groups already established on the Akuapem Ridge and the Akyem incomers are evident, reading between the lines of this account of the original foundation “Concord”<sup>150</sup> In spite of the considerable kudos which Addo Dankwa must have gained from his part leading the Akuapems in the coalition which defeated the Asantes in the battle of Akantamansu, ending the local domination of the latter in 1827, it was not enough to prevent exploitation of the already confrontational local politics, by a new governor of the Danish Fort of Christiansborg, Morck, in pursuit of his struggle to prevent the take-over of the Danish Trade influence and hegemony in Akuapem by the British as a result of which Addo Dankwa, who had declared in favour of the British, was destooled, and Adum, a sister's son, ( and therefore eligible) the candidate of the “wing chiefs”, i.e. the chiefs of Guan and Kyerpong towns,- with the support of the Governor of Christiansborg was declared to be Paramount Chief. The Rev.Edward Reynolds, in his little history of the Akropong Presbyterian Church written for the 150th anniversary in 1985 tells that Addo Dankwa “then moved the Paramount Chief's stool to Kwabenya, where he stayed with some of his people” and that “feeling betrayed by his people”, Addo Dankwa “committed suicide” in 1839. Riis’ failure in his efforts to prevent the customary killing of slaves to accompany the dead Chief at his burial caused him great distress. No doubt this slaughter would have been felt to be especially necessary by those responsible for the burial and the funeral rituals of a Chief who had taken his

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<sup>150</sup> This account is of great interest; it is unfortunate that space will not allow it to be quoted in full. It describes how the local disparate ethnic groups, before 1730 has “led independent community lives. There was no central authority”. They became prey to the nearest expansionist power, the Akwamus, and had consequently sent a joint delegation to the *Omanhene* of Akyem Abuakwa (an Akan people whom we have already met in the first chapter) to come to their help. After a successful campaign, we are told the confederate groups asked that the Akyem “war lords” should be sent back to them to organise them into a unified state, and to rule over them with their head as their paramount chief, in order to give them perpetual protection.” Nana Sofori, (the nephew of the *Omanhene* of Akim Abuakwa who had led the victorious coalition) “when he came down to take his position as *Okuapehene* in 1733 (requested) the groups of Akuapem to assemble at Abotakyi so that they should ‘drink fetish’ and swear an oath as evidence of their good faith. Nana Sofori wanted to ensure the unflinching loyalty of the people he was asked to rule, as far as the Ofori Stool which he had brought from Bansa was concerned. The people consented and took with them one of their principal fetishes, called ‘Kyenku’, to the venue of the meeting....They and their leaders unanimously swore that the victors...should stay ...and that they would serve them and their descendants ‘for all time’.” Nana Sofori then following the already established pattern for Akan *aman* “constituted Akuapem into three main divisions both for military purposes and good governance.”

own life, (normally a grave crime against the Ancestors), to help towards his proper reception in the *samando*.

There are indications of genuine interest and support for the mission from the *Okuapehene* and his Akropong Elders. For example, so convinced was the Danish Company Governor Morck of the influence of Riis (himself a Dane) over Addo Dankwa that in spite of Riis' careful neutrality in the foregoing events, he blamed the latter for Addo Dankwa's decision to declare his support for the British. actually detaining Riis in Christiansborg for three months, and subsequently forbidding the missionaries from exercising any ministry, while the Danish nominee Adum discouraged any approach from the people. It is not clear when Adum was enstooled, nor when he was challenged by one Owusu Akyem, "his cousin", on the matrilineal side, the candidate of the Akan Adonten and the elders of Akropong itself - leading to a confused civil war lasting till soon after Riis' return.<sup>151</sup> Smith tells us two interesting facts about Nana Owusu Akyem : that he was a prominent citizen and a friend of Riis,<sup>152</sup> and that he was the father of David Asante, one of the nine boys enrolled in the first *Twi* language school when it opened in September 1844, and later to become the first ordained Akan pastor with a very influential and dedicated ministry.<sup>153</sup>

When Riis arrived back in 1843 he brought with him a party of Christian West Indians, ( six families and three bachelors) freed slaves and all but one within the Moravian Mission community in Jamaica, and personally selected by Riis. The great encouragement of the success of Christian mission in Sierra Leone which was so evidently due to the presence of communities of Africans - victims of the slave trade and settled in Sierra Leone, together with the influence of T.F. Buxton's widely read book *The African Slave Trade and its Remedy*, had contributed to, the thinking of the Basel Mission Committee leading to the decision to recruit the West Indians for Akropong. Hope Masterton Waddell, an Irishman, ordained and commissioned as a

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<sup>151</sup> It seems that Owusu was either enstooled in 1843 or merely put in charge as "vice-regent" with the support of a new Governor of Christiansborg but was killed in December 1844.

<sup>152</sup> There is a letter in the Basel Mission Archives dated 7th December 1844 from a missionary called Thompson claiming that Riis had "installed Owusu Akyem as successor of Adum during Adum's lifetime and thus was guilty of of the palavers": see K.E.Ababio PhD thesis 1991 (Edinburgh).

<sup>153</sup> N.Smith op.cit.39ff . Another son of Owosu Akyem was also trained by the Mission.

missionary by the Edinburgh Presbytery of the Scottish United Secession Church, working in Jamaica at the time of emancipation, who together with non-ordained colleagues both black and white, pioneered missionary work in Calabar in the east of what is now Nigeria, wrote in his memoirs:

**From the day the sun of Negro freedom arose in 1834, it was hoped by all friends of Africa that among the emancipated Christians of the West Indies, valuable agents would be found for propagating the gospel in the land of their progenitors.**

He indicates that there was spontaneous enthusiasm for the project from the Jamaican congregations..

The presence<sup>154</sup> of the West Indians, however did not, in those first years, yield the hoped for dividends, and several of them asked for repatriation to Jamaica; the local difficulties were great; Akropong was in disarray and almost deserted because of the civil war. However the terms of their contract with Basel, as summarised by Smith imply that they were not regarded as ‘missionaries’. Moreover the Moravian Mission in Jamaica had been the first by at least half a century<sup>155</sup> and, no doubt, the group of second or third generation Jamaican slaves, chosen for their Christian “ respectability”, were not of the same enthusiastic calibre as the “recaptives” of Sierra Leone or those with fresh memories of their roots in Africa. Those who remained, however made a considerable contribution as the nucleus of congregation and school, (founded in 1844) and as products of the seminary (built in 1848) for teachers and catechists, and later, as pastors, and also in increasingly successful growing of new food crops.

There is a strong local tradition that the decision to bring the West Indian families to settle was prompted by some words of Nana Addo Dankwa I to Riis. Edward Reynolds<sup>156</sup> (among others), himself a descendant of one of these families, repeats the traditional words in the characteristic English terminology of the time:

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<sup>154</sup> Hope M.Waddell op.cit.206ff. Professor Sanneh describes a similarly motivated venture by Jamaican Baptists at the same time ending up in Fernando Po (.op.cit.107f)

<sup>155</sup> Hewat op.cit. p.14

<sup>156</sup> *150 Years 1835-1985 Akropong Presbyterian Church*, (Presby Press Accra 1985) p.5.

**When God created the world he made book for the whiteman and fetish and juju for the blackman, but if you could show us some blackmen who could read the whiteman's book, then we should surely follow you.**

We will be returning to this tradition later.

Another indication of the favourable attitude of the 'Stool' of Akuapem to Riis' mission is quoted by Brokensha.<sup>157</sup> Riis who was "eager to establish outstations", was told by the *Omanhene*:

**Your missionaries are welcome to Akropong- even if a hundred or more come, we would not mind. But the fetishes at Aburi, Larteh and Adokrom are too powerful to allow you to open schools there as you intend.**<sup>158</sup>

(Chronology suggests that the *Omanhene* would have been Owusu Akyem, who would, as we have seen, have had some personal interest and experience behind this comment.) This also illustrates that the opening of schools and the provision of literacy skills was, at this time, thought to be what Christian mission was about; Christians were designated *sukuifo* or "school people".

An interesting and relevant phenomenon is the absence of the *Kwaesidae* celebration ( or "Sunday *Adae*") in the Akropong ritual calendar. Elsewhere this is part of the main ritual means whereby the royal stool Ancestors are formally contacted in the "stool house" and honoured, being offered drink and food, one by one, by their successor on behalf of the people with requests for protection and essential blessings twice in every 42 day period, once on a Wednesday *wukudae* and once on a Sunday *kwesidae*. The story goes that the drumming and dancing, both of which were eloquent 'languages' (and still are to those who retain this knowledge) essential to the public side of the Sunday *Adae* was making the Christian Sunday worship taking place so near, impossible, and that the *Okuapehene* and his council had graciously ceased to celebrate the *Kwesidae*!<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> David Brokensha, *Social Change in Larteh*, ( Oxford 1966) p.101

<sup>158</sup> This revealing tradition will be explored in Pt 2 of this chapter.

<sup>159</sup> It is probable that this Akan tradition was not very important to the non-Akan sub-chiefs.

The land allocated by the *Okuapehene* and his elders for the use of the Mission was adjacent to - but separate from - the town itself. This would undoubtedly have been in accordance with custom. All towns were built in separate “quarters”, to accommodate separate lineages, each with their own chosen lineage head. Each of these would have had their own traditional story of origin, some arriving as groups of “refugees” from inter-clan or inter-tribe struggles. The Akropong *oburoni kurom* or (Whiteman's town) contained the street still called “Hanover” and the houses of the West Indian families, the schools and the Seminary. and later the huge compound of the Presbyterian Training College and large Presbyterian Church. The word “Salem” can still be seen on the buildings of the original “Middle School” This model was repeated in other towns in the Eastern Region. The arrangement soon seemed congenial to the missionary’s purposes. They became convinced that a Christian community could only be built up in the future from among the children in the schools. “Adult converts were very few and indigenous social and religious conditions were considered to be so depraved that the Mission made no attempt to work within the existing African social framework or to present the gospel in African terms.”<sup>160</sup> As we shall see this separation has led to some fundamental problems, for which solutions are still to be found.

In the two decades following 1850 (the year when the British took over the Danish forts and areas of influence) the commitment to proper commerce as one of the best means of promoting civilisation and Christianity in Africa was not neglected . The Mission based in Akropong ( and in Osu /Christiansborg) found itself increasingly involved in what is still called in Presbyterian church policy “income generating projects” to obtain supplies for the growing number of Christian communities, attached to towns of the Akuapem Ridge ( and beyond) each with its school, or schools. The commercial enterprise of the Mission which became The Basel Mission Trading Factory, began with a young Basel agent functioning from a store in Christiansborg which led amongst other contributions to the prosperity of the area, the building of roads by the mission. Flourishing cash-crops (including the earliest

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<sup>160</sup> Smith op.cit p. 44



experiments with cocoa) and artisan training workshops for various basic crafts based in Christiansborg, and financed by the profits from these activities; and of course the literacy skills provided by the schools which were much valued, contributed to the prosperity of the Christian communities and the general well-being of the area. All this would be recognised by the Chiefs and their Elders, and would no doubt, at this stage be assumed to be acceptable to the Ancestors.

Meanwhile the Basel Committee (who were not apparently happy with the “Salem” pattern) in pursuance of its conviction that “at all costs” Africans must be taught in their mother tongue and be able to read the Bible in it and worship in it, had appointed J.G.Christaller to Akropong to study *Twi*, the language of the Akans. On the basis provided by Riis, and after six years, he had published the four Gospels and Acts with selections for use in schools and hymns for worship, all in the mother tongue. Then followed the whole Bible in *Twi*, a Grammar and finally his *Dictionary of the Ashanti and Fante Language called Tshi* published in 1881. This amazing work “ a veritable encyclopaedia of Akan life, thought and custom” is still consulted today. ( We have already noted Danquah's gratitude for Christaller's collection of 3680 proverbs and maxims.) Christaller's work though it reduced the Twi language to writing (or alternatively as Noel Smith expressed it “raised it to a literary level”, ) and facilitated what might be called conceptualisation, (or giving “the first real insight into Akan religious. social and moral ideas,”- Smith again) and although it certainly “welded the expression of Akan Christian worship to the native tongue”,- did not, it seems, have much effect on the prevailing attitude of the Basel Mission agents to Akan religion and custom.<sup>161</sup>

On the other hand the very large part played by those indigenous teachers and catechists trained by the Mission in the Akropong Seminary from 1850 onwards in the growth and establishment of the Christian communities centred around the schools and the vernacular Bible and daily Christian worship was surely empowered and facilitated by the great work of Christaller and his Akan colleagues.

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<sup>161</sup> See pt 2 of present chapter.

One of the earliest and most deep-seated ways in which Christian polity has become 'indigenised', especially within the spheres of what later became Presbyterian and Methodist Churches in the Gold Coast, was through the approximation of the minimal structures that the missionaries found necessary to the Akan structure of chief *akyeame*, elders and commoners.<sup>162</sup> Thus the minister functions similarly to the chief, the catechist to the "linguist" or *okyeame*, the elders, (or leaders among the Methodists) to the State elders. These together with the pastor form the supreme court of the local church exercising a similar function to that of the chief in council. "The affairs of the central church and its sub-stations are overlooked by this central court which undertakes responsibility for the administration, business and financial, and the oversight of the spiritual welfare of the congregations- the court is omniscient. A substantial proportion of the time of ministers and elders is absorbed in the hearing of 'cases'; they act as a tribunal to which members, singly or in groups, bring their affairs for settlement. Quarrels, disagreements, wrong-doing of all kinds come to them. The local church with its sub-stations, is an *imperium* set within the wider Akan society."

Williamson then explains the role of the catechist in the two mission-founded churches with which he was familiar. For the missionary, the catechist was the local pastor and teacher of the small congregation of the village sub-station, with the support of the the central church. In Akan thinking it is the other way round: the catechist is essential as representing the central authority, "as the linguist (*okyeame*) who interprets the chief's message, as the village headman (*odikuro*) responsible for village affairs." Although the Basel Mission with its very early establishment of a seminary for catechists and teachers equipped with Bible extracts in the vernacular managed a reasonably high standard of training, this attitude still prevailed : the pastor must have his official representative, trained or not, in each sub-station, without which

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<sup>162</sup> Hereafter I am following closely the masterly survey of this aspect of acculturation, or perhaps of inculturation in the sense of "transposition" (cf A. Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, New York pp12f) provided by the Methodist missionary writer S.G. Williamson in his book *Akan Religion and the Christian Faith* (Accra 1960) pp. 79ff.

there would be as much loss of prestige for the sub-station congregation as for a village denied an *odikuro*.<sup>163</sup>

In the gerontocratic society of the Akan, it is inevitable that there should be a division between the pastor and the elders (called presbyters in the Presbyterian Church, both men and women) on the one hand and the generality of the membership on the other, who are analogous to the *mmemeranti* literally “young men”, that is everyone who is not old. This has led both to the obstruction of change and creative initiative, on the one hand, and an authoritarian stance in the pastors. Further, as I am told by a fellow student, an Akan pastor, already quoted,<sup>164</sup> not only is no one eligible for the ministry under thirty, but in the meetings of the annual Synod any contribution to the debate has now to be made through a senior pastor appointed as *okyeame*.

Another similar development is indicated by the change by which the title *osofo*, traditionally belonging to the officiating priest of an *obosom* has become attached to the Christian priest or pastor, and is now almost exclusive to the latter, bringing with it much of the attitudes of Traditional Believers towards their priests<sup>165</sup> “The Christian *osofo* is accorded the prestige and respect traditionally accorded to one who is versed in holy things. The Church’s theological training course seems to acquire in the Akan mind the efficacy of the initiation period and training undergone by novitiate traditionalist priests.”<sup>166</sup> All this would involve the corollary that, in the

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<sup>163</sup> A further indication that the development of the ‘Salem’ pattern (for the negative aspects of which the missionaries are normally blamed) was culturally characteristic and therefore inevitable is to be found in the ways in which the ‘spiritual’ or ‘independent’ churches which have been proliferating throughout the last three quarter century “take on the functions of the tribal and kinship units so important in Ghana’s cultural tradition”, including the mediating role of the prophet leader/founder and his /her heirs, and the group identity and mutual support of the members.

<sup>164</sup> Information given me by the Revd Charles Gyan-Duah, who also cited an early suggestion of a name, discarded in favour of the name Presbyterian Church of the Gold Coast, for the self-governing, and about to be autonomous church, which was a translation of the word presbyterian into *Twi*: *Mpanyimfo Asafo*, elders or presbyters church, as an indication of the ease of the aspect of acculturation in question.

<sup>165</sup> Even for Rattray, writing in the twenties, *okomfo* which was originally used not of the priest in charge, but of members of his staff, as it were, who practised ecstatic gifts, and were possessed by the *obosom*, had become the preferred title for the former.

<sup>166</sup> It would be interesting to know if this also applies to trained and ordained women. Female *akomfo* also undergo long and perhaps to the popular mind equivalently esoteric training followed by dedication ceremonies.

exercise of his office, criticism of an *osofo* is improper. How much all this has been modified in the generation since Williamson wrote is not clear to me; I would suspect not very much from the little I have seen.

The kindly welcome and sustained interest of traditional rulers of Akuapem did not however, lead to any desire for Christian baptism by any of the reigning chiefs; though in addition to David Asante, mentioned above, two members of the stool family,- William Oforiba and Theophilus Opoku were baptised in 1852, but very few other adults.<sup>167</sup> In his speech in 1986 (see below) the reigning *Okuapehene* Addo Dankwa III, in illustrating the “full co-operation” of Akuapem with the early Basel missionaries, mentioned a daughter of the first Addo Dankwa, “who was very gifted in Akuapem *Twi* (and) became, figuratively speaking, the main reference library from where Christaller obtained the necessary information and material for his monumental works in *Twi*.” Moreover Smith's authorities, the Basel Mission Annual Reports etc. make clear that the usual verdict on the preaching of the Gospel was that it was a “good and sweet word”, which must first be thought about and pondered on.<sup>168</sup> In spite of the traditional Akan, and Guan, hospitality towards new religious practices, especially those which promised more power for living life, as the whiteman's cult ostensibly did, the chiefs and elders, were understandably cautious as it soon became apparent that the Christians did not play according to traditional rules. It was not just a matter of serving a new god with its (or his/her) own taboos, requirements and sanctions, though it did include these. For baptism, the required initiation to the new “cult”, was soon seen to imply “ a complete break with the essential bases and structures of Akan life”, for which the chief and his council of lineage heads and the “queenmother” or *Ohemaa* were responsible and essential. The tension and confrontation between the infant mission-founded churches and the Akan authorities, which inevitably followed, both overt and within the psyches of pastors and catechists will be discussed in Part Two of this chapter.

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<sup>167</sup> The sons of chiefs who were not of course eligible for the Stool, as royals or “princes” did have status and could be directed by their fathers to take advantage of what the whiteman offered.

<sup>168</sup> *op.cit* p.92

The address, quoted above, made by the present Paramount Chief of Akuapem, Addo Dankwa III at the launching of the Akrofi-Christaller Centre in 1985 in Accra (before it moved into its present quarters, the beautiful original Seminary compound in Akropong) is very illuminating, and extracts from it can, I believe, be usefully interpolated at this point. Earlier in his speech the *Okuapehene* had referred to the Danish Dr Isert and his pioneering experimental farming settlement, for which his predecessor and elders had allocated the land, adding,

**When Nana Addo Dankwa I became paramount Chief of Akuapem...he learnt about his great grand uncle Obuobi Atiemo. He got to know that by welcoming the white man with open arms, industry and prosperity followed.**

Here we have an eloquent indication of the reasoning behind the initial welcome given to the earliest up-country Basel Mission at this stage; the practical life-enhancing skills which the missionaries brought to their people would be understood as part of the concern and responsibility of the Ancestors and consequently of the

**On the occasion of the inauguration of the Akrofi-Chistaller Centre, I should like to repeat the message of Addo-Dankwa 1, my great grand uncle. Nana Addo Dankwa is still saying to missionaries through me, whether they be Whites or Blacks, that in the desire of Christian Churches to wash the African baby to make it acceptable to Christ, they should make sure that in the process they do not throw the baby away with the bath water.”**

The insight provided by this speech from a very “modern” paramount chief into the living link with what can be called the wisdom of the Ancestors will be called on in chapter three. Meanwhile in Part Two of this chapter a comparative study will be attempted of the encounter with Christianity in the religious history of these two societies under the heading: “Encounter as Confrontation”.

## **Early Encounters: Some Further Comments**

### **The “Great Commission” felt to be equally imperative across the centuries**

**‘Going, therefore, teach ye all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit...even to the end of the age.’...And again: ‘This Gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world, for a testimony to all nations, and then shall the consummation come.’...**

Thus Patrick in para. 40 of his *Confessio*, and in para 34:

**I ought...always to give thanks to God, who has shown that I should believe in Him, the indubitable one, without ceasing, and that I, though ignorant, may in these last days attempt to approach this work, so pious and so wonderful; that I, may imitate some of those of whom before the Lord long ago predicted (that they) should preach His Gospel, ‘for a testimony to all nations’ before the end of the world. Which, therefore, has been fulfilled, as we have seen. Behold, we are witnesses that the Gospel has been preached everywhere, in places where there is no man beyond,**

he states the basis of his vocation and the authority of his mission.

The 19th century missionary to Africa would express his vocation and motivation in virtually the same way. Even the Portuguese sailors who established the first European trading centre on the Coast, were aware that their Prince's motives in sending them included that of "bringing light" to those "in darkness".<sup>169</sup> In the early years of our own century the World Student Christian Federation chose as its slogan: "The total evangelization of the world in this generation".

Patrick's condemnation of the behaviour of the British Christian Coroticus and his followers in seizing his newly baptised converts for slaves and **distributing baptised women as prizes as rebels against Christ**, has, in the past, sometimes been assumed to indicate a rejection of slavery as such. Such an attitude would be virtually an historical impossibility; the New Testament writers themselves, as is well-known, did not do so. He begins the letter by emphasising the fact that he is a bishop, and claiming that he is forced by **the truth of Christ... and out of my love for my neighbours and sons for whom I gave up my country and parents and my life to the point of death**" to speak so harshly to those **who welter in the blood of innocent Christians, whom I have begotten into the number for God and confirmed in Christ**. Yet while he begins by referring to his own work in bringing so many Irish into **the flock of the Lord** in his condemnation of those who have **no respect for God nor his priests**, what Patrick seems to be revealing in the bulk of his letter is his anger and indeed his horror at what he sees as the blasphemy perpetrated at the instigation of Coroticus. In contrast to the **Roman Christians of Gaul**, who send large sums **to the Franks and other heathen...to ransom baptised captives**, he writes **;You prefer to kill and sell them to a foreign nation that has no knowledge of God. You betray the members of Christ as it were into a brothel**.

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<sup>169</sup> For a summary of the history of the hermeneutic of Matthew ch. 28:vs 18-20 "the great commission" see D. Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (1991) pp.339-341. That this was a key text for Scottish 16th century reformers is illustrated by the place given it on the title page of the first printed edition of the *Scots Confession of 1560*. The records of the first debate (in 1796) on the subject of "foreign mission" in the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland however show that the argument that "men must be polished and refined before they can be enlightened in religious truth" won that particular day. Yet they prompted the famous words from Dr John Erskine: "Moderator, rax me that Bible", which it is generally believed "prepared the way for the rise and development of the foreign mission enterprise in Scotland". Elizabeth G.K.Hewat *Vision and Achievement 1796 1956* (London 1960,) p.1

There are over a dozen references in the letter to the fact that these members of his flock are **baptised**, which seems to me to indicate the fundamental reason for his rage and horror. The history of the movement against slavery and the slave trade within 18th and 19th century Christendom is a moving testimony to the long-term expansion of this insight to include all human persons as made in the image of God, finding expression in the missionary movement, which was itself fuelled partly by corporate guilt, a human passion which is not always negative in its effects!

In her book based on exhaustive study of Irish hagiography (together with evidence in Penitentials and Annals etc) Lisa M.Bitel<sup>170</sup> cites material illustrating the ‘saints’ concern for the helpless, offering themselves “as mediators and alternative patrons to those in distress..”and who appealed to them for help, including hostages, slaves and even criminals. The active concern among clerics for the helpless and disadvantaged in early Christian Ireland, is without doubt a genuinely contributive motive behind the first of the *Cána, Cáin Adomnáin (Lex Inocentium)*.<sup>171</sup> providing for an artificially raised honour price for women killed or injured, later extended to minor clerics. This active concern does seem to me to constitute a characteristically Christian critique of the rigidly aristocratic/hierarchical institutions and attitudes of Early Ireland.

### **The Gospel “a good and sweet word”**

In spite of the absence of details of the earliest responses to Christianity in Ireland, that they were on the whole warm and welcoming must surely be assumed. There was, after all no evidence of any foreign power exercising colonial type influence, its complicated motives backed up by latent force, such as accompanied, and preceded, 19th century Christian missions in the Gold Coast. There can be no doubt whatever of the prestige and power of the learned classes in Ireland and although we cannot know precisely who made up those Christian groups to whom

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<sup>170</sup> *Isle of Saints Monastic Settlement and Christian Community in Early Ireland.* (Cornell Univ.1990) p.167f

<sup>171</sup>. Kuno Meyer ed & trans. (Oxford 1905). However the *Audacht Morainn*, a text which is regarded by experts, as noted below, as showing little direct Christian influence, does urge the king to care for the weak. See ed. Kelly op.cit. para. 30 p.10/11.



bishop Palladius was sent by the Pope, or how closely they were in touch with the churches of south and west Britain, we have the ‘evidence’ in Muirchú’s<sup>172</sup> powerful tale of the tradition that the *filid* and the ‘lawyers’ responded while the druids resisted.<sup>173</sup> Thus, in spite of the inevitable absence of ‘documentation’ we can be sure that the soil was already prepared for that flowering of ardent and learned Christian devotion in such spirits as Columbanus and Columcille and the author of *The Alphabet of Devotion*. As the content of Judaic/Christian Scriptures became open to the generations succeeding Patrick’s ‘sons and daughters of kings’, its ready ‘availability’ within their universe of meaning must have fed that insatiable hunger for biblical learning which is so strikingly evident in the historical sources for early mediaeval Ireland. A recently published book called *Iona. The Earliest Poetry of a Celtic Monastery* in which are collected poems “written in Gaelic and Latin by... men who lived and studied, wrote and died on the island”, provides clear evidence of monks in the 6th and 7th centuries who were also poets skilled (and trained) in complicated vernacular verse forms<sup>174</sup> who were writing praise poems to their hero, indicating a strong continuity between the heroic and loyal spirit represented by the traditional ‘champion’, and that of the Christian saint.

The entry on *o-nyame-som* in both editions<sup>175</sup> of Christaller’s Dictionary reads as follows: **the service or worship of God; (the true) religion; godliness; o-nyamesomfo, pl.a-, a worshipper of the true God; o-nyamesom-pa, true godliness, piety.** We cannot know just when this definition was finalised by Christaller, but we know that it was Riis, or one of his colleagues who, according to local tradition, was

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<sup>172</sup>The well-known passage in Muirchú’s *Life of St Patrick* describing a confrontational ‘encounter’ between ‘christianity and paganism’ forms a main ‘text’ in Part 2 of this chapter. As noted there, Muirchú’s patron at whose bidding the *Life* was written was a bishop from Leinster who belonged to the ‘Roman party’ in the Easter controversy, in close touch with the ecclesiastical leaders in the south. Moreover the evidence for the privileged mobility and common world of discourse shared by the Irish learned classes is indisputable.

<sup>173</sup> For a discussion of the evidence in the Munster based law-tracts called the “*nemed* group”, especially the *Uraicecht Becc* indicating the longer-lasting prestige of the druids there than in the north-east see N.Patterson, *Cattle Lords and Clansmen* (London 1994 2nd ed.) pp.40-45.

<sup>174</sup> Clancy and Markus op.cit. The earliest of these poems in Old Irish is the *Amra* (or Elegy) *Choluimb Chille* which is believed to be contemporary with Columba’s death.

<sup>175</sup> The first edition was published in 1881.

given the name *Onyame* by “a fetish priest” of a neighbouring town *obosom* (probably of Abirwu) as the name of the ‘Supreme Being.’ This seems to me to represent one significant clue to that initial general response to the missionary message, that it was “a good and sweet word”. The Christian claim to be bringing good news of the accessibility of *Onyame/ Onyankopon*, and to be revealing him as inviting individuals to entrust themselves to his hands-on care was soon seen to involve drastic concomitant demands which made it impossible for those responsible for maintaining the basic structures of society to respond further. Thus while sons and daughters of chiefs, were also among the earliest catechumens and pastors among the people of Akuapem, they had no actual stake, as such, in the matrilineally based structures of power, and it is only comparatively recently that baptised Christians have been taking office in the traditional structures of society.

The famous dictum (undoubtedly owing its crude wording to the pathetic inadequacies of the English vocabulary for such concepts available to the interpreter of the time)<sup>176</sup> of the first Nana Addo Dankwa of Akuapem, with its ‘mythological’ content and force, comparing the Creator’s gift of **book** to the **whiteman** with his gift of **fetish** and **juju** to the **blackman**, adding **if you could show us some blackmen who could read the whiteman’s book, then we should surely follow you**, has, as we have seen, significance for the study of the early ‘encounter with Christianity’ among the Akan. Both cultures shared, of course a deep sense of the power, creative, illuminative and destructive, of the uttered word,<sup>177</sup> for both, this reverence was naturally given also to the book in which it was, as it were, captured and enshrined.<sup>178</sup> The central place of the Bible in the life of the Salems no doubt

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<sup>176</sup> The word *juju*, for instance is Nigerian pidgin, while *fetish* is Gold Coast.

<sup>177</sup> Though as we noted in ch1, the Akan seem to have seen the primordial Word as being uttered by the drum (*kyerama odomankoma*).

<sup>178</sup> There are a number of examples of the power of self-preservation of a sacred book after being immersed in water or exposed to fire in the Irish records, a belief to which the learned Adamnán subscribed as in 11.9 of his *Life of Columba*, (R.Sharpe trans.London 1991 160f.) though he does indicate that the holiness of the scribe was the cause..The Asante were familiar with the notion that the physical written words of a sacred work contained spiritual power from the influence of popular Islam. Arab slaves employed as scribes in the Kumasi bureaucratic set-up were called on to supply written scraps of the Koran as talismans, in the perpetual search for supplementary sources of protection for the Asantehene and others. I was told that an ancient worn “mat” under the feet of the

added to this deep-seated attitude, which still lends strength to what looks like obscurantist ‘fundamentalism’, and makes it hard for some clergy and students to accept that their text-books can and should be subject to criticism.

The differences between the historical circumstances and the quantity and quality of information available about these earliest encounters with Christianity of the two cultures being studied complicate any attempts to make direct comparisons at this stage. And yet, as we have seen, whatever the divisive hardening of attitudes towards the chieftaincy as an institution in mission and church in the Gold Coast,<sup>179</sup> there is a not unexpected parallel between an aspect of early missionary strategy in both cultures which emerges from evidence stated by the Akan pastor K. Effa Ababio in his doctoral thesis *Conflict, Identity and Cooperation*, : “All (missionaries) recognised the power and authority of the traditional rulers and saw the need to win their confidence and good will.” That this attitude is inevitable in societies which are so inextricably informed and integrated by the presence of a “sacral ruler” is evident in Patrick’s Confession. In both cases this goodwill led to the foundation of resident Christian communities, held together by a rule of life and worship under the authority of dedicated leaders, developing into centres of learning and all kinds of life-enhancing skills. Both, in ways appropriate to their time and place, depended on the approval, respect, and value placed on their contribution by the community centred on the sacral ruler. And, as we have seen the contribution made by these communities to the well-being, at every level, of the peoples for whom these rulers were responsible was recognisable by them. The ‘saalem’ pattern was welcomed by missionaries on the ground as a means of keeping Christian converts and their families from “contamination” by the beliefs and way of life of their “heathen” kin and neighbours. That a somewhat similar mission strategy must have formed part of the early foundation of Irish monasticism, as in Europe as a whole, in the age influenced by the ‘Desert fathers’ cannot surely be denied; both were intended to enable a dedication to the way of holiness, and both were intended to foster ascetic ideals, however much

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*Okuapehene* when sitting in state during the *Odwira* had such Muslim talismans sewn into it. I have not heard of such ‘protective’ use being made of the text of the Bible.

<sup>179</sup> See Akan section of pt 2 below.

each was culturally and historically conditioned, and however little their similar aspirations would be mutually recognisable as such. And as we shall see, some degree of confrontation and conflict with those same traditional 'heathen' sacral powers was inevitable in both cases.

However the similarity is obviously only partial, as must already be apparent. The founding Saints of the great monasteries were not foreigners bringing their own alien world view, and with no roots in the community, but members of the indigenous ruling elite, and in that kin-based society deeply bound up with the political aspirations of provincial over-kings, and at the same time recognised as carrying the responsibility of those endowed with divine wisdom and authority for the stability and well-being of all. And yet, the acculturation process recognised by Williamson thirty years ago in the polity of the Presbyterian church, (and also of the Methodist church) in Ghana, which he implies can be traced to the early days of these mission-founded churches, was not apparently planned or even perhaps recognised by the authorities in Basel. As we have noted they were initially suspicious of the development of the salem system. However, by a somewhat paradoxical development, and from various causes, the Basel missionaries 'in the field' seem to have succumbed to the ethos which gave them chiefly status in such a way as to be perceived in the early years of this century when "independent", "spiritual" and "African" churches began to emerge, as standing in the way of the indigenisation of Christianity, because of the weight of the 'Basel' tradition which they and their indigenous colleagues preserved.

As noted above the holistic community life offered and practised by many of the 'spiritual' Christian churches, has proved very attractive, particularly for modern town-dwellers, providing as they do some equivalent to the security, (in all senses of that word), and mutual aid and support of the ancestral kin-group and the traditional state.<sup>180</sup> In this later development of Akan/African Christianity, there is a similarity with what was provided by the local early Irish monastic compound.

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<sup>180</sup> See Christian Council of Ghana publication *The Rise of the Independent Churches in Ghana*.op.cit. pp.34ff

## **Postscript; Encounter as seen by an English Anglican missionary monk, Diocese of Accra 1925**

So far no space has been found for the ‘encounter’ experience and response in Akan land where the missionary agents belonged to non-protestant christian traditions. The unpublished paper summarised briefly here came into my hands ‘by chance’, its ultimate provenance unknown. It is superscribed: *The Blessed Sacrament in the Mission Field* . by Dom Peter Harris, O.S.B. (A paper read at the C.B.S. Festival in Caxton Hall, London on June 18, 1925) It is by an Anglican missionary sent to the Gold Coast by the SPG, (Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts), and represents the influence of the Tractarian or “Oxford” or Anglo-Catholic Movement in the Church of England. A careful reading of this text reveals to me some real insights into and appreciation of what in modern jargon would be called ‘the spirituality’ of the Akan people, not apparently open to the usual protestant missionary mind of that time and which Dom Peter is seeking to convey to his British audience. Unfortunately he finds it necessary to intersperse his talk with allusions to “the childishness” and “superstition” of the African and the need “to displace” his “heathen religion” which in accordance with the accepted categories of the time he calls “animism or spiritism”. The summary account he gives of this, however, and the strong emphasis he places on their “very real conception of GOD as the Creator, as the One Supreme Being behind the Universe,” adding, “it clears the ground considerably at the start if we realise what I believe to be true, that the One God of Christianity and the One God of West African heathenism is the same true GOD, called “the God of the Sky...All-powerful and All-seeing.”...indicates that his own understanding is not confined by the concept suggested by the word ‘animism’.<sup>181</sup> Dom Peter is, I believe, caught in a typical missionary bind: - the desire (and practical

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<sup>181</sup> This was the term still current in the fifties when I joined my husband in the Church of Scotland “mission field” in Eastern Nigeria; it was used as a big improvement on the term *juju* the more offensive pidgin English term. See next sentence above. Now it, in its turn is regarded with suspicion as reductionist and imperialist.

need) to convey his own illuminating experience 'in the field' in terms of the ignorances, prejudices and mixed motivations of the sending bodies, whose language he once shared and **still has not learned how to repudiate.**

He begins by justifying giving special treatment to the overall subject of the 'Festival' in the context of 'the Mission Field'<sup>182</sup>: "... a subject such as this has within its scope the consideration as to how far and in what sense a converted heathen finds himself able to enter into and to weave into his spiritual experience Catholic teaching as to the Holy Communion and the meaning of the presence in the Tabernacle and the Sacrificial aspect of the Mass." It is necessary first of all...to examine...the underlying principles of the heathen religion that has to be displaced. As far as the West African is concerned his religion consists in what is known as 'Animism' or...'spiritism' This does not mean...that he worships and makes idols of trees or stone pillars or the sun, or animal creatures...but it does mean that he imagines a spirit to have taken up its dwelling in this tree or that river;...much will depend on the relationship between him and the spirit indwelling the patch of ground on which his cocoa trees are planted...With the object of keeping on good terms with these spirits he will put food for them at certain spots..." Dom Peter then adds a reference to "the veneration and invocation of bygone chiefs" centred in the "tribal stool" and to the golden stool of the ancient Ashanti kings... the most sacred of these stools; and finally to the "very real conception of GOD as the creator, as the One Supreme Being behind the Universe".<sup>183</sup>

"...the West African possesses already through his religion more than a germ of Catholicism,..He believes very intensely indeed in another world and a future life;...(the ) unseen world and, if not the supernatural at any rate the praeternatural, is part and parcel of his everyday life, far more real to him than the invisible and unseen is to many Catholics even...; he has already known Sacraments, not, it is true, sacraments

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<sup>182</sup> He explains that his own experience of this is entirely within the "Diocese of Accra, comprising the Gold Coast and Ashanti", reflecting in the size of its area, incidentally, the comparatively small input of Anglican mission outreach..

<sup>183</sup> The example Dom Peter gives earlier of the offering of food to a local spirit presence is interestingly the offering placed in a forked branch "outside many houses in Ashanti villages" which was recognised by Rattray as '*Nyame dua*, directed at that same "Supreme Being".

of Grace, but at any rate Sacraments of Nature,...; his tree, his river, is a sacrament: the outward wood, the outward water enshrining the indwelling spirit.”.

“The awe and mystery of the Catholic environment appeal instinctively to him...and that is why it is easier for the West African to grasp the teaching of Catholic Sacraments than it is for a heathen in England...<sup>184</sup> If once then we can get the African to realise that the old superstitious fear of his heathen religion is false and that his (own) GOD is calling him in Christ, there is always the mystical awe of his animistic faith and his sense of the unseen world, whether of devils or angels, and his sacramental instinct to build upon and to help to make the change to the Church’s sacramental teaching an easy and natural transition...

“...The diocese is divided into ...districts with here and there, central stations where a priest, or priests are resident..., in the diocese of Accra, at each of these central stations the Blessed Sacrament is reserved, and in every case the Tabernacle is on the chief Altar of the Church....” At the end of the talk he gives an account of a catechist “who had just left our school” posted to a remote outstation, who wrote to him, from Kumasi, reporting cheerfully of his first six weeks; “I am trying to get our new house (he means church) ready so that we can have our services in it very soon, before the rainy season comes...This is my first time of returning to Kumasi as a short visit to the Blessed Sacrament. I have to stay at Domi Bipposu (his sub-station) for six weeks and then come here for my Communion.”

“At Mass they worship with real reverence. Quaint things happen sometimes. When I have been saying Mass in some primitive little bush Church a stream of rosaries and crosses and medals have found their way to the Altar via the server, so that they might get a Blessing during the offering of the Holy Sacrifice. The Daily Mass, though most are prevented by their work from coming, always has its bunch of the faithful to assist...

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<sup>184</sup> There follow a long section contrasting the “soil” for the West African with that in ‘England’ (a) because of the effects on “once fertile soil of ‘centuries of Protestantism’ (b) the difficulty of “realising the supernatural” in the physical environment created by the industrial revolution. He refers also to the difficulty for missionaries of “the general irreligion or non-practice of religion of the European official or trader”.

“They need the sacraments frequently and they use the sacraments frequently. Living as they do among heathen surroundings...and as converts in whom heathen habits of life-long standing have been embedded, it is obvious that they must need constant shriving and the inflowing grace of the Bread of Life...Those who happen to be travelling by road or by train and have to leave before the hour of Mass will frequently receive their Communion before they start from the Tabernacle... They are in practically every case exceedingly careful about keeping the fast before Communion.”

The most cogent and illuminating comment that could be made on this text is, to my mind, contained in the following extracts from those lectures<sup>185</sup> given by Nana Addo Dankwa III of Akuapem to the Presbyterian theological students in Trinity College, Legon in 1989.

“Without making, at first, any value-judgements as to whether it is a good thing for Africans to worship nature-spirits, Christians should be able to acknowledge that the supernatural world in which the African believes is a reality...Christians should distinguish between the African view of the cosmos and the traditional practices that are associated with it...It is necessary to believe what is a fact, however unpleasant it may be. But how one tries to adjust oneself to that fact may be wrong and undesirable. For example, if it is true that spirits exist, it would be foolhardy not to accept that fact, but one’s attitude or practices towards these spirits may be wrong and call for re-adjustment.

“...One fact that the churches should not lose sight of is the fact that the African is not the type of person whose approach to the Supreme God or religion generally, can be made in abstract form. Unlike most Europeans, the African employs symbols and gestures very much in his day to day activities, Basically, in religion, the African believes that, in most cases, his faith in say God is strengthened and reinforced by a visible object or act which tends to bring his God nearer to him.

“In recent times, due to the advanced state of enlightenment reached by many African Christians, most of them no more use amulets, but instead, they use blessed

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<sup>185</sup> Published by The Power of the Word Press N.Y. 1990, pp.60-64



water (Florida Water), blessed handkerchiefs, crucifixes, etc. Since those objects have been blessed by the Pastors, most African Christians believe in their efficiency...the African who does not feel at home in an abstract way of thinking and...doing things...any denial of the efficacy of blessed symbols will only make him confused...(and) will not drive away the belief...Rather the African Christian will become a hypocrite who officially will pretend he does not believe in these things, but privately he would resort to these same things by joining the spiritual churches and prayer groups where symbolic objects are used to reinforce the belief of the members in God and Christ...

“...It has been said that in Africa, in statistical terms, there are more Muslims than Christians...many Muslim methods appeared more attractive to the African than the Christian approach...For instance, the Muslim’s solution to the African belief in the existence of witchcraft and malevolent forces were the concrete materials which were given to converts and which the converts were made to believe possessed extraordinary potency that could neutralise all evil powers...while ..the missionary admonished him to stop being superstitious and gave him nothing to remove his fear and urged him to trust in the efficiency of abstract prayer to an unseen God...

“...Christians and uninitiated Africans should endeavour to do justice to African culture so that in the desire of Christians to conform to Western or European standards, they do no permanent damage to customs and values which contain a stronger and nobler foundation for a good Christian life than those we adopt readily without a moment’s thought. For instance, why is it that Ghanaian graphic art cannot find expression in murals of church buildings?

No doubt, Christ wants to see us all as good Christians, but He might also want to see us as good “African-Christians.”

Juxtaposed in this way, the comments of these two, the early twentieth century English missionary and the contemporary Akan paramount chief, both devout Christians, reveal that they share a recognition of a deeply valid *preparatio evangelii* in the world view and religious experience of the ‘African’.

## **PART TWO: ENCOUNTER AS CONFRONTATION**

### **Encounter as Confrontation in Ireland**

We have seen that at least within the tradition represented by 2MT, the relationship of Lugh with Tara is deeply significant. As for Tara itself, it has been an intensely potent symbol in Irish consciousness from very early times and on into this century. F.J.Byrne, whose scholarly authority on the subject must be recognised, comments in his O'Donnell Lecture *The Rise of the Uí Néill and the high-kingship of Ireland*<sup>186</sup>: “The meaning behind the title 'king of Tara' would give ample scope for several lectures. Briefly, we can accept that the kingship of Tara was essentially sacral. The glory of Tara always lies in the pagan past, and Muirchú makes it clear that he regarded Tara as a pagan Babylon and a centre of druidry. The legends about the kingship of Tara seem to show that it was not a normal tribal kingship, to be succeeded to on the death of the previous incumbent in the usual manner.”

It is probably quite safe to say that for most present day Irish school students and many of their elders, Tara means mainly two much loved traditions: the ancient glory of Cormac Mac Art and the “High Kings” on the one hand and St Patrick's victory over the “pagan” King Lóighuire and “his druids” on the other: an illustration of the abiding power of *senchas* in Ireland and incidentally a tribute to the mythographical brilliance of Muirchú's story of encounter with Christianity seen as confrontation in the extracts from his *Life of St Patrick*, which form the ‘text’ for this section..

Indeed the earliest dateable literary works relating to Tara are the Latin Patrician texts in the *Book of Armagh*, which have been edited and translated by

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<sup>186</sup> F.J.Byrne, *The Rise of the Uí Neill and the high-kingship of Ireland*, (Dublin 1969) p.13; see also his *Irish Kings and High kings*, (London 1973) pp. 49-70.

Ludwig Bieler.<sup>187</sup> He dates both Muirchú's Life of Patrick and the Tírechán material to the end of the seventh century<sup>188</sup>.

The following passages from Muirchú's *Vita* reveal a brilliant mind whose literacy and whose learning was in a language other than his mother tongue, a mind informed by, and feeding on, a richly satisfying corpus of sacred Christian lore to which he had privileged access:- writing at the close of the century which saw such influential cosmopolitan Irish abbots as Columbanus the pioneer founder of Irish monasteries on the Continent and Adamnán, the ninth Abbot of Iona. It is now becoming more customary to recognise the legitimacy of the language of Myth and to treat such a self-consistent tale as follows with respect, as capable of conveying what might be called,- a 'truth of the matter'.

That Patrick's own writings were familiar to Muirchú, (and were presumably preserved in Armagh), is evident from the early part of the *Vita*<sup>189</sup>; and although these do not actually mention any encounters with "pagan priests", there can be little doubt that they happened, and that Muirchú's tale conveys effectively how they were seen, experienced and interpreted. McCone's exegetical comments on Muirchú's use of both overt and subtly allusive references to the Bible are illuminating<sup>190</sup>. They perhaps help to reveal that such confrontation can only take place where there is mutual recognition<sup>191</sup>.

For Muirchú, Tara has all the necessary prestige to make it the proper site to stage the symbolic confrontation between the Christian apostle Patrick and the power of "paganism". Tara becomes Babylon; and simultaneously perhaps, the Jerusalem of Herod<sup>192</sup>, and even, potentially, the seat of an Irish Christian Emperor.

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<sup>187</sup> L. Bieler ed. & trans., *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh* (Dublin 1979) pp.1f

<sup>188</sup> idem, pp 41-43. It cannot now be known where the Early Irish written sources used by the redactor of 2MT hail from, but such an influential work as Muirchú's must have been known to the ninth century sage/s responsible for them.

<sup>189</sup> Bieler op.cit. p16.

<sup>190</sup> op.cit. pp 33,34

<sup>191</sup> One is reminded of M-L Sjoestedt's comment on the significance of the "opposition" of Lugh and the Dagda, quoted in Chap.1 above..

<sup>192</sup> McCone loc.cit.

## Tara as Babylon

Section I 1-5 of Muirchú's book<sup>193</sup> is based "for the greater part either directly or indirectly" on the Confession being a kind of summary of Patrick's early years, making an appropriate introduction to the tale.

We begin the extracts from our source as Muirchú has brought his hero to Ireland after his consecration as Bishop. Then follows:

**In the days when this took place there was in those parts a great king, a fierce pagan, an emperor of the non-Romans, with his royal seat at Tara, which was then the capital of the realm of the Irish, by name Lóiguire son of Níall, a scion of the family that held the kingdom of almost the entire island. He had around him sages and druids, fortune tellers and sorcerers, and the inventors of every evil craft, who according to the custom of paganism and idolatry, were able to know and foresee everything before it happened." Muirchú then tells of the king's two favourite Druids and of their prophecies of the coming of a kingdom with an unheard-of and burdensome teaching...from afar over the seas;...it would be honoured by all, would overthrow kingdoms, kill the kings who offered resistance...destroy all their gods, banish the works of their craft, and reign for ever. They describe the man who was to achieve this, reciting the following words...in the form of a poem...not very intelligible, owing to the peculiarity of their language:**

**There shall arrive Shaven-head,**

**with his stick bent in the head.**

**from his house with a hole in its head**

**he will chant impiety**

**from the table in the front of his house:**

**all his people will answer 'Be it thus, be it thus. In our own language all this can be expressed more clearly. When all this happens (the druids would say) our kingdom, which was a pagan one, will fall.**

And in {1 15(14)} Muirchú's chosen setting for Patrick, in the words of the Psalmist (to) **smash the head of the dragon...1 13 (12):**

**It so happened in that year that a feast of pagan worship was being held, which the pagans used to celebrate with many incantations and magic rites and other superstitious acts of idolatry. There assembled the kings, satraps, leaders, princes, and the nobles of the people; furthermore the druids, the fortune tellers, and the inventors and teachers of every craft and every skill were also summoned to king Lóiguire at Tara, their**

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<sup>193</sup> The extracts from Muirchú's Life of St Patrick which follow are from Ludwig Bieler's translation of his edition of the Latin text, op.cit.at 1 10(9) and 1 15 (14).

**Babylon, as they had been summoned at one time to Nabuchodonosor, and they held their pagan feast on the same night on which holy Patrick celebrated Easter They also had a custom...that whosoever in any district... should have lit a fire on that- night before it was lit in the place of Tara, would have forfeited his life.**

Thereafter the tale unfolds in familiar dramatic detail and other tales of power contests and trials by fire and water between Patrick and the druids/pagans/infidels, richly full of biblical quotations and allusions, (mainly Old Testament) themselves echoing native religious imagery and experience,- and with some specifically contemporary reference as well, which so captivated the imaginations, not only of those connected with the Patrician *paruchia* of Armagh but beyond it and eventually of the whole country.

One can only make selective comments on so much richness. The Druids encapsulate irreconcilable “paganism”. In 2MT they, together with the Dagda, (the god of druidry) have the power to manipulate fire; and this is a very strong traditional association.<sup>194</sup> McCone's chapter on Fire and the Arts contains illuminating material on this whole theme<sup>195</sup>. Not only does the tale of the lighting of the first Paschal Fire by Patrick on the Hill of Slane in view of Tara become a powerful image of the ultimate challenge of the Easter message, it also implies the ultimate overthrow of the role of the druid caste as a trusted source of divine wisdom to be replaced by Patrick and his heirs. That the druids had privileged access to prophetic knowledge was not denied, but even though they use their powers to foresee the coming of Patrick and his “doctrine”, because it is the druids who are exercising this prophetic power through which truth is revealed, it is illegitimate power: **according to custom of paganism and idolatry.** ( This kind of double-think is not sustainable in any mode of discourse as we can see in learned developments in the Irish sources and equally in the last thirty or more years of indigenous African Christian thought.)

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<sup>194</sup> Ed Gray ITS LII para. 80

<sup>195</sup> (1991) pp.161-179. For references to associations of druids with Beltane fires and with Uisneach see A.&B.Rees *Celtic Heritage*, (London,1961) p.158.

The apparent anomalies involved in Muirchú's choice of place and time for the confrontation between Christian and Pagan Fire have been well discussed<sup>196</sup>. The topicality of the importance of Easter with the monastic and episcopal establishment in the South having as "Romanists" already accepted the Roman dating for Easter while Armagh had been taking longer, might have been a factor in the choice of Easter, rather than Beltane, with its native fire ritual<sup>197</sup>. Hughes suggests the desire to show "the source of Uí Néill power recognising the authority of Patrick" as a factor in Muirchú's choice of Tara rather than Uisnech traditionally associated with such ritual; and all this within the context of a developing propaganda war between Armagh, the heirs of Patrick, and Iona and the monastic family of Columba ( Colum Cille) under its brilliant 9th Abbot Adomnán<sup>198</sup>. The scornful tone used by Muirchú, notably in his reference to the "peculiarity" of the Druids' language in contrast to "our language", was no doubt acceptable to his public : latinist biblical scholars and literati.

Whether or not Muirchú intended either the feast of pagan worship quoted above or the feast held by Lóiguire on Easter day at which Patrick was invited to eat, to be the *Feis Temrach* in the special sense in which it is now regarded: - as a royal inaugural feast including a sacred marriage ritual of the king with the land/province/goddess,- we cannot know. Muirchú's general attitude noted above might suggest a deliberate refusal to refer to such specific superstitious acts of idolatry.

In a well-known entry in the Annals of Tigenach, Diarmait mac Cerbaill whose reign as king of Tara is well documented, is mentioned for the year 560, as celebrating the Feast of Tara specifying that this was the last time it was held<sup>199</sup>. For Binchy this entry recording "in historical as opposed to legendary sources" the end of "this pagan fertility rite, with a quasi-divine king at its centre" represents the "final

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<sup>196</sup>D.A. Binchy, "The Fair of Tailtiu and the Feast of Tara", *Ériu* *XVIII*, 1958-62 and K.Hughes *The Church in Early Irish Society* (London 1966 ) pp.116ff

<sup>197</sup> Behind this choice there could also be the whole hinterland of Lugh as a comparative mythological "newcomer" and the strong hints of an "adversary" in various guises.

<sup>198</sup> Herbert (1988). especially pp.47-56.

<sup>199</sup> c.f. *Byrne Kings and High-kings* pp.94f and Binchy (1958).p.137.

Christianisation of the Tara monarchy”<sup>200</sup>. Perhaps this often quoted statement from an undoubted authority has nowadays to be somewhat modified as not taking account of the inherent ambiguity of the terms used. However the dearth of direct references to the forms of the ritual of the *banfeis* in Irish literature does suggest some kind of self-censorship among the literati<sup>201</sup>.

Muirchú's description of Lóiguire, as *imperator barbarorum regnans in Temoria, quae (tunc) erat caput (regni)* conjures up a memory of glorifications in mosaic of Christian Emperors in contemporary basilicas as, for instance, in Ravenna, which made such an impression on Constantine.<sup>202</sup> That Muirchú and Tírechán also, writing as protagonists of Armagh and the “traditions of Holy Patrick, “were pursuing a struggle to establish the national primacy of Armagh in archiepiscopal mode is well argued by Celticists<sup>203</sup>. One remembers that the former were familiar with Patrick's own account of his “onerous episcopate” and with the ringing sentence with which his letter to Coroticus begins : **I Patrick, unlearned and resident in Ireland, declare myself to be bishop....** This description of Lóiguire together with Muirchú's reference to the king's father Níall of the Nine Hostages as ancestor of the line that **held almost the whole country**, accordingly would suggest that Muirchú had a scenario in mind with an Uí Néill dynast as “Christian Emperor” or King of all Ireland, with the heir of Patrick, established as Primate; and his story of Lóiguire's final conversion (I 27 26) could further indicate this. Tírechán, on the other hand, in his collection of memoranda on the mission of Patrick made at roughly the same time<sup>204</sup> makes Lóiguire say to Patrick on a second visit to Tara,

**My father Níall did not allow me to accept the faith, but bade me be buried on the ridges of Tara. I, son of Níall and the sons of Dúnlán in Maistu in Mag Liphí, face to face in the manner of men of war**<sup>205</sup>.

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<sup>200</sup> loc.cit 136f

<sup>201</sup> Giraldus Cambrensis' tale: its well-known description of the king being bathed in the broth from a sacrificial mare etc. is unique; it seems to have taken a foreign observer to lift the veil. *Typographia Hiberniae*, ed. J.J.O'Meara (1949) Proc. Roy. Ir. Acad. LIIC, pp.113-178

<sup>202</sup> K.Clark *Civilisation* (BBC London 1969) p.18

<sup>203</sup> e.g.Herbert(1988). p.53 and McCone, *Peritia 1*. 1982 pp.107-145 (at 142)

<sup>204</sup> Beiler (1979). p.36

<sup>205</sup> idem, p.133, Tírechán para. 12

For him perhaps the “pagan” associations of Tara are too strong. In a later tale with a remarkably anti-clerical tone the desertion of Tara as the residence of the “kings of Tara” ( which had indeed happened well before the end of the eighth century)<sup>206</sup>, was attributed to the powerful curse of saint Ruadán of Lothra and the twelve apostles of Ireland and all the saints of Ireland<sup>207</sup> in the reign of that same Díamait who was the last to celebrate the *feis Temrach*. This suggests that the “Tara as Babylon “ school of thought among churchmen had a long life, or at least was popularly believed to have.

Before we leave the Muirchú text, it is worth commenting on two short passages in it which would seem to have echoes in 2MT. There is strong evidence that the traditional powerful role of the divine Lugh in connection with the Festival of Lughnasa both as a time of Assembly and as the celebration of the First Fruits of the harvest, was taken over in later legend by the **tradition of holy Patrick and his miracles.**<sup>208</sup> In the 2MT account of the Feast given by Núadu to the *Túatha dé Danaan* on the resumption of his kingship, the presence of the *Aés Dána*, each in his own place, and no place empty, is of central importance. In the passage quoted above, Muirchú includes with the kings, satraps...nobles, the druids and fortune tellers, **the inventors and teachers of every craft and skill** among those summoned to the feast in Tara. (Earlier he had used the phrase **inventors of every Evil craft.**) And in 17(16) Muirchu writes:

**And holy Patrick was summoned to the presence of the king...and the druids said to their people: Let us not arise when he comes,for whosoever rises at his coming will believe afterwards and reverence him.**

And when Patrick entered the banqueting hall on Easter day **only Dubtach maccu Lugir an excellent poet** rose. There might almost be a reference to this in 2MT as deliberate as Muirchú’s use of the word “satrap” made to recall Nebuchadnezzar's

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<sup>206</sup> See text cited below.

<sup>207</sup> Within *Betha Ruaddáin* in Bk of Fermoy ed and tr. by S.H.O’Grady in *Silva Gadelica* 1892 i 66-ii p.70

<sup>208</sup> M.MacNeill MM.passim.



court, in the incident in 2MT when king Níadu arose before Lugh for thirteen days. In terms of the subtleties of this mode of discourse there would be likely to be also a comparison between the “excellent poet “ recognising his master in divine knowledge in Patrick, with the King recognising the prototype and paradigm of sacral kingship in Lugh. Be that as it may, the comparison is note-worthy. It is likely that this is the earliest instance of Patrick and Lugh playing a similar role.

It is tempting to speculate further on the significance of the linking of these two deeply mythological events. Fergus Kelly in his section on The Law of Persons in the Old Irish Law Texts (dated within the 7th-8th centuries) is examining the legal position of “Clerics”<sup>209</sup>, and he quotes from *Crith Gablach* **Who is nobler, the king or the bishop?** answered by the statement that the bishop is nobler because **the king rises up before him on account of the faith.** Muirchú has set the confrontational scene with the warning from the king’s druid to his brethren and to the assembled **aés dána** not to rise before Patrick “lest we afterwards believe and reverence him”. In view of all the evidence which Kelly and others adduce for the replacement in the ancient laws of status etc. of the druids by the clerics, the refusal of the former to rise to Patrick appears as a desperate rearguard action against the overwhelming power of the incoming Faith wielded by and conveyed in Patrick himself. The exception of the “excellent poet” in that context is a beautiful example of the power of mythological language to express a whole complex of event, meaning and social structure in less than ten words. But where does this place Lugh? I would tentatively suggest that as the unique sage in every art, and demonstrably gifted with powers sufficient to release the king and his people from bondage to the Fomoiré, and by the victory won over these forces of chaos, to inaugurate a golden age, the poet/sage responsible for 2MT could in this passage, not only be deliberately, though subtly, likening Lugh with Patrick before whom kings should rise, but also suggesting that Lugh *Samildánach* is himself more than the primordial divine prototype sacral king.<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> Kelly (1988). pp.39ff

<sup>210</sup>We will be referring in ch.3 pt 3 to the reference in the Middle Irish tale *Scél na Fír Flatha* describing the guidance given by Lugh (the *Scáil*) to Conn in *Baile in Scáil* and by Manannán to Cormac in *Echtra Cormaic* as a “godly ministration” implying that it was given by angels., There

Although Adomnán, Muirchú's contemporary, the ninth abbot of Iona, and the powerful head of the Columban *familia* with its wide spreading *paruchia* in Ireland and Scotland, writer of the great Latin Life of Columba, was clearly inspired by a similar vision of a Christian king of all Ireland, his attitude to Tara was likely to have been different from Muirchú's: he does not apparently mention it. What he does do, however, is refer in his *Vita* to two Uí Néill kings who were historical kings of Tara, as Kings of all Ireland: Díamait mac Cerbaill (544-565) twice<sup>211</sup>, and his son Áed Sláine, “another ancestor figure among the Uí Néill” who is warned (by Colum Cille) against loss of **the prerogative of monarchy over the kingdom of all Ireland predestined for you by God**<sup>212</sup>. Although by the ninth century, “King of Tara” was beginning to be used by way of equivalence with “King of Ireland”, in official learned circles, it is generally assumed that no such equivalence is necessarily implied in the 7th century<sup>213</sup>. However Adomnán was actually a member of the ruling lineage of the Cenél Conaill, that branch of the Northern Uí Néill from which it was customary to select abbots for Iona, and as Máire Herbert has shown, he had, before going to Iona as Abbot in 679 at the age of 52, been both monk and prince in Ireland as his much revered patron had been. Moreover during Adomnán's abbacy the Cenél Conaill ruler, Loingsech mac Óengusso, became king of Tara. It is inconceivable that Adomnán should have been totally resistant to the mystique of Tara's ‘past’, which must have been the daily mental fare of all scions of kings in the Northern Half of the country.

In the complex, well documented portrait of Adomnán provided by Máire Herbert,<sup>214</sup> Adomnán appears as both a cosmopolitan man of affairs, and a devoted son and disciple of the founding saint of Iona, establishing his fame for all time; and as one who wielded considerable influence both sides of the Irish sea at a time of restless

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are also other hints in the literature that the cults of both Lugh and Manannán, (possibly equivalents or supplementary) contributed to that of St Michael the Archangel, “He who is like God”.

<sup>211</sup> e.g. “ordained by God’s will as the ruler of all Ireland”: *Adomnán of Iona*.ed.R.Sharpe at i 36 p.138.

<sup>212</sup> Quoted by Herbert (1988),p.52

<sup>213</sup> e.g. Byrne in his O’Donnell lecture *The Rise of the Uí Neill and the high-kingship of Ireland* (Dublin 1969) pp. 5ff

<sup>214</sup> op.cit.pp. 47-56

vitality and change. He was well-known to Bede, who saw him as a convert to the need to persuade the Irish churches to conform to Rome in the matter of the observance of Easter, though failing to convince his own community on Iona. He was the writer of a popular treatise *De Locis Sanctis*, based on the reports of a Gallic bishop returning from a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. He also created the first of the *Cána*, the *Law of the Innocents* which the Ulster Annals record as having been first brought to Ireland by him in 697, by which the protection of Iona and its saint was specifically promised to women in wars and violent encounters (extended to clerics and children, possibly later.) The ninth century composite text<sup>215</sup> contains details of high fines and severe penalties for offences against this law which Melia points out amount to the creation of an artificially high honour-price for women and clerics not of high birth, whom to injure or kill under traditional law was a relatively inexpensive proposition.<sup>216</sup> The text includes the provision that a proportion of fines etc. should go to the Columban federation. It also contains a list of ninety-one leading ecclesiastical and secular rulers, from Ireland and from areas of Iona influence in Scotland, headed by Loingsech Óengusso, King of Tara, who agreed to guarantee the enactment of the Law:- a list which is now accepted as contemporary (c.700)<sup>217</sup>. Herbert further comments on this achievement of Adomnán: "The Law of Adomnán was not only an influential move aimed at the betterment of Irish society but also acknowledged a mutuality of interest in the matter between secular and ecclesiastical leaders" All this is the background of the research done by Michael J. Enright<sup>218</sup> into what might have been an even more momentous contribution by this remarkably prophetic and creative 7th century polymath: the provision of a ritual which might fill the dangerous vacuum left by the rejection of the ancient basic sacrilizing rite inaugurating and authenticating the power vested in the king of Tara, (perhaps as a

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<sup>215</sup> ed. and tr. Meyer 1905, who also dates the bulk of it to the 9th century; see also Daniel Melia "Law and the Shaman Saint" in ed. P.K.Ford *Celtic Folklore and Christianity* (Santa Barbara 1983) 113-128.

<sup>216</sup> *op.cit.* p.118

<sup>217</sup> Herbert *loc.cit.* See also Máirin Ní Dhonnchadha, "The Guarantor List of Cáin Adomnán" *Peritia 1* (1982) pp.178-215.

<sup>218</sup> *Iona, Tara and Soissons* (Berlin 1985) pp.5-75

kind of paradigm of every *rí túaithe*.) and probably also of ritual means of selection of one candidate from among many.<sup>219</sup>

Enright's thesis that Adomnán attempted to establish a new ordination and consecration rite for kings involving the use of unction, - and that passages in *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis* (whose compilation can be dated by internal evidence together with the obits of the two authors in the Annals of Ulster, between 690 and 725<sup>220</sup> ) represent an attempt to make such a rite part of canon law for Ireland - is too complex and meticulously and impressively detailed to summarise adequately. It is based on detailed exegesis of passages in *Vita Columbae* particularly the account of the choice and "ordination" of Aidan mac Gabrain as king of Dál Riata by the saint.<sup>221</sup>

It is however perhaps worth quoting Enright's own interim summary of his findings from the relevant *Vita Columbae* passages, with some explanatory references in brackets. Adomnán (a notable biblical scholar) "...tried to put biblical directives into practice. In accordance with Irish reverence for the Old Testament and of biblical precedent in general, he decided to make I Reges (1st Book of Samuel) the basis for a new royal inauguration ritual. This interpretation is based on the appearance of four different and completely novel kingship ideas in the *Vita Columbae*, all of which are also to be found within a few pages of each other in the Book of Kings (I Samuel) These include the concept of royal inviolability for anointed kings now applied to the Uí Néill, as expressed in Columba's terrible curse on the murderer of Díamait mac Cerbaill 'who had been ordained by God's will as ruler of all Ireland', the ordination of Aidan (of Dál Riata) based on the unction of Saul, (1Sam.chs 9 & 10) the choosing of Eochaid Búide (from Aidan's two sons) based on the story of the first unction of David ( 16,1-14), and the appearance of a book of the ordination of kings given to

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<sup>219</sup> The next chapter will contain an attempt to explore the evidence of an Irish "doctrine of the sacral ruler" in the context of this comparative study.

<sup>220</sup> op.cit.p. 24

<sup>221</sup> Enright precedes his study by a summary of the latest evidence regarding the huge volume of Hiberno-Latin scriptural commentaries being produced in both southern and northern Ireland in the 7th century and "the extraordinary intensity of the Irish interest in Scripture" in this period. We have seen it in action in Muirchú's hand, and we have Bede's authority in his *Ecclesiastical History* for Adomnán's fame as a biblical scholar: ed. B. Radice, (Penguin) p. 319, see also pp293-298.

Columba and corresponding to the book on which Samuel wrote the laws of the kingdom including that of royal selection.” Columba is cast as the prophet Samuel; and the parallels between the saint of the *Vita* and the biblical Samuel are similarly detailed. The implications for the former's coarbs in the present and the future are plain.

The brilliantly planned project as discerned by Enright must have appealed in principle to those ardent aspiring scholars in the monastic schools of Ireland, schools which were producing the *peregrini* of the age of Columbanus of Luxeil and Bobbio abroad, and the beginnings of the material for *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* at home.<sup>222</sup> For some, perhaps many, for whom the “concept of unity”, so powerfully part of their intellectual/ spiritual motivation was deeply associated with Tara as microcosmic centre,- such a biblically based and authenticated ritual might have filled a great need.

However the scheme was never put into effect. As Enright suggests the causes may, in the short term, have been to do with the contemporary political struggles between Armagh and the Columban federation. But if it had actually been initiated by means of an alliance between the latter and an Uí Néill kingship of Tara it would have made the king of Tara into “the Anointed of the Lord” with revolutionary consequences which it is hardly conceivable that seventh century Irish society could sustain.

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<sup>222</sup> Enright also offers a detailed study of passages relating to royal ordination in the *Collectio canonum Hibernensis* the compilation of which is dated between 690 and 725, deducing a similar concept of a Christian sacral inauguration ritual based on biblical precedents and including unction, to that he has isolated in the *Vita Columbae* of Adomnán. op.cit pp.24-48

## **Tara as Babylon (ii)**

However a century after Muirchú, we meet echoes of a confident dichotomy in apparently similar mood and attitude, in the Prologue to the Martyrology of Óengus,<sup>223</sup> written about 800, probably in Tallaght the centre of the Reform Movement of the *Céile Dé*, the Clients of God (Culdees)<sup>224</sup> The following extract is from the translation to be found in *A Golden Treasury of Irish Poetry* eds. Frank O'Connor and David Greene. As always when making any exegetical approach to a contemporary document the enquirer must accept the presence and influence of local and political bias. However, the exact degree of 'historical validity' of the claims of this frankly triumphalist poem is not the matter of this attempt to study it.<sup>225</sup>

**The sad world in which we are, its kingdoms are brief: the king who rules the angels is the lord of every country...**

**The great settlement of Tara has died with the loss of its princes; great Armagh lives on with its choirs of scholars.**

**A great cutting off, the pride of Loigueire has been stifled; Patrick's splendid revered name is spreading...**

**The fortress of Cruachan has vanished with Aillil, victory's child; a fair dignity greater than kingdoms is in the city of Clonmacnois: Though you should tell of sweet eternal choirs about Ciaran with the triumphant clamour of great Clonmacnois-...**

**The proud settlement of Aillin has died with its boasting hosts; great is victorious Brigit and lovely her thronged sanctuary.**

**The fort of Emain Machae has melted away, all but its stones; thronged Glendalough is the sanctuary of the western world...**

**Old cities of the pagans to which length of occupation has been refused are deserts without worship like Lugaid's place...**

**The little places settled by twos and threes are sanctuaries with throngs, with hundreds, with thousands.**

**Paganism has been destroyed though it was splendid and far-flung; the kingdom of God has filled heaven and earth and sea...**

**Choice angry bloody Donnchad or victorious Bran from the Barrow do not lift from me the sorrow of weakness when I visit their tombs.**

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<sup>223</sup> W. Stokes ed. *Féilire Óengusso Céili Dé The Martyrology of Oengus the Culdee*, (London 1905) Verses from Prologue (pp.17-31) translated by D. Greene and F. O'Connor in *A Golden Treasury of Irish Poetry* A.D.600 to 1200. (London 1967) pp. 61-66

<sup>224</sup> See P. O'Dwyer, *Céile Dé*, (1981)

<sup>225</sup> See however note below on the career of Fedlimed Mac Crimthain both king of Munster and cleric, the later revered patron of the Culdee Reform and the contrast he presents with Óengus' picture of that movement's founder.

**Mael Ruain, the sun south of the plain of Meath, after his short life; by his pure tomb the wound of every heart is healed...  
The great hills of evil have been cut down with spear-points, while the glens have been made into hills.**

The verses are comparing and contrasting centres of power identifying the paganism that has been destroyed with the visible ruins of great Iron Age Royal Duns which once dominated four of the ancient provinces, each with their ritual sites, as archaeology is confirming: Tara, Cruachan, Dun Aillin, Emain Macha.<sup>226</sup> **Old cities of the pagans to whom length of occupation has been refused are deserts without worship like Lugaid's place.** Each of these is paired in dramatic contrast with one of the great monastic complexes:- those **little places, now sanctuaries with throngs, with hundreds with thousands** whose *scriptoria* had been producing Christian literature for over two hundred years: - copies of the canonical Scriptures, apocryphal writings with commentaries showing a knowledge of both Alexandrian and Antiochene exegetical methods, Latin grammars and other teaching aids, homilies and hymns and liturgical treatises, devotional poems, monastic rules and penitentials, lives of saints, martyrologies, such as the one we are quoting, ecclesiastical legislation, law tracts also and the earlier annals; at first in Latin, and as the eighth century proceeded, increasingly in Irish as well. Some of these *scriptoria* would be under the direction of an anchorite, a *Cele Dé*.<sup>227</sup> The quotation ends with a punch line, as it were, containing an apposite image from Isaiah 40:4,5:

**Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain :  
And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed...<sup>228</sup> (The King James Version)**

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<sup>226</sup> Indeed, the noticeable lack of evidence of domestic occupation revealed by recent excavations on these very sites is giving greater credence to the picture painted in these verses.: see B.Raftery *Pagan Celtic Ireland*, (London 1994) pp.64-97.

<sup>227</sup> Hughes op.cit (1966) p.188; cf. F.Henry "The effects of the Viking invasions on Irish Art", in B.Ó Cuiv ed *The Impact of the Viking Invasions on the Celtic-speaking Peoples*.(Dublin 1983) pp.61-77 at pp. 61-63.

<sup>228</sup> Some of the many striking folk memories found all over Ireland, collated and listed by by M. MacNeill in *The Festival of Lughnasa* (MM). relate "Lughnasa sites" to mountain heights. Unfortunately we are unlikely to find evidence showing whether "Lugaid's place" (*Lathrach Lugdach*) was sacred to Lugh *Lámhghada*.

It is relevant here to note that the earlier version of the origins of the Battle of Mag Rath in the Yellow Book of Lecan,<sup>229</sup> has in its first sentence the words *ite teora feisa hÉrenn.i.feis E Eamna feis Temra feis Chruachna*. Cruachan, Emain and Tara are of course three of the four pagan strongholds now without worship in the Félire. Whether or not the inauguration of every *rí-túaithe* involved a ritual marriage (*banfeis*) of the chosen sacral kings with goddess owner and spirit of the land,- and it seems highly likely that this was once so,- this text implies that the pagan worship in the great, and once powerful, ruined high places named by Óengus included such rituals, and that Christian leaders had found it and presumably other rituals presided over by kings or druid, totally unacceptable, probably from the beginning. Such was the indestructible significance of Tara in Irish consciousness, and the evidence for this is multiform, - it is not surprising that the *feis Temrach* seems to have been an especial target.

In bringing out the contrast between the effect on him of his pious visits to the tombs,- on the one hand of two sacral kings notable because of successful warrior forays, and on the other of a devoted client of the **King who rules the angels** - the poet assumes the presence of considerable numinous power in both. Lisa M. Bitel in her recent book *Isle of Saints, Monastic Settlement and Christian Community in Early Ireland* based mainly on an exhaustive study of the hagiographical literature has collected some convincing evidence indicating something like deliberate choice by the saints of sites already regarded as places of “openings to the other world”, as imbued with sacral power, settlements near or on places already holy. A notable example of this practice is the site of Kildare and the preservation of sacred fire of **victorious Brigit**. Here the Culdee is stressing aspects of the superior quality, as it were, of the power emanating from the tomb of the holy Máel-rúain, as healing, comforting and restoring. Burial places were some of the most obvious centres of openings to the Otherworld in the “sacral landscape” of early Ireland<sup>230</sup>; and, of course, this is a world-wide phenomenon. The tombs of the past, including the great passage graves and

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<sup>229</sup> Marstrander, ed. and trans. *Ériu V* (1911) .

<sup>230</sup> Bitel op.cit.pp.42ff for an illuminating study of the general theme of the “Sacral Landscape and its Christian reorganisation” in the context of Irish hagiographical material, cf. Richter op.cit. p.51



other tumuli “littered the Irish landscape” then as now. And although these latter became *sídi* or “fairy mounds”, they were known to have been human burial places in Tírechán's time (7th century).

About thirty years ago studies were published indicating that the prevailing scholarly understanding of the effects of the raids and invasions of the Vikings, on “native Irish institutions” in 10th century Ireland<sup>231</sup> based on the reports in the contemporary Annals coming out of monastic *scriptoria*, were exaggerated, and even that Viking attacks on Monasteries were comparable with those of the Irish themselves. However Hughes<sup>232</sup> made a useful analysis of this evidence indicating that by separating the evidence into periods, the earliest of these, - 830-880 - can legitimately be described as a time of real Viking terror for the monasteries and their dependants.

The view of the situation at the close of the 8th century encapsulated in the verses above shows enormous confidence in the power of the saints radiating from the inner sanctuaries, the holy of holies, the saint's place of resurrection,- the tomb with accompanying relics usually, by now, encased in precious metal-work; his or her superhuman holiness and consequent power from God evident in the hive of creative activity within the outer *termon*, - itself well-blessed by the ritual invoking the saint's protection and his/her power of benediction and curse.<sup>233</sup>

What the Vikings were looking for in these earlier terribly ruthless raiding attacks was portable loot:- treasure and potential slaves; and they were completely impervious to all the sanctions limiting, to some extent, the violence and greed of raiding kings from outside the territorial area of the monastic centre's direct influence.

In proclaiming the present power of the new holy sanctuaries over against the former power of those of the pagans the verses also, and quite clearly, imply the

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<sup>231</sup> See D.A. Binchy: “The Passing of the Old Order”, in *The Impact of the Scandinavian invasions on the Celtic-speaking peoples*. O Cuiv ed. (1962) pp. 119-32.

<sup>232</sup> K Hughes *Introduction to Early Sources* ( London 1972) pp. 148-159. Cf F. Henry “The effects of the Viking invasions on Irish art”, in op.cit. ed. Ó Cuiv, *The Impact of the Scandinavian invasions*.etc. pp.61-77 at 61.

<sup>233</sup> See Bitel op.cit., her section on “The Monastic Enclosure” pp.57-82, citing numerous indications from the Saints' Lives.

superiority of their power to that of kings. An interesting example of a degree of contemporary validity of this claim can be seen in the often cited entry in Annals of Ulster for 811 (which does refer to a sacred site closely connected with Lugh, and one which incidentally was far from being deserted or dead), describing the success of the *Céle Dé* Community of Tallaght in preventing the celebration of the *Óenach* of Tailtiu at Lughnasa by the reigning king of Tara, Oirdnidhe of the Northern Uí Néill. They had put a ban on it because their sanctuary had been violated by some member of the dynasty and not a single horse or chariot turned up, and the king had also had to make (legal) reparation by many gifts to Tallaght.<sup>234</sup>

The reference to two recently dead kings : Donnchad Midi Mac Domnaill of the Clan Cholmáin Uí Néills, kings of Tara, and Bran, provincial king of Leinster further illustrates this point.<sup>235</sup> The poet is contrasting the effect on him of visiting the tombs of these kings which do not lift from him the sorrows of weakness to the empowerment and healing of his visit to the pure tomb of Máel Ruáin his revered patron and soul friend; the contrast no doubt underlined by the knowledge that his holy abbot Máel Ruáin had successfully exercised his proper role of peacemaking during the careers of these two.<sup>236</sup> Donnchad had on one occasion in his efforts to dominate the Laigin actually encamped in Dún Ailinne and ravaged the land around. (within Tallaght's sphere of influence). Moreover the exploits of angry bloody Donnchad had involved the fighting forces of the monasteries of both Durrow and of Clonard. As is often mentioned, throughout the eighth century armed conflicts

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<sup>234</sup> The phenomenon of Feidlimid king of Munster 820-846, the first king to be also a cleric, who became a patron and venerated adherent of the *Cele De* reform movement, who combined his bid to challenge the Uí Neill in their own *Leth Cuin* area of influence as kings of Tara, with waging war on a large scale against leading monasteries, on the grounds that they were too worldly, must be mentioned. It calls for much more than a footnote, which is all that can be offered here. It prompts, however a couple of speculative comments: (i) Was Tallaght's special devotion to St Michael, the warrior Captain of Archangels an attraction to him and (ii) is he an example of the syndrome represented by Hogg's *The Justified Sinner*?

<sup>235</sup> As the site for the Tallaght monastery had been donated to **God and St Michael** by Cellach Mac Dumchada, an earlier provincial king of Leinster (see P.O'Dwyer "Celtic Monks and the Culdee Reform", *An Introduction to Celtic Christianity*, ed.J.P.Mackey, Edinburgh 1989 pp144f), it was likely that at least Bran would have been buried in the monk's cemetery at the sacred centre of Tallaght itself.

<sup>236</sup> Byrne.1973 pp. 157ff

between kings struggling to extend ( or resist) their dynastic power were endemic. In some of these monastic communities were involved, (their abbots and higher officials being of course, influenced by their own kinship affiliations), and actual pitched battles between monasteries are recorded in the Annals, with numbers of combatants reckoned in hundreds.<sup>237</sup> However the original primary purpose behind the ecclesiastical *cána* or Laws of the Saints seems to have been to secure peace and order, (notably the earliest, the *Lex Innocentium* of Adamnán). Thirty three occasions are recorded in the Annals of the local promulgation of the Saints' Laws during the eighth century, often by both a king and a “prominent ecclesiastic” together, reinforcing the fines and penalties for violations of each termon.<sup>238</sup> The high degree of shock brought to the inhabitants of the monastic “cities”, great and small, and to those supportive of and dependent on them by the experience of the vulnerability of even these inner sanctuaries, and their occupants, living and dead, and of their powerfully sacred treasures, to the heathen hordes from over the northern seas, cannot, I believe, be questioned. The tone of the entries in the Annals does after all give expression to it!

Such an experience, shared by so many, would inevitably have precipitated an urgent need for a renewal of trust in the Cosmic order and in those with recognised access to divine wisdom and power. This was clearly the responsibility of those now representing the Dumézlian First Function in Irish Society: not only the saints, both the dead Founders of Monasteries and their living coarbs, whose authority has been so brutally challenged, and the ecclesiastical scholar (the *fer leigend*), but also the guardians and interpreters of the *Senchas*, many of whom, presumably, belonged to the still highly prestigious order of *filid*. There are indications, I believe, that the ninth century poet and traditional scholar responsible for the bulk of the *Cath Maige Tuired* was responding to this felt need in composing this great work. There will be further discussion of this aspect of the role of Lugh in Christian Ireland in the comparative comments in the third section of this Part Two of Chapter Two. Another possible

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<sup>237</sup> Hughes *The Church in Early Irish Society*.1966 p.169f

<sup>238</sup> Kelly (1988).pp.22 and 281f

indication of the response to a need for a more traditional means of access to divine knowledge and power in this period is the ninth century material in *Cáin Adomnáin*<sup>239</sup> As for the saints, although Bitel herself cites the argument that the Lives which are her main sources hardly ever mention the arrival or presence of the Vikings<sup>240</sup>, she refers later to the fact that most of the Lives, (whose main purpose is so evidently to enhance and emphasise the protective and divinely delegated powers of the saints,) appeared after the period of the Viking terror, thus probably responding to this as well as other more material needs.

There follows now further exploration into the more explicitly confrontational stance offered by the missionaries and the Akan churches to the sources of power in Akan traditional belief, with some further comparative comments. Then in the four parts of the central Chapter Three some deeper study will be offered comparing the background, role and seminal significance of the sacral ruler in the religious history and experience of the Irish and the Akan, which may throw some light, among other things, on why the traditional rituals expressive of sacral kingship have proved so resistant to accomodation with westernised Christianity .

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<sup>239</sup> Meyer ed. and trans.(1905); also D.F.Melia "Law and the Shaman Saint",*Celtic Folklore and Christianity* ed Ford (Santa Barbara 1983) discussing the shamanistic efforts attributed to Adomnán to force God to enable the Law to be passed and enforced.

<sup>240</sup> *op.cit.* p.6

# The Akan Encountering Christianity as Confrontation

## Salem and Palace

The sources for this section of the present chapter, like those for the Irish context, reveal early encounters with Christianity in terms of confrontations between centres and manifestations of power, all power being understood as spiritual. However as Patrick J. Ryan has argued in his article "Arise O God!: The problem of 'gods' in West Africa",<sup>241</sup> the Semitic (and also Indo-European) tradition of a struggle within the "transcendent" for supremacy, present in the Christian Scriptures, is alien to West African religious experience. This became a semantic problem for translators of the Bible into vernaculars. When Semites came eventually to recognise "the uniqueness of God - His arrival at 'upper-case' status in English - (it was) as the result of God's ousting his former colleagues, the 'lower-case', plural gods. God's status as God, however, (had) not been absolutely assured, inasmuch as He shared, at least to some extent the category of godhead (deity, divinity) with the other members of the Semitic divine assembly". Only when these others "fell into oblivion, or were transformed into angelic choirs, was the onliness or aloneness of the God assured." This anomaly is particularly striking in the case of the Akan *abosom* who are either 'children' of the Supreme Being, or his *akeame* ('spokesmen').

With the demands of the "comparative" structure of this study in mind, I propose now to choose a 'text' available in translation in Noel Smith's history of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana. The text is from the writings of P Steiner, historian of the Basel Mission, writing in 1905, (no doubt using the home reports of the missionaries as his sources) describing conditions in Akropong in 1851, and I believe that there is a case for comparing it with the extract from Muirchú's life of Patrick quoted in the last section of this chapter. Steiner is not of course using the same mode of discourse as Muirchú was, (or not consciously) in the latter's account of Patrick's mission as a confrontation with "pagan king and idolatrous priests" in Tara the great

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<sup>241</sup> *Journal of Religion in West Africa* vol. XI 3 ( Leiden 1980) pp.161-171

power centre of 'paganism': a mode which we would designate as "mythography"; but both were writing some time after the early encounter between Christianity and the established institutions of 'pagan' power; and both were writing from the point of view of a Salem/ monastic 'town'. behind its 'sanctuary' walls.

Steiner was no doubt visualising the buildings of the Akropong Salem which are very close to the palace of the *Omanhene*. From the mission house once occupied by Christaller and later by Akrofi also, now the guest house of the Akrofi--Christaller Centre, the huge *gyedua* or "tree of reception" shading one corner of the assembly space in front of the palace is seen to be only a few yards away. (We shall be returning to the *gyedua* described by Platvoet as "one of the symbol complexes by which the Akan themselves expressed how they viewed their societies and political order,"<sup>242</sup> in the next chapter.)

**The little culture, which today licks the coastal areas, had not penetrated to the uplands. England's power (sic) had not yet held the various tribes in check. The tribal chiefs still ruled with the old despotism over their subjects, oppressing them as slaves without rights. This oppression was increased by the fetish-priest (lit. Teufelpriester) and sorcerer, who, by the use of poison and magic incantations exploited the people and made them slaves of fear. The severe laws and senseless decrees of the so called sacred fetish retarded the progress and welfare of the natives. Slavery, polygamy, drunkenness, bloody quarrels, brutality and cruelty revealed the pagan life of the people. In the middle of this heathen world, the tiny mission colony at Akropong established itself...it was exposed day and night to all the heathen commotion, whether from the salvos of the flintlock guns, from the raucous yells during the gruesome ceremonies for the dead, from the political quarrels which led to bloody street fights, from the frantic deceptions of the fetish priest, or from the wild dancing and drumming during festivals. The hearts of this small evangelical group must often have trembled as they looked into the heathen darkness and cried, "Watchman, is it not yet dawn?"**

Much of this speaks for itself, and is understandable in the context. The first two sentences express the notion of the "white man's burden" which had become hardly challengeable at the turn of the century, when these words were written,

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<sup>242</sup> J.G.Platvoet, "Cool Shade, Peace and Power", *Journal of Relig. in Africa*, vol.XV 3. (Leiden 1985 p.174

because of the necessity for justifying the notorious “scramble for Africa”, among the European powers. Moreover the Basel missionaries, being mostly Germans, would have had strong traditions about the responsibilities of the secular authorities to enforce religious (i.e. Christian) public standards; Noel Smith makes several references to criticisms of, and appeals to, the British ‘authorities’ to take action in this regard. The reference to the “despotism” of the tribal chiefs indicates the opaqueness of the institution of Chieftaincy to the foreigners. However one must remember that the long years of frustration felt by the missions in their desire to reach Asante with the Gospel, had recently come to an end with the destruction of the enormous power of ‘Kumasi’, which was begun by the British defeat of the hitherto dominating Asante army and the total destruction of Kumasi city and much of its accumulated wealth in 1874, followed by the exile of the *Asantehene*, King Prempeh and the Queenmother, and finally after the “war of the Golden Stool” the annexation of Asante into the Gold Coast Colony. The horror inspired by the reports of the notably cruel and bloodthirsty rule of Osei Kofi Karikari ( 1867-1874)<sup>243</sup>, and of course of the continuance in Asante of the “funeral custom” which had affected the early missionaries deeply, (and had been illegal in the Protectorate and Colony for some time), involving the provision of an entourage to accompany the chief as he journeys to join his predecessors, (originally including volunteers), had no doubt figured in the reports sent to Basel at the time. The huge numbers hunted down by the hereditary cast of executioners to give maximum honour to their chief, seemed sheer brutal “savagery” and blood lust, and they were, not surprisingly, unable to see beyond it to the socio-religious relationship with the Ancestors of which it was a small part.

The conviction proper to Europeans in the Age of Enlightenment that the consciousness of a world of spiritual beings was *ipso facto* a ‘primitive’ delusion, caused them to make a blanket condemnation of the activities of the priests and priestesses of the cults of the *abosom*. which they called fetishes, as “frantic deceptions”. No doubt there **were** some deliberate deceptions and exploitation of both

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<sup>243</sup> Who was de-stooled on the grounds of his cruelty.

the needs and the fears of those who adhered to the cults.<sup>244</sup> The regular rituals conducted by the Chief and also the Queen Mother involving the blackened stools of the royal Ancestors<sup>245</sup> and indeed by every lineage head possessing a stool was included in this condemnation, involving as they did words and actions which seemed idolatrous and also implications offensive to the Lutheran/Calvinist teaching that no communication with the dead can take place. Moreover the court officials whose duties involved them in the ordering and conduct of ritual, were no doubt committed to a secretive attitude to their inherited lore, and much of the detail would be unknown to the Chief's "subjects". Nana Addo Dankwa III, in the interview he gave us, mentioned examples of such details, whose original meanings were long forgotten, even by those carrying them out.

As we have seen, the early development of the *Salem* quarters in Akropong and elsewhere, was congenial to the Basel mission agents 'in the field',<sup>246</sup> While converts remained few, this could be tolerated, but as the influence of the literate Christian minority grew and the Salems began to function as thriving separate communal structures, claiming the right for their members to withdraw from some of their basic duties and obligations, so did the problem they posed for the traditional authorities, become more evident. The problems for the missionaries and pastors were deeper and more confusing as they struggled with the inevitable consequences for their flocks of an inner (and outer) dichotomy between the demands of Church rules

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<sup>244</sup> Many people who were kind enough to answer my questions during my visit to Akropong, church leaders and others including the *Okuapehene* himself gave me examples of ecological or other rational explanations for ancient traditional taboos, clearly a matter of importance to them.

<sup>245</sup> It is quite clear, that the sacred blackened Stools were never touched by the bodies or blood of those immolated in order to provide an entourage for the Chief in question in the *samando* whither he was bound; indeed it would be unthinkable pollution to allow this to happen. The first missionaries (19th century) really thought that the appearance of the sacred stools was due to the blood of those immolated. See Freeman's Journal op.cit p.47

<sup>246</sup> N. Smith cites passages in the letters to the Home Committee in Basel urging that this segregation was the only way to protect converts from the influence of "non-Christian practices and customs" and to enable the peace and "privacy necessary for personal devotions;... that pastoral care of the converts was made much easier." Their reports of the practice of gathering for "devotions every morning and for the Friday evening prayer meeting" within the unified Christian settlements must have gratified the Committee. {see op.cit pp.49ff} This pattern of daily corporate worship by Christians is indeed still taking place in similar areas surrounding the large "gothic" churches in the main centres of population, usually before dawn, throughout the Akuapem and Akim Abuakwa and beyond, and are customary among most Christian groups. .



(however real their allegiance to the Christian “good news”) and the deepest roots of Akan socio-religious identity which were of course nourished by the beliefs and rituals surrounding the traditional Chieftaincy. For instance I was told that the children of some pastors and perhaps of some catechists and presbyters (church elders) were still, a generation ago, not allowed out, even to watch the public celebrations, shared in by the whole town, such as the annual *Odwira* in Akropong.<sup>247</sup>

Some early and endemic sources of controversy between the churches and the traditional states motivate the following revealing document:

**Memorandum on the relation between Christians and the State presented to Nana Sir Osei Agyeman Prempeh II, Asantehene, by representatives of the Christian Churches in Ashanti on 16th October 1942,**

expressing the signatories’ regret “that so often in the past there has been a cleavage between Christians and non-Christians.” They add that although some Christians have at times broken unnecessarily with Native Customary Laws<sup>248</sup> and not fulfilled their rightful allegiance to their chiefs, they are “forced to recognise that in some of its aspects Ancient Ashanti Religion asks an allegiance to certain spiritual powers which the worshippers of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ cannot give”; for example, the use of oaths in court cases and the requirement to avoid work on Thursday. On the latter the Memorandum adds:

**The question arises should they (their members) be asked to observe the day out of respect for the beliefs of others in the community. We feel that we cannot ask this of our members, in that to refrain from work on Thursday would be to them a confession of faith in Asase Yaa and her relation to harvest and famine and therefore a denial of the Fatherhood and providential care of God...If however the chief reason behind this observance is not so much the association with Asase Yaa as a desire for some communal act to express the unity of the nation, we would ask whether there is not some other act of allegiance in which Christians could take part; an act which would not place the working life of farmers under the disadvantage of refraining from work on two days of the week.”**

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<sup>247</sup> The deep importance of this particular event will be suggested in Pt 4 of the next chapter called “Festivals”.

<sup>248</sup> As recognised by the Colonial Government as part of the “Indirect Rule” policy.

Another specific difficulty experienced by the Christian was in relation to the Oath by which legal cases in the customary courts were instituted still of course functioning in colonial times under 'indirect rule' provisions. The requirement to "swear back an oath" was felt to be impossible for the Christian conscience.<sup>249</sup>

The rigidity of the barriers set up between "Salem and Palace", have in many ways become modified in recent years. As educated persons, some of whom are more than nominally Christian, have increasingly become eligible for choice as chiefs and elders, the Churches have been faced with a new problem. It had been assumed that any Christian accepting a Stool would automatically become excommunicated.<sup>250</sup> The 1985 revision of *The Regulations Practice and Procedure*<sup>251</sup> of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana states the PCG's position on the matter as follows:

**As long as stools, especially black stools of chiefs and elders are regarded by the heathen and treated as objects of worship, a Christian cannot conscientiously occupy the office of Chief or Elder. But where a Christian heir-apparent, before his enstoolment repudiates ancestral worship, and where because of his desirability the traditional elders and people covenant to grant him customary dispensation, and make a solemn declaration exempting him from all heathen practices, performances, rites and customs, he may, with confidence and Christian conscience accept the stool...In such cases, the Stool Elders appoint a Stool Elder and some important Stool functionaries to deputise for the Chief. A case in view is Nana Agyemang Badu, ...who, although Omanhene of Dormaa Traditional area, is a full member (communicant) of Dormaaa Ahenkro Presbyterian Church.<sup>252</sup>**

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<sup>249</sup> Some account of this system will be given in Chapter 3 pt 2.

<sup>250</sup> Not only were his ritual duties towards the Ancestors regarded as idolatry, but he would also be customarily expected to marry his predecessors wives; and polygyny was also grounds for exclusion from Holy Communion.

<sup>251</sup> Revised edition 1985, 111-112 para 308-310. Cited from K.Effa Ababio, *Conflict, Identity and Cooperation* : the relation of the Christian Church with the traditional, colonial and national states in Ghana with special reference to the period 1916-1966, unpublished PhD thesis Univ. of Edinburgh 1991, pp. 276f.

<sup>252</sup> This case was discussed in our presence, as a matter of interest to us, which indeed it was.

## Encounter of Christianity and the Gods of Larteh.

“Akans say that we encounter each other as spirits; we are all spiritual intelligences and our encounters and relationships. are within the realm of spirits because the world is basically spiritual.”<sup>253</sup>

One of the Akuapem towns mentioned by the *Okuapehene* in 1844 when he was contrasting his own attitude to Riis with what the latter would find in towns dominated by a powerful “fetish”, was Larteh. It is a Guan town and has been occupied by the same Guan-speaking patrilineal group for several centuries. Tradition still speaks of the “thirty towns” of Larteh before the oppressive take-over by the then dominant militant Akan State, Akwami,-- now dated to the first half of the 17th century. The reduction of this number to seven is thought to have happened before the end of that century. Larteh itself: is a “twin town”: Larteh-Ahenease and Larteh Kubease, each originally with its seven *brongs* or territorial areas on a lineage basis, each *brong* with its own politico/religious leader or *adadi* (Guan word), also sometimes called *osofo*, which is the *Twi* word originally designating the priest in charge of a shrine.

It was mentioned above that the *obosom* chosen for providing the guarantee and sanction for the Oath cementing the “Abotakyi Concord” which was the foundation of the *Oman* or state of Akuapem in 1733 (dated now by historians to 1730) incorporating the Kyeropong and the other Guan towns into the characteristic Akan quasi-military political structure was Kyenki whose cult was based in the significantly named town of Obosomase. It became the custom for the Paramount Chief of Akuapem to attend festivals of the four main *abosom* of the state of Akuapem:<sup>254</sup> those of Kyenku, Bosomptra at Abiriw, Dampite at Mampong and Konkon at Larteh. This custom was discontinued by Nana Kwasi Affufo, *Okuapehene* 1895-1907 and 1920-27 who had been trained at the Akropong Seminary and claimed that he was a Christian and “could not perform the rites.” There can be no doubt that

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<sup>253</sup>Dr .Bediako during an interview at the Akrofi-Christaller Centre for 'Mission Research and Applied Theology in Akropong -Akuapem 29.9.1993

<sup>254</sup> Brokensha op.cit. p.156

this same *Omanhene* fulfilled all the stool rituals, so this excuse perhaps reflects the endemic tension between Akropong and the towns of the non-Akan Left and Right “Wings” and could also be seen as consistent with what appears to be an ancestral lack of enthusiasm for “fetish worship,” in the Stool Family of Akuapem! Brokensha quotes a statement. in a Basel Mission report of 1880, made, as he remarks, somewhat prematurely, that “the King at Akuapem has broken with fetishes”.<sup>255</sup> There is however no state *obosom* for Akuapem.<sup>256</sup>

Konkon, the powerful “fetish” of the *Omanhene*’s warning to Riis, was indeed in evidence when the first catechists from Akropong were posted to Larteh in 1853. These were David Asante and a West Indian and they did not stay long because the opposition from the “fetish servants “ was too strong. But another catechist, Edward Sampson, from Aburi, another “strong fetish” town, posted to Larteh in 1857 did better. He was welcomed by the *Benkumhene* chief of the left wing and given twelve pupils for a school, and the Mission was allowed to buy two plots of land for building a “Salem”. In 1859 however the *Omanhene* sent two messengers to Larteh to say that a shrine priestess had prophesied that unless the school was done away with, the god Konkon would destroy the town, and a band of “young men” or commoners demonstrated against the mission. At this moment of crisis a boy given up for dead by a shrine priest was restored by the prayer of the catechist; and “within six months there were thirteen baptisms and many enquirers.” David Asante, now ordained, was posted back to Larteh in 1862, and under his leadership, the Christian congregation grew rapidly with comparatively little friction. Brokensha<sup>257</sup> lists enthusiastic abstracts from Basel Mission Reports from 1870-1911: for example in 1884 “...a fresh and joyful spirit in Late...large church attendance, even the heathen listen from outside; and in the following year: “...Late (sic) is a special Christian town...the elders promote discipline and order...they have passed and enforce, a series of regulations about watching heathen festivals, bathing of women in the open and trading in the streets”; in 1888 “..the congregation increasingly learns to live in brotherly love with

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<sup>255</sup> idem loc.cit.

<sup>256</sup> Information given me by Dr Bediako.

<sup>257</sup> op.cit pp.11ff

each other”; and in 1891: “...a thriving Christian community -. and also darkest heathendom.” It is relevant to mention at this point that the only Christian martyr in the history of the Gold Coast was a catechist from Larteh who was killed in Takyimantia in Asante, during the last of the Asante wars in 1900. What was it that made the church in Larteh so healthy? An attempt to answer this question involves some understanding of the characteristics of the Larteh way of life.

There were certainly plenty of active *abosom* in Larteh during this period. Brokensha lists eighteen known in his time, thirty years ago, (not all active), including, unusually, three mythical ancestor brothers; and others, not “resident” who would be approached, notably the spirit of the River Densu. Of special interest was and still is **Akoned**, known to Christaller, as Akwenedi Abenaa with special days Tuesday and also Friday, non-farming days for all of Larteh, and as “the wife of Konkon”<sup>258</sup>. Her remarkable shrine in Larteh-Kubease has survived her early “agricultural” role and is flourishing to this day, in this complex ‘modern’ world, with a comprehensive ministry. Vocations to become priestesses, involving three years of arduous training, are still plentiful throughout southern Ghana; indeed the shrine seems to be becoming world famous.<sup>259</sup> N.Smith summarises information provided by both W.S. Mensah-Dapaa, who some years ago filled an administrative role at the shrine, in a paper delivered at the Ghana Science conference in 1961, (including some direct quotations) and the anthropologist Brokensha. Besides the chief priestess and others including novices in training, Nana Akoned (the *obosom*) is attended by herbalists, drummers and spokesmen (*akyeame*). “The supplicant pays his fee, makes known his request, and awaits the oracle. The special days are Tuesdays and Fridays when normally the chief priestess is possessed by the spirit of Nana Akoned. She is dressed in white and there is singing and drumming while the priestess talks, dances and gesticulates until

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<sup>258</sup> cited by Brokensha from Christaller’s Dictionary op.cit p.599

<sup>259</sup> The “Ecumenical team” of delegates from their partner churches visiting the Presbyterian Church of Ghana in 1984 of which I was a member, was taken to this shrine and were privileged to meet the Head Priestess (*Okomfohene*) and her priestesses, both qualified and in training, some of whom obligingly became possessed and danced followed by a libation poured by the *Okomfohene* from the bottle of spirits we had brought with us.

the *obosom* leaves her. Ideally the instructions given during the ecstatic possession state are then implemented.

**Treatment is mainly by herbs, roots and barks...and spiritual or ceremonial cleansing always precede the herbal treatment. Some cases are referred to a hospital but no illness inflicted by witchcraft or juju lies beyond the reach of Nana Akonnedi unless it has been ignored too long to cause excessive damage...or unless the malady is a punishment inflicted for an offence in which case the treatment is dependent on confession as well as pacification of the offended.<sup>260</sup>**

Mr Mensah-Dapua records a series of cures at the shrine, of barrenness, impotence, epilepsy, paralytic and mental illnesses, dipsomania, respiratory affections and skin rashes. I have included this detail because as a highly respected example of its genre it helps to explain the popularity of the *abosom* shrines among educated 'modern' persons as well as rural people in Ghana; no doubt one should not expect it to be typical among the very many being consulted. When I asked two PCG pastors for comments on the Akonedi shrine, one replied "It is very much influenced by Christianity" while the other said "The Church must aspire to provide this service also." Neither comment could of course have been envisaged by European missionaries or Akan pastors in earlier times .

Returning to Larteh a hundred years and more ago and to the earlier encounters with Christianity there: - are there hints to account for the growth of, and especially favourable comments on,- the congregation and "Christian town" in Larteh?

The evidence of the brief references to its history above suggests that Larteh was, on the one hand, used to accommodating a plethora of cults within its bounds, allowing each its space in every sense; and that it had learned, on the other, by bitter experience, that the safety, well-being and indeed the very identity and continuity of its lineages depended on a capacity for consensus and united action This was expressed and enabled by the carefully orchestrated shared rituals of the annual *Bba* festival now usually given the *Twi* name *Ohum* which indeed could aptly be called 'liturgy' (the people's work), prepared and organised by the lineage (or clan) heads

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<sup>260</sup> N.Smith 1966, p.262f

from each *brong*, each with their priestly role, to which the priests of the greater *Abosom* were invited. Yam and palm wine were used in almost a sacramental way in this essentially agricultural celebration.<sup>261</sup>

In view of the blanket condemnation by the Basel missionaries of the “fetish priests” with “their frantic deceptions” it is perhaps significant that no European mission agents were ever stationed as residents in Larteh, where shrine priests, and their retinue of *akomfo*, (those who normally became possessed by the *obosom* they served,) mainly priestesses, were so integral to the establishment. Although it is likely that David Asante for instance, as the first (surviving ) pastor who had studied in Basel would have adopted at least a sceptical attitude and an immunity to the claims of the *abosomfo*, and all Akropong-trained catechists would feel bound to speak as though they held similarly agnostic views,- yet it seems that there were signs of what Brokensha describes as an “increasing rapprochement between the Christians and others” .He quotes a priestess as saying as early as 1866, “Christianity is not as bad as we thought at first. It is the best method of bringing up children. But one must bring one's earlier gods offerings on feast days; then everything is all right”<sup>262</sup>. Brokensha adds the comment: “Asante reported that such remarks were frequently heard, especially when children were ill. Such expressions were not welcomed by the missionaries,...who regarded Christianity and traditional beliefs as irreconcilable. Yet it is an extremely revealing quotation, showing how Christianity is seen as a means of controlling new situations: it is suitable for some people in specific contexts, while the traditional gods are more suitable for other people in other situations.” One of the earliest converts had been a priestess.

The truth of the statement that “primal religions generally conceive of religion as a system of power, and of living religiously as being in touch with the Source and channels of power in the universe”,<sup>263</sup> is of course evident in Larteh as it is throughout the areas of this study, and the first Christian church in Larteh has a ‘foundation

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<sup>261</sup> Brokensha (op.cit.pp.171ff), who witnessed the *ohum*, in 1951. See also the information given me by the Revd S.K. Aboa, himself a Guan, mentioned in ch.3.pt 4 below.

<sup>262</sup> Brokensha cited from Basel Mission Monthly 1867 2.

<sup>263</sup> Bediako op.cit.p.106.

myth' of striking significance and validity, in that context. I hasten to add that in using that phrase foundation myth of the restoration to life by the prayers of the catechist Edward Samson of the boy who had been given up for dead by a 'shrine priest', soon after the most powerful Larteh *obosom* had threatened to destroy the whole town if the building of the school was not abandoned, I am not in any sense casting doubt on the truth of that event. (The boy, presumably from the proper lineage in the appropriate *brong*, became *Benkumhene* in 1907) The striking response of thirteen adults seeking initiation as devotees by baptism gave an unusual initial impetus to the development of a Christian community expressing some at least of the Basel pietist ideals. After all, the practice of devotion, both personal and communal, to Jesus, and the desire to "please" him and conform to his rules and taboos, such as the regulations imposed by the elders mentioned above, would be quite spontaneous and congenial within the context of the customary respect in Larteh for each other's locally based cults. And at the same time this shared devotion could and did bear fruit in recognisably Christian "brotherly love" in the Larteh church. And moreover the geographical situation of the "Christian town", more or less in between the territories of Ahenease and Kubease, enabled the Church to make its consciously Christian contribution towards the desire for overall harmony and peace among the Larteh people, as the Church had links in both towns and was accepted as a neutral arbitrator and peacemaker in the endemic disputes between the two towns.<sup>264</sup>

In 1887, however, the Larteh towns were upset by an unusual disturbance which could well have prompted the reference to "darkest heathendom" in the Basel Mission report. A new shrine had been founded in 1885 for Odente or Dente an *obosom* with a very powerful oracle. This oracle whose main shrine was at Kete-Krachi 120 miles up river in a cave beside the Volta near a vital ferry crossing for a main trade route, (now drowned by the Volta Dam) was often consulted by Asante kings in connection with their war plans, even though situated in an area outside the *Asantehene's* current sphere of influence. A tradition in Larteh identified Dente with Konkon and a young girl under possession by Odente/ Konkon declared that Konkon

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<sup>264</sup> Brokensha, op.cit (1966) . p.119.



wished to return to his own town and demanded, among other things, a human sacrifice. The skeleton of a northern boy was found there after a tip-off to the District Commissioner and four priests were duly tried and executed, and Brokensha adds that “the *Benkumhene* ( the chief of Ahenease who is also the chief of the left Wing) narrowly escaped implication himself”. D.J.E. Maier<sup>265</sup> cites an account by the Basel pastor Peter Hall ( from an Akropong West Indian family) of the paramount chief of Akuapem, Kwame Fori, impressed with what he had heard about Odente and making it plain to his subjects that any of them who would like to go to Krachi to be apprenticed to Odente would be allowed to do so; and that it was shortly after this that the chief of Larteh-Ahenease decided to try to establish Dente in Larteh and committed the human sacrifice. Apart from an episode in 1888 when “the devilish fetish (Odente) took possession of a beautiful girl during the church service (who) suddenly began to shake and scream at the time of the sermon” and then left the church for nearly forty years,<sup>266</sup> the effect of this violent intrusion from the world of war and spectacular power-politics, dominated by the Asante Union, into the comparatively peaceable enclave of Larteh was temporary.<sup>267</sup>

### **“The Shattered Microcosm”?**

The turn of the century can be taken as a symbolic date for the recognition of a coming together of very considerable and complex economic and political changes and development affecting every aspect of life in the Gold Coast and her neighbours in West Africa.

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<sup>265</sup> *Priests and Power The Case of the Dente Shrine in Nineteenth-century Ghana* ( Bloomington USA 1983) p. 44

<sup>266</sup> Brokensha op.cit. p14 quoting a locally written Centenary history of the Larteh Presbyterian Church 1853-1953.

<sup>267</sup> No doubt the accomodating temperament and attitude of Lartherians living and “dead”, and of their *abosom*, so often mentioned by Brokensha, played its part in the story of Christianity in Larteh. Noel Smith {op.cit 214} writing in the sixties and noting the general loyalty of Akuapem to the Presbyterian Church gives Larteh as the exception., listing congregations of eleven different Christian denominations established in the town.

The explosion of the market for cocoa and its widespread development as a cash crop amongst farming communities leading to the creation of out-lying cocoa-farming villages, - notably by Akuapems in Akyem country, - and the acquisition of 'independent' cash income and personal wealth, independent also, to some extent, of the skills acquired through the Mission schools,- was generally destabilising too to the locally centred social structure. The final destruction of the power of Kumasi, (the Asante empire), and its incorporation into the Colony of the Gold Coast, followed by the cutting down of the power of the Chiefs on the one hand, and the policy of "indirect rule" on the other, was confusing. At the height of this heady situation came the devastating shock of the influenza pandemic, which was totally beyond the power and skills available among both black and white, of western medicine or the most powerful shrine, of Christ or the Ancestors. This weakening of the old structures of the authority of the old tribal *abosom* and even of the tribal Ancestors, and general opening up to the wider world has been described as the "shattering of the microcosm"<sup>268</sup> accompanied as it was by a remarkable increase in the numbers turning to both Islam and Christianity, and by the rapid increase, in the latter case, in the number of "prophet", "healing" "praying" or "independent" movements and churches, and has prompted a debate in both anthropological and missiological circles on these phenomena.<sup>269</sup> This debate reveals the problem of finding a common language for assessing what , historically speaking, could be called near-universal human experience.

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<sup>268</sup> Taken from E.Ikenga-Metuh, "The Shattered Microcosm: A Critical Survey of Explanations of Conversion in Africa" (a survey of studies on the phenomenon of the huge increase of adherence/conversion to Christianity and Islam. in this century, in *Neue Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft / Nouvelle revue de science missionnaire, (Immensee)* 41.4 1985 (Source of reprint actually consulted seems untraceable.)

<sup>269</sup> Initiated by R.W.Horton "African Conversion", *Africa* vol.XLI 20 1971pp.85-108 (also in "On the rationality of Conversion", Vol. XLV 1975 pp.219-253, 373-399) proposing his "intellectualist theory" that the response of the "African world view" to these massive destabilising changes as, would be "to develop the concept of the Supreme Being, to meet the challenges of the macrocosm while reducing in importance of the lesser spirits, underpinners of the microcosm" even if there had been no missionary movement involved..(Summary in Ikenga-Metuh cited above p.14) See also R.W Wyllie, "On the rationality of the Devout Opposition Africa, *Journal of Religion in Africa* XIII(1980),2 (1980) pp.81-91

The intense feeling of insecurity these developments brought, led also, as we have noted, to increased fear of witchcraft especially amongst more successful individuals, which in turn led to the influx of those ‘new shrines’ (or in some cases the revival of old ones)<sup>270</sup>: usually classed as *abosom brafo* and ‘drinking medicine’ cults. M.J.Field <sup>271</sup>the anthropologist working in the Gold Coast before the second world war who returned after it qualified in General Medicine and Psychiatry and chose to work in connection with a series of these shrines in Asante, gives a useful summary description of the situation in her day. “The typical pilgrim comes annually to the shrine, asks the deity for a year’s protection and promises a thank-offering of a sheep and a bottle of rum at the end of the year. The deity’s protection and blessing is granted conditionally on the supplicant’s keeping prescribed rules of ethical conduct. He must not steal, commit adultery bear false witness, nor curse another person. And above all he must neither possess bad talismans, make bad magic against others, nor engage in witchcraft. If he breaks any one of these rules the deity will first ‘catch hold’ of him and then, if he does not promptly confess and obtain pardon, will swiftly kill him, or alternatively, smite him with permanent madness. A similar fate will overtake anyone else who attempts the prohibited offences against the ‘protected’ innocent worshipper.” She adds that the old benign tribal gods still exist alongside the new *obosom-brafo* shrines, but are considered inadequate for modern needs and quotes a devotee of one of the latter, ‘Mframa is greater than the old ones, because Mframa can kill’ <sup>272</sup> Not, she comments further, that the old gods were regarded as unable to kill, rather were they regarded as preoccupied with blessing (rain, health, fertility, tribal peace and well-being). “The idea that the wages of sin is death and the reward of goodness is long life belongs to all the ancient cults, but in the new shrine cults is the central emphasis.”<sup>273</sup> Some ‘inadequacy’ in this regard was, at least in the

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<sup>270</sup> The Akonedi Shrine could perhaps be classed as one of the most notable of these.

<sup>271</sup> Her book *Search for Security*, has already been quoted . What follows is from pp 87ff

<sup>272</sup> The ‘Curse’ of the founding saints of the monasteries of early Christian Ireland when invoked by their successors was credited with a similar power ; together of course with their power of blessing.

<sup>273</sup> It is, I think, worthy of note, that the *abosom* consulted in the ‘new shrines’ do not appear to emphasise particular taboos, so integral to cults of the “old gods”; one cannot avoid noticing that the wording in this summary by Field of the conditions for their protection and blessing approximate to the demands of the 10 commandments.

fifties, apparently one of the criticisms levied against the teachings of the 'old' mission-founded churches! And, as I was told in 1993, while the membership of all Christian bodies is still continually rising the 'traditionalist' shrines of the *abosom-brafo* and drinking medicine type also still flourish.

## Further Comparative Comments on 'Encountering Christianity' arising from the foregoing.

**"Jesus is the Son of God", said the Christian evangelist.**

**"My shrine-spirit is also a child of God", said the traditionalist.**<sup>274</sup>

This recalls the opening paragraph of the Akan section above. It is hard to find any evidence of a conflict between divinities among the Akan, notably between the "Supreme Being" to whom the English word 'god,' (and therefore **God**) is recognisably applicable, and the *abosom* to whom it is not: all witnesses now agree about this from Christaller onwards<sup>275</sup>. For both Semites and Indo-Europeans a War in Heaven is integral to their cosmology and the scenario of the seminal document from Irish literature with which this study began is dominated by it.

A possible exception to this apparent absence of conflict is contained in the myth (so popular with Christian apologists) of the primordial withdrawal of

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<sup>274</sup> So begins Kwame Bediako's abridged version of his paper "The Unique Christ in our Pluralist World" read at the World Evangelical Fellowship Theological Commission consultation in the Philippines in June 1992, (made for the Akrofi-Christaller Newsletter July-Dec 1994). He goes on to describe this as an imaginary conversation between a Christian preacher and an African religious traditionalist, (which) illustrates the issues at stake when Christians affirm the uniqueness of Christ in the context of other religions", but it is obviously a not uncommon, and quite genuine interchange. (For instance see, M.J. Field op.cit.p. 95)

<sup>275</sup> Dictionary 1st ed. p.342 entry under under '*o-nyame* (the **Supreme Being** etc; includes "...in recent use also: a **god** (of polytheists, with a newly introduced **pl. a-** ; the heathen negroes are, at least to a great extent, rather monotheists, as they apply the term for **God** only to one supreme being"..'.

'*Nyankopon*, and of 'heaven' his home, out of reach of the pestle of *aberewa*, the Old Woman. It does not, it seems, on the face of it, suggest divine wrath against sin or rebellion, though it could imply a weariness at human folly. It seems however to have reference to tension between the opposites: male/female, masculine /feminine, sky(and rain)/earth, He of Saturday/ She of Thursday. It is clear that the "children of *aberewa*" is the collective for all human kind for this matrilineal people. Once again that often quoted proverb, **All are children of *Onyame*; none is a child of the earth** obviously significant as it stands, appears also to have been at some stage a controversial theological statement, implying something of a struggle between two divine principles, however pre-gender, or perhaps explicitly androgynous, *Onyame* ( a non-Twi or Akan language name) originally was.<sup>276</sup> The battle between Yahweh and 'the Queen of Heaven' still being 'fought out' in Judaic religious history in the books of Deuteronomy and Jeremiah, was long-since won for the 19th century western mainly protestant Christian missionary movement. For the mission agents (and the leaders of the churches they founded), the reverence given to *Asaase Yaa* the Earth-spirit and her taboos did not, it seems, figure as any challenge to their patriarchal Christianity; it was merely part of that collection of unacceptable pagan beliefs and customs requiring to be "replaced" by the Christianity they brought with them.<sup>277</sup>

One of the three contributions made by Lugh to the actual battle of *Mag Tuired* when it was finally joined, was his slaying of Balor, the Fomorian Champion with the one eye with which he could destroy (or paralyse) all who looked at it, and who was Lugh's maternal grandfather. Balor had already killed Núadu, the king of the *Túatha Dé Danaan* when Lugh confronted him, and destroyed his evil eye, not with a spear throw, but with a sling-stone, and in this tale also caused his death. As Gray notes in her commentary on the text of 2MT: "The death of Balor at the hands of Lug, son of his daughter Ethne, is an important incident throughout Irish literary and

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<sup>276</sup> This material will be included in the chapter (4) on the Female principle in the religious history and consciousness of both cultures.

<sup>277</sup> An attitude modified, perhaps but still evident in the Memorandum presented to the *Asantehene* in 1942 cited above.

folk tradition".<sup>278</sup> The richness of the material and the width of its significance are unfortunately beyond the scope of this study, but it does reinforce the depth of the tradition among the Celts of the theme of a struggle between rival divinities,<sup>279</sup> whose rivalry is usually imaged in terms of an old god displaced by a younger one, often, as here, 'related' to each other. 2MT's treatment of the theme however, in spite of the total rout of the *Fomoirie* in the battle, is notable for the care with which the victory of the young god and indeed everything about him is shown to have a unifying function. For example Lugh's birth as the fruit of a formal marriage alliance between the two potentially opposed divine tribes is quite unlike the usual form of birth-tale of a hero<sup>280</sup>. Other indications of Lugh's unifying function and power are: the use of both matronymic<sup>281</sup> and patronymic when Lugh is 'introduced' into the tale; the importance of the appellation *samildánach*, given to Lugh in this tale in the sense of uniting many skills in one divine being in implied contrast to the other *áes dána*, the *nemed* persons of the 'tribes of the goddess', who are themselves their 'gods'; his restoration of the structural unity of the sacred walls of Tara when damaged by the destructive use by the warrior champion of the latter's own 'divine power'; by his integrating of the diverse divine skills of these same *áes dána*,<sup>282</sup> through recognition and consultation, and his orchestration of them into the victorious army defeating the vast hordes of the enemy; and finally uniting in himself the 'third function' with the two which he already encapsulated. I see in all this a notable, and I believe deliberate, contribution of our 9th century poet-sage to the on-going great work of those same "synthetic" historians

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<sup>278</sup> This is also true of the Welsh sources. See the detailed study (of both) in W.J.Gruffudd *Math ap Mathonwy* ( Cardiff 1928)

<sup>279</sup> This theme is taken up in ch.3 pt 4.

<sup>280</sup> See e.g.Rees and Rees chapter on "birth tales" op.cit. pp.213-234.c.f.T Ó Cathasaigh, *The Heroic Biography of Cormac mac Art*, (Dublin 1977) It is, of course also quite unlike the birth of Lugh in the Balor legend corpus.

<sup>281</sup> Eithne is of course also Lugh's mother in the Tory island legends researched by Gruffyd and M. MacNeill op.cit. p.8 and summarized by the Rees brothers (loc.cit.) relating to his secret conception against the will of her father etc. and is one of the most common goddess names associated with the sacred marriage of kings.

<sup>282</sup> It is noteworthy that the the strife and deadly rivalry between the skills acquired in the 'Ages' called Bronze and Iron represented by Dían Cécht, and those of his son who used spells and manipulation and herbs, seem to be reconciled in the dovetailing of the restoration of TDD warriors by incantation and bathing in the healing well, on the one hand, and the restoration of their weapons through the skills of the divine smith woodworker and brazier on the other..

towards the elucidating (rather than creating) of an Irish Old Testament, or *preparatio evangelii*.<sup>283</sup>

However the thrust of the material adduced in the first two sections of this second part of the current chapter does indicate that Christianity did bring similar challenges to the centres of power in both societies. Comparing our two “texts”, the extracts from Muirchú’s Life of Patrick, and the extract from Steiner’s account of the beginnings of the Basel mission in Akropong, both composed some time after those beginnings, we are aware of comparable confrontational attitudes, with quite similar use of biblical echoes and imagery. Both choose to give dramatic emphasis to the situation as they see it: the one by the visualizing “in the middle of this heathen world” (described in highly coloured language) of “the tiny mission colony at Akropong... exposed day and night to all the heathen commotion” from over the wall in the assembly area in front of the paramount chief’s palace, “as they looked into the heathen darkness and cried ‘watchman is it not yet dawn?’”; and the other bringing Patrick into Tara itself to confront “the fierce pagan, an emperor of the non-Romans” and all his entourage, having deliberately defied an authoritative taboo, and challenging them to rise at the presence of the spiritual power of the “new faith”.

It now becomes necessary to try to isolate a significant difference between the nature of the confrontation expressed in these two texts which is not immediately obvious perhaps. While Steiner does not recognise the possibility of any common ground between the message brought by the missionaries and the ritual goings on in the chief’s palace over the wall, Muirchú is, I believe, describing recognition by both sides of a shared battle ground so to speak, surely a necessary precondition for any effective confrontation. For instance the account he gives of the prophecies by the druids of the king of Tara of a kingdom “with an un-heard of and burdensome teaching” which will carry all before it, and quoting the poem beginning **There shall arrive Shaven-head, / with his stick bent in the head**<sup>284</sup> (which latter has, to my

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<sup>283</sup> Seeing this tale as a contribution towards such a grand design obviates any efforts to extract specific biblical allusions from the text of 2MT.

<sup>284</sup> Moreover that very Book of Daniel mined by McCone for detailed parallels for much of Muirchú’s tale, recounts how Nebuchadnezzar’s “magicians, enchanters and sorcerers” when commanded not only to interpret his dream as they would normally do, but also to know its content

mind an authentic feel about it) indicates an acceptance that the druids had access to such prophetic knowledge, open also, and more powerfully, to Patrick, which the 19th century Europeans would not be able to give. Biblical parallels did not seem to be felt by those children of the 'enlightenment' to have relevance in the context of their confrontation with African 'heathenism'. (The insight shown by the anglo-catholic monk in the early twenties through the freshness of his own passionate re-discovery of Christian sacramental understanding and teaching makes an interesting postscript to the story of the mainly protestant 19th century missionary movement.)

The early 'success story' of the church in Larteh as seen in the Basel Mission records, summarised by Brokensha and cited above, seems relevant at this point: indicating, as I believe it does, that its early growth, warmth of conviction, and the local interest it inspired, was due to the fact that those providing its leadership and pastoral guidance were all indigenous, notably of course David Asante and Edward Samson. The capacity of the former to identify himself with the learning and piety of his teachers in Basel will not have closed to him the world of meaning into which he was born and nurtured. Both he and Edward Samson whose prayer saved the life of the boy, who later acceded to the stool of the *Benkumhene*, undoubtedly occupied what I have called a 'shared ground' with the devotees of the *abosom* of Larteh whom they were confronting.

The relevance of the statement already quoted that "primal religions generally conceive of religion as a system of power, and of living religiously as being in touch with the Source and channels of power in the universe" has been very evident in all the foregoing material. The vital role played by "the sacred practitioner"<sup>285</sup> as mediator both of divine wisdom and of power is similar throughout. The following quotation from *Prophetism in Ghana*,<sup>286</sup> that early classic study of the independent, or "spiritual" churches whose proliferation is so important a product of the "encounter with Christianity" in Ghana and elsewhere in Africa, seems to me to indicate a close

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failed, while "the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision of the night" in response to an appeal to the "mercy of the God of heaven." (Daniel ch 2)

<sup>285</sup> J.L.Cox op.cit pp.93-97

<sup>286</sup> C.G.Baeta (London 1962) pp. 6f



kinship with the saints of early Christian Ireland as we meet them in their Lives. “...Prophetism seems to me to be a perennial phenomenon in African life, and the basic operative element in it seems to be personal in character. Whether in relation to or independently of events in society, the individual endowed with a striking personality and the ability to impose his will on others, believing himself, and believed by others to be a special agent being or force, will emerge from time to time and secure a following. Powers traditionally credited to such persons, of healing, of revealing hidden things, predicting the future, cursing and blessing effectually, etc. will be attributed to him whether he claims them or not. Some will make a more successful showing than others. Such things as the above-mentioned endowment, inner illumination, a sense of divine vocation, spontaneous enthusiasm (in the original sense of being in God, experiencing ardent religious zeal) are facts of life and have their effects in African society.” The applicability of this statement of Baeta in the context of ‘encounter with Christianity’ in both cultures, is striking; as it applies equally to the early ‘independent’ prophetic churches in West Africa and to the cults of the founding saints in Ireland. In both cases there is observable the same tension between confrontation with, and rejection of, the old ‘powers’ (particularly the *asuman* or ‘talismans’/‘fetish’ in the case of the Akan), and a deep inner continuity with immemorial experience which can truly be called “religious”.

We noted above that there does not seem to have been an Akan myth of a War in Heaven involving the Supreme Being as the Victor. While for the Akan “Life is religion and religion is life”, as we have seen, that “life is war” as a common Twi saying goes, and involves a constant battle with inimical spirits and transhuman forces, especially witch craft<sup>287</sup> This is clear from much of the foregoing. That this warfare is part of Christian devotional life, is also very evident, especially so, perhaps, in the ‘spiritual’ churches, but also in the consciousness of the ‘orthodox’ worshipper. Adubofuor gives examples of popular Fante lyrics sung by Methodist congregations

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<sup>287</sup> Adubofuor 1987 p.185f

all over Akan land which are songs of war, praising Nyame, the “king of the Christian” who fights on his or her behalf.<sup>288</sup>

The title of Field’s book cited above is “The Search for Security” and it indeed summarises the main conclusion to which her unique experience of the work of those same sacred practitioners among the Asante, led her, - that the fundamental need of their suppliant/patients was for protection. That her approach to the data was influenced by her own world view, which did not allow her perhaps to identify with all the perceptions of the folk she was dealing with is, I think, a valid criticism which I have heard made. There is evidence that the positive instructions for remedying the troubles both in the mind/body and in the circumstances of the individual and for bringing healing provided by these recognised ‘sacred practitioners’ mediating supernatural power whether from one of the *abosom* or direct from *Onyame* or from Christ are also sought after and valued by their adherents. However no one can quarrel with her main contention; it is after all a fundamental instinct belonging to all sentient creatures to a greater or lesser degree. To those recognising their world as being essentially spiritual, containing both benign and malign beings and forces, as did the peoples whose religious history and experience are being compared, the protective powers of such expert and gifted persons (some of whom in the old Scots tongue might be described as ‘far ben’), would be, and indeed were, earnestly sought.

The insular Celtic sources are full of evidence of this . There are the *loricae* or ‘breastplate’ prayers obviously regarded as effective protection against a variety of dangers, (which we would divide into ‘physical’ and ‘spiritual’), the most well-known and all-encompassing of which is “The Deer’s Cry”<sup>289</sup> or St Patrick’s Breastplate, parts of which are used as a modern hymn. The Old Irish praise poems to Columba mentioned above and Adomnán’s Latin Life show the saint as able to protect both in the dangers of this life and from the threat of hell hereafter.<sup>290</sup>

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<sup>288</sup> idem p.177f

<sup>289</sup> Greene and O’Connor op.cit.trans.pp.27-32

<sup>290</sup> Clancy and Márcus, op.cit. pp.32 and 96-171 The earliest Saints lives (all in Latin) are Cogitosus’ Life of Brigid, Muirchú’s St Patrick and Adomnán’s Columba. It is relevant that these are the three powers who were being invoked in Gaelic prayers and blessings together with the Archangel Michael, Mary, and the Holy Trinity until almost a century ago in Scotland, as recorded in

There is another somewhat indirect parallel which caught my attention and which could, perhaps, be illuminating in this context, leading us deeper into the area of human experience which this study hopes to enter. A quite close comparison can, I believe be made between the loving intuitive, and powerfully clairvoyant ministry and fiery vital personality of the Columba of Adomnán's *Vita*, and those of the priest, who had founded one of the *obosom-brafo* shrines to which M.J.Field, psychiatrist and anthropologist, was attached as a kind of unofficial consultant.<sup>291</sup> He was, she writes, "by all accounts a man of character so radiant" that she deeply deplored that he had died a year before her arrival in the village where she found that "some were so grief-stricken that they could not speak of him without distress". He was an elderly farmer with wives and children when the *obosom*, later called Mframa meaning (strong) wind, first 'came to him' and possessed him with great strength, 'shaking him as a great wind shakes the trees of the forest' and driving him so far into the bush that search parties had to be organised. "Having accepted his vocation, he went to a very ancient shrine where he was guided by the aged priest, not himself an *okomfo* through the dangerous early stages of spirit possession till his behaviour, controlled according to traditional ritual, became automatic", from which he returned to found his shrine. Once again only a selective summary of Field's account can be given here.

The shrine soon became a village named Mframaso ( the place of Mframa). "Various friends and kinsmen of the priest came at his invitation ...About a dozen were appointed shrine elders, (two of them women,) partly to act as trustees in business affairs, and partly to be present at every *abisa*<sup>292</sup> for no *obosom* will hold an *abisa* without a quorum of elders, as witnesses. The nominal head of these elders- the 'owner'<sup>293</sup> or custodian of the shrine, was a near kinsman, already an *odikro* or

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A.Carmichael *Carmina Gaedelica Orthana Gaidheal* Vols I&II first published 1900, (the whole "rearranged", Floris Books Edinburgh 1992)

<sup>291</sup> After re-reading Book III of the *Vita*, Field's vivid description, coloured as it is by the premises proper to a psychiatrist of her time, the shared characteristics of these two 'holy men' become even more striking.

<sup>292</sup> "Session before the shrine when supplicants make their requests and propound their problems (*bisa*, to ask). idem 17

<sup>293</sup> The shrine, like all 'new shrines' was "privately owned and charged for its services. But in this case the *Krontihene* of the Wenchi (paramount) stool who was the "ceremonial head of the priest's

headman of a (neighbouring town) Most officials, which included *akeame*, (spokesmen) the treasurer, young drummers and shrine attendants were kinsmen also.

“The shrine prospered, mainly because of the remarkable personality of the priest. He was full of fire and vitality, and took a warm-hearted personal interest in every supplicant,” accepting no payment from the needy, though “unstinted thank-offerings poured in from those whose affections he had won. Many stories were told of his paranormal cognition, not only when the spirit was in possession but in everyday life. Sometimes he would go out to meet and welcome pilgrims on the road, telling them, before they told him, whence and wherefore they had come”.

“The priest’s rule of the village was a benevolent despotism. Everyone took joy in working with him. The new buildings<sup>294</sup> were put up by men and youths under the direction of an ex-army mason, and they still recall their pleasure and enthusiasm...”

“Like most other Africans, he saw no incompatibility between Christianity and his own creed. The Christians bothered about only one of God’s sons. A poor God indeed it would be who could achieve but one son; his own *abosom*<sup>295</sup> were all God’s sons. At any rate the old man proposed to build both a church and a school in Mframaso, and he saw no reason why he should not worship God in church every Sunday after his morning *abisa*...”

“Another<sup>296</sup> prophecy that he made when first possessed by the spirit was that he would die after seven years priesthood and that each of his successors would die after seven years. After about six years it became apparent that he had TB. He was

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family acted as “general overseer”, analogous, perhaps to the Visitor of many present-day catholic communities of ‘religious’.

<sup>294</sup> Including guest-houses for pilgrims.

<sup>295</sup> Other *abosom* also started to possess the priest, “gentler in manner” than the “furious Mframa ...sharing among them the work of possessing the priest and hearkening to the needs of the suppliants”

<sup>296</sup> Field had just mentioned that when she arrived at the shrine to ask if she could observe its workings, the officials, “insecure under the new regime,” were suspicious and unfriendly but when one of them reminded the others that the old priest had prophesied that a European would come and stay in the village, their attitude changed and they gave her land to put up her dwelling, never tiring of telling her how the old priest would have built her a guest house and visited her every day to check on her well-being..

not perturbed and refused to spare himself, fasting three whole days in the week and working 'like one possessed' which indeed he was..." When told in hospital to which his friends had insisted on taking him, that there was nothing they could do, he laughed and thanked the staff courteously for their trouble, went home and lived until his seven years were up, and when lying weak and dying was still visited by the tempestuous Mframa. "When he died, he was buried, in obedience to his own orders, under the spot in front of the sanctuary where the priest stands to conduct *abisa*. His ghost, he said, would there help and sustain his successors".

Some indications of a parallel between the trauma for the Akan of the experience of those historical phenomena of change and disruption in twentieth century West Africa which has been summed up as "the shattering of the microcosm",<sup>297</sup> and the experience of change which culminated in the Viking phenomenon for the Irish in the first half of the ninth century, which Binchy called "the passing of the old order" have already been suggested.<sup>298</sup> The phenomenology of the response to the situation can also be compared: most obviously perhaps in the remarkable upsurge of adherence to the 'new' churches as well as the mission-founded ones, and to Islam as well, among the Akan, and in the proliferation of the Lives of the Saints, the use of their relics etc. among the Irish. There are however two other comparisons which I believe can legitimately be made in this area.

The surviving early mediaeval Irish literature which is the main source for this study, cannot of course give us definitive information about the responses to Christianity among the "invisible people",<sup>299</sup> while field research still yields data among the Akan; of which the example just quoted at some length is a revealing one. Research into hagiography has, however, provided some interesting insights from the work of Plummer onwards,<sup>300</sup> and once again Lugh figures prominently. Professor Pádraig Ó Riain, whose recent work in this area seems likely to be seminal, in

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<sup>297</sup> See at the beginning of this section above.

<sup>298</sup> "The passing of the Old Order" in B Ó Cuiv ed *The Impact of the Scandinavian Invasions on the Celtic-Speaking Peoples c.800-1100 A.D.* (Dublin, 1983) pp.119-132.

<sup>299</sup> B.Raftery op.cit.chapter 6,pp.112-146

<sup>300</sup> C.Plummer *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae* Vols 1&2 (1910)

introducing his illuminating article, “Traces of Lug in early Irish hagiographical tradition,”<sup>301</sup> writes: “The more one studies the record of Irish saints..., the more apparent it becomes that many must have been formerly the subjects of local, pagan cults. Brigit of Kildare may be the most transparent mutation of pagan goddess to christian saint; she is by no means the only one.”<sup>302</sup> In his very closely argued article he shows on linguistic, historiographical and genealogical grounds, that Lugh, whom he describes as “the best-known, if not the most important Celtic deity,... who may have reappeared in the christian milieu in the persons of a number of other saints”<sup>303</sup>, “became Lugaid *al.* Molua, Lóchéne *al.* Molacca and Lachténe *al.* Molachtócc, all of whom appear in Calendar lists of saints, local cult evidence such as place names and church dedications, and in the case of Molua and Molacca, extant Lives. In a later article<sup>304</sup> Ó Riain, writes : “No branch of early Irish tradition is more entitled to the name of 'christian literature' than its *noibscribenda*. Yet despite its adoption of such genres as *vita*, *calendarium* and *martyrologium*, all of which are basically composed on the European model, Irish hagiography remained to a large degree unashamedly 'pre-christian' in its themes and, more importantly, in its *dramatis personae*, ninety or more per cent of whom are demonstrably, or implicitly, pagan in origin. Its treatment of Lug is again very much a case in point.”

While these phenomena do not make an exact parallel with the notable increase of local *abosom* shrines in Ghana since the 1920's, side by side with the increase in Christian and Islamic adherence: - Ghana does not, and never has had, an official Christian ruling establishment -, there is a kind of resonance between them and the general assumption among all levels of Akan society that “the *abosom* have power”, and power which is locally available. There is perhaps a stronger parallel in the rejection of the old sources of supernatural help, and the turning to the archangels

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<sup>301</sup> P.Ó Riain in *ZCP XXXVI* (1977) pp.138-156

<sup>302</sup> *op.cit* p139. He adds that while Saint Brigit's feast coincides with Imbolc (Feb.1st ), the pagan deity Brigit “is not associated with a particular festival in the surviving record. this is the privilege of Lug...” See Pt Four of Chap.3 below.

<sup>303</sup> *loc.cit.*& pp. 42ff

<sup>304</sup> “Celtic Mythology and Religion”, *Geschichte und Kultur der Kelten*, K.H.Schmidt & R. Koedderitzsh edd. (Heidelberg 1986) pp.241-251, at 249f.

and patriarchs in some of the 'spiritual churches'.<sup>305</sup> Ó Riain's researches into the genealogical sources for his theme, which prompted the comment which follows the last quotation: "The prominence given to Lug as an ancestral figure of the Dál Modula of Munster is mirrored by the devotion which that people paid the erstwhile deity in the guise of a christian saint", are called on in the comparative study of the place of **ancestors** in the next chapter.

There is one further comparison which can be made between 9th century Ireland and the early 20th century in the Gold Coast/ Ghana. "The incursions of the Vikings, whatever other effects they may have had, can only have increased Ireland's awareness of itself as an entity distinct from and threatened by the outside world; and the growing ambitions and ever more extensive conquests of the dynasts of Tara were bringing the dream of a super-tribal, quasi-national kingship nearer to realization."<sup>306</sup> A similar growing "awareness of itself as an entity" was being experienced in the first half of the 20th century in the Gold Coast Colony, leading to its achievement, the first in Africa, of independence in 1957. We have already noted how Danquah one of the leaders of the movement towards independence, was also concerned in his pioneering book, *The Akan Doctrine of God* to bring his own cultural/religious world into the larger world, comparing his aims with those of the compilers of the LGE <sup>307</sup>. It is possible that the subsequent movement among leaders of thought in post colonial Ghana, including Christian thinkers, which is concerned to recover the 'positive' elements of traditional culture, belief and practice, may provide an analogy for, and one of the clues to, the learned enthusiasm which produced the great Irish sagas, from the 9th century on.<sup>308</sup>

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<sup>305</sup> See Bediako, (1995) pp.91-93.

<sup>306</sup> J. Carey (1989), p55

<sup>307</sup> See Chap. One especially Pt. 3

<sup>308</sup> A more recent development evident in universities and cities in Ghana, which was mentioned to us by Professor K.A. Opoku and by a retired PCG senior administrator (Rev.Kwansa), has been described as "a striking upsurge of a new wave of 'Pentecostalism' fuelled by an American gospel of prosperity...The noisiness of this sort of American Evangelicalism does not help the analysis of its African significance, but the impact in an impoverished continent of a gospel of wealth which seems to link one with highly ascertainable sources of wealth is not to be underestimated." [Editorial, *Journal of Religion in Africa XXIV 3* (Leiden, 1994)]

We turn now to the centre of this comparative study, - 'central' in many senses of that word, - and attempt to elucidate and understand the significance of the role of the sacral ruler in the religious history and experience of both cultures, in relationship to the impact of Christianity.



# CHAPTER THREE: THE SACRAL RULER

## PART ONE: KINSHIP AND KINGSHIP

In the introduction to his *Guide to Early Irish Law*, Fergus Kelly quotes Binchy's well-known dictum<sup>309</sup> on the characteristics of early Irish society as "tribal, rural, hierarchical and familiar (using this word in its oldest sense, to mean a society in which the family, not the individual is the unit)." These categories could in a general sense be applied to traditional Akan society. Detailed comparison of these two societies under these headings, bringing out both basic attitudes and functions in common, and interesting and significant differences, would make a fascinating study in itself, but would obviously be beyond the scope of this thesis; only a highly selective summary is possible.

In both societies the basic working unit is the lineage segment. In the surviving Irish Law Texts, regarded as providing much of our knowledge of early Irish society, this is the *derbfine* or "true kin", whose members are all descendants through the male line of the same great-grandfather, and are mutually responsible in law for each other<sup>310</sup>, and in that rural society would live near to each other. Among the Akan very similar kinship obligations are observed within small segments of a lineage seldom including more than four generations of the uterine descendants of an ancestress; and in the characteristically structured towns and villages of the Akan such kin-groups would normally live close together in the same ward, and everyone, men and women, would have their own matrilineal home-compound: the right to live there as part of the *fiefo* or house-folk unchanged by (exogamous) marriage<sup>311</sup>. However the lineage group localised in a town can extend further back and be very large, perhaps only

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<sup>309</sup> F.Kelly, *Guide to Early Irish Law* (Dublin 1988) p.3, cited from D.A.Binchy, Thomas Davis Lecture : *Early Irish Society* ed. Dillon (Cork 1954) p.54

<sup>310</sup> *idem* p.12f. See interesting discussion of the whole area of the terms relating to kinship categories in the Texts being used in "conflicting and vague ways " and possible reasons for this: N.W.Patterson "Patrilineal Kinship in Early Irish Society: the evidence from the Irish law texts.", *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* vol.XXXVII 1990, pp.133-165.

<sup>311</sup> Busia ed.Forde 1951 p.196; Rattray 1929 pp.2ff etc.

gathering as a whole for a funeral of a member. The mother-child bond which makes a person a member of her lineage also makes him/her a member of her *abusua* or “clan”. of which there are usually said to be seven. Membership of one or other of these clans is claimed by every Akan wherever they are settled, and the belief that all the lineages of a clan are descended from a single ancestress (although that ancestress is not in every case named in sacred tradition), is basic to Akan identity and sense of unity<sup>312</sup>.

The localised lineage segments of an *abusua* are part of the political structure of each Akan community which has developed over many centuries into an hierarchical and elaborate system of “divisions” or traditional states, each headed by its paramount chief or *Omanhene*, with the *Ohemmaa* or female ruler, (called by British administrators “Queenmother”) together with his “elders” or councillors. Every lineage has a head, and these lineage heads together form the council of the *odukro*, the chief of the village or group of villages, who himself is chosen from the lineage regarded as the ruling lineage of the village by the senior woman and adult men from within the lineage group, (he is not the head of his own lineage) and who, if he is accepted by the *Omanhene* and the rest of the Council, swears an oath of allegiance, being recognised as having succeeded to the stool of his ancestors. In relation to the chief of the division (now called *Omanhene*) these sub-chiefs have military titles. The most essential duty of each lineage head is the veneration of the lineage ancestors. There is a kind of hierarchy of ancestors in the structure, whereby the ancestors of the “ruling” lineage in each community become the ancestors of the community, up to the ancestors of the royal lineage to which the paramount chief belongs, who become the Ancestors of all in the division or *oman*. In the case of the Asante Union, the Ancestors of the Oyoku royal lineage formed a higher unifying authority still.<sup>313</sup>

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<sup>312</sup> Busia loc.cit. Note also in the Early Irish Law Tracts four “circles of kinship” are recognised, - the widest being descendants on the male line of the same great-great-great grandfather.(Kelly op.cit.p.312)

<sup>313</sup> Sarpong (1974) pp. 36f

The choice of a new Paramount Chief is also made, on the same principle, from amongst those with a recognised “kin-right to the Stool”. The royal lineage, normally the one believed to have been the first to settle in the area, is usually traceable many generations back, with several branches, whose official details are preserved by court officials, especially *akyeame* or spokesmen and others in charge of traditional genealogical lore, themselves hereditary, of whom the Queen-mother (who can be in fact quite a distant relative within the lineage) is expected to be one. Indeed the latter is traditionally the primary guardian of this lore and has the right to make the first nomination in consultation with the leaders of these branches. Customarily however, the Divisional Council of Elders will make the final decision with the endorsement of the assembled commoners. “Kin-right and popular selection are combined”<sup>314</sup> throughout the structure. The process is not of course complete until the royal Ancestors have been involved in the inaugurating enstoolment ritual. This simple ceremony takes place in the stool-house with a select few present when the new Chief having been presented to the Ancestors by the senior spokesman (*okyeame panyin*) is gently lowered onto the most important of the blackened stools three times. after which libations would be poured and sacrifices and prayer would be offered by the *Okyeame* for the new Chief, and for prosperity and increase during his reign.<sup>315</sup>

Busia records a further ceremony in his eye witness account of the enstoolment of the *Wenchiene*, the head of his own home division, when another sheep, *nyame- dwane* (sheep for ‘*Nyame*) was killed in the open yard outside the stool-house when the new chief himself prayed to ‘*Nyame* for the same blessings and for help for himself, so that his reign might be successful, after which libations were poured and the meat of the sacrifice was shared in this case only by sons of chiefs and younger members of the royal lineage: an interesting example of the personal direct relationship of the chief with the ultimate Source of all power. Rattray adds: “From now onwards he is invested with all the sanctity and power of the dead, until such

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<sup>314</sup> Busia (1968) p. 21

<sup>315</sup> *idem* 12f

time as he dies or is destooled, i.e. made to sever by force this spiritual connection.”<sup>316</sup>

The *túath* of the Irish Law Tracts is, generally speaking, a smaller unit than the Akan *oman*; but the latter has within it, as we have seen, separate semi-autonomous, sub-chieftaincies. The Irish Tracts also recognise, not only the *rí túaithe*, but some who are also *rí túath*, overlord of several *túatha*, and most important of all *rí ruirech* (king of kings) who is provincial king or *rí cóicid* (lit. “king of a fifth, or province”).<sup>317</sup> There is therefore a valid basis for comparison here.

The Law Tracts do give details of the mutual obligations within the *derbfine* and the penalties for failing to perform them. Among both peoples the murder of a kinsman was regarded with especial horror, striking as it does “at the heart of the kin-based structure”<sup>318</sup> of both societies. They also mention the “head” of the kin-group, who is “chosen” on the basis of his superior rank, wealth and good sense.”<sup>319</sup> Among his responsibilities was representing his kin on public occasions, such as an Assembly or court of law: that is, when the *túath* is functioning as a whole. Both the criteria for his choice and his place by right in the corporate life of the “state” are closely paralleled in the Akan system as we have seen.

Another responsibility of the early Irish kin-group head was for the arrangements connected with the “kin-land”. According to Kelly, most Irish farmland was *fintiu*, kin-land, which could not be disposed of without consent of the kin-group. The situation was similar among the Akan. Traditionally all farmers would regard their right to farm and enjoy the usufruct of their lineage land to have been inherited from their matrilineal ancestors to whom this right belonged. According to Akan stool traditions all settled land was originally ‘family land’, that is, it was cut out of the forest under the leadership of a founding ancestral lineage head, ‘originally’ a woman with a ‘brother’ no doubt beside her. Busia sums up the traditions shared by many oral court histories as follows. “The general picture then is that the communities first

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<sup>316</sup> Rattray (1929) p. 84

<sup>317</sup> Kelly (1988) pp.17f

<sup>318</sup> Kelly *idem* pp.127f.

<sup>319</sup> *idem* pp.13f

lived in large settlements: a central village...usually the capital where the chief lives. From this central village the chief sent out his hunters to view the surrounding country. A large area usually distinguished by natural boundaries such as rivers, rocks or trees was demarcated. The chief made a sacrifice to the Earth and the rivers of this locality on behalf of the community. The area thus demarcated, after permission has been sought from *Asaase Yaa* with due sacrificial ritual, became stool land under the care of the chief; it was tribal land.”<sup>320</sup> Kelly records that a portion of the land of the *túath* was attached to the office of kingship.<sup>321</sup>

If as Kelly’s reading of the Laws implies, cultivated land in Ireland was also originally kin-land, it could perhaps be possible that the unusual arrangement by which a lord (*flaith*) acquires clients, so basic to early Irish society, by advancing him a fief of stock or land in return for food rent and services, the contract being preferably with a kinsman, could also have been thought of in earlier times as a grant of usufruct only, at least in principle; there is so much evidence that the real owner of the land was ‘the goddess’.<sup>322</sup>

There are at least three types of origin tales among the Akan: those which refer to the emergence of the first clan ancestors from a specific sacred hole in the ground;<sup>323</sup> those whose founding ancestor was a woman descending from the sky with golden treasures; and those with memories of a migration into the forest from the north. The extracts from the account of early traditions of the “Asona Stool” of the Akyems cited in ch.1 pt2 contain both the second and third.<sup>324</sup> Rattray however records evidence he was given, very reluctantly, of traditions of totemic clan origins.<sup>325</sup> The usual response to his questions was the proverb: **One does not**

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<sup>320</sup> Busia loc.cit.; Rattray (1929) pp.354 ff. who quotes a legal phrase for the grant of land : “I take this land (i.e.soil) and give it to you to eat upon.”

<sup>321</sup> See also Patterson 1994 p.218 on this as connected with the privileges of *flaith gelfhine* lit. lord of the kin-group; *gelfhine* “also used to refer to the prominent descent group, especially that of the chief” (p.380). See glossary.

<sup>322</sup> See discussion of this in ch.4

<sup>323</sup> e.g.Rattray (1923) pp.121ff

<sup>324</sup> See also Wilks in HWA.1 p. 364 for further examples.

<sup>325</sup> (1929) pp.65ff

**disclose the origin of another.** He quotes several of his informants for example as follows:

**We really do believe, as do members of other clans that we are descended from some animal. This is one of the greatest mysteries of the clan, and it is told in secret to the Chief on the occasion on which he is first permitted to enter the room containing the blackened stools.**

The children of the clan were told to respect the animal, but not why. The taboo against killing or eating the animal in question by a clansman was total, similar to that against kin-slaying. The parallels in the Irish sources are close : for example the *geiss* on Conaire Már against killing birds, his divine father's people,<sup>326</sup> and on Cú Chullain against eating dog-meat.

It is not known when the Sacred Stool of the chiefly Ancestors, unique to the Akan among African peoples, uniting the disparate lineage groups in the *oman* first developed, but it was familiar to the Portuguese in the 15<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>327</sup> The story of Larteh in Akuapem already referred to in the last chapter shows a late example of how other patrilineal basically farming groups became incorporated.

Both in Akan traditional law and in the Irish tracts the “stranger” within the Akan *oman* and Irish *tuath*, has no legal standing. One common Irish term for stranger is *ambue* the meaning of which could be either “non-person” or “one who does not have cows”.<sup>328</sup> The stranger within the *oman* is one who has no recognised lineage-base there. As we have seen a quarter of the Akan town was normally allocated to groups of strangers, who have been allowed to settle. The general duty of hospitality is, of course, recognised in both cultures while in ancient Irish law it was especially the duty of a specific group among the land-holding classes,- the *bríugaid*, or hospitaller.<sup>329</sup>

F.J.Byrne in his study “Tribes and Tribalism in Early Ireland” makes the comment: “The ambiguity of Irish terminology makes it difficult to assert whether or

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<sup>326</sup> “The Destruction of Da Derga’s Hostel” in Gantz op.cit. p. 64.

<sup>327</sup> Wilks in HWA p.365.

<sup>328</sup> Kelly (1988) p.5

<sup>329</sup> See McCone (1991) p.124

not the primeval Irish *túath* regarded all its members, or at least those of free status, as of common blood.”<sup>330</sup> He adds that while the custom of naming a *túath* after its ruling family might imply the sharing of a common founding ancestor by the inhabitants, in historical times the *túatha* normally included families of different descent, some of which were recognised in genealogies as being such, as well as “subsumed older population groups”, which, he argues would make an actual common ancestor unlikely. A comparison of the apparent anomaly of this situation with the Akan evidence noted in the previous paragraph might suggest perhaps that the *túath* could still have been based on a kindred-group, acquiring a similar deep relationship with the specific area of land, by right of clearing the aboriginal forest,<sup>331</sup> The Akan “stool history” foundation tales, summarised by Busia above, have likewise to be put beside the empirical make-up of all towns and villages in Akan land. That kinship was of deep importance in the Irish consciousness is evident in many ways, as we have already seen, not least in the phenomenal number of genealogical tracts appearing from the 7<sup>th</sup> century onwards recording at least 2500 tribes, families and dynasties and the names of many thousands of individuals.<sup>332</sup>

Since Eoin MacNeill published in 1921 his pioneering study of the early Irish genealogical tracts, many studies have been made by Celtic scholars, mining them for material useful to their various interests and themes. McCone’s chapter entitled Politics and Propaganda<sup>333</sup> showing “how intimately saga can interact with plain genealogy and vice versa”, concludes: “As usual one can only admire the skill and sensitivity with which the various strands were interwoven with each other and the whole in the vast web of socially, politically and religiously oriented *senchus* that early Christian Ireland’s *literati* so painstakingly and creatively compiled and cultivated to explain their and their fellow countrymen’s role in the world.” Referring to the work

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<sup>330</sup> F.J.Byrne “Tribes and Tribalism in Early Ireland *Ériu* XXII, (1971) pp.128-171 at p.130f

<sup>331</sup> A process associated with those Otherworld women of the *Dindshenchas* and taken into the LGE tradition in the person of *Tailtiu* See detailed discussion in Chapter Four, where comparisons are made with the Akan *aberewa* as founding ancestress.

<sup>332</sup> McCone (1991) p.233, cited from D. Ó Corráin “Irish origin legends and genealogy” in ed.T.Nyberg et al.(1985) p. 55f.

<sup>333</sup> McCone idem pp. 233-255

of Goody and Fortes both providing evidence in northern Ghana among the Gonja and the Tallensi respectively on the manipulation of genealogies, McCone quotes from J.Vansina,<sup>334</sup> "...genealogies are sources in which distortions are very prone to occur, because they form the ideological framework with reference to which all political and social relationships are sustained and explained. Because of the functions they fulfil, they undergo many alterations, and are frequently telescoped." This can be paralleled in Akan oral palace histories of the deeds and genealogies of the royal ancestors over the years, partially hidden, no doubt, by those sanctions ensuring verbal exactitude in those repeating them in ritual situations in earlier times!<sup>335</sup>

However, as we have seen, the Christian or/and christianised and westernised Akan *literati* were not themselves engaged in these adjustments of traditional lore from the inside until comparatively recently. The deeply felt motivation inspiring the work of the early Irish "synthetic historians", among whom the genealogists were so important, in integrating their whole *senchus* within the divine/human history of Christendom, (referred to in the quotation from McCone above,) was not, at that stage, present among the new *literati* among the Akan.

However there is one aspect of MacNeill's own discoveries of special relevance here. He extracted the whole section of the collection of genealogies preceding those names for whom independent sources are available, all of which, of course began with the sons of Míl or rather Míl's grandfather, (who were in turn given a pedigree from Adam). In "almost all" of the ruling lineages listed, the name Lugh (or Lugaid) appears, sometimes more than once, sometimes with alternative names of mythological interest, notably Conmac, ("hound-son"),<sup>336</sup> sometimes with Ethniu, (Lugh's mother's name in 2MT,) as his father... Other names mentioned in these lists are Manannán or Oibsiu, (whose connections with Lugh are of interest) and

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<sup>334</sup> idem p.235 quoting from J.Vansina *Oral Tradition: a study in historical methodology*. (1973) p.153.

<sup>335</sup> The criticism of the books of Eva Meyerowitz, popular in their day, much of which were using material supplied at the court of the contemporary *Omanhene* of Techiman, who was engaged in a long-running dispute with the Asante Confederation, some of which clearly involved disputed oral history, is an example in point.

<sup>336</sup> Note reference to 'totem' animals above.



the Dagda. MacNeill also notes that a genealogy of the Uí Néill themselves, preserved in the Book of Balymote, identifies Núadu *Airgetlám* (Silverhand) with Írial, a son of Éremón son of Míl, and adds: **And what some say is that every ruling kindred in Ireland except the Éoganacht is of the seed of Núadu Airgetlám.** It had, it seems, become orthodox doctrine among the *senchaid* as early as the eighth century to euhemerise the Immortals of the *Túatha Dé Danaan* within the genealogy of the Sons of Míl. However, it also appears that once this was recorded, successive compilers of genealogies felt no need to hide an earlier doctrine of divine ancestry evident in their material, as is witnessed, for instance, by several glosses noted by MacNeill, and in fascinating detail in the section on “The ancestral background” in Ó Riain’s “Traces of Lug in early Irish hagiographical tradition”<sup>337</sup>

Murphy, in his fascinating little essay on Divine synonyms<sup>338</sup> in which he has fun with what are sometimes called the “mythological genealogies”, refers to MacNeill’s comment that both Lugh and Núadu appear in the tradition as “ancestor of almost all the Irish”. As a result of his exploration he suggests that certain “progenitors” of Lugh/Lugaid (Núadu, Cian and Dáire) could be synonyms of that god from whom the Gaulish Celts believed themselves to be descended according to Caesar<sup>339</sup> and that the “ancient Celts... traced their descent from him through his son, known also by many synonyms, of which, in Ireland, Lugh and Conmhac were two.”<sup>340</sup> K. Simms, in her book *From Kings to Warlords*<sup>341</sup> writing on the inauguration of Irish “chiefs” by “surname” in 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, shows that in annalistic texts after 1400 “a new reverence was attached not to the vestigial rites of sacred kingship but to the chieftain’s surname...one meets phrases like...the proclamation of the name, or...the ritual of the name.” The possible implications of this apparently late development are beyond the scope of this study.

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<sup>337</sup> op.cit (1972) pp.149-155. See also op.cit 1986 (Ó Riain’s article, “Celtic Mythology and Religion”) pp.249f

<sup>338</sup> *Duanaire Finn, The Book of the Lays of Fionn* vol.III App. H pp 205ff

<sup>339</sup> op.cit De Bell. Gall vol.VI p.181

<sup>340</sup> There are thought to be other possible personages in the tradition identifiable with Lugh, e.g. Tagd mac Cein and Fionn mac Cumail himself.

<sup>341</sup> (Suffolk 1987) p.32

Here, however, we come on what would seem to be a real difference between the significance of kinship in relation to the ‘universe of meaning’ for the Akan and the early Irish Celts. While the *abosom* are in mythological terms sometimes referred to as ‘sons’ of *Onyame* and can themselves ‘give birth’ to further *abosom*: their powers, in theory, at any rate, derived from him as Source of all power, the ‘spirit grandfathers’, the *Nananom* are not ‘descended’ from any divinity. Whatever the original meaning of the often quoted proverb, **All are children of Onyame: noone is the offspring of Earth**<sup>342</sup> it would appear to preclude a notion of *Onyame* as specifically the divine Ancestor of royal lineages.

Busia is not the only witness to describe the religion of the “Ashanti” as “mainly ancestor worship”. It is essential at this point to make an attempt to understand something of the role of the Ancestors among the Akan. For “there is much more to ancestor worship than its utility as a means of mapping out and providing a charter for a genealogically ordered social structure”<sup>343</sup>

A great deal has been written in English on what has been called “ancestor worship” over the years, but, as usual, not only the language itself but also the motivation of the writer has tended to influence the information provided, as much when the latter is an Akan as an expatriate.<sup>344</sup> The anthropologist Meyer Fortes has

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<sup>342</sup> The probabilities, indeed the evidence, would indicate that this proverb relates to ‘three souls’ concept or doctrine by which the *okara* or *kra* of a person is regarded as “part of *Onyame*” and is essentially ‘pure’, and is associated both with the breath of life and the ‘destiny’ of every child born into the world and which returns to *Onyame* at death. One cannot avoid comparing this to the divine ‘spark’ or ‘seed’ of Christian mystical tradition, including the “that of God in everyone” of the Society of Friends. See also other aspects of belief about the *kra* in note below.

<sup>343</sup> Meyer Fortes (see note below).

<sup>344</sup> As the climax to the programme arranged for the visit of myself and my husband to Akropong the reigning Paramount Chief Nana Addo Dankwa III graciously allowed me to interview him in his palace. The transcript of Nana's words convey a highly ‘demythologised’ description of the relationship of a Chief to the royal Ancestors and to their Stools, far more so than that implied in Nana Addo Dankwa's speech quoted above, or even in the lectures which he delivered at Trinity College, the Presbyterian Seminary, of which he kindly gave us a copy. The latter was a contribution to the dialogue between the Church and the Chieftaincy, and reflected Nana's desire to classify the ritual functions of the Chief as “cultural” and not religious. Talking to an elderly British couple on a visit to Ghana he would naturally, as a cosmopolitan business man with a London Economics degree, use the language of the discourse community in which he participated in the fifties and sixties when he himself was a student.

provided in his article, "Some Reflections on Ancestor Worship"<sup>345</sup> some helpful insights. His use of the word "worship", however is not endorsed by the majority of contemporary witnesses.

First then, ancestor worship, "though it consists descriptively of ritual relations with dead forbears, is not co-terminous with the worship of the dead." He refers to the "dogma of human personality" which in every culture "establishes the conceptual premises and the symbolic images of the nature, causes, and consequences of death and the relations between the living and the dead." As we have seen the Akan traditionally hold that the human person has "three souls". There is the *Okara* or '*kra* which is a birth gift from the Supreme Being "a little bit of *Onyame*" giving the breath of life and the "destiny" of the person; and is associated, rather mysteriously, with the day of the week on which the child is born, providing it with a name; this '*kra* returns to God at death.<sup>346</sup> There is the *sunsum*, the personal character, which comes from the father, originally "a specific instance" of the *Ntoro* (spirit) of the patrilineal line.<sup>347</sup> The constituent of the living person which can be transmuted into an Ancestor as such, "is thought of as the counterpart, in the context of the lineage cult, of the matrilineal component of that person",<sup>348</sup> or the *mogya* sometimes translated as the "blood soul". This it is which becomes at death the *saman* often translated as "ghost", and it is hoped that the *saman* will with the devoted help of his or her children and all the members of the matrilineal lineage through the elaborate proper ritual and observance including displays of public corporate grief proceed to the *samando* or spirit-world to join the dead of its own *abusua* in much the same social set up as the life it has left.

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<sup>345</sup> Meyer Fortes, "Some Reflections on Ancestor Worship in Africa" *African Systems of Thought* (London 1965) 122-141.

<sup>346</sup> Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashanti* (London 1927) p.153 quotes Christaller's Dictionary entry on *Okra*, which can be put beside the description from Busia in Ch. One above: "... the *kara* of a person exists before his birth and may be the soul or spirit of a relation or other person already dead... In life the '*kra* is considered partly as the soul of a person and partly as a separate being, distinct from the person, who protects him... gives him good or bad advice, causes his undertakings to prosper, or slights or neglects him... and therefore... receives thanks and thankofferings like a fetish." ( See also the ritual for washing the '*kra* of the Chief at *Odwira* mentioned in Pt 4 of this chapter.)

<sup>347</sup> The spiritual link with the father's *sunsum* remains after his death and according to Rattray (1923) p.53, it can eventually be reincarnated in a member of the same *ntoro*.

<sup>348</sup> Fortes op.cit p.129

That the *saman* may become reincarnated within the *abusua* is regarded as not unlikely especially if it has for any reason been excluded from the *samando*<sup>349</sup>

However these “concepts of the physical constituents of personality...do not have the metaphysical implication of the Christian notion of the soul. They refer to activities, relationships, and experiences that are deemed to fall wholly within the regime of nature.<sup>350</sup> So mortuary ceremonies, though couched in language and rites which appear to personify the dead, are in fact not directed towards consigning them to, and equipping them for spiritual existence in a supernatural realm, but towards disincorporating them from the social structure.<sup>351</sup>” Akan do “live with their dead” like other Africans, because they share with them the “world of spirits”, but the relationship is not necessarily easy or comforting. “The living are happier because they are alive. But the dead are more powerful”.<sup>352</sup> It is not to question the validity of the fore-going in terms of its structuralist approach to add that the grief expressed by mourners whether more-or-less professional singers or close relatives is as genuine as at any funeral anywhere.

“But death and mortuary rites, though they must precede, do not confer ancestorhood. Specific rites are needed for that.” And not everybody who has “the status of mother’s brother” becomes an ancestor. “Normally, it is only those members of a lineage who have been invested with authority, i.e. jurisdiction in the lineage, as lineage heads or as holders of office in the external politico-jural domain, who become permanently enshrined in stools of worship”.<sup>353</sup> And not even every Paramount Chief or Queenmother qualifies for “reinstatement” as an Ancestor, by which his “continued relevance for society, not as a ghost, but as a regulative focus for the social relations and activities that persist as a deposit, so to speak of his life and career” is

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<sup>349</sup> Sarpong (1976) p.9

<sup>350</sup> The use of this word here could be misleading, as “in the Akan view nature was, if you like, supernature, antecedently spiritual”. Abrahams op.cit pp.50f.

<sup>351</sup> Fortes loc.cit.

<sup>352</sup> I have not been able to find the precise source of this quotation: it was, as I remember cited by Bishop John Taylor from Alexis Kagame.

<sup>353</sup> Fortes op.cit.p.130

established.<sup>354</sup> In the next section, comparing the sacral functions of Irish king and Akan chief, details of the qualities and behaviour required will be discussed.

Having touched on the punitive, or rather, “the corrective intervention” of the Ancestors “whose vigilance is directed towards restoring order and discipline in compliance with the norms of right and duty, amity and piety whenever transgressions threaten or occur”, and the reciprocal duties of the Chief and the Elders, Fortes sums up “ancestor worship” considered in relation to the social structure in the two following dense paragraphs: “...ancestor worship, among such peoples as we have been discussing, can be described as (inter alia) a body of religious belief and ritual practices, correlated with rules of conduct, which serves to entrench the principle of jural authority together with its corollary, legitimate right, and its reciprocal, designate accountability, as an indisputable and sacrosanct value-principle of the social system. In these societies, jural authority implies not only control but responsibility and rests on mutuality of rights and duties. It is effective because he who holds authority is himself bound to superior authority and is both entitled and obliged to invoke this superior authority as the sanction of his status. He can fulfil his responsibilities with authority...because the ultimate responsibility lies outside his control.”

“In these societies, the kind of authority and right here at issue is generated and exercised through social relations created by kinship and descent. Jural authority vests in a person by virtue of kinship status or office that, in the last resort, depends upon descent... Ancestor worship put the final source of...jurisdiction on a pedestal, so to speak, where it is inviolable and unchallengeable, and thus able to mobilise the consent of all who must comply with it.”<sup>355</sup>

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<sup>354</sup> Dr Bediako compared this “deposit” with its continued relevance as a regulative focus down the generations to the characteristics of the continuity preserved in the papacy. The masculine pronoun used reflects the “creeping patriarchy” which has put in shadow the Stool of the *Ohemmaa*, “the female ruler” or Queenmother which Rattray was told was “the senior stool” (1923 p.81)

<sup>355</sup> So real is this authority even at the level of the “household”, that students at the Teacher Training College in Akropong in 1993 studying *Romeo and Juliet* had no sympathy with Juliet because she was not only going against her parents wishes but also against lineage solidarity, expressed in the .. Montague/ Capulet feud.

These quotations from a structuralist anthropologist reveal the fundamental and essential nature of the relationship with the Ancestors among the Akan,- not so much symbolised, though it is that,- as encapsulated in the Blackened Stool and its rituals: that it represents what was perceived (and still is by some) as the irreducible basis of order and health in society. There is plenty of evidence in the Irish sources for the same identification of physical and spiritual kinship: for instance that supplied by the story of the Columban monastic *familia*<sup>356</sup>, and also in the hereditary nature of all practice of the Arts,<sup>357</sup> even the art of brigandage;<sup>358</sup> and this, incidentally, is consonant with the ancient doctrine of descent of royal lineages from the gods,<sup>359</sup> which learned orthodoxy in our period is obscuring within the genealogical *schema* of the “children of Míl of Spain”.

Though grateful for the insight provided by Meyer Fortes, I am left with a feeling of unease, partly because “in my culture” one does not readily connect the very deep feelings which undoubtedly inform all the areas of Akan life of which Fortes is writing, with the analysis he has provided; we tend to separate the practical from the ‘spiritual’. Rattray’s books are full of anecdotes from his personal experience when he witnessed expression of such feelings of love and devotion both individual and corporate towards both the ancestors and their living heirs.<sup>360</sup> The evidence provided by Ó Riain in his study of saints names derived from the root name ‘Lug’ referred to above, which includes so many “pet names” or hypocoristic variants such as the tender personal prefix *mo-* would suggest, as he himself hints, continuity from a warmer and more personal local devotion towards the Irish pre-Christian divinity in his day than is normally allowed to have been the case. That Ó Riain includes in his article some genealogical details associating Lugh as ancestor both with the lineages

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<sup>356</sup> .Herbert op.cit passim.

<sup>357</sup> Exemplified in 2MT by the mini-tale of Dian Cécht, the divine physician and his family.

<sup>358</sup> See Conaire's foster brothers in “The Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel” Gantz op.cit.p.57.

<sup>359</sup> One wonders if any research has been done into a possible connection with the ancient concept of *nemed* as applied to persons in the Irish law tracts.

<sup>360</sup> His detailed account of the practice of the cult of *Ta Kora*, associated with the River Tano and his/her many ‘sons’, conveys, as one would expect, a similar relationship between the priests and devotees and their respective *abosom*: *Ashanti* (1923) pp.172-202.

local to the evidence of the cults of the saints with Lug-derived names, ( and indeed in the genealogies of the saints themselves), does perhaps give more legitimacy to the analogy with the religious experience and history of the Akan which I am here suggesting.

## PART TWO: THE SACRAL RULER

The actual areas over which the most influential of the traditional rulers had some kind of headship, developed, or rather fluctuated, within historical and proto-historical times in both cultures. We have referred to the rise and fall of powerful Akan states enriched by trade first with the north and from the 16<sup>th</sup> -18<sup>th</sup> centuries with the European trading ports on the south coast. In Ireland archaeology has laid bare evidence of obviously powerful cult centres associated with the power of those “traditional provincial over-kingdoms, the *coiceda* or Fiftths”<sup>361</sup> and their legendary warriors who dominate the literature, the visible decay of which is exploited by Óengus the Culdee.<sup>362</sup> That the early Irish legal tracts, however, generally relate their contents to the single *tuath* and so to the king’s role within it, has always been a problem for Celtic scholars. And yet in the material available for both the early Irish and the Akan in historical times, there is discernable what might be called a basic dogma of chiefship or kingship, which is regarded as applicable to all. Sources for early Irish doctrine of the sacral kingship, in addition to these Legal Tracts ( as made so available to the lay person in Fergus Kelly’s *A Guide to Early Irish Law* ) consulted below, are the “Wisdom Text”<sup>363</sup> *Audacht Morainn* and several of the tales and sagas including of course our basic text of *Cath Maige Tuired* which are related to, or ostensibly set in, the mythologised past of the Kingship of Tara.<sup>364</sup>

The published sources for a study of the traditional rulers of the Akan are, as we have seen, mainly to be found in the truly monumental works of Captain Rattray on the Asante, supplemented and usually corroborated by others. A certain amount of the material specifically relating to the ritual aspect of the chieftaincy is still

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<sup>361</sup> F.J.Byrne in “Tribes and Tribalism” *Ériu*XXII (1971) p.135 where he adds “The existence of the *coiceda* (whatever their exact number, and whatever the position of Mide in the scheme) seems, as MacNeill said, to be the earliest and best-attested fact in Irish history.”

<sup>362</sup> B.Raflery op.cit. pp.64ff

<sup>363</sup> Kelly op.cit.Appendix .4

<sup>364</sup> cf P.MacCana “Notes on Early Irish Concept of Unity”, *The Crane Bag* (Dublin 1977-81) pp.205-219 (discerning: the coexistence of a cosmological and religio-cultural unity with cellular, un-centralist political structure.)



observable, and though much of it will be somewhat opaque to those by whom the great richness of symbol in artefact, in the language of the drums and of dance and the court language of allusive and proverbial speech (and in my case of the everyday speech as well) is not understood, the ritual still contains what might be called its essential features<sup>365</sup>. Busia gives a summary of the most frequent ceremony whereby the chief carries out his duties towards the royal Ancestors on behalf of his people, called the *Adae* which is normally observed twice in every six weeks (42 days), once on a Sunday, the *kwaesidae* and once on a Wednesday<sup>366</sup>. On the day before, the sacrificial sheep and drink etc. are collected and the drums announce the approach of the *Adae*, when no work can be done. The most sacred part is in the stool-house and witnessed by few. "Here the chief is the servant." Having greeted the ancestors, with his sandals off his feet and standing on them (there is a strong taboo, against any part of the chief's body touching the ground) and his shoulders bared, he either initiates or presides over the sacrifice of the sheep and its proper distribution beginning with the placing of the portions for the ancestors on their stools. "He then reverently offers drink and meat to his ancestors with the prayer:

**Today is *Adae*, come and receive this and eat; let this town prosper let the bearers of children bear children; may all the people get riches; life to me ; long life to the nation (*oman*)..**

The chief is functioning as *Ohene Komfo* (priest chief) and shows the Ancestors "the same reverence and pays them the same courtesies as he is accustomed to receive from his subjects, because he is the one who sits upon the stool of the ancestors."<sup>367</sup> The ceremonies for the rest of the day are public. The drums recite the brave deeds of the chief's ancestors and the "minstrels drone into his ear" their names and achievements. Sitting in state the chief receives the greeting and respects of the elders, with their subjects and lineage members, and he then sends them drink, - originally presumably palm wine. Then follows dancing and drumming. The *Odwira*, the great

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<sup>365</sup> A distinguished retired pastor of the PCG who befriended us in Akropong, described his feelings of deprivation in never having had the opportunity to learn the drum language.

<sup>366</sup> Rattray describes in some detail four occasions in different areas when he witnessed the central rite in the stool-house as a unique privilege: op.cit (1923) pp 92 -102.

<sup>367</sup> Busia op.cit. pp 28f

annual festival characteristic of most of the Akan in which the Chiefs preside and the ancestors are honoured, will be described later. It has several features in common with the Irish annual autumn festival of Lughnasa, the *nasad* or festival of the divine Lugh.

Once enstooled the chief is the intermediary, in the fullest sense of that word, with the Spirit Ancestors and his judgements were largely held to be their decisions. We were told in Akropong that the paramount chief elect went through a period of instruction before his enstoolment from the custodians of the oral lore, under the direction of the senior *okyeame* or “spokesman”.<sup>368</sup> And yet as Rattray put it, “in spite of the reverence and religious awe in which his person was held, his subjects yet had...very distinct ideas as to the manner in which he should exercise his authority”. He illustrates this by giving a “typical example” of the instructions publicly recited before the chief on the occasion of his enstoolment. Two officials who are also sub-chiefs or lineage heads will rise and speaking through the *okyeame* because the chief can neither be addressed directly nor speak directly to anyone in public, will say :

**Tell him that: We do not wish that he should disclose the origin of any person.**

**We do not wish that he should curse us.**

**We do not wish greediness. (e.g. using “stool property for personal gain”.<sup>369</sup>)**

**We do not wish that his ears should be hard of hearing.**

**We do not wish that he should act on his own initiative (lit. out of his own head.)**

**We do not wish things done as in Kumasi.<sup>370</sup>**

**We do not wish that it should ever be that he should say “I have no, time”, “I have no time”.**

**We do not wish personal abuse.**

**We do not wish personal violence.**

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<sup>368</sup> In some Divisions the custom has been for the newly enstooled chief to spend seven days and nights in the Stool house alone with the ancestors, with the door locked..

<sup>369</sup> Busia op.cit. p.51

<sup>370</sup> J.G.Platvoet sums up the significance of this neatly: To each of these rules of conduct the ruler elect was to answer *mate*, ‘I have heard (and understood)’, or *me pene so*, ‘I agree’, and thus make public his intention not to rule his people in the autocratic, bureaucratic and at times violent ways which had increasingly become the mode of government at Kumasi in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but in the traditional way of constant consultation with the *mpanyinfo*, elders, and of respect for the autonomy of the wards, or towns, or states which they represented. (In Journal of Religion in Africa XV 1985 p.185). See also Pt 4 of this chapter.

These injunctions are delivered before the reciprocal oath-taking which preceded the enstoolment and are not mere pious hopes directed to a potential tyrant<sup>371</sup> For persistent disregard of these injunctions put the chief in danger of destoolment; they belong to the area of taboo.<sup>372</sup> For they all offend against the basic concerns of the tribal ancestors: the continuity and well-being of the tribe, which depend on its peace and unity, which in turn depends on the maintenance of well-proven social *mores* expressed in customs and taboos established by them. Thus the paramount chiefs were called on to act as judge only in cases involving what Rattray called “public offences” such as were *oman akyiwade*, “ things hateful to the tribe<sup>373</sup>”, affecting the relationships between the community on the one hand and the chief’s ancestors or the tribal gods on the other.<sup>374</sup> It is of interest that the importance of the relationship with the tribal *abosom* in this context, (as providing powerful sanctions against moral and ethical misdemeanors ) has varied between different “peoples” among the Akan. As has been noted in Ch.Two however, it seems that the keeping of the taboos of *Asaase (Yaa)* and therefore the relationship between the traditional state and the Earth Spirit is of equally vital importance everywhere. Other offences *efisem* or “household cases” were dealt with within the appropriate smaller unit, whether the household *fiefo* or local lineage group.

The earliest of the four ‘wisdom-texts’ in Early Irish belonging to the genre *Speculum Principum* or “Mirror of Princes” containing advice to a king, is the

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<sup>371</sup> See below for an account of the place and nature of the Oath .

<sup>372</sup> The ritual by which destooling took place was normally by compelling the Chief in question to come in direct contact with the earth so breaking a fundamental taboo.

<sup>373</sup> The word “tribe” is a difficult word to use precisely in any context; it has acquired so many connotations. Rattray is here using it in connection with the people owing allegiance to the ancestors of a “paramount chief” whose own ancestral lands are within the territory of the former, who are in accordance with one of the definitions given in the current Chambers Dictionary, “an aggregate of families forming a community”. As for the Irish of our period, it would seem to be more applicable to the peoples regarding themselves as belonging to a “province” or *coicéd* (lit.fifth), making up “four fifths” of Ireland, generally accepted as a very ancient concept, that is Ulster, Connacht, Leinster and Munster. (For a thorough, and to me impressive exploration of this tradition in all its elaboration see Rees and Rees op.cit. pp.118ff.). However in historical times in Early Ireland, the above dictionary definition could no doubt be cogently used of population groups associated with smaller divisions of territory.

<sup>374</sup> Busia op.cit 65ff cf Rattray (1929) chs xxv--xxxvii. N.B. the prestige of the tribal *abosom* in this regard seems to vary considerably from one division to another.

*Audacht Morainn* (The Testament of Morann). Its early date (compiled c. 700 A.D.) and the lack of “specifically Christian sentiments and very few Latin loan-words” give it especial interest in this context.<sup>375</sup> For it can be said to contain a detailed statement of that ‘dogma’ of Irish sacral kingship referred to above, particularly in paragraphs 12 to 28, in which, in a kind of litany, the authority and effectiveness of the king, the prosperity and security and fruitfulness of both people and livestock and the land itself, depend on *fír flathemon*, which in some contexts is translated as princes’ truth and here in Kelly’s English version of the *Audacht* text as the justice of the ruler.<sup>376</sup>

This ‘litany’ immediately follows the introduction to the whole ‘instruction’ in the form of a double triad:

**Tell him before every word....with every word this lasting advice.(par. 5)  
 Let him preserve justice, it will preserve him. Let him raise justice, it will raise him. Let him exalt mercy, it will exalt him. Let him care for his *túatha* they will care for him. Let him help his *túatha*, they will help him. Lets him soothe his *túatha*, they will soothe him.(paras 6-11)<sup>377</sup>  
 Tell him that it is through *fír flathemon* that plagues (and) great lightnings are kept from the people.  
 It is through *fír flathemon* that he secures peace, tranquillity, joy, ease,(and) comfort.  
 It is through *fír flathemon* that he dispatches (great) battalions to the borders of hostile neighbours.**

And in paras 16 onwards the following blessings are attributed to *fír flathemon*: that every heir plants his house-post in his fair inheritance; that there are abundances of tree fruit in the great forest: that milk yields of cattle are maintained, and abundance of corn, and of fish, that fair children are born. Para.22 tells the king whose rule is young to observe the skills of the driver of an old chariot and (23): **Tell him, let him**

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<sup>375</sup> F.Kelly,ed. *Audacht Morainn*, (Dublin 1976) Intro; .cf Binchy “*Bretha Dein Checht*” *Ériu* XX 3 . Kelly adds, “Archaic features of syntax suggest” that much of the Rescension B which he uses, was composed a good deal earlier than the proposed compilation date c. 700.

<sup>376</sup> In Kelly's opinion that first paragraph is a later addition introducing the mythical judge Morann as the author of the *Audacht*, telling a younger kinsman or foster-son Neire to pass on the instructions to a king Feradach Find Fechnach.

<sup>377</sup> Note that the king in question is here more than the simple king of one *túath*.

**not exalt any judge unless he knows the true precedents.**<sup>378</sup> Paras 24-28 complete the section on the effects of *fir flathemon* : enabling every great man of art to attain the crown of knowledge; that the borders of every true lord include all the grazing he needs; an obscure clause about provision of clothing and another that *fir flathemon* maintains three immunities of violence at every assembly. The remaining thirty-five paragraphs are also of great significance; the long section beginning in para.32: **Tell him, let him estimate the creations of the creator who made them as they were made;** anything which he will not judge according to its profits will not give them with full increase, and in which every injunction begins *Ad-mestar*: (let him estimate..) seems to indicate that *fir flathemon* in the sense of ‘Prince’s Truth’ is a source of knowledge; perhaps it should be called *imbas forosnai* “the knowledge that illumines”; a knowledge which he must diligently exercise with reference to everything that is needful for his people’s life: the fruits of the earth including the raw materials for all life-enhancing skills, all farm animals, all laws and customs regulating the proper “honour price” of each graded rank, the proper rewards for all grades of men of art, the right and justice, truth and law, contract and regulation of every just ruler towards his client. By estimating the potentialities of all these creations of the creator who made them as they were made the true ruler can, it seems, empower their fulfilment.

Although the texts cited above vary in complexity, the mediatory role of the sacral ruler conveyed in both, between the ‘transcendent’ powers and human society is clearly similar; though it might be said that the *Audacht Morainn* passages show the *fir flathemon* as more positively creative in its effect than the Akan ancestors. There is obviously more to be discovered about this mediatory role of the sacral ruler in both cultures as an area for comparison.

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<sup>378</sup> This is presumably the *brithem túaithe* appointed by the king and accompanying him everywhere. Kelly (Early Laws 1988) pp.51f

## The Role of Lugh as Primordial Sacral King : Further Evidence

There are passages, among those quoted above, which show the *Audacht Moraimn* to be in touch with the provisions and regulations of the Law Tracts presumably in the process of compilation at the time (late 7<sup>th</sup> century). As a “mirror of princes”, it is also clearly very close to the vision of the prototype Other World primordial kingship encapsulated in the part played by Lugh the Many-skilled in 2MT.

Another source for the role of Lugh in the early mediaeval Irish traditions of kingship is the *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, The Book of the Invasions of Ireland. F.J. Byrne<sup>379</sup> describes this work as “constantly being brought out in new and revised editions until the end of the twelfth century...a fantastic compound of genuine racial memories, exotic Latin learning and a world history derived from Orosius and Isadore of Seville, euhemerized Celtic mythology, dynastic propaganda, folklore and pure fiction” whose earliest version was already current in the eighth century. References to Lugh are scattered around the text of the section on the *Túatha Dé Danaan*,<sup>380</sup> and he is credited with remarkably cogent and self-consistent aetological functions within the “synthetic” history reflecting his role with regard to the sacral kingship without of course having explicitly to attribute to him any divine status.

In paragraph 316 in the section under the heading “First Redaction”<sup>381</sup> we read Lug s.Cían s.Dian Cécht s. Esarg s.Nét s.Indui s.Alldui, he is the first who brought *fidchill* and ballplay (*liathroit*) and horse racing (*eclaisc*) and assembly (*óenach*) in Ireland *unde quide cecenit*.<sup>382</sup> The four-lined verse attached to this entry<sup>383</sup> runs:

**Lug son of Ethliu, a cliff without a wrinkle, / with him there first came a lofty assembly: / after the coming of Christ, it is no idle proclamation / Conchobar the wise and violent died.**<sup>384</sup>

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<sup>379</sup> *Irish kings and high-kings*, (London 1973) p.9

<sup>380</sup> R.A.S. Macalister ed. and trans. *Lebor Gabála Érenn The Book of the Taking of Ireland*, Part IV (Irish Text Soc. XXXIV. 1941). pp.91-292

<sup>381</sup> *idem* p. 129

<sup>382</sup> Other loci are in *idem* Paras 317, 349, 369

<sup>383</sup> *idem* LV p. 225

<sup>384</sup> Note the name Ethliu, which in this form is a patronymic.

In a lengthy paragraph (368) entitled the “Genealogy of the *Túatha Dé Danaan*” there is this entry:

**One son of Cían s. Dian Cécht, Lug Lamfada: this Cían had another name, Ethlenn s. Dian Cécht, and he had another name, *Scál Balb*. This is why he is sometimes called Lug s. Ethliu and sometimes Lug s. *Scál Balb*.**<sup>385</sup>

Para. 349 also attributes contesting at assembly as one of Lugh’s all-time ‘firsts’.

In his *Early Irish Laws and Institutions* Eoin MacNeill states that “the chief functions of a king of a *túath* were three: he was president of the assembly, commander of the forces in war and judge of the public court.”<sup>386</sup> Lugh in 2MT is pre-eminently carrying out the first two of these functions. “From several statements in the Laws...it is clear that the king of every tribe was bound to convene an *óenach* at regular intervals”.<sup>387</sup> It is also evident from the contexts that the other inventions with which Lugh is credited in the LGE extracts noted, are associated with an Assembly; and we must therefore expect them to partake of, and contribute to, the significance of “lofty assembly” for the proper functioning and well-being of the *túath*. They were presumably part of the funeral games referred to in both alternative foundation stories for the Assembly at Tailtiu, and also in *Óenach Carmain*.<sup>388</sup> That they, (possibly even including the board game *fidchell*),<sup>389</sup> were integral to Assemblies held at Lughnasa is powerfully endorsed by the information on extensive survivals of customs and legends and local sites of celebration connected with the time immediately before and after August 1st collated by Máire MacNeill.<sup>390</sup>

The second and third of Eoin MacNeill’s “chief functions” of the king of the *túath* were as commander of the forces in war, and judge in the public court. As the

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<sup>385</sup> In the alternative tale of the founding of the Tailtiu Lughnasa assembly (311) Eithne daughter of Balor is named as Lugh's mother.

<sup>386</sup> (Dublin no date) pp. 97f

<sup>387</sup> “The Fair of Tailtiu and Feast of Tara” op.cit p.

<sup>388</sup> E Gwynn ed. *Metrical Dindshenchas* vol. III p.124.

<sup>389</sup> In *Cáin Íaraith* (Law on Fosterage) knowledge of *fidchell* and *branuischt* were part of the training required for sons of kings and nobles .see Kelly (Early Law op.cit.1988 pp. 86f) See also E MacWhite, “Early Irish Board Games”, *Eigse* V-VI (1944-52) pp27-35. Note importance of Lugh “winning all the stakes” with the Tara *fidchell* boards in 2MT.

<sup>390</sup> op.cit passim

king had no standing army, (only a personal bodyguard supplemented on occasions no doubt by the support of his kin-group. and his personal clients), the former gave him the right and duty to summon all the freemen of the *tíath* to a *slogád* or hosting for defence or attack which was made, or presumably sometimes endorsed, in the context of an *óenach*. Lugh's part in the primordial theomachy in 2MT reveals him as indeed the prototype king in this role. As for the king's role as judge, Kelly, recognising that the Law Tracts show that normally the role of public judge was performed by one or more of the members of the professional caste of lawyers cites a short text on court procedure which he calls the *Airecht* text<sup>391</sup> which "makes it clear that the king does have some role in the judgement of important cases". This text describes the seating arrangements in a law-court: among various sections adjoining the court proper is a *cul-airecht* (back-court) where sit the (provincial) king, the bishop and the chief poet, who are described as **the cliff which is behind the courts for judgement and for promulgation**. This makes a significant connection with the poet's designation of Lugh as "the cliff without a wrinkle" in LGE. Perhaps this can be regarded as another hint of a widespread and still lively tradition some centuries "after Patrick", of Lugh, not only as the king-god, but also as *Samildánach*, uniting in himself the ultimate powers of poet, divine wisdom and sacral king.<sup>392</sup> At this point a brief study of the essential function of the Oath within administration of justice in these two primal cultures, will, I believe, once again reveal some kind of parallel between the function of Lugh and of the Ancestors.

### **The "Oath" in the traditions of the Akan and early mediaeval Ireland.**

Busia has provided a concise summary of the use of the oath in the context of the traditional legal system of the Akan as a method whereby a private injury could be brought before the chief. As one would expect, it is the Ancestors who give power to the oath. Every lineage elder, village headman, lesser chief (*birempon*) queenmother

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<sup>391</sup> Kelly, op.cit. (Early Irish Law ) p.23 and 354f (app 1 No.71)

<sup>392</sup> 2MT (ITS LII) paras 149-161 Lugh, while consulting the "wise man" Máeltne Mórbrethach on the proper "honour price" for the sparing of Bres, yet gives the judgement finally chosen, himself.



(*ohemma*) and *ohene*, (divisional chief) has his/her oath, by virtue of his/her office. All “have reference to some misfortune or disaster that according to tradition, occurred in the past”; in the case of a lineage elder this would usually be to an individual ancestor, while the oaths of chiefs might refer to “such distasteful incidents” involving a royal ancestor but would include reference to defeat in war or other “tribal disasters”. The oath is a set formula alluding very obscurely to the tragic incident, usually merely mentioning the day of the week on which it is believed to have occurred. To utter the oath in public is to break a very strong taboo, in some cases invoking the death penalty, “because the ancestors are either annoyed or aggrieved by the recollection of their disaster,” and this estranges them from the community. There is also the fear that the use of the oath may cause a repetition of the misfortune to fall on the successors of the ancestors. The person uttering the oath has thus committed a crime which brings him into the area of jurisdiction of the appropriate court, compelling the elder, village head or chief whose oath has been used, to enquire into any matter in connection with which it is used.<sup>393</sup> There is also a form of oath-taking akin to the notion of ordeal in connection with the *abosom* which puts one in the power of the *obosom* invoked, for good or ill. The oath, combined with “drinking fetish” invoking the local community *obosom* Kyenku, endorsing the Anbotakyi Concord at the founding of the Akuapem traditional state, would seem to be an example of this, while the many “drinking medicine” cults which proliferated in the early years of the present century are others.

The use of Oath in the early Irish legal system would appear to be more complicated: - to quote Fergus Kelly<sup>394</sup>, - “the terminology connected with the swearing of oaths is extensive, and the 7<sup>th</sup>/ 8<sup>th</sup> century law-texts distinguish a number of different types of swearing”; but in both cultures, the sacral power of the oath is, of course, essential to the stability of human society. There is no space here for detail; however it is well-known that in legal cases the oath of a person of higher rank automatically overrode the oath of a person of lower rank, which rank was reckoned

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<sup>393</sup> K.A.Busia *The Position of the Chief in the Modern Political System of Ashanti*, (London 1968) p.75

<sup>394</sup> *op.cit.* p.199 ; see also especially pp.190-202.

in terms of the person's honour-price, which itself is reckoned with characteristic subtlety and detail by the Irish legal profession in the extant law texts. Thus "a king can overturn the evidence of everybody else in the territory, except for a bishop, sage (*sui*) or hermit (*deorad Dé*)", unless he "has debased himself by engaging in menial work or by travelling without a retinue" and so had his honour-price reduced to that of a commoner. This system seems to have been expressive of the concept of *nemed* with a basic sense of "sacred", used of both privileged persons (as "dignitary", "professional" e.g. "great poet") and of place or "sanctuary",<sup>395</sup> basic to the Celtic aristocratic social hierarchy, in contrast to the gerontocracy of the Akan system.

As one would expect, oaths referred to in the law tracts are sworn by God or by the Gospels, and in later commentary there is frequent reference to swearing at Christian cemeteries<sup>396</sup> and, in a practice shared with all mediaeval Christendom, it became customary to swear on relics and other objects connected with the saints. However while the laws do not mention pre-Christian custom, the "Old Irish sagas make numerous references to the practice of swearing by the elements..." It is of interest that the list of Guarantors for the *Cáin Adomnáin*<sup>397</sup> includes them and that they are invoked also in the *Lorica* of St Patrick. There are also the examples of the formula of swearing an oath by "the gods by whom my people swear"; Kelly quotes four references to this phrase, by way of examples in the *Táin Bó Cúlaighe* (Res.1.) Kelly also cites in this context the well-known penalty of one year's penance prescribed in the "First Synod of St Patrick" for a Christian who swore "in the pagan manner" before a druid. As an illustration of the deep importance of the oath for order in society Richter notes that in early Irish Penitentials perjury was regarded as a greater sin than murder.<sup>398</sup>

And how does Lugh come into all this? Kelly lists several words with the meaning "oath" used in the law texts, the first mentioned being *luge*.<sup>399</sup> Daithí Ó

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<sup>395</sup> idem 318

<sup>396</sup> Kelly op.cit.(1988) p.199

<sup>397</sup> K.Meyer, ed.and trans. "*Cáin Adomnáin*," *Anecdota Oxoniensia Mediaeval and Modern Studies* vol.XII (Oxford 1905) p.22

<sup>398</sup> op.cit.p.76

<sup>399</sup> op.cit.199 n. 60

h'Ogain in his entry on Lugh<sup>400</sup> refers to a proposed etymology for his name which would connect it to *luge*, citing in the first instance an article by H.Wagner<sup>401</sup> in which the latter writes: "Herodotus' reference that Hermeas was the oath-god of the Thracian kings suggests to me that *lugu-* may be connate with Ir. *luge*, the verbal noun of *tongid* "swears", but also meaning "oath" (from *\*lugio-*).<sup>402</sup> The generally accepted meaning for Lugh seems to be "the shining one",<sup>403</sup> and various learned connections are made with Fionn (*find*). But in view of the evidence for a characteristically Irish love for (and belief in) manipulating words - for the "fitness of names"-, could there not be room for both? The temptation to expatiate on the cogency of such a possible identification of Lugh as the 'oath-god' with his role as the 'king-god' is great!

### **What are the Sources of the Authority and Power of the "Sacral Ruler"?**

The questions must be asked: what were the traditional sources of that sacral authority and power wielded by the king of the *Audacht Morainn*; and how was his authority authenticated? In Part One of this chapter the answer to this question in relation to the reigning traditional rulers of the Akan has been summarised as "they sit on the stools of their royal Ancestors" and are therefore in receipt of and conveying the accumulated wisdom and authority of the Ancestors who are now freed from the limitations of their earthly bodies, providing, of course that the proper *som* or service of "grandchildren" continues to be afforded them by their successor. Although the Irish sources, by the operation of what was presumably a voluntary taboo, make no direct mention of the rituals belonging to the sacrality of kingship, several of the Tales in the Cycles of the Kings yield clues for the enquirer.

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<sup>400</sup> *Myth, Legend and Romance* (London 1990) p.273.

<sup>401</sup> "Studies in the Origins of Early Celtic Civilisation", ZCP XXXI (1970) p.23

<sup>402</sup> Dr h'Ogain in reply to a letter asking for information about the background of this etymology for the name "Lugh" most kindly sent me a copy of the Wagner article.

<sup>403</sup> cf MacCana in op.cit.(Celtic Mythology ) p.28.

*The Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel, Togail Bruidne Da Derga*<sup>404</sup> which has some parallels with 2MT<sup>405</sup>, while it has no direct reference to Lugh, contains and conveys powerful images of the fateful and integral relationship between an archetypal sacral king and the Otherworld of the gods to which Lugh belongs, on the one hand, and this world on the other. Space only allows for the briefest references to this rich source.

Conaire, the central character of the tale has a double paternity; he is described as the son of Eterscél, king of Tara, but, before his mother's union with the latter, had been fathered by an Otherworld birdman. His mother Mess Búchualla herself the offspring of incest, having thereby a double descent from the goddess Étaín of the *Sid*, was brought up in secret by the herdsman of Eterscél.<sup>406</sup> On the king's death a successor is sought through a bull feast:

**a bull was killed, and one man ate his fill and drank its broth and slept, and an incantation of truth was chanted over him.**

Whoever this man saw in his sleep became king. Meanwhile Conaire, who in this tale has been brought up at Tara, had had an encounter with a mysterious flock of birds which he had followed onto the sea, whose leader protected him from their attack, declaring,

**I am Nemglan, king of your father's bird troop. You are forbidden to cast at birds, for by reason of birth, every bird here is natural to you.**

Through Nemglan's instructions, Conaire fulfilled the prophetic vision of the dreamer of a naked man coming along the road to Tara at day-break bearing a stone in his sling. On each of the four roads that led to Tara there were three kings waiting with garments to receive the unknown candidate. Again through the teachings of the birdman, Conaire gave the right answer to the people of Tara's objection to his youth and they conferred the Kingship of Erin upon him. Conaire completed this test by saying, **I will enquire of wise men that I myself might be wise.** Then the birdman

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<sup>404</sup> Comments on TBDD are based on the edition by Knott as translated by Gantz 1981 60-107.

<sup>405</sup> See ITS ed. Gray Intro.8

<sup>406</sup> These birth circumstances are now recognisable as qualifying characteristics of the Hero: see Ó Cathasaigh 1977 passim.

sets the scene of the future tragedy, **Your bird-reign will be distinguished, but there will be *gessa* against it.** Following a list of these, each of which are broken in grim progression as doom approaches, comes one of the classic descriptions of the reign of a just king, of which there are several in the literature, (including another later in TBDD), the content of which are similar to the *Audacht Morainn*. The first of Conaire's *gessa* to be broken is one forbidding plunder in his reign. And it is broken by his three foster brothers the sons of the *fian* champion Dond Désa. The false judgement given by Conaire in sparing his foster brothers (and not their followers) is recognised by him and although he changes it by banishing all the band of professional marauders it leads eventually to his death at their hands in the mysterious Hostel of Da Derga, the House of Death, after every one of his *gessa* have been broken, several of them through the agency of Otherworld beings.

In this tale it is made clear that Nemglan, Conaire's Otherworld guide, is, or more likely mediates, and represents, the Otherworld power with which Conaire as sacral king has a threefold relationship, as follows:

(a) He enables Conaire to pass the necessary tests: (i) fulfil the vision of the dreamer in the *tarbhfeis* (bull-feast); (ii) satisfy the doubt of those who felt that **our bull-feast and our incantation of truth have been spoilt, for it is a young and beardless lad who has been brought to us:** by making a true judgement in his reply showing that he has generosity and integrity and also a hereditary right to take hostages at *Temuir*; iii) acceptance by the people of Tara, completed by his promise I will enquire of wise men that I myself may be wise.

(b) He conveys the promise that **Your bird-reign will be distinguished:**-fulfilled in the bounty of nature and good weather and in the excellence of law and peace and goodwill in Ériu,<sup>407</sup> bringing in a Golden Age. He also pronounces the *gessa* against Conaire' reign. It is notable that in this tale these taboos which are imposed from the Otherworld,- and otherworld beings seem to be hounding the king into breaking them, - it is the king's very special relationship with his quintessentially violent foster-

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<sup>407</sup> Gantz op.cit 78

brothers which is responsible for his first sin against *fir flathemon* (the prince's truth or justice), which sets the whole destructive process in motion.<sup>408</sup>

(c) He confirms Conaire's Otherworld parentage, which is, at the same time bound up with a 'totemic' relationship with birds.<sup>409</sup>

In his article on "The Semantics of *Sid*",<sup>410</sup> Ó Cathasaigh explores the significance of the fact that the word *sid/sith* is used both for (1) "Otherworld hill or mound" and for (2) "peace" in Old Irish. He cites this story as part of an impressive body of evidence indicating that the legitimacy of the true king, which is made evident in the peace within his kingdom, which in turn is dependent on his possession of *fir flathemon* is derived from the Otherworld. Although *Audacht Morainn* with its detailed descriptions of the peace secured through *fir flathemon* does not explicitly indicate this, Ó Cathasaigh finds in *Echtrae Cormaic i Tír Tairngiri* the tale of Cormac's Otherworld adventure a clear message that the "quality (*fir*) which characterises the worthy king reigns supreme in the Otherworld".<sup>411</sup> And in 2MT, (166) in the Morrigan's proclamation of the immediate results of the victory of the *Tíatha Dé Danaan* under Lugh's leadership, (with the necessary adjustment of spatial imagery) we read:

**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 in heaven...**

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<sup>408</sup> This suggests to me a subtle understanding of human psychology; in Jungian language, the foster-brothers represent Conaire's unintegrated shadow. (It is also, as noted above, an example of the hereditary principle common to both cultures being studied).

<sup>409</sup> There is no doubt an interesting inculturating link between this totemic relationship with birds and the importance of birds in the specifically Christian voyage literature.

<sup>410</sup> *Éigse* 17 1977 135-155

<sup>411</sup> This tale which has significant parallels with *Baile in Scáil*, the second of the two tales featuring Lugh (see next section), tells how Cormac in pursuit of a stranger who has abducted Cormac's daughter, son and wife Ethne, finds himself in a palace and in the presence of a handsome warrior and a beautiful girl. "In the evening a man arrives with a pig which can be roasted only if a truth be told, for each quarter. Three truths are told and then it is Cormac's turn who tells the story of his wife, son and daughter, and the whole pig is seen to be done. Cormac's family are restored to him, the warrior gives him a golden cup which distinguishes truth from falsehood, and he gives him a magic branch. He reveals that he is Manannán king of *Tír Tairngiri* The Land of Promise, and that it was to show Cormac *Tír Tairngiri* that he had brought him there. The next morning when he rises Cormac finds himself at Tara with his wife, son and daughter, and the golden cup and branch." See Ó Cathasaigh *idem* p 141, who adds: "There could be no clearer account, in terms of Irish tradition, of the Otherworld dimension of kingship."

Mention must be made of the alternative tale of Conaire's accession to the kingship of Tara, part of a genealogical tract emanating presumably from a monastic scriptorium: *De Síil Conaire Móir*,<sup>412</sup> chiefly because it has so often been cited in a search for clues to the ritual of kingly inauguration. Here it is with the help of the hosts from the *síd*, led by his mother who is **of great size and evil aspect, and used to come and go in seas and elf-mounds and that by sorcery**, that Conaire, who in this tale has no Otherworld father but is Eterscél's unacknowledged son, becomes king of Tara. Although the **men of Leinster and the race of Conn**, (who, so Mess Búchualla had told her son, **"tis the succession of your father they are changing there"**), flee at the terrifying sight of the evil giantess and her *síd* hosts approaching Tara, Conaire has to pass the tests : to enter and drive successfully the chariot yoked to two unbroken horses; to fit into the king's mantle in it, and, on approaching two flagstones put so closely together that a hand could not pass between them, find them opening up to let him through; and that *Fál*, the stone penis at the head of the chariot course, would screech against his axle as he passed it.

McCone comments<sup>413</sup> that it is not mere coincidence that this genealogically oriented tale "emphasises martial (and ritualised) sexual prowess as its hero's qualifications for kingship whereas TBDD emphasises the more pacific attributes of generosity, wisdom and inheritance..." One might add that the emphasis put on Conaire's openly dynastic claim to inherit Tara as the son of his human father, and the demonisation of both the *síd* hosts and, most dramatically, of the Woman of the *síd*, could well be further indications of the bias of the genealogical "monastically oriented" *Senchaid* in a text dated earlier than that of TBDD. Moreover the identification of the phallic standing stone of Tara with *Fál* the stone which screeched its acceptance of the one to hold Tara's kingship, uniquely made in this tale, has been questioned, with some cogency I believe, in a recent article<sup>414</sup> called "*Lia Fáil: Fact and Fiction in the Tradition*", in which Thomas O'Broin brings together a

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<sup>412</sup> L.Gwynn ed. and tr. *Ériu* vol. VI (1912) pp. 138-143

<sup>413</sup> 1991 p. 61

<sup>414</sup> *Celtica* vol. xxi (1990) pp. 393-401

considerable number of textual references to the stone of Fál, in which it is clearly envisaged as lying flat on the ground, - a *lecc* or flagstone in fact.<sup>415</sup> The whole tale in its context of the burgeoning work of the “synthetic historians” of which the early genealogical texts were part, evinces a self-consistent “creeping patriarchy”<sup>416</sup>. Further reference will be made to O’Broin’s thesis in the next section.

We are still left with a real *lacuna* in the Irish evidence for the authority of the sacral ruler: the paucity of knowledge of the ritual needed to sustain it and make it effective (in the most literal and direct sense of that word), which ritual, as we have seen, is still continuing in an inevitably etiolated sphere in Ghana today. This is particularly important with reference to the personal commissioning, as it were, of the Irish kings themselves. What follows now is an attempt to summarize any evidence available suggesting some of the ingredients of a traditional ritual for inaugurating Irish kings.

In a recent overview of this subject made by K. Simms she states that<sup>417</sup> : “There are no contemporary accounts of the rite used to confer kingship before the twelfth century”. She begins with a discussion of the notorious passage by Giraldus Cambrensis in *Topographia Hibernie* describing a ritual involving a symbolic union with a white mare, which is then sacrificed and the king bathed in a broth from the flesh which he also drinks. He has been told, it seems, that this rite is customary in the “northern and farther part of Ulster” among the Tír Conaill. Nowadays, she comments, the parallels to this rite recently traced with other Indo-European peoples mean that Giraldus can no longer be accused of fabrication. Her own conclusions on the matter are that Giraldus’ informants (possibly from Leinster) accepted that there “were marked regional variations in the manner in which kingship was conferred in

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<sup>415</sup> The entry in DIL for the word *Lia* (1) (a) General meaning **stone**, (b) Various specific: **whetstone** or **grinding stone**, **millstone**, **standing stone**, **pillar stone** (usually of a memorial stone - marking place of death or burial), **landmark** - not always clear whether a pillar or a flagstone.

<sup>416</sup> I owe this phrase to Professor J.P.Mackey. We were made much aware of this in 2MT in the importance given to patrilineal descent and the dangers of women’s influence . See also the discussion in ch.4 below.

<sup>417</sup> *From Kings to Warlords* (1987) pp. 21-31.



twelfth century Ireland, and that they could envisage a pagan survival of this kind in a remote area.”<sup>418</sup>

The speculation on this bit of politically motivated reporting does illustrate the completeness of the ‘taboo’ observed by the learned classes on the content of the rites practised in those royal cult sites, being revealed as such by recent archaeology, before the confrontation with incoming Christianity, which undoubtedly included an unacceptable ritual celebrating a *banais righi* a sacred marriage between the king and the goddess, the spirit and owner of the land, of which the *feis temrach* last celebrated in 560(or 558)<sup>419</sup> was apparently a supremely important instance. And yet Byrne is able to cite a description in the Annals of Connacht of the inauguration of a king of Connacht in 1310 in which this same imagery is used :

**and when Fedhlimidh son of Aedh...married the province of Connacht...this was the most splendid kingship marriage ever celebrated in Connacht down to that day.**

Byrne adds, “The words used are *feis* and *banais*”.<sup>420</sup> This whole area will be discussed further in Part 3 below, and in Chapter 4.

Myles Dillon wrote a paper on “The consecration of Irish kings”<sup>421</sup> (which he did not live to revise for publication) in the form of a comparison with parallel Indian rites, as a contribution to the on-going Indo-European comparative studies of the time. In it he includes a summary of an account in Edmund Spenser’s “View of the State of Ireland” which contains useful detail:

**After the death of a chief lord or captain his people assemble at the appointed place and elect, not the oldest son, but the oldest and most worthy kinsman, a brother or even a cousin. They place him upon a stone reserved for the purpose, commonly on a hill, where he receives an oath to preserve the custom of the country, and then hath a wand delivered to him by some whose proper office that is, after which**

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<sup>418</sup> The existence of a prehistoric horse cult in the *Leth Cuin* is highly probable as for instance the frequent use of the name Eochaidh suggests, though that is no valid indication that even in “remote” corners such a rite was actually enacted in the high middle ages. See Byrne’s interesting analysis of this matter in pages cited in note below.

<sup>419</sup> D.Binchy “The Fair of Tailtiu and the Feast of Tara”, *Ériu* XVIII (1958-62) p.132

<sup>420</sup> loc. cit.

<sup>421</sup> *Celtica* 10 1973 1-8.

**descending from the stone, he turneth himself round, thrice forward and thrice backward.**

This 16<sup>th</sup> century account from the representative of alien oppressors has an authentic ring, showing indeed recognisable continuity with familiar immemorial features of early Irish custom. The traditional inauguration site “commonly on a hill”, recalls the evidence for preference for prehistoric burial mounds or high ground with a wide view. Temair, the Hill of Tara, the most prestigious “inauguration site” of all, has both. The survival of the traditional custom of choice of a “king’s” successor from within the eligible kin-group was strange to the Elizabethan Englishman, though the taking of an oath on such an occasion would be obviously essential. The content of the oath though not felt to be of interest to the foreigner, would be very much so to us. Dillon notes the ceremonial threefold steps in two directions taken by the new chief as providing a parallel with “ancient Indian royal consecration” ritual. We have already referred to the “stone reserved for the purpose” and will explore that further in the context of *Baile in Scáil*. The significance of the “wand delivered to him by some whose proper office that is” has been explored by Byrne and A. Watson.<sup>422</sup>

First, a quotation from Byrne: “The *fili* played an important part in the inauguration of a king. An inaugural ode addressed by Torna Ó Maol Chonaire (+1468) to Féilim Ó Conchobhair is accompanied by a description of the ceremony as carried out at the immemorial site, the prehistoric mound of Carn Fraoich (Carnfree in county Roscommon). Although bishops and coarbs and all the Gaelic sub-kings of Connacht are in attendance, we are told:

**... it is Ó Maol Chonaire who is entitled to give the rod of kingship into his hand at his inauguration, and none of the nobles of Connacht has a right to be with him on the mound save Ó Maol Chonaire who inaugurates him and Connachtáin who keeps the gate of the mound.**<sup>423</sup>

A clue to the significance of the rod of kinship is provided in the late Irish Life of St Máedóc of Ferns again cited by Byrne, in a description of (a contemporary) enkinging

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<sup>422</sup> F.J.Byrne *Irish Kings and High-kings* (London 1973) pp.15-22; A.Watson “Kings, Poets and Sacred Trees”, *Etudes Celtiques* vol.XVIII (1981) pp.165-180.

<sup>423</sup> *idem* pp. 15f

of the “king of Breifne”, in which a priest, the successor of O’Duffey, **for he was Máedóc’s fosterer**, is instructed to **give the wand to the king of Breifne in honour of Máedóc. And this wand must be cut from the hazel of Máedóc...** As Byrne comments: “...the mention of the poetic hazel in the Life of St Máedóc betrays the true origin of the rites it describes.”<sup>424</sup>

“The King, the Poet and the Sacred Tree” by Alden Watson contains much relevant material in this context. He begins his study by citing the lore (to which presumably Byrne is referring) that the sources of sacred wisdom, and therefore of poetry through which it is expressed and actualised, are the hazel trees growing at the Otherworld wells at the sources of the Shannon and the Boyne and perhaps other great rivers also.<sup>425</sup> It seems clear that the “rod of kingship “ was symbolic of the sacred wisdom to which the poet had access, without which a king’s rule was doomed to failure. Byrne<sup>426</sup> also quotes Martin’s (17<sup>th</sup> century) account of the “ceremony of proclaiming the Lord of the Isles” including the following:

**Then he was to receive a white rod in his hand, intimating that he had power to rule not with tyranny and partiality, but with discretion and sincerity.**

The king’s special white robe goes to the poet in his account, - one of numerous instances of the Poet receiving the king’s accoutrements as his proper due in later mediaeval accounts which Byrne cites, indicating that while in these tribes the poet was sometimes displaced from his prime officiating role, he could never be entirely dispensed with. Byrne notes further that the “proclaiming “ of the king (as in the extract just quoted): “the calling aloud of his name and title became the essential part of the ceremony, indicating that the poet, “as master of the power of the Word”. was the true king-maker.”<sup>427</sup> The poet was also in Watson’s phrase the “sustainer” of kingship. The 15<sup>th</sup> century account of the ceremony at Carnfree indeed was appended

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<sup>424</sup> This account in late hagiography is an example of the early claim of the saint and his heir to be the equivalent of an *ollam* among the *filid*.

<sup>425</sup> e.g. in Whitley Stokes ed. and trans. “Prose Tales in the Rennes Dindshenchas”. *R.C.XV* p.456; and in Stokes ed. *The Irish Ordeals, Cormac’s adventure in the Land of Promise etc Echtrae Cormaic i Tír Tairngiri Irische Texte* 3.1891 p.213.

<sup>426</sup> 1973 p. 20

<sup>427</sup> See also Simms’ account of later developments noted above.

to the poet's inauguration ode. Kelly, in the introduction to his edition of *Audacht Morainn*,<sup>428</sup> summarises evidence strongly suggesting, though not perhaps proving, that a repetition of a *Teagasc Rioch* (of which the *Audacht Morainn* is the oldest extant) was part of the early enkinging ritual.<sup>429</sup> That the creation and delivery of poems or chants in praise of the reigning king and tales of kingly and heroic ancestors<sup>430</sup> was a main task of the *filid* is attested for all times up till the "flight of the earls" in the 17<sup>th</sup> century: - and of Gaul also.<sup>431</sup> The reverse side of this creative power of the word, - the destructive power of satire or malediction uttered by a poet (and by some saints) is also well-attested in the literature, though according to the doctrine exemplified in 2MT, the satire has to be the truth for it to be effective.<sup>432</sup>

### **The Sacred Tree and the Sacral Ruler in Irish and Akan Tradition**

The immediacy and the universality of the experience of the paradigmatic numinosity of a great tree with its roots in the earth and its branches stretching into the sky is such that it is to be expected that this would also be powerful among both the early Irish and the Akan. Anne Ross in *Pagan Celtic Britain*<sup>433</sup> collects plenty of material on this subject from many "celtic lands" including place and personal names iconography and the varied literary sources.<sup>434</sup> The special relationship of large trees with ancient Irish royal inauguration sites is well documented, showing that the latter normally, perhaps always, included one or more large trees. Such a tree would be

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<sup>428</sup> 1976 p.xiv

<sup>429</sup> Note the Injunctions given to the newly chosen Akan chief before the oath is administered and his enstooling performed. See above.

<sup>430</sup> The parallels with the Akan have already been noted, as in particular, the role of the drummers.

<sup>431</sup> Refer to pt 3 of this chapter re early praise verses edited by Meyer re Laigin Loingsech.

<sup>432</sup> ITS LII para.39

<sup>433</sup> op.cit. pp.59-65

<sup>434</sup> This includes some references which could have connections with Lugh, e.g the story of Llew Llaw Gyffes ( in the Mabinogion), his Welsh counter-part and the latter's momentous sojourn in an oak tree, and her evidence that "in certain districts of Gaul.(that).the native equivalent of the classical god Mercury seems to have been particularly associated with trees. Known as Erriapus from dedications, he may be portrayed as a head emerging from foliage." (loc.cit.)

designated a *bile*, a word for tree which seems always to suggest sacredness.<sup>435</sup> There is a significant *bile* in *Baile in Scáil*.<sup>436</sup> In his study of five famous trees Watson has uncovered rich lore mostly in the *Dindshenchas* tradition, citing for instance, *Eó Rossa* The Tree of Ross<sup>437</sup>, which contains a poem in early alliterative verse consisting of a long and remarkable list of praise epithets for the tree more than half of which refer to aspects of the functions of either the poet or the king and, as Watson comments, not in isolation but as they are drawn together and related by the sacred tree. Watson concludes from this and other tales connecting poets with these trees, that they were thought of as earthly sources of the wisdom of which the poet is the recipient and guardian, and, so he suggests, connected in the lore with both the sacred hazels at the sources of great rivers and the “rod” of kingship. .

Watson notes that one of the secondary meanings of *bile* is “scion” or “hero”. The imagery of tree and branch is indeed, as one would expect, commonplace in bardic praise verse, and is not likely to stem merely from the importance of genealogy to the court poet. The association of the *bile*<sup>438</sup> with the local sacred inauguration site of their patron would also add to the meaning of such imagery. However there is clearly much more to it than that, as Watson’s sources for the lore of the five legendary trees reveal.

The prose tale of *Eó Rossi* begins with a list; in Watson’s standardised reading they are: *Eó Rossa*, a yew; *Eó Mugna*, an oak, bearing three crops every year:- acorns and apples and nuts ; *Bile Dathi*, an ash; *Craeb Uisnig* an ash; *Bile Tortan*, an ash. It includes beside the verses quoted above, lore of the direction of the fall of each tree, with names of the places reached. Watson has worked out the distance for two of them (the trees of *Mugna* and *Uisnig*) suggesting a huge size, covering eight and

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<sup>435</sup> DIL 100

<sup>436</sup> See pt 3 of this chapter.

<sup>437</sup> ed. Stokes R.C. *XVI* (1894-95) pp.277ff, cited in Watson op.cit.p.170; see also Máirín O Daly “The Metrical Dindshenchas”, J.Carney *Studies in Irish Literature and Poetry* (1955) pp 6lf, quoting Alfred Nutt: “Some of the matter to be found in this collection (of prose Dindshenchas) is probably as archaic as anything preserved by any other branch of the Aryan speaking peoples.”

<sup>438</sup> DIL gives “an ancient and venerated tree” as a primary meaning.

twenty miles respectively. Met.Ds *Eó Mugna*<sup>439</sup> fills out this tradition for *Eó Mugna* by asserting that its shadow could give shelter to a thousand men and the tree itself could shelter a hundred score of warriors plus ten hundred and forty. The prose Ds of *Eó Mugna* mentions that “equally broad were its top and the plain (in which it stood)”<sup>440</sup>. Together with some of the epithets in the praise poem for the Tree of Ross we surely have evidence here to reveal these great legendary trees as prototypes of the *bile* at the sacred inauguration site of every *tuath*; and that the relationship of the king with the *bile* is closer than the word ‘metaphor’ in its modern limited meaning, can cover.

In the (Rennes) *Dindshenchas* tradition the trees are given another mythological, indeed cosmogonic, link with kingship. Both Ds *Temair Luachra* and Ds *Mag Mugna* include a reference to a tradition that these primeval trees were “hidden” until the birth of Conn.<sup>441</sup>

Ds *Mag Mugna* also contains a cryptic reference to the mysterious *Trelfulgid* (here surnamed *treorach*) of *Do Suidigud Tellaich Temra*, “On the settling of the manor of Tara,”<sup>442</sup> and to his gift of the “berries” from the branch bearing the three fruits which he carried to seed the five trees. The Middle Irish tale referred to has been described by Kim McCone as a “particularly elaborate and ambitious attempt to interpret Irish *senchus* with Christian world history through the agency of Fintan”, (the antediluvian survivor, the prototype *senachie*) which it very clearly is, even, as he says, with a “cursory reading”.<sup>443</sup> It is hard to understand therefore why this should lead him to dismiss the pioneering exegesis given it thirty years ago by Alwyn and

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<sup>439</sup> E.Gwynn, *The Metrical Dindshenchas* vol. III (1906) p.147

<sup>440</sup> Stokes,ed. RC XVI p.420 The tree was envisioned as being able not only to shelter all the people of the tuath, but also its territory; see Watson loc.cit.

<sup>441</sup> The former mentions three of them and the latter only *Mugna*. *Temair Luachra* (which is in Kerry), has an alternative occasion, “the time of the sons of *Usaine*”, and the rivers and lochs which “burst forth” are located in Mug’s Half. The interesting entry in *Féilire Óengusso* supplies the lore that *Eó Mugna* remained hidden from “the time of the deluge”, until revealed at the birth of Conn. (ed. Stokes RC XVI. p.258.) This association with the primordial kingship of Tara with cosmogonic events makes an interesting parallel with the drum sequence passage stating that the basic ingredients of the chieftaincy came first in *Odomankoma*’s ‘making of things’.

<sup>442</sup> R.I.Best ed.and trans. *Ériu* vol.iv (1910) pp.121-167

<sup>443</sup> 1991 p. 75

Brinley Rees<sup>444</sup>, revealing in the tale what might be called “traditional” cosmological learning of some subtlety as part of the *senchus* which the learned Christian *filid* were seeking to integrate with the thought world of contemporary Christendom. Thirty years ago, no doubt the insights of the Rees brothers into the meaning of sacred space, (and of the Centre) the cosmological significance of number etc. were unfamiliar, but nowadays they are likely to be, though perhaps not in every detail, as self-evidently a key to this tale as his own judgement quoted above. Unfortunately there is no space to explore this fascinating synthesising theological treatise. Suffice it here that Fintan shows those assembled for Diarmait mac Cerbaill’s Feast of Tara that Ireland consists of four quarters and a centre, and that the five fifths (*coicida*) are Connacht, Ulster, Leinster, Munster and Meath, with the “hearth of Tara” at its sacred Centre,<sup>445</sup> and that this arrangement had been confirmed by Trefuilngid, (later described by Fintan as **an angel of God, or he was God himself**) when he had appeared with his treble fruiting branch and stone tablets on the day of Christ’s crucifixion at an ancient Assembly, and the five trees which grew from the berries given by the latter to Fintan were part of this basic fivefold scheme. The sacred trees are thereby firmly incorporated within the synthesis.

The foregoing represents only one instance, though an important one in the context of this study, of the potency of the image of the tree evident in Irish mediaeval literature. It affords links and parallels with cultures close to the early Irish, such as the Scandinavian lore of the Yggdrasil, the world tree, and with Odin whose likeness to Lugh is often mentioned, and, in the context of the encounter with Christianity, with the amazing Northumbrian Ruthwell Cross with its Rune, dated c. 700 at a time when the mutual influences represented by Lindisfarne was still operative.

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<sup>444</sup> *Celtic Heritage* (London 1961) pp. 118ff, 146-172

<sup>445</sup> This is, as it were, an alternative arrangement of the “Fifths” to that mentioned in the LGE, e.g. op.cit.Pt IV:XLIX, L11, which has two Munsters instead of Meath leading to Uisnech as the Centre: **The points of those provinces / to Uisnech did they lead,...** Fintan however, copes with that problem by taking the nobles of Ireland to the top of Uisnech **where he set up a pillar stone of five ridges. And he assigned a ridge of it to every province in Ireland, for thus are Tara and Uisnech in Ireland as its two kidneys are in a beast.** (para 32 p.153)

In view of the universality of the imagery of the tree as representing the “transhuman”,<sup>446</sup> it comes as no surprise to recognise parallels between the significance of the *bile* for early Irish society and cosmology, and the *gyedua* or “tree of reception” in living Akan tradition, especially in their relationship to the sacral ruler.

We have already mentioned the huge *gyedua* in Akropong-Akuapem opposite the *Ameffie*, sometimes called “palace” of the paramount chief. This together with its fellows in other towns, planted in similar places in the wide main street which normally runs north and south through the town, traditionally provide with their wide spreading high tops the cooling and peaceful shade required, not only for receiving official strangers, but also for gatherings of all those separate matrilineages making up the town, or for great festivals involving the whole traditional state or *oman*.<sup>447</sup>

Besides this “eldest” *gyedua* originally planted, according to tradition, at the foundation of the town, there are others. These are to be found on the streets running at right angles to each other dividing the compactly built quarters or wards each “owned” by a matrilineage, and made up of its constituent households headed by its *panyin* and senior woman. These trees serve both to express the autonomy and internal unity of the matrilineage and to enable the peaceful co-operation so necessary for the well-being of the larger community, though the balance between these two functions varies in different tribes.<sup>448</sup> Platvoet translates two apt proverbs quoted by Rattray: -*Gyedua si abonten*:

**the tree of reception stands in the main street, but its roots ('extremities') are in the house.;(and) If a tree stands in a hamlet, its roots reach into your home.**

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<sup>446</sup> Watson quotes Eliade ; “The idea of a ‘Center’ followed from the experience of a sacred space, impregnated by a transhuman presence: at this particular point something from above (or from below) has manifested itself.” *Shamanism* trans. W.R.Trask (N.Y.1964) p.259 See also C.J.Jung : e.g. *Man and His Symbols* (London1964) pp.80f. under heading “The archetype in dream symbolism”

<sup>447</sup> “Cool Shade, Peace and Power” is the title given by a Dutch authority on the Akan, J.G. Platvoet, for his study, in some depth, of the *Gyedua* in *The Journal of Religion in Africa XV* (Leiden 1985). Only a selective use can be made from this source, which itself makes some use of the indispensable records in Rattray’s books.

<sup>448</sup> Platvoet op.cit pp.186f



Rattray records prayers addressed to “trees of reception” as part of customary rituals belonging to the day after the enstoolment of a new “paramount” chief, first to the central *gyedua* by the custodians of the royal burial place and then by the new chief to each local *gyedua* as he visits all the quarters of his town to thank his elders for his election. Each tree has been clothed in a fresh piece of white calico and after pouring a libation of palm wine on the roots the chief addresses it as follows:

**Today they have put me on the stool,/ I pray you to protect me well,/ I pray you for a long stretch of life,/ I pray you for fame,/ Do not permit that my people cut off my branch,/ Grant that this nation (*oman*) may prosper”<sup>449</sup>**

The phrase “cut off my branch” is a recognised euphemism for the destooling of a chief, which as we have noted, was a far from uncommon event in both colonial and pre-colonial times

Platvoet mentions evidence of “close symbolic association, and even identification” of the tree of reception and the ruler. For instance such trees as have been required to be planted in his reign, on his behalf, can become his intimate memorials where his mourning people would venerate him. The high platform under the central *gyedua* was traditionally the place for the chief to sit and receive homage and distribute palm wine; the chief’s huge state umbrella represents the “cooling” shade of the *gyedua* when he walks abroad. Both are called *Mankata* or the Cover of the Nation. Christaller’s dictionary quotes the saying: **If *mankata* has given us tranquillity, then we are happy.** If the *Gyedua* was blown down or even damaged the chief went into mourning, with appropriate rituals. The death of a chief would be announced in such words as **The great mighty tree has fallen.**

Some directly comparative comments relating to the Sacred Tree are appropriate here. However the symbolism is so profound and so illuminating (as deep as the roots and as far-reaching in all directions as the branches ) that such comments can only seem superficial.

The most obvious parallel might be the position of the tree, (of the “eldest tree, in the case of the Akan) at the “centre” of both people and territory, clearly

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<sup>449</sup> Rattray 1929 p.144, passage trans. by Platvoet.

representing/ embodying the unity for whose maintenance the sacral ruler is the human executive agent. In both cultures this localised unit is made up of separate blood-related kinship groups (the *fine* and the *abusua* sections). The importance of the tree as “cover of the nation” for both early centripetal movements, crystallizing in the *túath* and the *oman* respectively, and the link, amounting it would seem almost to identification in some sense, with the king is surely profound. There could also be an interesting comparison to be made between the significance of the rite at the sacred Grove of Santemanso at the foot of the wild fig-tree, at the site of the hole from which the original ancestors of ruling clans of the Asante were believed to have emerged <sup>450</sup>, and the ancient inauguration rite uniting the king with the ‘Land’ in the presence, as it were, of the *bile*. The employment of the imagery of the branch by the guardians of ancestral/divine wisdom in connection with the living ‘scion’ could afford material for a separate comparative study!

Another and quite direct parallel is evident between the custom of an enemy making a priority of destroying the sacred tree (or trees) when attacking another Irish *túath* or an Akan town.<sup>451</sup> The taboo against even breaking off a leaf or twig from a *gyedua* is very strong. Rattray records (in the same note) two interesting exceptions. When a chief “goes elsewhere” (one of several euphemisms to avoid mentioning death of *omanhene* or *ohemmaa* ) certain officials make a frenzied attack on the tree with sticks; and when the support of public approval has been forfeited by the reigning chief it becomes safe for the “young men”/commoners to express this by making a similar attack on the central *gyedua*. Watson cites certain tales illustrating the threefold relationship in Irish traditional learning between the poet, the king and the sacred tree, as appropriate to the tree as “source” of the wisdom necessary to the other two. There does not seem to be any recognisable parallel here with Akan understanding.

As one of the main overall themes of this study, and the ground for its comparative claims is the encounter between Christianity and the deeply rooted sacral

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<sup>450</sup> See ch.4 etc. Rattray 1923 pp.120ff.

<sup>451</sup> Rattray 1929 pp.213f n. and Mac Cana,(1970) p.50

kingship so integral to the identity of both cultures studied, and as this encounter is very much a living reality among the Akan, at this very time, it seems appropriate, if perhaps somewhat presumptuous, to suggest the possible fruitfulness of exploring the biblical image of the tree in direct relationship with the *gyedua*, and also with the *nyamedua*.

Mention was made above of the early English poem *Dream of the Rood*, part of which is inscribed in runic form on the Northumbrian carved stone free-standing cross now in the church of the Scottish border village of Ruthwell. A recent translation runs as follows:

**It seemed I saw the tree itself / born in the air, light wound about it, / a beam of brightest wood, a beacon clad / in overlapping gold, glancing gems / fair at its foot, and five stones / set in the crux, flashed at the cross-tree....**

**(The tree itself speaks) I dared not break or bend aside / against God's will, although the ground itself / shook at my feet. Fast I stood, / who falling could have felled them all....**

**I shook when His arms embraced me / but I durst not bow to ground / stoop to earth's surface / stand fast I must....**

**I was reared up a rood / I raised the great King, / liege lord of the heavens, / I dared not lean from the true.**

**They drove me through with dark nails; / on me the deep wounds manifest / wide-mouthed hate dents / I durst not harm any of them.**

**How they mocked at us both! / I was moist with blood / sprung from the Man's side / after He sent forth His soul.<sup>452</sup>**

Perhaps this is the place to add a vignette from Kyerematen's Panoply of Ghana, which I find illuminating, without using it to labour any point in particular. "On certain occasions the *Asantehene* discards all his richly ornamental stools or chairs, (resting on the skin of a leopard, lion or elephant to denote his strength and power) and sits on a cushion, *pintaa*, placed on a blanket of coarse northern cloth, *nsaa*, which is spread on the ground. He leans on another cushion propped against a modelled *Nyame dua*." (The comment is that this denotes "the personal distress of the *Asantehene*".)

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<sup>452</sup> M.Alexander ed. "Dream of the Rood" *Earliest English Poems*, 3rd edition (London 1991) quoted in D.Brooke *Wild Men and Holy Places* (Edinburgh 1995); Note also for example, the verse in the contemporary *Pange lingua*, Venantius Fortunatus' hymn on the cross as tree..

The next part of this chapter contains further material in the composite area of myth/ritual relating to sacral kingship, first in the Irish sources, where once again Lugh plays a paradigmatic role, and then much more briefly, in the story of the foundation of the Asante Union and “empire”.

## PART THREE. - Myth, Ritual and Theology of Power

### Introduction

**Then Ogma threw the flagstone, which required fourscore yoke of oxen to move it, through the side of the hall so that it lay outside against Tara. That was to challenge Lug, who tossed the stone back so that it lay in the centre of the royal hall; and he threw the piece which it had carried away back into the side of the royal hall so that it was whole again.**

[2MT]<sup>453</sup>

**Tell him, there are only four rulers: the true ruler and the wily ruler, the ruler with occupation of hosts, and the bull ruler.**

[*Audacht Morainn*]<sup>454</sup>

**...primal religions generally conceive of religion as a system of power, and of living religiously as being in touch with the Source and channels of power in the universe.**

[Bediako in *Christianity in Africa*]<sup>455</sup>

**We do not wish that he should act out of his own head. We do not wish things done as in Kumasi.**

[Typical injunctions requiring solemn assent from about to be enstooled Akan paramount chiefs]<sup>456</sup>

The problem of how to deal with raw physical/military force and prevent it from “shattering the microcosm”<sup>457</sup> is one with which every society in every region of the world in every age has to cope, not least in our own. The quotation from 2MT which heads this section shows Lugh *Samildánach* as both ‘king-god’ and supreme sage, doing just that in the context of both sacred time, which Eliade calls “really real” time,<sup>458</sup> and sacred space - “really real” space. In that same tale, Bres, admits that his exclusion from the “kingdom which he ruled”, (of which Tara is the microcosmic

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<sup>453</sup> ITS LII par.72

<sup>454</sup> ed.Kelly.(1976) par.59-62 p.19.

<sup>455</sup> 1995 p.106.

<sup>456</sup> Rattray 1929 p.2.

<sup>457</sup> See E. Ikenga-Metuh. (1985)

<sup>458</sup> See J.L.Cox *Expressing the Sacred An Introduction to the Phenomenology of Religion*,:(Zimbabwe 1992) pp.79ff where, under the heading “Myths and Rituals” he cites passages from M.Eliade’s *The Sacred and the Profane* (London 1959) pp.62ff.

centre) was brought about by nothing but his own *anfír*, his own “injustice and arrogance” (Par.45-48) precipitating the onslaught of the forces of chaos. The required behaviour for the ‘True Ruler’ in both cultures, and the dire consequences of its violation on the holistic prosperity of the people are, as we have seen in the previous section of this chapter, very similar.

The structures relating the basic kin-groups or lineage segments to the traditional state, or *oman* among the Akan are remarkably well-understood and are recognisable throughout Akan land. It has been argued in the first part of this chapter that it is likely that a similar centripetal development could have occurred in Ireland in pre-historic times leading to the formation of the *túath* whereby it was able to include subsumed older population groups and kindreds of different origins from the dominating group, from which latter the *túath* would normally derive its name and its royal dynasty; the unifying focus and force in both being the sacral ruler.

In the religio-political history of both the Akan people and the Irish the self-consistent microcosm represented by the *oman* and the *túath* (as treated in the Early Irish Law Tracts) respectively, was, in its structure and ethos not conducive to further movement towards unity. The king of the *túath* exercised no direct authority beyond his borders. There were ‘over-kings’ and provincial kings of course, and it was common practice for a *ri-túaithe* to enter into a personal contract with other kings, and this was formally ratified by his *túath*, on whose behalf he had acted. He would engage to pay a certain amount of tribute to his overlord, attend his *óenach*, and lead the forces of his own *túath* on a lawful hosting called by his overlord. Hostages - usually of his own family - guaranteed that he would fulfil these obligations. This contract was initiated by the giving of gifts by the overlord to the client king illustrating the similarity between this relationship with that between the king or noble and his free clients within the *túath*<sup>459</sup> But these contracts did not give the *riurí* “great king” with several client kings nor the *rí cóicid* “provincial king”, however powerful, any legal authority within the individual *túath*;<sup>460</sup> which authority is after all

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<sup>459</sup> F.J.Byrne, “Tribes and Tribalism in Early Ireland” *Ériu* 22 (1971) p. 133

<sup>460</sup> It is interesting, however that the *Audacht Morainn* does use the phrase “his tribes” in paras 9,10 and 11 (ed. Kelly 1976. p. 5)

ultimately sacral. The situation in the 7th century with which Adomnán, the ninth Abbot of Iona was so heavily and influentially involved and which has been to some extent explored in Chapter Two was of course dominated in the north and midlands (Conn's Half) by the dynastic power of the Uí Néill to which Adomnán himself was committed, by his close kin ties. Richter comments:- "The almost inexorable rise of the Uí Néill was achieved by means which were not provided for in the law tracts, namely through taking possession of the land of others . However there is a term in the poems and stories which describes this new reality: *ferann claidib* 'sword land'". Just when and to what degree the old client system of aggrandisement by royal lineages of individual *tíatha* was overtaken by sheer brute force, which in turn presumably was based on the number of clients owing obedience to their overlord's *slógad*, is not clear. These 'conquests' seem to have involved in some cases a subordination of the independent 'sovereignty' of the *tíath*, sometimes by the imposition of a member of an Uí Néill dynastic family as "ruler".

It seems that the situation was not dissimilar among the Akan. While individual powerful chieftaincies often called 'kingdoms' arose, during the 17th and early 18th centuries such as the Akwamu and the Denkyra which sought and obtained tribute from other neighbouring *aman* as a result mainly of wealth due to trade giving them superior arms, they did not overcome the basic autonomy, of such tribute-paying states. The Ancestors could have no power over lands and peoples outside their sacrally founded boundaries. There was nothing to prevent the continual wars, which could indeed be designated as inter-tribal. The formation of the Asante Union, a significant attempt to bring about further union within the firmly established sacro-political Akan system, while it modified this endemic inter-tribal strife within its bounds, led, as we shall see, within a generation or two to increasing institutionalised violence within the dominant state of Kumasi.

As we have seen, the appointment of the individual ruler was made on the basis of kin-right and popular choice in both cases. But it is also abundantly clear from the evidence adduced in the foregoing pages that these by themselves could not give authority or efficacy to the ruler so chosen; recognition and approval by 'transcendent' powers and what in both cases could be called a ritual act of union

with them, was essential for the health, unity, peace and general well-being of all. This is, I believe, a valid generalisation, in that it pinpoints the area where encounter with Christianity brought confrontation in the experience and religious history of both the peoples being studied, confrontation, which it seems to me, was not, (or in the Akan case, has not yet been) resolved. Thus while the ideological barriers between the chieftaincy and the Christian bodies are still operative in Ghana, and the essential rituals, though modified, survive and retain popular support,- the influence of the churches in Ireland, it seems put a successful embargo at least on the full ritual of the *banfeis* or sacred marriage as formerly celebrated in the great provincial centres of proto-historic Ireland. For it is only in connection with these centres: Emain Macha for “Ulster” (the Ulaid), Cruachu for Connacht (the original Connachta), Dún Alinne in Leinster and in particular of course, Tara itself <sup>461</sup> that the sources indicate that specifically ‘pagan’ ritual was performed. As the archaeologist Professor Barry Raftery has recently written, <sup>462</sup> these sites “figure prominently in the early Irish literature, and with them archaeology and the written sources begin to coalesce.... We can be confident that they were, indeed, royal centres of the Celtic Iron Age and there can now be little doubt that they were, as Óengus believed, centres of pagan ceremonial.”

This scenario, though it must continue to be obscure to the historian compared with the 7th and even the 6th centuries, does suggest perhaps that the initial confrontation of Christianity with provincial/ tribal/ heroic society in the fifth century was more momentous than has sometimes been thought. The huge size and magnificence of the building called “Phase 4”, (dated to the Iron Age,) indicated by excavation of Navan Fort (Emain Macha), whose purpose, together with earlier structures which it replaced, is recognisably ritual, indicates a very considerable power and makes its defeat, or rather the take-over of part of its ancient territory by the Uí Néill, presumably in the 5th century, impressive. The huge popularity of the epic *The Cattle Raid of Cooley*, *Táin Bó Cúlaighe*, in later times, however, in which the Ulaid

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<sup>461</sup> The four, incidentally, which are mentioned in the text from *Féilire Oengusso*, used in ch.2.

<sup>462</sup> *Pagan Celtic Ireland*, (London 1994) p. 64f. See also rest of chapter pp.64-97.



are the victors, indicates the lasting memory of its glory. There could also be hints here of an earlier, but now hidden, initial alliance of Níall of the Nine Hostages<sup>463</sup>, the eponymous founder of the Uí Néill dynasties, with the early church, “the heirs of Patrick”, lying behind the choice of Armagh as the ecclesiastical centre. It is possible that the text from The Martyrology of Óengus studied in Chapter Two encapsulates a more important ‘truth of the matter’ than has sometimes been thought; and that among the complex historical changes and influences accompanying the rise of the Uí Néill, the part played by the encounter with Christianity as confrontational has been underrated.

The Uí Néill, of course, chose Tara, the “focus or capital of the kingdom of Brega” as their ritual site, whose archaeological remains show it to have been in use from the second millenium BC until, perhaps, the “last” celebration of the *feis Temro* by Díamait mac Cerbaill in 560 or 558, or not very much longer.<sup>464</sup> The overwhelming importance to the Uí Néill of this connection has been evident in a great deal of the foregoing material, as has its significance as symbolic of the concept of the notional unity of the ‘Men of Ireland’, which is of course balanced by the increasing use of goddess names for the self-contained island unity of the Land. And yet the “Tara as Babylon” school was evidently highly articulate and influential throughout the 7th and 8th centuries. This dangerously divisive situation required responsible leadership from the clerical heirs of those wielding the powers of divine wisdom, living exponents of that early Irish concept of unity<sup>465</sup> as transcending the *túath*-based boundaries of identity. The situation required a cleric of the stature and experience of Adomnán, the ninth Abbot of Iona.<sup>466</sup>

The particular problem posed by this situation relevant to this study is the absence of ritual providing authenticity and all that went with it for the kingship as exercised by the dominant power, the Uí Néills of Tara. Of especial interest, as we

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<sup>463</sup> His appellation referring to the Airgialla who belonged to the original southern territorial area of the “fifth” of Ulster which included Emain Macha, whose kings became the clients of the Uí Néill.

<sup>464</sup> D.Binchy “The Fair of Tailtiu and the Feast of Tara” *Ériu* XVIII 1958-62 pp.127ff

<sup>465</sup> As expounded by P.MacCana in “Notes on the Early Irish Concept of Unity” *The Crane Bag Book of Irish Studies*, M.P. Hederman & R. Kearney edd (1977-1981) pp.207-218.

<sup>466</sup> See Herbert 1988, pp.47-56.

have seen, are attempts made by 7<sup>th</sup> century ecclesiastical leaders, apparently led by Adamnán to transform and yet endorse the sacrality of Irish kingship by an inauguration ritual based on a combination of biblical models and “Roman” ( and Byzantine) theocratic dreams, all in the context of struggles between the heirs of the ‘founding’ saints and their ecclesiastical power bases for influence over the increasingly powerful dynasties of overkings in the Northern Half - notably the Uí Néill in all their branches. And not less relevant is the undoubted failure of this venture. For the lesser kings, and indeed for the bulk of the population, both free pastoral farmers and the unfree, still living all their days within one of the hundred or so *túatha*, with no identity beyond it, there was “no *túath* without a king” in every sense of that phrase. Enright’s comment is of interest here: “...the *hieros gamos* of the *rí túaithe* was a rite which endorsed, ratified and sustained local political independence by stressing the unique and theoretically indivisible relationship between the tribal ruler and the land and people over which he ruled... a standing challenge to the proponents of a new type of kingship...”. The lack of early Irish documentation of such a rite among the “invisible people”<sup>467</sup> of the petty kingdoms discussed above, might make such a comment appear speculative, were it not for the cumulative weight of data collected by distinguished secondary authorities from late sources cited above.

Binchy<sup>468</sup> connects the change in other Indo-European cultures from the “primitive \*teuta(-) with \*req-s(-)” to “states” with a “monarch”, to urban development requiring “at least the nucleus of a permanent administration”. Such conditions were not present in 7<sup>th</sup> century Ireland, making an Irish Christian Emperor of Muirchú’s dream quite impracticable and indeed almost unthinkable in the context, involving as it does for him apparently, the rejection of Tara in its cosmological dimension.<sup>469</sup> Adomnán’s scheme insofar as Enright’s analysis of the texts is accepted, and making allowance for Adomnán’s identification with Uí Néill ambitions, does have a more authentically indigenous feel about it in terms of the early Irish concept

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<sup>467</sup> See Raftery op.cit pp.112-146.

<sup>468</sup> *Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Kingship*, O’Donnell lecture for 1967-68 (Oxford 1970)

<sup>469</sup> Binchy notes in passing (loc. cit.) that in Roman historical development from partially Indo-European roots “the later *imperator*.... was in no sense the successor of the old *rex*”.

of unity. F.J. Byrne's comprehensive study of the material relating to the concept of 'king of Tara' in the chapter of that name in his *Irish Kings and High-Kings* reveals the scenario in which Adomnán can both use the title "king of all Ireland" for a king of Tara, when there is no political justification for it from the modern historian's point of view, and also see the urgent need for a ritual with the supreme authority of Christian scripture to fill the gap left by the banning of the *feis temra*, a need all the greater because of the weakening of the spiritual sanctions controlling the "ruler of occupation with hosts" ( and no doubt the "bull ruler" as well).

This rest of the chapter will explore aspects of the search for unity in these two cultures. This will be done for the early Christian period in Ireland mainly through an exegetical study of *Baile in Scáil*, that other mainly 9<sup>th</sup> century tale in which Lugh appears as the Otherworld king reigning in the Otherworld Tara. This will be followed by a summary account of the creation of the "Asante nation" as a confederation of independent traditional states at the close of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, by means, very largely, of the inauguration of the Golden Stool, by a Moses-like visionary and administrative genius, *Okomfo Anokye*, - the priest Anokye.

### **Baile in Scáil**

We have already discussed the profound and prolonged shock brought by the experiences of the Viking raids to the monastic based establishment and indeed to the sense of trust in its power among the populace in general. We have also argued that the earlier tale of *Cath Maige Tuired* (2MT) is a conscious response on the part of a member or school of the powerful and influential hereditary caste of poets - the *filid* - to the crisis of confidence particularly affecting the monasteries and their areas of influence.<sup>470</sup> The importance of the cosmic role of Tara in 2MT and *Baile in Scáil*, both tales featuring Lugh in a pivotal role, is equally pronounced

A study of *Baile in Scáil* now follows. It forms the introduction to what purports to be a list of the "kings of Ireland" revealed to Conn of the Hundred Battles, the eponymous ancestor of the Dál Cuinn dynasties, compiled in the form of a

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<sup>470</sup> Corroborated by J.Carey in *Studia Celtica* 1989/90 pp.53-69.

prophecy.<sup>471</sup> Murphy provides arguments for the dating of this tale to the late 9<sup>th</sup> century<sup>472</sup>. Byrne describes it as a reworking of *Baile Chuind Cétchanach* (dated by Murphy to the 7<sup>th</sup> century).<sup>473</sup> In the list of kings following *Baile in Scáil* whose reigns are “prophesied”, the latest name to have historical existence is Máel Shechlainn (obit. 1022) the last of the Uí Néill “high kings”, which provides an eleventh century date for the compilation of the texts which have survived.<sup>474</sup>

For anyone who has read *The Second Battle of Moytura* (2MT) with any attention, Lugh must stand out as an attractive and charismatic figure whose ‘divinity’ within a mythological scenario is evident. And as we have seen the tale in all its complex detail provides a remarkably complete picture of Lugh functioning, - in Máire Herbert’s phrase - as the king-god. And yet while Eithne,<sup>475</sup> as Lugh’s mother and Ériu, Brig and the Morrigan, all with recognisable divine names, have their part to play in the theomachy, Lugh is given no consort, and the Feast given by Núadu at Tara has no reference to a sacred marriage. *Baile in Scáil* might be said to fill the gap. One wishes one could know the degree of association the poets/sages who were responsible for the ninth century material in these two tales had; what might be called the personality of Lugh in each tale feels similar. John Carey<sup>476</sup> points out that the Har1.5280 text of *Baile in Scáil* is found immediately following 2MT, which may, or may not, be significant.

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<sup>471</sup> It is preserved in Rawlinson B 512 and in Har1.5280 M.Dillon *Early Irish Literature*, (Chicago, 1948) The introductory section: paras 1-10 was given a translation by O’Curry in an Appendix to his *Lectures on MSS Materials*, 186; Dillon also gives a long “summary” in *EIL*. The Rawlinson B512 text of paras 1-40 was edited by Meyer *ZCP* 13, pp.371ff and by Thurneysen *ZCP* 20, pp.213ff; Har1.5280 paras 1-41 was edited by Meyer in *ZCP* 3, pp.457ff.

<sup>472</sup> See *Eriu* XVI (1952) p.150 n.1.

<sup>473</sup> Byrne *Irish Kings and High Kings* 1973. p54

<sup>474</sup> *Baile Chiund Cétchanach* seems to have a similar purpose but with Conn Cétchanath apparently as himself the prophet. However as Dillon comments: “The title suggests this, but there is no introductory statement”. It is of great value to historians; Byrne refers to it many times in his historical study of Irish Kingship.

<sup>475</sup> For the roles of Eithne and Ériu in what is perhaps more an 11th century context than a ninth, see C.Dagger “Eithne -The Sources” *ZCP* XLIII; & T.O.O’Rahilly “On the origin of the names Érainn and Ériu”, *Eriu* XIV (1943-57) 7-28; etc

<sup>476</sup> “Myth and Mythography in *Cath Maige Tuired*” *Studia Celt.* (1989/90) p. 63 note.27

There is first a fairly transparent political aim evident in the tale, - that of providing some authentication for the claims of the Uí Néill dynasties to the ‘original’ kingship of Tara and therefore of Erin herself. Evidence deduced from the following study suggests to me the presence of a parallel aim: that of endorsing and authenticating the surviving essentials of the ancient ritual by which kings are given their sacral powers, and are confirmed in their central and unifying role between the various levels of being.

*Baile in Scáil* is also an early example of the literary *Echtrae* describing a visit to the Otherworld of a royal personage from which the traveller returns “enriched by the knowledge” he has acquired<sup>477</sup>. This is clearly stated in the “title” found in para 9. of the text: **Vision and Adventure and Journey of Conn of the Hundred Battles, and The Phantom’s Frenzy**<sup>478</sup>; or *Ocus is di sen atta) Asslingi & Echtra & Argraige Cuind Cetchanach & Baile in Scáil*”.<sup>479</sup> It could be described as a drama in two scenes with an interlude between them. Scene One is on the Ramparts of Tara at dawn; the Interlude is the “journey” in the supernatural mist; Scene Two is in the Otherworld “kingly dun”, roofed in gold. There are four main characters: Conn the king of Tara (with his entourage of three druids and three poets); *Fál*, the stone that screamed; Lug mac Ethnenn the *Scál*; a young woman, *ingen*, who is the Sovereignty of Erin *flaith Érenn*.<sup>480</sup>

Scene One: Conn had come onto the rampart of Tara at sunrise with his entourage as his custom was, to view all four points of the heavens **lest the *fír síthi* or the Fomoiri should take Erin unawares**. Here we have the Fomoiri identified with the “hillmen” (which is O’Curry’s translation of *fír síthi*), as alien and potentially dangerous. The reference to the “four points of the heavens” is of course a recognisable example of the language of ancient cosmology, sometimes called “the

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<sup>477</sup> Nora Chadwick, “The Borderland of the Spirit World in early European Literature”, *Trivium* XI (1967) p..

<sup>478</sup> Dillon EIL p.13.

<sup>479</sup> R. Thurneysen ed..”*Baile in Scáil*”, *ZCP* vol.XX p.220

<sup>480</sup> The names of two of the druids, Bloc and Bliuccniu (Meyer ed. BIS in *ZCP* XIII p.372) are used of the two flagstones of Tara in *De Sil Chonaire Már*.op.cit.p.139.

cult of the Centre”.<sup>481</sup> The time and the place are both ‘liminal’ creating the expectation of a portentous event. **Conn happened to meet a stone there...and it screamed under his feet.** Conn asked his *filid/druí* about the stone and after fifty days and three the *fili* answered that **Fál (i.e.-ail “under-rock”, i.e.”a rock under a king”) was its name;**<sup>482</sup> and that it had come from Inis Fáil to Tara in the country of *Fál*;

**in the land of Tír Tailten it shall abide for ever and there shall be an Óenach there (in Tailtiu) for as long as there shall be sovereignty in Tara; and the last day of the Óenach, for the sovereign who does not witness it, there shall be hardness in that year**<sup>483</sup>. **Fál has screamed under thy feet this day, and has prophesied; the number of calls which the stone has screamed is the number of kings that shall come of thy seed for ever: It is not I that shall name them for thee, said the druid.**<sup>484</sup>

As noted above, Fál is here unmistakably, a flagstone which screamed when Conn stood on it. It is while the king is standing on it that Fál “prophesies”; the screams revealing to the *filid/druí* that while he is standing on the stone Conn is in contact with a source of supernatural knowledge or prophecy; each scream being a recognition of each of Conn’s seed who shall follow him in the kingship of Tara. The final words of the druid set the scene for the second act of the drama: **It is not I that shall name them for thee.**

Interlude: (What follows is from O’Curry’s translation) **As they were there they saw a great mist all around, so that they knew not where they went, from the greatness of the darkness which had come; and they heard the noise of a horseman approaching them. “It would be a great grief to us”, said Conn, “if we should be carried into an unknown**

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<sup>481</sup> cf Rees & Rees op.cit. pp.189ff. Five (four points in a square with a centre) is of course a fundamental cosmogonic number in other cultures. A West African example is found in Yoruba (Nigeria) mythology.

<sup>482</sup> This explanation of the meaning of *Fál* only appears in Rawl. B512

<sup>483</sup>: An important cross-textual reference in Lebor Gabála para.309 (Irish Texts XLI 1941) **“It is the Túatha Dé Danaan who brought with them the Great Fál, (that is the Stone of Knowledge) which was in Temair, whence Ireland bear the name of the “Plain of Fál”. He under whom it should utter a cry was the King of Ireland; until Cú Chulainn smote it, for it uttered no” cry under him nor under his fosterling, Lugaid son of the three Fíns of Emain. And from that out the stone uttered no cry save under Conn of Temair. Then its heart flew out from it (from Temair) to Tailtiu, so that is the Heart of Fál which is there. It was no chance which caused it, but Christ being born, which is what broke the power of idols.”**

<sup>484</sup> From O’Curry loc.cit and Dillon EIL p.108 ; see also ed. Thurneyson loc.cit.

country". After this the horseman let fly three throws at them, and the last throw came with greater velocity than the first throw. "It is a wounding of a king indeed", said the druid, "whoever shoots at Conn in Temair". The horseman then desisted from the shooting and came to them, and bade welcome to Conn, and took them with him to his house. They went forward then until they entered a beautiful plain. And they saw a kingly rath and a golden tree (*bile*) at its door; and they saw a splendid house in it, under a roof-tree of *Findruiné* (gold); thirty feet was its length.

The mysterious horseman, approaching in the magical mist and heralded by his spear casts would probably suggest *Lug Lamfadha* (Longarm) to the reader/audience. The reference to Taitiu and its *Óenach* in Scene One would have already brought Lugh to mind. In the LGE tradition Lugh's spear is one of the four treasures brought by the *Túatha Dé Danaan*, of which the stone of *Fál* is of course another.<sup>485</sup>

The "beautiful plain" suggests the Otherworld *Magh Meall* and the productive land cleared in primordial times by divine beings. The significance of the sacred tree *bile* has been discussed above. But here it is "golden", shining at the gate of the Otherworld dwelling, itself shining with gold.<sup>486</sup>

**Scene Two: They then went into the house, and they saw a young woman (seated in a chair of crystal,) with a diadem of gold upon her head; a silver kieve with hoops of gold by her, and it full of red ale; a golden can (*escra*) on its edge; a golden cup at its mouth. They saw the *Scál* (champion) himself before them, in his king's seat. There was never found in Temair a man of his great size, nor of his comeliness, for the beauty of his form (*delba*), the wonderfulness of his face.**<sup>487</sup>

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<sup>485</sup> Macalister ed.op.cit.IT XVI paras 305, 325, 357 and Gray ed 2MT para.p.4 . The significance of the superiority of the long distance missile weapon such as the spear and also the sling stone with which in 2MT Lugh defeats Balor, over the huge wooden club of the Dagda, is paralleled in the superior power wielded by the Asante over earlier Akan-dominating "tribes" because of access to crossbow and then to guns. Another interesting ref. to a spear in connection with the theme of BIS is in the 12<sup>th</sup> century Life of Colmán son of Luachan; a description of an inauguration rite of a king of Meath in which the king standing at the foot of the Pillar stone of the Hostages above makes a cast at the representative of the family with an hereditary right to 'proclaim' the king, ('given' to his ancestral kin by the saint) standing upon the flagstone below with an open horsewhip in his hand with which to defend himself. K.Simms op.cit. p.23.

<sup>486</sup> The numinous qualities of untarnishable gold are recognisable in the wearing of torques by the Gaulish naked warriors in the descriptions of the classical ethnographers etc. This is widely evident in the sacred treasures of the Asante in Kumase. See A.A.Y.Kyerematen *The Panoply of Ghana* (Ghana 1964) passim.

<sup>487</sup> This picture is surely reminiscent of iconography of the Gaulish Mercury and Rosmerta/Maia? {McCana 1970, pp. 25ff}

**He spoke to them and said to them: “I am not a *Scál*, and I am not an *aurdrach*, and I have come after death to be honoured by you, and I am of the race of Adam. My name is Lug son of Ethniu son of Smretha son of Tigernmar son of Faelu son of Etheor son of Irial son of Érimón son of Mil of Spain. And I have come to tell you the span of your sovereignty and of that of every prince that will come of you in Tara forever. And the *ingen* that was in the house before them was the *flaith Herend* for ever<sup>488</sup>.**

We have now been introduced to all four main characters in the tale. So what are we to make of the opening words of the shining and superlatively beautiful king, (who throughout the rest of the tale is called the *scál*) - declaring that he is not a *scál*, nor an *aurdracht*?. It is clearly an important question and difficult to answer satisfactorily as both words belong to a group of terms for supernatural beings which seem to have similar indeed more or less interchangeable meanings, “the interchangeability partially explicable by the highly subjective apprehension of these supernatural beings by the early Irish”.<sup>489</sup> In the article just quoted William Sayers examines a text in which *aurdrach* (*aurddrag*) is used of a distinctly sinister supernatural (and corporeal) being in the *Tain*<sup>490</sup> and he sees the pairing of *scál* and *aurdrach* as an example of what became a narrative commonplace, a listing of names of monsters and spirits. *Scál*, however, does not appear in any of the other lists which he quotes.<sup>491</sup>

However the entry for *scál* in DIL is as follows: “supernatural or superhuman being, phantom, giant, hero.”; later also “man, human being”. O’Curry gives “champion” in brackets beside his first mention of *scál*. These varied translations

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<sup>488</sup> Dillon gives “specter” for *aurdrach* and “Phantom” for *Scál*. O’Curry omits *aurdrach* in his translation. This paragraph follows Dillon’s translation of para. 7 of the Rawl.B512 text. Harl.5280 has only Lug mac Ethlend maic Tigernmais. {ed.Meyer op.cit. p.460.}. The last sentence is from O’Curry’s translation.

<sup>489</sup> W.Sayers, “*Airdrech, Sirite* and Other Early Irish Battlefield Spirits” *Eigse* 1992 pp.45-55 esp.p.50

<sup>490</sup> ed. and trans. C.O’Rahilly 1976 paras 492-502.

<sup>491</sup> Sayers does however mention the following instances where the word is used with an apparent malign meaning, viz: *scál* is used for the huge apparition in *Briuuccu’s Feast*, translated by Gantz as “giant”(op.cit.247ff). Sayers loc.cit.. quotes M.A.O’Brien “Varia: Old Irish *scál* etc.” *Ériu* XX (1932), pp.89f, who sees *scál* as a word “corresponding exactly in meaning form and gender with the Gothic *skohl* = evil spirit. demon”.



taken in this order might serve (with an addition or two) as an index for a diachronic study of Lugh as he appears in the literature!

It would seem probable then that if the word *scál* suggested a supernatural or superhuman being, (whether or not beneficent) to the reader at this period, then “I am not a *scál* nor an *aurdracht*” followed by “I am of the race of Adam, who has come after death to be honoured by you”, can be explained as a perhaps somewhat crude euhemerising ploy which is reinforced by both versions of the genealogy for Lugh which follows: one ZCP 13 and 20 from Rawl.5123 gives him a descent of seven steps from Míl of Spain; the other ZCP 31 gives only “son of Edlenn, son of Tigernmais”<sup>492</sup>. Both of these latter incidentally turn Lugh’s matronymic into a patronymic (and both include Tigernmais). The *locus classicus* for Lugh as son of Eithne is in 2MT paras 55,8: the latter describing his mother Eithne as daughter of Balor. And Eithne has been shown to be the most used name for an avatar of the sovereignty goddess.<sup>493</sup> As we have seen the redactor responsible for the first nine paragraphs of 2MT places the narrative which describes the doings of the *Tíatha Dé Danaan* before the arrival of the sons of Míl, within the “historical” *schema* of the Book of Invasions, thus enabling the sacred mythological lore which it contains to be “organised” freely by learned *filid* functioning within early mediaeval Christendom. What we have in this speech given to Lugh, looks like something quite different; the redactor responsible for making Lugh a descendant of Míl was perhaps influenced by the habits of contemporary politicised genealogists. Its startling inconsistency, (together with the pairing of *scál* with *aurdracht*), with the rest of the tale as we have it, would be consistent with an 11<sup>th</sup> century clerical compiler such as the Abbot of Armagh (1049-64) suggested by Dillon<sup>494</sup>, but also illustrates the judgement made by

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<sup>492</sup> D.Ó.hOgain, *Myth Legend and Romance. An Encyclopaedia of the Irish Folk Tradition.*, (1990) p.400 has collected some lore on Tigernmais: his descent from Eremon, son of Míl; as “king of Ireland” and his association with the first gold mine and the crafts of gold and silver working; he was “said to have originated the worship of Crom Cruach at Magh Sleacht”. The latter appears as the evil adversary of Patrick in the legends associated with the Festival of Lughnasa collated by Máire MacNeill. (MM passim).

<sup>493</sup> O’Rahilly 1946 163f. Further references to Lugh as son of Eithne are listed in C.Dagger ZCP 45 under Eithne Z: found in LGE and in the *Banshenchas* and *Dunairé Finn*.

<sup>494</sup> EIL. p.107

Murphy: that “the basis of *Baile in Scáil* would...seem to belong to the late 9<sup>th</sup> century..” to which he adds that the language of this introductory part of BIS “tends to confirm the belief that its basic framework goes back to the late 9<sup>th</sup> century”.<sup>495</sup>

As for the exclusive use of *scál* to designate the Otherworld king in the rest of the tale, there are several other references connecting Lugh with the epithet *Scál*. For instance there is a tradition that Lugh’s father was known as *Scál Bálb* “the dumb (or stammering)” *scál* in the *Rennes Ds of Nas*, and also in the *Rennes Ds of Tailtiu*<sup>496</sup>. In LGE Cian, who in 2MT and elsewhere is Lugh’s father, is explicitly named *Scál Bálb*.<sup>497</sup> There is also a reference to *scál find* (bright or shining or just “fair”) in a quatrain dated by Dillon as early as the 6<sup>th</sup> century and part of what the latter believes to be a ceremonial eulogy in praise of the great ancestor Labraid Loingsech at the inauguration feast of a Laigin king. The verse in question begins with *Lug Scéith/ scál find*.<sup>498</sup>

It seems reasonable to assume from the foregoing that the introduction of the name “Lug mac Ethnenn” in BIS, followed by so much of what might be called circumstantial detail, would bring to the reader/listeners’ minds a particular supernatural, superhuman Being in all his familiar otherworldly magnetism, and one for whom the epithet *scál* peculiarly belonged. One is left with the possibility that to seek for insight into Lugh through the meaning of *scál* is inappropriate; indeed that the reverse is the case, because as Chadwick concludes<sup>499</sup> “...the *Scál* par excellence is the god Lug”. It would seem that the 9<sup>th</sup> century scholar responsible for BIS has found within his lore a way of solving the terminological problem of designating a divinity who is still functioning as such, while the Dagda for instance, can be described as a “god” for pre-Christian times in the *Glossary of Cormac*.

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<sup>495</sup> Murphy 1952 p.152 n.

<sup>496</sup> ed. Stokes, R C XV pp.1 316-18 & XV pp. 50f.

<sup>497</sup> LGE para.368

<sup>498</sup> See K.Meyer: *Altteste Irische Dichtung* cited by Dillon, “A poem on the Kings of the Eóganachta” *Celtica X* (1973),p.7; and N Chadwick:”Lug Scéith Scál Find”, *Scottish Gaelic Studies* (1935), pp.1-5.

<sup>499</sup> *idem* p. 5.

The interest now centres on the queenly figure of the “young woman” who is the *flaith Herem*. The text becomes a little confused here, and we follow Dillon’s summary: “...she gave food to Conn, the rib of an ox and the rib of a hog. The ox-rib was twenty-four feet long and eight feet from the arch to the ground. The hog’s rib was twelve feet long and five feet from the arch to the ground. When she went to serve the ale, she asked to whom the cup of red ale (*derbflaith*<sup>500</sup>) should be given and the *scál* answered her. When he had named every prince from the time of Conn onwards, Cesarn, one of the two *filid*, wrote them down in ogam on four staves of yew.”

**They<sup>501</sup> went from out the shadow of the *scál* (*hi foscad a scáil*) and they did not perceive the rath nor the house. The kieve was left with Conn, and the golden *escra*, and the bowl. It is from this have come the vision (*baile*) of the *scál*, and the adventure and journey of Conn.**

Then follows a dialogue between the sovereignty and the *scál* giving the long list of king’s names starting with Conn.

She first gives to Conn the huge ox-rib and the hog-rib. Do these represent the hospitality proper to a kingly rath?. Beef and pork often appear together in this context usually in gargantuan proportions in the sagas. Could the ox-rib be intended to represent the pastoral sources of the wealth of Erin with, of course strong connections with goddess figures, e.g. Brigit and Bui, while the boar’s rib would carry with it not only the associations with hunting in the wild, but also with the Otherworld Feasts and other numinous qualities. In summing up her chapter on Divine Animals Anne Ross writes: “The boar was seen to be perhaps the most typical Celtic animal, symbolic of war and the sacred ritual of hospitality, a frequent form for metamorphosis, and the hunt animal par excellence of the Celtic world.”<sup>502</sup>

The *ingen* then proceeds to her main role in this part of the tale - to distribute the drink, the *derbflaith* - the red ale in her “vat”. There are several references to the

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<sup>500</sup> Dillon notes that Thurneysen had pointed out that there is a play on the words *flaith* (sovereignty) and *laith* (drink):EIL p.109 n.8.

<sup>501</sup> Returning to O’Curry’s translation.

<sup>502</sup> op.cit pp. 483 & 9

pouring and giving of a drink by goddess or queen figures in the literature: for example in *Tochmarc Étaín* when Eochu is trying to win his wife Étaín back from Mider and expects to recognise her by her way of serving a drink. Perhaps the most definite example is in the Middle Irish tale *Echtra Mac N-Echach Muigmedón*<sup>503</sup>, showing how Níall of the Nine Hostages (eponymous ancestor of the Uí Néill) and his three legitimate half brothers seek a drink from a well guarded by a horrible hag and Níall wins it by agreeing to mate with her whereupon she is transformed into a most beautiful young woman, announces herself to be the sovereignty of Erin and prophesies his future glory as king. In Murphy's translation of *Baile Chiund* each king in the list is said to "drink it" i.e. his kingship. In a collection of examples cited by McCone<sup>504</sup> the latter includes a reference to O'Rahilly's etymology of Medb (the three personages of this name are clearly avatars of the Goddess) as a feminine derivative of a word meaning "mead".<sup>505</sup> McCone also refers to the famous and surely significant account by Aristotle of the foundation legend of Massilia (Marseilles), the Greek maritime colony in Gaulish territory, according to which the daughter of the local Gaulish king who was about to choose a husband by offering him a drink, chose the leader of the Greek colonists: an interesting pan-Celtic mythological link.<sup>506</sup>

These references convincingly show, as I see it, that, in the commonly understood symbolic language of the *filid* of early Christian Ireland, "Scene Two" of *Baile in Scáil* encapsulates an enduring essential ingredient of the ancient ritual basic to cosmic order and meaning- the inauguration of the sacral king. By setting this scene in what is depicted as the Otherworld prototype of 'Tara of the Kings', the tale

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<sup>503</sup> W.Stokes ed. *RC*. XXIV (1903 ) (trans. in *Ancient Irish Tales* pp.508-513.)

<sup>504</sup> 1991, pp.109f

<sup>505</sup> T.F.O'Rahilly, *Early Irish History and Mythology* (Dublin,1943) p.15.

<sup>506</sup> McCone goes on to compare this to examples in Irish mythology of a woman "giving love in absence" notably Étaín in TBDD. Presumably this is connected with traditional wisdom about the need for exogamous marriage for the health of a kinship group, a matter of some importance in the archaic world of the individual túath and its king revealed in some of the law tracts. In a matrilineal, not necessarily matriarchal, society of which there survive some hints, provisions for exogamous marriage are even more important. The elaborate safeguards in connection with the marriage of the women in a lineage group in traditional Akan society were still unquestioned in Rattray's time and beyond.

enables this essential union of each “king of Ireland” with the territorial goddess<sup>507</sup> to take place in a timeless, once and for all, supernatural event. The authenticity of the supernatural event is confirmed by the tokens left for Conn,- the ale vat and the golden cup and the bowl, after he and his entourage had “ gone out from the shadow of the Scál”.<sup>508</sup>

If this scene in the Otherworld timeless Original of Tara of the Kings, which Conn has not only seen in his vision, but also to which he has journeyed through the “misty darkness”, and experienced in his adventure, and which includes the “prophetic frenzy of the Scál”, is intended to recall and make present (in both senses of that word) the Myth of the sacred marriage on which the stability and well being of society is seen to depend, then the scene in Tara which precedes it must convey a recognisable ritual reflection of, and response to, the Otherworldly Event.

In the course of the examination of the material collected by Byrne, Dillon and others giving hints relating to the ritual involved in the authenticating of Irish sacral kings in Part Two above, it became clear that royal inauguration sites in historic times included a stone, usually on a hill on which the king was required to stand, probably with bare feet.<sup>509</sup> Reference had been made in connection with the tale *Síl Conaire Mór* in which the *Lia Fál*, the stone which screamed when touched by Conaire’s chariot wheels, is described as a “stone penis”, to a recent study of the *Lia Fál* by Thomas Ó Broin. As mentioned there, in this article Ó Brion collects some highly cogent references implying that *Fál* was a *lecc* or flagstone, set in the earth, which it

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<sup>507</sup> But see below discussion of Herbert’s important comment in her essay “Goddess and King: The Sacred Marriage in Early Ireland” in *Cosmos vol.VII Woman and Sovereignty*,(Edinburgh1992) pp.264-275.

<sup>508</sup> There are at least two other inter-textual comparisons demanding recognition here. One is connected with Lugh and is in the Birth Tale of Cú-chullain where the morning after the birth of the boy child in the supernatural dwelling near the Brugh na Bóinne, Conchobar and the Ulaid are left with “**no house no birds, only their horses and the boy with his colts**”. (Gantz op.cit.p.132). Another is *Echtra Cormaic i Tir Tairngiri*, part of *Scél na Fír Flatha*; ed. W.Stokes.1891.) in which Manannán mac Lir performs a similar role to Lugh’s in BIS. The parallels in the tales, both as similarly patterned Otherworld Journeys of royal travellers who return with tokens of their renewed kingship, provide one of the hints in the sources suggesting a close relationship between Lugh and Manannán. Perhaps there are also faint echoes of remote Celtic origins for the Grail legends here.

<sup>509</sup> Just below the craggy top of the rock of Dunadd in Lorn, there is a flat stone with the outline of a foot carved in it together with a beautifully designed boar: a most striking indication of the site of a royal inauguration ritual in Scotland .

clearly is in BIS, and that it was a manifestation of the ancient mother Goddess of the Land on which it is lying, imbued with her presence and power. So when Conn stands on *Fál* it is “a marital gesture, directed towards rock and earth.”<sup>510</sup> The cry is the bride’s response.” Ó Broin sees an intentional identity in BIS between the prophesying *lecc* which is *Fál* and the goddess figure of our second scene.

That Lugh, whether under the title the *Scál* or explicitly as Lug mac Ethnenn of the race of Adam, plays a very central role in the tale both from the point of view of the 9<sup>th</sup> century loremaster and from that of the 11<sup>th</sup> century redactor is clear. It is presumably possible that the explicit mention of Lugh by name, which in the text includes of course “his” genealogies, belongs with the speech it purports to introduce, which is, or so we have argued, the work of the 11<sup>th</sup> century redactor. We shall never know, of course, if that is so; the implication of the foregoing would be that the 9<sup>th</sup> century reader/teller/hearer of the tale would not actually need the name Lugh as such. Nor can we know whether the 11<sup>th</sup> century redactor made any more subtle changes to the tale as he received it in addition to the necessary up-dating of the king-list which follows the tale.

These speculations do derive some relevance from Máire Herbert’s study of the adaptations to the early myth of the sacral marriage in Irish literature in her article (referred to above) “Goddess and King: The Sacred Marriage in Early Ireland,”-developments which she relates to historical changes in the exercise of kingly power. She relates *Baile in Scáil*, looked at from the point of view of its 11<sup>th</sup> century compiler, to the two versions of the tale of the encounter of Níall of the Nine Hostages with the *puella senilis*<sup>511</sup> belonging to the same century, all sharing the political purpose of providing extra authority for the Uí Néill at a time when their

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<sup>510</sup> Two of the passages which Ó Broin cites in evidence are (a) from W. Stokes ed. “*Cóir Amnann*” IR. Texte III (1897) p.326 **Núadu Finn Fail...used often to visit the *Lia Fáil* playing with it, and courting ; for the prophets had foretold to him that he would be king of Ireland, wherefore he was called Fair Núadu of Fál thereafter.** and (b) from 2MT (ITS LII p.49) in the tale of the Dagda’s contest with the daughter of the king of the Fomoiré where she threatens to be **a stone at the mouth of every ford you will cross.** and he replies, **I will tread heavily on every stone, and the trace of my heel will remain on every stone forever.** For examples of a rock as goddess (or a goddess in a rock) see idem pp.398f

<sup>511</sup> Stokes ed..RC. XXIV (1903) and M. Joynt “*Echtrach mac Echtach Mugmedóin*” *Ériu* IV 1903 pp 91-111.

claim to exercise hegemony over all of Ireland was being successfully challenged by Brian Boruma. Herbert sees the *Ectra mac nEchach Muigmedóin* as revealing an interpretation of the myth of the sacred marriage in response to the historical development of dynastic kings who actively fought for and seized power and “shaped their own destinies”. She points the contrast to an earlier time visible in the traditions about Medb in all her guises, where “the female is the constant, and the initiator of relationships with her male partners.” In the Níall story, the female “sovereignty” functions rather “as an object to be appropriated- in this instance her appropriation being the necessary condition for the recuperation of her form and appearance.”<sup>512</sup>. This interpretation of the role of the Woman of Sovereignty in the Níall tale would no doubt be recognised as acceptable by the compiler of BIS, especially if he were indeed an establishment dynastic ecclesiastic such as Dillon suggested.

While this use of the original myth does not seem to fit the 9<sup>th</sup> century *Baile in Scáil* very well if, as argued above, the lore of *Fál* was still vividly alive at the time, there is no such difficulty with the following comments on the scene in the Otherworldly Tara in BIS : “In this text, it is the king-god, Lug, who instructs his female companion regarding the bestowal of the drink of sovereignty on successive kings. It is his action rather than that of the goddess, therefore which ultimately designates the ruler. The locus of power has shifted from female to male.” Herbert’s final conclusion is also probably unarguable : “Female sovereignty is privileged in the era of prehistoric *rois fainéants*, but in the androcentric culture of kingly power her role as partner is diminished. “Indeed it is becoming more and more evident that the ‘masculinity’ of Lugh together with his mastery of all the arts and the identification of his cult festival of Lughnasad with the still prestigious celebration of kingship at the *Óenach Tailten*, all help to account for his importance to the responsible ‘literati’ of the 9<sup>th</sup> century.

For it is not only the ‘female sovereignty’ who is diminished in the 11<sup>th</sup> century tales ; it is also, as Herbert implies, the sacrality of the king,- his responsibility towards the ‘King’s Truth’, and towards the general well-being of land and people.

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<sup>512</sup> Joynt 1908:102-9

Viewed as a ninth century written composition, however, BIS can be seen to show Lugh performing a vital function as prototype of the perfect king complementing, and indeed completing, his role in 2MT. In “CMT as Exemplary Myth” Ó Cathasaigh sums up *Baile in Scáil* as follows: “...Lug is shown to validate the Dál Cuinn kings of Tara (and Lugaid mac Con as well) by instructing his Otherworld consort to give them a drink which symbolises sovereignty for the term of years specified by Lug. We can carry the interpretation of this text a step further and say that this means, in effect, that each of them in turn will be wedded to Lug’s consort.... and be his surrogate for the time being in the kingship of Tara.” The tale then, as I see it, can be said to combine several aims (a) to emphasise and authenticate what remained of the ritual enactment of the sacred marriage, by which the newly designated king steps on the sacred flag-stone (*lecc*) set in the soil on the sacred central hill or mound, the ancient inauguration site, and is united with the spirit of the earth; (b) as confirming the (northern) claim of the unique significance of Tara as microcosmic ritual centre of the island of Ireland and of the unifying role of the kings of Tara expressed in their claim to the High Kingship of all Ireland, and (c) as validating the claim of the Uí Néill dynasties to the ‘original’ kingship of Tara.

It has become clear that for the school of thought evident in both 2MT and BIS Lugh had retained considerable vitality and significance. (Perhaps therefore the placing of BIS immediately following 2MT in Harley 5280 is no coincidence.) As considerable work of scholarship has shown, 2MT combined the basic myth of the theomachy, the battle between Order and Chaos, with some fairly explicit and thoroughly contemporary ‘doctrinal’ application; and throughout Lugh played the dominant role as prototype and primordial king. But equally skilful and learned scholarship has shown beyond any doubt that (at any rate in the Old Irish period), the ‘King’ and all he embodies is both meaningless and functionless without his ‘Consort’. *Baile in Scáil* as interpreted above, appears in its 9<sup>th</sup> century context as a necessary complement to 2MT.

The period in question is about 200 years later than the failure of attempts by Adomnán of Iona and the patrons of Miurchú’s Life of St Patrick (from the opposite camps of the Columban and Patrician familiae) to realise the dream of an Irish



Christian ‘Emperor’. This failure, whatever the proximate political causes may have been, must witness to the enduring strength and depth of the roots of the Sacred Marriage, the ever renewed union of the opposites, within the consciousness of the Irish people in early Christian times. The accompanying efforts of the ‘Saints’ to nullify the power of the royal sanctuaries, typified in the *feis Temrach*, did it seems succeed. The argument of the foregoing suggests that there was felt to be a dangerous vacuum left which 2MT and BIS were intended to fill.

Fortunately we have a passage in *Scél na Fír Flatha* which throws light on how at least one school of thought in the Church seems to have responded to BIS. It is here cited from McCone’s chapter on Sovereignty and the Church<sup>513</sup>:

**...but the ecclesiastical scholars say that every time a wondrous apparition (*taidbse ingnad*) used to be shown to the royal rulers (*dona rí - flathaib*) of yore - as the Scál revealed to Conn and as the land of promise (*tír taingiri*) was shown to Cormac - it was a godly ministration that used to come in that guise and not a devilish ministration. Moreover, (it is) angels that used to come to help them, since it is natural truth (*fírinde aicnid*) that they used to follow and it is the commandment of law (*timna rechta*) that served them.”.**

The reference to the ecclesiastical scholars indicates a separate learned establishment of *filid* responsible for traditional lore,- the two functioning with what looks like mutual respect. The passage also implies that *Baile in Scáil* was well-known at least in literate circles, and as orally delivered on suitable occasions presumably including specifically royal ones, to what must have been a large public. It seems highly probable that the use of the epithet *scál* throughout BIS and in the passage just quoted and the separation of the Otherworld visitation of the *Scál* from the *Fomoir-cum-fír síthi* facilitated the ecclesiastical scholars in their hermeneutics.

### **The Golden Stool of the Asante Nation.**

There follows at this point a brief account of a remarkable attempt to accommodate this same crude aggressive power in the context of the system of Akan traditional kin-based, essentially autonomous tribal states, at the close of the 17<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>513</sup> 1991 p. 156

century that was the basis of the power and wealth of the Asante Union centred in Kumasi, for almost two hundred years.

Tradition tells that segments of the Oyoko Clan originating from Santemanso had moved away and settled near the wealthy trading centre of Tafo, which eventually submitted to an Asante chief, Osei Tutu. The latter made his capital in Kumasi nearby. However Kumasi and all the neighbouring states were paying tribute to the Denkyira, who had become a dominant power, like the Akwamu further east, through success in the struggle for control of the centres of gold production and of the trade routes. Osei Tutu, “through conquests, persuasion and treaties”, mobilised near-by chiefs into a loose confederation and defeated the Denkyira in 1701. Many Denkyira chiefs transferred their allegiance to Osei Tutu, most of them being recognised with titles giving them an official place in the councils of the Kumasi division, bringing with them the lands belonging to their stools, thus building up the wealth and influence of Kumasi. The allied states continued to make “conquests” for a while, making use of the new long distance weapon, the crossbow, obtained in huge quantities by trade with the coastal forts (and soon after the gun also) but the self-sufficiency of each chieftaincy in terms of the lineage system would inevitably have broken up the ‘Union’, leading to yet more incessant wars. This problem was partially solved by the genius of the *Okomfo* Anokye (the priest Anokye), who first knew Osei Tutu, to whom he was related, when the latter was a boy and a servant at the palace of the ‘king’ of Denkyira.

Anokye’s powers as an *okomfo* with remarkable shamanistic gifts, travelling from place to place before becoming Osei Tutu’s “friend and counsellor” are legendary.<sup>514</sup> The evidence of the skill and wisdom which he showed in “directing the affairs of state”, such as the policy of incorporating some of the heads of the states defeated into the militarised hierarchy of sub-chiefs instead of adding them (literally)

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<sup>514</sup> Rattray records traditions of these covering fourteen pages of one of his books: (1929) pp. 270-284. The large hospital in Kumasi, the subject of a recent television series, is named after him, witnessing to the tradition of his healing powers

to the skull collection of the stool of Asante, is also impressive.<sup>515</sup> In addition, many traditional laws and taboos, however ancient, such as the clan exogamy, tend to be attributed to 'Komfo Anokye'.<sup>516</sup>

Dr Peter Sarpong, Catholic bishop of Kumasi, in his treatise, *The Sacred Stools of the Akan*,<sup>517</sup> adds: "None of the achievements of Anokye can be compared with his creation of the Golden Stool." The story goes that Anokye, declaring himself to have a mission from *Onyame* to make the Asante into a great and powerful nation, called on the *Asantehene* Osei Tutu to arrange for a summons of all the chiefs, queen-mothers, etc. to a gathering (on a Friday) in Kumasi. In the presence of a huge crowd, Anokye, "with the help of his supernatural power, is stated to have brought down from the sky, in a black cloud, and amid rumblings, and in air thick with white dust, a wooden stool with three supports and partly covered with gold. This stool did not fall to the earth, but alighted slowly upon Osei Tutu's knees."<sup>518</sup> Anokye then declared that this stool contained the *sunsum* (sometimes translated as "the personality soul") of the Asante nation, and that their power their health their bravery and their welfare were in this stool. He then caused the *Asantehene* and all the Asante chiefs and queenmothers to "take a few hairs from their head and pubes and a piece of nail from their forefinger"<sup>519</sup>, which he made into a powder and mixed with "medicine" (natural substances believed to contain power) some of which was smeared on the stool and some drunk by the contributors "as a sacramental drink." Thus the *sunsum* of each was provided a resting or anchored place in the stool. The stool cannot, of course be sat on; never can it be allowed to touch the ground. but normally rests on its own stool. While the *Asantehene*, the "king of the Asante nation" is deeply revered to this day, the chiefs and captains of the Asante in 1895 allowed the deportation of King

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<sup>515</sup> The parallel between this head-collecting custom and the attitude to these heads and references in the Irish sagas and in comments from the classical ethnographers is quite close, indicating the values of a 'heroic' culture shared by the Asante and Iron-age Ireland.

<sup>516</sup> Rattray 1929, pp.279f

<sup>517</sup> (Ghana 1971) pp.29-34

<sup>518</sup> Rattray 1929, pp. 289f

<sup>519</sup> In the event of person dying too far away for his body to be brought home for burial, pieces of hair and finger nails could be used to convey the *sunsum* home to take care of living members of his *ntoro*.

Prempeh I, rather than resort to war, which they had reason to believe they might lose and risk the loss of the Golden Stool. Yet when Governor Hodgson in 1900 visited Kumasi and demanded that the Golden Stool should be brought for him to sit upon, "he was heard in silence". When the assembly broke up every man went home and prepared for war. In the struggle that followed the Asante were finally subdued. But "Friday's Golden Stool" of Asante has "to this day survived many dangers with its unifying power unimpaired"<sup>520</sup>.

Rattray was once told that Okomfo Anokye was the Jesus of the Akan which is an interesting comment in itself.<sup>521</sup> But the parallels with Moses are surely strikingly close and are of course unattributable at that time to the influence of the Judaic/Christian Scriptures!

The glimpses of Kumasi at the height of its power and great wealth, sustained by the development of bureaucratic institutions, on a scale not, one can be sure, envisaged by Anokye himself, appearing in the course of this study, can only give a very inadequate picture. The quotation at the beginning of this section from the substance of the oath taken by the newly installed *Omanhene* of one of the constituent states of the Asante Union indicates an ambivalent attitude. Yet there can, I believe, be no doubt that the Asante in general, did glory in their identification with this power and wealth with its ostentatious expressions, all in huge scale, including the ritual bloodshed which was so appalling to outsiders. And yet though the anguish accompanying the temporary loss (and desecration) of the Golden Stool during the upheaval following the capture of Kumasi and the exile of the *Asantehene* and the Queenmother by the British was undoubtedly deep, there is plenty of evidence of

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<sup>520</sup> Sarpong 1971 loc.cit.

<sup>521</sup> Rattray 1929 279. The tale of Anokye's quest for the medicine against death as told to Rattray by his descendant is worth quoting. After retiring to his village Anokye eventually 'died', having first told his elders not to disturb him for 7 years and 77 days. However his nephew announced his death seven days short of this period, and the wailing and gun-shots announced the beginning of his "funeral custom", although when the door to Anokye's room was opened it was found to be empty.. A man from a neighbouring town, on his way that same day was accosted by a man under a certain palm tree, who asked him what was happening in Agona (Anokye's village). The latter said that he himself was Komfo Anokye, that he had obtained the medicine against death and was returning with it, but as his kinsmen had disobeyed his orders, he would go away for ever and the Ashanti would never find the medicine, "whose great taboo was the holding of the funeral custom."

relief felt by even the most loyal Asante 'subjects' at the ending of the endemic danger of literally losing their heads, on occasions such as "the fall of the mighty tree"! The attitude that sees all power as religious on the one hand, and the identification of all through the blackened stools of the ancestors with the actions of the sacral ruler on the other, provided the matrix for the reception of the Golden Stool and the enthusiasm and conviction inspired by its cult. And while the destruction of the military and aggressive power of Kumasi, centred on an elaborate non-traditional bureaucratic administrative basis, by a more powerful similarly organised force, could be accepted without much difficulty within this world view, the power and prestige of the Golden Stool remain undiminished.

## **PART FOUR The Irish Festival of Lughnasa and the Akan Odwira**

### **Introduction**

This part of the central chapter of the study begins with an examination of both the literary references and the surviving folk-lore,- the customs and legends - relating to the fourth of the ancient quarterly sacred days of the Celtic year, which in Ireland bears the name of Lughnasa, the festival of Lugh, and attempts to understand its diachronic development. There follows a section giving some account of the Akan festival called *Odwira*. There are a number of traditional festivals celebrated among the Akan to this day which are of course of interest. In accordance with the overall plan of this comparative study the *Odwira* has been chosen for this somewhat selective account, because it combines in one occasion features which were also present in the festival of Lughnasa. For instance: (a) they are both annual events, taking place at a time relating to an indigenous calendar: the Irish one to correspond to the last of four quarter days in the year that is around August 1st, and the Akan at the time of "the new year", which is reckoned at the end of nine "months" of 40 to 42 days each, some time in September or October; (b) both are associated with the celebration of the First Fruits of the harvest: of grain and some wild fruits for the Irish, and the new yam for the Akan; and (c) there is evidence relating to both these festivals indicating their importance as an expression and demonstration of the centralising power of what in the early Irish context we would call "over-kings", (a *rí tuath* or *rí ruirech*) and among the Akan the "paramount chiefs"(the *amenhene*). And in the two centuries of the spreading Asante hegemony from Kumasi, until the banishment of the *Asantehene* Prempeh I and the Queen mother to the Seychelles by the British in 1896 when it was abolished,- never to be revived -, the most spectacular festival of all the territory (now Ghana) was the *Odwira* of the *Asantehene* in Kumasi.

Once again the comparative aspect of the study of these two festivals is not straightforward, for some at least of the reasons mentioned in the first chapter. However the first part of the section on the *Odwira* comes from Rattray's material on its celebration in Kumasi at the height of the Asante hegemony outwith any indigenous or foreign Christian influence, (which latter is of course something which is always present in the early Irish sources), while the rest is based largely on a partially eyewitness account of its celebration in 1993 in Akropong-Akuapem, a celebration which was always presided over by the paramount chief, who in this case is both a successful business man with a western university degree and a loyal and indeed a personally devout presbyterian. The much-loved Queenmother, Nana Dokua I who had already reigned for 26 years, and who was described to me as a "fiercely devout pentecostalist Christian,"<sup>522</sup> had, I was also told, exerted a gentle tactful influence over the years. The ongoing effects of 150 years of 'encounter with Christianity' was, I believe, discernable in this basically traditional celebration.

### **The Festival of Lughnasa as Celebration of Kingship**<sup>523</sup>

While the LGE ascribes to Lugh the beginning of Assembly in general, so it and *Dindshenchas* traditions mention specifically that Lugh was the originator of the *Óenach Tailten* the most highly documented Assembly of all. In all of the three entries in LGE Tailtiu is given as the name of Lugh's foster-mother whose grave is at the site, and **her games were made by Lug, a fortnight before Lughnasad and a fortnight after. Lughnasad, the assembly of Lug son of Eithne, is the name of the games.**<sup>524</sup> The two other LGE entries on the foundation of the *Óenach Tailten* give her a cosmogonic role being responsible for the clearing of the primeval wood **so that it became a flowery plain.** The *Dindshenchas* material including the alternative

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<sup>522</sup> The largest Christian body in Ghana.

<sup>523</sup> The material on this festival can be conveniently divided under two headings, the second of which draws considerably on Maire MacNeill's book *The Festival of Lughnasa* which has as its subtitle *A Study of the Survival of the Celtic Festival of the Beginning of the Harvest* (Oxford 1962), hereafter designated MM.

<sup>524</sup> LGE op. cit. Pt IV para 311. See also paras 330 & 363.

origin tale naming two of Lugh's wives as the Otherworld women in whose honour the funeral games were observed will be more fully discussed in Chapter Four.

“In the Fair of Tailtiu (*Óenach Tailten*)...we have a genuine historical institution, whose existence is attested in the annals from the eighth century onward and in other historical documents from the sixth<sup>525</sup>.” These words introduce Binchy's survey of the evidence, included in his seminal article “The Fair of Tailtiu and the Feast of Tara”<sup>526</sup> on the basis of which he proves that in spite of the claims of what is sometimes called the Uí Néill propaganda machine, which led later historians such as the 17th century Geoffrey Keating to regard *Óenach Tailten* as a nation-wide gathering of the men of Ireland, it was in effect a provincial assembly, but one of peculiar prestige. “It was in fact the most important fair in Ireland because it was held under the aegis of the king of Tara who, as titular head of all the Uí Néill kingdoms and their dependent tribes, was normally the most powerful monarch in Ireland.”<sup>527</sup> The cumulative effect of all the evidence from the Annals cited by Binchy together with the contents of the 59th stanza of the early 11th century poem by Cúán úa Lothcháin written to celebrate the holding of the *Óenach Tailten* at Lughnasa after a gap of 79 years is to indicate beyond doubt its importance as a celebration of kingly power par excellence. The passage from LGE, cited above, explaining that the

**Heart of Great Fál [that is the Stone of Knowledge] which was in Temair, whence all Ireland bears the name of "The Plain of Fál, ...under whom it should utter a cry was King of Ireland... flew out from it [from Temair] to Tailtiu, so that it is the Heart of Fál that is there; it was no chance that caused it, but Christ's being born, which broke the power of the idols,**

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<sup>525</sup> There is a well-known reference in Adomnán's *Life of Columba* R. Sharpe ed. and trans. (London 1995) iii.3 p.207, to the synod which excommunicated the saint as being held *hi Teilte* in Tailtiu. This perhaps is an example of an ad hoc assembly convened for a special purpose, at the provincial sacred site. This is of course in later tradition the occasion prompting Colum Cille's "exile" to Iona: see e.g. Herbert op.cit. pp.27f. and D.A. Binchy (next note, pp.122f)

<sup>526</sup> *Ériu* XVIII (1958) pp.113-138

<sup>527</sup> *idem* p.126. Earlier in this paragraph Binchy has written “But just before the opening of the historical period *Óenach n-Emna* (or *O.Macha*), the great fair of the Ulaid, may well have been the most important assembly of its kind.” He implies that the northern Uí Néill now controlling much of this “dismembered province” and continuing to regard Tailtiu as their principal “fair” or Assembly site contributed to the prestige of the *Óenach Tailten*.



neatly expresses the ‘doctrinal’ rationalisation of the situation.<sup>528</sup>

The recently completed geophysical survey of the ridge of Tara through which “the number of recognisable sites at Tara has been increased to almost forty” has not altered “the traditional view that the primary importance of the Hill of Tara was as a place of long-lived ceremonial significance”.<sup>529</sup> There is no archaeological evidence, so far, nor does anything in the literature suggest that Tara itself was the site of an “Assembly” or *Óenach* in the sense understood in the Laws. Moreover, generally speaking, events in Tara in the traditions, are connected with *Samhain*; and never with *Lughnasa*.

Tailtiu or Teltown is not the only Assembly site which owes its traditional origin to “funeral games” in honour of an Otherworld Woman whose grave is said to be on the site. The other *óenach* written up in the *Dindshenchas* tradition is *Óenach Carmain*<sup>530</sup> which is associated with Leinster, though its site is not certain. In this case the Woman responsible is an evil figure who with her three sons whose names are rendered **violent, black and evil** came from Athens . **So they went to Ireland to bring evil on the Túatha Dé Danaan by blighting the corn of this island upon them.** The sons were driven over seas<sup>531</sup> but Carman herself was “left as a hostage” and on her death-bed asked the TDD to **hold her óenach at her burial place, and that the fair and the place should always bear her name.** The very long and elaborate Metrical Ds<sup>532</sup> which incidentally makes some play on the theme of the women’s graves at the site tells us also that the *Óenach* was celebrated at Lughnasa..

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<sup>528</sup> The poem itself is a notable contribution towards the development of the doctrine of the primordial high-kingship of Ireland associated with Tara. It is often noted that while the poem is explicitly directed in praise of the poet’s patron Máel Sechnaill II the Uí Néill king of Tara who was holding the *Óenach Tailten* after such a long gap, it was after the latter had acknowledged the overlordship of Brían Bóruma, signalling the end of the centuries -old power of the Uí Néill.

<sup>529</sup> B.Raferly op.cit pp.69f.

<sup>530</sup> W.Stokes ed. “Prose stories in the Rennes Dindshenchas” RC. XV,pp. 311f..

<sup>531</sup> By a combination of a poet (*Ai Ollam* ) “a lampooner” called Cridenbél ( our old friend of the encounter with the Dagda in 2MT ) a druid with the name Lugh Laebach and a witch Bé cuille, also an echo of 2MT!

<sup>532</sup> This poem attributed to one Fulartach must be a potential source for anyone wishing to study the ‘development’ of the doctrines of the learned poets in the high middle ages. There is no time to mine it in the context of this study.

This is no place to repeat the evidence collected in a dense paragraph in MM which concludes the chapter called ‘The Ancient Assemblies’ relating to other *óenaige* mentioned in the literature indicating that “some of them, perhaps most of them, were Lughnasa assemblies”<sup>533</sup> The seven listed, of which three are in the south and west, are connected with Otherworld women, justifying the conclusion that “the similarity of name-type and origin-legend...suggests that all Oenachs named from entombed women of the otherworld were Lughnasa assemblies.” Further possible significance of this phenomenon will be explored in the next chapter.

### **The Festival of Lughnasa as Celebration of the First Fruits of the Harvest**

Meanwhile it is interesting to note that there is no reference in LGE to any connection between these festive gatherings around August 1st with the Harvest of the First Fruits, and very little elsewhere in the literature.<sup>534</sup> The entry in *Sanas Cormaic*, the Glossary of Cormac mac Cuilenan, the King-Bishop of Cashel (obit 908) on Lughnasad is however quite specific:

**Lughnasa i.e. the *násad* of Lugh son of Ethle i.e. an assembly held by him at the beginning of harvest each year with the coming of Lughnasa. *Násad* is a name for games or an assembly.**

It is perhaps not surprising that we should owe this simple corroboration of the seasonal aspect of Lughnasa Assemblies to a king of Cashel who would be free of the obsessive political preoccupation with the prestige of Tairtiu and its *óenach* characteristic of “Conn’s Half” and the Tara centred tradition.

At this point the considerable contribution both to the study of Lugh and Lughnasa and to their “encounter” with Christianity made by Máire MacNeill’s book *The Festival of Lughnasa*<sup>535</sup> must be examined. The rich material it brings together of memories culled from every corner of Ireland (with glimpses of other parts of the

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<sup>533</sup> MM adds that “this deduction is based on inference not on stated fact.”

<sup>534</sup> My authority for this is MM who refers to this fact more than once. Quotation from *Sanas Cormaic* is translated by M. MacNeill idem 2f.

<sup>535</sup> See note above.

once Celtic world) provides real insight into the essentially local and stationary world of the early mediaeval Irish *bóaire*, the freehold farmer, and of the *dóer*, unfree, his dependents and neighbours, and of the woman folk, for whom the beginning of the harvest in a good year must have been a time of wholehearted joy, in spite of the residual fear of the onset of disease, such as varieties of blight. She cites a valuable early reference to the celebration of the beginning of the harvest season<sup>536</sup> showing Columcille allowing a regular “festivity and merrymaking to the brethren” when the crops they had tended reached full growth. She also refers to a passage in Adomnán’s Life of Columba. Barley seed had been sent by Columba to a peasant in June, with instructions to him to plant it after ploughing, with the message:

**Let that man trust in the omnipotence of God. His crop, although sown after fifteen days of the month of June have passed, will be reaped in the beginning of the month of August.**

The crop was duly reaped fully ripe, “in the beginning of August.... according to the saint’s word.”<sup>537</sup> These two references certainly suggest recognition and acceptance in the world of settled monastic establishments of the holiness of the connection between the First Fruits of the earth’s harvest and the ancient festival day of Lughnasa.

In the course of this study, the absence of information about pre-Christian ritual in the literary sources used, has been a notable difficulty. A thorough study of MM, for which the sources are “mere” folklore, brilliantly collated by its author, reveals, I believe, some valuable clues and hints, not incompatible with what we have glimpsed in those same sources. The bulk of the book is taken up with a detailed analysis of over a thousand pages of replies to a questionnaire sent out in 1942 by the Irish Folklore Commission to interested persons, together with material from such sources as antiquarian and travel writings. From her study of all this, Máire MacNeill has been able to name 197 sites where festal gatherings have been held until quite recent times, either on the Sunday before August 1st or the Sunday after. Many of the local replies to the questionnaire mention customs reminiscent of those to be met with

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<sup>536</sup> *idem* p.3 quoted from E.Gwynn “The Monastery of Tallaght”, *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* vol.xxix (1911) p.156.

<sup>537</sup> Quoted from bk ii 3.

in the literature such as those listed for the Patron of Cloghane: “the great assembly of the year in the Dingle Peninsula, within the memory of the old generation...a day of games, athletics, vaulting over horses, dancing, singing and courtship, of faction-fighting and feasting.”<sup>538</sup> There are also a large number of customs surviving in living memory relating to the “first fruits of the harvest” commonly, as one would expect of maincrop potatoes, but also of grain, and even the formation of fishing crews for the season etc., with the corollary that the safety of the crop depends on waiting for Lughnasa. The majority of these sites are on or near commanding heights, with a smaller number at lake or river sides<sup>539</sup>, and another group associated with holy wells. The author gives about 200 pages to the texts of surviving legends relating to these festival days under 24 “type” headings. There is also a list of variant names for the celebration in local tradition, attached to the appropriate Sunday.

MM does not claim that her lists of sites cover all possible Assembly sites in Ireland; nor does she claim to have proved that each represents the place and date of the regular *óenach* of the *tíath* or of a group of *tíatha* as summoned by the appropriate king. Indeed she gives a separate list in an Appendix (II) of assemblies at Holy Wells where patrons take place or are remembered to have taken place on August 1st or on the Sunday before or after, suggesting that this, in some cases may not have been the original place of assembly. However the evidence behind these lists is surely impressive enough to establish her thesis that the fourth of the quarterly ancient seasonal Celtic festivals, which we know to have been celebrated with great yearly assemblies at certain provincial sites around the First of August (the month of *Lughnasa* in Ireland) was almost certainly also observed in a similar way in every *tíath* in Ireland.

Basic to MM and to the author’s main conclusions from it is her isolation of the elements of a harvest myth in 2MT of a struggle between gods in which the secret of agricultural prosperity is wrested from a powerful and reluctant god by Lugh. This struggle between two adversaries, usually called St Patrick and Crom Dubh is the

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<sup>538</sup> MM p.104

<sup>539</sup> Not surprisingly there tends to be more emphasis on horse-racing in such sites including swimming the horses.

dominant theme of the hundreds of surviving popular legends relating to the Lughnasa Festival sites. The saint's role in the stories is that of a clever newcomer endowed with superior<sup>540</sup> wit or power, (sometimes of prayer ) who “enters the domain of the established lord and gets possession of the lord's wealth, often of his bull or his corn and occasionally of a woman of his household.”<sup>541</sup> The outwitted opponent is often described as a “pagan”, and not surprisingly the most fruitful places for the survival of legends and customs are those which have been taken over as mountain pilgrimage sites<sup>542</sup> together with a few more which have been kept alive where the patronal celebration of the local parish coincides with one of the Lughnasa Sundays, - “a circumstance readily understood as the theme of struggle and victory lent itself parabolically to the triumph of Christianity over Paganism.”<sup>543</sup> Reading through the chapter just quoted called “The Associated Legend-Types” in which the contents of the huge body of legends (of which details are given earlier in the main body of the book and in an Appendix) are collated under 23 headings, it is clear that the majority of them contain echoes of a “struggle” between two gods.<sup>544</sup>

**“ The most striking thing about the folk-tradition of the Lughnasa assemblies is the absence of Lugh. How is it that in the corpus of folk-legend surviving about his festival there is no mention of him? Surely he must have been the most important actor in the myths these legends spring from?...Lugh would certainly have had the role of victor, as St Patrick has....If we restore Lugh to the role taken by Saint Patrick, the legends acquire a new meaning.”<sup>545</sup>**

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<sup>540</sup> Cormac Dubh is one of the local variants of this name. Not surprisingly, in Dingle the operative saint is St Brendan.

<sup>541</sup> MM p.409.

<sup>542</sup> Croagh Patrick in Mayo where thousands still perform the pilgrimage on the Sunday before August 1st, Slieve Donard the highest peak of the Mourne Mountains, Church Mountain in Co. Wicklow and Mount Brandon in the Dingle peninsula (see above). It may be worthy of note that each of these four are situated in one of the Four Provinces.

<sup>543</sup> idem 392. MM adds here that the saint's adversary is sometimes “described in terms from much later times...such as ‘Sasanach mór’, ‘Protastúnach mór’..etc”

<sup>544</sup> Some mention is made of those legends where the “adversary” of the saint is female in Chapter Four.

<sup>545</sup> MM herself points out that while the name of Lugh is absent in the “popular traditions of the assembly-sites, Fionn was often named in them, although seldom as a chief actor. She refers to local hill names such as Seefin, and notes that the name “Fionnlugh occurs in the genealogies of several saint-actors in the legends.”

So begins the chapter in MM 'The Myths in the Legends'.

Who then was Crom Dubh, who has given his name to the Sunday nearest to Lughnasa, and indeed of all the various local names of the festival Domnach Chrom Dubh was the most widely used?<sup>546</sup> The name which suggests the meaning "dark bent one" does not appear in the early literature as a name of a mythological divine figure (though it seems to have been well-known in the early 12<sup>th</sup> century as a name for the Lughnasa Sunday.<sup>547</sup>) MM sees him as representing several personages such as Bres, the Dagda, Núadu and Balor; and it is of interest that "the name is unknown in Donegal" which is of course the traditional home of Balor where legends recalling the Balor /Lugh myth were preserved.<sup>548</sup> The details supplied with reference to the Patron at Cloghane at the foot of Mount Brandon (see quotation above) state that it "was instituted, tradition said, to commemorate the day on which the pagan Crom Dubh was converted to Christianity...A stone carving,formerly kissed as a cure for toothache, in the wall of a local church is said to represent his head." An entry in the Ordnance Survey Books for the parish of Clahaan (Cloghane), dated 1841, states "that Croum Dhu was the god of the harvest whom the pagans worshipped until they were converted by St Brendan". Crom Dubh has also been identified in the past with Crom Croich of the Rennes Ds Mag Slecht<sup>549</sup> tale which explains Magh Slecht as "the plain of prostrations," in which the latter is described as the **king-idol of Erin...surrounded by twelve other "idols", and receiving animal and human sacrifices, until Patrick's advent.**

To quote MM again "On the evidence of the the folk-legends...Crom Dubh is not a subordinate - he has all the appearance of a chief god." She notes that he is in possession of the heights; of the bull, which figures in three large groups of legends;

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<sup>546</sup> See idem Appendix V pp.659f

<sup>547</sup> idem p.17 MM's references include . *Annals of the Four Masters'* record of the murder 1117 (1118) of the Abbot of Kells on the "eve of Crom Dubh Sunday."

<sup>548</sup> idem p.31. Crom Dubh also appears to be unknown in the area of South Kerry and West Cork dominated by the paps of Anu in which the two sites Cullen Well and Drung Hill are associated with trios of women. idem p. 413.

<sup>549</sup> op. cit (no.85) p.35. See also in *Met Ds IV* p.22 and in *The Tripartite Life* where "the chief idol is called Cenn Croich.: cited in MM from Rees and Rees op.cit. p.196.

of the corn in another group; he controls the weather; he may be responsible in some of the variants of the legend of the baleful light which killed everyone who saw it until Saint Patrick came and extinguished it, a legend with a “widespread distribution” etc. MM poses the question, “how can a chief god be defeated?” adding “the application of the myth to the victory of Christianity over Paganism may have given a permanency to the defeat which it had not originally. Was not the myth repeated each year? And may not the dispossession have been brief, perhaps co-terminous with the time of the festival?”<sup>550</sup> Her further speculations based on such rich material are all of interest, but there can only be space here for a brief reference to the many bull legends, one group of which tell of a bull which is butchered, skinned, eaten and resuscitated. A version of this tale, the earliest one extant, appears in Muirchú’s *Life of Patrick*, indicating, as MM points out that the “adaptation of the myth to hagiographical anecdote” had already happened by the 7<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>551</sup>

It is of interest that both here (and in the *Vita Tripartita*) the animal restored to life is the local magnate’s horse and not his bull as in the folk-legends. It seems possible that here, in the 7th century, we are in touch with the Iron Age of chariot warriors and horsemen, the age of Phase 4 of Emain Macha, and of the 2 kilometres of roadway across the Corlea bog in Co. Longford recently excavated, whose timbers, after dendrochronological analysis in 1985, showed a felling date of 148 BC.<sup>552</sup> This piece of roadway has been revealed as a gigantic undertaking “comparable to the effort involved in the...building of the great royal centres” and “more massive” than the only similar roads in prehistoric Europe, found in former peatland in lower Saxony, and well able to accomodate wheeled vehicles.<sup>553</sup> This fact together with the

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<sup>550</sup> idem pp.409f

<sup>551</sup> idem p. 393. cf. Beiler, *The Patrician Texts of the Book of Armagh*. Muirchú I 24=Bii 6 (1) p.109

<sup>552</sup> B. Raftery 1994 98-111. The chapter is headed by the description in *The Wooing of Etain*: of the building of a causeway over a bog, one of the tasks imposed on: Midir: **Into the bottom of the causeway they kept pouring a forest with its trunks and its roots, Midir standing and urging on the hosts on every side.** The archaeologist adds “Building a road such as that at Corlea was indeed a hero’s task.” For the one kilometre a minumum of 200-300 large oak trees and as many birch trees together with more than 5000 pegs were required . (The saga gives its own explanation why Midir’s road was never finished! Gantz op.cit. 54)

<sup>553</sup> Raftery idem 103f

prevalence of metal horse-bits, one of the few archaeological collections indicating the La Tène “period” of influence associated with the ‘Northern Half’ of Ireland is part of the corroborative evidence for the significance of the magnate’s horse in this context. For the Patrician hagiographical works themselves are using material springing specifically from the encounter of Christianity with the dominant powers, both human and transhuman, in Ulster and among its rivals in 5th and early 6th century Ireland. The bull legends, preserved into the beginning of this century in the intensely local, unchanging rural communities of Irish-speaking areas have their roots, it would appear, in truly pre-historic times.<sup>554</sup> Material cited in Chapter Four should give strength to such a supposition. The basic pattern of the legends is of course undoubtedly the same, the reflex of a myth of death and resurrection, sacrifice resulting in new life, and as MM argues, strong hints of a ritual, apparently associated with the festival celebrated at the end of the summer and the beginning of winter.

While there is as far as I can see, no hint of such a ritual in the literary material on the *Óenaige*, other perhaps than what may be hidden in the “contesting at Assembly” the origin of which LGE attributes to Lugh, there must surely be some very important significance of this nature in the consistency of the presence of the grave of an Otherworld Woman in the origin stories of the more prestigious of the Lughnasa Assemblies. This area of enquiry is tackled in the next chapter.

### **The Odwira Festival among the Akan**

Bowdich’s famous eyewitness account of the *Odwira*, in Kumasi<sup>555</sup> which he called the Yam Custom, published in 1819 deeply impressed, as well as horrifying, (chiefly by the number of slaves he saw killed in its honour), its wide readership with the very real power of the Kumasi dominated Asante Union.

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<sup>554</sup> Lugh of course is depicted in our 9th century sources as both a horseman and a spear-throwing chariot warrior.

<sup>555</sup> Rattray includes an extract from this in *Religion and Art in Ashanti* (1927) claiming that for the “uninitiated” spectator the “proper sequence of events...and the *raison d’être* for this rite” are obscured, “by the tumult, the barbaric pomp, the splendid, sometimes ghastly scenes, the marching and counter-marching of thousands...”



That Asante tradition, Rattray tells us, credits 'Komfo Anoyke with the foundation of the *Odwira*<sup>556</sup> is not surprising in this context. Indeed Rattray's account of its meaning emphasises its significance as a cleansing and renewal of those sources and instruments of sacral power sustaining the complex socio-political-military web centred in, and integrated by, the Golden Stool of the *Asantehene*.<sup>557</sup> The Asante *Odwira* festival then, according to Rattray's informants, "was an annual ceremony held in September in honour and propitiation of the Ashanti kings who had 'gone elsewhere', and for the cleansing of the whole nation from defilement." *Odwira* means purification or cleansing, and is actually the name of a *suman*, which is, as we have seen above, a composite object made up of natural ingredients believed to be imbued with characteristic and dangerous power, whose function in this case is specifically for ritual cleansing. This *suman* is said, on the one hand, to date from the reign of Osai Tutu, Anokye's patron, and on the other, to be "more ancient than the Golden Stool". The need for cleansing and renewal was clearly felt as a preparation for both a new year, and for the first fruits of the longed for harvest of an original staple food as the wild yam had been. Cultivated yam is still a main ingredient of the national dish of *fufu* and the proper vegetable food to offer to the ancestors, either with or without palm oil. Thus while Rattray's "white-haired Ashanti informant" was concerned to emphasise the glories of past *Odwira* festivals as celebrations of supreme chiefly power, Rattray himself has to add that "it was a feast of the dead, very closely associated with the crops and the first-fruits."

Against this background it is of interest to return to the non-Asante traditional area or *oman* of Akuapem, especially as we have already given a brief 'historical' account of its formation in the thirties of the 18th century,<sup>558</sup> which indicated the overriding need, felt by all involved, for a unifying network of institutions and

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<sup>556</sup> Rattray 1929 p.279; and 1927 p.127f

<sup>557</sup> i.e. the purification of the "shrines of ancestral spirits of the gods, and of lesser non-human spirits" : loc.cit.

<sup>558</sup> This was based on the text of the official brochure issued under the authority of the **Ofori Stool**, which is of course the Stool of the Paramountcy (but is also that of the incoming Akyem "warlords" with whom the Abotakyi accord was made by the local independent disparate groups) for the 1992 celebration of the *Odwira* in Akropong.

constituent rituals to provide security against neighbouring aggressive ‘kingdoms’. Some reference was made in ch.2 pt 2 to the original Guan Annual Festival, called in Guan *Bba* (meaning sewing together) and *Ohum* in Twi, which has not been forgotten. The Revd S.K.Aboa<sup>559</sup>, himself a Guan, kindly gave me a contemporary summary of this festival, celebrated by all Guan towns:

**During the *Ohum* (new yam) festival the gods and ancestors are fed. This is to show gratitude for good harvest and preservation of the farmers during the past year and to ask for more blessing for the succeeding year from the rain-God, and other deities and the ancestors.<sup>560</sup> The stools are regarded as guardian spirits or powers to which the community owes its existence and unity and are worshipped and sacrifices are made to them, like the deities, at the *Ohum* festival. they are washed or cleaned and re-seasoned for longer preservation.<sup>561</sup>**

Under the heading Extra Significance of the *Ohum* Festival, this ‘text’ continues:

**The *Ohum* festival is a time for: (a) Rest from farming activities (b) Renewal of citizens’ loyalty to the traditional authority, state and tutelary deities and ancestors; (c) Remembering the dead : (d) Renewal. of family ties; (e) Settling of family/ individual quarrels; (f) Contracting and dissolving marriages (e) Making new contacts and friends.**

During an evening in the Rev.S.K.Aboa’s house built on the site of the Abotakyi Accord, he described a ritual during the *Ohum* festival in his own town Mampong-Akuapem, (which includes the site of the once “great” town of Abotakyi,) whereby the “clan heads”<sup>562</sup> each bring a pot of palm wine which is then poured into a huge pot, stirred round and then served to each one, movingly signifying and enabling their unity for the coming year. Nowadays of course superimposed on the structures

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<sup>559</sup> See note above.

<sup>560</sup> This special mention of a locally named “rain-god” is noteworthy. The presence of stools here also adds to the evidence that these had already been adopted into Guan ritual before the Akan hierarchy took over.

<sup>561</sup> The Revd Aboa added at this point: - **In actual fact the stools are symbols of remembrance of past and successful chiefs and are preserved to inspire future chiefs to emulate their good and successful forerunners.** This statement indicates that the writer belongs to the school of thought of those who are working diligently towards the healing of the breach between the Christian churches and the traditional chieftaincy to which the *Okuapehene*, Addo Dankwa III, the paramount chief of Akuapem, also belongs.

<sup>562</sup> See information on these personages in section on the “gods of Larteh” in ch.2pt2.whose role in this ritual belongs to their original priestly functions which included “political” headship.

ritualised and preserved in the *Ohum* is the system of wing chiefs owing allegiance to the Paramount Chief in Akropong. Each of these also celebrate their own *Odwira* in addition, being also expected to attend the central celebration of the Omanhene of Akuapem in the “capital Akropong”.

There follows some account of the *Odwira* as celebrated in Akropong-Akuapem in 1993 from Monday September 20th to Sunday 26th, some of the more public parts of which we were privileged to see. In common with all annual celebrations of the “outdooing of the New Yam” including the one just mentioned, the central Akuapem *Odwira* is preceded by a forty day ban on drumming and dancing singing weeping and all forms of noise and also on funerals (which are not, of course, coincident with the burial of the body), which is a time of fasting for those officiating. *Osadeeyo* Nana Dankwa III, the *Omanhene* of Akropong - Akuapem, when telling us this added:

**We are entering the new year and we believe that you will only have a more prosperous year if you cast away all bad aspects of your life and enter the new year a clean person. Hence the name *odwira* which means purification...and the purification has so many dimensions, social, political, religious, and other dimensions. For instance, the social aspect: if during the year there were some misunderstandings between members of the family we try as much as possible to become reconciled. If there have been political misunderstandings among the chiefs, every chief must come and renew his allegiance before he enters the new year. Then I can deal with that person without any division.**<sup>563</sup>

However, even in Akropong, and even in the official Brochure of the 1993 **Akuapem Odwira Festival** it is clear that the *odwira*, after which the festival is named, is itself a sacred object or power, as in previous times in Kumasi.. The programme of events begins on the Monday with the clearing of the pathway leading to the royal mausoleum outside the town

**so that the ancestors may come in and eat and also to keep the lines of communication open between the living and the ancestors so that the ancestors may travel home without hindrances.**

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<sup>563</sup> It must be said that the peculiar history of Akuapem has made this sound rather like wishful thinking. Even within the last months (1994) there has been renewed tension and actual physical strife between the variant groups within the *Okuapehene*'s traditional area.

On Tuesday, the day starts with the **“Bringing in of the Odwira”**, when certain hereditary officials go to the Amamprobi royal mausoleum early in the morning to

**usher in the ‘Odwira’. Later in the afternoon, the group returns from Amamprobi with a purifying, strengthening mixture which has been prepared. They also bring other sacred materials, all combining to form the symbol representing the Odwira which is ceremonially presented to the Okuapehene.**

At this point the ban on drumming etc. is lifted with the obvious cheerful result!

**The New Yam crop is then introduced to the people. This ceremony takes the form of a mock battle or struggle during which the young men of the town compete in breaking, with their fists pieces of the yam and scattering them on the main streets of Akropong.**

This signalled the lifting of the official taboo on eating of the new yam, although the ancestors were not to be fed with it until two days later!<sup>564</sup>

On this day we were taken by our guide, a lecturer in the Presbyterian Teacher Training College, and a daughter of an Akropong royal lineage, to witness the *odwira* being celebrated in her own matrilineal household presided over by her uncle, a sub-chief of the Centre, by his *okyeame* and elders, on behalf of his lineage members gathered there. This involved (though we could not of course understand the words used) the invoking (or inviting) of the lineage or stool ancestors, with pouring of libation, and we presumed, with prayer to *Onyame/Onyankopon* etc.<sup>565</sup> and

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<sup>564</sup> This anomaly is as I see it one of the signs of a careful knitting together of rituals originally of different “ethnic” origins. However, I am reliably informed that this taboo against eating the new yam prematurely is not kept up by many folk who would yet be careful not to carry it openly in the streets! The custom of staging a mock struggle for the New Yam suggests a possible comparison with “contesting at Assembly” and its possible survival in the faction fights in the Lughnasa survival customs which would be interesting, especially if it were to throw light on the significance of either!

<sup>565</sup> The officiating *okyeame* spoke for some time at this point, no doubt exhibiting his eloquent grasp of the traditional forms. Nana Addo Dankwa in his lectures to the students in the Presbyterian seminary explains that **“In the olden days, the best exponents of our culture were...the mediums or Fetish priests...The excellent manner in which the appropriate words follow each other when an Osofo was pouring libation in the olden days was the envy of any Okyeame who aspired to excel in his work...it has been a mark of eloquence, deeply appreciated, if Okyeame, in pouring libation, is able to name as many of the deities as possible...At times, however, some of the words accompanying libation are not appropriate to the occasion.”** Nana urges Akyeame “with

the sacrifice of a sheep, the solemn laving by such persons present who were not inhibited by their Christian conscience, (as our guide apparently was), with water from a large bowl in which purifying leaves were steeping, the whole accompanied by an enthusiastic drum band including several young boy players, and followed by dramatic dancing by some senior individuals. Two days later we returned to the the same house for a ceremony which involved the sacrifice of another sheep,<sup>566</sup> a visit by the chief and the queenmother and another official, to the “stool room”, an alcove behind a curtain in the courtyard where all were sitting, presumably in order to place before the stools parts of the sacrifice and the new yam already roasting in a ceremonial fire, and the anointing of the chief with some blood from the sacrifice. I presume, that after we left, the lineage members who remained would share in the roasted sheep and the new yam. Being allowed to witness the *Odwira* in this confined and family context did reveal some of the real ongoing tensions of the contemporary ‘encounter’.

Wednesday is devoted from dawn onwards to general mourning in remembrance of dead relatives expressed by **weeping and wailing and drinking** but in many houses no cooking of food. At midday **the *Okuapehene* sits in state with his elders to receive condolences from all comers** and thereafter himself with entourage visits **all stool occupants in Akropong to offer his condolences**. Events on Thursday and Friday involve the Akuapem chiefs from outside Akropong who come **to renew their allegiance to the paramount Stool**. Before dawn on Thursday under

**security precautions the Black Stools are taken to the ‘Adami’ stream for ritual purification, which is done to symbolise the cleansing of the traditional area and the people.**

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**Christian backgrounds... to try to omit from prayers words having any reference to an Obosom without obliterating the basic traditional norms.**

<sup>566</sup> Apparently a sheep, because of its manifestly peaceable and conformable behaviour and gentle spirit was regarded as the most suitable animal for sacrifice in such a corporate ritual whose main purpose is the re-establishment of harmonious relationships within the *abusua*, including both the living and the dead, and within the larger community of the *Oman*. There are plenty of instances where a summary sacrifice of a sheep is required, often to propitiate the powers concerned for a breaking of a taboo, mentioned by Rattray. (See also in account given by the Revd S.K.Aboa in ch. 2 pt 2 where it is the spirit of the Earth which is liable to take vengeance.)

Rattray's descriptions of this event in other areas indicate that normally the paramount chief would himself, together with the Stools of his Ancestors, undergo purification in the local sacred river. In the afternoon bowls of mashed yam, some mixed with that other staple, palm oil, are carried in procession to feed the ancestors in their final resting place outside the town. The young girls from royal lineages who are chosen to carry them had by the time they arrived almost all, as we saw, become **possessed by the spirits of the ancestors** and had to be held up by their escorts.<sup>567</sup>

We were also present that evening when the *Omanhene*, once more sitting in state, received gifts, mainly of drink<sup>568</sup> and  **blessings and good wishes from his elders in turns,**<sup>569</sup> which, so the Brochure explains, **signifies the solidarity of the elders to the Ofori Stool and its occupant.** This was a happy occasion, with some powerful and elaborate drumming and dramatic dancing by some of the most senior and eminent persons present, all obviously directed towards the *Omanhene*, and all clearly conveying complex meaning. While we had been waiting for the *Omanhene* to appear<sup>570</sup> a single drummer was keeping the cognoscenti laughing by the messages he was giving with his small drum. At one point in the proceedings one of the royal bearers of the food for the ancestors still in an ecstatic state, was escorted up to the chief's throne and placed on his knees.

The brief notice of the final event of this day in the brochure seems to be very carefully worded:

**Night Curfew: The adoration ceremony of 'Odosu'<sup>571</sup> by the traditional executioners is performed at night. Gong-gong is beaten to impose curfew on the whole town to enable the Banhumene and his executioners perform this ceremony. This curfew is strictly observed.**

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<sup>567</sup> In the old days the feeding of the ancestors would have been accompanied by the "gift" of several prisoners of war or condemned criminals to serve the ancestors.

<sup>568</sup> It was pointed out to us that gifts to the *Okuapehema*, Nana Dokua, were all soft drinks, in deference to her Pentecostalist convictions.

<sup>569</sup> The "blessing" was given by queenmothers also and took the form of taking liquid (palm wine or water probably) into the mouth and spraying it towards the seated *Omanhene*. Apparently this ritual had been recently modified, as "unhygienic", but although the blesser was at a safe distance from the throne there was applause and laughter for those whose "blessing" reached nearest to the chief. Spit, as we have seen is a vehicle of the *sunsum* or personality soul.

<sup>570</sup> The greater the personage the longer he is expected to keep lesser folk waiting.

<sup>571</sup> I did not find out what or "who" Odosu is.

Among the beautifully dressed urbane court officials, sub-chiefs and queenmothers crowding the palace for the festival the executioners seem incongruous with their drab, ragged clothes, and the unease that their vigilant ubiquitous presence inspired, for instance, in our guide. We realised afterwards that they were chiefly watching for violations of taboos connected with the presence chamber of the *Omanhene* and the sacred protocol governing all proceedings; offences which in the old days could well have required the executioners to perform their traditional role on the spot. Their role like that of most traditional officials is hereditary, and on a day when the ancestors seem to be responding to the invitation to participate in the festival by taking possession of some of their 'great nieces', and when the executioners were preparing for their annual secret rites, it is not surprising that tales were being told of their sinister side. No one, however highly educated, would choose to break that curfew.

**The highlight of the festival, which is the Grand Durbar of the Chiefs,** was indeed remarkably impressive in its combination of archaic and living pomp and circumstance so long after executive power in a political sense had become nationalised, as it were: so much so that one wonders if the magniloquence of the bardic descriptions in the Metrical Ds of the *óenaige* of Taitiu and Carman, dating from a time also at some distance from the long period of their real power, does deserve such scepticism as is normally given to it. The brochure provides a description of precisely what we saw.<sup>572</sup>Some extracts from it follow.

**The Durbar...begins at noon with the royal procession of the Okuapehene, the Okuapehema and all the chiefs and elders from the area's five divisions. They are borne aloft in stately palanquins and hammocks amidst stately cultural displays, and fanfares meant to usher in the traditional New Year. The position of each chief, elder, noble or attendant, his or her dress or paraphernalia indicates ranks and roles. Each chief is accompanied by a large following .**

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<sup>572</sup> There was one interesting departure from tradition; the main proceedings were held in the Christian quarter in the huge playing fields of the Teachers Training College for the first time instead of crammed into the place of meeting under the main *gyedua* in front of the palace. In spite of some fears of the Ancestors' disapproval all went well and the rain held off.

There is plenty of mirth and jollity. Drums crash in deafening booms, women and children dance hilariously. They cheer and shout madly while waving white cloths and handkerchiefs and screaming appellations. The men sing war songs while some fire musketry intermittently into the sky, all pointing to a celebration charged with ecstasy, enthusiasm and spontaneity. The impressive procession is a spectacular drama, showing the ancient war formation of the ancestors, all at once militant and serious, playful and entertaining.

As the procession moves, in slow majestic paces, thunderous drum ensembles follow every group...as the chiefs rock in their gaily-decorated palanquins, slashing about with their swords...In some of the chiefs' entourage are the elephant tusk-made horn blowers who eulogise them with their tunes. The chiefs respond by waving their swords and enliven the affair by dancing... (in their palanquins!)

Meanwhile scores of gold-plated swords, staffs,<sup>573</sup> fly whisks and buoyant ceremonial umbrellas add to the dazzle of the colourful costumes.<sup>574</sup> The Okuapehene's entourage can be easily identified... by the thickness of his following, a two-tiered umbrella and a holy boy<sup>575</sup> wearing a feathered crown...(who) sits in front of the Okuapehene... At the head of the procession were the *abrafo*, or "executioners", their faces smeared with customary clay and clad in battle-weary, sometimes blood-

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<sup>573</sup> The senior *akyeame* carry ancient ceremonial staffs some of them which we saw with solid gold emblems on top of them. All such in common with all the golden regalia worn by most of the chiefs etc in the Durbar carried significant meanings, not all of them it would seem still understood, though some referred to well-known proverbs.

<sup>574</sup> Many of them made of the very beautiful many coloured traditional *kente* cloth. .

<sup>575</sup> This child is called *okra* or "soul"- that is the "life-soul", one of the constituents of the Akan (human) psyche. Professor Opoku had told us that "every *okra* is pure and remains pure until it contaminates itself", so presumably it is this proper state of the chief's '*kra* which the child embodies, which perhaps explains why this "holy" child was to be seen at the *Omanhene*'s feet on all the ceremonial occasions at which we were present, except at the more or less private one on the Friday called *fida fofie*, a week after the Durbar. This ritual at which an official called the *Okarahene* together with five other *akara* officiated was clearly as we realised from the proceedings the "washing of the Chief's '*kra*. One does not hear of such a ritual being thought necessary for others; only for the one who sits on the stool of his royal Ancestors who like the blackened Stools themselves must be cleansed free from all the sources of contamination seen and unseen to begin the New Year safely. The ritual was of great interest; suffice it to say here that it included libation and a sharing in the bottle of spirits used by *okara*, *okyeame* and elders present, ending with the *Omanhene* who, when he had drunk poured a few drops at the four corners of his chair. After this the *okarahene* who had placed ten or twelve eggs in a bowl of water with the usual leaves in it, took one egg and broke it at the Chief's feet, then took the bowl to the Chief who took an egg and passed it round his head and another with which he touched his mouth three times, and taking a twig from the bowl sprinkled water on his face, head and shoulders, which was imitated by all. Even without understanding the spoken liturgy in which all joined, the symbolism of water and cleansing leaves, and of the eggs renewing the life/'*kra* of the sacral ruler; was a moving and accessible experience for the foreign observers.



stained tunics. This overwhelming sight of the 'abrafo' is an adequate arrangement to pave the way through the milling crowds.<sup>576</sup>

...The durbar is conducted in a formal protocol order. After brief drumming and dancing session, the senior linguist<sup>577</sup> is called upon to pour libation for the prosperity of the State and all present. Earlier, a pastor from the orthodox<sup>578</sup> Christian church opens the proceedings with a Christian prayer to ask God's blessings and guidance for a peaceful New Year and a year of abundance for the State.

The theme of the speeches which followed were related apparently to the development plans and projects for the traditional area of Akuapem, including the bestowal of the Akuapem Award to certain prominent citizens. The keynote speech was delivered by the President of the Republic of Ghana, the guest of Honour on this occasion.<sup>579</sup>

The programme for the Odwira Kwasida (Sunday) included the following:

**The Okuapehene, his chiefs and people attend a service in thanksgiving to the Almighty God and take part in an Odwira Harvest, part of the proceeds of which are used in financing development projects in the Oman.<sup>580</sup>**

We attended the Service in the main large presbyterian church in Akropong which took about five hours, the last hour of which was presided over by the *Okuapehene* himself and was taken up with the giving of supplementary offerings for the furnishing and future maintenance of a magnificent Youth Centre donated by a wealthy church

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<sup>576</sup> In Bowdich's account of the Kumasi *Odwira* the *abrafo* in the procession are referred to as follows: **A group of painted figures are dancing up to the king beating time with long knives on the skulls** (of slain enemies of the *Asantehene*) **stuck full of thyme**, (to give protection from the *sasa* or dangerous aspect of the dead warrior's psyche). These skulls figured largely in the paraphernalia of the *Asantehene* especially evident, it would seem, during the *odwira*. As noted before, the skulls (sometimes just the lower jaw-bones) of defeated enemies, seemed to be regarded by the Akan in their "heroic age" in the same light as is shown in the Irish sagas and in reports of classical ethnographers on the Celts of the European continent.

<sup>577</sup> The word "linguist" to indicate the *okyeame* was invented by the British, and is obviously misleading. I was told that the prayers offered on this occasion by the *okyeame* did not contain any address to an *obosom*.

<sup>578</sup> A common designation for a "mission founded church"; another is "historic"

<sup>579</sup> This is the formerly military Head of State, known as Flt Lt Jerry Rawlings, who in spite of agreeing to a democratic civilian Constitution, followed by democratic elections, has contrived to remain in power. There were interesting *vibes* present in that huge crowd of spectators, but this is no place to discuss them.

<sup>580</sup> In the interview he gave us the *Okuapehene* emphasised the obligation of all the children of the *Oman* to contribute to such projects on the occasion of the *odwira*.

member, and dedicated during the service. Nana Addo Danquah III showed himself to be a brilliantly successful fund-raiser! This active patronage of this considerable venture to enhance the life of his people, would no doubt be satisfying to him as the 'grandson' or ("great grand nephew") of the first Addo Dankwa, whose purpose he feels bound and indeed enabled to fulfil.

### Some Comparative Comments

As noted in the introduction to this concluding part of the chapter, both the festivals discussed have a twofold significance. Both include a thanksgiving for the First Fruits of the land with undertones of a ritual of deep religious / cosmological significance; and in both cultures, viewed diachronically, this basically agricultural festival has been taken over by the need for a ritual celebrating and validating the centralising power of the sacral ruler. There are indications that this development occurred in response to the exigencies of an heroic (or militarised) age, with its earliest beginnings sparsely documented for both peoples, as far as the historian is concerned.

The history of the Akuapem *Oman* provides something of an exception, since its origins are historically documented. The summary account of the Guan *Ohum* quoted in this section, viewed against the background of the attempt to sketch a picture of the culture of the Guan town of Larteh in ch.2 pt2, could be said perhaps to show the Akuapem *odwira* as a conscious attempt to integrate all the essentials of New Year ritual, **when the edges of the years have come round**<sup>581</sup>. The next chapter on the 'female principle' in the religious history and experience of the two peoples being studied, contains some discussion relevant to this theme, particularly with reference to the prehistorical origins of the festival called Lughnasa, but it is certainly striking how clearly the above material on the festivals shows a similar demoting of the original agricultural/seasonal purpose in the two annual ritual

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<sup>581</sup> These words are cited from Rattray 1927 p.127 in his account of the (discontinued ) traditions of the *Odwira* of Kumasi. The extract from the *Asantehene's* address to the Ancestors in their mausoleum in Kumasi runs: "**The edges of the years have come round, we are about to celebrate the rites of the *odwira*; do not permit any evil at all to come upon us and let the new year meet us peacefully.**"

celebrations. One big difference, already noticed in general terms, between the cosmology or world view of the two peoples is evident in this context also: the absence of any appearance of struggle between two divinities in the Akan experience and ritual.<sup>582</sup>, such as has clearly emerged in the Lughnasa material. Such a notion can, I believe, be seen to emerge with the encounter with Christianity, when for instance *onyamesom* is found to be in conflict with what is regarded as the proper and necessary respect for the Spirit of the Earth in terms of her taboos, and is also still operative in the context of the tension between Christians and the traditional civic religion explored above. The endemic struggle to control *bayo* or the power of witchcraft is I think, thought of generally speaking, as something different. As we have noted, the fear of witchcraft<sup>583</sup> grew considerably from the turn of the century onwards, and is still strong. It was, and perhaps still is in some areas, believed to be best counteracted by skilled use of the powers of the newer *abosom brafo*<sup>584</sup> which in their origin and operation shade so easily into the impersonal powers caught in the *asuman* or “fetishes”. It is interesting that the *sunsum*, which is the part of the Akan psyche which can be “vulnerable to witches”, can, if it is “heavy” enough be immune from their attack.<sup>585</sup> In conversation with some articulately committed Akan Christians, the conviction was expressed that the practice of Christian worship and prayer and depth of commitment was the most effective safeguard against both witchcraft and being “caught” by *asuman brafo* and this accords well with this understanding of the *sunsum*.<sup>586</sup>

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<sup>582</sup> A possible indication of something latent might be the traditional tussle over the first New Yams produced near the beginning of the *odwira* festival.

<sup>583</sup> Mary Douglas in the Introduction to her book *Purity and Danger. An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, (Penguin 1970) p.11, refers to Evans-Pritchard’s study of witchcraft among the Azande people of the Sudan, and his finding that “the feelings of an Azande man, on finding that he has been bewitched, are not of terror, but of hearty indignation, as one of us might feel on finding himself the victim of embezzlement.” I would suppose that before the turn of the century and to some extent still, in spite of an increased experience of insecurity, this would be part of the spontaneous response of the Akan person also.

<sup>584</sup> Note that *brafo* is the word translated as “executioner”.

<sup>585</sup> Information given us by Professor K.A. Opoku.

<sup>586</sup> A recent book by Emmanuel Milingo, the remarkable former Archbishop of Lusaka (Zambia) now in exile in Rome, (where he currently ministers with some acceptance apparently, to Italians); conveying his theology/spirituality/ pastoral ministry, *The World in Between: Christian Healing and*

It is perhaps admissable in passing to see an analogy between the political overtones of that 1993 celebration of the Akuapem *odwira* and those recognisable in relation to the Metrical *Dindshenchas* of Taitiu. The particularly ordered magnificence and impressive size of the gathering when held in the playing fields of the College, was, I have no doubt, expected to give a message to the President of Ghana, whose seizure of power back in 1981 had been accompanied by deeply insulting challenges by his young followers to the traditional rulers and all that they stand for. It is generally assumed that the early 11th century revival of the *Óenach Tailten* after almost a century, by Máelsechlainn mac Domnaill, the Uí Néill king of Tara who had already acknowledged the supremacy of “the Munster interloper Brían Bóruma”, as written up with so much creative imagination by the Uí Néill poet Cúán úa Lothcháin, had an analogous political hidden agenda.

The importance of the role of the *Okyeame* for the functioning of the sacral ruler among the Akan has been very evident in the foregoing, not least in the conduct of the *odwira*. It should not be surprising in view of the parallels which have already come to light between the Akan chief and the king of the *tíath*, and between the paramount chief and the early Irish over-king, that there are some interesting comparisons to be made between the relationship of the *filid* or Irish caste of poets with the king, and more specifically of a poet of *ollam* rank to his patron, and that of the head *okyeame* to the chief he serves.

Rattray brings together in a passage in his *Religion and Art in Ashanti*<sup>587</sup> several aspects of the role of the *okyeame*. He preferred the English word spokesman to ‘linguist’ which is still customarily used, and believed that it is not just a matter of etiquette that no chief can address or be addressed in public by anyone., but rather it is to avoid any chance of “supernatural contagion or pollution from those with whom the kings or chiefs are brought in contact constantly, that an intermediary is necessary.” The *Okyeame*’s function is however much more than that. “He is the prime minister and chief adviser to the king.” He must therefore be “deeply versed in

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*the Struggle for Spiritual Survival*. (New York 1984) gives a glimpse into this world in which African Christian spiritual leaders function “with signs following”

<sup>587</sup> Rattray 1927 pp.276ff

the whole history of the clan he represents” and a “walking storehouse of proverbs” in which the ancestral wisdom of the Akan people is preserved and expressed. In the words of one of these proverbs, translated by Rattray: **If a town becomes broken, it is the fault of the *okyeame*, if a town stands it is due to the *okyeame*.** As we have seen, he is judge in all cases brought before the chief, and his relationship to the ruler who chooses him in the first place is similar to that between the Irish *brithem* or judge and the king<sup>588</sup> And taking into account the differences in the concept of the oath, there is perhaps a further interesting parallel with early Irish legal notions, according to which the king cannot himself be legally challenged as his honour-price is too high and therefore his oath is too strong, in the following :”In case of appeal from a lower to a higher court, it is against the *okyeame* who in the first instance gave judgement that the unsuccessful litigant must take proceedings. This he does by ‘swearing an oath’ against him’: **I swear an oath that you have given judgement on a crooked oath.** As noted above, it was taboo for the chief to conduct the case himself, although his presence is necessary. The ‘true’ chief, who sits on the Stool of his Ancestors cannot make an unwise or ‘false’ judgement. This is very close to the Irish doctrine by which if the king makes a false judgement he automatically loses his sacral kingship.<sup>589</sup>

The responsibility of the *okyeame* for the chief is made clear in the words of the oath he takes before he takes office. This oath belongs to the type called “drinking the gods”<sup>590</sup>

**Okyeame, receive the gods (*abosom*) and drink; we give you this stool that you may speak the truth. If you do not speak the truth, but lie, and if you receive things and put them beneath a mat, and if the chief does wrong and you do not tell him, but keep urging him on to evil, and if you walk between two nations, if you do these things may the gods slay you, because you have broken your great oath.**

I have quoted this text in full because it seems to me to be not too speculative to see in it some clue to the content of an oath sworn before a druid, which in the

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<sup>588</sup> See *Audacht Moraimn* op.cit.para 23.

<sup>589</sup> This is, of course a major theme in 2MT . See also the tale in which the legendary king Conchobar of the Ulaid is prevented by his entourage from making any verbal “judgement” at all, for fear of the consequences both to himself and his kingdom.

<sup>590</sup> As in the Abotakyi Concord founding the *oman* of Akuapem.

judgements of ‘The first synod of St Patrick’ entails a year’s penance. The ‘gods’ whose sanctions are invoked in the Akan formula are as local as those “gods by whom my people swear” invoked in the *Táin*.

There is, I believe, much more, particularly in the Irish sources, to enrich the comparison between the Akan *okyeame* and that elusive shape-changing presence which even the Christian scribes can in the one text call both *druí* and *fili*,<sup>591</sup> in the subtle and complex relationship they each have with the traditional sacral ruler. One more coincidence must end this section. The *okyeame* may address his chief as ‘**me kunu**’ **my husband**, and the latter call his *okyeame* ‘**eno**’, **mother**, which makes a revealing comparison with the Irish poetic convention, by which the poet becomes the king’s wife.<sup>592</sup>

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<sup>591</sup> For example in the “first scene” of *Baile in Scáil*.

<sup>592</sup> The appellation ‘wife’ in this context in Irish and ‘mother’ in Akan can be seen to relate to the differences in the place given to the ‘female’ in the world view of the two cultures explored in the next chapter.

# CHAPTER FOUR: The ‘Female Principle’ in the religious history and experience of the Irish Celts and the Akan People of Ghana

## PART ONE : “Lugh won the flower of gracious queens”

To turn from an attempt in earlier chapters to appreciate the mind-set of those responsible for the main literary sources we have used so far for the study of Lugh, somewhat sophisticated and intellectually profound as we have found them to be, to the *Dindshenchas* tradition feels like stepping into a more archaic world. M-L Sjoestedt’s designation of *Dindshenchas* (rendered variously as the “History of Places” or “the lore of prominent places”) as “the mythological geography of Ireland” is often quoted. Alfred Nutt noted the large proportion of the legends in the Prose *Dindshenchas* which are wholly or mainly concerned with the *Túatha Dé Danaan* in contrast to the comparatively small space occupied by the latter in the pre-11<sup>th</sup> century literature as a whole.<sup>593</sup> Mac Cana provides a useful description of *Dindshenchas* as follows: “...an important part of the repertoire of the *fili*, the expert in native learning, and which, not surprisingly, became a staple element of literary creation. By the accretion of centuries a vast corpus of this lore came into being...a kind of comprehensive topography, a legendary guide to the Irish landscape, and it is for this reason that it assigns a conspicuous, even a dominant role to the female divinities, for it is to these, as avatars, or manifestations of the earth-goddess, who are primarily associated with the land in all its various aspects: its fertility, its sovereignty, its embodiment of the powers of death as well as life, and so on.”<sup>594</sup> It is fascinating to discover how Lugh is related to this vibrant world.

Lugh is credited with several wives in the *Dindshenchas*.<sup>595</sup> The *Ds* of Cnogba (Knowth) provides the most comprehensive of these: “as the poet says”:-

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<sup>593</sup>.Quoted by M.O’Daly op.cit. in Carney, *Studies in Early Irish Literature* 1955 p.59

<sup>594</sup>. *Celtic Mythology* (1970) p.49

<sup>595</sup> Gray ITS LII provides a list with references pp.126f.

Echtach, daughter of white-toothed Dalg, (or *Daghda*) Englic, Nás, guileless Buí, these are the wives of Lug, lord of hosts (*linmair*), who won the flower of gracious queens. Of these, Echtach does not seem to appear elsewhere; while according to Gray, Englecc, “daughter of Elcmar” is identified as Lugh’s wife in several sources. Gray also cites from a text edited by Bergin a reference to Lugh’s killing of Cermait Milbel for seducing Lugh’s wife Buach daughter of Dáire Donn.<sup>596</sup>

Nás and Buí are described in several sources as daughters of the “king of Britain” notably in the prose (Rennes) *Dindshenchas* of Nás<sup>597</sup> which is worth quoting as it has important references to Lugh. In its second aetiological account it provides the following:

**Nás and Boí two daughters of Ruadri meic Teite king of Britain, were the two wives of “Lugh meic Scáil Bailb”, (the Dumb Scál). Now Nás was the mother of Ibec son of Lugh. There Nás died, and in Nás was she buried, hence it is called Nás. Her sister Boí died straightway of grief for her, and was buried on *Cnogba*, “*Cnucc Bae, et unde Cnuc Bai dicitur. i Cnoc Bua*”. Lugh gathered the hosts of the Gaels from Taitiu to Fiad in Broga (the land of the Brug) to bewail those women on the Calends of August in each year: so that thence was the *nasad* of Lugh, whence *Lugh-nasad*, that is Lugh’s commemoration, or remembering, or recollection, or deathfeast.**

It has been suggested that the Leinstermen may have been interested in connecting their important stronghold of Nás with the *nasad* of Lugh. This might indicate Nás as an intrusive fourth in the triad, were it not that the tradition linking Nás with Buí in this way is well authenticated. Boí/Bua/Buí however, as we shall see, is the name of a very powerful mythological or divine person indeed.

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<sup>596</sup> T.Ó Cathasaigh, “The Eponym of Cnogba”, *Éigse* XXIII, (1989) p. 35, cites a suggestion made by O. Bergin that “Buach” was originally the genitive of Boí/Buá. . According to the *Met. Ds* Loch Lugborta, Cermait was the son of the Dagda. It may be significant that the four wives of Lugh listed in the *Prose Ds* of Cnogba, cited above, may, if the evidence for a doubling of Elcmar and the Dagda is taken into account, be reduced to three, identifying Enlecc and Echrach. Or, alternatively, Boand, the eponym of the Boyne, that sacred river, the source, together with the favourable basic geology, - of the immemorial fertility of that part of Ireland, - Boand, who is the mate of both the Dagda and Elcmar according to traditional lore, might subsume both Enlecc and Echtach, - giving us a “triple goddess” of some status!

<sup>597</sup> W. Stokes ed. *Rev. Celt.* vol. XV, pp. 316ff at 318.



The metrical Ds of Cnogba makes the connection of Bua, wife of Lug mac Céin of the red spears with the tumulus of Knowth very clear, (even though it gives it only as the first of three explanations of the name of the “hill” of Cnogba):

**...it is there that her body was hidden;/ over her was a great hill built up.  
/ A hill had Bua in the midst of Bregia, / where the noble woman was  
laid, / in that spot yonder:- the name of the hill is Cnogba. But though it  
is easier to utter / of its names be perfect Cnogba, / yet its most proper  
style is Cnoc Buí / down from Bua daughter of Ruadri.<sup>598</sup>**

The relationship of Buí/Bua with Lugh is thoroughly explored by Ó Cathasaigh in his study entitled “The Eponym of Cnogba”. The declared purpose of the article is by “drawing data on Lug and Buí from a number of disparate, sources” to show that “Buí’s dual role as eponym of Cnogba and spouse of Lug is part of a larger design”. The following paragraphs will make grateful use of Ó Cathasaigh’s findings.<sup>599</sup>

He lists briefly the data on Lugh’s own association with Cnogba in the article, referring to the statement in the Middle-Irish *Senchas na Relec* that Brug na Bóinne was the burial ground of the *Túatha Dé Danaan*; and to the Early Irish tale *Compert Con Culain* which tells of the begetting by Lugh of the quintessential Hero Cú Chullain in the mysterious house in the Brug na Bóinne<sup>600</sup>. He also mentions the poem in praise of Ragnall, king of Man, dated by its editor between 1187 and 1208,<sup>601</sup> which contains these two verses:

**Emhain Abhlach of the yews, smooth is the top colour of its trees,  
a bright place around which the blackthorn is black in which was reared  
Lugh, descendant of the poet. (stanza seven)  
(and stanza fifteen, addressed to Ragnall ) Many are the doorways of thy  
land, brighter are they than blue skins, among them, O branch of the  
haven of Eamhain, are the cave of Fern and the fair cave (*uaim chaem*)  
of Cnoghdha.**

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<sup>598</sup> E Gwynn, ed. *Met Ds pt III* pp.40,43, first three stanzas.

<sup>599</sup> Following Ó Cathasaigh in this project and becoming acquainted with his sources one begins to see him as a latterday *ollamh* ( or perhaps his assistant) delighting in his craft as an “organiser” of sacred lore.

<sup>600</sup> Cited from A.G. Van Hamel, *Compert Con Culainn and other stories* (1933) p.5.

<sup>601</sup> B.O’Cuiv, *Éigse VIII* 1957 pp. 283-301

“Lugh descendant of the poet” presumably refers to the variant genealogy of Lugh as son of Cían son of Cianté (satirist)<sup>602</sup> This is consistent with the emphasis on Lugh as Poet in the 14<sup>th</sup> century poem by Gofraigh Ó Dálaigh.<sup>603</sup> That poem also brings Lugh from *Eamhain Abhlach* to Tara.

The reference to the central mound at Knowth as a “cave” and as an entrance or doorway to the Otherworld *Eamhain* of the Apple Trees is an interesting blending of traditions, making a ‘geographical’ linking of the underworld domains of the *fir síthi* with the Blessed Isles.<sup>604</sup> It is possible that here the poet is using his knowledge of the varying lore concerning Lugh to enhance his eulogy of the Viking Prince.

Apart from the last reference which is late and may not have very old roots the foregoing ‘connections’ of Lugh are generally with the Brug na Bóinne and not specifically with the main tumulus at Knowth with which in *Dindshenchas* tradition Bua/Buí is so strongly identified: and indeed the former are nothing like as definite and well documented as are those of the Dagda and Óengus (the Mac ind Óg). However the tradition which mates Buí of the Hill of Cnogba with Lugh, together with the specific linking of Buí and her “sister” Nás with **the nasad of Lugh whence Lugh-nasad that is Lugh’s commemoration...or deathfeast** on the calends of August in each year is definite enough to stand by itself. And Buí herself is so well documented as Ó Cathasaigh has shown, that much can be learned through her of Lugh’s involvement with the ‘Sovereignty Goddess’. For “the crucial step towards all understanding of Buí’s character was taken by T.F.O’Rahilly when he identified the eponymous Buí of the *Dindshenchas* with the personage known in Irish literature and folklore as the Hag of Beare, (*Caillech Bérrí*, modern *Calleach Bhéarra*)”<sup>605</sup>, though without providing much in the way of specific evidence. The main source for this

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<sup>602</sup> Refs are listed by Gray, ITS LII, (p.126) mostly late.

<sup>603</sup> O. Bergin, “A Poem by Godfráidh Fionn Ó Dálaigh”, E.C.Quiggan ed. *Essays and Studies Presented to W.M.Ridgeway* (1913) pp.324-332 esp. stanza 22. The poem is of interest in relation to the preservation and development of the 2MT tale of Lugh’s arrival at the gates of Tara, in the hands of a notable 15th Irish poet.

<sup>604</sup> See J.Carey, “The Location of the Otherworld in Irish Tradition”, *Éigse* XIX (1983) pp. 36-43. for arguemnts for the lateness of such a linking.

<sup>605</sup> Ó Cathasaigh 1989.p.38.

“understanding of Bui’s character” must be the remarkable poem *The Lament of the Old Woman of Beare*. Ó Cathasaigh uses the text provided by Murphy in his *Early Irish Lyrics*<sup>606</sup> in which (“in deference to O’Rahilly”) he prints line 5 of the poem as *Is mé Caillech Bérrí, Búí*; and translates as, **I am Búí, the old woman of Beare**. He also recounts an anecdote in the LU version of *The Expulsion of the Déisi* featuring a *caillech* called Boí/Buí which tells how one Corc Duibhne “**was cleansed of congenital pollution**”, under her care with the aid of her Otherworld cow, which gives additional backing to the rendering of Búí as the proper name of the *caillech*.<sup>607</sup>

This tale is of great interest. For instance it tells of a druid and the *caillech* Búí dealing with the evil effects of incest, a problem important in 2MT<sup>608</sup>. The tale is “told” to the Déisi,- who have arrived in Tech nDuinn, the house of Donn,- by Corc Duibne, who tells them he had been reared there. His life had been saved by a druid when he had been condemned to die as the offspring of incest by the men of Munster “to remove the shame from the land”, by removing him to Inis Búí off the west coast of Co.Cork where the *caillech* Búí had washed him each morning on the back of a white red-eared cow. The cow is then turned into a rock in the sea whose name was Bó Búí, (Búí’s cow). “Duibhne is then fit to be returned to Ireland,” Ó Cathasaigh writes, adding that the “mention of Tech nDuinn (home of the dead) in connection with this rite indicates that Corc’s exile-and-return is conceived, symbolically at least, as death and rebirth”. This tale associates Búí not only with water and the sea, but also with Otherworld cows.

Ó Cathasaigh also quotes from a prose preface to the Lament which states that the *Caillech* whose name is given in this and an alternative preface variously as *Dígde* and *Digi* or *Duinech*)

**passed into seven periods of youth, so that every husband used to pass from her to death of old age, so that her children and grandchildren were people and races.**

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<sup>606</sup> G.Murphy, *Early Irish Lyrics* (1956) pp.74-83,esp p.74/75,v.2

<sup>607</sup> Cited from V Hull “The later version of The Expulsion of the Déssi”, *ZCP* XXVI, (1958/9) pp. 34-63

<sup>608</sup> See the last para. 167: ITS LII p.731 containing the prophecy of the Morrigan/Badb..

This surely makes unmistakably clear that the Hag of Beare is both the Sovereignty and the Mother Goddess. (This calls to mind the often cited quotation from the *Táin Bó Cúlaighe* about Queen Medb,- that **never was she without one man in the shadow of another**, and of Medb Lethberg of Leinster who **would not permit a king in Tara unless he had her for his wife**; two out of many other relevant examples of the so-called ‘sovereignty goddess’) Incidentally Byrne<sup>609</sup>, referring to this, gives the additional information “that she appears under that name (Dígde) in genealogical tradition as the foster-mother of Corc Duibne, ancestor of the Corcu Duibne of the Kerry peninsulas.” This would appear to confirm the identity of Dígde with Buí, and with the *caillech* of the Lament.

The richly allusive poem, *The Lament of the Old woman of Beare*, with its complex layers of meaning has inspired much general interest and much learned comment. Suffice it here to note that the poem clearly belongs to Munster; that it is full of sea and water imagery: and not only reflects the intimate connection of the *caillech* herself with the peninsula of Beare where the name Buí is an eponym of several places, but also indicates that she is a presence of power in both mythical time and historical times within Munster. The continuity of that power and that presence is expressed in the very word *caillech*,- the veiled one, as referring both to the “dying” goddess and to the Christian nun, implying the special access to spiritual power belonging to the latter’s vocation, and in the subtle combination of the Christian devotional feeling of the nun with the loving nostalgic evocation of a ‘golden age’ when she had mated with heroic kings as the source of their prosperous sovereignty. And as MacCana writes, “the whole texture of the poem is shot through with subtle allusions that delicately presume her essential identity with the land and landscape of Ireland”<sup>610</sup>. She struggles and prays for acceptance of the knowledge that she will never again be transformed to youthful beauty ; that the flood tide will not return again.

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<sup>609</sup>1973. pp.166f

<sup>610</sup> P.Mac Cana, “Women in Irish Mythology” *The Crane Bag Book of Irish Studies*, M.K.Hederman & R.Kearney, edd, (Dublin 1982) 520-524.at p.522.

The date given by Murphy for the poem - c.A.D.800 - in his *Early Irish Lyrics*<sup>611</sup> is surely significant: it is contemporaneous with the triumphalist verses of the Preface to the *Félire Óengusso* (on the eve of the disruption typified by the Viking attacks on monastic centres of sacred power); it might be said to be a complementary response to the prevailing mood amongst the Christian literati of that particular time. How, one wonders, would the author of the Lament feel if he (or possibly she?) were to jump two centuries or so and read the poetic version of *Echtra Mac Echdach Mugmedóin* attributed to Cúán Ó Lochcháin (obit 1024)<sup>612</sup>, or the tale of the Luguids, sons of Dáire, believed by Gwynn to be “written in imitation” of it?

With reference to the tale of Níall of the Nine Hostages just mentioned, Ó Cathasaigh cites another verse version<sup>613</sup> which tells that the hunt which leads to Níall’s encounter with the *caillech* takes place “in the mound of Cnogba” a *Cnogba chuirr*. which he describes as another “piece of the jigsaw in place”. The Tale of the Sons of Dáire<sup>614</sup> also provides links both with BIS and with the home base of the heroine of the Lament. As we have seen the third recipient of the *derbflaith* from the hand of the beautiful ‘queen’ who is Sovereignty, as designated by the Scál in BIS is not of the Dál Cuinn but is Lugaid mac Conn of the Cork Luigde of the Munster Érainn, the son of Lugaid Luigde, and who is specifically named by the *flathius* (in the Ds of Carn Mail version) as “the one I will sleep with”. There could also be a connection with the ubiquitous lady herself here in the mention in *The Yellow Book of Lecan*, of a wife of Lugh named Buach daughter of Dáire.<sup>615</sup> There is also a reference to the “hounds of Lugaid” in the lament itself.

There are still further sources which can yield some understanding of the significance of this obviously ancient and formidable divinity, Bua/Buí of the Brug to

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<sup>611</sup> Murphy 1956 loc.cit

<sup>612</sup> ed. Joynt. 1910

<sup>613</sup> B. Ó Cuiv ed. *Ériu* XXXIV ( 1983) pp 157-74

<sup>614</sup> Met. Ds vol IV pp134-143 and W.Stokes ed., *Cóir Anmann* Irishe Texte III/2 (1897) pp 316-323.

<sup>615</sup> See note above. Mac Cana says of Lugaid Luigde that he was “almost certainly an avatar of the god Lugh” *Celtic Mythology* (1970) p.120; cf Murphy loc. cit. *Duanaire Finn*.

whom Lugh is linked, -overtly in the *Dindshenchas* lore, and implicitly in several other important traditional texts. We turn first to the folklore of Meath.

Both O'Donovan, in the Ordnance Survey Letters for Co. Meath 1836<sup>616</sup> and Meyer, in a note on the mention of *Caillech Berre ban* in *Aislinge Meic Conglinn*,<sup>617</sup> quote an almost identical quatrain which the latter translates as,

**I am the poor old woman of Beare / Many wonders have I seen, / I have seen Carn Ban a lake, / though now it is a mountain.**

Meyer's informant told him that this "old hag or witch" is supposed to have lived near Oldcastle Co.Meath, and that the large cairns of stone seen there are supposed to have been dropped by her from her apron. and quotes a triadic saying current in his day : **Three great ages: the age of the yew tree, the age of the eagle, the age of Caillech Bheara**, and gives further sayings and a tale which associate her with water and with the sea, and a story about her bull and cows in which she turns her disobedient bull into a stone.

O'Donovan mentions that the quatrain<sup>618</sup> "is yet repeated at Carnbane." Carnbane is the name of two summits in a range containing several hills called Sliabh na Cailligh 40 km west of the Brug na Bóinne, three of which are crowned with megalithic cemeteries containing 30 surviving passage tombs in all. This fact, which has only become evident in recent years through the work of archaeologists, gives added interest to the legend of the *Caillech Bheara bhocht* and her stones, of which O'Donovan gives a more detailed version.

The wide ranging named 'presence both in historical time and geographical space of this particular manifestation of the Irish Goddess is remarkable. She is, as we have seen 'native' to West Munster as well as to Meath. She (together with Nás of the Laigin) is daughter of the king of Britain. She does not appear in the literature (even in the Lament) as humanised wife of any named king of the children of Míl, but retains a certain autonomy. She is nearer to being indeed in herself the *flaith Érenn* as

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<sup>616</sup> See S.P.Moore, " An Chailleach Bheurtha" *Éigse* vol.VIII pt2 p.78 where he cites the quatrain quoted by O'Donovan in the Ordnance Survey Letters for Meath

<sup>617</sup> (1892) pp.131f

<sup>618</sup> loc.cit.

well as Mother/ Fostermother and Fertility goddess than any other named female divinity. She, like Brigit is closely connected with cattle, and though not so supremely the much loved goddess watching over the well-being of a pastoral people as Brigit appears to be, she does partake of that role, both in Meath and in Munster. In the latter she is closely involved with the sea and in Meath specifically with stone and hill and with the megalithic passage graves of the Brug, and its environs ; and folklore connects her with water and with a 'time' so primeval that Carnbane was still a lake.

There is, however, still another source of insight into the ancient roots of the "female divinities...who are primarily associated with the land in all its various aspects; its fertility, its sovereignty, its embodiment of the powers of death as well as life..." and into Buí in particular. I refer to the findings of the thirty years of archaeological work on "the hill of Bua" and its satellite tumuli at Knowth as recorded by the archaeologist, George Eogan.<sup>619</sup> I would argue further that these findings could provide clues to an indigenous ritual of encounter between what might be called the executive power in society and the aboriginal chthonic power encountered in the cycle of nature by which decay, death and burial in the earth lead to the miracle of new life (and rebirth) in beauty and joy, millennia before the earliest date usually given for the arrival of Celtic people of Indo-European origin in these islands.

### **Cnogba, the Hill of Buí and the Excavations at Knowth**

Presumably it is since the excavations at Knowth began to be reported in the sixties that it has become clear that Bruig na Bóinne refers, not just to Newgrange whose main mound is so conspicuously large that it could never be ignored, but to three remarkable necropoli . Part of Professor Eogan's general description of "Knowth in its local setting" runs as follows: "The area used as a cemetery was bordered on three sides by the river. Today, the remains of up to forty round mounds survive. Their core is situated on the Knowth-Dowth ridge, and between it and the river Boyne...Within the core, clusters of sites can be seen. Knowth with up to twenty sites, is the largest and most integrated cluster...the cemetery is also

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<sup>619</sup> G.Eogan, *Knowth and the Passage Tombs of Ireland*, (London 1988)

distinguished by the size and prominence of three of the mounds - Dowth, Newgrange and Knowth. Each covers over an acre of ground, is perched on the highest point of its respective ridge, is visible from the other two, and displays sophisticated design and construction.” Presumably Tara (a “landmark” from Knowth) is also visible from the other two. Eogan also states that “... the evidence (at Knowth) shows that considerable forest clearance had taken place for agriculture by the time the tombs were built.”. This suggests further linkage with the characteristic ‘work’ of Taitiu and Buí. Indeed, as is well-known, the period known as Neolithic was ushered in by people who began to grow food in an organised way, and an aspect of these early farming communities over large parts of western and northern Europe was the building of megalithic tombs.

The effect on human values and spirituality of the ‘discovery’ of agriculture must have been very great. “The hundreds of thousands of years spent in a sort of mystical symbiosis with the animal world” which preceded this fundamental revolution in human consciousness have indeed “left indelible traces” to quote Eliade.<sup>620</sup> and there are plenty of these traces to be found in Irish literary sources. But with the development of agriculture “...religious relations with the animal world are supplanted<sup>621</sup> by what may be called the mystical solidarity between man and vegetation. If the bone and the blood until then represented the essence and scarcity of life, from then on it is the sperm and the blood that incarnate them”. Eliade continues: “In addition woman and feminine sacrality are raised to the first rank. The fertility of the earth is bound up with feminine fecundity; hence women become responsible for the abundance of the harvests, for they know the mystery of creation. It is a religious mystery, for it governs the origin of life, the food supply, and death.” The Meath passage tombs within their great womb-like mounds are surely strikingly and unequivocally expressive of this religious mystery.

The “court tombs” which are also almost all to be found in the northern third of Ireland are generally thought to precede the building of passage tombs. They are in

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<sup>620</sup> M.Eliade, *A History of Religious Ideas (vol I) From the Stone Age to the Eleusian Mysteries*, trans.R.Treasc, (Chicago1978) p. 360.

<sup>621</sup> Is this the appropriate word? It seems to me to imply too drastic an uprooting!



long barrows and are dispersed near a water supply and on light, well-drained soil and “generally at a modest elevation”. Like the passage tombs only a selection of each community seem to have been buried therein. The two types of tombs seem to be mutually exclusive.<sup>622</sup>

Professor Eogan after thirty years of involvement in the excavation of the Knowth complex, has no doubts about the “deep spiritual commitment” of the passage tomb builders any more than he has of their high mental and administrative ability, engineering, architectural and artistic skills, which are evidently shared by other elite groups building similar ritual complexes in northern Europe and in Spain; (and also in Anglesey and Scotland).<sup>623</sup> Not only does this “massive and majestic” building (not to mention Newgrange and all the others in the area) presuppose abilities and commitment of this calibre, but also the presence of a considerable population able to provide the huge labour force needed and to farm successfully in that fertile valley of the Boyne and the rivers that flow through it. This would have been assisted by a climate : “a couple of degrees warmer than today”.<sup>624</sup>

It is tempting to spend more time on the secrets hidden for five millennia or so within “the cave of Cnogba” - which, as modern methods of measuring age have been able to show, was being constructed more than half a millenium before the first of the Egyptian pyramids,- than would be justified by the remit of this study. Archaeology has not yet been able fully to map, or account for, the apparent discontinuity between these megalithic monuments to human creative brilliance, to mental and spiritual energy and social coherence, - and subsequent cultural periods in these islands. Eogan writes: “indeed the end of that culture is as enigmatic as its beginning. Nor is its legacy to subsequent generations clear. Despite its endurance and sophistication, the Boyne culture had a surprisingly small impact on contemporary complexes and made little contribution to succeeding ones.”

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<sup>622</sup> Eogan, op.cit.pp. 25f,213,219.

<sup>623</sup> Much recent research on Stone Circles suggests the presence of similar qualities.

<sup>624</sup> Eogan pp. 204f

Indeed while the traditions recorded in the *Dindshenchas* of Nás and of Cnogba cannot, of course, be ‘dated’, it would seem from the early literature generally that when Ireland was adopting Christianity, over three millennia after the building of the main tumulus at Knowth, the “hill of Buí of the battles” probably looked much like it did in 1960 (possibly with exception of the Iron Age ditched enclosure on top of it, mentioned above). And yet tradition sees Buí as older than the “cairns”, and as being present when the landscape was still being formed. So perhaps it should not be totally unexpected that among the meticulously detailed accounts of every aspect of the finds resulting from the first twenty-five years of work on the Knowth complex in Eogan’s book, there are descriptions of some features which have an almost familiar ring to anyone interested in Irish mythological sources.

“Passage tombs”, he tells us, “may be regarded as a spacious expression of ritual but indicating the interdependence between ritual and secular events.” The central mound of Knowth, (the one known as Cnogba in our texts), contains two passage tombs, one facing east and one west. This orientation suggests to Eogan two probabilities, not necessarily alternatives, that there could have been two main ceremonies, one at the vernal equinox representing the growing season, and one at the autumnal equinox for the harvest, and that there could have been a morning ceremony at the eastern tomb entrance and one at the western entrance in the evening. The space outside the entrances to passage tombs where the surrounding kerb of huge stones are made to curve inwards clearly suggests a worship area. At Knowth, we are told, these areas in front of both tombs were given added emphases: the incurving kerb stones are elaborately carved; the “reserved” area with its carefully designed “settings” of small exotic stones includes a “dished” one directly opposite the entrance in the centre of the sacred area and similarly paved but with a central square limestone flagstone, “very carefully secured”. Close to this and aligned both with a vertical line down the centre of the kerbstone (which, as it were, guards the entrance to the tomb), and the flagstone, was a standing stone. As Eogan points out a possible “celebrant standing on the flagstone at the entrance to the eastern tomb would be directly in this

alignment (and presumably with the rising sun at the vernal equinox)".<sup>625</sup> In the context of ritual, Eogan mentions the "conical stone object" found near the entrance to the western tomb, beautifully carved, and a similar one (without the decoration) found at Newgrange in a similar place, which he describes as definitely "phallus shaped"<sup>626</sup>.

A further find of possible relevance is an ovoid finely carved "ceremonial macehead" "right inside the right-hand recess of the Eastern Tomb Chamber (possibly deposited in this most sacred area when it was finally sealed, Eogan suggests.) one side of which "if one wishes to stretch the imagination... has the appearance of a stylised human head, with hair, beard, eyes, mouth and spirals for ears all laid out in correct proportions.

In the chapter *Ritual in Burial and in Art*<sup>627</sup>, Eogan suggests that the positioning of certain stones decorated only in "the angular and rectilinear styles" near the entrance would enable ordinary worshippers to "identify with events inside"; and that a "further purpose in maintaining contact with the burials" might have been a "cult of communal (not necessarily family) ancestors... who with time become transmogrified into incorporeal beings possessing power and influence." It will be interesting if the archaeological survey now being made at the Hill of Tara discovers the original placing of the standing stone popularly called the "member of Fergus" or the *Lia Fáil*, in relation to the Mound of the Hostages, Tara's passage tomb, which is also east facing. Excavation, completed in 1959, of this tumulus (now known to be a millennium younger than Knowth) revealed some forty Bronze Age burials, all but one cremated, "above, or in some places replacing, Neolithic cremated remains."<sup>628</sup> . Presumably, this indicates a greater degree of devotional and ritual continuity on the Hill of Tara than at Knowth.

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<sup>625</sup> op.cit. 178f,9,15,46-55 etc.pl.24,25

<sup>626</sup> idem 179

<sup>627</sup> idem 177-195 at 181

<sup>628</sup> See supplementary note in S.P. Ó Ríordáin, *Tara the Monuments on the Hill*. (Dundalk 1965), pp.27f.

There is much stimulus for speculation in the features archaeology has disclosed at Knowth. At least they would seem to extend the horizons of such phrases as “conservation and innovation” in connection with early Irish literary sources. For instance they give further strength to the evidence for the indigenous quality of the Irish doctrine of the sacred marriage as suggested above. This could be said to be one of many examples of the ability of people living within an integrated oral culture creatively to welcome, experience and inculcate enriching new understandings of reality such as was presumably brought by “Indo-European Celts” with their working mythology of sacral kingship in the context of an heroic cum pastoralist, familial society. This is a salutary reminder because this characteristic quality of such ‘primal’ oral cultures is one key to the apparent ease with which Christianity was embraced during those hidden years before the *scriptoria* of the Irish monasteries began to function. The world of the Bible opened up to the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> century Irish was very close to their world. We, with a culture cut off at the roots have, intellectually, to stand on our heads to understand it.

Ó Cathasaigh, as we have seen, wrote the article “The Eponym of Cnogba”, which has been so often cited in the foregoing, with the “purpose” of tracing the “design” behind “Buí’s dual role as eponym of Cnogba and spouse of Lug... by drawing on data on Lug and Buí from a number of disparate sources.” In doing so he clearly opened up a very large area of enquiry, inevitably leaving open questions about the nature of any “design” involved.

It would seem to be somewhat difficult to bring the formidable Bua/Buí and her relationship with Lugh into a process such as is expounded in McCone’s learned chapter quoted in Chapter Three Part Three which sees Lugh (and Manannán mac Lir) as fulfilling an angelic ministrations. It may be that the design which Ó Cathasaigh seeks to discern in this relationship was part of another and older process of acculturation in which Lugh, the Many skilled, a smith or metal worker (and the foster son of a magic-working smith/druid in legend) was indeed mythologically a ‘newcomer’ (as depicted in 2MT) and required a *banais-ríghí* with Bua/Buí of the Brug and of Beare. Such a scenario could also be relevant as a context for the great Balor-Lugh myth.

The poem, *The Lament of the Old Woman of Beare* is dominated by autumnal images of decay and approaching death, for which references to her clothing/ covering provide analogues.<sup>629</sup> There are, however so many delightful passages in the literature about those “gracious queens”, mothers and brides, attempting to describe the surpassing beauty of the Irish goddess in the youthfulness of her vernal manifestations, many of which were still being written or revised subsequent to the Lament. Yet what has survived most clearly in folk-lore is the dangerous hag-like aspect of this ancient divinity, and one must accept that this is one outcome of the encounter of this being with Christianity, which itself was deeply affected by developing ‘patriarchy’ world-wide.<sup>630</sup>

This prompts a return to Máire Herbert’s study of changes in the myth of the sacred marriage indicated in certain texts reaching us in 11<sup>th</sup> century redactions which she cites, (including *Baile in Scáil*, to which we referred in the section on that text), notably the two versions of the tale of the eponymous ancestor of the Uí Néill, Níall of the Nine Hostages and the *puella senilis*. Her arguments summarised there, reveal the *flaith/flaithius Érenn* as no longer a sovereign goddess who is “the constant”, and the “initiator of relationships with her male partners,” but functioning rather “as an object to be appropriated - in this instance her appropriation being the necessary condition for the recuperation of her form and appearance.”<sup>631</sup>

The *Dindshenchas* tradition also provides a further interesting variation in the origin story of the *Óenach* of Tailtiu, the LGE version of which we have already

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<sup>629</sup> Ó Cathasaigh 1989, pp.36f

<sup>630</sup> There is of course another otherworld power whom we have met in 2MT as the *Morrigan/Badb*, sometimes called the (triple) goddess of war and death who is also ‘female’ and who is highly dangerous and also a shape-changer, and figures in folk-lore as the banshee. She will be briefly mentioned in Pt 3 of this chapter..

<sup>631</sup> ed. Stokes 1903 *Revue Celtique* 24 190-203 and *Joint Eriu* 4 91-111. But see also similar meeting with this personage in *Coir Ammann* ed. Stokes 1891 318-21 and *Ds of Carn Mail* ed Gwynn Met. *Dind.*vol.IV: the tale of the five *Luguids*. The *caillech* in the *Ds* version of the story threatens to devour them if they do not agree to her demands. And in the Níall story she denies them the water they so desperately need, - water, which is of course simultaneously the means of sustaining life and the sovereignty drink. Do these references perhaps indicate both the sense of her residual power and its demonisation?

discussed.<sup>632</sup> While the 11<sup>th</sup> century Metrical Ds Tailtiu attributed to Cúán úa Lothcháin follows the LGE account that Tailtiu herself was forced to clear the wood and transform the site of the *óenach* to a flowering plain<sup>633</sup>, in the Prose Rennes Ds both of Nás (first part) and of Tailtiu, it is her husband who organises the clearing away of the wood in her honour.<sup>634</sup> The latter reads:

**Tailtiu daughter of Magmor was the wife of Eochu the Rough son of Dua the dark. 'Tis by him the fortress of the Hostages was built in Tara, and she was the fostermother of Lug (*meic in Scáil Bailb*). 'Tis she that asked her husband to clear away for her the Wood of Cúan, so that there might be an assembly round her grave. And after that she died on the Calends of August, and her lamentation and funeral games were held by Lugaid. Hence we say *Lug-nasad***

The following section of the Ds provides a date not earlier than the first part of the tenth century by naming Donchad, grandson of Máelsechlainn, (obit 942) However it seems highly probable that this Ds represents an earlier tradition or perhaps a continuing learned controversy between two schools of thought among the loremasters of the time. There is certainly an interesting parallel with the tradition that Bua /Buí was involved in the formation of the Carnbane hills and their megalithic tombs.

In her chapter, "The Associated Legend-Types", collating the surviving legends relating to the Lughnasa Fairs under headings, - Máire MacNeill states that the type yielding the largest number of versions collected (no less than forty) is : "Saint overcomes Female Fiend often of Serpent form (Banishes, Destroys or Confines Her)<sup>635</sup>". At first sight this might be of interest to those looking for Irish associations of the 'goddess' with the 'serpent'. However there is little overt evidence in the literature for this and iconographic survivals in 'Celtic lands' though they include plenty of snakes, ramheaded monsters, etc., on their own, or associated with

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<sup>632</sup> This was brought out by Herbert in a paper given at a Day conference in the School of Scottish Studies in Edinburgh in 1993 under the auspices of the Traditional Cosmology Society.

<sup>633</sup> ed.E Gwynn op.cit. vol.III pp.146-163

<sup>634</sup> Ds of Nás op.cit .Stokes ed.. *Rev.Celt* vol.XVI pp.316f no.20; and Ds of Tailtiu, vol. XV pp50f. and no. 99;

<sup>635</sup> op.cit pp.399f

anthropomorphic representations of divinities, these seem to be mainly male.<sup>636</sup> MacNeill herself in considering all the “feminine actors in the Lughnasa myths” in her chapter, “The Myths in the Legends”: “the female fiend who is routed, the pagan’s daughter who is converted, the girl who is abducted, the spiteful old woman”, concludes: “...whatever part the old mother goddess may have at one time played in the harvest festival, the surviving legends represent it as a drama of rival gods.”<sup>637</sup> However as we have mentioned above, she notes in various places in her book some indications of a more archaic observance of the Harvest, possibly indeed ‘pre-Lugh’ in his Irish manifestation, which we must now gather together.

First, there are actually references in the literature to an earlier name for the month at the beginning of which the fourth of the Celtic seasonal festivals was celebrated. Máire MacNeill collects them together in the first chapter of her book<sup>638</sup> The name is *Brón Trogain* which appears twice in *The Colloquy of the Ancients*<sup>639</sup> in a phrase translated as “the first day of the month of Trogan now called Lughnasa.” She adds: “a verse attributed to Fionn speaks of a feast made for him every year on the day of *Brón Trogain*”.<sup>640</sup> In *Tochmarc Emire* there is a passage naming the four festivals<sup>641</sup> and explaining the name *Brón Trogain*, the beginning of harvest as “the earth sorrows under its fruits” .

The implication of this powerful image cannot be ignored: to my mind it throws some light on much of the evidence emerging from the material studied in this chapter and in the third and fourth parts of the previous one. The evidence for the association of several important Assemblies meeting “in the Calends of August”, with

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<sup>636</sup> See references to examples of these in Ross 1974 and M.J.Green 1986

<sup>637</sup> *idem* p. 412,3. She also comments “...was there an original myth of a newcomer god driving out blight? This was the story at Carman, and it must be admitted that tradition had plenty of examples of blight or famine being personified as female. The local cult of St Ann, if studied, would certainly yield some further light, for her feast-day, July 26th, is close to the festival and her name has attracted legends of Anu, the mother of the Irish gods, and of Áine and long-living woman of the Síde.” .

<sup>638</sup> *op.cit* 10f

<sup>639</sup> *Irische Texte* vol IV,(Leipzig 1900) pp.10, 129. See S G O’Grady, *Silva Gadelica*.

<sup>640</sup> K.Meyer R.C. vol.XI,pp. 454-457 at p.443 (lines 2f.)

<sup>641</sup> A.G.Van Hamel, *Compert con Culainn* (1933) pp32,43. See T.Kinsella, trans. *The Táin..*(Oxford 1970) p. 27. (translated as “earth’s sorrowing autumn”)

the burials of ancient cosmogonic female divinities, is very strong. MacNeill refers to origin stories not only for *Óenach Tailten*, *Óenach Carmain*, and *Óenach Macha*,<sup>642</sup> and an *óenach* at Cruachan, all presumably provincial assemblies, but also for four other less well-known assemblies all named for “entombed women of the otherworld”.<sup>643</sup> All the evidence adduced with reference to Bui/Bua, together with the detailed origin tales for the *Óenach Tailten* especially perhaps the Rennes Ds Tailtiu version, suggests a deep recognition of the importance of the Otherworld personage, being honoured in her ‘funeral games’. Some of the implications of the aetiological role given to Lugh by the ‘synthetic historians’ in LGE and elsewhere as founder and inaugurator of Assembly and of *Óenach Tailten* have already been discussed. The *Dindshenchas* extracts quoted in this chapter, do concur with this scenario, preoccupied as they seem to be with claiming Lugh’s relationship with the “noble woman” in question, and incidentally ‘explaining’ the name *lughnasad*. It seems relevant in this context to note again the absence of reference to the harvest in this literature. The establishment learned orthodoxy does not seem interested.; the *Óenach Tailten* had presumably been under the patronage and protection of the saints since early times: the reference to a “synod” in Tailtiu in Adomnán’s Life of Columba implies this, and there are legends linking Patrick and Ciarán and others with the *óenach*. It seems that leaders of churches and of the *filid* ‘establishment’ (those “monastically oriented literati”) saw the Lughnasa festival at Tailtiu mainly as a focus of political power. And while, no doubt the school of thought represented by the compilers of the LGE, were happy to distance Lugh and Lughnasa a little way from this explicitly female Otherworld power by envisaging her as his Foster-mother rather than his Mate, that very political power, vested still in the presiding king, was still inextricably ‘sacral’, still requiring authentication in relationship with the ‘Woman of Sovereignty’, who herself cannot be separated from the Earth, now identified with the land of Ireland.

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<sup>642</sup> MM does not claim to have proof that this was a “Lughnasa” festival.

<sup>643</sup> *op. cit.* pp.342-349; much of her evidence is from the Metrical *Dindshenchas*.



The ninth century texts studied in earlier chapters (together with the Ds material quoted in this chapter) do, I believe, suggest that (a) Lugh, Lughnasa and his cult must at some time have taken over an earlier agricultural celebration and Festival of First Fruits involving worship rituals and communion with the Earth Spirit who is Mother and nourishing foster-mother etc; that (b) such an 'agricultural' festival goes back at least to the third millenium BC, and probably beyond the early beginnings of cultivation to the grateful gathering of wild fruits,<sup>644</sup> (including fish, and apples and hazel nuts: all with numinous qualities in the literature); that (c) the evidence offered by Eogan from the archaeology of Knowth, together with that presented by Ó Cathasaigh in "The Eponym of Cnogba" suggest a neolithic ritual of sacred union at the entries to the "hill of Bua" to which Lugh has also been in some sense linked in learned lore by his *banfeis* with Bua.

Before leaving this subject I must refer, once again, to the invaluable insight provided by local folk memory in Irish speaking rural areas, culled by the research, and collated by Máire MacNeill with such brilliance, learning and devotion, and cite still another example. Under the type-heading V. "The Battle of the Crops",<sup>645</sup> MacNeill refers to a strongly held belief in Irish folk-lore that the prosperity of the crops was the concern of the fairies, and that it was decided by a fairy battle. She adds: "This notion that a battle could bring fruitfulness to one side or another is, I believe, the explanation of the faction-fights on the assembly-hills. I suggest, in addition, that the "contesting at Assembly" which included, as we have seen, horse-contests "inaugurated" by Lugh, might have been ritual innovations added to, or replacing earlier, purely agricultural rites.

I end with memories of a bit of what might be called field-study. In the summer of 1992 my husband and I spent a week in County Meath exploring the

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<sup>644</sup> The only indication in the literature apart from Cormac's Glossary entry on *Lughnasad* suggesting a connection with the harvest at the *Óenach Tailten* found by MM, was an entry in *The Book of Rights* telling of foods sent to the "king of Ireland" on the "Calends of August" from various parts: fish (from the Boyne), venison, fruit (from "Manaan"), bilberries, cress; the eating of which would bring a fruitful, and victorious year. (Quoted above.)

<sup>645</sup> MM p.408.

'antiquities': visiting the Hill of Tara, Newgrange, Dowth and Knowth, the Assembly site of Tailtiu at Teltown, and the hill of Uisneach. We spent time on the height of Carnbane East in the Sliabh na Caillighe, looking inside the main mound which is excavated and available to view. And finally after visiting Kells and Castlekieran with their high crosses and St Kieran's Well we joined the local community at the Well on the afternoon of Sunday August 2<sup>nd</sup> for the annual patron and 'fair'. (This is written up in some detail as a notable example of a festival of Lughnasa survival in M. MacNeill's study.) Watching people drinking from the Well and bathing their feet in the stream which flowed from it and especially joining in the recitation of the Rosary led by the parish priest from a small stone oratory on the top of the rise above the Well was moving and memorable. There was a consciousness of solidarity with the experience of untold generations going back to an almost inconceivably remote past, - beyond the attempts to enshrine it in awe-inspiring stone and tumulus, and a strong sense of continuity between the ever renewed beauty, healing and protective power of the presence invoked in the prayers of those Christian people and the poetic vision encapsulated in some of the early Irish mythological tales.

## **PART TWO: The 'Female' in the religious history and experience of the Akan**

The material relating to this theme is rich and complex. In the first place the Akan are of course a matrilineal people.. Although the legal consequences of this fact have been modified in recent times particularly where the inheritance of property is concerned, it was, as we have seen in earlier chapters evidently integral to Akan consciousness and identity, and still is.

At every level of Akan hierarchical social organisation the male head is complemented by a female. From the basic unit of the matrilineal household with its house-father who, in theory, is the brother of the senior woman, through the village where the heads of these matrilineages formed the council of the *odekro* or “owner of the land” - the village head who is the representative of the senior or royal lineage of the village -, and the sub-chieftaincies with their stools, up to the *Omanhene*, the ruler of the traditional division or state, and in the case of the Asante to the *Asantehene*, the head of the confederacy, everyone has their female counterpart, the *aberewa* or Old Woman . In the case of a chieftaincy with a stool, the latter would normally be called *Ohemma* or female ruler ( the name “Queenmother” was coined by the British); for she has her own stool. Indeed it was said that the stool of the *ohemma* was the elder stool *akonmua panyin*<sup>646</sup>. Rattray moreover tells us in the chapter entitled “Matrilineal Descent in Ashanti” that this information was given him by his many friends among the queenmothers and “confirmed almost without exception by the older men”, and adds that the chief’s stool “ has so far been the only one accorded recognition” (by the colonial authorities). The chapter not only includes some detail about the role and function of the *ohemma* but also a plea to his Colonial Administration bosses to recognise the enormous power for good wielded by these wise old women of which they were generally oblivious. As we shall see the plea was not heeded. What follows

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<sup>646</sup> Rattray op.cit.1923 p 81.Cf. K.Arhin “The Political and Military Roles of Akan Women” in ed.C. Opong, *Female and Male in West Africa*, (London 1983) p.94

refers generally to pre-colonial times, but represents something still cherished in popular feeling and custom<sup>647</sup>.

The *aberewa* at every level had special responsibilities for the women,<sup>648</sup> but as members of their respective councils they had a voice in all community decisions. An *ohemma* of a state also had her own Oath, for starting the judicial process in her own Court, and her own *okyeame* (spokesman) who in Akan courts, as we have seen, acted as prosecutor and judge.<sup>649</sup> She could be appealed to by litigants who found her court dues less expensive than those in the Chief's court and also for mitigation of a severe sentence. She was normally to be found each day seated on her 'son's' left hand and was required to advise and "admonish" him, even in public.<sup>650</sup>

We have already seen something of the role of the *ohemma* in the appointment of a chief, which in pre-colonial times was a vital one. She was officially the foremost authority on the genealogy of the royal matrilineage and able to give judgment on who was qualified by blood to be the male ruler by actual descent from the founding ancestress. (Matrilineages often incorporated "stranger segments" who over time became more or less indistinguishable from those belonging through the descent of the *mogya*.) The peace and well-being of the state depended much on her wisdom and the carefulness of her consultations and enquiries before the nomination was made from among those eligible.<sup>651</sup> It was the right of the *Ohemma* to choose a senior wife for

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<sup>647</sup> The official Brochure for the Akuapem *Odwira* for 1991 during which the Silver Jubilee of the *Okuapehemma* Nana Dokua Ist was celebrated contains appreciations of her influence during her reign which though somewhat flowery do support this statement. When we paid our respects to her in Akropong in 1993 she also kindly allowed me to ask her questions, and although verbal communication was somewhat hampered by her using the vernacular throughout and by what I guessed to be the somewhat free interpretation given by her *okyeame*, the charm and warmth of her personality and her reception of us was striking, and gave me subliminal insight into aspects of *aberewa*.

<sup>648</sup> Dr Bediako told me that the wife of (ex-Flight Lt) J.J.Rawlings the President of Ghana, has made a real effort to get to know and consult the queenmothers or *ahemma* of the paramount chieftaincies, and cooperate with them in their responsibilities towards the young women of Ghana.

<sup>649</sup> See Arhin *ibid* 93-95 and Rattray *ibid* 96-85 for this and subsequent paragraph.

<sup>650</sup> Perhaps originally it would be he who would be sitting at her right hand! It has been known for an *ohemma* to be destooled for not carrying out her duty of giving good advice to the reigning chief.

<sup>651</sup> Arhin cites the civil war in the Asante Union when the *Asantehemma* Yaa Akyiaa in 1885 sponsored her own son as candidate for the Golden Stool, going against wise custom.

the *Ohene* on his accession, which she would normally use to make a useful political alliance. Both Rattray and Busia testify to the tradition that the *aberewa* was originally in charge but because of the taboo against the blood of menstruation, there were occasions when she could not carry out her duties, and the story goes that her elders asked her to appoint an eligible candidate from among the male members of her royal lineage. Two out of many examples of traditions still preserved of Women as founding lineage or *abusua* Ancestors are contained in texts cited in Chapter One, Part Two. In the Drummer's history of the Mampon Stool<sup>652</sup>, where it begins at Stanza VIII, a greeting is given to one *Asiama Toku Asare*. Rattray tells us that she was the first<sup>653</sup> Queenmother of the Beretuo clan, who was believed to have descended from the sky on a chain. The drums go on to address her as "*Asiama* from '*Nyame*'", (followed by some untranslatable "strong names"), and then as *Asiama* of *Nyankopon*. There follows the usual refrain, apparently giving a message from *Odomankoma 'Kyerema'*<sup>654</sup>. Rattray goes on in the same footnote: "Her blackened stool is preserved and has the centre place of honour at the *Adae* ceremonies She was the head of the Beretuo clan before they migrated to Mampon". Another example is to be found in the text of the Stool history of the Asona of Akyem Abuakwa compiled by K. Attobrah, though this is a little confused. He heads the tree showing the names of all the "kings" with a shadowy *Aberewa Musu* as the mother of the "first king of the Asona clan of Akyem Abuakwa" and mentions two sisters of the latter, one of whom is called Bonaa and was "the first Queenmother of the Asona people." Moreover there have been rare examples of an *ohemma* being recognised as the occupant of the stool of an *omanhene* in historical times.<sup>655</sup>

Arhin makes the following interesting comment "The *ohemma* was *aberewa*, wisdom personified: an Akan court panel preceded their retirement to discuss a case

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<sup>652</sup> Rattray 1923 pp.266-286

<sup>653</sup> in a note loc.cit. p.280

<sup>654</sup> For a discussion about the meaning of this phrase, peculiar to the Drum sequences, see Chap.One, Pt Two.

<sup>655</sup> loc.cit. One example of a woman on the paramount stool was "Queen Dokua" of Akyem Abuakwa, reigning in the 19th century, whose name was taken by the present *Okuapehemma* (of Akuapem), Nana Dokua 1, in recognition of the origin of the royal lineages of Akropong-Akuapem.

before passing judgement by saying that they were going to consult the *aberewa* (old woman.)”<sup>656</sup> Here we are brought in touch, I believe, with a tradition older and more universal than the structures represented by the Stools and their hierarchies. For as Rattray tells us<sup>657</sup>: “The Ashanti name for the Earth is *Asase Ya, Aberewa*,<sup>658</sup> sometimes qualified by the phrase *Asase bo ne nsie*, i.e. Earth, the Creator of the Underworld.”

In spite of the lack of interest shown in *Asaase* by those early Akan writers, there can be no doubt of her basic importance. In the 1920s Rattray could state; “The Ashanti regard the Sky and the Earth as their two great Deities”. He gives a highly significant instance supportive of this statement in another volume<sup>659</sup>. He is describing the procedure followed among the Asante, for the “Succession to the Stool”, of which an initial very solemn Oath-taking is a vital part: first an Oath of allegiance to the new Chief by the Chief’s *Mpanyimfo*, his hereditary councillors, and then an oath by the former to the latter by which he binds himself to **rule the people well as my forefathers (*nananom*) and you ruled them** and to listen to their advice.” This he does, standing before them and unsheathing “the ceremonial sword the point of which he raises first to the sky, then lowers until it touches the ground. He then holds the sword before him and speaks the oath,.” This gesture, Rattray, in a note, explains as implying *Gye Nyame, gye Asase* or **Save God and mother earth, I have no equal**. As we have seen in Chapter One, *Asaase Yaa* is not an *obosom*, she has no priests or priestesses, “she does not divine”, though like them and all Akan humans, she does have a name corresponding to a day of the seven day week, and in this

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<sup>656</sup> I was also told this by the Rev. S.K. Aboa, during our visit to Akuapem.

<sup>657</sup> Rattray (1923) p. 215

<sup>658</sup> N.Smith mentions the appearance of an early imported cult from the Ivory Coast in 1906, the *Aberewa* cult, “essentially ...offering protection against witchcraft and other calamities...promising success in undertakings if certain moral and legal requirements are met” A praise song claims that *Aberewa* hates liars, hates cheating, blesses the good, helps the miserable person...”. The cult contained many of the typical ingredients of later incoming cults which began to proliferate at that time; for instance her devotees believed that any “wicked person” or one practising witchcraft who partook of the potion drunk as part of the worship at her shrines would be “caught” by *Aberewa*. Such fears are widely held in relation to *abosom* to this day. The *Aberewa* cult was suppressed by the colonial government as a result of some “unexplained deaths” Smith op.cit.pp.132f.

<sup>659</sup> 1927 p.87

balances, as it were, *Onyankopon Kwame* (“he of Saturday”) and differs from *Onyame*, who has none. As we have already noted, she is invoked either second or first in the prayers accompanying the *Adae* and similar ritual occasions. The second stanza in that drummers’ introductory set piece already quoted several times, (using Busia’s translation<sup>660</sup> rather than Rattray’s whose version seems to be more fanciful) reads:

**Earth, condolences, / Earth, condolences, / Earth and dust, / The Dependable One,<sup>661</sup> / I lean upon you. / Earth, when I am about to die, / I lean upon you. / Earth, while I am alive, / I depend upon you. / Earth, that receives dead bodies, ...**

At burials as one would expect, libation is poured and *Asaase Yaa* is addressed: ***Asaase Yaa, receive this wine and drink; Your grandchild so and so has died. We beg of you that we may here dig a hole.*** Ritual courtesies offered to *Asaase* include such occasions as the beginning of the farming season, before the tilling of the farm begins, when a farmer with the help of his wife or his sister will offer mashed yam or plantain and sacrifice a fowl. Rattray records a prayer to accompany this. After addressing his ancestor (who **once came and hoed here and then left it to me**) the farmer goes on to say:

**You also Earth Ya, on whose soil I am going to hoe, the yearly cycle has come round and I am going to cultivate; when I work let a fruitful year come upon me, do not let the knife cut me, do not let a tree break and fall on me, do not let a snake bite me.<sup>662</sup>**

The intention and content of this prayer is similar to most other prayers, such as, for instance, those Rattray records addressed by a woodworker to a tree which he needs for his craft, or a drummer to each of the natural sources he must tap for the construction of his highly sacral instrument. (“*Asaase*” refers to the earth only and not to what grows and lives upon it.).

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<sup>660</sup> 1951 p.195

<sup>661</sup> Rattray renders this as “Spirit of the sky”, as it is a “praise name” normally belonging to *Nyankopon*.

<sup>662</sup> 1923 215

*Asaase* has some strong taboos. We have already seen in Chapter Two Part Two, the importance of the taboo against working the land on her “day of rest”, corresponding to the day of the week regarded as “her natal day”, which among the Asante and neighbours is of course Thursday,- “*Yaa*”: a taboo which formed such a barrier to accommodation between the Christian communities and the Divisional Chiefdoms . Breaking it was considered to be so dangerous to the well-being of all, that “in the old days” the offender had to be killed instantly.<sup>663</sup> Her taboo against human intercourse in the open directly on the earth was also very strong. Information given to me suggests that this taboo was probably common among other peoples, certainly those in the forest areas. *Asaase Yaa* had special responsibility for and powers over conception and puberty of girls. If a girl conceived before her puberty rites were performed *Asaase Yaa* had to be propitiated.<sup>664</sup> Unlike the Ancestors, interestingly, she did not taboo menstrual blood.

One of the most well-known taboos effecting the sacral ruler among the Akan is that which forbids any contact with the Earth of any part of the chief’s body, the breaking of which, as we have seen, automatically annuls his sacral status. Even Rattray makes no claim to understand fully the reason for this; it is commonly regarded as part of the concern to protect the chief from any chance contamination: with dead bodies perhaps, or the “dead “ blood of menstruation. One of the inconsistencies which are met with in Akan traditional lore is that there should be such strongly held origin stories effecting some of the leading clan lineages of the ancestors emerging from a “hole” in the ground. One of the most vivid of Rattray’s descriptions of ceremonies he was privileged to witness is that of the ritual at the sacred grove at Santemanso<sup>665</sup>, at the site of the hole from which the ancestors emerged, some of

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<sup>663</sup> Rattray 1929 343. The Rev S.K Aboa kindly answered some questions about rituals to do with the land in his own community (Guan people) in writing, as follows: “When a tree falls on and kills a person on a farm or in the bush; when a person commits suicide, or fouls the earth with rape on a farmland,-the place of the accident or action is deemed to have been defiled and needs to be ritually purified. Libation is poured and a sheep is sacrificed at the place... This is done to drive away the spirit of the accident victim from the spot or to purify the farmland, Furthermore the ritual is necessary to prevent similar incidents in the future.”

<sup>664</sup> These did not include circumcision which is not practised for boys either among the Akan.

<sup>665</sup> 1923 pp.121-123



which was summarised in Chapter One. Some further points of interest mentioned in this context: four out of the five women in the list of the names of these ancestors of the Aduana Clan named to Rattray, (only after waiting for a permitted day and with proper ceremony) had names beginning with *aberewa*.<sup>666</sup> Although the Queenmother responsible for the shrine referred to the ancestors of the Oyoko clan to which the *Asantehene* belonged as also having emerged from the ground at Santemanso, the *Asantehene* was not allowed to set foot in, or even gaze at, the sacred grove as he passed, though he was allowed to send a sacrificial cow, once a year. This suggests the need felt by the aggressive “new-comers”, the founders of the Asante hegemony to claim autochthonous status. Once again the parallels with the Uí Néill are striking.

As for the Earth Spirit, in spite of the specifically female form of her name, she does not appear, generally speaking to have any anthropomorphic epiphanies among the Akan; and in this they differ from some of their neighbours<sup>667</sup>. Perhaps this is because of an implicit identification with the ancestral *aberewa*, hinting perhaps, that, each of the latter, might be said, in spite of some legends of descent from “the sky”, to be embodying the Earth Spirit’s mysterious power. The importance given to her, as we have seen, both in polity and its religious expression within the structures of society imply that she is “the spirit of the settled and cultivated earth...is concerned with the welfare of the polity as a whole, and works through her control of agriculture. She brings good harvests as a reward for harmonious living, and withholds such gifts as a sign of displeasure at strife in the community”.

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<sup>666</sup> One of them *Aberewa Miso* is the same as that heading Attobrah’s “family tree” of the royal lineage of the Asona clan of Akyem Abuakwa.

<sup>667</sup> For example the Krobo people, who are, incidentally, patrilineal, and share borders on the north and west with the Akyem and the Akuapem respectively. Like the Guan their stool chieftaincy was adopted later; and the head priest, “who serves the Supreme God directly through *Klokewi* the Earth deity” retained considerable power. *Klokewi* is described as “Queen of the gods”, and “mother of the tribe.” She presided “in person” over the puberty rites, - preceded by a long and comprehensive training - of all Krobo women. This remarkable *Dipo* custom has been a complex problem for Christian Krobos. My information comes from an unpublished paper by the Rev. Cephas Onyemo, himself a Krobo, who kindly gave me permission to use it.

This last quotation is from a closing contribution by Robin Horton to a reissue of a book by Meyer Fortes called *Oedipus and Job*.<sup>668</sup> In it the former puts forward a socio-anthropological hypothesis, that for certain West African peoples, all of whom believe in the overall powers of a heavenly supreme being, and all of whom function in terms of lesser agencies deriving from the latter, these lesser agencies can be divided into two sets : the “forces of nature” and “the forces of society”. Under the heading “Ashanti”, Horton finds that the spirit and power of the Earth belongs firmly to the latter together with the mother tie and the *asamanfo*, the ancestors; while the forces of nature are represented by the *abosom*, who, although they are woven into the whole as “the gods - *abosom* - of our ancestors” do, in practice, offer sources of aid in daily contemporary personal problems, in areas associated with the *sunsum*.<sup>669</sup> the active, creative, more individual part of the person, and of course the spirits of the forest, who are themselves said to have *sunsum*. This part of Horton’s argument is clearly in accordance with the evidence for the Akan, as we have seen it, and incidentally might be said to query the stereotype which relates the ‘female/feminine’ with ‘nature’ and the ‘male/masculine’ with social development.

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<sup>668</sup> R.Horton “Social Psychologies: African and Western” (pp. 41-82) in M.Fortes, *Oedipus and Job in West African religion*.. 2nd edition (Cambridge 1983)

<sup>669</sup> And, of course, not only the *mmomatia*, the “fairies” which he does mention, but also the spirits of animals and plants of the wild, which he does not. The brief reference to Horton’s theory does not do justice to its general interest..

### PART THREE: Some Comparative Comment

Once again it is in connection with the Sacral Ruler that comparisons between the religious history and experience of the two peoples being studied become most cogent.

First, however for both, the statement quoted from Eliade<sup>670</sup> in the first part of this chapter, that with the beginnings of cultivation “woman and feminine sacrality are raised to the first rank” seems to be applicable; and “it is the sperm and the blood “ that henceforward represent and “incarnate “ the “essence and sacrality of life” For the Akan this is very clear in terms of two of the three spiritual principles or “souls”: the *mogya* or “blood soul” which is constituent of *abusua*, clan/lineage/*nsamanfo*, and which is carried and guarded by the *aberewa* and passed on through the women when they give birth, on the one hand ; and on the other, the *sunsum /ntoro*, sometimes called the personality soul which is conveyed through the semen. For the people of Ireland this same revelatory experience, was interpreted, expressed, and its power harnessed, it seems, by the ritual of the sacred marriage.

There is a significant difference here. For the Akan who, in common with other African societies, are fundamentally a **gerontocracy**, are also matrilineal, with their dogmas about blood, which can only be passed on through the mother. For them it is by **mother-right, mother-choice and mother-wisdom** that the “king”, together with the *panyin* or male-elder at every level of the communities which make up the structures of society, rules. It is in this context, in terms of the *aberewa* as we have been discovering her, that the rest of the quotation from Eliade applies, “The fertility of the earth is bound up with feminine fecundity; hence women become responsible for the abundance of the harvests, for they know the mystery of creation. It is a religious mystery, for it governs the origin of life, the food supply, and death.”<sup>671</sup>

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<sup>670</sup> M.Eliade *The History of Religious Ideas* (London 1978), p.40

<sup>671</sup> *idem loc. cit.* . One must remember that in spite of the huge wealth and power built up by the pursuit of international trade in kola-nut, gold etc and notably in slaves, mainly by the Asante, the economy of this area is, and always has been, dependent on agriculture

The Irish sources make it very clear that the success and prosperity of the kings' rule is bound up with their relationship with the Land, which is personified as a female divinity, the Owner and Spirit of the Land, with local avatars. Their right to rule, their authority and proper functioning, require their recognition by, and sacral union with, this vital, essential divinity. In spite of several centuries of general acceptance, at least by the *nemed* classes in this essentially aristocratic society, of Christian faith and of the God of Christendom identified with, or recognised as, Lord of the Elements and King of the Angels, the literature shows that the deep conviction remains that at least the acceptance and recognition of the ruler by the *fliath Éirenn* is required. In spite of the *puella senilis* elements in the tales, the lady in question is essentially a beautiful and "gracious queen", - a reflection perhaps of the changing beauty of the seasons in a northern clime; yet Búi/Bua, in her folk-lore survival at least, in her great age, old as the eagle and the primeval Yew tree, older even than the hills has something in common with the *aberewa*.<sup>672</sup>

The 'female principle' in the Irish religious consciousness is not of course limited to the 'Woman of Sovereignty'. There is also the Mother sometimes as foster-mother (perhaps a gentler and more nourishing image in early Irish society) personified in the beloved Brigit, the Bride of so many wells and Christian dedications throughout Celtic lands; the foster-mother of Christ and the aid-woman of Mary, appearing in 2MT as the Otherworld, primordial, keening mother. And Mary herself<sup>673</sup> came to embody this power, as the Mother and kin of all, from the Bardic tradition until the present.

As for the formidable triple 'Irish War Goddess' very little reference has been made to her in this brief attempt to make contact with female 'divinity' through early Irish literature.<sup>674</sup> Her vitality and significance demand specialist study. However her important part as the Morrígan in the drama of 2MT should be noted: she is one of

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<sup>672</sup> Although she is specifically 'foster-mother' of the eponymos Corcu Duibne, and not 'ancestor'.

<sup>673</sup> In the oral prayers collected in the *Carmina Gadelica* in the 19th century from Gaelic speaking Scotland by Alexander Carmichael, there are many where both Mary and Bride are invoked, sometimes both together. For a brief overall picture of Mary in Irish Bardic Poetry see J.P Mackey in *Cosmos* vol.10/1 (1994) pp 70-78.

<sup>674</sup> It is perhaps worthy of note that Búi/Bua is referred to as "Búi of the battles" in the Ds of Cnogba.

three female characters whose allegiance to one of the two sides in the Battle seems to have been won as the result of a sexual encounter,<sup>675</sup> illustrating the writer's emphasis on patrilineality as essential to Order in the microcosm.<sup>676</sup> This could perhaps suggest some long-running controversy, dating from a prehistoric matrilineal ingredient in social structures, such as might account for the incidence of matronymics for such figures as Lugh himself and Conchobar mac Nessa<sup>677</sup>; or as has been suggested, it might have been part of an argument against intermarriage with Viking settlers. It is highly likely that it is illustrative of the general misogynist sentiments of the learned classes of the time, who were, after all, very much part of their mediaeval world of international scholarship. And yet the Morrigan's function in the Battle shows her in her characteristic role of actually causing the rout of the enemy by 'spiritual means', by inhibiting the normal executive capacities of 'the men of Ireland' by the panic and terror she wields. Our 'sage', in organising his lore for a didactic purpose, as just suggested, finds himself quite unable to control her. She may choose to support the forces of order because of her relationship with the Dagda, but she is no pushover. The saviour figure, Lugh, includes her powers with those of all the archetypal Otherworld 'Men of Art' whose gifts, freely offered, he orchestrates for the defeat of the disruptive forces of chaos and to inaugurate a golden age. She is also given 'the last word', in which she seems to be speaking for the sage, or learned school, responsible for the Tale: proclaiming the victory of Order, cosmic and microcosmic, as dependent on true kingship, prophesying its fruits in terms of an age of peace and prosperity, and ending with a characteristic prophecy of disaster and disintegration.

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<sup>675</sup> Two of them with the Dagda : the Morrigan paras 84,85 in ITS LII and the daughter of Indech the Fomorian king para. 93; and the third Ériu of the *Túatha Dé Danaan* with Bres' Fomorian father, paras 16-22

<sup>676</sup> See full discussion of this in connection with Bres' kingship in E.A.Gray "Cath Maige Tuired: Myth and Structure" in *Éigse* XVIII pp 183-209 and XIX pp.1-34,op.cit.

<sup>677</sup> N.W.Patterson, 1990., "Patrilineal Kinship in Early Irish Society: the evidence from the Irish law texts." refers to Jack Goody, *Comparative Studies in Kinship*, (Stanford USA 1969) pp.235-239 "Goody has shown that the linguistic evidence for Indo-European patriliney could as well be interpreted as showing Indo-European matriliney." She adds, "Patrilineality was a strict rule only as regards denial of the rights of outsiders who had fathered offspring on women of the *fine*; the rule prevented the disruption of the kinship group by the competing loyalties of sons who lived with their mothers' people but maintained ties with their fathers." p.136.

Among the Akan there does not appear to be a specific *obosom* associated with war and destruction, unlike for instance their neighbours the Krobo.<sup>678</sup> Belief in witchcraft is very strong, and therefore in the impersonal force *bayo* which controls witches who are mostly, but not always, women. The strong belief in the disruptive power of negative emotions such as envy, anger and ill-will on both the *sunsum* and also it seems on the *'kra*, nowadays commonly translated as 'soul' (simpliciter), seems to me to have some connection with the destructive power of witchcraft.<sup>679</sup> *Abosom* are invoked to seek out and counteract witchcraft and also *asuman* can be used for protection. There does not seem to be any specific connection between 'the Female Principle' and this destructive force.

### **And their Encounter with Christianity?**

The remit for this study requires some attempt to assess the evidence for a significant encounter of 'female divinity' with incoming Christianity in both cultures, and having done so to make some comparative comments.

It is probably fair to claim that the advent of Christianity did not itself cause the 'put-down' of female divinity in the consciousness of the learned classes among the Irish.<sup>680</sup> The hints discernable in the foregoing study of literature relating to Lugh and Lughnasa do suggest that this very masculine pan-Celtic divinity, with his attributes and soubriquets of 'longarm' and 'many-skilled' had been an essential mythological newcomer where Ireland is concerned, at least in the heroic period of

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<sup>678</sup>Omenyo 1985 p.4.

<sup>679</sup> The Rev. Charles Gyang-Duah, however told me that the prevailing notion nowadays is that it is *bayo* which produces the evil thoughts rather than the other way round. See interesting cogent evidence in B.Meyer, "If you are devil, you are a witch and, if you are a witch, you are a devil" *Journal of Religion in Africa* vol.XXII pp.98-130 (1992), on the basis of field-work among Ewe Christians in south-eastern Ghana, integrating the phenomenon of witch-craft into the world containing 'biblical' demons; a somewhat paradoxical development in the eyes of contemporary European Christians!.

<sup>680</sup> See Herbert 1988 "Goddess and King" cited in chap.three, part three; and her unpublished paper cited in part one above.

uncharted Irish proto-historical times, and perhaps before. However the patriarchal climate of the world into which Jesus of Nazareth came was already so pervasive that the literature which provided the nourishment, inspiration and intellectual fire of those vital pioneers of what is called Celtic Christianity inevitably had its further effect as the Christian faith was inculturated within Early Irish society. McCone's chapter on "Sovereignty and the Church", with his usual wealth of quotations from the Judaic/Christian Scriptures, together with extracts from sagas, provides some indications of several methods employed by monastically trained literati to demote the Women of sovereignty.<sup>681</sup>

However, in Chapter Three above, especially in the section examining *Baile in Scáil* some evidence has been collected indicating that in the ninth century the *Flaith Érenn* was still making her presence known in and through the *Lia Fáil*, lying directly on the earth, and that that presence was still necessary to the authenticity and sacral authority of kings.<sup>682</sup> The passage quoted in the note above reveals both the vitality of the tradition and the need to give it some kind of Christian reference. Reference to the goddess origin of Fál, implicit in: **It was no chance which caused it** (the flight of the heart of Fál from Tara to Tailtiu) **but Christ's being born, which is what broke the power of idols**, enabling a rejection of her and of her sacred *lecc* and at the same time retaining the significance of *Fál* in connection with the Dál Cuinn, to whose interest, in parallel with that of the authority of the churches, so much of the surviving literature is devoted.

For the nineteenth century European Christian missionaries to the Gold Coast, both *Asaase Yaa* and the ancestral rites and traditions involving *aberewa* were, as we have seen merely valueless idolatry, to be repudiated by all Christian converts

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<sup>681</sup> 1991, pp.138-160, esp.148f and153ff

<sup>682</sup> An interesting "explanatory" passage in LGE (.para.309), referred to above, is worth quoting in full. **It is the Túatha Dé Danaan who brought with them the Great Fál, (that is the Stone of Knowledge *Lia Fis*), which was in Temair, whence Ireland bears the name of the "Plain of Fál". He under whom it should utter a cry was King of Ireland; until Cú Chulainn smote it, for it uttered no cry under him nor under his fosterling, Lugaid son of the three Finds of Emain. And from that out the stone uttered no cry save under Conn of Temair. Then its heart flew out from it from Temair to Tailtiu, so that it is the heart of Fál which is there. It was no chance that caused it, but Christ's being born, which broke the power of idols.**

and adherents. And as far as the Protestant missions were concerned, their theology gave no room for a Female presence (though what might be called the 'feminine' could not be excluded from their own characteristic spirituality). The controversy between the chiefs and the churches over the observation of the taboo on farming on certain days discussed in Chapter Two had nothing to do with any acculturation sensitivity; it is no doubt a different matter now.<sup>683</sup>

A quotation from one of the few recognised West African women theologians, seems appropriate. She is Mercy Oduyoye,<sup>684</sup> who although she is based in Nigeria and writes under her married Yoruba name is herself a member of an Akan royal lineage. "Matriliney may give the impression of the structural domination of women in certain parts of Africa, but...no real power resides in the hands of women. In today's Ghana and in the context of political power struggles, the maternal line is irrelevant". She herself has not seen evidence to back up "the chorus of voices that points out women's prominence in traditional cults". In her essay "A Case Study: Spiritual Churches in Cape Coast, Ghana"<sup>685</sup>, Bridgett Levitt shows that in spite of the preponderance of women in the membership of the 33 churches she researched, all of the positions of authority were filled by men, and even in those six which were actually headed by a Prophetess, "the other positions of authority were usually occupied by men". She goes on to confirm Oduyoye's comment on male leadership of 'traditional' shrines:- "the courts of even the female *akomfo* are composed almost entirely of men." As for the mission founded churches, the reluctance of those who have actually ordained women to make them District Pastors is still evident ( and is paralleled for many of their European sisters!)

Thus in both peoples the 'encounter with Christianity' cannot be said to have caused the diminution of the status of women; indeed in its emphasis on the value of the poor and disadvantaged and Christian responsibility to care for their welfare, it

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<sup>683</sup> Professor Opoku of the African Studies Institute of the University of Ghana is, I believe, currently doing some work on Ecology and Religion in Ghana.

<sup>684</sup> *Hearing and Knowing* (1986) p.123

<sup>685</sup> In ed. Asempa Publishers, *The Rise of Independent Churches in Ghana*, (Accra 1990) pp.39-69.



probably mitigated any oppression by society<sup>686</sup>. Patriarchal control was already taking over in pre-Christian Ireland, as we have seen, and among the Akan, the influence of close contact with Islam from, perhaps the 13th century onwards, together with the development of the *Oman* level of militarised structures of power, emphasised male power. And, as Rattray tells us, the deeply engrained male chauvinism of European colonial officials, which also of course informed their friends, the Christian missionaries, further weakened the influence of *aberewa*.

While the Christian Irish, as we have seen, still continue to retain the experience of the female/feminine in the divine in Mary, mother of God, at least in popular devotional ritual and custom, the motherhood of God, does not seem, in my very limited experience, to be a concept that is readily available,<sup>687</sup> so to speak, for the contemporary English-speaking Akan Christian. That it was, however, and presumably still is, just below the surface for the matrilineal Akan is corroborated by the fact that the great Dr Aggrey of the Gold Coast “always thought of God as Father-Mother, or rather Mother-Father”.<sup>688</sup>

The last word should perhaps go to a Ghanaian woman, Mercy Amba Oduyoye. Part 11 of her book, which she heads “Themes in African Theology” has a section called “Feminism: a Precondition for a Christian Anthropology”, from which the following is taken<sup>689</sup>: “Our baptism in Christ compels us to see ourselves as the beginning of a new humanity modelled after Christ. Just as Galatians 3:27-28 has been evoked on behalf of the abolition of slavery and racism, so the feminist in these latter days evokes it to show that sexism is incompatible with our being in Christ. We are baptised into Christ as persons, irrespective of our social status, so that just as the humanity of the male is taken into the Christ so is the humanity of the female. There is

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<sup>686</sup> *Cáin Adomnáin*; the Law of the Innocents, is a case in point.

<sup>687</sup> There are other West-African peoples whose Supreme Being is thought of as explicitly Mother/Father such as the Fon of Dahomey where Mawu-Lisa is “one deity with dual aspects, male and female.” (See Ikenga-Metuh 1982). There are recent attempts by African Catholic theologians to apply African motherly imagery to God. e.g Charles Nyamiti of Tanzania see J.Parratt, ed. *A Reader in African Christian Theology* (London 1987) pp.58-68.

<sup>688</sup> cited from Edwin Smith’s Foreword to *West African Religion* by Geoffrey Parrinder, (London 1961) by Bediako, 1995. p.211.

<sup>689</sup> op.cit p. 137.

no sexual distinction in the Trinity, but the qualities labelled feminine and masculine are all manifested in Christ Jesus who is the image of the excellence of God.”

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

The part played by the Celtic divinity Lugh in his Irish guise in two mythological Tales, - *Cath Maige Tuired* whose exegesis formed the first part of Chapter One, and the 'Introduction' to the text known as *Baile in Scáil* examined in Chapter Three, has indeed, I believe, proved itself to be the ground-bass<sup>690</sup>, as it were, of this comparative study. The bulk of both narratives as written literature are dated to the 9th century, putting them firmly in the Christian era, so that they are themselves evidence for the encounter with Christianity which is the given context for this enquiry. These and other Early Irish sources for the lore of Lugh in its context are of course written entirely in the language of myth, and are descriptive, ostensibly at least, of a by-gone age. The material for the study of the Akan people of Ghana relevant to this same encounter whether in ethnographic, historical and theological writing, or from what might be called 'field research', relate to a living contemporary situation and are, to some degree, mediated in 'modern' western/northern discourse. I believe, however, that this dissimilarity has not affected the cogency or impaired the validity of the comparisons disclosed.

These tales, taken together, convey a remarkably comprehensive and self-consistent picture of the 'doctrine' of Irish sacral kingship which in early Christian Ireland was still seen to inform and integrate society in all its aspects, and to be vital to its health and stability and to cosmic Order itself. They are the work of members of the hereditary caste of *filid*, custodians of traditional learning and its cultural forms on whom the responsibility rested, together with the saints and their heirs, for mediating the 'knowledge which illumines' especially, no doubt, at times of crisis and need. That there were urgent contemporary didactic purposes implicit in both of the tales has been argued in this study. What is striking, however, in literature coming from roughly four hundred years 'after Patrick' is the central role given to Lugh

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<sup>690</sup> Chambers English Dictionary 1988; entry for **ground-bass**: "bass part constantly repeated with varying melody and harmony".

*Samildánach* / the *Scál* ; there seems to be no escaping from the implication that this role is being regarded as necessary to endorse the ideology and the status of the ‘sacral ruler’.

In both tales Lugh figures as the prototype/Otherworld King; and in both he is functioning in and through a ‘microcosmic’ Tara. The events recounted in 2MT are explicitly set in that ‘other time’, mythological time, in “really real” time in Eliade’s phrase<sup>691</sup>. The “really real” place in 2MT is, of course ‘Ireland’ - that Ireland to which the news of the victory of the *Túatha Dé Danaan* is announced by the Morrígan in the last paragraph: **...the royal heights of Ireland and...its síd-hosts,...its chief waters and ...its river-mouths**<sup>692</sup>. *Baile in Scáil* however, is set in the time of the Sons of Míl, and tells of the adventure of Conn, the eponymous ancestor of the Dál Cuin, whose contemporary descendants still ‘reign’ in Tara, now in grass-covered ruin. Yet Tara in the Tale is the really real primordial Tara, where Conn experienced the epiphany of two Otherworld powers, not only of Lugh Longarm, ‘king-god’ and *Scál* but also, through his stepping onto the *Lia Fáil*, the flagstone set directly in the earth, of the Earth goddess/ *flaith Érenn*, who recognised and responded to the encounter with her voice, with its prophetic message. The really real Event which authenticated the claim of the kings of Tara to be kings of all Ireland, however, is set in the Otherworld dun/inauguration site, to which Conn and his entourage journeyed, “under the shadow of the *Scál*”, and where Lugh, the *Scál*, reigns as King and the *ingen/flaith Érenn* (under his direction) gives the drink of sacred marriage to each king of Tara from Conn to the present.

That these tales were understood and valued by their readers/ hearers in the 9th century and beyond is evident from the respect shown to them, not only by the 11th/12th ‘orthodox’ redactors, but by those who preserved them and referred to them in subsequent surviving written sources, indicating their status and authority as sacred word. In addition we have the highly significant reference in the Middle Irish text *Scél na Fír Flatha* (cited above) to the dictum of the “ecclesiastical lawyers...that

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<sup>691</sup> Quoted above.

<sup>692</sup> ed. Gray ITS vol.LII. I find this summary illuminating, - calling out for an attempt at exegetical commentary if mundane time/space allowed!

every time a wondrous apparition used to be shown to the royal rulers of yore - as the Scál revealed to Conn and as the land of promise was shown to Cormac - it was a godly ministration that used to come in that guise and not a devilish ministration. Moreover, (it is) angels that used to come to help them, since it is natural truth that they used to follow and it is the commandment of law that served them.”

In Chapter Two Part Two, under the heading Encountering Christianity as Confrontation 7th and 8th century texts and other material were examined revealing a strong school of thought, based in the monasteries, for which Tara was ‘Babylon’, indicating how deep had gone an early struggle between the new faith and those “royal heights of Ireland”, and which is, or so it appears to me, corroborated by recent archaeology. The completeness of the ban on any mention of details of those “pagan rites” accompanying the *banfeis*, particularly the *feis Temrach*, which was apparently embraced by all early Irish literati, is most significant. Above all, the evidence pouring in of the passionate searching of the Christian Scriptures, as literary material in all sorts of contexts, as we have seen, for example, in the analysis by McCone of Muirchú’s tale of the confrontation at Tara.<sup>693</sup> and most notably of all in our context, the planning, by Adomnán and like-minded clerics, of a new biblically based inauguration ceremony involving anointing with oil by the Church, helps to make the role given to Lugh in these prestigious 9th century Tales more remarkable still.

I indicated in the the first section of Chapter One my hope that by focusing mainly on the lore surrounding Lugh on the one hand, and on the institution of the Akan traditional chieftaincy on the other, the similarities within the ‘universe of meaning’ proper to each of these cultures might be revealed in a mutually illuminating way. Most of the findings resulting from research on these lines is concentrated under four headings in Chapter Three, during which it has become evident that that role given to Lugh in relation to the sacral aspect of Irish kingship, belongs among the Akan to the Ancestors of the royal lineage from which a paramount chief is chosen. The main parallels detected between the functions of the Sacral Ruler and the

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<sup>693</sup> The ‘confrontation school’ is also evident in the demonization of the people of the *sídh* in the later sagas and noted in the tale *De S’il Conaire Már* from a genealogical tract, in the identification of the *Fomoiré* and the denizens of the Mounds in BIS, and in the short section on the word *Scál* .

doctrines behind them, in the two societies being compared, were discussed in the second part under that heading. But first some summary reference should be made to the background material explored under the first heading, - Kinship and Kingship.

In both societies the basic working unit was the local lineage segment or kin-group; the Akan *fofie* or matrilineal household being in practise about the same size as the *derbfine* or 'true-kin', though not often as much as four generations, while each unit would normally recognise wider kin groups within the same geographical area. Similar mutual obligations were recognised and accepted within kin-groups both basic and extended. Another similarity is that the Irish kin-group chose a 'head' whose considerable responsibilities included representing his kin when the *tuath* met in Assembly or law court. It is of interest that among the Akan the kin-member chosen for this latter duty was not necessarily the natural head of his lineage group but one, like the Irish representative, chosen for his suitable qualities from among those eligible. And more significantly still, the sacral rulers uniting the various lineages/population groups making up both the Irish *tuath* and *tuatha* and the Akan 'traditional divisions' or *aman* were similarly chosen by *nemed* persons or *opanyinfo* (council of elders) respectively, from the ranks of a recognised 'royal' lineage. For the Irish, the *senchaid*, the historian genealogists, and for the Akan the *aberewa*, the Old Woman, in the person of the reigning 'queenmother', provided the necessary expert and authoritative genealogical knowledge.

Both in Early Irish law and among the Akan, cleared agricultural land was 'kin-land', which could not<sup>694</sup> be alienated without mutual consent. It is clear that Akan farmers saw that their right to work a piece of land and to enjoy its fruits came from the matrilineal ancestors who had first taken it from the forest, but that the land itself belonged to the Spirit of the land (in Asante and Akuapem etc known as *Asaase Yaa*) whose permission had originally been sought and given when those ancestors first settled and marked out the area of "the Division", but whose permission was also sought with proper ritual by the head of the household before putting in the hoe each

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<sup>694</sup> This, though still true in theory in Ghana, has been modified by the growth of cocoa farms (and subsequent economic developments) which were sometimes cut out of 'the bush', by 'strangers, from another traditional division, (with permission of course.).

year. Putting together clues in the section “Kinship and Kingship” and in Chapter Four, I am suggesting that there could be quite a close parallel with these Akan perceptions in very early Irish tradition. I would mention for instance: the number of Origin Tales in which an Otherworld Woman or divinity is responsible for clearing the unformed wilderness and creating a fruitful plain, and is honoured by the whole (*nemed*) people; the sacredness of neolithic grave sites, and the whole cult of the sacred marriage with the goddess of the Land, combined with the arrangement by which a lord (*flaith*) acquires clients, by advancing them a fief of stock or land, in return for food rents and services, the contracts, so Kelly tells us, being made preferably with kinsmen. All this together suggests that all grants of land may also in early times in Ireland have been thought of as for usufruct only, the true ‘owner’ of the land being the goddess.

So far the parallels are close in what might be called the path from kinship to kingship. But as we have seen society for the Akan was a gerontocracy while for the Celtic Irish it was essentially ‘aristocratic’. For the former all authority and wisdom came from the spirit elders, and in developed Akan society, ultimately from the so-called ‘royal’ Ancestors, the *Nananom*, the “Spirit Grandfathers”<sup>695</sup> who are contacted through their ‘blackened stools’, (though all the *Nsamanfo* are honoured as senior members of their lineage group), and is embodied and exercised through their ‘grandchild’ (or rather their great nephew), - the one who sits on the Stool of the Ancestors. The authority they wielded in life, and also their power, is greatly enhanced by their purely spirit state. That this power must come from the ‘Supreme Being’ was acknowledged but not apparently much emphasised. That immemorial recognition comes into play, of course, in any circumstance or overwhelming combination of events which not only the ancestors but all other intermediate spirit powers and their accredited ‘sacred practitioners’ are proved to be helpless to remedy.<sup>696</sup>

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<sup>695</sup> Once again the female “senior stools” though still presumably in existence have apparently become marginalised .

<sup>696</sup> This was recently emphasised to me by two younger (non-Akan) PCG (Presbyterian Church of Ghana) pastor friends from Northern Ghana, first generation Christians, coming from communities still almost entirely traditional believers .

However the evidence of the importance of the ancestors to the Irish is also plentiful, not least in the huge volume of genealogical tracts which have survived. It seems quite clear that in pre-Christian doctrine and belief the Irish as Caesar said of the Gauls, believed themselves, (that is all *nemed* persons or *nemid*,) to be ultimately descended from a god, perhaps in theory from one particular named god, but that must be speculation. The aristocratic principle at the base of all Law and social structures which is expressed in the notion of *nemed* is surely bound up with this belief. However the coming of Christianity to Ireland and its acceptance by the professional lawyers, historians and poets, made overt reference to this tradition impossible. The brilliant work of the compilers of the Book of the Invasions of Ireland (LGE) by treating the *Túatha Dé Danaan* in the first place as one of a succession of peoples invading the land of Ireland, and subsequently giving selected members a second genealogy traced from the Sons of Míl, made it possible to 'record' the descent of "almost all the Irish" from Lugh, Núadu *Argetlám* or/and others, possibly including doublets of these. In spite of this basic dissimilarity, there is one extremely powerful shared paradigm/ image, as I see it, of the path from 'kinship to kingship' in the sacred Tree.<sup>697</sup>

There is a further interesting parallel, - relevant to the encounter with Christianity, - between the relationship of the contemporary Akan to the 'royal' Ancestors and that of the Irish to theirs. McCone quotes the passage in the tract *Senchas na Relec*<sup>698</sup> claiming that Cormac mac Art perhaps the most renowned legendary 'royal ancestor' was the "third person in Ireland who believed". Conchobar mac Nessa, the much storied king of Ulster, is named as the first who according to his death-tale was baptised in his own blood as a consequence of his passionate violent response to the news of Christ's crucifixion.<sup>699</sup> In the main church in Akropong there is displayed a plaque above the seats reserved for the *Okuapehene* and his court which reads:

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<sup>697</sup> See section on this in Chapter 3 part 2, which is already a summary.

<sup>698</sup> 1991.p.73

<sup>699</sup>.K Meyer . *Death -Tales of the Ulster Heroes* RIA Todd Lecture Series vol.14 Dublin 1906 2-21



**To the glory of God, With this plaque we honour our kings, Nana Addo Dankwa I, during whose reign the Gospel was preached and found a footing in Akuapem, Nana Dankwa II, during whose reign that Presbyterian Church of Ghana attained its centenary; Nana Dankwa III, during whose reign the Presbyterian Church in Akropong attained 150 years.**

It is worth quoting Dr Bediako's comment on the deep "symbolic significance" of the plaque, placed in a church which still refuses to grant the king full communicant membership. For it was indeed "the rulers who first welcomed Christianity to the realm...which means the ancestors.. It is hard to see how the king could come into full church membership without his royal ancestors. Were not they the ones who welcomed and provided for the establishment of Christianity in the first place? And is the king not after all the 'one who sits on the stool of his ancestors'? The dilemma which these questions posed<sup>700</sup> for all concerned is probably the measure of the importance of a Christian theology of ancestors." Both writers are Christian theologians attempting to relate their deepest inherited values to the Christian dispensation, in ways appropriate to their historical circumstances and discourse.

To return to the central comparison, beginning with the more visible aspects of the role of king/chief. Eoin Mac Neill's threefold summary of the duties of the king of a *tuath*: president of the assembly, commander of the forces in war and judge of the public court, can as we have seen be applied both to the lesser chief (*birempon*) and to the divisional *ohene* or paramount chief, and to the *Asantehene* also; and in practice it applies also to Irish 'overkings' including the *ri-cóiced* or provincial king. For in both societies the 'lesser' units were to a large degree legally autonomous, each linked through their own 'sacral ruler' to the higher king by a contractual arrangement involving an oath made personally by him (and for the Akan by the 'queenmother' also) which also bound them to bring their own entourage to their superior's Assembly and to aid him in war. As for the ruler's role as judge, interestingly there is evidence, as noted above, that it was called for in a limited type

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<sup>700</sup> Bediako 1995, pp.228f . This comment by Bediako relates to the case of the reigning *Omanhene* of Dormaa who has become a communicant in return for a substitute being appointed by his elders to carry out those duties which are still forbidden in PCG regulations to a communicant member. See Chapter Two Part Two

of case only, and that the business was conducted by members of the specialist *brithem* caste according to Irish custom, and by the *akyeame* among the Akan. The ruler's role for both seems to have been similar, one of endorsement: described in an Irish legal text as the "cliff which is behind the courts for judgement and promulgation", with its echo in the LGE verse relating to Lugh. And here there is quite an illuminating comparison to be noted; the possible dangers of a more participatory role in the proceedings for both 'sacral rulers' are equally dire. For the Akan chief's words in a trial where the Oath carrying the deepest taboo of his royal ancestors has been spoken must convey nothing less than the true verdict of those Ancestors themselves, and any repeated failure in this would be grounds for the 'de-stooling' of the chief if the wrath of the Ancestors with all its possible consequences is to be avoided ; and likewise any 'false judgement' uttered by a reigning Irish king, as a violation of *fir flathemon*, the Truth or Justice of the Ruler, automatically invalidated his kingship as both 2MT and other sources testify, with equally destructive consequences to the well-being of his people and land. As we have seen the inviolability of the Oath with its various functions and forms was essential to the stability and viability of both societies. Once again, while for the Akan, the Ancestors and the *abosom* provided the sanctions supporting the Oath, for the Irish, after the proscription of swearing an oath before a druid and by the gods of "my people", there are hints that Lugh retained in surviving Irish tradition some special connection in that area, although the saints and with their Christian Scriptures, their relics and power of malediction, took over the main role.

This brings us into the deeper area of that 'dogma' of sacral rule mentioned above. We have noted and compared in some detail the evidence available of the requirements of what might be called the social contract between chief/king and people. We cited the contents of the injunctions given to the king in the *Audacht Morainn*, illustrated vividly in 2MT, for the Irish, and the sample given by Rattray of those to which the chief when taking his oath before his enstooling has to agree, for the Akan. We noted the similarity of the consequences which were expected to follow if this 'contract' were broken. Moreover, as the whole thrust of 2MT shows, the behaviour by which the Irish 'true king' is recognised has cosmological and

cosmogonic implications. For the Akan, the well-being of the traditional state and its 'subjects' was thought of as depending on the *ohene*'s performance of those regular rituals, twice in each six-weekly month, greeting and giving honour and 'food' to the stool-ancestors. And there are cosmic implications, or so I have argued, in the drum sequence telling of the initial creation by *Odomankoma* of those three essential officials of the 'aboriginal' or prototype chief's Court, itself creative of human Order. And if one were to make a selection of the proverbs or maxims in Christaller's great collection which would be used by the chief's senior *okyeame* (and indeed also conveyed on the drums, and suggested in symbolic visual design and artefact) on public occasions presided over by the chief, I have no doubt that they would convey as rich an understanding of the ethical power of the sacral role of the chief as does the *Audacht*.

Just as the living king/chief conveys blessing and wisdom from the unseen world, so he needs the reciprocal support and blessing of his people. We have seen similarities in the specialist role and relationship with the sacral ruler of the 'state' poet among the Irish, and of the Akan *okyeame*<sup>701</sup>, with the interesting difference that for the Akan the latter can be addressed by his chief as "my mother" and the Irish poet by his king as "my wife". But the rulers also both received, and still do in Akan-land what might be called creative praise from poet or drummer etc.<sup>702</sup>

All these aspects of sacral rule are of course derivative ; they stem from a mythological 'fact', a mediatorial relationship between the unseen world of power and this world, which requires a ritual act of union between the power from beyond and the 'king'. As we have seen this is accomplished for the Akan in the simple ceremony of enstoolment by which the new chief is lowered gently three times onto the most revered blackened stool of an Ancestor after which libations are poured and sacrifices and prayer offered by the *okyeame* for the chief, and for prosperity and increase in his

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<sup>701</sup> See chapter 3 pt 4

<sup>702</sup> Mentioned above is the ceremony of blessing the chief during the *Odwira* in Akropong which involved a spraying of water taken into the mouth., 'conveying' as we have seen the personal blessing of that person's *sunsum*.

reign.<sup>703</sup> Thereafter the Chief is the one “who sits on the Stool of the Ancestors” a phrase which encapsulates perfectly his sacral status. “From now onwards he is invested with all the power and sanctity of the dead (ancestors), until such time as he dies or is destooled, i.e. made to sever by force this spiritual connection.”<sup>704</sup> Another helpful comment describes the chief as being continuously possessed by the spirits of the Ancestors.

The search for details of the ritual by which the sacral authority of Irish kings was made real and effective in pre-Christian Ireland has occupied many scholars for many years. Moreover, as we have seen, the most powerful and dedicated minds among the most influential *nemed* persons in 7th century Christian Ireland - abbots and ecclesiastical lawyers -, were directed towards discovering and instituting a specifically Christian inaugurating ritual, without success.

Collating the evidence discerned by several scholars, we can list the following ingredients of an inauguration ceremony surviving into Christian Ireland: the use of specially designated ancient inauguration sites usually on a hill or ‘mound’, (there are many indications suggesting that this was normally a ‘hollow hill’ i.e. a burial mound/*sid*), involving a sacred flagstone or *lecc* on which the king steps, a sacred tree or *bile*, an officiating poet or other designated person who hands a rod of hazel to the king. Probably the occasion would have involved a proclamation of a form of *Teagasc Rioch* of which the *Audacht Morainn* is regarded as the oldest example, and an oath, and also praise/chants provided by an *ollam* from the *filid*. It is clear however that there must have been, in earlier times, at any rate on the “royal heights” or provincial ritual centres, a more explicit ritual celebrating the sacred marriage, which may have had some connection with a Celtic horse-god cult and which was unacceptable to the establishment of Christian Ireland, including the order of *filid* and the *senchaid* generally. The evidence has convinced me that that establishment’s attempt to fill a serious gap as in Adamnán’s suggested anointing ritual based on passages in the the 1st Bk of Samuel was not and could not be applicable or

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<sup>703</sup> See under “Kinship and Kingship”

<sup>704</sup> Rattray 1929 p.84

acceptable in the 7th century, and that *Baile in Scáil*, probably composed two centuries later, confirms that view. That Tale, as we have argued, not only authenticates the kings of Tara as Kings of all Ireland through their participation in the sacred union, the *banfeis* with the Sovereignty of Ireland, who also gives them the symbolic heroic food from her domain; it also endorses the ancient lore of *Fál*, the prototype of every sacred flagstone in every kingly inauguration rite. One might say that the latter could have been felt to be the ‘keystone’ of the autonomy of the *tuath* integral to the Law Tracts, which in the ninth century was being seriously undermined. In the course of Ó Cathasaigh’s meditation on “The Semantics of *Síd*”<sup>705</sup> (“the occurrence in Old Irish of the formally identical pair 1. *sid/síth* ‘Otherworld hill or mound’, and 2. *sid/síth* ‘peace’”) he quotes Byrne:<sup>706</sup> “the ceremonies which attended the inauguration of Irish kings may have been as old as the tumuli on which they were performed”. The findings of Professor Eogan, the archaeologist presiding over the excavation of the 5000 year old great mound of Knowth and its two passage tombs, noted in Chapter Four above, seem to me to give a remarkable endorsement to this supposition. His description of a “worship area” immediately in front of the entrance of both tombs, (facing east and west respectively) includes among other relevant details, a central square limestone flagstone, “very carefully secured”. As we have noted the whole of this description makes cogent reading in this context including evidence of a standing stone in direct alignment with the centre of the flagstone and the centre of the ornamented kerbstone at the mouth of the tomb. (We are reminded once again of Lugh and the *Dindshenchas* tradition of his *banfeis* with Buí the eponymous noble woman of Cnogba, the ancient goddess figure par excellence, whose ‘tomb’ is Knowth ) Moreover the findings of Ó Cathasaigh in the study just mentioned which convey a basic connection between the typical kingly inaugural site and the ‘people of peace’, bring added depth of meaning to the essential significance of the sacred marriage for Irish kingship, as understood in ‘Celtic times’. This has been further explored in the fourth chapter on the ‘Female Principle’.

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<sup>705</sup> *Eigse* vol.XVII (1977-79), pp. 137-155, at pp.137 & 148.

<sup>706</sup> 1973, *Irish kings and high-kings*, p.2

The material researched in Part Four of this central chapter, The Irish Festival of Lughnasa and the Akan Odwira provides as we have seen, several interesting parallels. Both include a thanksgiving for the first fruits of the land; both are festivals of the dead; and both have been taken over, as it were, by the need for an annual ritual celebrating and reinforcing the centralising power of the sacral ruler. And, to repeat an earlier “comparative comment”,- there are indications that this development occurred in response to the exigencies of an heroic (or militarised) age for both peoples, with its earliest beginnings sparsely documented as far as the historian is concerned. For, as we have seen, the Akan evidence suggests that the characteristic stool-chieftaincy and the formation of the *aman*, represented a movement from more or less acephalous communities towards a more centralised identity, with the need for unifying rituals. The feast of the dead aspect of the *Odwira* could also be made to contribute to the glorification of the achievements of aggressive power, as it did in Kumasi. The respect for the presence of the ‘tombs’ of those “gracious queens”, whose funeral games are the ‘occasion’ of the *nasad* of Lugh, continued in historical (Christian) times side by side with the Uí Néill propaganda/tradition surrounding the Tara kingship and the *Óenach Tailten*.

There is, however, as we have seen, what appears to be at least one difference; the Akan feast marks the New Year, which coincides in that tropical culture with the harvest of the ancient staple food, the yam, to be followed after due rest, by the start of the preparation of the soil and the planting season in time for the fructifying rainy seasons, and is prepared for by fasting and the silence imposed on the drums. The name *Odwira* itself means cleansing or purification and the *Odwira suman*, is traditionally imbued with powerful forces for achieving this for the whole community. We noted the emphasis given by both the Akuapem paramount chief and the Revd S.K.Aboa on the cleansing and renewal of harmony in community and extended family life and the strengthening of all ties.<sup>707</sup> It is not clear whether the Lughnasa festival

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<sup>707</sup> The *geissa* attached to the Lughnasa festival in some *Dindshenchas* texts are too obscure perhaps to yield some comparison with this aspect of the *Odwira* festival. The Akan/Twi word *Odwira* is the appropriate word used in the Akan Bible to translate references to the purification from sin wrought by Christ, and is given as an example of the potential richness of meaning for Akan Christians

had this connotation also; it was certainly not a new year celebration. The great Lughnasa pilgrimage up Croag Patrick in Co. Mayo does have a penitential and redemptive aspect.

The chapter on The Female Principle provides some background for the parallel just noted; that the annual Festival of thanksgiving and petition for the produce of the Earth goddess/spirit (in the case of the Akan this seems to have included the work of the rain-god: water, as we have seen, being the image of the semen/masculine/*ntoro/sunsum*.) was subsumed to the needs of the growing 'political'/ military/ dominating power of the 'overking'. It also indicates a deep though subliminal likeness between *Asaase/aberewa* and the Irish Earth goddess. Their relationship with the sacrality of the king/chief, though it is basically equally powerful and essential, is imaged differently: one as Bride and one as Mother. This difference is mirrored in the imagery of the relationship between the Irish king and his personal poet and the chief with his head *okyeame*. Both are sources of Otherworld knowledge: while *Lia Fáil* is called "the stone of knowledge" in LGE, so the *aberewa*, (the old woman) is the repository of wisdom. One might suggest that Brigit shows kinship with some aspects of both *aberewa* and *Asaase*, and the Irish 'sovereignty' with others. As for Búi of Knowth and Beare, she seems to combine something of all the avatars of Irish Female divinity; (she is even given the title "Búi of the battles") and is the most formidable, primeval and well-documented of those "gracious queens" to whom Lugh is wedded in the tradition. As cited in connection with the Festival of Lughnasa in the previous section, we do have real evidence of an older name for the Irish celebration of First Fruits at the ancient Celtic quarterly seasonal festival at the beginning of August, *Brón Trogain*, or "the earth sorrows under its fruits".

Under a postscript to Chapter Four the question was asked whether the general 'put-down' of female divinity discerned in many parts of mediaeval Irish literature can be attributed simply to the encounter with Christianity. A tentative

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whose Christian experience is fed through the Scriptures in their own mother tongue. See Bediako 1995 pp.70ff

answer, as I saw it, is that the ‘rise’ of Lugh himself as belonging to the heroic age suggests that this was already part of a growing imbalance of power in human consciousness conceived of as both cosmic and terrestrial which is itself evident in the Judaic/Christian scriptures, which formed so much of the nourishment of early Irish literati. This climate of patriarchy in an heroic age also applies to the gradual marginalisation of female power among the matrilineal Akan. The quotation from Mercy Amba Udyoye however, echoes the critique which rejects this as part of the message of Jesus, which is here, as in so many contexts, seen to be creatively subversive of entrenched dominating power bases.<sup>708</sup>

Much illuminating material relating to this study has been quoted (particularly in Chapter Four) from Ó Cathasaigh’s article “The Eponym of Cnogba” which includes many clues for a possible “design” in the learned tradition relating to Lugh and Bua/Buí. Ó Cathasaigh has opened up areas of enquiry which give space for the many hints, (amounting, as I see them to convincing evidence) contained in the foregoing, suggesting that Lugh, was, as far as Irish<sup>709</sup> traditional learning is concerned, mythologically a ‘newcomer’ of which this evidence for the earlier existence of *Brón Trogain* is one.

Such a scenario would I believe, as noted above, indicate that the role of Lugh, as *samildánach*/ supreme sage, as King god/prototype Otherworld sacral ruler, divine warrior/saviour bringing the cosmic and microcosmic victory of Order over chaos and reigning still in the ‘really real’ Tara, through its ‘rightful’ kings’, was itself the result of an acculturating process in prehistoric, though not necessarily very early, Ireland. For this process and the potential unity which it enabled, Lugh’s *banfeis-righi* with Buí, and Nás (for the Laigin) and also with the daughter of the Dagda/Elcmar would be of deep importance, with the interesting addition of Tailtiu as foster-mother. It would incidentally explain the aetiological work of Lugh in connection with Assembly in general and *Óenach Tailten* in particular in the LGE tradition. But more

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<sup>708</sup> The brief summary of the parallels discovered under the heading “The Female Principle...” in chapter 4 are likely to be fruitfully illuminated in terms of a so-called ‘feminist hermeneutic’.

<sup>709</sup> One must remember, (as noted in the first paragraph of Chapter One Part 2) Lugh/Lugus’ credentials as a pan-Celtic divinity .



cogently still, it would further explain the importance given in Christian Ireland to such works of contextual theology as the two 9th century Lugh Tales BIS and 2MT, with their reaffirmation on the one hand of the content of ‘sacred marriage’ in the inauguration ritual of kings, and on the other, of the doctrines of sacral kingship, and their efficacy. That the “ecclesiastical lawyers”, found no difficulty in recognising within their own Christian scripture-based theological categories a place for Lugh (and Mananán mac Lir) as providing an angelic ministration from the One whom Busia and others refer to as the Supreme Being, and who for the Gaels is King of Angels and Lord of the Elements, should not surprise us.

But the similar autonomous identity which both *oman* and Irish *tuath* provided did not readily expand into a wider political unity and loyalty. However, while Ireland was not a political or practical whole, it was geographically and mythologically one, enabling *ollam* and *co-arb*, both with high enough *nemed* status, to function in theory at least, in terms of that wholeness, Akan-land and Ghana itself are neither. This fact makes the work of the Moses figure *Okomfo* Anokye the more remarkable: the founding of the cult of the Golden Stool of Asante enabling a ‘Union’ of neighbouring Akan paramountcies to share an identity and mutual loyalty which lasted for two centuries and formed the basis of what became the enormous wealth and ruthless power of the ‘Asante Empire’. The on-going struggle that African ‘countries’ have within their arbitrary boundaries to achieve a working unity and order based on community consent, such as they enjoyed in simpler times, while at the same time avoiding falling into “the way things (were) done in Kumasi” is worthy of our understanding.

An attempt to elucidate some concise ‘conclusions’ on the encounter of the Akan traditional states and their ‘sacral’ rulers with Christianity, based on the material examined in this text must now be made. The main difficulty is of course that this encounter is still in process, and that in spite of many fairly recent mitigating developments, its confrontational aspects are still recognisable. The reasons for this situation have been seen to be complex. The most evident and well canvassed is the widely differing world view and consequent bias in interpreting the Christian Scriptures, brought by the first 19th and early 20th century European missionaries

preventing them from recognising any possibility of *preparatio evangelii* in the religious experience of their converts. This led them to establish the policy of separating their early communities as much as possible, not only from the personal household dealings with subordinate spirits, so important in the exigencies of Akan customary daily life, but also as much as possible from the practices of the ‘civic religion’, centred on the Ancestors, and the one who “sat on the Stool of the Ancestors” which informed the whole fabric of Akan society. And although this attitude by expatriate missionary staff was already changing even in Rattray’s time, its effects lasted longer. As we have seen, the ‘Salem policy’ also contributed to the indigenisation of the structures and hierarchical leadership of the Protestant mission churches, in that they came to resemble those of the traditional state. For the members of Christian communities, “the fountain of spiritual power and leadership was now the Church whose Minister was regarded as the servant and representative of Christ who was the Head of the Church”.<sup>710</sup> The challenge to the traditional state began to be apparent as we have seen not long after the beginning. The missionary founding fathers both white and black can also be seen to this day to exert characteristic ‘ancestor’ influence in both positive and inhibitive ways. It seemed to us in conversations with individual pastors of the PCG and others in Akuapem that for some the cautious *status quo* between the church and its ‘ancestors’ on the one hand, and the civic/religious relationship with the lineage ancestors embodied in the traditional chief on the other, can and should be maintained. Among others however, there is evidence of a deep and growing conviction that the whole matter of the reality of the ancestors is too integral to Akan identity and therefore to Akan Christianity to leave as it is. For how indeed can the the one who sits on the stool of the ancestors “come into full church membership without his royal ancestors”?

Yet the days of European missionaries attempting to control Christianity in what is now Ghana have long since gone; the claim is continually being made on the basis of plenty of evidence that it is now an indigenous religion, with the adherence to one or other of the very many Christian churches and groups growing fast. One of the

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<sup>710</sup> Effa Appabio op.cit.pp.280f.

features of this growth which provides another parallel with early Christian Ireland is a similar discovery and experience of the Christian Scriptures as “our story”; though some of these groups have tenets which are not recognisably biblical. The majority, however, show features that might provide illuminating parallels with the process in early Ireland by which devotion to the old sources of supernatural help such as the goddess Brig (Brigit) and Lugh himself was transferred to angels and saints<sup>711</sup>.

There is something very profound, as we have seen, in this enthusiastic appropriation of the biblical faith history into the corporate consciousness of both peoples, enabling that characteristic primal “vital participation”<sup>712</sup>...participation in a common life and in its resources and powers that constitute community” to be enlarged and enriched, and indeed ‘universalised’. As Bediako puts it: “Applied to the experience of transcendence, ‘vital participation’ in Christ then opens the way for a participation equally in the resources and powers of all those who are also brought within the community”. This appropriation and its effects sustained the intellectual effort of the Irish *senchaid* over hundreds of years, and, it seems, is an important dynamic empowering much contemporary African Christian congregational life, and not only such theologians as Kwame Bediako.<sup>713</sup> It is to be regretted that having reached the limits of space and time appropriate to such a study as this there is no room to do more than make such generalised reference to the working out of this dynamic in some of the ‘independent churches’.<sup>714</sup>

The main focus of this thesis has of course been the **sacral ruler** as integral to the history, in the widest possible sense of that word, of the two peoples who have been the subject of this comparative study. An attempt has been made in this concluding chapter to summarize the multifarious details of similarities which have

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<sup>711</sup> See Ó Riáin, 1977, discussed at the close of Chapter 2.

<sup>712</sup> See Bediako 1995 p.103 referring to the writings of the Zairean theologian Vincent (now Gwa Cicala M.) Mulago.

<sup>713</sup> See, *op.cit.* *passim*.

<sup>714</sup> The Musama Disco Christo Church for example founded in 1922 and still stable, vigorous and genuinely Christian, identifies the story of the biblical ‘people of God’ as their story, combining a structure closely modelled on that of the traditional *oman* with some aspects of Methodism, and whose spirituality is unmistakably African. The potential for a cogent comparison with the life of the larger monastic ‘cities’ is there.

been uncovered. I would conclude with the following brief general comments on what I see as having emerged from the whole. (a) I think that it could be described as a study on the theme of 'power' in human society, as it has been experienced and understood by these two peoples; of the nature and sources of power, seen as essentially spiritual, and how it can be best be accommodated, and managed.' (b)The most striking similarity of all which has become evident, is the resistance to 'Christianity' posed by the socio/religious structures (with their moral reference), so deeply rooted in the sacrality of the traditional ruler; this, in both cultures, within a milieu of a remarkable degree of inculturation of the Christian faith. I believe that this similarity has contemporary theological relevance, and not only for those Akan Christian leaders who are hoping to bridge the gap between the churches and the chieftaincy. In my introduction to this study I referred to the title of Dr Bediako's lecture: "The primal imagination and the possibility of a new theological idiom". In the course of these five years study, I have been confirmed in my growing conviction, mentioned in that same introductory section, that the patterns of response to what is experienced as the 'really real', which have emerged are also recognisable in the roots of our own life experience, partially hidden under the prevailing epistemological structures of our western culture. I am encouraged therefore to hope in the possibility of the 'primal imagination' active in African Christianity, and so appealing to a section of the reading public in these islands in what is currently called 'Celtic Christianity', becoming an impetus towards a "new theological idiom"<sup>715</sup> for our newly pluralised, ecology conscious, 'new age' western society, sharing as we do a world-wide longing for empowerment.

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<sup>715</sup> Bediako 1995 pp.91-108.

## Glossaries of Irish and Twi Words Used

[Definitions are working definitions only; for the semantic field of any word, see DIL]

### Irish Words<sup>716</sup>

- aes dana*: folk with special art or skill; in 2MT 'men of art.'
- airecht*: assembly or court of law.
- ambue*: outsider, 'without cow'.
- anfír*: injustice, untruth.
- baile*: vision, prophetic ecstasy.
- ben*: woman, wife, *ban* as prefix: e.g. *banfeis*.
- bile*: sacred tree.
- bó*: cow.
- bóaire*: cow-freeman, 'strong farmer'.
- brithem*: judge, arbitrator, jurist.
- briugu*: (later *brugaid*) hospitaller.
- caillech*: old woman, nun.
- cáinte*: satirist.
- cath*: battle.
- céile*: client.
- cénél*: kin, race, people.
- comarbae*: (anglicised 'coarb'), used of ecclesiastical 'heirs'.
- cúlairicht*: backcourt.
- deorad*: outsider, alien, exile; hermit (*deorad Dé*).
- derbfine*: 'true kin': descendants in the male line of the same great-grandfather.
- derbflaith*: 'red-ale' drink (with play on *flaith*)

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<sup>716</sup> Many of these follow Kelly, *A guide to Early Irish Law*, 1988 pp301-323

*Dindshenchas*: Lore of Places.

*dóer*: unfree, base, dependent.

*drui*: druid, 'magus', worker of magic.

*din*: fortified dwelling, stronghold.

*echtra(e)*: adventure, 'outing'.

*éiric*: (later form of *éraig*) body-fine, fixed penalty for homicide.

*éolais*: secret knowledge.

*feis*: 'sleep the night' - wedding feast; (later, feast).

*fer*: man; e.g. *fer leigend*: Latin scholar.

*fidchell*: a board-game.

*fili*: poet (Pl *filid*).

*find*: fair, bright, shining.

*fine*: kin, family group.

*fintiu*: kin-land.

*fir*: truth, justice.

*fir flathemon*: king's justice, prince's truth.

*flaith*: ruler, king, lord,; sovereignty as in *flaith Érenn*.

*fled*: feast.

*geis*: taboo, injunction from Otherworld, prohibited action; (pl .*gessa*, *geissi*).

*iarrath*: fosterage; e.g. *Cáin Iarrath*, the law of the fosterage).

*imbas forosna*: 'encompassing knowledge which illumines'; poetic skill.

*ingen*: maiden, young woman, daughter.

*Lebor Gabála Érenn*: Book of the Taking of Ireland.

*lecc*: stone laid flat.

*lia*: stone in general.

*luge*: oath.

- mag*: plain, cleared meadowland.
- nemed*: privilege, sacredness: privileged person, dignitary, skilled professional; sanctuary, sacred place, land owned by privileged person.
- óenach*: assembly, fair.
- ollam*: expert, master in an art.
- rath*: “a fief, or advance of property, usually cattle, given by a lord to a client to secure his services”.<sup>717</sup>
- rí*: king, as in *rí cóicid* or king of a fifth or province, *rí ruirech* king of overkings, *rí tíaithe* king of one *tíath*.
- samildánach*: (the) many skilled (with the implication that the skills are united in one)
- scál*: supernatural or superhuman being, phantom, giant, hero, champion; (later man or human being: see also *banscál* for woman).
- senchas*: traditional lore, history; e.g. *Senchas Már*, a collection of law texts.
- senchaid*: nom. plural of *senchae*, historian, custodian of tradition.
- sid/síth*: Otherworld hill or mound; peace.
- tíath*: the basic polity, a people, petty kingdom, a territory.
- Túatha Dé Danaan*: ‘tribes’ or people of the goddess (Dana?)

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<sup>717</sup> Patterson, 1994, p.381.

## Words in the Akan Language (Twi)

[Note: the plural is indicated by prefixing the letter 'a' and when the initial letter is 'o' the prefix takes its place. This is a somewhat crude simplification.]

- aberewa*: old woman; used as name for 'Earth Spirit; and in connection with founding primordial ancestresses and (rarely) as general term for living 'queenmothers'.
- abisa*: session at obosom shrine when supplicants make their requests and propound their problems to officiating *okomfo*.
- abusua*: extended matrilineal clan of which there are generally believed to be seven, mostly experienced in their localized segments.
- adae*: lit. sleeping place; ritual contact with the royal ancestors in the stool house, made by their successor twice in every six-week month.
- adinkra*: symbolic designs, mainly used on ceremonial cloths.
- akyawade*: 'things hateful (to the tribe)': crimes which must be judged in the presence of the paramount chief, the *omanhene*.
- akonnua*: a sacred blackened stool, one which had belonged in this life to a revered royal ancestor, preserved as the individual locus, in a deep sense of his or her *sunsum* and the authority he or she still wields.
- asaase*: earth; also as *Asaase Yaa* (*Asaase Efua* in Fanti), the Earth Spirit, 'owner' of the underworld.
- Asantehemma*: queenmother of Asante.
- Asantehene*: king of the Asante people.
- bayi, bayo*: witchcraft.
- benkumhene*: chief of the the left wing, a sub-chief in the Akan quasi-military structure of the traditional state or *oman*.
- borebore*: excavator, hewer, architect, inventor, carver; often used as an appellation of *Odomankoma*.



- brafo*: executioner: see also *obosom brafo* and *suman brafo* to designate some working shrines.
- brong*: Guan traditional areas, patrilineal lineage based.
- efisem*: offences not involving the ‘tribal’ ancestors and coming within the jurisdiction of sub-chiefs or village heads and their councils.
- eno*: mother; term of respectful greeting to an older woman.
- fida fofie*: the day when the ceremony of the washing of the ruler’s *kra* took place in Akuapem on the “Friday after *Odwira* Sunday”; *fofie* means sacred Friday: “a day which comes round every forty-three days.”<sup>718</sup>
- fiefo*: matrilineal household.
- gyedua*: sacred tree: ‘tree of reception’.
- kunu*: husband.
- kwaesidae*: Sunday adae.
- kwame*: name given to male born on a Saturday.
- kyerama*: drummer.
- nmoatia*: dwarf-like spirits in the forest, some of them actively evil.
- mogya*: ‘blood soul’; the part of the Akan psyche which makes him or her part of the abusua, through the mother’s blood, and become a saman at death, hopefully proceeding to join that part of the abusua living in the samando, and can be reincarnated.
- mpanyinfo*: those exercising eldership in the structures of traditional society.
- nana*: ‘grandfather’ or proper address of respect for all chiefs both male and female; also used for *abosom*.
- nananom* : usually a collective term for matrilineal chiefly ancestors whose blackened stools occupy the stool house.

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<sup>718</sup> Rattray, 1927, p138.

- ntoro*: spirit inherited from father's line, 'child' of its patrilineal *obosom*, which is itself usually connected with waters, lakes or rivers. From this comes the person's *sunsum*.
- nyame akuma*: God's axe; stone celt (prehistoric implement) which used generally to be placed in the *nyamedua*.
- nyamedua*: God's tree; forked stem or branch of tree with container in fork with water and other offering, including piece of *nyame akuma*, placed in domestic compounds.
- oberoni kurom*: whiteman's town or quarter.
- obosom*: 'lesser deity'.
- odukro*: village headman.
- Odomankoma*: a name of God, translated as 'maker of things' or nowadays as 'Creator', especially associated with ceremonial drumming.
- odwira*: new year and first fruits (yam) festival, for honouring, feeding and celebrating the ancestors; purification and renewal of whole community and all the symbols and structures of the traditional *oman*.
- ohemma*: queenmother.
- ohum*: Twi name for Guan (*Bba*) 'new yam' festival, with renewal of community relationships including those with ancestors and local divinities.
- okara, kra*: (a) sometimes called 'life soul' (in Christian circles just 'soul'); comes directly from *Onyame* at birth and returns at death; (b) the child representing the *kra* of the chief; (c) adult *akara* who officiate in such rites as the washing of the chief's *kra*.
- okomfo*: ecstatic divining priest or priestess of an *obosom*, normally attached to a shrine.
- Okuapehemma*: queenmother of Akuapem traditional state.
- Okuapehene*: paramount chief of Akuapem.
- okyeame*: 'spokesman' of chief; female chiefs (*ahemma*) also have them.

- oman*: traditional state or division.
- omanhene*: paramount chief.
- osofo*: originally a priest of a state or of a local *obosom* cult; latterly taken over as a designation of ordained Christian clergy.
- opanyin*: elder.
- saman*: sometimes translated as ‘ghost’, not used of a person in this life. The ‘living-dead’ who share *mogya* with fellow-clan (*abusua*) members are known collectively as *samanfo*.
- sasabonsam*: evil forest monster; *sasa* is a dangerous, negative and destructive *spirit*, attached to the human psyche also and to that of some animals.
- sukuufo*: ‘school people: a popular name for Christians.
- suman*: “A fetish (*suman*) is an object which is the potential dwelling-place of a spirit or spirits of inferior status, generally belonging to the vegetable kingdom...closely associated with the control of powers of evil or black magic, for personal ends...used as much for defensive as for offensive purposes”.<sup>719</sup>
- sunsum*: ‘the personality soul’: see under *ntoro*. Some trees, animals etc also have *sunsum*.
- yaa*: name for a female born on Thursday.

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<sup>719</sup> Rattray *ibid* p.23.

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**ORAL SOURCES /INTERVIEWS INFORMING THE MATERIAL  
ON THE AKAN.**

**During visit to Eastern Ghana: 17th September - 8th October 1993:**

The Rev. S.K. Aboa, retired minister of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana; Twi language expert engaged in a new translation of the Bible accomodating the various dialects and vocabularies; Vice-Chair of the Akrofi-Christaller Memorial Centre; in his home at Mampong Akuapem. 19th Sept.

20th Sept. Introduction to the Akrofi-Christaller Memorial Centre for Mission Research and Applied Theology, Akropong Akuapem, its work and its staff .

Mrs Salome Ansa. Lecturer on staff of the Presbyterian Teacher Training College. Member of a sub-chieftaincy royal lineage within Akropong. She gave us some briefing information on the *Odwira* Festival, for which she was our guide: 21st 23rd, 24th, 26th and 1st October.

The Rev. T.A.Osei, retired Pastor of PCG; former Synod Clerk, (Secretary of the Synod of the PCG); within the *fofie* or lineage household of his late wife, the home of his retiral, in Akropong: 21st Sept.

Nana Dokua I, queenmother of Akuapem; in her official residence in Akropong; 27th Sept.

The Rev.A.L.Kwansa retired PCG Pastor, also former Clerk to the Synod; at his home in Aburi, Akuapem; 28th Sept.

Dr E Evans-Anfom FRCS, President of the Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences, and Chair of other medical and educational bodies (including the Akrofi-Christaller Centre); at his home (and surgery) in Accra; 30th Sept.

Professor K.Asare Opoku, Associate Professor in the Institute of African Studies in the University of Ghana, Legon, Accra: in the Institute building; 30th Sept.

Nana Addo Dankwa III, *Omanhene* of Akuapem, in the reception room of his palace in Akropong; 5th Oct.

The Rev. Dr Kwame Bediako, Director of the Akrofi-Christaller Memorial Centre; scheduled discussions in the Centre; 22nd and 29th Sept. and 6th Oct.

Other 'oral sources' included a variety of unscheduled contacts and discussions and social occasions; attendance at Church Services and the Centre daily prayers; and of course the experience of being present at the richly varied celebrations of the *Odwira* in Akropong.

### **During visit to Ghana 4th-27th August 1984:**

(as member of group representing European Churches in partnership with PCG. The first rains had just fallen after the disastrous year of drought, loss of harvest through bush fires, expulsion of all Ghanaians in Nigeria and devastating devaluation.)

I visited fifteen PCG congregations of Akyem Abuakwa Presbytery with its Chairman, the Rev. Maj.(rtd) Mafo Ahenkora; 6th-17th August. Two of these were in capital towns of traditional Divisions (*amen*) where I was taken to pay respects to the *Omanhene*. Attended the meetings of the annual Synod of PCG 19th-22nd August.

We were based at the Girls Secondary School in Aburi Akuapem from which our host and guide for the visit the Rev S.K. Aboa, then Ecumenical Secretary, took us to visit the shrine of the *abosom* Akonedi in Larteh.