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Author(s): Margaret E. Dobbs

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The Dál Fiatach

by MARGARET E. DOBBS

THIS study of the people known as Dál Fiatach, or Ulaid, is not a history of Ulster as a whole. They and the Dál Araidi were the two leading population-groups in N.E. Ireland from the third to the twelfth centuries. The ancient name of Ulster was Ulad, and it included the whole country north of the Boyne and across to the Shannon. It subsequently shrank to the limits of the present counties of Antrim and Down. The Dál Fiatach were predominant in Down. Their records were kept in the monasteries of Saul and Downpatrick and have survived in a compilation of history, tradition and genealogies, known as *Senchus Sil hir*.^{*} There are other sources for their history, viz., the *Annals*, the *Ban-shenchus*, the lives of saints. They hold an important place in the life of St. Patrick, for when he landed at Inber Slainge in Loch Cuan, i.e. Strangford Lough, he landed in Dál Fiatach territory. His first converts in Ulster were people of this stock. Dichu was a chieftain of Dál Fiatach. His brother, Ros, helped Patrick to revise the *Senchus Mor*. They and their kindred held all East Down and the Ards. The early monasteries and schools of Bangor, Moville, Nendrum, Saul, grew up in their midst. St. Finnian of Moville, St. Domongort and St. Tuan of Boirche, St. Mael Cethir of Kerry, Iarlathi, third bishop of Armagh after Patrick, St. Samthann, all traced their descent from Dál Fiatach. Members of the race have left their names on the map to this day in Slieve Donard, Ben Madigan, Glengormly, Rademan, Dunsy Island. In the *Annals* and the *Book of Rights* they are the leading people in east Ulster from 600 A.D. down to the Norman invasion. "The Irish have twelve kindreds of noble birth: six in Leth Cuinn=Northern Eire, Dál Cuinn, Dál Céin, Dál Araidi who are the Picts, Dál Fiatach who are the Ulaid, etc."¹ Professor McNeill considers this statement to be of great antiquity . . . much earlier than the tenth century account in the *Book of Rights*. Another passage says: "Another name for the Dál Araidi is Cruthnig, i.e. Picts. The Ulaid to the east of these, Dál Fiatach, of the race of Cu Roi m. Daire m. Dedad from Munster. Thence their origin this Dál Fiatach who to-day are called Ulaid. The true Ulaid are Dál Araidi who spring from Conall Cernach. . . ."² The genealogies in nearly every instance assert the Munster origin of Dál Fiatach. How and when do they appear in Ulster? The traditions embodied in the saga of the Táin Bo Cuailgne do not mention them. As they became eventually the over-lords of the Dál Araidi they

AUTHOR'S NOTE.—I drew up this paper at the suggestion of Professor MacNeill, whose advice and criticism have been invaluable. The following abbreviations are used in addition to those listed for general use in *U.J.A.*:—*Lec.* (Book of Lecan facs.); *LL.* (Book of Leinster facs.).

^{*} *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie*, xiii, p. 308; xiv, p. 44.

1. E. MacNeill, "Early Irish Population Groups," in *P.R.I.A.*, xxix, C. 4, p. 94.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 96.

might have sought a place in the great epic, but this is not the case. The whole glory of the Táin is left to the Dál Araidi whose ancestors are the heroes of that great war. The Dál Fiatach stuck to the claim that they were of the same stock as the Erainn of Kerry, whose greatest hero was Cu Roi, the opponent of the Ulaid of the Táin. They had no tradition as to how they came north. There is a list of kings of Ulad in pagan times, and the first Dál Fiatach name occurs after Táin names in the list in Laud 610, a tenth century MS.:

"Irial Glunmar son of Conall Cernach.

Fiachu Findmas son of Irial.

Fiachu Find of Dál Fiatach."

From this onward the two families alternate in the list which is carried down to the generation before St. Patrick. Whether reliable or not, it shows the traditional belief that the Dál Fiatach did not come to, or were of no account in, Ulster till after the Táin Age. The same tradition is followed by a family history compiled circa 700 A.D. It is a tract embodied in a larger work, the *Senchus Sil hÍr*, (also called *Leabhor Ultach* or *Senchus Ulad*).³ From internal evidence the tract was not carried further than 700-706 A.D. This work begins with "two sons of Fiatach Find King of Eire." The tract then skips some generations and links up with the age of Cormac m. Airt. The traditional date for his floruit is the third century A.D. His saga is copious and detailed. According to it his chief enemies were Fergus Dubhdetach and Eochaid Gunnat of Dál Fiatach, leaders of the Ulaid. The tract however does not mention Cormac. "Fergus Dubhdetach fought the battle of Saman (in Munster) where fell Cian son of Ailill Ulaim, and the battle of Feartha where fell Eochaid son of Ailill U. Then Fergus was ruler of Eire till he fell in the battle of Crinna." A.F.M. attributes the victories of Saman and Feartha to Cormac, and dates them in 241 A.D. The tract is however a much older authority and does suggest a reason for the Dál Fiatach leaving Munster, viz. a feud with the Eoghanacht of Munster. Further traditions of Dál Fiatach at this period are here given for what they are worth. The Bodleian Annals (so called *Tigernach*) contain "the oldest known history of pre-Christian Eire . . . the most ancient example we are ever likely to find of the endeavour to construct a scheme of Irish history before St. Patrick"⁴ (MacNeill).

"Battle of Granard Cormac defeated the Ulaid.

 " " Srith " " " "

 " " Feartha " " Munster.

Cormac dethroned by the Ulaid.

Fiacha Araidi ruled in Emain.

Battle of Fothaird Muirthemne. Cormac defeated the Picts under Fiacha Araidi.

Fergus Dubhdetach and his brothers ruled in Emain.

Cormac dethroned by the Ulaid.

3. *Zeitschrift f. Celtische Philologie*, xiii, p. 308; xiv, p. 44.

4. E. MacNeill, "Annals of Tigernach," in *Eriu*, vii, p. 108.

Battle of Crinna in Bregh. Defeat of the Ulaid by Cormac and Tadg son of Cian (killed at Saman). Fergus killed.

Ros of Dál Araidi ruled in Emain.

Aengus Find, son of Fergus D., ruled in Emain.

Battle of Crinna Fregabuil. Cormac defeated the Ulaid.

Aengus Find slain.

Fergus Fogha of Dál Araidi ruled in Emain.

Expulsion of the Ulaid into Manaind by Cormac."

The earliest Irish synchronisms equate Fiacha Araidi with two Roman emperors from 225 to 238;⁵ Fergus Dubhdetach is equated with Gordianus, 241-245;⁶ Aengus Find is dated 250 and Fergus Fōgha 251.

The Bodleian Annals quoted above do not mention Eochaid Gunnat. He represented a separate branch of the Dál Fiatach distinct from the main line. He expelled the Conaille from Muirthemne⁸ (N. Louth). They were supposed to have taken part against Dál Fiatach at Crinna. That these latter dominated Louth at this period is implied in the account of Crinna in LL 328b, the earliest version of the battle as far as I know.

"Cormac was king of Eire till the might of Ulad came against him and banished him into Connaught . . . after the feast they gave Cormac in Northern Magh Bregh when a gillie singed his beard with a candle. There were three sons of Imchad of Dál Fiatach viz. Fergus Dubhdetach etc. Cormac went to Tadg m. Céin to help him to fight the Ulaid. . . . The army went to Brug-mic-ind-oc (i.e. Newgrange) . . . to Crinna at the head of the meeting of the rivers. . . . Tadg defeated the Ulaid seven times on that day till he reached Glais Nera beside Druim Inasclaind (Dromiskin near Castlebellingham)."

If the Dál Fiatach gave Cormac a feast it would be in their own territory. Northern Magh Bregh is the plain south of the Boyne. When Cormac attacks he finds them close to Newgrange. When defeated they fall back to Castle Bellingham. The Conaille were probably a conquered race who rose against their masters. The traditions about Crinna make no mention of any battle in Co. Down. The Dál Fiatach in Cormac's saga are in Louth. This was included in Ulad in the days of the Táin and it looks as if they were thought to have settled here when driven out of Munster. The traditions about Crinna show them driven still further north by a leader of the Eoganacht, Tadg, whose father had fallen at Saman. The second battle of Crinna may have been at the river Fregabuil, i.e. Ravel Water in Co. Antrim. This seems quite probable as the Ulaid were subsequently obliged to take refuge in Man or in Manann in Scotland.

Of all these events the family history makes no mention after Crinna. It passes

5. *Ibid.*, p. 113.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 108.

7. *Zeitschrift f. Celtische Philologie*, viii, pp. 327, 330.

8. Cp. LL., 24a, 129b; cp. *Lec.*, 173b, 128b, 130vb, 115d.

over Oengus Find and his son Lugaid. Yet there were other memories connected with this time of defeat. Eochaid, son of Fergus Dubhdetach, was taken prisoner and executed by Cormac. His lady-love determined to lament him publicly in Tara to Cormac's face. She went, disguised as a youth, to a great poet to learn how to compose a fitting lament. This is given. It is in obscure archaic language. The story is an echo of defeat and family misfortune.⁹

With the end of the Cormac saga the Dál Fiatach disappear for a while from traditional memory. The family tract knows nothing of the period from Crinna down to a certain Dallan whose grandchildren were contemporary with St. Patrick. It mentions his brother Daig as a high-king, but the name is in no regnal lists or annals. If these brothers may be dated circa 380-400 A.D. they are later than the overthrow of the Ulaid by the three Collas "when Fergus Foga, last prince in Emain Macha, fell. . . . The Ulaid did not again dwell therein and lost their kingdom west of Loch Neagh." Though not specially mentioned this must include both Dál Fiatach and Dál Araidi. The event is dated in 332 A.D. This marks the lowest ebb in Dál Fiatach fortunes. Driven east of Armagh they had breathing space to recover themselves and settle down. The tract gives twelve families descended from Dallan who were still represented in the eighth century when the tract was compiled. The fuller record may indicate better times and more settled conditions.

A later text (fifteenth century) locates the Dál Fiatach at this period in North-West Ulster.¹⁰ The story told in great detail had already been summarized in a poem written before 1247.¹¹ This must have been based on still older texts. It is stated that Dál Fiatach chiefs ruled from Assaroe to Lough Foyle, and that they were conquered by the sons of Niall. There may be genuine tradition underlying the story. The chroniclers must have had some grounds for associating the Dál Fiatach with Donegal, but neither the Annals nor the Senchus Ulad know anything about it.

When all the foregoing traditions and sagas are considered as a whole it can be said that here is a memory of Munster folk moving northward circa 200-400, harried continually by stronger breeds, and getting no peace till finally driven into east Down somewhere between these dates.

When the family tract approaches Christian times it expands. It gives two main sections of Dál Fiatach circa 400; first, the descendants of Fergus Dubhdetach; second, the families from his brother Fiac, including the Uí Echach of the Ards and the Uí Trichim. When Patrick landed, the chiefs of these latter are said to have been settled as follows:—

Laegaire in Dun (da-lethglass).

Ailill in Magh Bile, i.e. Moville.

9. *Eriu*, xiii, p. 34.

10. *Zeitschrift f. Celt. Philologie*, xiv, pp. 213-269.

11. *Irish Texts* (O'Keefe) fasc., 2, p. 6.

Dichu in Sabul, i.e. Saul.
 Duirrthecht in Oendruim, i.e. Nendrum, Mahee I.
 Eogan in Cill Cleithi, i.e. Kilclief.
 Niall in Cill Cleithi, i.e. Kilclief.
 Rus in Dun Da-lethglass.

This list from the Catalogue of Saints (Lec, 36v. LL, 349) agrees with the tract. It shows the extent of Ui Trichim Territory. In the Ards the chief of the Ui Echach seems to have been Enna m. Cathbotha (Cathbaid) whose obit in the Annals is 457. The tract shows his descent. This early entry of an otherwise unknown person is doubtless due to his relationship with Dichu, and his proximity to Sabul where the family history was compiled. As to the main branch of Dál Fiatach we have no clear statement of their territory at this time. The tract claims that Patrick blessed their chief, "Muredach Muinderg in his kingdom," and this is repeated in the Synchronisms of Kings. It is not in the *Vita Tripartita* which gives a visit of Patrick to Muredach's son, Eochaid. He is said to have rejected Christianity but, as St. Domongart is called his son, the family evidently accepted it. There is one reference in the tract to Dál Fiatach territory at this time: "Ochtar (Cuillche) was their fort in Druimne Breag. There the sons of Muiredach divided their inheritance." There was a Druim Breg in Louth near the Boyne, but this was Ciannacht territory ever since the battle of Crinna. The sons of Muredach could have no inheritance there. Druimne Breag must have been in Co. Down. The district of Lower Iveagh abounds in druumne, i.e. ridges, and place-names beginning with "drum" are more frequent than in any other part of the county. The townland "Drumnabreeze" preserves the old name. This is in Magheralin parish, and in the Ordnance map 1837, a large fort-site is marked close to Drumnabreeze House. This may have been Ochtar Cuillche. O'Donovan describes the extensive view over all Down from a fort, now demolished, at Ballymackeanan in Magheralin. From such a view-point the survey of new territory and its division could well be made after their expulsion from Emain Macha.

At a later period a section of Dál Araidi, the Ui Echach Cobo, were settled in this district as tenants of the Dál Fiatach, and gave their name to it, Iveagh. They were there before 684 (A.U. see note 10). The Annals have an entry as follows:—

"496. An eclipse of the sun. The storming of Dun Lethglaiss."

The entry of an eclipse denotes contemporary observations. Astronomy confirms the dates of such in the Annals. The storming of a place in the same year is likely to be authentic, but the attack here mentioned on Dun Lethglaiss is puzzling. As already stated it was in Dál Fiatach hands in Patrick's time. Laegaire, Dichu's brother, was settled there. The only enemy likely to attack were the Dál Araidi. There is no mention of the event in the family tract. The records now approach the age of written history.

Monastery schools were springing up in Dál Fiatach territory. Chief among them were:—

Sabul, i.e. Saul, founded circa 460
 Oendruim, i.e. Nendrum, founded circa 490.
 Maghera, i.e. near Murlough, founded circa 500.
 Magh Bhile, i.e. Moville, founded circa 550.
 Benchor, i.e. Bangor, founded circa 555.

Leading churchmen of the race included :—

Iarlaithi, bishop of Armagh, ob. 481.
 Mo Chaoi, abbot of Nendrum, ob. 497.
 St. Domongort of Rath Muirbolg, ob. circa 550.
 Cathub, bishop of Achad Cinn, ob. 555.
 St. Finnian, abbot of Moville, ob. 579.

The family tract and the Catalogue of Saints give other clerical names of this period: Do Cuma, Furaran Othra, Bishops Aengus, Colum, Baedan, etc. Of these no other record survives. The Martyrology of Donegal gives Deicter, daughter of Muredach Muinderg, as mother of many early Christians. Also a virgin saint, "Duinseach on Loch Cuan," who has left her name on Dunsy Island in Strangford Lough.

The Bodleian Annals (Tigernach) have an entry: "death of Muredach Muinderg. Eochaid his son, King of Ulad." This is equated with the famous battle of Cell Osnad fought in 489 A.D. Muredach left five sons, "who divided their inheritance in Druimne Breag." That this is the district round Magheralin is confirmed by the name "Rath Droma Breg" given as the residence of one of the sons, Cairill.¹² He could not have been in southern Louth. The descendants of another son are located at Ard Mic Naisci, i.e. Holywood. Cairill succeeded his brother Eochaid as King. The subsequent royal line traced their descent from him. A chronological tract says he was "one of those present at the death of Patrick as books and sages say."¹³ His death is given in A.F.M. in 526. He had several sons, of whom two left a mark on the history of their day; Baetan and Deaman. If the authority of the tract is accepted (I see no reason why it should not be) the two brothers retrieved the fortunes of Dál Fiatach and set them on the road to supremacy in Ulster. Of the two the tract has most to say about Baetan. The Annals only give his obit, 581 or 587 (A.U.). The oldest copy of the tract, in the Laud genealogies, has: "Baetan mac Cairill was King of Eire and Alban. Aedan mac Gabrain submitted to him at Rosnaree in Semniu (Island Magee). He cleared Manu [of foreigners]. The second year after his death the Goidil left Manu."

The Manu here mentioned must be the district now called Slamannan in S.E. Stirlingshire. It was part of the kingdom of Aedan m. Gabrain. The Annals say that in 582, the year after Baetan's death, Aedan won the battle of Manu and Fergna, son of Caibleine, died. The Cableine were a Dál Fiatach family.¹⁴ Fergna

12. *Zeitschrift f. Celt. Philologie*, xiii, p. 324.

13. *Leabhar Breac*, p. 220.

14. *Zeitschrift f. Celt. Philologie*, xiii, p. 338.

was most probably the leader after Baetan and fell fighting Aedan and, after his death, "the Goidel, i.e. Gaels, left Manu." Baetan left descendants but founded no dynasty. He was most probably a soldier of fortune, trying to carve out a kingdom for himself in Scotland. His brother Deaman had a different career. He remained in Dál Fiatach homeland. His story is given as follows: he was fostered by Domongart m. Predae,¹⁵ chief of the Ui Echach of the Ards. They were of course of his own family and, as his foster-brethren, helped him to defeat a certain Fergal (or Fergna) of the Ui Ibdaig. The tract gives an "Oengus Ibtach, from whom are the Ui Ibdaig," as a brother of Muredach Muinderg. Fergal is called "King of Ulad," so it was a family fight for the kingship. Deaman won. "This man was King and his family after him down to the present day." The battle was fought circa 557 at Druim Cleithe. This was perhaps near Cell Cleithe, i.e. Kilclief, in Lecale, not far from the Ards. Fergal and his family were wiped out. Deaman married a lady¹⁶ of the Ailech Ui Neill and had five sons. He must have been the founder of Rath Demain "in quo erat rex Ultorum,"¹⁷ as his father's fort was Rath Droma Breg. The name is still preserved in Rademan townland in Kilmore parish. The Bodleian Annals say: "Demain m. Cairill, King of Ulad, was killed by the shepherds of Bairenn." There is a townland, Burren, west of Rademan in Dromara parish. The indications are that the Dál Fiatach were moving east, as we hear no more of Druimne Breag, and later this was Ui Echach Coba territory. Downpatrick at this date was still in the possession of the Ui Laegairi. A daughter of this family, contemporary with Deaman, was Lasair, mother of St. Finnian of Moville.

Other of his contemporaries belonging to the Ui Echach of the Ards are very fully recorded in the tract. These traced their descent to Eochaid Gundat, the opponent of Cormac m. Airt. There is a big gap between him and the first names of the tract. They start with Cathbad, father of Enna, who died in 457 (A.U.). Enna had two grandsons: Bishop Cathub (Cathbad) and Praed. Their mother, Corpach, was also mother of Diarmaid m. Cearbaill, High-King, who died in 565 (A.U.). This alone dates Cathub and Praed, but Cathub's death is in all the Annals, 555 (A.U., Chr. Scot., A.F.M.). He is called bishop of Achad Cinn. Possibly this was the original form of Ardquin, or Ardkeen, both place-names in the south of Ards. Praed had seven sons, including Domongort, foster-father of Deaman. Among his, Domongort's sons, was Ronan who is described as "laech," i.e. "hero." Laech also means "layman." Here I think "hero" is indicated because, "Ronan was sprung from Domongort and from Manannan m. Lir, a half from head to heel from each." A similar fable was told of Mongan of Dál Araidi (ob. 625 A.U.) a famous person in his day. Ronan must have been famous also, though no record of his deeds has survived. The belief in descent from a heathen god had

15. *Ibid.*, p. 334.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 338; *Revue Celt.*, xlviii, p. 183.

17. *Life of Mo Choemog.*, ob. 655 A.U. See Plummer, *Vita Sancti Hib.*, ii, p. 168.

evidently not been wiped out by Christianity. It is of interest that the fable concerned two men of the same period and both living on the N.E. coast opposite Manannan's island. Praed's seven sons included a bishop, Cathair, who founded a church. All these people were contemporaries of Deaman in the sixth century. He died in 572 (A.U.). His brother, Baetan, survived and succeeded him as King of Ulad (ob. 581 or 587).

At this point A.U. has two entries: "First adventure of the Ulaid in Eufania (577)," and "Return of the Ulaid from Eumania (578)." This must indicate an attack on Emain Macha during Baetan's Kingship.

His successor was a son of Deaman, Fiachna. A.U. gives some data of Dál Fiatach in his times:—

- 601 Earthquake in Bairchiu.
- 602 Battle of Cul Coel. Fiachna m. Demain fled. Fiachna m. Baetain (of Dál Araidi) was victor.
- 610 The army of Ulad struck by terrible thunder in Bairchiu.
- 626 Battle of Lethet Midend in which fell Fiachna (of Dál Araidi). Fiachna m. Demain was victor.
- 627 Battle of Ard Corann. The Dál Riatai were victors. Fiachna m. Demain fell (by Connadh Cerr, King of Dál Riada, e.g. Scotch Dál Riada).

In MS. Egerton, 1782, there is a tract dealing with the period 615 to 710 A.D. While historical in outline it gives gossip and legends that sprang up round the actual events. It speaks of "the great war between the two Fiachnas. Fiachna m. Baetain was usually victor." A story is told of how Fiachna of Dál Fiatach went to St. Comgall of Bangor for help. The saint gave him the choice between victory in this life or life eternal hereafter. Fiachna chose victory now "over the King who defeated me," which duly came to pass. The tract reflects the Dál Araidi point of view, and the legend was their explanation of how their King was finally defeated. The scene of the last battles seems to be in north-east Antrim. The names "Lethet Midend" and "Ard Corann" suggest Layde and the Corran at Larne. This fits in with the statement in the Bodlein Annals and A.F.M. that Connadh Cerr, King of (Scotch) Dál Riada, took part. At this period Dál Araidi was stronger than Dál Fiatach. By the time the Book of Rights was compiled the situation was reversed.

The best-known woman of Dál Fiatach must be noticed at this point. She was Dubhlacha, daughter of Fiachna m. Demain and his wife, Cuman of the Ui Tuirtri. She is not in the Annals, but the family tract records her parentage, her marriage with Mongan of Dál Araidi and her two sons. One of the chief romances in the list in the Book of Leinster is: "Serc Duibilacha do Mongain." Mongan was son of the Fiachna of Dál Araidi. He has a whole cycle of tales to his credit. Though Dubhlacha's name only occurs in the one mentioned above, she is possibly the "Fair lady" or "flame Lady" of other tales. That their fathers were at daggers drawn suggests that her marriage was an effort to bridge the quarrel and make peace.

There was tragedy as well as romance in Fiachna's family. Dubhlacha had two brothers. Fiachna had first married the widow of his uncle Baetan. Her sons by Baetan lived at Dun Mogna, which there is reason to believe was near Bangor. One of her sons by Fiachna, Dunchad, murdered these half-brothers in 606 (A.U.) and also his own full brother. The father was apparently unable to punish the crime, as Dunchad was subsequently King from about 636 to 643 (A.F.M.). Fiachna had made a second marriage with a sister of his namesake of Dál Araidi. One of her sons, Mael Coba, slew the murderer, Dunchad, and was King in his turn. In 637 an event occurred which probably helped the Dál Fiatach in the struggle for supremacy. This was the crushing defeat of the Dál Araidi by the High-King, Domnall, at Roth, i.e. Magh-rath, in Co. Down. In the romantic account of the battle, and what caused it, the Dál Fiatach are not once mentioned. But they held the Kingship of Uladh six times running after it.

Mael Coba had only a few years of Kingship. The family tract merely mentions his death (647 A.U.) at the hands of Dunchad's son. A later tract (compiled after 950) credits him with great hospitality to the poets of Eire. For three years it is said he supported some hundreds of them in the country round Carlingford Loch. Keating says that Dallan Forgaill and Senchan (Torpeist) were their leaders. If this were so, it may well be that at this gathering the revival and re-editing of the Táin were begun and the pupils sent out through the country to collect any surviving fragments. If we may assume this, then Mael Coba did a great service to literature. The later tract says he was killed at Dun mor by Congal Cendfota. This would be Dunmore south of Rademan. There is no trace of a dun there now, but the townland name bears witness to a large dun having existed there once.

Mael Coba was followed by his fourth son, Blathmac. The only allusion to Dál Fiatach in his lifetime is : A.U. 668 "Battle of Fertais between Ulaid and Cruithni." Fertais may be the same as Bel Fertsí, i.e. Belfast. Blathmac died in 670 (A.U.). The Ban-shenchus gives his wife's name as Laidir, daughter of the poet Ninine Eices, one of the redactors of the Táin. This marriage fits in with Mael Coba's patronage of the poets already mentioned. Blathmac had occasion for meeting poets and their families. A poem on the death of Mongan is attributed to his son, Becc Boirche (Bodleian Annals).¹⁸

A brother of Blathmac, Aengus (ob. 665), founded the minor Kingdom of Leth Cathail (Lecale). The name derives from his grandson, Cathal, circa 750. This line of Dál Fiatach were known later as Meic Gilli Muiri, now Gilmores.

When Blathmac died, his relative and enemy, Congal Cendfota, was king for a few years. He was killed by Becc Boirche in 674. Becc reigned till 707. In his time the first Saxon invasion from Britain took place in 684. It was confined to Magh Breg (South Louth), and did not affect Dál Fiatach. In 697 "the Britons and the Ulaid laid waste Magh Muirthemne" (North Louth). In 703 they were

18. See *Revue Celt.*, xvii, p. 178.

19. *Ibid.*, xlviii, p. 185.

fighting each other in Ard hUa nEchach. The Ulaid were victorious. This place-name suggests the Ards. In 707 "two earthquakes in one week, in December in Northern Eire," and that same year Becc Boirche abdicated, and went on pilgrimage for the rest of his life. He did not die till 718.

His private life seems to have been troubled. His first wife was: "Conchend, daughter of Congal Cendfota, King of Ulad, wife of Finachta Fledach. Conchend was also the first wife of Becc Boirche."¹⁹ She bore him seven sons. No sons by Finachta are mentioned. Becc killed her father in 674. He and Finachta, then High-King, fought each other at Tailltiu in 679. Finachta died in 693. From these data it seems probable that Conchend left Becc after 674 and went to the High-King for protection, married him, and induced him to attack Becc to avenge her father's death. She is distinguished in most references by the title "the Queen," which is unusual. After Becc's abdication Cu Cuarain of Dál Araidi was King till 708 when Aed Ron, one of Conchend's sons, succeeded. The family tract ends before his accession. No sons of his are given. It leaves off before 707. The same applies to the section dealing with the Ui Echach of the Ards. We have seen that Domongort, son of Praed and nephew of Bishop Cathub, was alive in 557. The tract gives his descendants as: Ronan fr. of Mael Dun, fr. of Praedene, fr. of three sons. These last may be dated circa 670. "Coisenmach un Predeni, King of Ui Echach Ulad, died in 784 (A.U.). He is not in the family tract which ends with Praedene's sons. The Ui Echach are not mentioned in the Annals after Coisenmach. They sink into obscurity, though the Kingdom of "na hArda" was still in existence in the tenth century according to the Book of Rights. Some references in the tract suggest that the Ui Echach were centred in the south end of the Ards: One of their leading saints was Cuman, daughter of Aillen "of Ard Ulad at Daire Ingen(e) Aillein."²⁰ This is Derry, a townland in South Ards, near Ardquin (Achad Caoin?). The ruins of two churches still exist here. Cuman's pedigree²¹ in the tract and in the Catalogue of Saints, if correct, dates her circa 660. A saying of hers,²² "on one stem are the Kings, Aengus . . . Blathmac," refers to the two Dál Fiatach princes, of whom Blathmac died in 670. The tract has also a reference to a certain Dunchad, slain by violence, whose young son, Eochaid, was blessed by Findia and Bec mac De, at Rath Maighe Oenaig: "Eochaid shall be King on the height of Dun Eathlaig." This latter name is corrupt in other copies of the tract, but there is a townland, Dunevly, near Ardquin. It is very possible that the great rath of Tara near Portaferry was the chief stronghold of the Ui Echach. The earthwork, Cruachan Cowey, in Tara Bay may have been another. If Deaman was fostered in this district he and the Ui Echach had not far to go to Druim Cleithe, where he won the Kingship for his descendants, the Cenel Deamain.

A second tract carries the family history down to 970. From internal evidence

20. Feilire Oengusso, *H. Bradshaw Soc.*, xxix; see Index.

21. *Lec.*, 37va, 43d; *LL.*, 350a.

22. *Zeitschrift f. Celt. Philologie*, xiv, p. 80.

this was contained in the Book of Dun-da-lethglas. It starts from Deaman. After Becc Boirche it goes on: "Aed Ron was King of the province after his father. From him descends the royal house of Ulad."

A.U. 712 "Overthrow of the Ulaid. Dubthach son of Becc Boirche slain."

From the context it seems they were taking part in a quarrel of the Meath Ui Neill.

A.U. 714 "A battle between two sons of Becc Boirche and the King of Ui Echach (Cobo). The sons of Becc were victors."

In 735 Aed Ron was killed in Muirthemne. A.F.M. gives more details. One of Aed Ron's people had profaned a church in Tyrone. Aed Allan of Ailech, the high-King, marched against the Ulaid to avenge the sacrilege. Aed Ron was defeated at Faughard, and his head was cut off in the doorway of the church of Faughard. He was succeeded by a son, Fiacha. He was noted for the numerous bridges he built and the law and order he maintained. If even one cow was stolen he made a pilgrimage to Bangor to atone. From various allusions in the tract Downpatrick was now the headquarters of Dál Fiatach. Fiacha did not directly succeed to his father. The Dál Araidi were still rivals for the supremacy, and their prince was King of Ulad down to 749. The historians of the period were much impressed by an unusual kind of sea-monster washed ashore in Bairche. It had tusks which Fiacha used to make shrines for Bangor and other churches. This suggests ivory. The animal may have been a walrus, but the stories about it are full of discrepancies. Their interest lies in the use made of the tusks, and the evidence of Bangor as a holy place of Dál Fiatach. In 759 Fiacha won a victory over the Ui Neill at Emain Macha. In 761 he defeated the Ui Echach (Cobo, i.e. Iveagh). In 784 he went to a meeting of state with the High-King on an island off the coast of Bregh (Louth and Co. Dublin). What important business they had to discuss is not mentioned. We are only told that they both stood on their dignity so much that Fiacha refused to be the one to land and the High-King refused to meet at sea, so the meeting was a fiasco. This able and successful man died in 789. When he was gone trouble started at once. He left six sons, two of whom, Cairill and Eochaid, fought bitterly. A cousin, Tomaltach (of Lecale), was killed by Eochaid. In the meantime, Tomaltach of Dál Araidi took the Kingship of Uladh till 809. In 811 the Ulaid had their first experience of Norse pirates and defeated them. In 819 Cairell was killed by a son of Eochaid, Muiredach, and again the Kingship passed to Dál Araidi. In 823 the Norse came again and did dreadful damage at Bangor. In 825 they raided Downpatrick and Moville. Eventually they were badly beaten by the Ulaid in Lecale. By this time Muiredach was King of Ulad. He became involved in a dispute about the abbacy of Armagh. The Ui Neill wanted one man, the Airgialla another. Muiredach sided with the latter. Finally it came to war. A fierce battle was fought at Lethi-cam, near Armagh, and the Airgialla and their allies were defeated. Muiredach's interest in the matter may be explained by the fact that his daughter, Gormlaith, was married²³

23. *Revue Celt.*, xlviii, p. 225.

to a noble of the Airgialla. Later a son of hers was vice-abbot of Armagh. Muiredach was killed in 839. He was one of many brothers both legitimate and illegitimate. He seems to have been one of the latter, which may have been the cause of two half-brothers combining to kill him. One of these, Aed, was evidently legitimate, as the royal pedigree is traced through him. He himself was killed by Muiredach's son, Matudan, who was acknowledged King of Ulad but not as ancestor of subsequent kings. He seems to be the Matudan commemorated in Ben-Madigan, now Cave Hill. Other descendants of Muiredach were Clan Gorm-laithe, whose memory survives in Glengormly. At this period Dál Fiatach held both sides of Belfast Lough. In 850 Matudan led the nobles of Ulad to an important meeting of state at Armagh. The High-King, all the chieftains of the North, the clergy of Armagh and Meath were present. What business was discussed is not stated. Matudan died in 856. He was succeeded by a prince of Dál Araidi who died in 872. After him the sons of Aed succeeded in keeping the Kingship for Dál Fiatach down to 889 (A.F.M.). It was the cause of family quarrels. Uncles and nephews fought for supremacy from 881 to 894, when Aidith of Dál Araidi became sole King of Ulad. In 911 the Dál Fiatach regained their position, and Aed son of Eochachan was king. From this on the Dál Fiatach dynasty kept the Kingship of Ulad (with two exceptions) in their own hands. In 912 they organized a fleet to combat the Norse. Unfortunately, they were defeated by the Norse in a naval action off the English coast and their commander, a prince of Lecale, was killed. The next year a new danger threatened. The Ui Neill under Niall Glundubh invaded Dál Araidi. Aed King of Ulad went to the help of Dál Araidi, and was defeated after bitter fighting. The Ui Neill seem to have had enough, for peace was made the same year and ratified at Tullyhog in Tyrone. This treaty had the result that when Niall Glundubh waged war on the Norse the Ulaid were with him, and when Niall fell in the battle of Dublin in 919, Aed of Ulad fell at his side. It is said of him in the family tract that he was the first of the family to owe service to Bangor, "none of them ever before went to Comgall but belonged to Patrick." This does not agree with the statement about Aed's ancestor, Fiacha. The tract also mentions two sons of Aed, Niall and Matudan. The Annals give two others; Dubgall, who succeeded to the throne and died in 924, and Mael Duin, killed fighting the Norse on Strangford Lough in 923. The regnal list gives two kings after Dubgall, who seem to belong to Dál Araidi and then "Matudan m. Aeda." By 933 he was, with Norse allies, raiding Monaghan, but they were routed by the King of Ailech. In 942 the Norse raided Downpatrick. While thus engaged other pirates seized their island strongholds, and their King was pursued and killed on the shore by the Ulaid. The following year the Ulaid of Lecale exterminated the Norse of Strangford Lough. In 948 Matudan raided the Conaille. In 949 he was killed by men of Iveagh. In the regnal list he is followed by a brother, Niall, but in 969 the Annals give his son, Artgar, as King, and Niall as King in 970. Artgar is not in the regnal list. Possibly he was only co-adjutor to his uncle. The tract

says that, "the royal House descends from him to this day," and he is in the royal pedigree. He is the last King in the tract, which leaves off at this point. The regnal list gives three of his sons succeeding him.

This is the period depicted in the Book of Rights when re-edited in the tenth century. In this authority the King of Ulad ranks next to the High-King. His subsidy is the largest for, though the Connaught subsidy is much the same, it did not include ships, and Ulad received 10 of these. Also Connaught had to provide six months' hospitality and Ulad only two when the High-King demanded it. They did not entertain him in Downpatrick or Rademan. The place named is Tulach Cearnaigh. There is a Tullycarn²⁴ in Donaghcloney, Lr. Iveagh. The King of Ulad in his turn gave subsidies to twelve minor states as follows:—

- Dál Araidi, i.e. South and mid-Antrim.
- Dál Riada, i.e. North Antrim.
- Airrther, i.e. district east of Armagh.
- Ui Dearca Chein, i.e. district in central Down.
- Dál mBuinne, i.e. district east of Lough Neagh.
- Ui Blathmaic, i.e. district of North Ards and Castlereagh.
- Duibh-thrian, i.e. along west side of Strangford Lough.
- Na hArda, i.e. the Ards peninsula.
- Leth Cathail, i.e. Lecale barony.
- Boirche, i.e. Mountain range in South Down.
- Cobha, i.e. South-West Down.
- Muirthemne, i.e. North Louth.

Four of these were offshoots of Dál Fiatach: Ui Blathmaic, na hArda, Leth Cathail, Boirche. The Ui Dearca Chein and the Ui Echach Coba were offshoots of Dál Araidi, the oldest and most famous stock in Northern Eire. From the evidence previously collected they are shown to have been on equal terms with Dál Fiatach down to 880, and gradually lost ground from that date till, by 960, the Dál Fiatach were sole rulers of Ulad.

In the fighting recorded they were frequently engaged with their vassal states of the Conaille Muirthemne and the Ui Echach Coba. Many of the fights recorded were probably punitive measures to enforce their authority. Their chief danger after 700 came from the rising power of the Ui Neill, and after 810 from the repeated attacks of the Norse. When the tract was compiled at some period circa 970-1080, the following families are named as in existence and, in some cases, their habitat is given. It would be interesting (though unlikely) should the names still be found in the localities named.

Ui Cairill, i.e. Carroll, in Downpatrick.

Ui Airemon, i.e. Irvine, in Inismore, i.e. Islandmore, in Strangford Lough.

²⁴ The name Tullycarnon occurs in the Ards and in Lecale. But Tullycarn in Lr. Iveagh is more likely as being on the route to Tara from the North. See *Leabhar na gCeart*, edit. O'Donovan, pp. 33, 39.

- Ui Dubgaill, i.e. Doyle.
- Ui Blaithmaic, i.e. Blake, in "Blaetwyc," near Donaghadee.
- Ui nAebain, i.e. Nevin, in "Blaetwyc," near Donaghadee.
- Ui Craibe, i.e. Creevy. There is a townland Lisnacreevy in Up. Iveagh, and Lake Creevy, south of Saintfield.
- Ui Creithim, in Downpatrick.
- Ui Etersceik, i.e. Driscoll, in Edrescall, near Holywood.
- Ui Dachua.
- Ui Aitheachda, in Findloch.
- Ui Muireadaig, i.e. Murray, in Boirche, i.e. Mourne.
- Clan Cairrellain, i.e. Carolan, in Boirche, i.e. Mourne.
- Clan Mail Sneachta, in Boirche, i.e. Mourne.
- Clan Laithnusa, in Blaetwyc, near Donaghadee.
- Clan Domnall, i.e. O'Donnell, in Blaetwyc, near Donaghadee.
- Clan Chuileandain, i.e. Cullinan, in Blaetwyc, near Donaghadee.
- Clan Breasail, in Sliabh Garbraide, i.e. Garvaghy? near Banbridge.
- Clan Cathail.
- Clan Gormlaithe, i.e. Gormley, in Glengormley.
- Clan Dondchada, i.e. Donaghy.
- Clan Diarmada, i.e. MacDermott.
- Clan Aengusa, i.e. Guinness.
- Clan Beice, i.e. Beaky.
- Clan Condmaig, i.e. Conmey, in Downpatrick.
- Clan Cearnaigh, i.e. Kearney, in the Ards.
- Clan Laisrine.
- Clan Eachach, i.e. Hoey.
- Clan Fiachach, i.e. McVeagh, in Downpatrick.
- Clan Cellaig, i.e. Kelly, in Druim Bo, in upper Castlereagh.

After the end of the second family tract in 970 the history of Dál Fiatach is only to be found in the Annals. I can find no cause why the local historians did not continue the work. A distinguished historian, Muircertach Ua Cairrell, died in 1083 (A.F.M.). He was airchinneach of Down, member of a Downpatrick family and must have resided there. Yet no attempt was made to carry on the record during the century 970-1080. It is of course possible that a record was kept and perished in later times.

Someone inserted a note in the tract about events circa 1070, but did not continue the regular course of events. Ardgar's son, Eochaid, and his death in the terrible defeat of Craobh Tulcha in 1003 are not mentioned. The regnal list in LL gives twenty more Kings for the period down to the Norman invasion.

Here then ends this study of Dál Fiatach; who they were, whence they came, how they suffered defeat and how they rallied again till they became the rulers of Ulad. Some of their descendants must still be in Ulster in spite of wars, plantations and confiscations. They may claim to be the true aristocracy of Co. Down.