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**The Descent of the Gods:
Creation, Cosmogony, and Divine Order in
*Lebor Gabála***

Sharon Paice Macleod

In a number of Indo-European mythologies, the creation of the world or cosmos is often accompanied by, or results in, the generation of two groups of divine beings. The first consists of giants or primal deities associated with creation, the cosmos, and the elements. From these are descended a second order of gods connected with the earth, society, and the lives of mortal beings. This second group figures prominently in the mythological tales and are associated with the land, subsistence, war, magic, wisdom, skill, and a variety of social roles and functions.

This paper seeks to ascertain if any trace of these early divine figures (and associated cosmogonic features) may be discerned amidst the native Celtic, early Christian, Medieval, and Classical elements which influenced the formation of early Irish literary sources. Information concerning Irish deities or divine figures (in varying states of preservation or transmission) may be gleaned from a number of sources, including *Lebor Gabála Éirenn*, *Táin Bó Cuailgne*, *Cath Maige Tuired*, *Acallam na Senórach*, and the *Dindsenchas*. This paper will ultimately focus on those sections of *Lebor Gabála* which profess to set forth the genealogy of the Tuatha Dé Danann.¹

¹ Over the last number of decades, the study and comparison of extant literary and archaeological evidence

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Many have commented on the apparent lack of a native Irish creation myth. This is not entirely surprising in that the incoming religion had its own myth of origins to promote. It is quite remarkable (as well as fortuitous) that any literary evidence concerning the nature of native pagan beliefs has survived at all. The preservation of components of Irish pre-Christian religion reflects the efforts of the church to combine native and Christian elements into a hybrid 'tradition' which embodied facets of both.

What constitutes a creation myth? What features might we look for in an attempt to uncover vestiges of a native myth of origins? An examination of elements associated with creation scenarios in other Indo-European traditions may help us recognize these cosmogonic structures, as well as their attendant groups of divine beings.

pertaining to Celtic deities has produced some excellent results. The study of Celtic deities and religion has sometimes received less attention than other areas of research in Celtic Studies. This is, in part, due to the incomplete nature of the evidence, the lateness of certain sources and the possibility of cross-cultural influence (Classical, Christian, Roman, etc.). In addition, a certain amount of cultural, professional and even socio-religious apprehension comes into play. While it is understandable that not every scholar might relish the task of trying to cross great cultural and temporal divides to play in the fields of polytheism and animistic belief, a good understanding of Celtic deities and religion is as important to the study of Celtic culture as that of Greco-Roman deities and myths is to the study of Greek and Roman culture and society (the latter being an accepted fact which does not seem to produce as much difficulty or reaction).

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Representations of Creation in Indo-European Tradition

Three primary creation scenarios occur in Indo-European settings:

Duality (represented by two halves of the cosmos from which the Earth and Sky are created),

Life from Death (involving the sacrifice and dismemberment of a primal being from whose body the elements of creation are formed), and

Cyclical Creation (often depicted as a struggle between order and chaos in a perpetual cycle of creation and destruction).²

All three types are present (to varying degrees) in Hindu, Greek, and Norse mythology, and in many of these accounts we can also perceive two different classes of divine beings.

In Norse creation scenarios, Duality and Life from Death are both evident. Two opposing regions come together (one of heat and one of cold), which results in the appearance of a primal being, *Ymir*, from whom a race of giants are produced. *Ymir* meets his death at the hands of his three grandsons, Odin, Vile, and Ve, and from his dismembered body the earth and the cosmos were created.³ Odin is the Chief Deity of the Norse Gods, sacred figures associated

² Willis, Roy, ed., *World Mythology* (Henry Holt and Co., New York, 1993), pp. 18-19.

³ A mythical analogy between macrocosmic elements and the parts of the body appears in a number of Indo-European settings, including Norse, Greek, and Hindu mythology. See Lincoln, Bruce, *Myth, Cosmos and Society: Indo-European Themes of Creation and Destruction* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1986), pp. 1-40.

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with the land, society, and the world of men. These gods differ from the earlier beings connected with creation and are those who figure most prominently in the myths (Thor, Balder, Freyr, Tyr, Loki, Frigg, Freyja, etc.).⁴

In an early Greek account of the creation of the world, various elements of the cosmos emerge from *Chaos* ('gaping void'). These in turn create other elements, and a union between Heaven and Earth (representative of Duality) produces the first beings, a race of giants known as the Titans.⁵ Here we can clearly perceive an early class of divine figures associated with creation, the elements, and the features of the earth.

The Titans *Kronos* and *Rhea* (his sister and consort) have a son whose birth heralds an important change. This change occurs in numerous mythological systems and is frequently the result of mythological incest or some other unusual or significant union. After the birth of this father-/warrior-god or king (who often overthrows his father or an early race of gods or giants), a new class of deities comes into existence.⁶ In Greek tradition, the

⁴ Davidson, Hilda Ellis, *Gods and Myths of Northern Europe* (Penguin, London, 1964), pp. 27-29.

⁵ Rose, H.J., *Handbook of Greek Mythology* (E.P. Dutton, New York, 1959), pp. 18-23.

⁶ Watkins, Calvert, *Dictionary of Indo-European Roots*, (Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 2000), p. 22. In many Indo-European cultures, the name of this archetypal deity derives from the IE root **dyeu-* ('to shine') with its many derivatives pertaining to 'sky', 'heaven', or 'god.' These include Zeus, Jupiter, and Jove, and words such as July, ('descended from Jupiter'). From the related root **deiwo-* ('god') are Tyr (an Old Norse Sky god), Old English Tiw (a god of

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figure in question is Zeus, whose amorous liaisons result in the creation of numerous divine progeny. These are the familiar deities of Greek myth (Apollo, Artemis, Hermes, Ares, Dionysus, Hephaestus, Athena, Aphrodite, etc), who differ from the earlier primal beings and are associated with the land, society, and the world of men.⁷

Hindu mythology has preserved a prodigious number of accounts concerning the creation of the earth and the cosmos.⁸ Many accounts of Cyclical Creation exist in Vedic tradition. In these accounts, the world exists for a great span of time before dissolving into chaos (from which a new universe emerges). Each cycle consists of four successive ages, each one considered inferior to the previous one.

A similar idea is expressed in Greek tradition as a cycle or progression of five ages (rather than four). These cycles do not involve destruction but are each associated with a different race of men.⁹ *Lebor Gabála*, a medieval Irish text concerned with the origin of things, also records five successive races of 'men'. Each race inhabits the primordial land of Ireland for a period of time, ultimately perishing from disease, flood, war, or other misfortune, making way for the next 'age' or 'race'.

In our attempt to discover if two classes of deities formed some part of Irish pre-Christian

war and the sky, from which we get the word Tuesday), Latin Diana (a moon goddess), the Hindu goddess name Devi, and English words such 'deity' and 'divine'.

⁷ Graves, Robert, *The Greek Myths*, Volume One (Penguin Books, London, 1960), pp. 44-57.

⁸ Willis, pp. 70-84; O'Flaherty, Wendy, *Hindu Myths* (Penguin, New York, 1980), Chapter One and Appendices.

⁹ Willis, p. 19; Graves, pp. 35-6.

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tradition, we should first ascertain if the literary sources display evidence of native beliefs associated with creation. If we can show that elements of pagan Irish religion (including those associated with cosmogony and creation) have been preserved to some extent, we may then reasonably proceed with a discussion of divine figures that also appear in the texts.

Elements of Native Belief in Irish Literary Sources

A number of mythological elements may be discerned in early Irish sources, many of which are found in association with creation scenarios in other cultures.¹⁰ There are three conceptual elements of special relevance. First is a cosmic design of three interconnected worlds. The cosmic design connects the worlds vertically through the middle, and uses a lateral, spatial organization as well. Time is represented as cyclical rather than linear. The other two elements are the description of a great flood (or floods) in the course of creation; and the transmission of knowledge from an earlier era through special animals, pagans, or sages of great age.

The Celtic Otherworld was conceived of as existing nearby (and parallel to) our own plane of existence. It could be accessed by traveling underwater or through underground passages and was most often located in or underneath hills, beneath lakes or under the sea, on islands situated in lakes or off the coast, or in halls encountered by chance in the night which disappear with the dawn¹¹ Certain

¹⁰ Willis, pp. 20-21.

¹¹ Carey, John, "The Location of the Otherworld in Irish Tradition," *Eigse* 19 (1982), pp. 36-43.

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aspects of the Otherworld parallel those of the mortal realm, yet in many ways it was considered superior to our world.

Sufficient evidence exists to support the assumption that the Celtic Otherworld or Cosmos was conceived of as triune in nature.¹² This reflects the almost universal perception of the threefold nature of the divine realms, often categorized as 'Earth, Sky, and Sea / Underworld'. R. Mark Scowcroft states that the division of the land into three is likely to have been an early native concept, a triune system which corresponds to what Mircea Eliade identified as 'the three cosmic zones' (actual, celestial, and chthonic) which are frequented by shamans around the world.¹³ In many cultures, the three worlds are connected by a central tree or pillar referred to as the world tree. The widespread focus on the central point of Celtic ritual sites and the abundant evidence pertaining to the veneration of trees (including single sacred trees, or *bile*) may point to native belief in a concept similar to that of the world tree.

Scowcroft mentions that the native threefold division of the cosmos appears to have suffered alteration over time, being presented later as a binary system composed of polar opposites more in keeping with the Christian concept of good and evil, Heaven

¹² *Ibid.*; Mac Mathuna, Liam, "The Christianization of the Early Irish Cosmos", *ZCP* 45-50 (1997), pp. 532-547 and "The Irish Perception of the Cosmos," *Celtica* 32 (1999), pp. 174-187; Scowcroft, "Leabhar Gabhála – Part II: The Growth of the Tradition," *Ériu* 39 (1988), pp. 1-64; Rees, Alwyn and Brinley, *Celtic Heritage* (Thames and Hudson, New York, 1961), pp. 112-115.

¹³ Scowcroft, p. 40, n. 11.

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and Hell.¹⁴ These changes in the interpretation, representation, and perception of the sacred realms resulted in a great deal of confusion regarding the nature of the Celtic Otherworld (and well as the nature and origin of its inhabitants).¹⁵ In addition to a three-fold vertical structure, the mythic universe also possesses a lateral structure. Many religious traditions refer to four quarters of the world (corresponding to

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 39-40. The world of the *síd*, at that point, was represented as drawing together “the celestial and infernal elements of the supernatural into an Otherworld the opposite and counterpart of this, and thus converts a triune moral and theological system into a binary cosmology”. This process of converting a triune system into a binary one plays out in the invasion saga of the *Tuatha Dé Danann*, which Scowcroft (pp. 44-45) describes as involving “far more complex literary processes than the mere euhemerization of pagan mythology: a complete merger between the natural and the supernatural, which creates a new synthesis and a new mythology. This comprises a system of implicit analogy based on the correlation of aetiological conflicts in (and between) this world and the Other, which is further complicated by the movement of the *Tuatha Dé* into the *síd*, and the resulting ambiguity of both in Irish tradition.”

¹⁵ This in turn complicates efforts to interpret any evidence which may reflect the nature and function of the gods, or to reconstruct a pantheon from the information we have (which is, in part, divorced from its narrative context). Scowcroft (pp. 44-45) points out that in these types of endeavors it is important to perform a synchronic analysis of text and tradition, and in the service of such, to look at original native concepts of deity and Otherworld (as much as is possible) when analyzing divine figures, attributes, roles, and relationships.

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the four cardinal directions).¹⁶ In early Irish literary sources (as well as more recent Irish and Scottish folktales), the concept of 'the whole world' is frequently described in a formulaic manner: 'from north to south, and from east to west'. In Celtic sources, there is often a focus on the central point as well, making a total of five sacred points.¹⁷

In many cultures, the four quarters are associated with particular elements, colors, or attributes. Alwyn and Brinley Rees discuss the Irish manifestation of this concept in some detail and present an example in which the four quarters and the sacred center were connected with a variety of attributes or elements (the primary attributes being battle in the north, music in the south, prosperity in the east, learning in the west, and kingship in the center).¹⁸ Another Irish text refers to certain 'winds' associated with each of the four directions (as well as two 'lesser' winds located between each of these). These 'winds' or directions were apparently associated with certain colors, a phenomenon which occurs in other cultural settings as well.¹⁹

In addition to a change in perception concerning the structure of the sacred realms, a shift also appears

¹⁶ Willis, p. 21.

¹⁷ This reverence for the sacred center is found in Celtic tradition, as attested by the existence of central offerings pits and wooden pillars in ritual sites or assembly grounds. In addition, the 'fifth' province (Meath < OIr *Mide* 'middle') was associated with kingship and sacred sites.

¹⁸ Rees, *Celtic Heritage*, pp. 118-139. The text is 'The Settling of the Manor of Tara'.

¹⁹ Carey, John, "A Tract on the Creation," *Éigse* 11 (1986), pp. 1-9 and "Cosmology in *Saltair na Rann*," *Celtica* 17 (1985), pp. 33-52.

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to have taken place in relation to the nature of time. The Christian concept of the Trinity required of all creatures (whether organic, inorganic, or intelligential) a beginning, a middle, and an end. Christian historians therefore assumed all temporalities to be linear, with movement from a beginning, through a middle stage, and on to an ending point.²⁰ This was implicit in the belief in one life in this world, which progressed linearly towards one of several 'Otherworld options' (but which did not cycle or repeat). This is quite different from the native concept of time, a topic which has been discussed by Patrick K. Ford and Alwyn and Brinley Rees, among others.²¹ In native tradition, time was perceived as cyclical in nature.²² In addition, the cyclical character of time was associated with cyclical perceptions of creation. Hence in many societies it is customary to commemorate or re-enact the events associated with creation at the new year, the start of a new temporal cycle.

Floods, deluges, or the eruption of sacred waters appear in connection with the creation legends of many cultures. A number of flood myths may also have existed in early Irish tradition. John Carey has examined the legend of Cessair (the first of the 'invasion myths'), a tale whose origin may exist in flood myths which were native to Ireland prior to the

²⁰ Ó Cróinín, Dáibhi, *The Irish Sex Aetates Mundi* (Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, Dublin, 1983), p. 4.

²¹ Rees, pp. 83-106; Ford, Patrick K., my notes from his course on "Celtic Paganism," Harvard University, Spring Term, 2000.

²² Carey, John, "Time, Space and the Otherworld," *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium*, Volume 7 (1987), pp. 1-27.

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creation of *Lebor Gabála*.²³ The original matrix of the tale involves the theft or abduction of a woman, which is followed by the destructive eruption of water (ocean, lake, well, or spring). These tales reflect local legends and traditions without any necessary connection to Biblical traditions concerning floods or primeval migrations.²⁴

Associated with native stories pertaining to floods, the eruption of waters, and the beginnings of things are a number of characters who exist throughout the ages in a variety of human and animal forms. One of the most famous of these is Fintan, son of *Bóchra* ('Ocean?'), who comes to Ireland prior to the flood. He survives in various animal forms throughout the ages as a witness to all that has taken place.²⁵ Similar concepts are also found in the story of Túan mac Cairell, a member of the first settlement in Ireland after the flood. He exists over time in the shape of a stag, a boar, a bird of prey, and a salmon. In salmon form he is eaten by the Queen of Ulster. She conceives as a result, eventually bearing him anew as a human child.²⁶ The stories of Fintan and

²³ Carey, John, "The Origin and Development of the Cessair Legend," *Éigse* 22 (1987), pp. 37-48.

²⁴ Carey, John, "Native Elements in Irish Pseudohistory" in *Medieval Studies – Cultural Identity and Cultural Integration: Ireland and Europe in the Middle Ages* (Four Courts Press, Dublin, 1995), pp. 45-60. Both Carey and Scowcroft make reference to a number of elements present in LG and other sources which, although often analyzed as having a Biblical origin, may in fact be native parallels.

²⁵ Carey, *ibid.*, p. 46.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 46-7. Of this episode, John Carey writes: "Prior to each of his metamorphoses, (and perhaps preserving some recollection of earlier visionary practices), Túan

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Túan, as well as that of Lí Ban (the survivor of the eruption of Lough Neagh) and the Children of Lir, may be relics of a native tradition in which “the enlightened adept, by recalling former existences, can look back in time to the Golden Age.”²⁷

In addition to native concepts associated with shapeshifting and the transmigration of the soul, the above-mentioned tales are also connected with creation and the origin of things. In the tale of Fintan, the king must locate the oldest man in order to obtain information pertaining to historical precedents associated with various aspects of society and religion. The legitimacy, power, and stability of the kingship (and by extension, that of society) depended upon the knowledge of the first beginnings.

The knowledge of the past (and of the origin of things) provided the basis for many important socio-religious precedents. These were used in legal proceedings, the administration of regal duties, and religious rituals (from pagan ceremonies to modern folk charms). In many of these settings, certain words or actions are described as a repetition of what others once did (saints, ancestors, deities, etc.). This re-enactment of ‘what the gods did in the beginning’ is an important feature of many religious traditions, deriving in part from elements of the origin myth.²⁸

retired to a cave, fasted, and then had a dream in which memory of his former lives was restored to him. As with the case of the Pythagorean initiates to whom the druids were so frequently compared, knowledge of the past was understood to be hidden within the self.”

²⁷ Ibid., p. 46.

²⁸ Rees, pp. 105-6.

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While native origin legends may not have survived the advent of Christianity intact, it is not inconceivable that elements of native belief and tradition pertaining to creation and sacred origins were preserved in certain tales or accounts. Indeed, we can see that a number of elements reasonably described as being associated with creation were in fact preserved in early Irish sources. What, then, of a native myth of origins?

John Carey writes that while we do not necessarily have any direct knowledge of the beliefs of the pagan Irish concerning the origins of the land or its people, “there can scarcely be any doubt that legends addressing these questions were important to them.”²⁹ Pertinent elements which originated in the fully pagan era may well have been recorded in the early historical period. Indeed, Carey maintains that Irish literature “preserves various ideas which are probably at least to some extent reflections of pre-Christian doctrine.” A good example is the early tale *De Gabail in tSida* which states that the first Gaels in

²⁹ Carey, John, *A New Introduction to Lebor Gabála Éirenn* (Irish Texts Society, Dublin, 1993), pp. 1-21. The nature of such a belief may be reflected in the first-century BCE statement of the Alexandrian scholar Timagenes in which he states that druids of Gaul maintained that part of the population was indigenous while others were said to come from remote islands and the region beyond the Rhine. In addition, in a more mythological vein, there is Caesar’s report that the Gauls stated that they were all descended from a common ancestor or divine father figure (*‘Dis Pater’*), and that this was the tradition of the druids. (Edwards, H.J., tr., *Caesar – The Gallic War*, Book VI, p. 342-3).

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Ireland “made peace with the gods of the land in order to successfully raise their crops and herds.”³⁰

The information presented in this section may be seen to constitute a considerable body of knowledge pertaining to the shape (at least) of certain elements of native Irish belief, including those associated with creation and origin myths. In the face of this information, we cannot reasonably maintain the stance that we know nothing at all about pagan Irish belief (especially in light of the conservative nature of certain aspects of Irish society, specifically the role of poets and historians). While we cannot know for certain how old these concepts may be (or in what state of integrity they were recorded), comparative data from archaeology, Classical sources, and Indo-European studies (as well as the frequency with which these elements appear in oral and literary sources over many centuries) support the possibility that they may in fact reflect native tradition to some extent. With this in mind, let us explore the native traditions which may have been recorded in *Lebor Gabála* in particular (albeit in a modified or incomplete form), pausing briefly to examine the composition and nature of the text itself.

Origins and *Lebor Gabála*

A great deal of discussion has taken place in an attempt to ascertain what *Lebor Gabála* represents and of what materials it was comprised. Some scholars feel that most elements in *Lebor Gabála* can be traced to Christian sources; others suggest that it is a vast repository of native tradition. Both of these extreme views may be missing the mark. There is a

³⁰ Carey, *ibid.*, p. 2.

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third school of thought, which maintains that *Lebor Gabála* is a blend of native and incoming traditions (the former including local histories, genealogies, and socio-religious information of various types, the latter reflecting traditions which have their origin in Classical, Christian, and Medieval sources).³¹ It is this more balanced and widely accepted school of thought which we will follow in the ensuing pages.

In his comprehensive articles on *Lebor Gabála*, R. Mark Scowcroft describes the text as an “anonymous, scholarly composition designed to provide Ireland and her inhabitants with a continuous and comprehensive history from Noah to the Norman

³¹ Scowcroft, pp. 1-64, particularly 12-14, 63-64; and Carey, *A Introduction to Lebor Gabála*, pp. 1-3, 7, 17-19. The Irish literati worked hard to integrate their country into the schemes of medieval historiography, geography, and ethnography. In the process, they created an 'ancient history' of the Gaedil which corresponded in many aspects to that of the Israelites. Certain elements in the text, however, (including pattern variants) suggest a reflection of a native archetype rather than a deliberate analogy with Biblical tradition. This theory is supported by the fact that other elements exist in LG which also have Biblical parallels but which may in fact derive from other sources. These sources include European and Near-Eastern history as it was perceived in the medieval era, medieval Irish politics, traditions concerning war between medieval Irish *tuatha*, elements of Indo-European mythology and culture, and early Irish cosmology. Acknowledging the existence of elements which derive from these many sources, for the purpose of the research at hand we will focus on those elements which seem most reasonably to derive from native mythological tradition. In this process, I owe a great debt of gratitude to the work of John Carey, Mark Scowcroft, Alwyn and Brinley Rees and Dáibhi Ó Cróinín.

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Conquest.”³² Its primary purpose was not to collect native traditions, but to find a place for Ireland in the biblical history of the world and provide appropriate ancestry for her inhabitants as descendants of Noah. In the process, however, origin legends and other mythical or pseudo-historical narratives (older than or independent of *Lebor Gabála*) which had been preserved in native Irish tradition were interpolated into the text.³³ Dáibhi Ó Cróinín describes the process as follows:

Christian historians made no effort to compete with the pagans, but preferred to adapt and integrate what they could into their own writing. Thus biography became hagiography and the lists of kings and emperors of the various races were joined to form the synchronistic history of universal man.³⁴

Alwyn and Brinley Rees also refer to the process through which *Lebor Gabála* was formed, characterizing it as “a laborious attempt to combine parts of native teaching with Hebrew mythology embellished with medieval legend.”³⁵ Rather than labeling the text as a “medieval work of fiction” (due to the existence of Biblical elements or parallels and the artificiality of certain aspects of the pedigrees), they point out that the monks or poets who compiled this work lived much closer to the pre-Christian world

³² Scowcroft, p. 1.

³³ Ibid., p. 13.

³⁴ Ó Cróinín, p. 4.

³⁵ Rees, p. 95.

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than we do.³⁶ It is not unreasonable to think that native pagan traditions may have remained in circulation in some cases, whether or not their full significance was completely understood by those who recorded or recited them over the course of time.³⁷

A number of the native concepts described in the previous section (many of which are associated with creation legends or cosmogonic myths) are also found in *Lebor Gabála*. Indeed, the Rees brothers point out that *Lebor Gabála* retains features which “the study of other mythologies would lead us to expect in myths about the beginnings of things.”³⁸ Here they are referring to the condition of Ireland at the time of the five invasions, when the land had not yet been completely formed, divided into provinces, or named:

From a mythological point of view,
nothing really exists until it has been
‘formed,’ ‘defined’ and ‘named,’ and in
as much as *Lebor Gabála* is
concerned with the origin of physical
features, boundaries and names,

³⁶ Ibid., p. 104.

³⁷ These traditions may have been preserved by the *filid* or other formal guardians of native tradition (who steadfastly and conservatively guarded and transmitted a great deal of other lore, including genealogy, social customs, place-name traditions, and poetry), as well as by professional, local or family story-tellers, or local lay-persons who maintained pride and interest in ancient history and traditions (whether local or national, much as may be found in certain areas of modern-day Ireland).

³⁸ Rees, p. 104.

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it retains some of the essentials of a cosmogonic myth.³⁹

In addition to the formation of the land and its natural features (including the bursting forth of rivers and lakes and the clearing of plains), the text seems to preserve information about the origin of things associated with society. These include cultivation, grinding, churning, building, trading, horse-racing, arts and crafts, poetry, knowledge, the origin of kingship, the administration of justice, and the holding of assemblies.⁴⁰

Scowcroft points out that despite the relative age of *Lebor Gabála*, it preserves some very old traditions (historical, legendary, and mythological).⁴¹ In light of the cosmogonic nature of the native elements which occur in *Lebor Gabála*, one might also expect to encounter information pertaining to the gods in such a setting (particularly primal deities associated with creation). Keeping this in mind, let us examine those portions of the text which refer to the *Tuatha Dé Danann* in some detail. The second tract of *Lebor Gabála* (*De Gabálaib Érenn*) is of particular interest, as it presents a great deal of information pertaining to the *Tuatha Dé Danann*, including what is purported to be their genealogy.⁴²

Prehistoric genealogies were important in that they legitimized the seat or lineage of kingship, preserving the status quo in society and maintaining custom and order. They were often recited at important social or religious events. Divine, semi-

³⁹ Ibid., p. 104.

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 104-5.

⁴¹ Scowcroft, p. 32.

⁴² Ibid., p. 2.

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divine (or at least noble or heroic) ancestors provided a foundation upon whose reputation, status, or divinity one might attain or maintain power and position. They also provided the recipient with a certain mystique, in some cases derived from the Otherworld realms.

In the medieval era, historians and genealogists in Ireland maintained this tradition by preserving or supplying eponymous ancestors for population groups on a national, territorial, and familial level. Providing appropriate ancestors for all the peoples of Ireland was important in terms of furnishing them with a Biblical origin. This included them in the new schema and gave all population groups a common origin (a method used to legitimize everyone no matter what their position in society, thereby reducing conflict, whether physical or ideological). The authors of Ireland's toponymic legends, the *Dindsenchas*, performed a similar task in recording or positing eponymous founders (many of whom had divine or semi-divine ancestry) for the place-names of Ireland.⁴³

Why should a genealogy of the Tuatha Dé Danann have been preserved? Providing the pagan deities with human ancestry might diminish their status by demonstrating that they were 'no longer gods'. Without a divine pedigree, they could be passed off as just another race or invasion of mortals who were conquered or subdued by the next incoming population group. In addition, Scowcroft makes the observation that "the mythographers of Christian Ireland were too interested in the old gods to leave them alone."⁴⁴

⁴³ Ibid., p. 12.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 35.

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The Tuatha Dé Danann are said to be the descendants of *Nemed* and are the third of five invasions (as enumerated in later versions of the tradition). They do not appear to have been included in the earliest accounts of invasions, however, and it may be that originally only Partholón, Nemed, and the Milesians appeared in these accounts (with the Fir Bolg and the Tuatha Dé Danann added later).⁴⁵

The earliest summary of Irish pseudo-history is found in a British source, the *Historia Brittonum*, written in Wales in 829-30 C.E.. The text appears to embody a number of earlier strands of tradition (of oral and Welsh derivation, as well as literary and Latin) and also includes Irish material resembling an early version of *Lebor Gabála*. It is likely that at least some of these sources existed as separate texts in Wales, North Britain, and Ireland.⁴⁶ The invaders include Partholomus (Partholón), Nimeth (Nemed),

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 29-32. The five ages presented in *Lebor Gabála* may have been influenced by the five ages known to Irish clerics from Classical sources. The invasions of Partholón, Nemed, the Fir Bolg, and the Milesians may also have corresponded with the foundation of the great world-kingdoms of the Third Age (the Assyrian, Median, Persian, and Alexandrian Greek), a tradition which would have been well known to medieval literati. In both cases, the invasion of the Tuatha Dé Danann seems to have been added into the scheme later, making them the last group to join an already established sequence of 'invaders'.

⁴⁶ Hopkins, Pamela S. and Koch, John T., "*Historia Brittonum*" (Excerpts from the Welsh Latin) in Koch, John T. and Carey, John, eds., *The Celtic Heroic Age* (Celtic Studies Publications, Malden, Massachusetts, 1995), pp. 270-285.

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and the three sons of Míl with a 'company of eight' (the Tuatha Dé Danann do not appear).⁴⁷

By the time of *Lebor Gabála*, the history of Ireland's inhabitants reflected a wide variety of Biblical, native, and medieval traditions, as well as newly created adaptations.⁴⁸ These alterations resulted in the generation of an invasion myth, which fused "elements of pagan theology with the politics of medieval Ireland."⁴⁹ In addition to socio-religious motivations for providing common ancestry for the peoples of Ireland, it is reasonable to suppose that in the eyes of the proponents of the new religion, the pagan gods of the Irish were a problem to be handled, as well as a force to be reckoned with.

John Carey writes: "It was an audacious move to weave the divinities of their pagan ancestors into the framework of their history, and this 'explanation' of the immortals seems never to have sat entirely easily in the minds of the medieval Irish."⁵⁰ The claim that the Tuatha Dé Danann had human ancestry is not made prior to the poems of the tenth century and never fully ousted the earlier view that they were

⁴⁷ Ibid. See also Carey, *A New Introduction to Lebor Gabála Éirenn*, pp. 4-6.

⁴⁸ There is insufficient room in an article of this length in which to discuss in any detail the sources which fed into the creation of pseudohistorical doctrine in the seventh and eighth centuries, nor would I feel qualified to properly interpret such evidence. However, as John Carey points out in his *New Introduction to Lebor Gabála*, it is clear that the scheme recorded in *Historia Brittonum* had been evolving over generations.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 32.

⁵⁰ Carey, "Native Elements," p. 53-54.

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destructive or uncanny spirits.⁵¹ Carey points out the inevitable artificiality of accounts that describe how the gods “came to Ireland” with the attendant need to fit them into a series of settlements: “Surely they were always there, an ineradicable part of the land whose powers they are: they do not come ‘from’ anywhere—any more than the *Fomoiri* seem to do...”⁵²

While we may never be able to confidently reconstruct the processes through which native and learned traditions came together, one element of the account is likely to be an old one. However they got there, it is the gods who rule Ireland when the Gaels arrive. “The new land belongs to these immortals...whose weapons are magic and illusion. Ireland, before the Gaels can win it for themselves, is itself a kind of Otherworld.”⁵³ The arrival of the Tuatha Dé Danann is described in *Lebor Gabála* as follows:

The descendants of Bethach mac Iarbonél
Fáith mac Nemed were in the northern
islands of the world learning druidism
and knowledge and sorcery and cunning
until they were pre-eminent in the arts of
the heathen sages. They are the Tuatha

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 53-54. The ensuing confusion is evident in the story of Túan, where we are told that “the men of learning do not know their origin, but think it is likely they are exiles from heaven.” This same speculative musing was recorded in connection with the fairies in Irish and Scottish folklore. It may also have influenced, or have been influenced by, accounts in which the Tuatha Dé are said to arrived “in dark clouds” (i.e. ‘out of the sky’).

⁵² Ibid., p. 54.

⁵³ Ibid.

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Dé Donann who came to Ireland. It is
thus that they came: in dark clouds.⁵⁴

The Tuatha Dé Danann land in the west and cast a darkness upon the sun for three days and nights. This is a significant and often ritualistic period of time in Celtic tradition (as it is in many cultures), frequently associated with journeys to the Otherworld, important adventures or ordeals, initiation, and changes of state or status.⁵⁵ After the three days and nights of darkness, the Tuatha Dé Danann are able to vanquish the Fir Bolg in battle, thus experiencing a change of status as they take possession of the kingship of the land.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Carey, "*Lebor Gabála Érenn*," p. 244.

⁵⁵ In many religious traditions (including those associated with shamanism), initiation rites or ordeals, and other important socio-religious ceremonies, frequently take place after or during a period of 'three days and nights'. Initiates often undergo or experience a symbolic 'death and rebirth' which involves the use of darkness as a related metaphor. Shamanic journeys or rituals often take place in the dark (or at night). In a possibly similar fashion, early Irish and Scottish poetic candidates were said to compose poetry in darkened huts or cells with their plaid wrapped around their head to block out the light. In addition, in various creation mythologies, life emerges from or is created from the darkness which precedes it.

⁵⁶ Rees, p. 107. An alternate interpretation (or origin) of the tradition of 'five invasions' presents itself. Alwyn and Brinley Rees compare the five pre-Gaelic peoples with the tradition of the 'Five Kindreds' known in India. In the *Rig Veda* they are spoken of as immigrants who come from another location "across the waters" and who settle and till the lands on the other shore. It is understood that this does not represent an historical invasion but a crossing over

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The Descent of the Gods

In *Lebor Gabála*, a Biblical origin for the Irish was provided through one of the three sons of Noah (Japheth) from whom the peoples of Europe were said to descend. In this scheme, the Sons of Míl (the Gaels) are descended from Japheth's son Gomer, while the 'peoples who came to Ireland before the Gaels' (the Gaileóin, the Fir Domnann, the Fir Bolg, and the Tuatha Dé Danann) are descended from Magog, another son of Japheth.⁵⁷ This arrangement

from one form of being to another. In these voyages to the sacred realms, a crossing of water often implies a change of state or status. The Five Kindreds travel by way of ship ("across the water," "from distant lands") or in a heavenly chariot. This is similar to descriptions of the invasions in LG, including that of the Tuatha Dé Danann. They too are said to have come from a distant location ("the northern islands of the world," which implies travel across water), arriving in ships or "in dark clouds" (the latter possibly interpreted as indicating 'from the sky').

⁵⁷ Carey, "*Lebor Gabála Éirenn*," pp. 211-216. It is interesting to note that in LG tradition, the Gaels and the non-Gaels are descended from two different grandsons of Noah, Gomer, and Magog. Gomer's son *Ibath* ('yew') has two sons, *Bodb* (a native word meaning 'raven') and *Baath* (also a native word meaning 'death' or more appropriately, 'sea'). *Bodb* has a son *Dói* ('unskilled, inartistic?') who has no descendants. *Baath*, on the other hand, has an extremely skilled son, Fénus Farsaid, a sage associated with poetry and poetic languages. It is through this reputable line that the Gaels claimed their descent.

The non-Gaels, however, are descended from Magog, a name which appears in the Old Testament as a place-name, denoting a northern kingdom ruled by a figure known as Gog (*Ezekiel* 38:2 and 3, and *Ezekiel* 39:1). It is unclear whether Gog is an historical person or not. In *Revelations*

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differs from that found in the Old Testament. A number of other additions and alterations appear which constitute a departure from Old Testament tradition and an expansion of the Biblical model in which known population groups attribute their origin to one of the sons or grandsons of Noah.⁵⁸

In the Bible, Japheth's descendants occupy Asia Minor and the Mediterranean. In *Lebor Gabála*, they inhabit a similar area but also occupy 'all of Europe'. Additionally, in Biblical tradition the offspring of

20, however, Gog and Magog are mentioned as destructive figures whose names (in this context) symbolize the gentile nations leagued against the church at the end of time. Thus the non-Gaels (including the Tuatha Dé Danann, the pagan gods of the Irish) descend from a shadowy figure who is in one Biblical context associated with paganism. I am grateful to former Br. Bartholomew Mallio for information and references pertaining to Gog and Magog.

⁵⁸ *The New Jerusalem Bible*, (Bantam Doubleday, 1985), pp. 28-9. We cannot be sure, of course, exactly which books of the Bible (or other associated works) the early Irish scribes had in front of them, some of which may have been used in the formation of whatever other sources or pseudo-historical texts they may have been referencing or drawing from. Other learned influences came into play, as well. In making comparisons in the present work, I have referred to the *New Jerusalem Bible*, performing a careful reading of Genesis and other sections (including the index of persons). A computer search and close reading of pertinent sections of the Vulgate was also performed. Clearly some of these medieval adaptations resulted from the challenge facing the newly-converted Irish of finding a place for themselves among the descendants of Noah, as well as coordinating their traditions with the current system which was based on both Biblical authority, Greco-Roman historiography, and other learned medieval sources.

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Japheth's son Gomer are listed as Ashkenaz, Riphath, and Togormah. In *Lebor Gabála*, Gomer has two sons called Emoth (from whom come the 'northern peoples of the world') and Ibath. Ibath has two children, Bodb and Baath, who do not appear in Genesis and whose names are of Irish origin. [Appendix One]

Several names from the pedigree of the Tuatha Dé Danann in *Lebor Gabála* also appear in *Historia Brittonum* (referred to hereafter as HB) as well as in the genealogies of the Leinstermen from Rawlinson B.502 (noted as RawlB502).⁵⁹ A few of the names

⁵⁹ Hopkins and Koch, "*Historia Brittonum*"; O'Brien, M.A., ed., *Corpus Genealogiarum Hiberniae*, Vol. 1 (Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, Dublin, 1976), pp. 1-7. Names which appear in *Historia Brittonum*, as well as in Irish and / or Welsh genealogies, may have their origin in some earlier source or tradition which may reflect Biblical, medieval and / or native elements. Clearly it would be difficult to speculate upon the nature of these sources.

The Welsh were also known for their predilection for genealogies (including models along similar pseudo-historical lines) and would certainly have been familiar with early histories (such as Isidore of Seville) which circulated in learned circles on the continent and elsewhere. They also trace themselves back to Adam through the offspring of Noah (although sometimes through different sons of Japheth than those who figure in Irish tradition). However, other than the sole mention of a figure called Seru in the Welsh Life of Saint Cadog, and an Enos, a grandson of Adam (as well as Enoc) in the Genealogies from *Hanes Gruffudd ap Cynan* (both of whom are also mentioned in the pedigrees from Mostyn MS. 117), the names from LG do not seem to figure in the Welsh genealogical tracts. Bartrum, P.C., *Early Welsh Genealogical Tracts* (University of Wales Press, Cardiff,

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are similar to those of persons in the Bible, but it is possible that the author(s) of the pseudo-historical texts, in encountering unusual or unfamiliar Irish words, thought they recognized in these names those of figures familiar to them from their own tradition.⁶⁰

However the genealogies in *Lebor Gabála* came about, it is reasonable to speculate that at some point native Irish lore and Biblical and medieval traditions were 'stitched together' into a pseudo-history which served many purposes.⁶¹ The artificiality of the pseudo-historical genealogical arrangement as it stands is obvious; the Tuatha Dé cannot, of course, be truly descended from Noah, supporting the theory that the genealogy is a hybrid of native and non-native traditions. With all of this in mind, we may proceed in our exploration of certain facets of the ancestry of the Tuatha Dé Danann as described in *Lebor Gabála*.⁶² Sections 12, 13, and 75 of the text (which are remarkably internally consistent) provide data from

1966). I am deeply indebted to Ms. Charlene Shipman for references pertaining to medieval Irish Biblical sources and traditions, the *Historia Brittonum*, and the information contained in the Genealogies in Rawlinson B. 502. I would also like to thank Ms. Katharine Olson and Mr. Benjamin Bruch for their help with sources pertaining to the Welsh genealogies.

⁶⁰ See footnotes 67 and 84 below.

⁶¹ In the genealogy of the Sons of Míl, the seam or borderline between native and Biblical elements seems to be fairly easily discernible. After Noah, Japheth, and Gomer we encounter Ibath, Bodb, and Baath, words which may reasonably be interpreted as Irish in origin, and proceed directly to such 'Goidelic' figures as Fénius Farsaid, his son Nél ('cloud') and Gáedel Glas.

⁶² Carey, *Lebor Gabála Éirenn*, pp. 213-262.

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which a genealogy of the Tuatha Dé Danann may be reconstructed.⁶³ [Appendix Two]

Let us examine the names of the persons who are reported to be the ancestors of the Tuatha Dé Danann. The first three figures (Noah, Japheth, and Magog) are Biblical in origin. The names which follow these are: *Faithecht*, *Braimin(d)*, *Esrú*, *Srú*, *Sera*, *Tat / Tait*, *Paimp*, *Agnoman*, *Nemed*, *Iardan / Iarbonél*, *Bethach*, *Ebath / Ibath*, *Baath*, *Eno / Éna*, *Tabarn*, and *Tat / Tait*. While the significance of some of these names is reasonably clear, a number of them present distinct challenges of derivation and interpretation (for which I invite the superior knowledge and commentary of others).⁶⁴

⁶³ In comparing and matching up the information presented in different sections of the text, it was found that the data was more than 90% accurate in terms of precision, reliability, and uniformity. There is some overlap in the information provided in these passages, as well as complementary data which fills gaps in other sections. Cross-checking all the data presented in the First Rescension concerning the Tuatha Dé Danann, the material was remarkably consistent. The few instances of confusion or omission were easily rectified by referring to other texts such as *Cath Maige Tuired* and *Acallam na Senórach*. This high level of accuracy is quite remarkable in light of the processes of accretion, amalgamation, and modification which undoubtedly took place.

⁶⁴ This paper is a speculative exploration and interpretation of wonderfully fascinating and nefariously difficult material. It is merely an initial foray into the formidable task of analyzing these elements in this manner, and I welcome and encourage the work of others in furthering this primary attempt.

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Faithecht may appear in HB as *Aurthoch*.⁶⁵ Similar names appear in MS Rawlinson B 502:[RawlB502] *Ethecht*, *Aurtacht*, *Aurthecht*.⁶⁶ In a genealogy given by Keating in his *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn* (which he attributes to the lost *Cín Dromma Snechta*) a figure called *Fáthach* is mentioned, the ancestor of Partholón and Nemed, and brother of Baath and Ibath (all three sons of Magog). While the possible variants above appear in other sources, I have been unable to locate any Biblical figure whose name is similar to that of *Faithecht*.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Hopkins and Koch, *Historia Brittonum*, p. 274.

⁶⁶ If the alternate spellings reflect the original more closely than that which appears in LG, perhaps there is some connection with the word *aitecht* 'tutorage, instruction' or *aittecht* 'act of returning; act of expounding, lesson, instruction'. *Aithech*, most commonly known as a word signifying 'vassal, peasant', it may also mean 'giant' or 'monster' (bringing to mind the early races of gods who, in some traditions, were a race of giants). In certain usages *aithech* may refer to a husband or master of the house, or a warrior or fighting man. See also *airthechta* 'privilege, prerogative, due, right' and *airthach* 'oath of confirmation or denial; guarantee'. The variants open up a number of possibilities.

⁶⁷ Carey, John, "The Ancestry of Fénius Farsaid," *Celtica* Vol. 22 (1990), p. 106. In his examination of genealogical traditions pertaining to Fénius Farsaid, Carey discusses the 'long pedigree' of the Sons of Míl, variants of which are found in a number of sources (including the first recension of *Lebor Gabála*, *Historia Brittonum*, *Auraicept na nÉces*, *Scéla Mosauluim*, and the dynastic poems edited by Kuno Meyer in the first part of his *Über die älteste irische Dichtung*). In this lineage, a pair of similar (or potentially related) names appear, those of a father and son duo (the father's name spelled *Aurthecht*, *Aurtacht*, *Athiecht*,

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It is possible that the name derives from Old Irish *fáith* 'seer, prophet' and may mean something like 'Art of Prophecy', or by extension, 'One who is Skilled in the Art of Prophecy'. (Cf. its derivative *fáthach* 'possessed of knowledge, skill; wise' as well as the suffix embodied in the word *dánacht* 'poetry, art of poetry').⁶⁸ Prophecy was a highly revered and often divinely derived skill which figures prominently in numerous sources, frequently ascribed to poets, druids, and other figures with high socio-religious status. A Divine Seer would be an appropriate ancestor for the Tuatha Dé Danann (who were renowned for their many skills, including the gift of prophecy).

Braimin(d). I have been unable to make anything of this name.⁶⁹

Esrú is also mentioned in RawlB502, and two similar names appear in HB (those of Ezra and father Izrau).

Aurtecht, Arthecht, Aurthach; the son's given as Ethecht, Ethiecht, Athecht, or Ethach). The relationship of these names to that of *Faithecht* is unclear. Here I should like to state that these pedigrees, their sources, dating and interrelationships, and the origins of various borrowings or variations, constitute a vastly complex topic which I am not attempting to unravel in full in this paper.

⁶⁸ All derivations or suggested origins, unless otherwise noted, derive from [DIL], *Dictionary of the Irish Language – Based mainly on Old and Middle Irish Materials* (Royal Irish Academy, 1913-1976).

⁶⁹ The name sometimes ends in *-in*, other times in *-ind*, perhaps suggesting a suffix of *finn / find* 'white, bright, blessed, etc', which occurs in association with other names associated with mythological settings.

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Ezra the scribe is a well-known Biblical character, where he is the son of Serai'ah (a figure whose name may be reflected in that of Esrú's grandson Sera in *Lebor Gabála* tradition). Ezra does not appear in Genesis, however, nor is he associated with Noah and his offspring.⁷⁰ Several possibilities exist to support a native origin for Esrú's name.

The word may derive from *esruth* 'scattering, bursting forth' (perhaps denoting the propagation of divine progeny or the dissemination of divine knowledge or power).⁷¹ A figure called *Estras* appears in *Cath Maige Tuired* (one of the four sages with whom the Tuatha Dé Danann studied occult lore and magic), and a derivation of his name from *esrais* / *esrus* 'outlet, passage; means, way, opportunity' has been suggested.⁷²

If the word is a compound, it may be comprised of [*DIL*, item 3] *es(s)* 'cataract, rapid; rapidly flowing stream' and *sruth* 'stream, river, current; stream of sea'. The second element could also reflect *sruith*, 'old, senior, venerable, revered, honored', which may be used as a substantive to denote an 'elder, ancestor, reverend person, sage'. This might suggest a meaning in the range of 'Waterfall' of the 'River / Stream' or 'Sage / Ancestor'.

Ancestors and sages play an important role in many early Irish tales. Water sources (including rivers

⁷⁰ *Ezra* 7.

⁷¹ Used in phrases such as *esruth sin*, *esruth gáith*, and *esruth rind* (scattering or bursting forth of storms, wind and stars). Perhaps similar to *esréd*, 'dispersing, scattering'. Also spelled *aesruth*. Cf. *assreud*, v.n. of *as-sréi*, 'sprinkles'?

⁷² Gray, Elizabeth, *Cath Maige Tuired* (1982, Irish Texts Society), pp. 24-5.

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and waterfalls) are often associated with divine knowledge, and in some cases sages or poets are connected with these sites. In addition, an important site of *síd*-related activity was *Ess Ruaid* ‘the Red Waterfall’, whose name could also be reflected in that of the figure *Esrú*.⁷³ Overall, this word seems to reflect imagery associated with the flowing of water and the possession or dissemination of divine wisdom.

Srú appears in RawlB502 (as *Srú* or *Zrú*) but does not appear in HB. If the name is Irish, it may derive from *sruth* or *sruith* (‘River / Stream’ or ‘Sage / Ancestor’), reflecting imagery similar to the figure described above.

Sera is not listed in HB but may appear in RawlB502 (spelled *Sara*). Biblical tradition provides several candidates: *Serai’ah* (the father of Ezra), *Serug* (a descendant of Shem), and the female name *Sarai* / *Serah*. However, a figure called *Sera* does appear in an Irish source as the father of *Starn*, father of *Túan*, a figure associated with primal floods and early cosmogonic elements. The meaning of the word is unclear.⁷⁴

Tat / *Tait* is most recognizable as a Welsh word meaning ‘father’, appearing in early Welsh sources in

⁷³ *Ess Ruad* was one of the places where *Finn mac Cumail* was said to have caught the salmon of knowledge. Words denoting ‘red’ may be used figuratively to mean ‘great’, ‘mighty’, ‘noble’, etc.

⁷⁴ Old Irish *séire* / *sére* ‘meal, food’?, or less likely *serr* ‘sickle’ or *seir* ‘heel, shank’.

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the names of figures like *Tad Awen*, 'Father of Inspiration'. Having insufficient expertise (or space) to properly speculate upon how a Welsh word found its way into an Irish genealogy, I will suggest only that it may have to do with the same channels through which Irish genealogies entered Welsh pseudo-historical tradition.

Irish origin is possible through a variety of words meaning 'joining' or 'union'. These include *táth* 'joining, welding, binding', used in a political sense to denote 'uniting, rallying' (cf. 1 *táthaid*, 'joins, welds, unites; welder, smith, artificer') as well as 1 *táide* 'stealth, secrecy, concealment; hence illicit intercourse' (cf. 3 *táth* 'fornication').⁷⁵

Paimp is a word whose meaning is unclear, although the inclusion of the letter 'p' may indicate derivation (or alteration) through Welsh channels. It may be that the name *Boib* (HB) or *Banb* / *Bainb* (RawlB502) are more reflective of the original form. It could also be the Irish form of the Greek name Priam.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ If some sort of initial mutation or re-duplication were involved, the word might be a reflex of *aite* 'foster-father; tutor, teacher'. (Cf. *an t-oide faoisidneach*, 'father confessor', also *d'oitib* , *do buimaib*.)

⁷⁶ The latter element is similar to that found in the deity name *Banba*, one of the three eponymous goddesses of the land of Ireland. For *Paimp* and *Agnoman*, cf Book of Lecan, facsimile pg. 35 verso, columns 2-3, pedigrees of Brutus. Several variants are given for Brutus, the colonizer of Britain, including names from Biblical and classical sources. The association of the names *Paim(p)* and *Agnon* (as they appear there) in parallel with such Virgilian names as *Anaichis* (Anchises), *Aenias* (Aeneas) and *Ascan* (Ascanius) suggest a Greco-Roman origin.

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Agnoman appears in RawlB502, as does the possibly related name *Ogamuin* (spelled *Ougumun* in HB). Its meaning and origin are uncertain, but it is probably the Irish form of the Greek name Agamemnon (see note 76).

Nemed is a word of native origin whose original sense was probably that of a sacred or consecrated place, with secondary meanings (from the honor attached to sacred space) of privilege, status, and dignity. As an adjective it means 'holy' or 'sacred' and as a noun 'privilege,' 'sanctity', or 'sanctuary'. In the earliest law tracts it signified all persons of free status. Freemen were considered 'holy' (*nemed*) in that they were qualified to participate in public religious rites. In early Ireland, the upper classes of society (*nemid*) included secular and ecclesiastical lords (*sóernemid*) and professionals (*dóernemid*), as distinguished from rent-paying vassals (*aithig*). A similar distinction existed among the gods between the skilled deities (*aes dána*) and the husbandmen (*aes trebtha*).⁷⁷

The concept of *nemed* also finds expression in the word *nemeton*, which refers to a sacred place (possibly originally a clearing in the wood). A *nemeton* could exist at, nearby, or in connection with groves, hills, lakes, wells, tumuli, and royal sites, which often formed the symbolic center of the *tuath*. These were points of access to the Otherworld as well as places of cult and sanctuary for the pagan Celts. It seems reasonable to suggest that the descent of the

⁷⁷ Scowcroft, "Leabhar Gabhála – Part II," p. 59. A translation of a prose version of the Aeneid survives in the Book of Ballymote.

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gods from a figure called *Nemed*, who was associated with sacred sites and ritual events associated with the contact and propitiation of the Otherworld, might reasonably have formed part of native tradition.

Iardan(ais) or *Iarbonél* 'Faith' ('The Seer') is a character whose names suggest a number of intriguing possibilities. The variant *Iardan* could be a compound word formed from *iar* 'after, across; end; dark, black' (a word sometimes used in formations have the sense of 'west' or 'western') plus *dán* 'gift, skill, especially of poetry'. This would suggest a meaning along the lines of 'Dark Skill' or 'Skill which Originates in the West'. The West was often associated with the Otherworld, and was also the direction associated with learning. A name relating to the gift of prophecy, a 'dark' or obscure skill which might originate in the west (or in the Otherworld) would be appropriate for a divine seer.

The form of the name is also sometimes given as *Iardanais*. *Danais* is the equivalent of *Tanais*, the ancient name of the River Don in Russia. This river designation (and that of numerous others in Britain and on the Continent) is thought to derive from the Indo-European root **danu-* 'river'.⁷⁸ The name may be a descriptive term ('dark river') or may reflect movement 'across' a river. Movement over or across

⁷⁸ Rivet, A.L.F and Smith, Colin, *The Place-Names of Roman Britain* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1979), p. 329. For an in-depth discussion on these **danu-* river names, found throughout the Celtic region and the possible association with the Irish figure Danu, see my "Mater Deorum Hibernensium" in *The Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium*, Volume 19 (1999).

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a body of water frequently signified a change of state or a journey to the Otherworld.

The third variant is *Iarbonél*. Its initial element may derive from *íarmúa* / *íarmó* ‘great-grandson / child’ (sometimes used with the meaning ‘descendant’) and the second from *nél* ‘cloud’. In an Indo-European system of mythic analogy in which the elements of the cosmos are compared to the body parts of the primal being, clouds are associated with the brain or thoughts.⁷⁹ An epithet meaning ‘Descendant of Cloud’ may have alluded in a poetic fashion to the seer’s ability to obtain knowledge from the heavens or the unseen world. In addition, the Tuatha Dé Danann were said to arrive “in dark clouds.”

The confusion which seems to surround the name of this divine personage may derive from (or have been influenced by) references to sages and poets who appear in *Auracept na n-Éces*.⁸⁰ One of these is *Iar mac Nema*, a figure whose name is quite similar to that of our seer, *Iardan mac Nemed*. *Iar mac Nema* was said to have discovered *iarmbéla*, ‘The Obscure Language of the Poets’.⁸¹ The *Auracept* also mentions one *Nél*, the son of *Fenius Farsaid*. Both *Iar mac Nema* and *Fenius* were sages associated with poetic lore, learning, and traditions pertaining to the various ‘common’ and ‘poetic’ languages.

⁷⁹ Lincoln, pp. 1-40.

⁸⁰ Calder, George, ed., *Auracept na n-Éces - The Scholar’s Primer* (Four Courts Press, Dublin, 1995), pp. 7-9, 17, and 101-3.

⁸¹ Calder, p. 17.

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We can see certain similarities (as well as possible sources of confusion) between the names of *Iardan mac Nemed* and *Iar mac Nema*, *Iarbonél* and *Nél* (son of *Iar mac Nema*'s fellow sage Fenius), and *Iarbonél* and *iarmbétra* (the poetic language discovered by *Iar mac Nema*). The word *dán*, associated with the art of the poets, may also have found its way into *Iar(dan)*'s name. However these variants came about, they all seem to be associated with poetry, prophecy, or the acquisition of divine wisdom, 'dark' or 'obscure' skills which are associated with, and often derive from, the Otherworld.

Bethach's name seems to appear only in *Lebor Gabála*. It may reflect the word *bethach* 'nourishing' or some form of *betha* / *bethu* 'life, existence; food, nourishment; sustenance, maintenance'. This would suggest a meaning along the lines of 'He Who Provides Nourishment' or 'He Who Sustains Life'. Interestingly, *Bethach* (whose name is associated with life or sustenance) is one the 'survivors' of the people of *Nemed*.⁸²

Ebath / *Ibath* appears in HB as *Iobaath* and in RawlB502 as *Enbath*. These names seem to reflect native words which refer to the aspen or yew tree and may also be associated with imagery pertaining to sacred trees or *bile*, ritual sites, and divine wisdom. The name will require additional discussion, presented in the following section.⁸³

⁸² Carey, "Lebor Gabála," Sections 49, 53, 54.

⁸³ Carey, John "Fénus Farsaid," pp. 108-110. Carey examines discrepancies and variants found in the pedigree

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Baath is found in RawlB502 (spelled *Boath* or *Baath*) and in HB, as stated above (*Baath* son of *Iobaath*). The name may reflect an Irish word, perhaps 1 *bath* 'death' or 2 *bath*, explained as 'sea' (*muir*). As it is our contention that some of the names in *Lebor Gabála* reflect primal figures or elements associated with creation, the second interpretation may be most suitable. Interestingly, *Baath* ('Sea'?) is one of the 'men of Ireland' who survive the deluge of Nemed's

of the Sons of Míl (whose genealogy shares a few common figures with that of the Tuatha Dé Danann; namely Baath, Esru, Sru, and Tait). In particular, he discusses the *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum*, a work written in Hebrew around the time of Jesus which was translated into Latin (probably around the third or fourth century) and circulated as one of the writings of Philo of Alexandria. It is an account of sacred history from the creation to the time of David, with much apocryphal detail. In one version of the text (where the names of Japeth's sons and grandsons are frequently garbled), three grandsons of Japheth's son Javan are listed as *Itheb* (or perhaps *Iabat*), *Beath*, and *Fenech*. Carey sees a resemblance between these names and those of the figures *Ibath*, *Baath*, and *Fénius* (*Farsaid*). Both trios of names are evidently unique in their respective literatures, and Carey feels that earlier versions of the *Liber* may have contained readings even closer to the Irish version. However, he also points out that he is unaware of any other convincing indication of knowledge of the text by the Irish, and that it is possible that only a fragment reached them. I suggest that it is also possible that similarities existed between the names of Biblical characters and those of native origin, resulting in confusion, substitution, and alternate spellings (a phenomenon which undoubtedly took place, and for which Carey gives at least one example in this setting).

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time, along with his father, *Ebath*, and grandfather, *Bethach*.

Eno / *Éna* appears in RawlB502 as *Énna* (and perhaps also as *Énoc*). This second name may reflect that of the Biblical figure Enoch, the great grandfather of Noah (and the only character mentioned thus far who is associated with Genesis).⁸⁴ It may also be that an Irish word was ‘recognized’ as a variant or reflection of Enoch. A derivation from the word *én* ‘bird’ is possible (cf. *éonu*, acc.pl. of *én*, and *énach* ‘pertaining to or haunted by birds’ or used as a collective form, ‘birds’). Due to the fact that the names of *Éna*’s father and son both mean ‘sea’, it is also possible that the name may reflect a form of the word *en* ‘water’ (gs. *ena*, as in the phrase *sruaim ena*).⁸⁵

Tabarn does not seem to appear in sources other than *Lebor Gabála*. The grandchild of *Baath* (‘Sea’), his name may reflect the Irish word *tabairn*, which also means ‘sea’.

Tat / *Tait*: Section 97 of *Lebor Gabála* states: “It is at Tait son of Tabarn that the testimonies concerning the Tuatha Dé Donann converge.” Indeed, after mapping out the ancestors and descendants of the Tuatha Dé, we can see that *Tait* / *Tat* is in fact the common ancestor of all members of the Tuatha Dé Danann.⁸⁶ It

⁸⁴ Genesis 5:18.

⁸⁵ It is also possible that some form of the verb *enaid* may be involved. In *Bérta na filed*, a language associated with *Éna*’s great-great-grandfather *Iardan* / *Iarbonél*, *enaid* means ‘shows, makes known’.

⁸⁶ See Appendix Two.

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is possible that the name reflects a native word pertaining to concepts such as 'joining' or 'union' (a meaning which may have suggested or strengthened by familiarity with the Welsh word *tat* 'father'; cf. Old Irish *aite* / *aiti*, 'foster father'). With this common ancestor or father-deity we encounter the familiar shift in focus from deities associated with creation to those associated with the land and the world of men. The descendants of these primal deities constitute the well-known divine figures of early Irish myth and legend (Dagda, Mórrígan, Oengus, Boand, Bríg, Ogma, Macha, Lugh, Manannán, Goibniu, and so on).

The Yew, the Ash, and the Salmon

Ebath, the son of Bethach ('He Who Promotes Life') and great-grandson of Nemed ('Sacred Place'), is a figure whose name requires special commentary. In the Ogam alphabet, *ebath* / *ebad* is said to represent 'ea' or ogam diphthongs beginning with 'e'. It is associated with the aspen in several places (although elsewhere with the herb elecampane). Its spelling is erratic, and there is considerable fluctuation and confusion between *ebad* and *edad* throughout the *Auraceipt*.

Some of this irregularity is the result of confusion with word *idad* (the letter 'i') which is connected with the yew. The trees associated with the ogam alphabet are grouped into four classifications: chieftain, peasant, herb, and shrub trees. The aspen is listed as a peasant tree and does not figure prominently in early Irish tree lore.⁸⁷ The yew, on the

⁸⁷ Ross, Anne, *Pagan Celtic Britain* (Academy, Chicago, 1996), pp. 54-5, 59-66; Kelly, Fergus, "The Old Irish Tree-List," *Celtica* 11 (1976); Calder, pp. 89-93; Newton,

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other hand, is included among the chieftain trees and, along with the oak and the ash, was considered to be a *bile*, a sacred tree under which assemblies might be held. In later times, these trees were associated with holy sites (wells, hills, and burial grounds).⁸⁸

Dindsenchas tradition records the name of five particularly sacred trees: The Tree of Tortu, the Tree of Dathí, the Tree of Uisnech (all ash trees), Éo Rosa (a yew), and Éo Mugna (an oak or yew). The last tree, Éo Mugna, was said to bear apples, nuts, and acorns. In one *Dindsenchas* account it is described as an oak (*dair*), while in two others it is said to be a yew (*éo*). One of these trees, at least, is explicitly referred to as a *bile*.⁸⁹ Two of the five trees are yew trees, while the other three are ash. Here we might recall that the world tree of the Norse was an ash. This symbol of the *axis mundi* played an important role in ancient Norse ritual and continued to do so in the folklore tradition. The gods were said to dispense justice from an assembly beneath the world tree, reminiscent of the tribal assemblies of the Celts which took place in the presence of the *bile*.⁹⁰

Michael, *A Handbook of the Scottish Gaelic World* (Four Courts Press, Dublin, 2000), pp. 92-6, 191-2.

⁸⁸ Lucas, A.T., "The Sacred Trees of Ireland," *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society*, LXVIII (1963), pp. 16-54.

⁸⁹ Ross, p. 60.

⁹⁰ Davidson, *Gods and Myths of Northern Europe*, pp. 162, 165, 168, 170, 179, 215, and 224; and *Myths and Symbols in Pagan Europe* (Syracuse University Press, 1988), p. 25: "As the center of the cosmos, the sacred tree was linked with creation legends... It was appropriate that the sacred center should be the place where kings are chosen and proclaimed, and where the law was recited." Many have

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While the aspen does not play a prominent role in early Irish tradition, the yew appears to have been a highly venerated tree. How can we account for (or clarify) the confusion between *ebad* / *edad* and *idad*, words which refer to either the yew or the aspen? Damian McManus has discussed at length the work of the composers of the *Briatharogam*, the oldest, least contaminated, and most trustworthy source of information on the types of *ogam* and their associations.⁹¹ He points out that the recorded name of the *ogam* characters for E (*ebad* / *edad*) and I (*idad*) pose considerable problems of interpretation and etymology and that this confusion is found as early as Cormac's Glossary.⁹² Perhaps the kennings associated with these letters may shed some light on the problem.

Edad is associated with the aspen or poplar tree. It represents the letter 'é' and words which begin with 'é'. It is connected with the salmon in the kenning "é—the crafty one of the water, i.e. salmon."⁹³ *Ébad* was

speculated on a possible connection between the symbolism of the world tree and the widespread veneration for trees found in Celtic tradition. The nature of sacred locations as described in both literature and folklore and archaeological evidence concerning the structure of Celtic sacred sites (both natural and manmade) support such a connection. It may be that great sacred trees or *bile* (as well as wooden posts or stone pillars mentioned in literary sources and found at Celtic ritual sites) may have served as symbols of the world tree in the community or location in which they are found.

⁹¹ McManus, Damian, "Irish Letter-Names and their Kennings," *Ériu* 39 (1988), pp. 127-145.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 163.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

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also mentioned in connection with the salmon, in the kenning: “fair swimming letter—a kenning for the great salmon... *é / éo* is a name / word for the salmon and it is written [with the character] *ébad* as [in] the ‘Alphabet of the World’, i.e. three stags, i.e. deer, salmon, three salmon, a snipe i.e. a blackbird.”⁹⁴ We will re-examine this somewhat cryptic statement further on.

The kennings for I pose fewer problems than those for E and refer primarily to the yew tree (*ibar* in the glosses).⁹⁵ Fergus Kelly mentions that (apart from *ibar*) another Old Irish word for ‘yew’ was *éo* (cognate with Welsh, Breton and Old High German words for ‘yew’).⁹⁶ McManus states that *ibar* cannot have been the old name of ‘I’, but that Old Irish *éo* could have been (<PI **iwas*; cf. Welsh *yw* ‘yew-tree’ and Gaulish *Ivo*).⁹⁷

The yew tree, then, was associated with both the letter ‘I’ (*ibar*, ‘yew’) and the letter ‘E’ (*é*). The kennings connected with these letters demonstrate associations with the salmon (*é / éo*, as in the phrase *éo fis*, ‘salmon of knowledge’) as well as an older word for the yew (also *éo*). However it occurred, there is clearly a measure of overlap between the E and I kennings, the former pointing to *éo* ‘yew’ or *éo / é* ‘salmon’ and the latter to ‘yew’ (glossed *ibar*). The kennings seem to have been composed at a time when the names of these letters were known to mean (E) ‘yew’ or ‘salmon’ and (I) ‘yew’.⁹⁸

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 147.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 164.

⁹⁶ Kelly, p. 110.

⁹⁷ McManus, p. 164.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 164.

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The World Tree of the Irish

The word *ebath*, then, was associated with the diphthong *éo* with its early attendant meanings of either 'yew' or 'salmon'. We have seen that the yew tree was considered sacred and was one of the chieftain trees. As a *bile* it was connected with religious assemblies, sacred sites, and the wisdom and abundance of the Otherworld. I suggest that the yew may have served as a symbol or representative of the world tree in early Irish tradition. As such, it would reasonably appear in association with creation myths and scenarios and their attendant divine figures. Let us explore this possibility in more detail.

In many cultures, the world tree is referred to as the 'Tree of Life'. The father of *Ebath* ('Yew') was *Bethach* ('He who Promotes or Sustains Life'), a figure whose propensity for life was such that he survived the deluge of Nemed's time. The *axis mundi* is also referred to as the 'Tree of Wisdom'. The word *ebath* was associated with the kenning *érnaid fid / fer* ('discerning letter, wood or tree' or 'discerning man'). This may refer to the use of rods of yew in divination rites as well as the connection of *ebad* (*é*) with the legendary *éo fis* ('the salmon of knowledge').⁹⁹ In addition, the world tree is frequently associated with longevity or immortality. The Tree of Mugna (a yew)

⁹⁹ The yew (*éo*) is connected with a number of other kennings which refer to the salmon, a creature associated with divine knowledge, poetry, and prophecy. The salmon often appears in connection with sacred rivers or other bodies of water associated with wisdom or prophecy. A number of sacred salmon are described as living in an Otherworld well of wisdom, which was often located near the world tree.

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was evidently so, as it was described as being evergreen.¹⁰⁰ The yew tree is glossed as ‘oldest of woods’ (*siniu fedaib*) and ‘oldest tree’ (probably referring to its well-attested longevity).¹⁰¹ Indeed, in Britain and other regions, the yews are the oldest intact trees.¹⁰²

Earthly representatives of the world tree are often found in connection with sacred or holy sites. In Ireland, ash and yew trees were often planted near churches (where perhaps they had formerly existed, according to Giraldus Cambrensis). These trees symbolized immortality well into the Christian era. Various socio-religious rites were held near the site of the world tree (or its symbol). In Scotland, the gathering place of the Stratherick Frasers was known as *Tom na h-Iùbhraich*, ‘The Hill of the Yew’. This hallowed site contained a sacred yew tree as well as an ancient burial ground. Most significantly for our exploration is the site known as *Taigh nan Teud*, which was considered to be the center-point of all Scotland. It was located near the yew tree of Fortingall, the oldest living tree in Europe, and was undoubtedly a sacred site in ancient times.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Lucas, p. 18. In a similar vein, the yew is mentioned in an early riddle: “Which are the two trees whose green tops do not fade until they become withered?” “Éo-Rossa and Fídh-Sidheang, Yew and Holly.”

¹⁰¹ McManus, pp. 136-7, 147. The yew is renowned for the great age it can attain and accordingly was placed last in the ‘Alphabet of the World’.

¹⁰² White, John, *Forest and Woodland Trees in Britain* (Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 207.

¹⁰³ Newton, pp. 191, 211, 214. Dr. Newton has been kind enough to point out to me that in addition to the association of a yew tree with the central point of Scotland, a number

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While the word *éó* most often connotes a yew tree, it had an earlier meaning of 'stem' or 'shaft' and can refer to a tree in a more general sense. Perhaps this reflects the symbol of the central pillar or shaft, which connected the three worlds and which helped facilitate communication between them.¹⁰⁴ Interestingly, as yew trees grow to an extreme age they become rotten in the middle, existing for many centuries with a hollow space in their center (sometimes filled with earth in which other plants may thrive).¹⁰⁵ A huge, ancient tree with a hollow center would be a fitting symbol of the world tree, and this characteristic of the yew may have reinforced its role as a conduit to the Otherworld.

The Man in the Tree

One of the most common representations of the primordial sacred site consists of a round area of land surrounded by ocean with the world tree at its center. Sometimes a well of wisdom is located underneath the tree. This was true of the Norse world tree, whose branches stretched over heaven and earth and whose roots passed into the Underworld realms. Two sacred springs or wells, one connected with wisdom and one with fate or destiny, were located beneath the tree.¹⁰⁶ Descriptions of hallowed sites in the Celtic Otherworld also mention sacred trees, which were associated with wells of wisdom.

of place-names which contain the element *nem-* ('sacred', as in *nemed* and *nemeton*) are also found near Fortingall.

¹⁰⁴ Lucas, p. 17.

¹⁰⁵ White, p. 207.

¹⁰⁶ Davidson, *God and Myths of Northern Europe*, pp. 26-29.

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The Norse tree was threatened by living creatures, which continually fed upon it. An eagle and a hawk lived in its uppermost branches, a great serpent gnawed at its roots, and horned creatures such as harts and goats fed upon the branches and tender shoots.¹⁰⁷ An interesting description of a tree associated with a variety of animals comes from the Irish tale 'Finn and the Man in the Tree' (dating in manuscript form from the eighth century).¹⁰⁸ The man in question is *Dercc Corra mac hUi Daighre*, (perhaps 'The Red Peaked One, Descendant of the Flashing One'), a figure whose name which may suggest some primeval or divine significance. The pertinent scene is as follows:

One day as Finn was in the wood seeking him [Dercc Corra], he saw a man in the top of a tree, a blackbird on his right shoulder and in his left hand a white vessel of bronze, in which was a skittish trout and a stag at the foot of the tree. And this was the practice of the man, cracking nuts; and he would give half the kernel of a nut to the blackbird that was on his right shoulder while he himself would eat the other half; and he would take an apple out of the bronze vessel that was in his left hand, divide it in two, throw one half to the stag that was at the foot of the tree and then eat the other half himself. And on it he would drink a sip of the bronze vessel

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ As quoted in Ross, p. 421.

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that was in his hand so that he and the
trout and the stag and the blackbird
drank together.

The Norse world tree was associated with animals which fed upon certain parts of the tree. In the Irish example, the man and his animal companions, who are located in or near the tree, also feed upon the produce of sacred trees (and in quite a ritualized manner). In Celtic tradition, hazel nuts were associated with divine wisdom or the gift of prophecy, and hazel trees are described as growing around a well of wisdom. The apple tree (and its fruit and branches) seem to have symbolized journeys to and from the Otherworld. Drinking sacred water (or certain ritual beverages) was also sometimes connected with the gift of divine knowledge. That all of these sacred elements appear together may suggest that the scene is representative of an Otherworldly or cosmogonic landscape.

In the Norse description, a serpent, a deer, and several birds are associated with the world tree, while in the Irish tale, a trout, a deer, and a blackbird appear in connection with the tree. In Irish and Scottish folk tradition, the salmon and the trout may serve interchangeable roles in connection with holy wells whose waters possess healing or other magical powers.¹⁰⁹ While there are no snakes in Ireland, they do exist in Scotland, and there the snake or serpent is sometimes substituted for the salmon in stories associated with the acquisition of gifts or skills,

¹⁰⁹ Logan, Patrick, *The Holy Wells of Ireland* (Colin Smythe, Gerrards Cross, Bucks., 1980), pp. 121-126.

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including prophecy or healing.¹¹⁰ This being the case, the similarity between the animals in the Norse description (serpent, deer and goat, birds) and the Celtic example (trout / salmon / serpent, deer, and bird) is all the more striking. In addition, the animals mentioned in the Irish tale (salmon / trout, deer, and blackbird) are the same creatures mentioned in association with the word *ébad* ('yew tree') in the kenning mentioned above. If the yew was considered to be the Irish symbol of the *axis mundi*, the scene depicted in 'Finn and the Man in the Tree' may reflect native traditions pertaining to the world tree and its manifestation in the cosmogonic landscape.

The name of the divine figure known as *Ebath* ('yew tree') may signify the world tree as well. If so, this lends support to the theory that the names of the ancestors of the Tuatha Dé Danann reflect elements of a native creation scenario. These figures do seem to be associated with concepts one would expect to encounter in a myth of origins, including well-known features of the primordial sacred site with its focus on the world tree. A hypothetical prototype of the original narrative is as follows:

¹¹⁰ McNeill, F. Marian, *The Silver Bough: A Four Volume Study of the National and Local Festivals of Scotland*, Volume One (William MacLellan, Glasgow, 1977), pp. 76-77. This substitution is primarily seen in later folk tradition, rather than in earlier literary sources in which the symbolism of the serpent may be influenced by a number of outside sources (Biblical, Medieval, etc.). A fine example may be found in *Scottish Traditional Tales* ed. A.J. Bruford and D.A. McDonald (1994, Polygon, Edinburgh), pp.288-291.

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First was Fáithecht, the Divine Seer, who saw all that was to be.

From him came Braimind and his son Esrú, the Sage who lived by the Sacred Waterfall.

Esrú was possessed of great wisdom, which he passed onto his son Srú, who created the Waters from which the world was formed.

His son gave birth to Tait, the Divine Artificer, who joined together the elements of the cosmos.

Next were Paimp and Agnoman, and then Nemed, a powerful god who created the Sacred Place where the gods might communicate with those on earth and receive their offerings.

Nemed's son was a great Seer, who was called by many names. He was known for his poetic abilities, dark skills whose origins are in the west. He created the sacred streams that flow from the well of wisdom.

From his son Bethach, 'He who Sustains Life' came Ebad, the Yew, who is the Tree of Life.

His son Baath was the Sea which surrounds the world tree.

Baath's son Éna was also a being of the waters, and he gave birth to Tabarn who

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created the great Oceans of the earthly realms.

From the Ocean, then, came Tait, the Great Father.

Tait is the ancestor of all the deities who came after him.

These are the gods who live in the síd mounds and have dealings with the men of earth. They are called the Tuatha Dé Danann, the Tribes of the Goddess Danu, and are renowned for their great power and skill.

As undoubtedly inaccurate as this narrative may be, it is along the lines of what we might expect when dealing with an early class of divine figures associated with creation. The offspring of these deities follow the established pattern and constitute the second class of deities who are associated with society, the land, and the world of men.

In *Native Elements in Irish Pseudohistory*, John Carey remarks that *Lebor Gabála* “reflects a deep (and for its time remarkable) reverence for and interest in native traditions concerning bygone times.” The blending of pagan and Christian lore demonstrates the redactors’ commitment to both traditions: “they were convinced that both were true and both important” and worked hard to reconcile one with the other.¹¹¹ This devotion is apparent in the words of a scribe who worked on the Second Redaction of *Lebor Gabála*, as he struggles to

¹¹¹ Carey, “Native Elements in Irish Pseudohistory,” pp. 47-8.

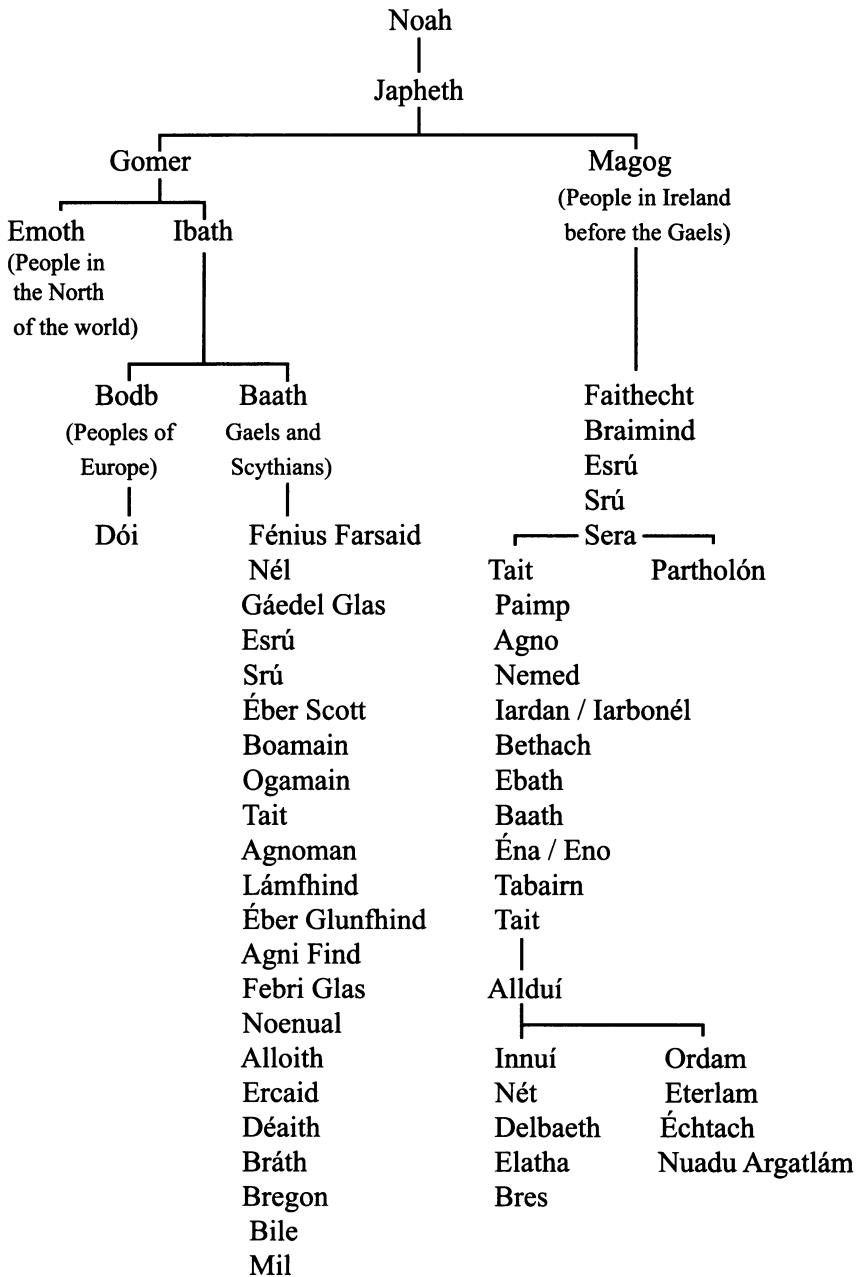
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understand, preserve, and faithfully transmit the names, attributes, and nature of the divine figures whose traditions he records:

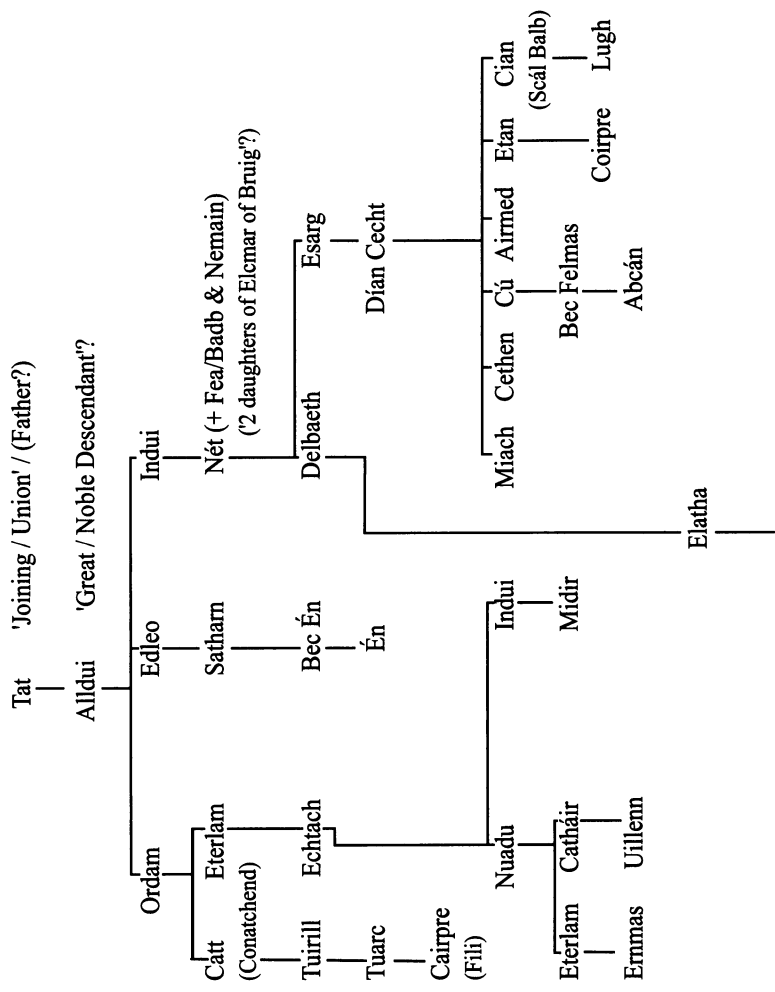
...[S]ome say that the Tuatha Dé Danann were demons, seeing that they came unperceived [and they say themselves it was in dark clouds that they came, after burning their ships] and for the obscurity of their knowledge and adventures, and for the uncertainty of their genealogy as carried backwards; but that is not true, for their genealogies carried backward are sound; howbeit they learnt knowledge and poetry; for every obscurity of art and every cleverness of reading, and every subtlety of crafts, for that reason, derive their origin from the Tuatha Dé Danann. And though the Faith came, those arts were not put away, for they are good, and no demon ever did good.¹¹²

¹¹² MacAlister, R.A.Stewart, *Lebor Gabála Éirenn*, Part IV (Irish Texts Society, 1997), p. 165.

APPENDIX ONE



APPENDIX TWO



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