

ALDFRITH OF NORTHUMBRIA AND THE IRISH GENEALOGIES

IT HAS long been recognized that King Aldfrith of Northumbria, who ruled c.685–705, was known as Flann Fína among the Irish. This learned Anglo-Saxon monarch – whose father, Oswiu, was himself reared by the Irish – was reputed to have had an Irish mother and to have composed a sizeable corpus of literature in Irish. Among the texts ascribed to Aldfrith – under his Irish name Flann Fína – is the Old Irish *Bríathra* (or *Roscada*) *Flainn Fína maic Ossu*, a long series of maxims which stress an ethical social outlook.¹ Records of varying degrees of reliability survive from both the Anglo-Saxon and Irish traditions which allow us to recreate a good deal of his family background. On the Anglo-Saxon side his lineage can be accurately traced back two generations relying on Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica*.² The genealogical records on the Irish side, although much more extensive, unfortunately are not always reliable. The use of Irish genealogies to explain or justify later political realities and dynastic aspirations makes it unwise to accept them literally without careful scrutiny.

In this paper I propose to examine Aldfrith's Anglo-Saxon and Irish genealogies and historical backgrounds, specifically addressing certain onomastic and chronological questions. The evidence will support the equation of Flann Fína with Aldfrith, and will show that Aldfrith was reared and educated by the Irish. For Celticists the case of Aldfrith is important because it involves a historical personage whose life and achievements are reliably recorded in contemporary sources from outside Ireland. For Anglo-Saxonists his case highlights the intimacy and extent of the Irish contribution to the flowering of Anglo-Saxon learned culture.

Aldfrith's paternal grandfather, Æthelfrith, ruled Northumbria c.592–617. He was a successful conqueror who ravaged the Britons more than any previous English king (*HE* i 34). He was slain in battle on the river Idle c.617 and was succeeded by Edwin, a man whom he had persecuted (*HE* ii 12). His death had far-reaching effects on the cultural history of Northumbria. During the reign of Edwin (c.617–33), Æthelfrith's sons, along with many young English nobles, lived in exile among the Irish and Picts, perhaps in Dál Riata among the Cenél

¹See my forthcoming edition, *Bríathra Flainn Fína maic Ossu: Old Irish wisdom ascribed to Aldfrith of Northumbria* (Early Irish Law Series IV, Dublin). Other texts ascribed to Aldfrith, some of Middle Irish origin, have been edited by V. Hull, 'Wise sayings of Flann Fína', *Speculum* 4 (1929) 95–102; and P. Walsh, 'A poem on Ireland', *Ériu* 8 (1916) 64–74.

²All references to Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica* [*HE*] are from the edition by B. Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors, *Bede's Ecclesiastical history of the English people* (Oxford 1969). However, for anyone intent on tracing the cross-cultural relations between Ireland and Britain, volume II of Charles Plummer's edition is indispensable: *Venerabilis Baedae opera historica* I–II (Oxford 1896, repr. 1975).

Gabráin, where they were baptized and received their education (*HE* iii 1).³

Upon Edwin's death (c.633) two interim kings ruled Northumbria. Osric, Edwin's uncle's son, became king of Deira. Eanfrith, Æthelfrith's son, who had been baptized by the Irish, became king of Bernicia. Both kings, according to Bede, apostatized and reverted to idolatry; both of them were slain within the year by the Welsh ruler Cadwallon (*HE* iii 1).

Soon after Osric and Eanfrith had met their deaths Eanfrith's brother, Oswald, defeated and killed Cadwallon at Hefenfelth (*HE* iii 2). Adomnán claims in the *Vita* of Columba that the saint had appeared to Oswald in a vision before his fight with Cadwallon and had predicted victory.⁴ Oswald had lived with his brothers and other English nobility among the Irish (*HE* iii 1).⁵ Once Oswald had established himself as king (c.634–42), he wanted to bring Christianity to his people and asked the Irish to send him a bishop. Aidan, who was sent from Iona, asked for and received Lindisfarne as his see (*HE* iii 3). Oswald was so eager for his people to accept Christianity that he personally acted as Aidan's interpreter because he had a perfect command of Irish (*HE* iii 3). Oswald died in the Battle of Maserfelth (c.642), fighting the pagan Mercians and their king Penda, who had slain his predecessor, Edwin (*HE* iii 9). He displayed a sympathy for Irish traditions throughout his life, and is the English king from this era who gained the greatest reputation for piety, both in Britain and in Ireland.⁶

Oswiu succeeded his brother Oswald to the throne and enjoyed a long reign, c.642–70. Oswiu, too, admired the Irish learning that he had become acquainted with during Edwin's reign (*HE* iii 25). The *Historia Brittonum* states that Oswiu had two wives. Eanfled, daughter of Edwin, is the wife Bede recognized; but his second *uxor* was a Welsh woman, Rieinmellt.⁷ Irish sources report that his sexual liaisons also extended

³For arguments that Æthelfrith's sons stayed in Dál Riata, see H. Moisl, 'The Bernician royal dynasty and the Irish', *Peritia* 2 (1983) 103–126. Both the *Historia Brittonum* and the E version of the *Anglo-Saxon chronicles* list seven sons of Æthelfrith; both sources are available in various editions.

⁴A. O. Anderson and M. O. Anderson, *Adomnán's Life of Columba* revised ed. (Oxford 1991) 14–17.

⁵Adomnán mentions Oswald and twelve others who were baptized among the Irish with him (Andersons, *Adomnán*, 16–17).

⁶For example, Oswald is included in the martyrology edited by G. Herzfeld, *An Old English Martyrology* (London 1900) 138. [I have not seen the edition by Günter Kotzor, *Das ae Martyrologium* (München 1981).] He also appears in *Féilire Óengusso* as *ardrí Sazan sóerdae* 'noble high-king of the Saxons': W. Stokes, *Féilire Óengusso Céili Dé: the Martyrology of Oengus the Culdee* (London 1905) 174. Adomnán referred to Oswald as *totius Britanniae imperator a deo ordinatus* (Andersons, *Adomnán*, 16). Bede dedicated several chapters to enumerating miracles attributed to Oswald after his death (*HE* iii 9–13).

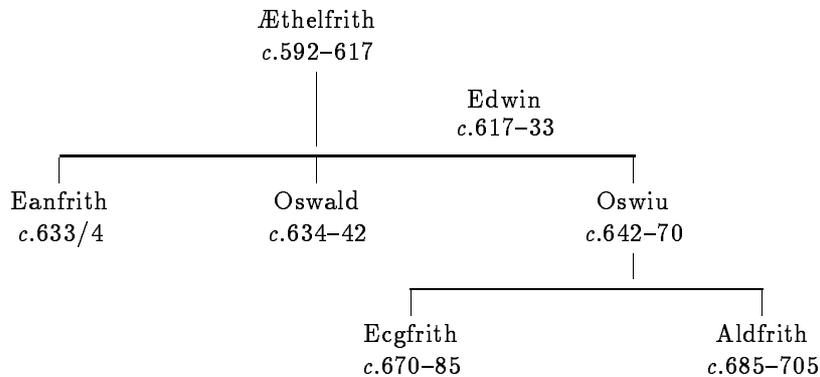
⁷T. Mommsen (ed.), *Chronica minora* (Monumenta Germaniae historica, Auctores Antiquissimi XIII, Berlin 1898) 203 § 57. Kenneth Jackson argued that since Rieinmellt was the presumed great-granddaughter of Urien Rheged it seems possible that Oswiu acquired Rheged by marriage and not by conquest: 'Angles and Britons

to Ireland. The genealogies are agreed that he fathered his most famous son, Aldfrith [/ Flann Fína], on a daughter of the Northern Uí Néill king, Colmán Rímid. In Irish law the acceptability of polygyny, as well as less permanent sexual relationships, had important ramifications for the legitimacy of offspring from such unions.⁸

Ecgrith, the son of Oswiu and Eanfled, ruled c.670–85. In 684, evidently attempting to counteract a Pictish–Irish alliance against him, he sent an army into Ireland under his general, Berht. He is the first English king to have invaded Ireland. The English spared neither churches nor monasteries (*HE* iv 26).⁹ A year later, ignoring the advice of his friends, including the English cleric, Cuthbert, he waged war against the Picts. Ecgrith was killed in battle and his army was defeated (*HE* iv 26).

Aldfrith ascended the throne of Northumbria upon the death of his half-brother Ecgrith. Aldfrith showed no interest in perpetuating the imperialistic designs of his predecessors, for Bede says that after Ecgrith's defeat 'he excellently restored the demolished status of the kingdom, although within narrower limits' (*HE* iv 26).

Having traced the Northumbrian rulers from Æthelfrith to Aldfrith by relying on Bede's account in the *Historia ecclesiastica* we can see that for more than a century Northumbria was ruled by members of a single family with only one intervening monarch, Edwin, from outside that family. The succession is illustrated in the following table which combines genealogy and regnal list.



Of the seven rulers listed, six are of the same family, representing three generations. Æthelfrith had three sons who ruled, and it was in Northumbria and Cumbria', in *Angles and Britons* (ed. H. Lewis, Cardiff 1963) 60–84, p. 71.

⁸See D. A. Binchy, 'Bretha Crólige', *Ériu* 12 (1938) 1–77, pp. 44–5 § 57. See also F. Kelly, *A guide to early Irish law* (Dublin 1988) 68–75.

⁹This event left its mark on Irish law. See D. A. Binchy, *Críth Gablach* (Dublin 1941) xiv. Moisl reiterates the notion proposed by others (with citations in his text) that Ecgrith was making a pre-emptive attack against a Pictish–Irish alliance supported by the Uí Néill (*Peritia* 2 (1983) 123).

during the reign of Edwin that Æthelfrith's sons spent their years in exile among the Irish. Oswiu had two sons who succeeded to the throne. Aldfrith's own son, Osred, succeeded him. Assuming the throne as a boy of eight, Osred ruled for eleven years (*HE* v 18).¹⁰

In the prose Life of St Cuthbert, Bede portrays Aldfrith as being far from the minds of the English as a possible successor to the Northumbrian throne. Aelfled, Oswiu's daughter, called upon Cuthbert's prophetic ability to tell her who would succeed her brother Ecgrith. Cuthbert gave her to understand that Aldfrith, her half-brother, who was studying 'in exile' *in insulis Scottorum*,¹¹ would succeed Ecgrith. The anonymous Life of St Cuthbert specifically states that Aldfrith was at Iona.¹² Bede describes the 'bastard' Aldfrith, *Aldfridus . . . nothus*, as being in 'exile' for the love of learning.¹³ If Oswiu fathered Aldfrith on an Irish woman, then customary practice in Irish law required Aldfrith to be fostered among the Irish, a point which will be discussed presently. This would contradict the frequently made suggestion that Aldfrith's 'exile' from Britain was imposed on him (for political reasons?) during Ecgrith's reign.¹⁴ Note also that Bede describes many English *peregrini* in Ireland as 'exiles' for the love of God.

Bede called Aldfrith a *vir in scripturis doctissimus* 'a man very learned in the Scriptures' (*HE* iv 26). This secular ruler was well enough educated to appreciate the writings of Aldhelm. We know that Aldhelm sent letters to Aldfrith, addressing him as Acircius, and composed a treatise on metre for him along with one hundred *enigmata*.¹⁵ Bede described Aldhelm with the same words that he used elsewhere to describe Aldfrith, as a *vir undecumque doctissimus* 'a man very learned in all things' (*HE* v 18).

Aldfrith's contacts with the Irish tradition are most closely traced by Bede through his contacts with Adomnán, abbot of Iona from 679 to 704. Adomnán's treatise on the Holy Places, *De Locis Sanctis*,¹⁶ was presented to Aldfrith on one of his visits to Northumbria. Adomnán

¹⁰Bede tells us nothing about Aldfrith's wife. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles, at the year 718 for the death-notice of Ingeld, brother of Ine, state that their sister, Cuthburh, who had established a nunnery at Wimborne, had been given in marriage to Aldfrith, king of Northumbria (J. Earle and C. Plummer, *Two of the Saxon chronicles parallel I* (Oxford 1892-9) 42-3).

¹¹B. Colgrave, *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert* (Cambridge 1940) 236. Bede later uses the phrase *in regionibus Scottorum* (*ibid.*, 238).

¹²*Erat in insula quam Ii nominant* (Colgrave, *Cuthbert*, 104).

¹³. . . *ob amorem sapientiae spontaneum passus exsilium* (*ibid.*, 238-9).

¹⁴Cf. B. Colgrave, *The Life of Bishop Wilfrid by Eddius Stephanus* (Cambridge 1927) 177; P. Hunter Blair, *An introduction to Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge 1956) 327; M. Lapidge and M. Herren, *Aldhelm, the prose works* (Ipswich and Totowa 1979) 32; C. L. Neuman de Vegvar, *The Northumbrian Renaissance* (Selinsgrove, London, and Toronto 1987) 237.

¹⁵Lapidge and Herren, *Aldhelm*, 31-3.

¹⁶D. Meehan, *Adamnan's De Locis Sanctis* (Dublin 1958).

was richly rewarded for his gift and Aldfrith had the text copied and distributed (*HE* v 15). Bede himself quotes extensively from it (*HE* v 16, 17).

Bede always refers to Aldfrith by his Anglo-Saxon name. Adomnán calls him *Aldfridum . . . amicum* in the *Vita* of St Columba.¹⁷ The *Annals of Ulster* at his obit name him as *Aldfrith m. Ossu sapiens, rex Saxonum*.¹⁸ These early sources refer to Aldfrith by his Anglo-Saxon name and not as Flann Fína. The *Annals of Inisfallen*, on the other hand, at 705 read *Flann Fíne mc. Gossa, rex Saxonum*.¹⁹ The *Fragmentary Annals* read *Flann Fiona mc. Ossa, rí Saxon, an t-eagnaíd amhra, dalta Ad[a]mnáin*.²⁰ The *Annals of Tigernach* specifically equate the two names, stating at his obit, *Altfrith mac Ossa .i. Flann Fína la Gaedhelu, ecnaidh, rex Saxonum*.²¹ Aldfrith's status as son of Oswiu and half-brother of Ecgrith appears to be confirmed by Irish evidence. According to the genealogies, Oswiu had fathered his son on Fína, daughter of Colmán Rímid, son of Báetán, son of Muirchertach, connecting him to the northern Uí Néill through the Cenél nÉogain. Aldfrith's alleged maternal grandfather, Colmán Rímid, was co-regent in the high-kingship with Áed Sláine according to some sources.²²

The genealogies as recorded in the *Corpus genealogiarum Hiberniae* read as follows:

Coic meic Bāetāin meic Muirchertaich .i. Fergus a quo Clann Fergus, Forannān a quo Hūi Fāirennāin, A[i]lill pater Cind-fāelad, Māel-huma in rígfēinnid. Colmān Rímid athair Fína, máthair Flaind Flina meic Ossu regis Saxonum.²³

I illustrate this information in a table – with significant dates added – as follows:

¹⁷ Andersons, *Adomnán*, 178.

¹⁸ S. Mac Airt and G. Mac Niocaill, *The Annals of Ulster* I (Dublin 1983) 150–51.

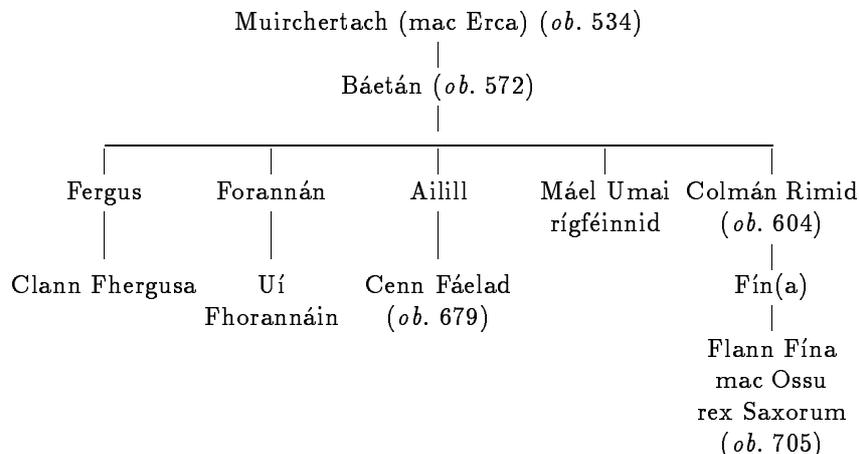
¹⁹ S. Mac Airt, *The Annals of Inisfallen* (Dublin 1955) 102–3. The form *mac Cos(s)a* or *mac Gos(s)a* for *mac Ossa/Ossu* is a common development in later sources and can be found in some genealogies and works ascribed to Flann Fína. See, for example, Rudolf Thurneysen's discussion of the name *mac Uthechair / mac Cuthchair* in *Die irische Helden- und Königsage* (Halle 1921) 94.

²⁰ J. N. Radner, *Fragmentary Annals of Ireland* (Dublin 1978) 54–5.

²¹ W. Stokes, 'The Annals of Tigernach: third fragment', *Revue Celtique* 17 (1896) 119–263, p. 219.

²² Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill, *Annals of Ulster* i 100–101; F. J. Byrne, *Irish kings and high-kings* (London 1973) 104, 281, 283.

²³ M. A. O'Brien, *Corpus genealogiarum Hiberniae* I (Dublin 1962) 135. The genealogies from Laud 610 agree: *Coic maic Bāetāin maic Muirc[h]ertaig .i. Fergus, otāit Cenél Fergus; Forannān, a quo Hui Forannain; Ailill .i. athair Cindfāelad; Māelhumai .i. in rígfēnid; Colman Rímid athair Fína máthair Flainn* (K. Meyer, 'The Laud genealogies and tribal histories', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 8 (1912) 291–338, p. 294).



Muirchertach is son of Muiredach – according to later sources his mother was Erc – who is son of the sept founder Éogan, who in turn is a son of Níall Noígíallach, the eponymous ancestor of the Uí Néill.²⁴

If one accepts the genealogies at face value – and all of those preserved agree in their pedigree for Flann Fína / Aldfrith – then some onomastic and chronological discrepancies must be addressed. Not only must we be cautious about the isolated and perhaps unique name, Flann Fína, but sections of the genealogy containing his name may have been invented. The centuries following Aldfrith's reign saw the rise to power of the Cenél nÉogain and their domination of the high-kingship. Fictions and forgeries intended to enhance the prestige of their lineage may be at work here.

The *Annals of Tigernach* explicitly identify Aldfrith with Flann Fína. It is not unheard of for a renowned personage in the Irish tradition to be designated by more than one name. Bede, Adomnán and some of the Annals use his Anglo-Saxon name. However, his Irish name was used in other Annals and is always found in the Irish literature which mentions him. A contemporary example of an Englishman with an Irish name is Ceolwulf, the Northumbrian king to whom Bede dedicated the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. He was apparently known as Eochaid in Irish sources.²⁵

Since the earliest sources use the name Aldfrith, it is possible that Flann Fína was applied posthumously to Aldfrith and is anachronistic. However, most texts that name Flann Fína call him *mac Ossu*. The identity of Ossu as Oswiu and the form of his name in Irish are

²⁴See tables in Byrne, *Irish kings*, 280–84.

²⁵Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill, *Annals of Ulster* i 182–3 (AD 731). See D. P. Kirby, 'King Ceolwulf of Northumbria and the *Historia Ecclesiastica*', *Studia Celtica* 14–15 (1979–80) 168–73; and D. Dumville, '“Beowulf” and the Celtic world: the uses of evidence', *Traditio* 37 (1981) 109–160, p. 114 n. 31.

verifiable in reliable sources.²⁶ For example, the title of the Old Irish *Briathra (Roscada) Flainn Fína maic Ossu* describe Flann Fína as a 'son of Oswiu'. The title of this text in several manuscripts further designates Flann Fína as *rí(g) Sazan*.²⁷ The only son of Oswiu who was king of the English and who also had a reputation as a scholar was the *sapiens* Aldfrith.

The entry in the *Fragmentary Annals* for the death of Flann Fína mac Ossu cites a poem which is supposed to be about him, but which is, in fact, about his half-brother, Ecgfrith.²⁸ The poem laments the death of a certain 'son of Oswiu' in battle against Bruide, a king of the Picts. It can only refer to the defeat and death of Ecgfrith at the Battle of Nechtansmere. It was after Ecgfrith's death that Aldfrith ascended the Northumbrian throne in 685. Although the annalist confused the two half-brothers, he left an accurate indication of Flann Fína's family affiliations.

In a Middle Irish poem which is usually ascribed to Flann Fína, we find the lines *Fla]nd find Fína mac Ossa / ardsúí hErend colossa* 'Fair Flann Fína son of Oswiu / chief-sage of learning in Ireland'.²⁹ It refers to that son of Oswiu who was a *sapiens*, that is, Aldfrith. The reference to him written into the poem is a sure sign that the ascription is spurious. The following line reads (in part) *ar brú [sro]tha Rein* which the editor translated as 'on the brink of the river Rhine'. However, *rein* should not be read as 'Rhine', but as genitive singular of *rían* 'sea'. In the case of Flann Fína / Aldfrith, 'on the edge of the stream(s) of the sea' may refer to the Northumbrian royal seat at Bamburgh on the Northumberland coast south of Lindisfarne. Also in this poem, which praises various regions of Ireland, the second location to be explicitly described after Armagh is Ailech, the royal seat of the Cenél nÉogain. In other words, even this late literary reference to Flann Fína is consistent with the genealogies.

The name Flann is a colour-word, 'red', specifically 'blood-red'. In poetic language the word is found as a masculine noun meaning 'blood'.³⁰ It is commonly used in Irish as a personal name.³¹ Difficulties with the name Flann Fína arise in the second element. *Fína* is apparently genitive singular of the neuter *u*-stem *fín* 'wine',

²⁶Several entries in the *Annals of Ulster* refer to Oswiu. The events can be corroborated by Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*. His name is uninflected in Irish and always has the form *Ossu* in these Annals. It occurs in the genitive at the years 642, 650, 671, 680, 686, 704, 713, and in the nominative at the year 656.

²⁷The title as found in the fifteenth-century manuscript bound together with the Yellow Book of Lecan (TCD 1318) reads *Roscada Flainn Fína maic Ossa rig Sacsan insso sis*, col. 229 a 42.

²⁸Radner, *Fragmentary Annals*, 54–5.

²⁹Walsh, *Ériu* 8 (1915) 70, 73 lines 89–90.

³⁰See (*Contributions to a*) *Dictionary of the Irish language* (Dublin 1913–76) [*DIL*] s.v.

³¹R. Baumgarten (ed.), 'Old Irish personal names: M. A. O'Brien's "Rhys Lecture"-notes, 1957', *Celtica* 10 (1973) 211–36, p. 222.

with non-palatal *n*, from Latin *vinum*. There are reasons to doubt its use as a proper name at so early a period. There is also a feminine *iā*-stem *fíne* 'vine', with palatal *n*, from Latin *vinea*. This latter word is attested as a feminine personal name in the Old Irish *Bethu Brigte*.³² The *Annals of Ulster* at AD 805 note the death of Fíne, abess of Kildare.³³ The same Annals cite the death in 733 of Flann Fíne, abbot of Clonmacnois.³⁴ As David Dumville rightly pointed out, there is confusion as to the exact identity of this particular abbot.³⁵ However, there doesn't appear to be any evidence to equate this latter Flann Fíne with Flann Fína mac Ossu beyond the superficial similarity of their names.³⁶ I am aware of only one instance where the second element of Flann Fína mac Ossu is given as Fíne, and that is in the unreliable entry in the *Annals of Inisfallen* where his patronymic is given as *mac Gossa*, and in bad Latin he is called *rex Sazorum*.³⁷

One's first impression might be to take *fína* as an epithet or appellative. Among the Irish, ale or wine could be used as a symbol for sovereignty.³⁸ Sovereignty was bestowed on the future king at a *banfheis* 'wedding feast'.³⁹ Although the original intoxicating liquor was ale or mead, wine developed the same significance.⁴⁰ The importance of wine in church ceremonies also ensured its use as a symbol of virtuous excellence. This is implicit in a simile used by Adomnán to describe the

³²D. Ó hAodha, *Bethu Brigte* (Dublin 1978) 16, 32–3 § 46.

³³Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill, *Annals of Ulster* i 260–61. O'Brien includes *Fíne* among his list of female names, but always with a short *i*: *Celtica* 10 (1973) 230, 235. The name is listed with a long *í* by D. Ó Corráin and F. Maguire, *Gaelic personal names* (Dublin 1981) 99–100.

³⁴Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill, *Annals of Ulster* i 186–7. John Ryan pointed out that in all other Annals Flann Fíne, apparently from Airgialla, either has another appellative or none at all: *Clonmacnois, a historical summary* (Dublin 1973) 34–5.

³⁵Dumville notes that this entry may be a doublet for Flann Sinnae, abbot of Clonmacnois, *ob.* 732. In Irish script *f* and *s* could easily be confused: 'Two troublesome abbots', *Celtica* 21 (1990) 146–52, pp. 149–52.

³⁶Without offering any supporting evidence Dumville has stated, 'I see no reason to follow Plummer, *Baedae opera historica* II 263–64, in believing the later mediaeval Irish equation of Aldfrith with Fland Fína. As far as I know, Fland Fína was an abbot of Clonmacnois who died in 733 (see the *Annals of Ulster, s.a. 732*)' (*Traditio* 37 (1981) 114 n. 30).

³⁷Mac Airt, *Annals of Inisfallen*, 102–3.

³⁸Byrne, *Irish kings*, 51, 100; D. Ó Corráin, 'Irish origin legends and genealogy: recurrent aetiologies', in *History and heroic tale: a symposium* (ed. T. Nyberg et al., Odense 1985) 51–96, pp. 80, 94–5 notes 57 and 60.

³⁹T. F. O'Rahilly, 'The names *Érainn* and *Ériu*', *Ériu* 14 (1946) 7–28, pp. 14–21. See also D. A. Binchy, 'The Fair of Taltiu and the Feast of Tara', *Ériu* 18 (1958) 113–38, pp. 134–8.

⁴⁰In *Baile Chuind* the sovereign-to-be 'drinks' the sovereignty: G. Murphy, 'On the dates of two sources used in Thurneysen's *Heldensage*', *Ériu* 16 (1952) 145–56, pp. 146–9. *Derglaith* 'red liquor' is poured out to each successive sovereign in *Baile in Scáil*: K. Meyer, 'Baile in Scáil', *ZCP* 3 (1901) 457–66, p. 460 § 10 *et passim*; see the discussion of this line by D. A. Binchy, *Scéla Cano meic Gartnáin* (Dublin 1963) 36 note to lines 462[–3]. A poem on sovereignty in this latter text has the line *cormand derga amal fín* 'red ales like wine', *ibid.*, 18.485.

abundant prophetic gifts of Columba, which were revealed to men from time to time like drops of fermenting wine seeping through the cracks of its container.⁴¹ *Fína* might be an epithet in praise of the good quality of Aldfrith's reign, a feature which is supported by Bede's account (*HE* iv 26); or as an epithet proclaiming his virtue and learning, characteristics that are also well documented. It is also possible to understand Flann Fína literally as 'Blood of wine', an appellation which signifies his nobility and virtue.⁴² There are examples in the seventh-century poem *A maccucáin, sruith in tíag*⁴³ and in the eighth-century poems of Blathmac⁴⁴ where the blood of Christ is called wine.

The genealogies, on the other hand, designate the second element of Flann Fína as the name of his mother. From this one may assume the nominative singular of her name to be *Fín*.⁴⁵ A proper name followed by the name of one of the parents in the genitive is common in Modern Irish,⁴⁶ and is also attested in Early Irish sources, especially poetry and genealogies.⁴⁷ However, in the list of saints' mothers, *Fína* is given as the nominative singular form of her name. This casts doubt on whether or not her name was *Fín* or *Fína*, if it was a proper name in origin at all. The following entry is found in the Book of Ballymote:

Fina ingen Cindfæladh mathair Floind Fina mac Gosa; aliter Fina ingen Colman Rime mic Bædain maic Muirchertaig mathair Floind Fina ri Saxan.⁴⁸

Here *Fína* is given as the nominative singular form of her name. In the genealogies outlined previously, *Fín(a)* is always in an environment

⁴¹Andersons, *Adomnán*, 92-3.

⁴²A. O. Anderson and M.O. Anderson, *Adomnan's Life of Columba* (Edinburgh 1961) 54. See *finjuil* 'noble-blood' in *DIL* under compounds of *fin*.

⁴³Ed. J. Carney, *Celtica* 15 (1983) 25-41, p. 32 § 4.

⁴⁴J. Carney, *The poems of Blathmac son of Cú Brettan* (Irish Texts Society XLVII, Dublin 1964) 20-21 § 56.

⁴⁵For an early note on names derived from *fin*, see K. Meyer, 'Zur keltischen Wortkunde', *Sitzungsberichte der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* 9 (1919) 389-90 § 213.

⁴⁶For examples, see B. Ó Cuív, 'Aspects of Irish personal names', *Celtica* 18 (1986) 151-84, pp. 175-6.

⁴⁷K. Meyer, 'Miscellen: 2. Zur Bezeichnung des Patronyms im Irischen', *ZCP* 8 (1912) 178-83, pp. 178-9. See also idem, *Hail Brigit* (Halle and Dublin 1912) 12-13 § 6, and *Über die älteste irische Dichtung* I. Rhythmische alliterierende Reimstrophen (Berlin 1913) 22. I owe the above references to Rolf Baumgarten. For names strung together in the genitive in an old genealogy, see D. Ó Corráin, 'An chléir agus an léann dúchais', *Léann na Cléire* (Leachtaí Cholm Cille XIV, Maigh Nuad 1986) 71-86, pp. 76-7.

⁴⁸R. Atkinson, *The Book of Ballymote* (Dublin 1887) 213 b 7-10. For full critical apparatus and variant readings from other manuscripts, see P. Ó Riain, *Corpus genealogiarum sanctorum Hiberniae* (Dublin 1985) 175 § 722.53.

where it can only be genitive singular which leaves the nominative singular form uncertain. Fína is evidently not attested as a proper name until after the Middle Irish period.⁴⁹

The genealogies of saints' mothers offer two alternative lineages for Flann Fína. The second version agrees with the Cenél nÉogain genealogy illustrated previously (see table). The first version, however, makes Fína daughter of an unspecified Cenn Fáelad. Several possibilities from the seventh century exist for the identity of this Cenn Fáelad. Three deserve mention here. For the first possibility one might assume that Cenn Fáelad mac Aillello *sapiens* (*ob.* 679), also of the Cenél nÉogain, is intended.⁵⁰ For the second possibility, some variant genealogies of saints' mothers make Fína daughter of a certain Cenn Fáelad from whose ancestor, Fiachu Suidge mac Feidilmid Rechtada, descended the Déisi.⁵¹ The Annals provide a third Cenn Fáelad as possible candidate for father of Fín(a). At 700 we find the *obit* of *Flann m. Cinn Faeladh m. Suibne* in the *Annals of Ulster*⁵² and the *Annals of Tigernach*.⁵³ In the latter chronicle Flann mac Cinn Fáelad is called king of the Cenél nÉogain.⁵⁴ Flann's father, Cenn Fáelad, could conceivably have had a daughter Fín(a) whose son was called Flann Fína.⁵⁵

In both history and saga many Irish men bore metronymics rather than the usual patronymics. In the genealogies Flann Fína's own alleged ancestor, Muirchertach mac Erca, is reputed to be named after his mother, Erc, daughter of Loarn, king of Dál Riata.⁵⁶ Muirchertach was son of Muiredach son of Éogan son of Níall Noígíallach.⁵⁷ In any case,

⁴⁹ *Fíona* was later used as the second element of compounded female names: Ó Cuív, *Celtica* 18 (1986) 166. In the same period males' names might be followed by . . . *an Fhíona*: *ibid.*, 178. See further, P. Walsh, *Irish men of learning* (Dublin 1947) 4–7, 168–9.

⁵⁰ According to the genealogy illustrated in the table Cenn Fáelad mac Aillello and Flann Fína / Aldfrith were second cousins. The reputations of both as *sapientes*, and both members of the Cenél nÉogain, may have encouraged genealogists to close the kinship gap between them.

⁵¹ Ó Riain, *Corpus*, 16 § 93. See also the later genealogy by the Four Masters based on these variants: P. Walsh, *Genealogiae regum et sanctorum Hiberniae* (Maynooth and Dublin 1918) 77.

⁵² Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill, *Annals of Ulster* i 158–9.

⁵³ Stokes, *Revue Celtique* 17 (1896) 216.

⁵⁴ In a poem on the rulers of Ailech (i.e. Cenél nÉogain) by Flann Mainistrech, we find a reference to a certain Flann mac Cinn Fáelad, *os lúnd* (translated 'over the lake'), who ruled for eighteen [years?]. The editor could not firmly identify this king. Flann Finn mac Maeltuile is not intended, since he is also included in the poem (J. Mac Neill, 'Poems by Flann Mainistrech on the dynasties of Ailech, Mide and Brega', *Archivium Hibernicum* 2 (1913) 37–99, pp. 48, 51 and note).

⁵⁵ Following this third possibility, Flann Fína was perhaps named after Flann mac Cinn Fáelad, his mother's brother, who became king of the Cenél nÉogain.

⁵⁶ L. Nic Dhonnchadha, *Aided Muirchertaig meic Erca* (Dublin 1964) xi–xiv.

⁵⁷ Francis J. Byrne warned against accepting the story of his being named for his mother as a likely fiction to enhance his prestige by adopting the proper name Macc Erca: 'Tribes and tribalism in early Ireland', *Ériu* 22 (1971) 128–66, p. 149 and n. 4. This tradition is reflected in titles from both saga-lists, *Aithed Erca ingine Loairn la*

these names are always followed by *mac* with one or the other parent's name in the genitive. It is not characteristic to find both parents' names used to designate ancestry.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, such names are recorded, as in the case of Corc Duibne mac Cairpri Músc, in which Duibne is explained as Corc's mother's name in *Cóir Anmann*.⁵⁹ It is thus possible, at least by the Middle Irish period, to find both parents' names used to designate ancestry in an Irish name in a manner parallel to the explanation offered for Flann Fína mac Ossu. However, one must bear in mind the distinction between the historical monarch Flann Fína, and the legendary eponymous ancestor of the Corcu Duibne. On the other hand, the apparent uniqueness of Flann Fína's name may accurately reflect the circumstances of his parentage, made more prominent by his unique achievements.

It has been noted that family members may bear etymologically related names.⁶⁰ This phenomenon suggests that *Fín*, or a name derived from it,⁶¹ might be used by the family as a proper name. This is supported by the tentative identification of Fínán, second bishop of Lindisfarne, c.651–61 (*HE* iii 26), as a son of Colmán Rímid. Charles Plummer had noted that this Fínán is called *mac Rímedo* in two Irish chronicles and an Irish martyrology.⁶² If Fínán mac Rímedo is indeed son of Colmán Rímid,⁶³ then according to the genealogies he would be Fín(a)'s brother and Flann Fína's maternal uncle.

Muiredach mac Éogain: P. Mac Cana, *The learned tales of medieval Ireland* (Dublin 1980) 46, 57. Byrne pointed out that Muirchertach's son, Báetán, is difficult to trace historically and that his status as a high-king should not be accepted without firmer evidence (*Irish kings*, 110).

⁵⁸For example, one never finds Muirchertach mac Erca called *Muirchertach Erca mac Muiredaig.

⁵⁹W. Stokes, 'Cóir Anmann', *Irische Texte* III/2 (Leipzig 1897) 314–15 § 62, 316–17 § 66. In both entries the name Duibne is etymologized as *dubh* + *find*. The feminine name in the form *Dovinia(s)* [> *Duben*, *Duibne*] is recorded on Ogham stones in Co. Kerry: R. A. S. Macalister, *Studies in Irish epigraphy* II (London 1902) 8, 20–22. For the genealogical information, see O'Brien, *Corpus*, 378. Jürgen Ulich called this name to my attention.

⁶⁰E. Poppe, 'Varia IV: *Émíne, Íamnat, Íamán*', *Ériu* 37 (1986) 187–8.

⁶¹O'Brien, *Celtica* 10 (1973) 222, 235.

⁶²Plummer, *Baedae opera* ii 189. According to Bede's chronology Fínán would have died c.661. The two chronicles are the *Annals of Ulster* (the entry is in Latin but the form of the name here is as likely to be Irish *Finnán* as *Fínán*) and the *Annals of Tigernach*. The martyrology was edited by John O'Donovan, *The Martyrology of Donegal* (Dublin 1864) 10. See also J. Campbell, 'The debt of the early English Church to Ireland', *Irland und die Christenheit: Ireland and Christendom* (ed. P. Ní Chatháin and M. Richter, Stuttgart 1987) 332–46, pp. 336–7 and n. 34.

⁶³Colmán's epithet, *Rímid* 'Counter', is explained in the *Cóir Anmann*: Stokes, *Irische Texte* III/2, 346–7 § 135. This entry demonstrates that the epithet *Rímid* was so firmly attached to Colmán's name that it could be used independently without creating confusion as to whom it designated. The only other *Rímid* listed in the *Corpus gen. Hib.* is son of Bécc Bairrche of Dál Fiatach. Bécc Bairrche's obit is set at 718, thus eliminating his son *Rímid* on chronological grounds. For the genealogy, see A. O'Sullivan, *The Book of Leinster* VI (Dublin 1983) 1443. For a chart of Dál Fiatach, see Byrne, *Irish kings*, 285.

There is also a chronological discrepancy which makes Flann Fína's pedigree suspect. Oswiu died in 670 at the age of fifty-eight (*HE* iv 5), giving him a birth-date of c.612. If Colmán Rímid died in 604, as the *Annals of Ulster* attest, then the latest possible birth-date for Fín(a) would be 605. Thus, she would have been, at the least, seven or eight years older than Oswiu, though this does not create an insurmountable chronological problem, particularly in light of the often transient sexual liaisons acceptable to the early Irish.

Oswiu and his brothers spent the reign of Edwin, c.617–33, among the Irish and the Picts. That covers a period of about sixteen years, and for Oswiu would have meant from between the ages of five and twenty-one, that is to say, all of his formative years. Plummer felt that Oswiu's marriage to Eanfled, Ecgrith's mother, would not have taken place before 642, when he assumed the throne of Northumbria.⁶⁴ Molly Miller thought that a date between 643 and 645 would be more likely.⁶⁵ Oswiu would have been about thirty years old when he assumed the throne, leaving the decade of 632–42 as time unaccounted for, when he could have fathered a son on an Irish woman.⁶⁶ In support of this supposition, William of Malmesbury describes Aldfrith as being older than Ecgrith.⁶⁷ Aldhelm leaves the distinct impression that he and Aldfrith were contemporaries when, in his letter to him, he recalls nearly twenty years previous, *nam pridem, tempore pubertatis nostrae* 'long ago, in the time of our young manhood'.⁶⁸ Aldhelm's age is reckoned as being at least seventy at his death in 709, thus setting his birth-date at c.639.⁶⁹ If Aldfrith and Aldhelm were contemporaries and born in, say, the latter years of the 630s, then they were a decade younger than their equally famous peer, Adomnán, who was born c.627.⁷⁰

The above speculations are based on a chronology reconstructed without due attention to extenuating circumstances such as political alliances. It is plausible that Æthelfrith's sons stayed in Dál Riata among Cenél Gabráin. Bede's statement that they stayed among the Irish and Picts leaves the picture vague, although Adomnán's remarks about Oswald seeing Columba in a vision, and Oswald's request for missionaries from Iona, all intimate direct contacts with Iona that suggest ties with Cenél Conaill through Iona's abbots. The Battle of Mag Roth in 637 broke the good relationship between the Uí Néill – specifically

⁶⁴Plummer, *Baedae opera* II, p. xvii.

⁶⁵M. Miller, 'The dates of Deira', *Anglo-Saxon England* 8 (1979) 35–61, p. 43 n. 4.

⁶⁶Oswiu would have been between the ages of 20 and 30, but Fín(a) could not possibly be younger than the ages of 27–8 to 37–8.

⁶⁷Plummer, *Baedae opera* ii 264. William of Malmesbury, *Willelmi Malmesbiriensis monachi de Gestis regum Anglorum* I (ed. W. Stubbs, London 1887) 57.

⁶⁸*Aldhelmi opera*, ed. R. Ewald, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Auctores Antiquissimi* XV (Berlin 1919) 62.

⁶⁹Lapidge and Herren, *Aldhelm*, 6. This chronology for Aldhelm is derived from a statement by William of Malmesbury.

⁷⁰Adomnán died in 704 at the age of 77: Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill, *Annals of Ulster* i 162–3.

Cenél Conaill – and Cenél Gabráin. However, on the same day as the Battle of Mag Roth which saw Domnall mac Áedo of Cenél Conaill defeat an alliance between Dál Riata and Dál nAraidi, there was a naval battle off the coast of Kintyre which pitted Cenél Conaill against the combined forces of Dál Riata and Cenél nÉogain.⁷¹ An alliance between Dál Riata and Cenél nÉogain at this time makes it seem all the more probable that, if the politically astute Oswiu was indeed fostered in Dál Riata, he might find himself in social circumstances that ensured the legitimacy of any offspring from a liaison with a woman of Cenél nÉogain.

However much reliance one places on the Irish genealogy describing Aldfrith's descent, the available evidence supports the tradition that his mother was Irish. Both Bede's prose Life and the anonymous Life of Cuthbert state explicitly that Aldfrith spent time *in regionibus Scottorum* or at Iona. Bede's phrase that Aldfrith was 'in exile' for the love of wisdom leaves the impression that Aldfrith's stay was temporary. However, following customary practice, in Irish law the mother's extended family must bear responsibility for the fosterage of the son of an Irish woman and a foreigner. In other words, the probable circumstances of Aldfrith's birth suggest that he was raised and educated among the Irish. The *Heptads* list seven cases when a woman and her *fine* must take full responsibility for the fosterage of a son:

Atait secht mna la Feine frisna comalat fir, noch it e ailde a mberda:
ben tsaer beiris . . . mac con glais. . . .

There are seven [types of] women among the *Féni* with whom men do not share the responsibility of *comaltar*, and it is they (the women) who bring up their children: a free woman who bears . . . the son of a *cú glass*. . . .⁷²

Comaltar 'joint responsibility for fosterage' is normally shared by both parents. *Cú glas* 'alien, foreigner from across the sea' is sometimes glossed by *murchoirthe* 'someone cast up by the sea', stressing his overseas provenance. Oswiu, as the exiled son of Æthelfrith living among the Irish, would certainly be classified as a *cú glas*, someone without appreciable social status within the tightly bound kinship structure of the Irish.⁷³ Any son that he fathered on a free Irish woman would become

⁷¹ Andersons, *Adomnan* (1961 edition), 47–8; F. J. Byrne, 'The Ireland of St Columba', *Historical Studies* V (ed. J. L. McCracken, London 1965) 37–58, pp. 47, 57 n. 78.

⁷² The passage and translation are quoted from K. Mulchrone, 'The rights and duties of women with regard to the education of their children', in *Studies in early Irish law* (ed. D. A. Binchy et al., Dublin and London 1936) 187–205, p. 196. The passage is from the *Heptads: Ancient laws of Ireland* V (Dublin 1901) 202; D. A. Binchy, *Corpus iuris Hibernici* I–VI (Dublin 1978), i 21.27–22.8, ii 547.1–21, iii 1054.9–11, v 1894.27–30.

⁷³ Binchy reiterates that the woman's *fine* is responsible for the child of a union with a *cú glas*, and points out that the *cú glas* has no legal status except through his wife: 'Family membership of women', in *Studies in early Irish law*, 180–86, p. 183). See also *Ancient laws of Ireland* v 516.1–9; and Binchy, *Corpus iuris* ii 426.35–427.7.

the responsibility of the mother's *fine*. Her kindred would see to her son's fosterage. Therefore, according to Irish law, if Aldfrith's mother was Irish, her family was responsible for his upbringing, regardless of Oswiu's status among the English.⁷⁴ Given Oswiu's long association with the Irish throughout his formative years, it seems likely that he would willingly follow Irish customs in such matters.

In summary, one must admit to difficulties in Aldfrith's Irish genealogy. If we accept the genealogical evidence that Fín(a) is his mother's name, following his own in the genitive, and followed in turn by the patronymic with *mac*, then it is a type of name rarely recorded.⁷⁵ The chronology, too, presents difficulties. If we accept Fín(a) as the daughter of Colmán Rímid, then she has to be at least seven to eight years older than Oswiu. Although this age difference is distinctly possible, when coupled with onomastic questions, it casts doubt on the literal acceptance of the genealogy. The existence of alternative lineages only adds to one's scepticism about the genealogical records as preserved. On the other hand, if *Fína* is in origin an epithet and not a person,⁷⁶ then it is an appropriate epithet, for the learned Aldfrith's reign established a period of *rapprochement* in northern Britain and oversaw a cultural flowering in Northumbria.

The available evidence supports the conclusion that Oswiu fathered his son Aldfrith on a high-status woman of Cenél nÉogain, and that Aldfrith was reared and educated among the Irish, who knew him as Flann Fína. This evidence can be listed as follows: (1) Bede's description of Aldfrith as Oswiu's *nothus* educated among the Irish, (2) the Irish influences in Oswiu's own upbringing, (3) the consistency of the Irish genealogies in assigning descent through Cenél nÉogain, (4) the political alliance between Dál Riata and Cenél nÉogain late in the decade of the 630s, (5) the practice of Irish customary law in making the mother's *fine* responsible for the son of a *cú glas*, and (6) Aldfrith's reputation for scholarship among the Irish and the corpus of Irish literature ascribed to

⁷⁴Tomás Ó Cathasaigh has demonstrated the importance of the concept of the 'sister's son' in early Irish society. The example of Flann Fína / Aldfrith is a historical case of the concept at work ('The sister's son in early Irish literature', *Peritia* 5 (1986) 128–60, esp. pp. 143–5). In light of the difficulties of establishing the identity of Aldfrith's mother with any certainty, one should note that according to *Cáin Íarr-aith* the *muimne* 'foster-mother' and *daltae* 'foster-son' relationship corresponded to, and might be as close as, that of mother and son; Mulchrone, 'Education', in *Studies in early Irish law*, 200. Therefore, even if we reject a literal acceptance of the genealogies, we must admit to the possibility that Aldfrith was fostered by a family of Cenél nÉogain, and then, perhaps, claimed by them as one of their own.

⁷⁵Note that although *Fíne* is recorded as a personal name from an early period, *Fín(a)* is not, unless we accept this apparently unique case.

⁷⁶For a discussion of medieval etymology and examples of how epithets and proper names may be fluidly interchanged, see R. Baumgarten, 'Etymological aetiology in Irish tradition', *Ériu* 40 (1990) 115–22, and 'Placenames, etymology, and the structure of *Fianaigecht*', *The heroic process – form, function and fantasy in folk epic* (ed. B. Almqvist, Dún Laoghaire 1987) 1–24 (repr. in *Béaloides* 54–5 (1986–7) 1–24).

him. Such circumstances suggest that Oswiu spent more time than the reign of Edwin (c.617–33) among the Irish. He may have stayed through most of Oswald's reign (c.634–42) as well, the period during which it seems most likely that Aldfrith would have been born. From the success that he achieved we can assume that his mother was of high enough social standing to see that her son received an excellent education and mixed with influential people. Whatever the specific circumstances of his Irish upbringing and social contacts, they were sufficient to allow Aldfrith eventually to ascend the throne of Northumbria, maintain his benevolent rule for nearly twenty years, and oversee what has been described as a 'Golden Age' in the north of Anglo-Saxon England.⁷⁷

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⁷⁷This paper has benefited from observations and remarks by David Dumville, Seán Duffy, and Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha. I alone am responsible for its final form.