

Ancient and Medieval Celtic Myths of Origin

Ladies and Gentlemen,

two years ago I had the opportunity to give a first paper on this subject to the Third German Symposium of Celtic Studies in Marburg, and I am very grateful for the occasion of presenting some further thoughts on this topic here to an auditory of medievalists. The main focus of my studies so far was on Celtic origin myths in antiquity, and particularly on the problem whether ancient myths existed at all which were independent of classical models, and what we can possibly assert about them. In Marburg, I proposed a model showing the process of formation, development, transmission and change of origin myths. I will not come back to this model here, but I am going to present some results of the analyses at that time and more recent ones. As the paper is not yet published, however, I include a copy in the handout for your information. In this connection, the question arises whether there is reliable evidence from medieval myths of origin, or in other words, whether there any "survivals" of more ancient concepts.

Probably, the mere word "survivals" may cause some irritation. But I am quite confident of avoiding the pitfalls of outdated interpretatory concepts. The cultural context and contiguity of each period and contemporary cultural contacts must be taken into account, whenever this is appropriate. I am not seeking the "essence" (*das Wesen*) of the Celtic "people" either. The ultimate goal is to determine whether there is a common inherited religious or mythological tradition or at least regionally distinguished ancient beliefs, and if such a tradition once existed, how it was changed in the course of time. I think these questions are legitimate and contribute to further studies in this field.

Initially trained in ancient Oriental and Classical studies and comparative linguistics, I have some knowledge of *ancient* Celtic cultures and languages. But I am no medievalist, and therefore, any comment or correction would be welcome.

As to origin myths in antiquity, we have a very valuable source in the writings of Timagenes, an Alexandrian rhetor and historian of the second half of the

first century BC. In 55 BC, he was brought to Rome as prisoner of war and liberated by Faustus Sulla (*Suda*, s.v. Timagenes). He is said to have written many kinds of books, but no title has been preserved except the one "About Kings" (Περὶ Βασιλέων). A *History of the Gauls* is referred to by Horace (*Epist.* i. 19.15) and Quintilian (i. 10.10; x. i; 75), and may have been part of the same work about universal history as "About Kings". Although nothing is preserved directly (see *FGH* no. 88), we have numerous quotations from later authors. The origin myths aroused the interest of Ammianus Marcellinus in the fourth century, who gave an extract of Timagenes's account. I give this passage in full (see handout, no.1).

"The ancient writers, in doubt as to the earliest origin of the Gauls, have left an incomplete account of the matter, but later Timagenes, a true Greek in accuracy as well as language, collected out of various books these facts that had been long forgotten; which, following his authority, and avoiding any obscurity, I shall state clearly and plainly.

- 1) Some asserted that the people first seen in these regions were Aborigines, called Celts from the name of a beloved king (i.e. his name was Keltós) and Galátae (for so the Greek language terms the Gauls) from the name of his mother (Galateia, who is said to be the spouse of the cyclope Polyphemus in other sources as early as Timaios in the 4th c. BC).
- 2) Others stated that the Dorians, following the earlier Hercules, settled in the lands bordering on the Ocean.
- 3) The Druids say that a part of the people was in fact indigenous, but that others also poured in from the remote islands and the regions across the Rhine, driven from their homes by continual wars and by the inundation of the stormy sea. ((Rolfe does not translate here "Drysidæ" but explains the name as "Druids" in a footnote: p. 178, fn. 1.))
- 4) Some assert that after the destruction of Troy a few of those who fled from the Greeks and were scattered everywhere occupied those regions, which were then deserted.
- 5) But the inhabitants of those countries affirm this beyond all else, and I have also read it inscribed upon their monuments, that Hercules, the son of Amphitryon, hastened to destroy the cruel tyrants Geryon and Tauriscus, of whom one oppressed Spain, the other, Gaul; and having overcome them both that he took to wife some high-born women and begat numerous children, who called by their own names the districts which they ruled. (This is the Theban Hercules according to a classification by Cicero, *De nat. Deor.* iii. 16.42, and Servius, *Ad Aen.* viii. 564.)
- 6) But in fact (*vero*) a people of Asia from Phocæa, to avoid the severity of Harpalus, prefect of king Cyrus, set sail for Italy. A part of them founded Velia in Lucania, the rest, Massilia in the region of Vienne. Then in subsequent ages they established no small number of towns, as their strength and resources increased.

But I must not discuss varying opinions, which often causes satiety. Throughout these regions men gradually grew civilised and the study of the liberal arts flourished, initiated by the Bards, the Euhages and the Druids." (translation by John C. Rolfe)

Ammianus, following Timagenes, knows of six hypotheses concerning the origin of the Gauls: 1. they are aboriginal, 2. of Dorian descent, 3. partly indigenous, partly of foreign provenance, 4. they are immigrants from Troy, 5. they are descendants of Hercules, and 6. they originate from Phocaea (which cannot be accepted but for Massilia, not Gaul in general). Immigrant theories are connected with one of the major migrations assumed by ancient historians.

One important origin myth, however, is missing from Timagenes's catalogue. There is no reference whatsoever to the famous passage in the sixth book of Caesar's Gaulish War (handout no. 2):

"All the Gaulish people boasts of being descended from Dis Pater and says this has been handed down by the druids." (*BG* vi.18.1)

Gallī sē omnēs ab Dite patre prōgnātōs praedicant idque ab druidibus prōditum dicunt.

Allan A. Lund (1990: 83) emphasizes that we have no reason to doubt the reliability of this piece of information. Caesar does not use this statement in order to create an image of the Gauls as "infernal beings" or the like, as could be assumed. If so, he couldn't speak of the Haedui as "friends and allies of the Roman people" (*amicī sociīque populī Rōmānī*).

We do not know when Timagenes wrote his universal history, but it could not have been finished by 50 BC, and was in all probability much later than that. About 50 BC Caesar's *Commentarii Belli Gallici* were published at the latest, if not already before, in annual reports. Among historians, Caesar's comments were well known and used as a source of information about the historical events and about the author. Sallustius, Velleius Paterculus, and Plutarch put him in a favourable light, whereas Lucan criticised him as a barbarian. Only the Augustan poets passed in silence over him.

Thus, the question may be raised why Timagenes did not mention Caesar's statement. It was surely known to him, and as a "barbarofilo", as Marta Sordi put it, he was certainly interested in the news from Gaul during his early stay in Rome (55-50). Of course, a question of this kind looks like a recourse to an *argumentum e silentio*. But there are several reasons why such an argument is applicable here: Firstly, Timagenes's presentation is confronted with the

"incomplete writings" of the ancient authors; so his own account of the matter is, in Ammian's opinion at least, a "complete" one. Secondly, Ammian chooses his own favourite (*vero*). This cannot be convincing if the reader could easily ask what Ammian thinks of myth so-and-so? For this reason, I plead for a different explanation: Probably the Dis Pater myth is already mentioned by Timagenes, but under a different label. A similar case can be observed concerning his first theory. In other sources, the "aboriginal" story is connected to the love affair of the cyclope Polyphem with the nymph Galateia. This is first recorded by the historian Timaios in the fourth century BC and later held to be an origin story among the Galatians. However, the consideration whether Timagenes took Caesar's record into account or not, is not essential. My argument also works with the similarity of the concepts, but the identity would give it further persuasiveness, of course.

A contemporary of Timagenes, the Hellenistic poet, Parthenius of Nikaia mentioned the Herculian descent as well. In his compilation "Torments of Love" (Ἐρωτικὰ Παθήματα, c. 52-27/26 v.), we find the summary "About Keltine" (Περὶ Κελτίνης, Lightfoot 1999: 356 f.; 531-535). You have the Greek text with an English translation by Jane Lightfoot on the handout, no.3, but I confine myself to give a summary here: Having killed the giant Geryon on Eurytheia, an island off the western coast of Spain, Hercules drove the giant's cattle home. On his way back *via* Gaul, he met Keltine, daughter of king Bretannos. Keltine fell in love with the hero, but Hercules was not easily persuaded to spend a night with her. It was only when she stole his cattle that he was willing to do so. From their liaison, the eponymous Keltós was born.

Lateron, Diodorus (iv. 19; s.a. v. 24) and Pliny (*Nat.Hist.* iii. 122; Rankin 1987: 81; 283-285) tell about the same story. A praise to Alesia is inserted into their version. Hercules is said to have founded Alesia and named the city after his wandering (Greek: ἄλη). (cf. *Etymologica Genuinum, Magnum and Symeonis*, Lightfoot 1999: 532 f.)

According to Ammianus, the Herculian origin was the most favoured one in his own time, i.e. the fourth century. This assessment could not be taken from Timagenes because he could not have said that he read it "inscribed upon their monuments" in the first century BC. Caesar's statement is about four centuries old at that time. This may be too long a period to reflect the same conditions and the same estimation among the Gauls. Nevertheless, the coincidence is encouraging enough to pursue the idea. Only the "aboriginal" story connected to Polyphem seems a further candidate. The rest of the myths do not mention

any name, or do not give a point of reference, as is the case of the Trojan story. Neither Anchises nor Aeneas played any role outside the Trojan exodus.

Testimonies from Classical antiquity are often seen as nothing but learned Greek constructs. Elias Bickerman's study on *Origines gentium* (1952) was influential in this regard, and L. Lacroix dedicated an article in particular to *Heracles héros, voyageur et civilisateur* (1974). But Caesar as well as Ammianus, among others, explicitly refer to native informants, and this does not seem to be unwarranted. From the Gaulish speaking provinces, we know of more than 20 dedications to Dis Pater and several leaden curse tablets (from South Germany, Austria, and farther east), but there is no pictorial evidence. Hercules, on the other hand, is clearly attested in c. 100 inscriptions, mainly from the North-East, and on more than 350 monuments throughout the three Gauls and the Rhine and Danube provinces. Sometimes he bears native epithets such as Andossus or Ilunnus. Thus, if Hercules in fact was a Greek or Roman construct, it was well accepted among the Gaulish population.

What do we know about an adoption of Hercules or an identification with a native god or hero in Gaul? We possess a unique literary record of an *interpretatio Celtica* of the Greek Herakles. This text has been much disputed, and no conclusive explanation can be offered so far. The last contributions are by Marion Euskirchen in an essay supplementing her short article on "Ogmios" in *Der Neue Pauly* and a short, but comprehensive article in Xavier Delamarre's *Dictionnaire de la langue gauloise* (2nd ed., 2003: 239). The complete text of Lucian is given in Greek and English on the handout, no.4.

Discourse Herakles

The Celts call Herakles Ogmios in their native language, but they depict the god's shape in a completely different manner. To them, he is an extremely old man, forehead-bald [According to the variant, "bald-headed"], completely grey all the rest of his hair, his skin wrinkled and burnt pitch-black throughout as are old men working at sea; he would more likely be Charon or a kind of Iapetus from those under Tartarus [i.e. the Titans] and all more likely than Herakles. But being of this kind, he has Herakles's equipment at the same time: for he is clad in his lion skin and he has the club in his right hand, the quiver is hanging by his side, and the left hand puts the bow ready strung out before him, and this is of course the very image of Herakles. I really thought that the Celts, in insolence toward the Greek gods, executed this against the rules of Herakles's appearance taking revenge on him in the picture because he once came into their country carrying off booty [The booty thought of in this context is presumably cattle] when he overran most of the western peoples in search of Geryones's herds.

The most unexpected detail of the picture, however, I have not yet told: For that old Herakles drags behind him a very large number of people, all tied to their ears. The fetters are thin chains wrought of gold and electrum, like the most beautiful necklaces.

I stop here with Lucian's account because no one is able to give a convincing explanation of these fetters. They seem to be unknown to classical iconography, and a reference to persons drawn by the aid of chains in Old Irish narratives is too far-fetched and is perhaps a coincidence by mere chance.

The existence of a painting of this kind was often denied, but there is actually no reason to do so. Lucian is well known for his allegorism and his scepticism, but he is not under suspicion of having invented a passage like this. M. Euskirchen, an expert in Roman archaeology, who is rather sceptic in some respects, does not doubt the existence of such a work of art (2001: 121).

The iconography puts Ogmios in the immediate vicinity of beings of the Otherworld. Iapetus is a Titan, thrown into Tartarus by Zeus, and Charon is the ferryman of Hades. He is widely diffused in the West and particularly among the Etruscans who call him Carun. From the description, it has been concluded that Ogmios is a god of the netherworld, and I think this association is justified. Lucian's acquaintance with the conventions of representation in classical art obviously led him to an unequivocal impression. But the artist who created this painting was all the more familiar with these conventions whether he was a Greek, a Roman, or a Gaul.

Helmut Birkhan (1997) made an interesting remark. He links the hero's sun-burnt skin to the conviction, in antiquity, that people living in the extreme east and west are closer to the sun; he refers to the Ethiopians, ("Aithi-ops" means "burnt face"). He regards this to be a hint at a localization of the god's abode in the west. The fact may be explained in simpler terms, however, and taken to be a drastic description of old age. (In fact, German Hafner explained the picture as a rendering of the combat of Hercules with Geras, personified Old Age, as early as 1958 but nobody followed his example.)

Besides Lucian, Ogmios is mentioned on two leaden curse tablets from Bregenz, Austria, published by Rudolf Egger. On the second one, found in 1930, Dis Pater and Herecura are invoked, and Ogmios is requested to do harm to a female person, abbreviated "Amc". On this record, he is directly connected with Dis Pater.

There is not much further evidence which could be of any help. On a potsherd of grey ware from Richborough, Kent, a figure wrapped in a coat is depicted, and an inscription *Ogmia* (?) is shown above the scene, which may

refer to a festival of the god. At last, a charter of the seventh century names one *Ogmireectherio*.— What is left, is the etymology of the name. But etymology is an unhistorical means of interpretation. It can never be excluded that the meaning changed in the course of history, as is well known from many instances. Nevertheless: The most convincing etymology connects his name to the IE root **ag̃* (*h₂eĝ-*) 'to lead, to guide'; the noun **h₂oĝ-mo-s* means 'guidance, way' which is recorded in Greek *ógmōs* and Sanskrit *ájma-*. A noun of affiliation, **h₂oĝ-m-io-s*, is "the one of guidance, or, pertaining to a way", "who leads people" (*le conducteur*), a name matching the description very well. Pierre-Yves Lambert (*apud DLG* 239) suggested the root **ouĝ-* 'to sew up' (OIr. *uaigid*), but in this case, Ogmios should have a long *o* which is not supported by the Greek orthography.

If Ogmios's character as a god of the netherworld can be accepted, we have four characteristics of this god: 1. physical strength and martial behaviour (traditional Herculan attributes); 2. eloquence (as in Lucian's account); 3. guidance of "many people" (dto.); 4. a connection with the netherworld (from iconography, connection to Dis Pater).

Gallo-Roman representations of Hercules emphasize his bellicose character (Euskirchen 2001: 121) in showing him as the only fighter against various opponents. The other features are not clearly discernible. However, a relation to the hereafter seems to be indicated by the frequency on tomb monuments of mythological scenes where Hercules descends to the netherworld in order to fetch away infernal beings like Cerberus, or to lead persons back to the living, as Alcestis. The prominent use of Hercules's netherworld adventures is explained by archaeologists with the hope for overcoming death and to gain a life after death. Hercules is the mythical paragon of such expectations.

One of Hercules's adversaries is Geryon, in Greek Geryoneús, Etruscan Cerun, a giant with three bodies and three heads; Virgil calls him a "figure of a tricorporal shadow" (*forma tricorporis umbrae*, *Aen.* 6.289). Hercules' mission to fetch the cattle of Geryon, like his descent to Hades to fetch Cerberus, is a heroic journey to the land of the dead (*Jenseitsfahrt*). In fact, both legends, together with the further labour to bring back the golden apples of the Hesperides, represent variations upon the theme of the hero's attainment of immortality and triumph over death. Geryon in turn has many characteristics of a deity initially the equivalent of Hades, as Malcolm Davies (1988: 279) convincingly argues. The Etruscan Geryon, called Cerun, appears beside Hades and Persephone in the Tomba dell' Orco at Corneto. In classical literature, he is located in a 'murky dwelling place' (στραμῶ ἐν ἠερόεντι, v. 294) as early

as in Hesiod's *Theogony*. ἠερόεις is a recurring epithet of Hades and Tartarus, the 'murky road' is a periphrasis of death (*LSJ* 766). Virgil mentions him in company with the Gorgons and Chimaera in a chamber of Hades (*Aen.* 289).

Hercules' relation to the netherworld is obvious in these instances chosen for representational purposes in the Gallo-Roman period. But this is, in explicit terms, a phenomenon of interference or acculturation. Hercules' deeds are well documented on tomb monuments in Italy as well. They could have been simply adopted from there. However, the existence of a Gaulish figure similar enough to Hercules to be identified with him suggests a fusion of concepts.

Giving a provisional result, we notice a bundle of characteristics in the Herculean descent story, recurring in Lucian's description of Ogmios, both probably reflecting Dis Pater. I compile these features here once again. We have a deity who is 1. the progenitor of his people; 2. he is a god related to the netherworld; 3. he is expert in the martial arts; 4. he is experienced in rhetorics (and/or poetic arts).

A combination of characteristics like these is rarely to be found in descendance mythologies. There is only one example I came across so far. The Indo-Iranian concepts of origin trace the respective peoples back to Old Indian Yamá, son of Vivasvant- (together with his sister Yamí the 'twin' gods). He is king of the dead, his Old (East) Iranian equivalent being Yima. ((An Old Norse cognate is Ymir, the primeval giant.)) Both figures, Yama and Yima, seem to have much in common, although the ancient Iranian mythology is little known to us. Yama has the same characteristics as Ogmios-Hercules. He is the inventor of poetics, a warrior god and father of mankind. The combination of descendance and netherworld, which is a bit unexpected to us, seems to be based upon ancestor worship. In the *Rigveda* (x. 14.2) we read (handout, no. 5):

"Yama has first found out the way for us: ...

Whither our former fathers have passed away,

thither those that have been born since (pass away) along their several paths."

Yamó no gātúm̐ prathamó viveda: ...

yátrā nah̐ pūrve pitárah̐ pareyúr,

enā̎ jajñānāḥ̐ pathíā̎ ánu svāḥ̐.

(transl. A.A.Macdonell 1976: 165)

The Scythians are a Western Iranian people, and perhaps they shared the same concept as their cousins to the east. Herodot (iv. 8f.) gives three *aitia* of the Scythians (iv. 8f.), one of them being a close variant of the Celtic Hercules-Geryon story (cf. also Diodorus ii. 43.3).

—Although it is not essential for our subject here, I give a short excursion on these myths because they shed some light on how *interpretatio* (*Romana* or *Graeca*) actually worked. In a research project I am intending to do, the methods of *interpretatio* will be studied in Egypt and the Levante, where we have native records at our disposal as well. It can be expected that these studies will provide a further insight into the socio-cultural context of *interpretatio*. This can be of relevance for our understanding of the phenomenon in the Roman west.

According to Herodotus, the Scythians themselves related that their people was the youngest of all. They counted 1000 years before Dareios which would imply a 'mythological' date of about 1500 BC. The first human being in the land later called the Scythians' was Targitaos, son of Zeus and a daughter of the river god Borysthenes (today Dnjepr). He is said to have had three sons whose mother or mothers are not recorded: Lipoxais, Arpoxais, and Kolaxais, names containing in all probability the Iranian word *χšāya* 'king'. They became progenitors of all the Scythian tribes. I do not go into further details of the story here, but concentrate on the starting point. There is a second myth explicitly linked to the Greeks dwelling in the Pontus area. After them, Hercules came on his way back from Spain, having defeated Geryon, to the uninhabited land which is now the Scythians'. Caught in a thunderstorm, he was numb with cold and fell asleep. Awaking, he realized that his horses (!) were gone. On his search for them, he came to an area called Hylaia (i.e. the woodland of Aleški on the Dnjepr), where he met a being half woman, half snake (a kind of Oriental mixed being called Echidna). She declared that Hercules would get his horses back if he spent a night with her. Like Borysthenes's daughter, she had three sons with Hercules: Agathyrsos, Gelonos, and Skythes. The parallelism between the two versions is surprising. Both times, a god or hero has a relation with an equally non-human female, seemingly a native chthonic or aquatic being. She appears as a woman with a serpentine lower part of her body on vases and metal objects in burial mounds in the Pontus area. According to Askold Ivantchik (2001), both legends are essentially the same and reflect "une transmission fidèle d'une source scythe."

The names of the native version are Iranian except for Zeus, whose mention is thought to be incorrect by Herodotus. Most probably, Zeus and Hercules are

different renderings of the same Scythian deity. The classical hero is used as a point of contact, a connecting link between Iranian origin account and Greek mythology. The latter provided a structured, chronological system of international reference. Sometimes, the Greek system even offered a choice of links, such as Aeneas, Hercules, and Cyclops in the Celtic origin accounts.

The events attached to this point of reference are particularly significant because they do *not* belong to the Greek mythological system. As we see from the comparison above, the core information is (almost) the same. Perhaps the perception of the mythical female differs in both cultures, and the Greek description may depend upon common Greek concepts. But all important details correspond to each other.—

When we now turn to more recent traditions in Celtic languages, we come across rather similar origin constructs. The most remarkable parallel to Ogmios is well known for a long time. Kuno Meyer, in his study on the Irish mortuary god and the island of the dead (*Der irische Totengott und die Toteninsel*, 1919) noticed a possible mythological background in traditions about a mortuary king.

In the narratives I shall call "invasion stories" here, Donn is said to be a son of Míl, leader of the last invasion. Tradition has it that he died soon after landing in Ireland (Carey 1995: 55). He is said to assemble the dead on an island called "House of Donn", *Tech nDuinn*. A different name is "The Bull", today Bull Rock southwest of Dursey. It has been assumed that the original name was *Tech nDuinn Tairbh* "House of Donn, the Bull", but this seems to be a mere association, just like the assumed relation to the bull called Donn Cuailgne in the "Cattle Raid of Cooley", *Táin Bó Cuailgne*, and the Gaulish name *Donnotaurus* known from Caesar, respectively (*GPN* 84 f.; 194 f.; Roider 1979: 102-105; Delamarre 2001: 123).

One of the early invasion stories, the poem "What is the Origin of the Gaels?" (*Can a mbunadus na nGaedel*, *CBG*, attributed to Mael Muru of Othain) from the ninth century, tells the following about him (Todd 1848; Best and O'Brien 1957; cf. *LGÉ* VIII, see handout, no. 6):

He died as he was sailing, without strength, / At the south of Irrus. //

There was raised *for him* a cairn with the stone of his race, / Over the broad sea,

An ancient stormy dwelling; and Tech nDuinn / It is called. //

This was his great testament / To his numerous children,

"To me, to my house, come ye all / After your deaths." (*LL* 16091 f.; Todd 1848: 248 f.)

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Donn's very name seems to reflect his otherworld character. The most satisfying etymology is from **dhus-no-* or **dhuos-no-* 'dark, brown', cognate with Latin *fuscus* (Meyer 1919); less likely, **donno-* 'noble' has been suggested, which is without a convincing IE connection (*DLG* s.v.). The first etymology would connect him well with Dis Pater and Ogmios. Donn's original *divine* nature is suggested by a quotation concerning his brother Amairgen whose statement is clear: "I am a god" (*am dé LL* 1562). Donn was remembered in popular tales, particularly in Co. Clare and Cnoc Fírinne (Knockfierna) in Co. Limerick. (Ó hÓgáin 166). The idea that the Irish are descended from a king of the netherworld seems to have been suppressed in later literature, according to John Carey (1994: 15) and Proinsias Mac Cana (1985: 36-38). A remark in Plutarch (*Mor.* 419; 941) suggests that this idea may be considerably older than the earliest literary sources. He mentions the veneration of a deity he calls "Kronos" off the South West coast of Britain. As Kronos is the leader of the Titans, and the god of a primeval period which is paradisiac and primitive at the same time. Later, the Titans were defeated by Zeus and thrown into Tartarus. So, there is a number of similarities between Donn and his counterpart in the Greek learned *interpretatio*.

Besides his character as progenitor of the Irish and king of the dead, he is portrayed as a hero, who led one half of the Milesians' troops (the other half being led by Erimon). In a different tradition, reflected in "The Book of the Taking of Ireland" (*Lebor Gabála Éirinn*) from the eleventh century, he is characterized as eager to destroy the Túatha Dé Danann and as arrogant enough to reject a request of Ériu (var. Banba), one of their queens. In the *Dindshenchas*, however, he is shown in a more favourable light.

Thus, most of the characteristics found in ancient Celtic sources are in fact present in Irish tradition, too. One of the aforementioned features is lacking, however: There is no evidence of Donn depicting him as skilled in poetics or rhetoric.

When we consult further literary sources, however, we obtain a different picture. In "The Wooing of Treblann" (*Tochmarc Treblainne*, R. Jennings 1997) from the twelfth century, we learn that Donn is the fosterson of Eochaid

Ollathair ("Eochaidh, great father" (and Bé Finn)) who is nobody else but the Dagda. In another source, Donn himself is called the "Dagda of Munster". Dáithí Ó hÓgáin e.g. thinks that Donn "seems to have been originally an epithet of the ... Daghdha" (p.165). This close association with a principal pre-Christian deity whose name derives from **dago-dēvos* 'the good god', is of particular interest.

Basic attributes of the Dagda are described in the account of the second battle of Moytirra. They show virtually all of Ogmios's characteristics in a very detailed manner. He is "great father" of the Túatha Dé. His image of progenitor is turned into a burlesque by the medieval scribes, for instance in the episode with the Mór-Ríoghain, goddess of land and of war. His bond to the otherworld is clear from several attributes. His iron club has the power to kill on one end, and the power to restore the dead to life on the other end. He is owner of a magic cauldron which never runs dry. And he presides over the festivities of his *síd*, the Bruig na Bóinne, where three trees grow, always fructiferous, and an immortal pig runs free. Wealth, fertility, and the otherworld are closely interrelated. His qualities as warrior and hero, leader and model of bravery are well documented in our literary sources. Moreover, the Dagda is Ruadh Ró-Fheasa, "the Red, All-Knowing Noble", as well. He is a great magician, an archpoet, a musician playing tunes of laughter, grief, and sleep on his harp. He has all the skills of Goibniu, Dian Cécht and Ogma. The image of a great, "red" god with an enormous club immediately brings the Ogmios painting to one's recollection. Club and cauldron have further been associated with the attributes of a Gaulish deity, Sucellos, who is represented on Gallo-Roman monuments with mallet and jar. This trace, however, cannot be pursued here any further.

From textual history, we know that the material included in *Lebor Gabála Éirinn* developed over a long period of time. Numerous poems of the tenth and eleventh centuries form the basis of this comprehensive treatment (Macalister 1938-1956; textual history: Carey 1993; 1994; Scowcroft 1987; 1988; bibliography: Wright 1998; s. Rankin 1987: 26-28; glosses in Ms.Vatikan Reg.Lat. 1650 from Reims, 9th c.: P.-Y. Lambert 1988 and O. Szerwiniack 1995). A short version of an invasion account is already present in *Historia Brittonum*, a Latin work of the ninth century, attributed to one 'Nennius'. ((The British analogies to Irish tradition have been studied by J. Carey (1991)). Interestingly, in the earlier form, there is no equivalent of Milesians *contra* Tuatha Dé Danann. It seems probable that this subdivision is later than the sources of *HB*. The motif of its introduction may have been the attempt to separate beings

conceived as 'human' from 'divine' ones. The latter were said to have been defeated and, as a result, they receded to the fairy mounds. Thus, the impression was furthered that the old gods gave way to Christianity. A procedure like this is probably an alternative strategy to euhemerization, i.e. the transformation of deities into human noblemen.

The segmentation of an original pantheon into different categories, such as 'human' or 'divine' may have caused the splitting of coherent groups, or perhaps the doubling of single beings. Therefore, Donn, who shares some (late?) characteristics with the fairies (e.g. his 'palace' under Cnoc Fírinne), may in fact be a pseudo-historical figure detached from the Dagda. But at present, this is more likely to be mere speculation.

One further idea may be added if we are dealing with speculations anyway. Bernhard Maier (2001: 99f.) drew attention to the concept of a "Water Bull" (Manx *taroo ushtey*) in origin myths in Continental as well as Insular Celtic tradition and folklore. He suggests a connection with ancient Oriental beliefs in a weather or storm god, called *Taru* in Hattic (*Tešub* in Hurrian), which reminds one of the word for "bull", *tauros* in Greek or *tarvos* in Celtic. Donn's residence has the name variant *An Tarbh*, and both Donn and the Dagda are conceived to be a kind of weather god, at least in later tradition. One may also ask whether the coincidence of names with the bull Donn Cuailgne is really nothing but chance?

Another remarkable parallel is the story of Fénius Farsaid I am going to mention in passing. Some indications to this story date back to the seventh and eighth centuries. John Carey (1990) refers to Fénius's pedigree in Leinster, "the manual for learned poets", *Auraicept na nÉces* (Ahlqvist 1983: 47 f.), two poems called *Moen oen* and *De gabáil in tsída* (Hull 1933). Further developments in the ninth century are attested in the "Story of Tuán mac Cairill" (*Scél Tuáin meic Chairill*, Carey 1984; 1984a) and, again, in "What is the Origin of the Gaels?" (*Can a mbunadus na nGaedel*).

Fénius, said to be a Scythian kingly, came out of his home country and travelled through the Near East. He stayed some time in Mesopotamia, where he met Nimrod, participated in the construction of the tower of Babel, and founded a great school "to instruct in all knowledge, a man deeply learned, who excelled in every language" (ἰϞ ϞϞϞϞϞ Ϟ ϞϞ ἱϞϞϞϞ, ϞἱϞ ἈϞϞ ἈϞϞϞ ϞϞ ϞἱϞ ϞϞ ἈϞϞϞ Ϟ ϞϞ ϞἱϞϞϞ, *CBG* p. 228). At last, he arrived in Egypt together with his family. His son Néil is said to be married to Pharaoh's daughter, Scotta. His clan became wealthy and numerous. Later, after the exodus, they were persecuted and expelled from Egypt for fear of gaining

control over the land. In analogy to the wanderings of the Israelites, they set sail westwards in the time of Míl. After a long odyssey, they arrived in Spain where they stayed for many years. But finally, they discovered Ireland from a great tower at Brigantia and crossed the sea to settle down on the emerald isle.

The pseudo-historical setting and the use of various allusions to the Old Testament and classical authors are well established and do not concern us here. Fénius's pedigree is surely based on *Liber antiquitatum biblicarum* (Carey 1990: 108f.), but the main point here is the characteristic of Fénius. He is the eponymous father of the Féni, a great military leader, and a language expert at the same time. I do not know of any connection of Fénius with the otherworld—except for speculations about the etymology of his name—, but again, we find three of the four attributes which seem to be typical for the Celtic concept of descentance.

In conclusion, I should like to say, that the Celtic traditions share a refined basic concept of descentance. Although Gaulish and Irish were mainly used here, the same is true for Brittonic as well; Celtiberian evidence is rather poor, in spite of recent advance. This concept is paralleled only in Indo-Iranian. In spite of all *interpretationes classicae* and all revisions in the Middle Ages, this setting is still discernible and surprisingly consistent. Nevertheless, it is slowly developing in some respects, presumably according to changing socio-cultural conditions. Thus it is, perhaps, no coincidence that so many skills are attributed especially to the Dagda. This may in fact be a back-projection of the omnipotence of the Christian god.

New approaches to *interpretatio* and a re-evaluation of the methodology applied in the history of religion will further our understanding and will give a new insight into the development of conceptions in the course of time. All I could do here was to offer a few glimpses of work in progress, and I hope this was not completely to your dissatisfaction. Thank you. Go raibh maith agaibh.

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