Research Repository UCD

Title	Historical Truth or Literary Embellishment? Uncovering the voices of historical queens in medieval Irish sources
Authors(s)	Cranny Walsh, Aoife
Publication date	2022
Publication information	Cranny Walsh, Aoife. “Historical Truth or Literary Embellishment? Uncovering the Voices of Historical Queens in Medieval Irish Sources.” University College Dublin. School of History, 2022.
Publisher	University College Dublin. School of History
Item record/more information	http://hdl.handle.net/10197/13303

Downloaded 2026-11-17 03:16:48

The UCD community has made this article openly available. Please share how this access benefits you. Your story matters! (@ucd_oa)

© Some rights reserved. For more information



Historical Truth or Literary Embellishment?

Uncovering the voices of historical queens in medieval Irish sources.

Aoife Cranny Walsh

The thesis is submitted to University College Dublin in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

The School of History

Head of School: Professor William Mulligan

Supervisor of Research: Associate Professor Elva Johnston

Research Studies Panel: Associate Professor Roy Flechner, Dr Kelly Fitzgerald, Dr Elizabeth Dawson

January 2022

Table of Contents

Abstract iv

Statement of Original Authorship v

Acknowledgements vi

Abbreviations vii

Chapter 1: Research Aims, Historiography and Methodology

1.1 Introduction 1

1.2 The Scholarship on Early Medieval Queens 5

1.3 The Scholarship on Early Irish Queens 9

1.4 Methodology and Dissertation Plan 15

Chapter 2: Sources for Early Irish Queens

2.1 Introduction 19

2.2 Legal Sources 21

2.3 Queens in Chronicles 28

2.4 Genealogical and related material 32

2.5 Queens in literature 34

2.6 Hagiography 37

2.7 Women, Queens and Material Culture 40

2.8 Conclusion 43

Chapter 3: The Queen in Society

3.1 Introduction 45

3.2 Royal marriage in Ireland 47

3.3 Polygyny and the Royal Household 54

3.4 The Queen and Divorce 60

3.5 Perceptions and Realities: the Queen in Society 64

3.6 Conclusion 70

Chapter 4: Queenship in the Annals

4.1 Introduction 72

4.2 Representation of queens in the Annals 74

4.3 Annals and network analysis 77

4.4 Queen as a daughter 89

4.5 Queen as a wife 93

4.6 Queen as a Title? 94

4.7 The naming patterns associated with queens 101

4.8 Conclusion 105

Chapter 5: The Queen and sovereignty in the Irish imagination

5.1 Introduction 107

5.2 Sovereignty and Kingship 108

5.3 The Representations of queens in early Irish literature 112

5.4 Queen Medb: Sovereignty and History 118

5.5 Problematising the Sovereignty Figure 124

5.6 Conclusion 129

Chapter 6: Comparing Queens: Frankia, England, Ireland

6.1 Introduction 131

6.2 Queens and marriage in Frankia 132

6.3 Queens and marriage in Anglo-Saxon England 138

6.4 Divorce in Frankia and Anglo-Saxon England 141

6.5 Regency and Leadership 144

6.6 Ordination and Anointing 150

6.7 Conclusion 154

Final Conclusion 155

Bibliography 159

Appendix: Queens Recorded in the Annals 179

Abstract

The purpose of this dissertation is to analyse the roles and representations of Irish queens in early medieval Ireland, systematically bringing together historical and literary sources on this topic for the first time. This thesis is a re-examination of Irish queenship, the main aim being to locate the experiences of Irish historical queens and to examine their position in society and how this changed over time between the seventh and tenth centuries. This will be underpinned by an analysis as to whether the sources allow us to think of queenship as forming a distinct institution and /or title or role. A secondary but important aim is to identify the disparity between Irish and contemporary Frankish and English queenship, for the first time placing Irish queens in a European context.

While the sources are wide-ranging in subject matter and genre, specific details relating to queens are scarce and as a result an array of sources will be examined. The first chapter will introduce the research aims, provide a literature review, and discuss the theoretical framework and key concepts of the thesis. The second chapter will examine the wide range of sources relevant to this study including law tracts, annals, genealogies, literature and material culture. The third chapter will explore the queen in society establishing the position of queens through an analysis of status and marriage laws, with a particular focus on royal marriage practices. The fourth chapter will examine the evolution of how Irish queens are recorded in the Irish annals while also extrapolating aspects of their role within society through the use of social network analysis. The chapter will also address the questions concerning whether Irish queenship was perceived as an institution that was more than a royal marriage. Chapter five will look to the literary representation of queens in the form of the sovereignty figure and explore what it meant in the Irish imagination. The chapter will disentangle the legendary representation of Irish queenship from the historical reality. Chapter six will provide a comparative chapter in which Irish queenship is placed in the context of European queenship. Together these chapters enable the thesis to develop its questions and arguments in order to demonstrate the roles of Irish queens and their growth in importance over time.

Statement of Original Authorship

I hereby certify that the submitted work is my own work, was completed while registered as a candidate for the degree stated on the Title Page, and I have not obtained a degree elsewhere on the basis of the research presented in this submitted work.

Aoife Cranny Walsh

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Associate Professor Elva Johnston, for her invaluable advice, encouragement and continuous support during my PhD studies over the past 5 years and for generously sharing her knowledge and her time. I would also like to thank my Research Studies Panel, Associate Professor Roy Flechner, Dr Kelly Fitzgerald and Dr Elizabeth Dawson for their invaluable help, contribution and their insightful comments and encouragement. I would like to thank all the members in the School of History, in particular Dr Emma Lyons for all her help and assistance. I gratefully acknowledge the funding received through the Margaret MacCurtain Scholarship in Women's History which I received. I would also like to thank the Higher Education Authority (HEA) for the funded extensions which I received. These extensions helped in the completion of my dissertation during a difficult time. I am also appreciative to all my friends for their support, good wishes and in particular those that have shared academic experiences with me.

Most importantly, none of this could have happened without my family. I would like to express my gratitude to my parents. Without their tremendous understanding and encouragement in the past few years, it would be impossible for me to complete my study. They gave me moral support, encouragement and motivation to accomplish this PhD.

Abbreviations

AU	Seán Mac Airt and Gearóid Mac Niocaill (eds and trans.), *The Annals of Ulster, to AD 1131.* (Dublin, 1983).
AI	Seán Mac Airt (ed. and tr.), *The Annals of Inisfallen: MS. Rawlinson B. 503*. (Dublin, 1951).
AT	Whitley Stokes (ed. and tr.), 'The Annals of Tigernach (*Part 1*)', *Revue Celtique* 16 (1895), pp 374–419. ———, (ed. and tr.), *'The Annals of Tigernach* (*Part 2*)', *Revue Celtique* 17 (1896), pp 6-33, 119-262, 337-420. ———, (ed. and tr.), *'The Annals of Tigernach* (*Part 3*)', *Revue Celtique* 18 (1897), pp 9-59, 150-198, 267-303.
CS	William M. Hennessy (ed. and tr.), *Chronicum Scotorum: A Chronicle of Irish Affairs from the Earliest Times to A.D. 1135: With a Supplement Containing the Events from 1141 to 1150* (London, 1866).
AFM	John O'Donovan (ed. and tr.), *Annala Rioghachta Eireann: Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland, by the Four Masters, from the Earliest Period to the Year 1616*. (Dublin, 1856).

Chapter 1

Research Aims, Historiography and Methodology

1.1 Introduction

This dissertation proposes to examine the role of Irish queens during the early middle ages especially, although not exclusively, before the tenth century. In a society where it was assumed and encouraged that kings would marry, it is perhaps strange that their role has not been examined in detail. This dissertation will address this gap while also placing Irish queens within social and comparative contexts, allowing scholars to understand their complex and evolving social roles with greater nuance. Not only will this illuminate early Irish queens, it will also offer a new way to think of Irish politics, which are almost exclusively interpreted as being the result of the actions of men. The lack of this analysis is partly due to the nature of the relevant early Irish sources which, as this dissertation will show, have gaps and difficulties as well as being spread across a number of different genres.

Moreover, while the direct sources for historical Irish queens seem few, this is largely due to the overshadowing effect of the many literary narratives that depict royal female figures. As a result, there is historical evidence relating to Irish queens which has not received the attention it deserves. Irish queens and queenship are rarely treated as much as kings and kingship, with scholarship surrounding queenship still under-appreciated and queens not considered in their own right as historical figures. This contrasts with the much greater interest in the institution of kingship. This is partly because their roles in the early middle ages can be obscure or informal and the available evidence is spread across an array of sources. When it comes to Irish queenship there has been a tendency to treat a wide variety of women associated with kingship as sovereignty women. It is the character of the sovereignty woman, arguably ‘the most enduring image in the Irish tradition’ which has led to an exaggerated interpretation as to the role and

position of queens in medieval Ireland.[1] As a result, the sources are heavily based on legendary and semi-historical queenship in narrative tales and related texts, with more obviously historical material interpreted through the framework of the narrative literature. Thus, queenship in medieval Ireland is most often associated with figures such as the fictional Queen Medb of the Ulster Cycle of tales; furthermore, there is a tendency for aspects of the sovereignty figure to be applied to historical queens the most notable of this being the treatment of the three Gormlaiths (d. 861, 948, 1030) as sovereignty women.[2] Similarly, the question must be asked why there is such a focus on Medb when Gormlaith (d. 948), daughter of the Uí Néill king of Tara Flann Sinna, is a historical queen whose references in numerous sources give her the largest record on any historical Irishwoman before the twelfth century.[3] Therefore, a primary aim of this research will be to disentangle legendary Irish queenship from the historical reality. The date range of the thesis will encompass the early medieval period from the seventh to tenth century. Arguably, from the eleventh century onwards changes in society, politics and economy are such that their consideration would require a separate study that would take it beyond the scope of a doctoral dissertation.[4] Moreover, the impact of Scandinavian peoples and their descendants on the role of Irish queens is not possible to analyse without first establishing the parameters of early medieval queenship as the sources relating to Scandinavian queenship fall outside the central timeframe of this dissertation.[5] Although occasionally there will be references when relevant. This thesis will argue that by approaching early

[1] Gregory Toner, *Manifestations of Sovereignty in Medieval Ireland* (Cambridge, 2018), p. 1.

[2] Ann W. Trindade, 'Irish Gormlaith as a Sovereignty Figure', *Études Celtiques* 23 (1986), pp 143–156; Patricia Kelly, 'The Táin as Literature' in *Aspects of the Táin*, ed. J.P Mallory (Belfast, 1992), pp 69–102; Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha, 'On Gormfhlaith Daughter of Flann Sinna and the Lure of the Sovereignty Goddess' in *Seanchas: Studies in Early and Medieval Irish Archaeology, History and Literature in Honour of Francis J Byrne*, ed. Alfred. P. Smyth (Dublin, 2000), pp 225–237; Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Tales of the Three Gormlaiths in Medieval Irish Literature', *Ériu* 52 (2002), pp 1-24.

[3] Ní Dhonnchadha, 'On Gormfhlaith Daughter of Flann Sinna and the Lure of the Sovereignty Goddess', p. 233.

[4] Marie Therese Flanagan, 'High-Kings with Opposition, 1072–1166', in *A New History of Ireland: Prehistoric and Early Ireland, Vol. 1*, ed. Dáibhí Ó Cróinín (Oxford, 2005), pp 899-932; Marie Therese Flanagan, 'Negotiating Across Legal and Cultural Borders: Aífe, Daughter of Diarmait Mac Murchada, King of Leinster, and Marriage, Motherhood and Widowhood in Twelfth-Century Ireland and England', *Peritia* 30 (2019), pp 71-95.

[5] Trindade, 'Irish Gormlaith as a Sovereignty Figure'; Judith Jesch, *Women in the Viking Age* (Woodbridge, 1991); Jenny Jochens *Women in Old Norse Society* (New York, 1995); Ní Dhonnchadha, 'On Gormfhlaith Daughter of Flann Sinna and the Lure of the Sovereignty Goddess'; Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Tales of the Three Gormlaiths in Medieval Irish Literature'.

medieval Irish sources on queens in a nuanced way it will be possible to examine them from a historical perspective, placing them, for the very first time, in a firm context.

Furthermore, this research aims to go further than unravelling the literary and historical contexts. In this re-examination of Irish queenship the main aim is to identify early Irish historical queens and their roles. A secondary aim is to examine whether the sources allow us to think of queenship as forming a distinct institution and / or title or role. In order to achieve this a number of research questions will be addressed in order to determine the place of queens in Irish society. As medieval Irish society was status-based there will be a focus on how gender and status impacted upon queenship.[6] Due to the patriarchal nature of Irish society, which was relative rather than absolute, did queens possess a higher level of status than other women in the same way that kings had compared to other men? Were they part of an elite grouping in society? If so how did they differ to women in a more general sense?

As will be evident from the legal sources women are most associated with marriage. Therefore, marriage practices will be extensively analysed, particularly in the third chapter. The importance of marriage for historical queens has, to a degree, been obscured as an aspect of the analysis of the sovereignty figure is the attribute of being involved in serial marriages. Therefore, actual women associated with a king or multiple kings are classed as a sovereignty figure, an example of the type of circular arguments that are common in discussions of early medieval Irish queens.[7] This thesis will argue that although serial marriage is a trait of the sovereignty figure it is also an aspect of life for medieval women, especially queens. As queens are most often associated with marriage alliances the question will be asked how central a role did queens play in those alliances? The thesis will also look to another form of alliance that of a peace-weaver, a term which is most commonly referred to in scholarship relating to English queens and queenship. Peace-weaver is a term which reflects the role of a woman who has

[6] Fergus Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law* (Dublin, 2016), pp 68-79.

[7] Proinsias Mac Cana, 'Aspects of the Theme of King and Goddess in Irish Literature', *Etudes Celtiques* 7 (1955), pp 76-114; Proinsias Mac Cana, 'Aspects of the Theme of King and Goddess in Irish Literature (*Suite En Fin*)', *Etudes Celtiques* 8 (1958), pp 59-65; Proinsias Mac Cana, 'Women in Irish Mythology', *The Crane Bag* 4 (1980), pp 7-11; Anne Connon, 'A Prosopography of the Early Queens of Tara' in *The Kingship and Landscape of Tara*, ed. Edel Bhreathnach (Dublin, 2005), pp 225–327.

been married to 'the king of a people not her own to seal a peace between their two peoples'.[8] Julie Ann Smith explains how the idea of the queen as a peace-weaver was more significant and more often exploited among the Anglo-Saxons than among the Franks. [9] One of the "'periphrases for 'woman' in Old English is *freothuwebbe*, 'weaver of peace'".[10] English queens were often peace- weavers, or at least partners in politically significant alliances.[11] In English society political marriages were often arranged to create alliances between different kingdoms. In these marriages, the queen was often expected to play the role of peace-weaver, becoming a bridge between her own people and her husbands to ensure good relations between them.[12] This thesis will expand on the role of Irish queens emulating the role of peace-weavers through marriage alliances and the role queens play as connectors of men, in particular kings in chapters 3 and 4. In order to both analyse and visualise the role played by queens, and the degree to which they participated in elite networks in society, this thesis will incorporate the use of social network theory in order to trace their connections and influence.[13]

Moreover, the contrast in scholarship of queenship compared to kingship, which is extensive, cannot be overlooked. Neither can how queens are rarely mentioned in the context of kingship, in both literary and historical sources with the exception of the sovereignty figure already mentioned. Therefore it is necessary to address, as far as the sources allow, where queenship fits in the institution of kingship. How interlinked are they? To what degree does the

---

[8] Pauline Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers: The King's Wife in the Early Middle Ages* (London, 1983), pp 44-5; Julie Ann Smith, *Queen-Making and Queenship in Early Medieval England and Francia* (unpublished PhD, University of York, 1993), p. 65.

[9] Julie Ann Smith, *Queen-Making and Queenship in Early Medieval England and Francia* (unpublished PhD, University of York, 1993), p. 65.

[10] R.I. Page, *Life in Anglo-Saxon England* (London 1972), p. 69; Máirín MacCarron, *Brides of Christ, Royal Marriage and the Conversion of the English in Bede's Historia Ecclesiastica* (unpublished PhD, University College Cork, 2007), p. 126.

[11] Pauline Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers: The King's Wife in the Early Middle Ages* (London, 1983), pp 44-5; Julie Ann Smith, *Queen-Making and Queenship in Early Medieval England and Francia* (unpublished PhD, University of York, 1993), p. 65.

[12] Pauline Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers: The King's Wife in the Early Middle Ages* (London, 1983), pp 44-5; Máirín MacCarron, *Brides of Christ, Royal Marriage and the Conversion of the English in Bede's Historia Ecclesiastica* (unpublished PhD, University College Cork, 2007), p. 126; Jack Goody, The Development of the Family and Marriage in Europe (Cambridge 1984), p. 19; Stephanie Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women and the Church* (Woodbridge, 1992) p. 161.

[13] Ralph Kenna, Máirín MacCarron, and Pádraig MacCarron, *Maths Meets Myths: Quantitative Approaches to Ancient Narratives* (Cham, 2017).

structure of society and kinship influence queenship? What does it mean to be the wife of a king? How important is terminology?

Due to the complex nature of Irish sources, which are often literary or schematic, as will be outlined in the next chapter, the dissertation will place Irish queens within relevant comparative contexts. This thesis will present the first comparison of early medieval Irish queenship with contemporary Frankish and English queenship. At present no approach such as this has been undertaken for Irish queens. As part of the comparison the question will be posed as to why there is no Irish equivalent of Brunhild.[14] Part of the answer is that many Irish sources give precedence to semi-historical and mythological queens, which contrasts with the more apparently rounded figures presented in English and Frankish sources. The Frankish sources, in particular, give an insight into the life of an early medieval queen in ways which Irish sources do not possess. This includes material on betrothal, marriage, roles in war and succession and regency, all of which are treated with reference to named historical figures, unlike Irish texts where the content tends to be prescriptive or ideological. Furthermore, the comparative framing allows the dissertation to revisit the gaps in the Irish material and it will be possible to highlight the inconsistencies when it comes to documenting the historical queens of Ireland.

1.2 The Scholarship on Early Medieval Queens

At this point, in order to underpin the multi-faceted approach of this dissertation, the topic will be placed within the context of scholarship on medieval queenship in general and on Irish queens in particular. This will help situate Irish queens as well as identify questions and approaches. Firstly, the historiography on early medieval queenship will be examined followed by an introduction to the Irish scholarship in order to determine how historians addressed queens and their place within society. In contrast to Irish historiography, there is a considerable amount of scholarly research on early medieval European queenship, especially concerning Frankia. In order to develop the crucial comparative dimension, the thesis will consult a number of important studies.

[14] Janet Nelson, 'Queens as Jezebels: Brunhild and Balthild in Merovingian History' in *Politics and Ritual in Early Medieval Europe*, ed. Janet Nelson (London, 1986), pp 1-48.

One of the most extensive body of writings on early medieval queens by any one historian is that of Pauline Stafford.[15] For example, her very influential *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers: The King's Wife in the Early Middle Ages* is a comprehensive study which details the stages of a queen's life from being a 'bride to be' to her 'retirement and death'. In effect, it distils the life of a queen into different stages, almost creating a sense of a royal biography. Moreover, Stafford details how queens were impacted by political and ecclesiastical reforms and changes. Stafford does this while keeping the queens themselves as the main subject matter. What is crucial for the comparative aspect of this research is that Stafford provides an in-depth analysis into the life and career of a queen from betrothal, marriage, her role in a household and patronage, something for which there is no Irish equivalent in current or past scholarship. A good example is her chapter 'Charles the Bald, Judith and England' which provides a detailed account of how England and Frankia are intertwined in these areas.[16] Stafford's discussion of Queen Judith details how two kingdoms address the title and role of queenship by examining the anointing of Judith. Through this we see how the practice of anointing queens developed as a tradition out of a need to change the status of a queen for succession and legitimacy purposes, something that can be compared and contrasted with Irish material, throwing light on the different societies and their needs. It also introduces the crucial idea that early medieval queenship was not static but changed over time, a contrast, as will be seen later, with the tendency for Irish sources to be treated as providing insights into more static social environments.

[15] Pauline Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers: The King's Wife in the Early Middle Ages* (London, 1983); Pauline Stafford, 'Charles the Bald, Judith and England' in *Charles the Bald: Court and Kingdom*, eds Margaret T. Gibson and Janet Nelson (Hampshire, 1990), pp 139-153; Pauline Stafford, 'The Portrayal of Royal Women in England, Mid-Tenth to Mid-Twelfth Centuries' in *Medieval Queenship*, ed. John Carmi Parsons (Gloucestershire, 1993), pp 143-167; Pauline Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith: Queenship and Women's Power in the Eleventh Century England* (Oxford, 1997); Pauline Stafford, 'Emma: The Powers of the Queen in the Eleventh Century' in *Queens and Queenship in Medieval Europe: Proceedings of a Conference Held at King's College London April 1997*, ed. Anne Duggan, (Woodbridge, 1997), pp 3-23.

[16] Stafford, 'Charles the Bald, Judith and England', pp 139-153.

Janet Nelson is another scholar who provides comprehensive insights into the lives of early medieval queens.[17] Nelson's 'Queens as Jezebels: Brunhild and Balthild in Merovingian History' is a highly influential article that traces the careers of two prominent Merovingian queens. Nelson stresses the need to distinguish between the historical realities of queenship and what has been written about the queens, especially subsequent to their deaths. Nelson is also keen to remind readers that these two queens are not typical of women of this period and their position was not an institutional one and depended almost entirely on personal circumstances rather than the advantages of being a queen. These are points that are equally useful for Irish material, particularly the tension between institutional and personal power. Nelson presents an interesting insight into the role status plays for queens and the opportunities that can arise for a small number of women through succession and regency. Nelson's 'Early Medieval Rites of Queen-Making and the Shaping of Medieval Queenship' like Stafford's work looks to the importance of anointing queens. She does this by examining the anointing of Merovingian, Carolingian and English queens. Nelson again traces the history of anointing from its invention as a tradition, and the reasons behind it, to the effect it had on the eventual institutionalisation of queenship. This provides potential analysis for the questions surrounding the role of Irish queenship and whether it is possible to trace it developing from a more informal to institutional role.

Suzanne Wemple's *Women in Frankish Society: Marriage and the Cloister 500-900* is divided into two sections, women in secular life and women in religious life, the first part being of interest for this thesis.[18] While Stafford and Nelson focus on royal women Wemple presents a more general account of women from elite

[17] Nelson, 'Queens as Jezebels: Brunhild and Balthild in Merovingian History', pp 1-48; Janet Nelson, *Charles the Bald* (London, 1992); Janet Nelson, 'Women at the Court of Charlemagne: A Case of Monstrous Regiment' in *Medieval Queenship*, ed. John Carmi Parsons (Gloucestershire, 1993), pp 43-61; Janet Nelson, 'Kingship and Empire in the Carolingian World' in *Carolingian Culture: Emulation and Innovation*, ed. Rosamond McKitterick (Cambridge, 1994), pp 52-87; Janet Nelson, 'Early Medieval Rites of Queen-Making and the Shaping of Medieval Queenship' in *Queens and Queenship in Medieval Europe: Proceedings of a Conference Held at King's College London April 1995*, ed. Anne J. Duggan (Woodbridge, 1997), pp 301-315; Janet Nelson, 'Religion and Politics in the Reign of Charlemagne' in *Religion and Politics in the Middle Ages: Germany and England by Comparison*, ed. Ludger Körntgen and Dominik Waßenhoven (Berlin, 2013), pp 17-29; Janet Nelson, *King and Emperor: A New Life of Charlemagne* (California, 2019).

[18] Suzanne Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society: Marriage and the Cloister 500-900* (Philadelphia, 1981).

and peasantry, something which can be compared with the way early Irish legal sources deal with different levels of society, from those at the top of the social hierarchy to those at the base. In her discussion on queens she provides an analysis of the effects of the transfer of power from the Merovingians to the Carolingians, including a particular focus on the political and ecclesiastical changes to marriage. These reforms led to changes in royal marriage strategies and the formalisation of the position of queens to a partner to her husband.[19] It is these changes to marriage legislation, in particular ecclesiastical reforms, which will be of most benefit to the thesis as these will provide similarities and contrasts to Irish marriage practices. They also allow us to examine the degree to which the same ecclesiastical reforms took place in the same period in Ireland. E. T. Dailey provides the most recent major assessment in *Queens, Consorts and Concubines: Gregory of Tours and Women of the Merovingian Elite.*[20] Using Gregory of Tours *Histories* Dailey provides an in-depth analysis of the lives of queens recorded in the *Histories*. Dailey presents more detailed insight into not only the status of women married to kings but how this effected both kingship and succession. This analysis will provide an opportunity to compare the importance of status when it comes to queens in society. Similarly to Stafford, Nelson and Wemple, Dailey discusses the marriage and divorce practices of the Merovingian elite, but he presents a different argument on the practice of concubinage then has been presented by Stafford and Wemple, one which will be touched on again in this dissertation.

Sources relating to queens in Anglo-Saxon England are not as readily available as those for the Frankish realms and this is reflected in the secondary literature. The position of women in early English law and society is examined by Anne L. Klinck, Christine Fell and Carole Hough but due to the nature of the primary sources very little can be easily uncovered regarding queenship.[21] The scholarship that does relate directly to queens in this period approaches the topic

[19] Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, p. 97.

[20] E.T. Dailey, *Queens, Consorts, Concubines: Gregory of Tours and the Women of the Merovingian Elite* (Leiden, 2015).

[21] Anne L. Klinck, 'Anglo-Saxon Women and the Law', *Journal of Medieval History* 8 (1982), pp 107-121; Christine Fell, *Women in Anglo-Saxon England* (London, 1984); Carole Hough, 'The Early Kentish 'Divorce Laws': A Reconsideration of Æthelberht, Chs. 79 and 80', *Anglo-Saxon England* 23 (1994), pp 19-34; Carole Hough, 'Women and the Law in Seventh-Century England', *Nottingham Medieval Studies LI* (2007), pp 207-230.

in two ways. The first is concerned with questions about the title and institutional role of English queens. Stafford, for example, interrogates the position of queens in 'The King's Wife in Wessex 800-1066'.[22] The article documents the reasons behind the absence of royal women from the history of ninth-century Wessex, documenting how some queens were perceived to have abused their position. The second approach is to interrogate the relationship between queens and the Church, namely their role in conversion, one where royal women seem to have gained more power than was the norm. But even here there is debate. Stephanie Hollis and Máirín MacCarron, for instance, present two opposing arguments in how queens are portrayed in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*.[23] Hollis argues that Bede reduced the role of women in his narrative of Anglo-Saxon conversion while MacCarron counters this by arguing that the importance of Christian queens can be detected in Bede's *Historia* when 'attention is paid to scriptural imagery and exegetical allusions in his text'.[24] The nuances and difficulties presented by the English material will be discussed more fully later in the dissertation.

1.3 The Scholarship on Early Irish Queens

In contrast, Irish scholarship does not deal extensively with queenship exclusively or as an independent topic in the time frame being covered by this dissertation, apart from the special case of the literature on the sovereignty figure. Although queens are mentioned in secondary sources it is usually in relation to marriage alliances and even here they are rarely portrayed as active figures. However, there are fruitful related lines of enquiry, especially within the scholarship focused on women more generally, which allow for some extrapolation related to queens. This section will introduce the most important relevant scholarship from the areas of early Irish law, literature and history to establish the main approaches that have

[22] Pauline Stafford, 'The King's Wife in Wessex 800-1066', *Past and Present*, no. 91 (1981), pp 3-27.

[23] Stephanie Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women and the Church* (Woodbridge, 1992); Máirín MacCarron, 'The Adornment of Virgins: Æthelthryth and Her Necklaces' in *Listen, O Isles, Unto Me: Studies in Medieval Word and Image in Honour of Jennifer O'Reilly*, ed. Elizabeth Mullins and Diarmuid Scully (Cork, 2011), pp 142-155; Máirín MacCarron, 'Royal Marriage and Conversion in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*', *The Journal of Theological Studies, NS* 68 (2017), pp 650-670.

[24] MacCarron, 'Royal Marriage and Conversion in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*', pp 650- 670.

been used to situate Irish queens within their society. It will soon become evident that historical queens receive less attention than their literary counterparts.

Scholarship on Irish law is an extensive topic but there are only a number of studies that exclusively discuss women or treat them as the primary focus. The legal status of women in Irish society was first discussed in detail in the ground-breaking *Studies in Irish Law*, published in 1936.[25] It contains several contributions which provide an insight into both the legal and social standing of women.[26] For instance, Nancy Power presented an in-depth analysis of the classes of women in the *Senchas Már*, a key early Irish legal source.[27] As marriage will play a vital role in this thesis, Power's examination provides important insights into how a woman's status is linked to marriage. She examines the relationships women can have with a husband or male partner. Power also provides a description of the terms for different women in each marital union and their legal capabilities. Power's work was not followed in detail for several decades. However, by the late 1970's Donnchadh Ó Corráin began to produce studies that looked extensively at women in early Irish society.[28] He particularly emphasised the legal position of women in a patriarchal society and their status, analysing the different types of marriage and a woman's legal capacity within each marriage type. He also examined divorce practices and their significance. His research highlighted the changes in legal capacity of women through the

[25] Rudolf Thurneysen, Nancy Power, Myles Dillon, Kathleen Mulchrone, D.A. Binchy, August Knoch, and J.S. Ryan, (eds) *Studies in Early Irish Law* (Dublin, 1936).

[26] Rudolf Thurneysen, 'Cáin Lánamna' in *Studies in Early Irish Law*, eds Rudolf Thurneysen, Nancy Power, Myles Dillon, Kathleen Mulchrone, D.A. Binchy, August Knoch, and J.S. Ryan (Dublin, 1936), pp 1-80; Nancy Power, 'Classes of Women Described in the *Senchas Már*' in *Studies in Early Irish Law*, eds Rudolf Thurneysen, Nancy Power, Myles Dillon, Kathleen Mulchrone, D.A. Binchy, August Knoch, and J.S. Ryan (Dublin, 1936), pp 81-108; Myles Dillon, 'The Relationship of Mother and Son, of Father and Daughter, and the Law of Inheritance with Regard to Women' in *Studies in Early Irish Law*, eds Rudolf Thurneysen, Nancy Power, Myles Dillon, Kathleen Mulchrone, D.A. Binchy, August Knoch, and J.S. Ryan (Dublin, 1936), pp 129-179; D.A. Binchy, 'The Legal Capacity of Women in Regard to Contracts' in *Studies in Early Irish Law*, eds Rudolf Thurneysen, Nancy Power, Myles Dillon, Kathleen Mulchrone, D.A. Binchy, August Knoch, and J.S. Ryan (Dublin, 1936), pp 207-234.

[27] Power, 'Classes of Women', pp 81-128.

[28] Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'Women in Early Irish Society' in *Women in Irish Society: The Historical Dimension*, ed. Margaret MacCurtain and Donnchadh Ó Corráin (Dublin,1978), pp 1-14; Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'Marriage in Early Ireland' in *Marriage in Ireland*, ed. A. Cosgrove (Dublin 1985), pp 5-24; Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'Women and the Law in Early Ireland' in *Chattel, Servant or Citizen: Women's Status in Church, State and Society*, ed. Mary O'Dowd and Sabine Wichert *(*Belfast, 1995), pp 45–57; Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'Early Medieval Law, *c*. 700–1200' in *The Field Day Anthology of Irish writing, Vol. IV: Irish Women's Writing and Traditions*, ed., Angela Bourke et al., (Cork, 2002), pp 6–44.

seventh to tenth century, arguing that Christianity improved the status of women in society. In general, his approach is to emphasise what he believes is the comparative freedom offered to Irish women, including his statement that there should be no doubt of the existence of 'domineering' women like Queen Medb in real life.[29] Furthermore, Ó Corráin provided an insight into women within the political sphere. He does this by arguing that although queens could not inherit political power and never governed as independent rulers, their presence in contemporary early medieval annals as well as their influence in dynastic marriages was significant.[30] This is a point that will be developed in detail in the fourth chapter of the dissertation. Similarly, Bart Jaski's *Early Irish Kingship and Succession* discusses the importance of queens in marriage alliances, arguing that the qualifications for succession were partly determined by the status of mother, depending on whether she was a first wife or a concubine.[31] The importance of the practice and differences between concubinage and polygyny will be explored later in the thesis. Most of these studies consider early Irish material in isolation. The only example of a sustained comparative perspective is offered in Jaski's article 'Marriage Laws in Ireland and on the Continent in the Early Middle Ages'.[32] It provides a rare consideration of the comparisons and contrasts between Irish and Continental legal traditions related to marriage and divorce practices, although at times the Continental comparisons are painted in broad strokes that are sometimes too general. However, he does usefully highlight that marriage and divorce practices were similar until changes in the influence of the Church, particularly related to the impact of the Carolingian reforms in the Frankish realms.

However, it has also been argued that the freedom of women, championed by Ó Corráin, has been over-emphasised in the scholarship. For instance, Fergus Kelly in his *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, a basic source for understanding vernacular Irish law, convincingly points to how literary portrayals of women have led to exaggerated claims regarding the degree of power women enjoyed when

[29] Ó Corráin, 'Marriage in Early Ireland', pp 5-24.
[30] Ó Corráin, 'Women in Early Irish Society', p. 10.
[31] Bart Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession* (Dublin, 2000).
[32] Bart Jaski, 'Marriage Laws in Ireland and the Continent in the Early Middle Ages' in *The Fragility of Her Sex?: Medieval Irishwomen in their European Context*, ed. Christine E. Meek and Katharine Simms (Dublin, 1996), pp 16-42.

the reality was more restricted.[33] A key aspect of this is returning to the primary sources and examining their evidence in detail. Charlene Eska provides the best recent extensive study of the legal material. This forms part of her new modern edition and translation of the law tract most related to women and marriage, *Cáin Lánamna*, a source whose importance cannot be over-emphasised.[34] This is the first major edition of the text since Thurneysen's in *Studies in Early Irish Law*, although there is also a diplomatic edition available in D. A. Binchy's monumental *Corpus Iuris Hibernici*.[35] Eska's work ensures that scholars can avail of a comprehensive examination of the text.

Although the above works have shed crucial light on aspects concerning women and queens, none have offered a sustained historical contextualization and analysis of Irish queenship, apart from the more general emphasis on women. The exception to this is the important article by Anne Connon, 'A Prosopography of the Early Queens of Tara', the fullest work that has been published primarily on Irish queens to date.[36] Connon presents a prosopography of the queens associated with the kings of Tara listed in the texts *Baile Chuinn Chétchathaig* and the so-called 'Airgíalla Charter Poem'. She examines the legendary queens, those who are historical and identified as the daughters of actual dynasts and those whose marriages are grounded in historical reality. The prosopography gives an insight into the marriage practices of the aristocracy, including serial marriage. This is also a major focus in the scholarship on the Irish historical queens known as the three Gormlaiths, Gormlaith daughter of Donnchad Midi (d. 861), Gormlaith daughter of Flann Sinna (d. 948) and Gormlaith daughter of Murchad mac Finn (d. 1030). Ann Trindade observes that the stories of the three Gormlaiths include elements of reasonable approximations of real life such as serial marriages. However, she points to some elements which lead her to believe that their images are made from a mixture of

---

[33] Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, pp 68-98.

[34] Charlene M. Eska, *Cáin Lánamna: An Old Irish Tract on Marriage and Divorce Law* (Leiden, 2010); Charlene M, Eska, 'Marriage by Purchase in Early Irish Law' in *Tome: Studies in Medieval Celtic History and Law in Honour of Thomas Charles-Edwards*, ed. Fiona Edmonds and Paul Russell (Woodbridge, 2011), pp 183–191.

[35] Thurneysen, 'Cáin Lánamna', pp 1–80; D. A. Binchy*, Corpus Iuris Hibernici* (Dublin, 1979).

[36] Anne Connon, 'The Banshenchas and the Uí Néill Queens of Tara' in *Seanchas: Studies in Early and Medieval Irish Archaeology, History and Literature in Honour of Francis J. Byrne*, ed. Alfred P. Smyth (Dublin, 2000), pp 98–108; Connon, 'A Prosopography of the Early Queens of Tara', pp 225–327.

myth and history related to the sovereignty figure.[37] However, the presentation of the Gormlaiths as sovereignty figures is rejected by Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha and Máire Ní Mhaonaigh. Ní Dhonnchadha argues that Gormlaith (d. 948) the daughter of Flann Sinna was not influenced by the sovereignty myth.[38] While she was married to three different kings, Ní Dhonnchadha argues she has not taken on any other traits of a sovereignty figure.[39] Ní Dhonnchadha instead points to the fact that treating Gormlaith as a sovereignty goddess has obscured from view the largest dossier of texts on a historical woman from before the twelfth century.[40] Similarly, Ní Mhaonaigh argues that the case for treating the three Gormlaiths as sovereignty figures is weak. Instead, each is a distinct literary entity in her own right.[41]

It is clear from the above that a great deal of literary and historical analysis has been influenced by the concept of the sovereignty figure. This figure is normally a woman who is seen as representing the land and its fertility. She is joined with the rightful king and their union cements his kingship. She is often referred to as a 'sovereignty goddess' in the secondary literature. At this point, it is important to introduce the major relevant studies of the concept, while chapter 5 will present a fuller and detailed critique of its intersection with historical queens. Proinsias Mac Cana examines the figure of the sovereignty woman in the much quoted 'Aspects of the Theme of King and Goddess in Irish Literature' and 'Women in Irish Mythology'.[42] Mac Cana explores the various ways in which the sovereignty representation is portrayed in Irish literature and its effect on recorded history.[43] He argues that attributes relating to the so-called sovereignty goddess were placed upon historical queens. In particular he looks to the figure of Mór Muman (d. 632), recorded in the annals as the daughter of Áed Bennán and the wife of Fíngen mac Áedo Duib king of Munster, and asks whether she

[37] Trindade, 'Irish Gormlaith as a Sovereignty Figure', p. 152.

[38] Ní Dhonnchadha, 'On Gormfhlaith Daughter of Flann Sinna and the Lure of the Sovereignty Goddess', pp 229-233.

[39] Ní Dhonnchadha, 'On Gormfhlaith Daughter of Flann Sinna and the Lure of the Sovereignty Goddess', p. 229.

[40] Ní Dhonnchadha, 'On Gormfhlaith Daughter of Flann Sinna and the Lure of the Sovereignty Goddess', p. 233.

[41] Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Tales of the Three Gormlaiths in Medieval Irish Literature', p. 24.

[42] Mac Cana, 'Aspects of the Theme of King and Goddess in Irish Literature', pp 76-114; Mac Cana, 'Aspects of the Theme of King and Goddess in Irish Literature (*Suite En Fin*)', pp 59-65; Mac Cana, 'Women in Irish Mythology', pp 7-11.

[43] Mac Cana, 'Aspects of the Theme of King and Goddess in Irish Literature', p. 76.

should be regarded as a historical figure upon whom sovereignty attributes have been placed or as an unhistorical figure 'conceived in the traditional pattern of the goddess?'.[44] For Mac Cana a king needed the 'seal of legitimacy' and to be ritually sacralised.[45] Mac Cana details the various ways in which the sovereignty figure is portrayed, from transformation into a beautiful woman with the rightful king, to bestowing ale in a golden cup to the practice of serial marriage. Similarly, in *Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature*, Kim McCone's chapter 'Kingship and Society' examines the mythical role of women as sovereignty figures and sacral kingship. McCone see the role of the sovereignty woman as an adaptable device for the 'narrative treatment of kingship'.[46] It looks at the role of the *banfheis* the *Hieros gamos* or sacred marriage between king and goddess.[47] Like Mac Cana, McCone examines the portrayal of the sovereignty woman bestowing a drink to the rightful king.[48] On the other hand, Gregory Toner suggests that there has been a tendency to treat a wide variety of female figures associated with kingship as sovereignty goddesses, often without much justification. In reality we must distinguish a range of characters, not all of whom can be linked to sovereignty.[49] He goes on to argue that the sovereignty figure has been distilled down to such a small number of bare essential characterises that almost any female associated with a king could be identified as a goddess.[50] In this important critique Toner further argues there is a danger of losing sight of historical queens to the narrative of the sovereignty goddess.

However, there are signs of other approaches to the literature becoming more prominent. Helen Oxenham's recent monograph examines how the concept of femininity was viewed in early Irish society.[51] She questions how the presentation of women in varying sources has created an image of what society was like for women, considering the authors own perceptions of femininity and their aims in the texts. Oxenham does this by examining the portrayal of women

[44] Mac Cana, 'Aspects of the Theme of King and Goddess in Irish Literature', p. 90.
[45] Mac Cana, 'Women in Irish Mythology', p. 8.
[46] Kim McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature* (Maynooth, 1990), p. 131.
[47] McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature*, p. 110.
[48] McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature*, p. 109.
[49] Toner, *Manifestations of Sovereignty in Medieval Ireland*, p. 1.
[50] Toner, *Manifestations of Sovereignty in Medieval Ireland*, p. 2.
[51] Helen Oxenham, *Perceptions of Femininity in Early Irish Society* (Woodbridge, 2016).

from the ‘feminine norm’, ‘powerful feminine’, ‘saintly and sinful feminine’ through an array of sources. The study offers refreshing new directions of research. Oxenham is one of the only authors to look at the idea of royal power from a woman’s perspective but focuses on the reasons as to why a queen would wield power rather than identifying actual queens and their practices. Therefore, even the most recent thoughtful studies are working around a major gap, the identification, role and practices of Irish historical queens and it is this gap that this dissertation will address, returning real queens to the centre of research.

1.4 Methodology and Dissertation Plan

In order to do this systematically, the study will consider a wide variety of sources, as detailed in the next chapter, including medieval chronicles and material evidence alongside legal and literary materials. This will create a more comprehensive picture of the representation and practice of queens and queenship in early medieval Ireland. While the sources are wide-ranging in subject matter and genre, specific details relating to queens are scarce. Due to the range of sources and their varying types of evidence each major type will be examined in a chapter of its own. This will allow for a nuanced reading of each type of source, while taking account of the secondary literature and making use of the relevant methodologies. It will place a close reading of the primary sources relating to medieval Irish queenship at the centre of the dissertation. Moreover, as the dissertation progresses insights from different chapters will supplement each other, building towards a full analysis of early medieval Irish queens. This analysis will be placed within the comparative contexts already outlined, allowing Gormlaith daughter of Flann Sinna to be considered alongside the likes of Balthild. Throughout, the research questions relating to queens, their power and their roles will be considered from the perspectives offered by the various sources.

The next chapter will contextualise these, providing the bedrock of the dissertation and establishing its scope. The aim of this chapter will be to see how queens and women are portrayed in the sources and how each source treats queenship. The chapter will also highlight the discrepancies between source types when dealing with the topic of queenship. Due to material relating to women

and queens being spread across such a diverse dataset this chapter will examine sources ranging from the literary to the legal, annalistic, hagiographical and material.

Chapter 3 will then focus on the queen in society. As such, it will interrogate the legal material establishing the position of queens in relation to the general role of women. To what degree did they have more power or prestige? Can we detect a recognition of this within the legal literature and if not why not? To what degree is a queen's status recognised in society? Is her status determined by family connections or marriage? Further to this what role did queens play in linking kindreds and what impact did political marriage alliances have on dynastic structures. Chapter 3 will examine the scholarship of Thomas Charles-Edwards who argues a woman's role in kinship was that of a 'principle bonding element' in which a woman linked two kindreds.[52] While the kinship of men was static and always tied to the one group, that of women was mobile and as a result a woman's kinship came to have a wider scope.[53] This is similarly seen in the work of James Brundage and Jack Goody.[54] Both Brundage and Goody look to the role and impact of marriage alliances on politics and its subsequent impact on 'social organisation'.[55] Goody discusses how western marriages place importance on the maternal family and decent.[56] This something which will be examined in more detail from an Irish perspective in chapter 3. He also discusses the value placed on a woman's role through marriage and alliances.[57] Brundage also comments on the importance of links made through marriage and between a woman's maternal family and her husband's family, something which is also evident in the Irish system.[58] The chapter will also address what the lack of material on queenship tells us, especially when compared to the deep footprint of kingship. Do other sources, such as hagiography, provide a counterbalance? This examination of queens in society

[52] Thomas Charles-Edwards, *Early Irish and Welsh Kinship* (Oxford, 1993), p. 87.

[53] Charles- Edwards, *Early Irish and Welsh Kinship*, p. 87.

[54] Goody, The *Development of the Family and Marriage in Europe*; James A Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago, 1987),

[55] Goody, The *Development of the Family and Marriage in Europe*, p. 11; Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe*, p. 578.

[56] Goody, The *Development of the Family and Marriage in Europe* p. 11.

[57] Goody, The *Development of the Family and Marriage in Europe*, pp 226-7.

[58] Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe*, p. 129.

will also provide a basis for chapter 6 in which the role of queens and Irish royal marriage practices will be compared to Francia and England.

Chapter 4 will explore the role of a queen as the wife of the king, with a particular emphasis on the terminology used in the contemporary early Irish chronicles, the source that provides the fullest body of references to historical queens. In addition to examining what the annals record in relation to queenship the chapter will set out to use this material to demonstrate the role these women played in society looking at how the annals present queens as daughters and wives while also examining how the title of queen is presented. The chapter will also raise the question of whether Irish queenship should be thought of as an institution and/or role and title. This examination will provide a basis for the comparative chapter where a much fuller discussion is possible because of the nature of Frankish and English sources. While a traditional close reading of the annals will be undertaken, the chapter will also use social network analysis, a methodological approach that has recently begun to gain recognition as an important tool for humanities researchers.[59] This analysis will help provide an analytical visualisation of the ways in which queens are interconnected in Irish society. The objective will be to portray the social visibility of queens, and a particular focus will be given to the connections created through political marriage alliances. This will enable an innovative approach to these areas, drawing out the real social impact of queens.

This will then be followed with Chapter 5 providing an analysis into the role of the sovereignty goddess in early Irish literature and the complex debate that it has inspired. It is the most discussed aspect of female queenship in the secondary literature, especially the attributes associated with the queen as sovereignty. This chapter will examine one of the most notable representations of queenship, the figure of the so-called sovereignty goddess. In particular this chapter will examine what the role of sovereignty is in the context of the representation of queens. This examination will go further, asking whether or not these attributes can be applied to historical women and queens or, indeed, had their origin in them. At this point in the dissertation the status and marriage

[59] Ralph Kenna, Máirín MacCarron, and Pádraig MacCarron, 'Introduction' in *Maths Meets Myths: Quantitative Approaches to Ancient Narratives*, *et al*., Ralph Kenna, Máirín MacCarron, and Pádraig MacCarron (Cham, 2017), pp 1-6.

practices of queens will have already been explored, enabling a different approach to be offered to the sovereignty figure. In doing so the aim will be to disentangle the historical from the literary, although within the context that the boundaries between them are always permeable to some extent.

Chapter 6 will offer comparative perspectives through the lenses of Frankish and English queens. As has been stated, this will present the first comparative study between Irish, Frankish and English queenship. The purpose of this chapter is to identify the disparities between different sources relating to medieval queens and to their interpretations. Are these disparities contributory to the way that the discussion of Irish queens as historical figures has lagged behind, especially in relationship to the scholarship focused on Frankia? The chapter will then examine the differences and parallels with the role queens play in institutional politics. Comparisons will also highlight other similarities and contrasts, especially to the extent of showing how each of these societies differed and how this is reflected in the types of sources that were produced.

Therefore, throughout, the aim of this dissertation will be to shed a new light on historical queens and their position in early medieval Irish society. This will be achieved by addressing a number of questions through the examination of a broad spectrum of sources and employing a variety of methodologies. Only in this way can a comprehensive analysis be established, providing firm footing for ongoing and future research concerning early medieval Irish queens and their contexts. The first important step is a consideration of the sources, and this is the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter 2

Sources for Early Irish Queens

2.1 Introduction

While the previous chapter addressed the research aims, historiography and methodology, this chapter will examine the sources that will be explored in this dissertation. The sources cover an extensive range, including legal materials, chronicles, genealogies, literary narratives, hagiography and archaeological evidence.[1] Although the sources provide vital insights, there are some that pose obvious and not so obvious problems. While the most clearly historical sources are wide-ranging in subject matter, covering annals and genealogies, queens are relatively rarely mentioned.[2] The legal material is also extensive but limited when it comes to the representation of queens and, indeed, women in general.[3] On the other hand, the literary narratives are abundant with references to queens, female leadership and the character of the so-called sovereignty figure.[4] Therefore, while some sources provide greater clarity and are invaluable for this research, others

[1] The list of relevant sources is extensive. Good introductions are: James F. Kenney (ed.), *The Sources for the Early History of Ireland: Ecclesiastical: An Introduction and Guide* (New York, 1929); Kathleen Hughes, *Early Christian Ireland: Introduction to the Sources* (Cambridge, 1972) offers a still valuable interpretative survey. Michael Lapidge and Richard Sharpe (eds), *A Bibliography of Celtic-Latin Literature 400–1200* (Dublin, 1985) has been a standard resource. However, the most exhaustive guide is Donnchadh Ó Corráin (ed.), *Clavis Litterarum Hibernensium: Medieval Irish Books and Texts (c. 400–c. 1600)* (Turnhout, 2017). Aidan O'Sullivan (ed.), *Early Medieval Ireland, AD 400-1100: The Evidence from Archaeological Excavations* (Dublin, 2013) is invaluable for understanding material contexts. Specific studies important for understanding the sources and their interpretations include Richard Sharpe, *Medieval Irish Saints' Lives: An Introduction to Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae* (Oxford Press, 1991); Kim McCone and Katharine Simms (eds.), *Progress in Medieval Irish Studies* (Maynooth, 1996).

[2] The most important annal collections are Annals of Ulster, the Clonmacnoise Chronicle group and the Annals of the Four Masters. Their interconnections have long been debated. The single most important study is Nicholas Evans, *The Present and the Past in Medieval Irish Chronicles* (Woodbridge, 2010). M. A. O'Brien (ed.), *Corpus Genealogiarum Hiberniae* (Dublin, 1962) is the most extensive modern edition of the genealogies. Their extent and context are discussed in Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'Creating the Past: The Early Irish Genealogical Tradition', *Peritia* 12 (1998), pp 177–208.

[3] A major source for Irish law tracts is D. A. Binchy (ed.), *Corpus Iuris Hibernici: Ad Fidem Codicum Manuscriptorum*, 7 Vols (Dublin, 1978). For the extensive literature on the topic see 2.2 of this chapter.

[4] Muireann Ní Bhrolcháin, *An Introduction to Early Irish Literature* (Dublin, 2009) introduces the major literary genres as well as touching upon this theme.

seemingly present further obstacles that need to be unpicked and closely examined. It is the complexity of the sources that obscures our understanding of the role of queens in early Irish society, alongside the range outlined. This chapter will introduce them in broad terms while later chapters will delve into the most important sources in greater detail.

As there is no one source which provides a clear picture as to what being a queen entailed it will be necessary to examine an array of them. However, there is also a danger in comparing different texts from a variety of genres as each has its own assumptions, aims and purposes. Moreover, while the dissertation focuses on a distinct historic period, this still covers three centuries, a time frame during which it would be highly unlikely that society would be unchanging. As a result, when examining sources questions about the intentions of authors must be incorporated alongside consideration of the intended audience and their influence on the texts.[5] When it comes to the representation of queens and women in the sources even their silence is arguably an indication as to how authors and audiences regarded them in society and their expectations as to where their roles were considered relevant. However, while absences can be noted, it is more challenging to interpret them or extrapolate further, meaning that there are some areas that remain difficult. Moreover, how queens are described when present in texts needs to be considered within the broader contexts of how those descriptions fit into their genres and assumptions. Oxenham makes the point that 'perceptions are not passive but active manipulation of material to produce messages and images they wished to convey'.[6] In other words, the texts are actively engaged with ongoing realities rather than representing strictly fixed traditions. The aim of this chapter will be to present an overview of how queens are portrayed in the sources and how each source treats them while remaining nuanced and raising questions where necessary. The chapter will also highlight the discrepancies between source types and their treatment of queens.

[5] This point is emphasised in relationship to analysing the literary depiction of women by Oxenham, *Perceptions of Femininity in Early Irish Society*, p. 10.

[6] Oxenham, *Perceptions of Femininity in Early Irish Society*, p. 5.

2.2 Legal Sources

Vernacular legal material constitutes a large corpus of written sources that encompasses almost all aspects of early Irish society.[7] It includes law tracts on a variety of topics, ranging from landholding to status and injury. It also incorporates legal maxims and short legal sagas that develop points of law.[8] Old Irish law-texts, most of which originate in the seventh to ninth centuries AD, are frequently accompanied by later commentary and gloss which show how their interpretation evolved over time, making them valuable witnesses to evolution and change.[9] They now largely survive in fourteenth- to sixteenth-century manuscripts, with some texts complete but others more fragmentary.[10] Overall, however, gaps aside, it offers one of the most comprehensive insights into how early Irish society was ideally imagined to operate.

Their value as articulations of ideals of early Irish society has long been recognised. D. A. Binchy described the main characteristics of early Irish society as 'tribal, rural, hierarchical and familiar', based on these sources but also saw them as being archaic and backward looking.[11] However, while he was right to stress the role of the kindred (his meaning of the term 'familiar'), he probably over-emphasised the archaism of Irish law and crucial research has shown the extent to which they are relevant to the times in which they were written.[12] As Fergus Kelly states 'to gain any degree of understanding of early Irish law, it is necessary to first look at the society in which it developed'.[13] The law is a product of that society, reflects upon it and reflects an image back to society. It had been argued

[7] Binchy, *Corpus Iuris Hibernici* is the standard diplomatic edition that can be supplemented by editions of individual law tracts. Liam Breatnach, *A Companion to the Corpus Iuris Hibernici*, Early Irish Law Series 5 (Dublin, 2005) is an important companion volume. For an introduction to Irish law the following are especially useful: Neil McLeod, *Early Irish Contract Law*, Sydney Series in Celtic Studies 1 (Sydney, 1992); Liam Breatnach, 'On the Original Extent of the "*Senchas Már*"', *Ériu* 47 (1996), pp 1–43; Robin Chapman Stacey, *Dark Speech: The Performance of Law in Early Ireland* (Pennsylvania, 2007) provides an exciting interpretative framework; Liam Breatnach, *The Early Irish Law Text Senchas Már and the Question of its Date*, E. C. Quiggin Memorial Lectures 13 (Cambridge, 2011); Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*.

[8] Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, p. 1.

[9] See the comments by Hughes, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 43; Breatnach, 'On the Original Extent of the "*Senchas Már*", pp 1–43.

[10] Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, p. 1.

[11] D. A. Binchy, 'Secular Institutions' in *Early Irish Society*, ed. Myles Dillon (Dublin, 1954), p. 54.

[12] Liam Breatnach (ed. and tr.), 'Canon Law and Secular Law in Early Ireland: The Significance of *Bretha Nemed*', *Peritia,* 3 (1984), pp 439–459; Donnchadh Ó Corráin, Liam Breatnach, Aidan Breen, 'The Laws of the Irish', *Peritia* 3 (1984), pp 382–438.

[13] Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, p. 7.

that vernacular law was transmitted, orally at first, in the secular law schools. However, this interpretation has been either heavily modified or abandoned. Most scholars argue that the laws have to be understood within a Christian framework and that they were largely a Christian creation.[14] It should be stressed that many, probably most, of the law tracts were definitely of clerical origin and were written by ecclesiastics.[15] Thus, the major role played by the Church in the production of the law has been an important theme of scholarship.[16] Important studies have shown that many tracts contain scriptural references that pre-suppose authors bilingual in Latin and Irish.[17] Indeed, Liam Breatnach has argued for a direct connection between the compilation of the most important collection of law tracts, the *Senchas Már*, with the politics of the Church of Armagh.[18] Conversely, it has also been shown that many native elements of the society were important to the legal writers and to this extent the world that they depict is one in which Christian frameworks are often subject to pragmatic realities, particularly in relationship to societally crucial issues such as reproduction.[19] This is something which will be further examined in later chapters in relation to marriage in Ireland as well as England and the Frankish realms. It is not a surprise, when put in broader contexts such as these, that there would be a need for a balancing of ecclesiastical and aristocratic interests.

In their treatment of legal issues, the authors of the law-texts pay great attention to the 'law of persons', hence the rank, profession or sex of a person concerned in a law case is of crucial significance and this is clearly relevant to

[14] D. A. Binchy, 'The Linguistic and Historical Value of the Irish Law Tracts', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 29 (1943), pp 195–227 and Binchy, 'Secular Institutions', pp 52–65 argued for the archaism of Irish law. See also Myles Dillon, *The Archaism of Irish Tradition*, Sir John Rhys Memorial Lecture (London, 1948); A key rebuttal is Ó Corráin, Breatnach and Breen, 'The Laws of the Irish'. Breatnach, 'Canon Law and Secular Law in Early Ireland: The Significance of *Bretha Nemed*', pp 439–459 is an influential contribution. The social contexts are explored in Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'Nationality and Kingship in Pre-Norman Ireland' in *Nationality and the Pursuit of National Independence*, ed. T.W Moody (Belfast, 1987), pp 7-8.

[15] Ó Corráin, 'Nationality and Kingship in Pre-Norman Ireland', p. 16.

[16] Ó Corráin, Breatnach, Breen, 'The Laws of the Irish', pp 382–438; Breatnach, 'Canon Law and Secular Law in Early Ireland', pp 439–459. See also Kim McCone, 'Dubthach Maccu Lugair and a Matter of Life and Death in the Pseudo-historical Prologue to the *Senchas Már*', *Peritia* 5 (1986), pp 1–35.

[17] Breatnach, 'Canon Law and Secular Law in Early Ireland: The Significance of *Bretha Nemed*', pp 439–459; Breatnach, *The Early Irish Law Text Senchas Már and the Question of its Date*.

[18] Breatnach, *The Early Irish Law Text Senchas Már and the Question of its Date*.

[19] Thomas Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 246.

this dissertation.[20] The material pertaining to women specifically provides an insight into the freedom and restrictions placed upon them in early Irish society.[21] *Cáin Lánamna*, focused on reproduction, is a crucial extant source, probably dated to the early eighth century.[22] It is complemented by the *Díre* tract, possibly of somewhat earlier date, which is concerned with status, as well as a range of material contained in Heptads and Triads.[23] Although there are laws reflecting the role of women in society it must be noted that laws dealing with queens specifically are scarce. There are two rare examples, the first text being the *Bretha im Ḟuillema Gell* which is an eighth-century tract.[24] This relates to pledge-interests and provides an insight into how queens are perceived as having what appears to be a higher status then other women in society:

> *Air is mo do thorbu dosli cach ben bes druinech olldaite cid rigna*
> The woman who embroiders earns more profit even than queens. [25]

The importance of embroidery here is that it was perceived as a high-status activity, to be compared with that of queens. The second text is *Bretha Crólige*.[26] The tract dates to the first half of the eighth century and is concerned with sick maintenance, a type of medical provision, with parts detailing the provisions made for women, including queens, although indirectly, through reference to the queen's son, again suggesting a high status:[27]

---

[20] Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, p. 15; Oxenham, *Perceptions of Femininity in Early Irish Society*, pp 12-13.

[21] Ó Corráin, 'Women in Early Irish Society', pp 1-14; Ó Corráin, 'Marriage in Early Ireland', pp 5-24; Ó Corráin, 'Women and the Law in Early Ireland', pp 45–57; Jaski, 'Marriage Laws in Ireland and the Continent in the Early Middle Ages', pp 16-42; Oxenham, *Perceptions of Femininity in Early Irish Society*.

[22] CIH 502.29-519.35; *Cáin Lánamna* was edited by Thurneysen, 'Cáin Lánamna', pp 1–80. The English translation is by Ó Corráin, 'Early Medieval Law, *c*. 700–1200', pp 6–44. Good introductions to the marriage laws are Ó Corráin, 'Women in Early Irish Society', pp 1-14; Ó Corráin, 'Marriage in Early Ireland', pp 5-24; Ó Corráin, 'Women and the Law in Early Ireland', pp 45–57; Jaski, 'Marriage Laws in Ireland and the Continent in the Early Middle Ages', pp 16-42. The modern edition is by Eska, *Cáin Lánamna*.

[23] CIH 502.29-51935, CIH 463.33-440.31, 922.12-923.10; Eska, *Cáin Lánamna*.

[24] CIH 462.19-477.30; Eska, *Cáin Lánamna,* p. 6; Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, pp 165-166; Oxenham, *Perceptions of Femininity in Early Irish Society*, p. 44.

[25] CIH 464.2-3; Eska, *Cáin Lánamna,* p. 6.

[26] CIH 2286.24-2305.3; D. A. Binchy (ed.), 'Bretha Crólige', *Ériu* 12 (1938), pp 1–77.

[27] CIH 2286.24-2305.3; Binchy, 'Bretha Crólige', p. 2; Breatnach, 'On the Original Extent of the "Senchas Már"', p. 32; Eska, *Cáin Lánamna,* pp 6-7.

> A*ta[t] airlengaid huitir la Fēne na(n)d alet a folag acht a fochruic a reir britemon: dretoll tegluigh, coemhtai flatha, mac filed, serc[g]nasaig boairec, mac banrigna*.
> There are [certain] persons debarred from sick-maintenance in Irish law, who are not entitled to maintenance but rather to a fee for them according to the decision of a judge: a household pet, a lord's cherished ones, a poet's son, a *bóaire's* favourites (?), a queen's son.'[28]

What is interesting here is that the son in question is identified through his mother, the queen, rather than the father, suggesting that she has a particular recognised high status that identifies her as a member of the elite.[29] However, as these examples show, references are often indirect and need to be teased out in order to understand their significance.

Due to the scarcity of sources directly relating to queens, to obtain a greater perspective of their role, the status and position of women in early Irish society is worth examining.[30] However, while legal sources to a certain degree capture what Irish society may have looked like or how it was envisaged by contemporaries, it is also important to determine whether or not the material is idealised, especially when compared with literary material. The next chapter, in particular, will provide a much more detailed consideration of these questions. Nonetheless, a few points are worth making at this point. Kelly, for instance, as previously mentioned, has highlighted that exaggerated claims have been made about the degree of power and freedom enjoyed by women in early Irish society.[31] As he points out, early Irish society was patriarchal, which means that women were ultimately subject to men as regards their social status and their legal rights and protection.[32] It is also evident from legal material that women were generally

[28] CIH 2286.24-2305.3; Binchy, 'Bretha Crólige', p. 42 (text), p. 43 (translation).

[29] Descent measured primarily through the mother is a rarity: a literary example is provided by King Conchobor mac Nessa, son of Ness, in the Ulster Cycle. The story of his conception and birth can be found in Vernam Hull (ed. and tr.), 'The Conception of Conchobor' in *Irish Texts IV*, eds J. Fraser, P. Grosjean and J. G. O'Keeffe (London, 1934), pp 4-12.

[30] Power, 'Classes of Women Described in the *Senchas Már*', pp 81-108; Dillon, 'The Relationship of Mother and Son, of Father and Daughter, and the Law of Inheritance with Regard to Women', pp 129-179; Binchy, 'The Legal Capacity of Women in Regard to Contracts', pp 207-234; Ó Corráin, 'Women in Early Irish Society', pp 1-14; Ó Corráin, 'Marriage in Early Ireland', pp 5-24; Ó Corráin, 'Women and the Law in Early Ireland', pp 45–57.

[31] Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, p. 68.

[32] Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, pp 68-78. See also, Power, 'Classes of Women Described in the *Senchas Már*', pp 81-108; Jaski, 'Marriage Laws in Ireland and the Continent in the Early Middle Ages', p. 17.

dependant on a man, on her husband or head of family.[33] This was founded on the hierarchical nature of early Irish society. For example, the important early eighth-century tract *Críth Gablach* describes the noble and non-noble grades of Irish society, and gives information regarding such topics as property requirements, food renders, and honour prices. [34] The tract concerns the lay grades, commoners, nobles and kings.[35] While detailing the various levels of kingship there is no mention of queens.[36] In terms of honour price, the text states that a man's wife, son or daughter is normally entitled to half his honour price.[37] Therefore, throughout all aspects of her life many women had no independent legal capacity without the permission or authorisation of a man or group of men, although there were exceptions such as a female heir.[38] This lack of capacity is also a feature of the *Díre* tract dating to c.700 concerning honour-price and the compensation due for offences committed against relatives.[39] It is very frequently cited as a source for understanding the rights of women in early medieval Ireland, especially the final part on *bandíre*.[40] This focuses on the honour-price of various classes of women and the compensation due to their relatives for offensives committed against them.[41] Again, while not mentioning queens the text provides an insight into understanding the rights and varying statuses of women during the time that it was written.

A woman's legal capacity was extremely limited until the beginning of the eighth century when it has been convincingly argued by Ó Corráin that they were able to exercise more extensive rights within marriage.[42] These limitations can be seen in a number of texts. For example, the *Sechtae*, also known as Heptads,

---

[33] Power, 'Classes of Women Described in the *Senchas Már*', pp 81-108; Jaski, 'Marriage Laws in Ireland and the Continent in the Early Middle Ages', p. 17.

[34] CIH 563.1-570.32, 777.6-783.38; D. A. Binchy, *Críth Gablach*, Mediaeval and Modern Irish Series 11 (Dublin, 1941); Thomas Charles-Edwards, '*Críth Gablach* and the Law of Status', *Peritia* 5 (1986), pp 53–73 provides an in-depth analysis of the tract.

[35] Breatnach, *A Companion to the Corpus Iuris Hibernici*, p. 241.

[36] Oxenham, *Perceptions of Femininity in Early Irish Society*, pp 98-99.

[37] CIH 779.7-8; Binchy, 'Críth Gablach', §125-127; Also discussed by Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, p. 11.

[38] Ó Corráin, 'Women in Early Irish Society', p. 1; Ó Corráin, 'Women and the Law in Early, pp 52-54.

[39] CIH 436.33-440.31, 922.12-923.10; Eska, *Cáin Lánamna*, p. xix.

[40] CIH 440.32-444.11, 923.11-17; Binchy, 'The Legal Capacity of Women in Regard to Contracts', p. 213; Breatnach, 'On the Original Extent of the "Senchas Már"', p. 26; Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, p. 267; Eska, *Cáin Lánamna,* p. 10. Thurneysen argues the last section of the *Díre* tract §§27-38 to be a sperate section called *bandíre* which focuses on women.

[41] Eska, *Cáin Lánamna,* p. xvii.

[42] Ó Corráin, 'Women in Early Irish Society', p. 3.

which date to the seventh or eighth century and form part of the middle third of the *Senchas Már*, provide several examples.[43] They cover a wide range of legal matters, which are arranged in groups of seven, as their name suggests.[44] In terms of the representation of women there are no examples of women speaking for themselves in the *Sechtae*, as a *ban-fiadnaise* (female witness) is excluded from giving evidence.[45] However, that is not to say women are not present. A female witness is among a group of others, mostly men, who also may not give evidence. Thus, while women are excluded from speaking and distinguished as unreliable witnesses, they are also placed amongst particular types of men who are excluded 'a man of relationships, a man who is purchased, a man who is degraded from others'.[46] Significantly, these are all men of low status and, as a result, regarded as being of less value than those higher up the social hierarchy.

A similar, although later, source is the *Trecheng breth Féne*, the Triads of Ireland, a ninth-century compilation of gnomic material.[47] One of the entries gives an insight into what society saw as the qualities admired of women in society and supplements the material already mentioned:

> *Trí fostai dagbanais: fosta thengad & gensa & airnberntais*.
> Three steadinesses of good womanhood: keeping a steady tongue, a steady chastity, and a steady housewifery.[48]

The source also suggests the contractual power women are given or in this case not given. Three contracts that are reversed by the decision of a judge:

> *Trí cuir tintaiter do réir britheman: cor mná & micc & bothaich*.
> Three contracts that are reversed by the decision of a judge: the contracts of a woman, of a son, of a cottar. [49]

---

[43] CIH 1.1-64.5; Breatnach, 'On the Original Extent of the "Senchas Már"', p. 23; Oxenham, *Perceptions of Femininity in Early Irish Society*, p. 57.

[44] Binchy, *Corpus Iuris Hibernici*; Breatnach, *A Companion to the Corpus Iuris Hibernici*, p. 291.

[45] CIH 1.1-64.5; Oxenham, *Perceptions of Femininity in Early Irish Society*, p. 57.

[46] CIH 45.1-5; Oxenham, *Perceptions of Femininity in Early Irish Society*, p. 57.

[47] Kuno Meyer (ed. and tr.), *The Triads of Ireland*, Todd Lecture Series 13 (Dublin, 1906); Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, p. 284.

[48] Meyer, *The Triads of Ireland*, p. 24 (text), p. 25 (translation).

[49] Meyer, *The Triads of Ireland*, p. 20 (text), p. 21 (translation).

> *Trí natat túalaing sainchuir: mac beo-athar, ben aurnadma, dóer flatha.*
> Three that are incapable of special contracts: a son whose father is alive, a betrothed woman, the serf of a chief.[50]

These triads combine both hierarchy and gender as the betrothed woman is compared to classes of men who are subservient to other male superiors. The second is much more specific than the previous triad which draws very broad distinctions, regardless of class. Similarly, to the *Sechtae*, women are at times grouped with men of a lower status suggesting that this aspect of female status was slow to change.[51]

Overall, in the laws which pertain to women, most are concerned with kindred and reproduction reflecting, as this dissertation will demonstrate, what were believed to be primary roles for women and, by extension, for queens. As already mentioned, *Cáin Lánamna* is the main legal tract which deals with Irish marriage laws and sexual relationships.[52] It formed part of the first third of the great legal compilation, the *Senchas Már* and will be examined in greater detail in the next chapter and will also be placed in broader comparative contexts in chapter 6.[53] *Cáin Lánamna* provides firstly a general description of couples in Irish law, followed by the listing of ten specific types of couples and the several types of marriage.[54] *Cáin Lánamna* also provides instructions on divorce and the division of assets. It is the legal source which provides by far the fullest consideration of the practicalities and interplay between status and gender in a major part of early Irish life.

As can be seen from this brief overview, law tracts relate to almost all aspects of society, including those of women's lives. Therefore, the lack of clarity on queens is quite revealing and shows that during the period the laws were redacted queens may primarily have been seen as the wives and mothers of

---

[50] Meyer, *The Triads of Ireland*, p. 20 (text), p. 21 (translation).

[51] See also Binchy, 'The Legal Capacity of Women in Regard to Contracts', p. 212, for other examples.

[52] CIH 502.29-519.35; Eska, *Cáin Lánamna*, p. 1.

[53] CIH 502.29-519.35; Thurneysen, 'Cáin Lánamna', pp 1-80; Ó Corráin, 'Women in Early Irish Society', pp 1-14; Ó Corráin, Breatnach and Breen, 'The Laws of the Irish', p. 420; Ó Corráin, 'Marriage in Early Ireland', pp 5-24; Ó Corráin, 'Women and the Law in Early Ireland', pp 45–57; Jaski, 'Marriage Laws', p. 18; Eska, *Cáin Lánamna*, p. 1.

[54] CIH 502.29-519.35; Thurneysen, 'Cáin Lánamna', pp 1-80; Ó Corráin, 'Women in Early Irish Society', pp 1-14; Ó Corráin, Breatnach and Breen, 'The Laws of the Irish', p. 420; Ó Corráin, 'Marriage in Early Ireland', pp 5-24; Ó Corráin, 'Women and the Law in Early Ireland', pp 45–57; Jaski, 'Marriage Laws', p. 18; Eska, *Cáin Lánamna*, p. 67.

kings. Like other women, a queen does not seem to have enjoyed any extra-legal powers independent of her husband. She has the right to give pledges, but in this she is no different from other freewomen. According to the *Díre* text, the mother of a king, bishop or sage has the same honour-price as her son, if she is fully law-abiding but this still meant that her legal capacity was dependent on that of a man.[55] To what extent did this limit the power of queens and did this change over the time period considered in this dissertation? A more diachronic source, such as the early medieval Irish chronicles, provides potential answers.

2.3 Queens in Chronicles

These early medieval Irish chronicles, also known as annals, are a substantial and important source for the record of Irish history.[56] The early medieval annals provide year by year accounts of events from the late sixth century to the arrival of the Normans in the twelfth century and beyond. The scholarly consensus is that the 'Chronicle of Ireland' is the main text underlying the surviving early

[55] CIH 502.29-51935, CIH 463.33-440.31, 922.12-923.10; Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, p. 78.

[56] Chronicum Scotorum edited by William M. Hennessy, (ed. and tr.), *Chronicum Scotorum: A Chronicle of Irish Affairs from the Earliest Times to A.D. 1135: With a Supplement Containing the Events From 1141 to 1150* (London, 1866); Annals of Clonmacnoise edited by Denis Murphy (ed.), *The Annals of Clonmacnoise, Being Annals of Ireland from the Earliest Period to A.D.1408, Translated into English, A.D.1627 by Conell Mageoghagan* (Dublin, 1896); Annals of Tigernach edited by Whitley Stokes (ed. and tr.), 'The Annals of Tigernach (Part 1)', *Revue Celtique* 16 (1895), pp 374–419; Whitley Stokes (ed. and tr.), 'The Annals of Tigernach (Part 2)', *Revue Celtique* 17 (1896), pp 6–33, 119–263, 337–420; Whitley Stokes (ed. and tr.), 'The Annals of Tigernach (Part 3)', *Revue Celtique* 18 (1897), pp 9–59, 150–198, 267–303; Annals of Inisfallen edited by Seán Mac Airt (ed. and tr.), *The Annals of Inisfallen: MS. Rawlinson B. 503* (Dublin, 1951); Annals of Ulster edited by Seán Mac Airt and Gearóid Mac Niocaill (eds and trans), *The Annals of Ulster, to AD 1131* (Dublin, 1983); Dáibhí Ó Croínín, *Early Medieval Ireland 400-1200* (New York, 2017), p. 8.

medieval chronicles, although this view is not universally accepted.[57] However, the first thing to note about the Chronicle of Ireland is that it is no longer extant, even though it is posited as the parent-text lying behind the extant annal entries up to AD 911.[58] In its original form it was arguably the earliest monastic chronicle in the Latin West, and it is a key source for reconstructing early Irish history.[59] The Chronicle of Ireland is believed to have originated in Iona, in the latter half of the sixth century, before eventually being continued in an ecclesiastical centre in the midland kingdom of Brega from c.740–911.[60] The Chronicle was written in both Latin and Irish with the use of Irish increasing over time, in parallel with fuller information being recorded. This, along with other details, will be examined in greater depth in chapter 4.[61]

The most complete version of the Irish annals is contained in the Annals of Ulster, which is also held to be the best extant representative of the Chronicle of Ireland.[62] As indicated earlier, from 911/12 there is a break in the texts with the emergence of a separate strand of Clonmacnoise-based chronicles that provide invaluable regional specifics.[63] The main witness of the Clonmacnoise tradition are the Annals of Tigernach and the *Chronicum Scotorum* with which it shares a

[57] Kathleen Hughes, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 101 first proposed the existence of this Chronicle and emphasised the importance of the Annals of Ulster as the main witness; Daniel P McCarthy, *The Irish Annals: Their Genesis, Evolution and History* (Dublin, 2008) disagreed and proposed that the Annals of Ulster should no longer be accorded primary status. Evans, *The Present and the Past in Medieval Irish Chronicles* returned to the model of Hughes as does Roy Flechner, 'The Chronicle of Ireland: Then and Now', *Early Medieval Europe* 21 (2013), pp 422-454. The scholarly consensus remains in favour of Hughes in broad outline. The text is reconstructed in Thomas Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland*, 2 Volumes (Liverpool, 2006); Bernadette Cunningham, *The Annals of the Four Masters: Irish History, Kingship and Society in the Early Seventeenth Century* (Dublin, 2010) shows the extent to which the so-called Four Masters used the early medieval chronicle tradition creatively; Elva Johnston, 'Mapping Literate Networks in Early Medieval Ireland' in *Maths Meets Myths: Quantitative Approaches to Ancient Narratives*, *et al*., Ralph Kenna, Máirín MacCarron, and Pádraig MacCarron (Cham, 2017), pp 195-211, considers the potential for the early medieval chronicles to be analysed according to social network theory, an area that will be developed in chapter 4.

[58] Hughes, *Early Christian Ireland*, pp 99-159; Evans, *The Present and the Past in Medieval Irish Chronicles*, p 115-170; Johnston, 'Mapping Literate Networks in Early Medieval Ireland', p. 197.

[59] Flechner, 'The Chronicle of Ireland', p. 422.

[60] McCarthy, *The Irish Annals: Their Genesis, Evolution and* History, p. 153; Elva Johnston, *Literacy and Identity in Early Medieval Ireland* (Woodbridge, 2013), p. 197.

[61] David Dumville, 'Latin and Irish in the Annals of Ulster, A.D. 431–1050' in *Ireland in Early Medieval Europe: Studies in Memory of Kathleen Hughes*, *et al*., Dorothy Whitelock, Rosamund McKitterick and David N. Dumville (Cambridge, 1982), pp 320–341.

[62] Hughes, *Early Christian* Ireland, p. 9; Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill, *The Annals of Ulster, to AD 1131*; Johnston, 'Mapping Literate Networks in Early Medieval Ireland', p. 197.

[63] Evans, *The Present and the Past in Medieval Irish Chronicles*, pp 67-72; Johnston, 'Mapping Literate Networks in Early Medieval Ireland', p. 198.

common source.[64] Unfortunately, Tigernach has several gaps in the record and it abbreviates or fails to preserve a great deal of ecclesiastical material from its original source.[65] However, it can be supplemented by *Chronicum Scotorum* to which it is very closely related.[66] Another important witness to the Clonmacnoise group is the Annals of Inisfallen which also incorporates unique sources from the Munster region.[67] The Clonmacnoise texts are clearly important. Indeed, McCarthy identifies the Clonmacnoise group as the key witness to the tradition as a whole. [68] He argues that the Iona Chronicle was continued not in Brega but in Moville from the 740's and then in Clonmacnoise from 752.[69] He has also questioned the consensus that identified 911 as the point in which the Chronicle of Ireland ends and argues that the Annals of Ulster is dependent on the Clonmacnoise Chronicle up to the mid-tenth century.[70] This has led to a re-examination of the chronicles and this has generally reaffirmed that the Chronicle underlies the Annals of Ulster and the Clonmacnoise group up until 911 and that the Annals of Ulster remains the best representative of the Chronicle.[71] However, Mc McCarthy's insights into the value of the Clonmacnoise chronicle group of texts has been an invaluable addition to the scholarship.

The final source which adds to this corpus of material is the Annals of the Four Masters compiled in the 1630's.[72] The aim of the Annals of the Four Masters was to 'produce a new version of Irish history, appropriate to the modern age'.[73] The pre-existing medieval annals provided its structural framework, even if its content was not confined to annalistic sources.[74] The Annals of the Four Masters

---

[64] Evans, *The Present and the Past in Medieval Irish Chronicles*, pp 50-57; Johnston, 'Mapping Literate Networks in Early Medieval Ireland', p. 198.

[65] Kathryn Grabowski and David Dumville (eds), *Chronicles and Annals of Mediaeval Ireland and Wales: The Clonmacnoise-Group Texts*, Studies in Celtic History 4 (Woodbridge, 1984), pp 163–4; Evans, *The Present and the Past*, pp 57–62.

[66] The relationship between CS and AT is not always clear but it is likely that they share a common source in the Clonmacnoise group of texts as argued by Evans, *The Present and the Past*, pp 50–57.

[67] Evans, *The Present and the Past*, pp 50-57; Johnston, 'Mapping Literate Networks in Early Medieval Ireland', p. 198.

[68] McCarthy, *The Irish Annals*, pp 168-197; Johnston, 'Mapping Literate Networks in Early Medieval Ireland', p. 198.

[69] McCarthy, *The Irish Annals*, pp 61-117; Johnston, 'Mapping Literate Networks in Early Medieval Ireland', p. 198.

[70] McCarthy, *The Irish Annals*, pp 168-197; Johnston, 'Mapping Literate Networks in Early Medieval Ireland', p. 198.

[71] Johnston, 'Mapping Literate Networks in Early Medieval Ireland', p. 198.

[72] Cunningham, *The Annals of the Four Masters*, p. 13.

[73] Cunningham, *The Annals of the Four Masters*, p. 39.

[74] Cunningham, *The Annals of the Four Masters*, p. 41.

drew on a broad range of sources while 'weaving together a new and comprehensive historical compilation, encompassing origin legends, genealogies of saints, and king lists' in a formal annalistic framework.[75] However, it generally did not invent new material and it provides valuable additional information, if used with care and an understanding of its early modern contexts. It is also worth noting that the compiler of the Annals of the Four Masters, Mícheál Ó Cléirigh, had access to better versions of the Annals of Ulster and the Clonmacnoise chronicle texts than now currently exist.[76]

As the Chronicle of Ireland, and its extant annals, encompasses such a large volume of records their use as sources in this dissertation is invaluable. The annals aid in establishing key political events and figures in a contemporary context, especially queens. The annals not only provide contemporary annual records of events, but they also provide clarity in terms of identifying the dates and names of individuals who appear in other sources such as genealogies and saints' Lives.[77] As has been evident with the legal sources, the instances in which queens are recorded is scarce, although the annals are, relatively speaking, richer in this specific area. They present a unique insight into how queens are recorded and suggest ways that their status might have changed over time. No other source provides as many references to actual historical queens as the annals. Although an obit recording a queen's death may appear short the information can be useful. This example from the Annals of Ulster has typical features:

> *Euginis filia Donnchada, regina regis Temorie, moritur.*
> Euginis daughter of Donnchad, queen of the king of Temair, dies. [78]

As can be seen the obit normally states the date the queen died and is sometimes followed by an identification of her father or husband. An obit can be deceiving but as will be argued in chapter 4, it can provide an abundance of information, especially focused on their genealogical links, marital status and role within society. Although concise, the information about the queen is highly significant.[79]

---

[75] Cunningham, *The Annals of the Four Masters*, pp 41-42.
[76] Cunningham, *The Annals of the Four Masters*, pp 46-49.
[77] Evans, *The Present and the Past in Medieval Irish Chronicles*, p. 1.
[78] *s.a.* AU 802.7.
[79] Oxenham, *Perceptions of Femininity in Early Irish Society*, p. 96.

The genealogical networks established can be compared and supplemented with other sources, allowing a wider societal framework to emerge. Thus, while legal sources relating to queens and status hint that they were regarded more highly in society then other women, the annals establish this far more clearly and explicitly. Moreover, the use of social network theory will help demonstrate that queens were central to high-status familial networks and marriage alliances, and this will be a central methodological approach in the fourth chapter.[80] The use of network theory will provide a visual analysis to expand and explain these connections.

2.4 Genealogical and related material

The Irish genealogies, which detail the descent of the principal dynasties and families of Gaelic, and later Anglo-Norman Ireland, are an invaluable source for the history of early medieval Ireland.[81] The medieval Irish genealogical corpus is the largest of its kind for any country in Europe and it has been argued that they began to be compiled as early as the late seventh century. The published corpus alone contains the names of about 12000 individuals, not including the materials in unpublished tracts, who flourished before the arrival of the Normans.[82] Genealogical material includes not only the pedigrees and kindreds traced back to a common ancestor, but also elements of king-lists and origin legends that depend upon genealogical content.[83] In fact, genealogical pedigrees feature across early Irish sources. The genealogies proper cover the

[80] Kenna, MacCarron, and MacCarron, *Maths Meets Myths: Quantitative Approaches to Ancient Narratives*.

[81] The most extensive edition of the Irish genealogies is M. A. O'Brien (ed.), *Corpus Genealogiarum Hiberniae* (Dublin, 1962). Also useful is Kuno Meyer (ed.), 'The Laud Genealogies and Tribal Histories', *Zeitschrift Für Celtische Philologie* 8 (1912), pp 291–338 as this particular set of genealogies appear to be early in the tradition. John Kelleher, 'The Pre-Norman Irish Genealogies', *Irish Historical Studies* 16, no. 62 (September, 1968), pp 138-153 is a valuable study; Ó Corráin, 'Creating the Past', pp 177-208 is an important consideration of the genealogies as an historical source; David E. Thornton, *Kings, Chronologies, and Genealogies: Studies in the Political History of Early Medieval Ireland and Wales* (Oxford, 2003) considers broader anthropological and comparative frameworks.

[82] Ó Corráin, 'Creating the Past', p. 180.

[83] Hughes, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 160. King lists are discussed in Kevin Murray, 'The Manuscript Tradition of *Baile Chuinn Chétchathaig* and its Relationship with *Baile in Scáil*' in *The Kingship and Landscape of Tara*, ed. Edel Bhreathnach (Dublin, 2005), pp 69–72; Edel Bhreathnach and Kevin Murray, '*Baile Chuinn Chétchathaig*: Edition' in *The Kingship and Landscape of Tara*, ed. Edel Bhreathnach (Dublin, 2005), pp 73–94. Origin legends are a complex area of research. For a recent re-evaluation see Lindy Brady, *Framing History in the British Isles: The Origin Legends of England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales* (Forthcoming 2022).

prehistoric/mythological period, proto-historic times and the historic period which begins about AD 550-600.[84] As a source they can be usefully cross-referenced with the annals as important individuals in the genealogies appear in both. Moreover, the extra detail provided by the pedigrees helps explain the inter-connections of dynastic groups and their role in early Irish political developments, enabling the analysis of social networks.[85]

There are challenges. Importantly, the Irish genealogies are almost entirely patrilineal and male-dominated; women generally feature only incidentally or because they are crucial in connecting kindreds.[86] As with the annals, the instances in which queens are mentioned is a small subset of the entire corpus. In terms of the information pertaining to women, the genealogies record mainly prehistoric marriage alliances linking dynasties.[87] However, it should be noted that a complete prosopography of women in Irish genealogies has not been yet completed. Even if this was confined to the published sources alone, it would be a great addition to the scholarship. The dissertation will navigate around this lacuna through focusing on key individuals, while acknowledging that this area remains incomplete. Thus, while the genealogies are complex and fascinating sources in their own right, they will primarily be used to supplement the annals for the purposes of this dissertation. For example, the name of a queen's father or husband can be cross-referenced with genealogies allowing the kinship network to be more firmly established. This approach will allow for a greater understanding to emerge of a queen's role in marriage.[88] As Thomas Charles-Edwards has shown, women alone could be members of two kindreds, the one they were born into and that of their husbands.[89] Therefore, a woman possesses the ties of her kindred from birth and her ties through her offspring, linking generations in a way that men did not.[90] Whereas men provided the main substance of lineage, women provided the connections between them.[91]

[84] Ó Corráin, 'Creating the Past', p. 180.

[85] A good example of this is found in the genealogies of the Osraige, where their political ambitions in Leinster are reflected in the way their prehistoric ancestry was portrayed. For a discussion, see Johnston, *Literacy and Identity*, pp 79-83.

[86] Charles-Edwards, *Early Irish and Welsh Kinship*, p. 86.

[87] Johnston, *Literacy and Identity*, p. 81.

[88] Charles- Edwards, *Early Irish and Welsh Kinship*, p. 87.

[89] Charles-Edwards, *Early Irish and Welsh Kinship*, p. 86.

[90] Charles- Edwards, *Early Irish and Welsh Kinship*, p. 86.

[91] Charles- Edwards, *Early Irish and Welsh Kinship*, p. 87.

Because of the elitist nature of Irish sources this can only be analysed theoretically through most of society. However, queens, named individuals whose family connections can be traced, provide concrete examples that allow theory and practice to be compared. Chapter 4 will demonstrate the previously under-appreciated centrality of queens in connecting dynasties and helping drive political alliances and events.

2.5 Queens in literature

Having looked at how queens are portrayed in legal and historical sources this thesis will also examine the representation of queens in vernacular literary sources.[92] The literary tales, like the historical and legal sources, reflect aspects of Irish society but not in a simple way. This dissertation will focus on the saga literature of narrative tales in particular, a literature that is very extensive.[93] Tales began to be written down from as early as the seventh century, although many texts are ninth century and later.[94] Dating can be made more difficult by the fact that tales were frequently reworked and adapted over time.[95] The most common questions regarding narrative literature relate to what extent are the tales and

[92] No footnote can do justice to the corpus of material on women in narrative literature, R.A. Breatnach, 'The Lady and the King a Theme of Irish literature', *An Irish Quarterly Review* 42, no. 167 (1953), pp 321-336; Muireann Ní Bhrolcháin 'Women in Early Irish Myths and Sagas', *The Crane Bag* 4, no. 1 (1980), pp 12-19; Proinsias Mac Cana, *The Learned Tales of Medieval Ireland* (Dublin, 1980); Myles Dillon, *Early Irish Literature* (Dublin, 1994); Muireann Ní Bhrolcháin, *An Introduction to Early Irish Literature*.

[93] Although dated, R. I. Best, *Bibliography of Irish Philology and Printed Irish Literature* (Dublin, 1913) and R. Baumgarten, *Bibliography of Irish Linguistics and Literature 1942–71* (Dublin, 1986) show the size of the literary tradition. See now Ó Corráin, *Clavis Litterarum Hibernensium*, pp 1235-1624. There are few modern book-length analyses. Prominent among them is Ní Bhrolcháin, *An Introduction to Early Irish Literature* is a monograph that focuses on a single tale. Demonstrating the complexity of the tradition is Ralph O'Connor, *The Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel: Kingship and Narrative Artistry in a Mediaeval Irish Saga* (Oxford, 2013). The most extensive study of women within the literature is Oxenham, *Perceptions of Femininity in Early Irish Society*.

[94] Johnston, *Literacy and Identity*, pp 131-56.

[95] See for example, the Old Irish saga *Longes Mac nUislenn* which had a long history, including as a source for significantly different reworkings. Vernam Hull (ed. and tr.), *Longes Mac n-Uislenn: The Exile of the Sons of Uisliu*, The Modern Language Association of America 16 (New York, 1949). Discussions include Caoimhín Mac Giolla Léith, 'From Saga to Folktale: 'The Deirdre Story' in Gaelic Tradition' in *Bryght Lanternis: Essays on the Literature of Medieval and Renaissance Scotland*, eds J. D. McClure and M. Spiller (Aberdeen, 1989), pp 405–19; Caoimhín Mac Giolla Léith '*Oidheadh Chloinne hUisneach*: The Transmission of a Gaelic Romance' in *Texte und Zeittiefe*, ed. Hildegard L. C. (Tübingen, 1994), pp 439–54; Elva Johnston, 'Kingship Made Real? Power and the Public World in *Longes Mac nUislenn*' in *Tome: Studies in Medieval Celtic History and Law in Honour of Thomas Charles-Edwards*, Studies in Celtic History 31, eds Fiona Edmond and Paul Russell (Woodbridge, 2011), pp 193–206.

sagas accurate in describing medieval Irish society? What roles are played by ideology and even entertainment, as many of these tales were aimed at a secular audience?[96] Who wrote them? The scholarly consensus for the latter important question is that they were largely composed and redacted by clerical authors but within the context of deep links with secular society and groups such as the *filid* who were also strongly connected with the composition and performance of narrative literature.[97] When it comes to examining queens, women and power, in general, the scholarly focus has often centred on two contrasting portrayals, the literary depiction of women encompassing power and the perception of women's lack of power in legal and historical sources.[98] However, it must be remembered that, as Oxenham points out, Irish vernacular literature centres on the extraordinary 'not the commonplace'.[99]

The specific texts that will be examined are part of a wider genre of literary sources, often classified into cycles, usually defined as the Historical, Ulster, Mythological and Fenian cycles, based upon their subject matter and shared lists of characters.[100] However, the division of these tales into cycles is a modern classification: the early medieval Irish tended to categorise tales according to subject matter and included genres such as cattle-raids, wooings and death tales.[101] Although the eras that these tales portray are rarely contemporary, they most likely reflect the social and political conditions of the period in which they were written. They are evidence for contemporary concerns rather than for the legendary or the mythological past.[102] Like the historical and legal materials, the literary sources provide an insight into the structure of society, including the

[96] Johnston, *Literacy and Identity*, pp 169-75.

[97] The connection between the *filid* and narrative literature is seen in a number of sources. A good starting point is Liam Breatnach (ed. and tr.), *Uraicecht Na Ríar: The Poetic Grades in Early Irish Law* (Dublin, 1987); see also John Carey, 'The Three Things Required of a Poet', *Ériu* 48 (1987), pp 41-58; questions of authorship are considered in detail in Johnston, *Literacy and Identity*, pp 131-56.

[98] Doris Edel, 'Early Irish Queens and Royal Power: A First Reconnaissance' in *Ogma: Essays in Celtic Studies in Honour of Próinséas Ní Chatháin*, eds Michael Richter and Jean-Michel Picard (Dublin, 2002), p. 1; Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, pp 68-69; Oxenham, *Perceptions of Femininity in Early Irish Society*, p. 83.

[99] Oxenham, *Perceptions of Femininity in Early Irish Society*, p. 84.

[100] Ní Bhrolcháin, *An Introduction to Early Irish Literature*.

[101] Mac Cana, *The Learned Tales of Medieval Ireland*, p. 21.

[102] K. H. Jackson, *The Oldest Irish Tradition: A Window on the Iron Age* (Cambridge, 1964) argued that the literature was archaic, but this is no longer accepted. See, for example, McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature* who influentially described the position of Jackson and others as 'nativist'.

position of queens. As already mentioned, in comparison with the historical and legal sources, their presence is more prominent and they are frequently among the main characters in a tale.[103] Queen Medb is probably the most famous example of this tendency, although she is in many ways atypical.[104] In particular, this thesis will look at the representation of queenship in the form of the so-called sovereignty figure, a concept which has already been touched on in the last chapter.[105] However, there are other areas of related interest: for example, these sources also feature the mothers of kings, especially in the contexts of the conceptions and births of famous rulers.[106] This compares well with the annals and genealogies, which also present women through their relationship to their male relatives or through marriage alliances. Moreover, this example shows that although differently expressed, assumptions are shared across genres.[107]

This is also the case with the so-called king-lists, a genre of texts that sometimes combines the structure of genealogies with the narrative of sagas, although the narrative element is often simplified or abbreviated.[108] For the purpose of this dissertation, the king-lists will be used to further explore named kings and queens of early medieval Ireland and analyse their relationships. For instance, the king-list known as *Baile Chuinn Chétchathaig* (Conn Cétchathach's prophecy/frenzy), presents a highly coded and composite text which contains the earliest extant king-list of Tara, dating to the seventh century.[109] The kings listed in *Baile Chuinn Chétchathaig* comprise of three broad categories, prehistoric and pseudohistorical kings, proto-historical kings and historical kings.[110] Aside from the text being a form of political propaganda it also reveals some contemporary

[103] Ní Bhrolcháin, 'Women in Early Irish Myths and Sagas', p. 12.

[104] Patricia Kelly, 'The *Táin* as Literature' in *Aspects of the Táin*, ed. James P Mallory (Belfast, 1992), pp 69–102.

[105] Mac Cana 'Aspects of the Theme of King and Goddess in Irish Literature', p. 76; Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Tales of Three Gormlaiths in Medieval Irish Literature', pp 1-24; Toner, *Manifestations of Sovereignty in Medieval Ireland*, p. 1.

[106] Ní Bhrolcháin, 'Women in Early Irish Myths and Sagas', p. 12.

[107] James Doan, 'Sovereignty Aspects and the Role of Women in Medieval Irish and Welsh Society', *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium* 5 (1985), p. 90.

[108] Bhreathnach and Murray, '*Baile Chuinn Chétchathaig*', pp 73–94.

[109] Rudolf Thurneysen (ed.), *Zu irischen Handschriften und Litteraturdenkmälern [I]*, Abhandlungen der königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen, Philologisch-Historische Klasse 14.2, (Berlin, 1912); Edel Bhreathnach, '*Níell Cáich Úa Néill Nasctar Géill*: The Political Context of *Baile Chuinn Chétchathaig*' in *The Kingship and Landscape of Tara*, ed. Edel Bhreathnach (Dublin, 2005), pp 49–68; Bhreathnach and Murray, '*Baile Chuinn Chétchathaig*', pp 73–94.

[110] Bhreathnach, '*Níell Cáich Úa Néill Nasctar Géill*', p. 50.

literary ideas about the kingship of Tara.[111] It provides insights into the survival of early beliefs concerning the kings drinking the ale or drink of sovereignty to legitimise his kingship, a topic which will be examined in greater detail in following chapters and which is related to the narrative literature of the sovereignty figure. The genre further developed in texts such as *Baile in Scáil* (The Phantoms Frenzy), an eleventh-century production that forms part of a group of tales which contains a vision or a visit to the Otherworld.[112] The text purports to be a prophecy recited by an Otherworld phantom in the presence of Conn Cétchathach, king of Tara, detailing all the future kings of Tara that would descend from him.[113]

Those connections between genres will be the focus of chapter 5, which will interrogate literary texts in more detail. As the foregoing has demonstrated early Irish sources were highly intertextual and to understand one requires an appreciation of its relationship to others.

2.6 Hagiography

Vernacular sagas, and related texts, are not the only informative narrative sources that can be drawn upon by the researcher; hagiography is another.[114] As a source hagiography is a form of narrative literature that consists of the sacred biography of saints, stressing their holy way of life and the 'supernatural phenomena which attended it'.[115] It was one of the major genres of Christian writing: in Ireland, it developed into significant literatures in both Irish and Hiberno-Latin, encompassing saints' Lives, miracle anecdotes, hymns,

[111] Edel Bhreathnach, 'Introduction' in *The Kingship and Landscape of Tara*, ed. Edel Bhreathnach (Dublin, 2005), p. x.

[112] Kevin Murray (ed. and tr.), *Baile in Scáil: 'The Phantom's Frenzy'* (London, 2004).

[113] Murray, 'The Manuscript Tradition of *Baile Chuinn Chétchathaig* and its Relationship with *Baile in Scáil*', pp 69–72.

[114] For an introduction to the study of saints and hagiography Hippolyte Delehaye, *Les Légends Hagiographiques* (Brussels, 1905); Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago, 1981); Richard Sharpe, *Medieval Irish Saints' Lives: An Introduction to Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae* (Oxford, 1991); Felice Lifshitz, 'Beyond Positivism and Genre: 'Hagiographical' Texts as Genre', *Viator: Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 25 (1994), pp 95–113; Thomas Heffernan, *Sacred Biography: Saints and their Biographers in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1998); Aviad Kleinberg, *Flesh Made Word: Saints' Stories and the Western Imagination* (Harvard, 2008); Robert Bartlett, *How Can the Dead Do Such Great Things? Saints and Worshippers from the Martyrs to the Reformation* (Princeton, 2013); James T. Palmer, *Early Medieval Hagiography* (Amsterdam, 2018).

[115] Hughes, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 219; Bartlett, *How Can the Dead Do Such Great Things? Saints and Worshippers from the Martyrs to the Reformation*, p. 564.

martyrologies and the genealogies of saints.[116] The tradition of hagiography was in place in Ireland by the seventh century, initially composed primarily in Latin and making use of Continental exemplars.[117] Over time it developed into a major genre of vernacular literature and had a creative relationship with the entirety of the Irish language narrative tradition.[118] However, as a source Elizabeth Dawson explains that 'hagiographical texts are not truly historical in conception' as the author was not concerned with chronology or establishing and examining evidence.[119] They are however 'historicist in practice, as it was the aim of the authors to preserve the stories and traditions of their Christian communities'.[120] Therefore, the examination of hagiography will be useful in providing both an insight into society and the contemporary issues of concern when considered alongside other sources.[121] The stories about saints reflected back onto the society that produced them.

The focus of this thesis will centre on the portrayal of queens in the Patrician and Brigidine texts, particularly the Hiberno-Latin *vitae* of the seventh century.[122] These have been chosen as they are datable and can be

---

[116] Sharpe, *Medieval Irish Saints' Lives* is an important introduction to the Hiberno-Latin tradition; the vernacular *bethada* (Lives) have not received the same level of attention as a group but there are many individual studies such as Sarah Waidler, 'Sanctity and Intertextuality in Medieval Munster: The Unusual Life of St Findchú of Brí Gobann', *Peritia* 30 (2019), pp 215-34; the fullest study of the martyrological tradition can be found in Pádraig Ó Riain, *Feastdays of the Saints: A History of Irish Martyrologies* (Brussels, 2006); see also Ó Riain, *A Dictionary of Irish Saints* (Dublin, 2011).

[117] Bartlett, *How Can the Dead Do Such Great Things? Saints and Worshippers from the Martyrs to the Reformation*, p. 50.

[118] Johnston *Literacy and Identity*, pp 53-58, places this within the broader context of the growth of the use of vernacular in many different genres.

[119] Hughes, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 219; Elizabeth Dawson, 'Seeing the Face of God: An Example of Conversion in the Seventh-Century Patrician Lives' in *Treasures of Irish Christianity: People and Places, Images and Texts*, eds Salvador Ryan and Brendan Leahy (Dublin, 2012), p. 37.

[120] Hughes, *Early Christian* Ireland, p. 219; Dawson, 'Seeing the Face of God: An Example of Conversion in the Seventh-Century Patrician Lives', p. 37.

[121] Hughes, *Early Christian* Ireland, p. 219; Bartlett, *How Can the Dead Do Such Great Things? Saints and Worshippers from the Martyrs to the Reformation*, pp 219-220.

[122] For primary hagiography sources on Saint Patrick see Whitley Stokes, (ed. and tr.), *The Tripartite Life of Patrick with Other Documents Relating to that Saint*, (London, 1887); Ludwig Bieler (ed.), *Four Latin Lives of St. Patrick: Colgan's Vita Secunda, Quarta, Tertia, and Quinta*, SLH Vol. 8 (Dublin, 1971); Ludwig Bieler (ed. and tr.) *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh*, SLH, Vol. 10 (Dublin, 1979); David Howlett (ed.), *Muirchú Moccu Macthéni's 'Vita Sancti Patricii' Life of Saint Patrick*, (Dublin, 2006). For primary hagiography sources on Saint Brigit see Sean Connolly and J.M. Picard (tr), 'Cogitosus' Life of St. Brigit: Content and Value', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 117 (1987), pp 5–27; Sean Connolly (tr.), '*Vita Prima Sanctae Brigitae*: Background and Historical Value', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 119 (1989), pp 5–49; D.N Kissane, '*Vita Metrica Sanctae Brigitae*: A Critical Edition with Introduction, Commentary and Indexes', *PRIA* 77 C (1977), pp 57–192.

contextualised, especially in relationship with the legal material, with which they overlap in time of composition.[123] The thesis will look at four texts in particular: the *Vita S. Brigitae* of Cogitosus, dating to the second half of the seventh century,[124] and the related Life of Brigit, known as the *Vita Prima*, which probably dates to a century later,[125] Bishop Tírechán's so-called *Collectanea* of Patrick, and Muirchú's *Vita Sancti Patricii*, both written in the last decades of the seventh century, with Tírechán being the earlier of the two authors.[126] These texts show their saints interacting with kings, queens and royal women, providing early narrative evidence for their portrayal and their expected roles within society. While women appear frequently in the Lives, queens make only a handful of appearances, but these are significant ones and allow for an examination of them as a distinct group, rather than simply as a subset of other women in the Lives.[127] Furthermore, hagiographical texts incorporate specific and explicit Christian attitudes towards gender, allowing for a particularly clear chance to examine the ecclesiastical viewpoint surrounding queens and women in medieval Irish society.[128] One striking area of concern is the portrayal of the part played by royal women in conversion to Christianity, especially the memorable story of the

[123] Breatnach, 'The Early Irish Law Text *Senchas Már*', argues for a direct connection between Armagh's claim of primacy through St Patrick with the compilation of early Irish law, which also embeds Patrician claims.

[124] Connolly and Picard, 'Cogitosus' Life of St Brigit': Content and Value', pp 5–27; Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, gives a date of not earlier than 675, based on the arguments for primacy claimed in the text.

[125] Connolly, 'Vita Prima Sanctae Brigitae: Background and Historical Value', pp 5–49. There is a debate surrounding the dating of the *Vita Prima.* Richard Sharpe has argued the Life dates to the middle of the seventh century, Richard Sharpe, '*Vitae S Brigidae*: The Oldest Texts', *Peritia* 1 (1982), pp 81–106. This has also been argued by other scholars such as David Howlett, '*Vita I Sanctae Brigitae*', *Peritia* 12 (1998), pp 1–23; Daniel P Mc Carthy, 'Topographical Characteristics of the *Vita Prima* and *Vita Cogitosi Sanctae Brigitae*', *Studia Celtica* 35 (2001), pp 245–270. However other scholars date the Life to the eight century. Kim McCone, 'Brigit in the Seventh Century: A Saint with Three Lives?', *Peritia* 1 (1982), pp 107–145; Connolly and Picard 'Cogitosus' Life of St Brigit: Content and Value', pp 5–27.

[126] Bieler, *Four Latin Lives of St. Patrick: Colgan's Vita Secunda, Quarta, Tertia, and Quinta*; Bieler, *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh*; for dating see Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, pp 438-40.

[127] Lisa Bitel, 'Women's Monastic Enclosures in Early Ireland: A Study of Female Spirituality and Male Monastic Mentalities', *Journal of Medieval History* 12 (1986), pp 15–36; Elva Johnston, 'Transforming Women in Irish Hagiography', *Peritia* 9 (1995), pp 197–220; Elva Johnston, 'Powerful Women or Patriarchal Weapons? Two Medieval Irish Saints', *Peritia* 15 (2001), pp 302–310; Oxenham, *Perceptions of Femininity in Early Irish Society*, p. 13; Elva Johnston, 'The 'Pagan' and 'Christian' Identities of the Irish Female Saint' in *Celts and Christians: New Approaches to the Religious Traditions of Britain and Ireland*, ed. M. Atherton (Cardiff, 2002), pp 60–78.

[128] Hughes, *Early Christian* Ireland, pp 217-447; Johnston, 'Powerful Women or Patriarchal Weapons'; Bitel, 'Women's Monastic Enclosures in Early Ireland: A Study of Female Spirituality and Male Monastic Mentalities'.

daughters of king Loíguire mac Néill in Tírechán.[129] This will be compared in chapter 6 to the portrayal of queens and their roles in conversion in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*.[130] As a whole, hagiography offers valuable insights. However, as the material is more limited in scope, it will be discussed at various points in the thesis, alongside other relevant sources, rather than receiving a chapter in its own right.

2.7 Women, Queens and Material Culture

Up to this point, the emphasis has been on textual evidence; however it is also important to consider the contexts of material evidence.[131] These include burials and material objects such as textiles.[132] However, availability of research relating to the material culture of kingship is much more comprehensive then than that of queens and it is extremely difficult to locate them within specific material contexts.[133] As a result, like the hagiographical evidence, material culture will be referenced when appropriate to the dissertation rather than being discussed in a specific chapter. However, it is worth touching on two areas, burial evidence and textiles, in more detail at this point. Female burials can be identified in the archaeological record and textile production was an area in which women were

[129] Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 26.1-21 (Bieler, *The Patrician Texts*, pp 142-4 (text), pp 143-5 (translation); Elizabeth O'Brien and Edel Bhreathnach, 'Irish Boundary *Ferta*, their Physical Manifestation and Historical Context' in *Tome: Studies in Medieval Celtic History and Law in Honour of Thomas Charles-Edwards*, eds Fiona Edmonds and Paul Russell (Woodbridge, 2011), p. 55; Dawson, 'Seeing the Face of God: An Example of Conversion in the Seventh-Century Patrician Lives', pp 37-39.

[130] Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (eds and trans), *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Oxford, 1969).

[131] Key introductions to the archaeology are Nancy Edwards (ed.), *The Archaeology of the Early Medieval Celtic Churches: Proceedings of a Conference on the Archaeology of the Early Medieval Celtic Churches, September 2004*, The Society for Medieval Archaeology Monographs 29 (London, 2009) and O'Sullivan, *Early Medieval Ireland, AD 400-1100: The Evidence from Archaeological Excavations*. For the importance of material evidence as a marker of aristocratic culture see: Niamh Whitfield, 'The Tara' Brooch: An Irish Emblem of Status in its European Context' in *From Ireland Coming: Irish Art from the Early Christian to the Late Gothic Period and Its European Context*, ed. Colum Hourihane (Princeton, 2001), pp 211-247. Much of the evidence, however, cannot be specifically linked to queens.

[132] For an introduction to burials see O'Brien and Bhreathnach, 'Irish Boundary *Ferta*, their Physical Manifestation and Historical Context'; Elizabeth O'Brien, *Mapping Death: Burial in Late Iron Age and Early Medieval Ireland* (Dublin, 2020). For a consideration of textiles and their appearance in early Irish tales see: Niamh Whitfield, 'Aristocratic Display in Early Medieval Ireland in Fact and Fiction: The Dazzling White Tunic and Purple Cloak' *Peritia* 27 (2016), pp 159-188.

[133] Elizabeth FitzPatrick, 'Royal Inauguration Mounds in Medieval Ireland: Antique Landscape and Tradition' in *Assembly Places and Practices in Medieval Europe*, eds Aliki Pantos and Sarah Semple (Dublin, 2004), pp 44–72; Elizabeth FitzPatrick, 'Assembly Places and Elite Collective Identities in Medieval Ireland', *Journal Of The North Atlantic* 8 (2015), pp 52-68.

heavily involved.[134] For example, this involvement is recognised in *Cáin Lánamna* where women receive recognition on the division of textiles following a divorce.[135] A further example is the episode concerning the nun Cummen, contained in the *Additamenta* of the Book of Armagh. Cummen is involved in a series of property transactions that ultimately benefitted Armagh, ensuring that they were recorded. The first of these involves Cummen making a mantle, which she then sells for profit.[136]

Both written and archaeological evidence is scarce when it comes to queens' burial practices. The most relevant examples are arguably *fertae*, ancestral graves that were important markers in the landscape, especially before the eighth century.[137] The importance of the *ferta* is emphasised in Bishop Tírechán's account of the conversion of the daughters of Loíguire mac Néill, king of Tara, by Saint Patrick.[138] The girls convert, and they die upon receiving the Eucharist and are described as having been buried 'beside a well' in a 'round ditch in the manner of a *ferta* because that is what the pagan Irish used to do'.[139] This has been connected by Elizabeth O'Brien with the use of women as central nodes in burial among the ancestors, a practice that eventually gave way to burial at ecclesiastical sites at the end of the eighth century.[140] Tírechán may well be commenting on a living tradition, where aristocratic women provided these central burials, connecting kindreds in death as in life.

Royal women continued to be honoured. For example in the Annals of the Four Masters, there is a reference to a queen upon her death being interred:

> *Flann, inghen Dúnghaile, ben Máil Sechlainn, mic Maol Ruanaidh, rí Ereann, & ba h-isidhe mathair Fhloinn Sionna, d'ég iar n-deigh-*

[134] O'Brien, *Mapping Death*, pp 182–95. I would like to thank my colleague Dolores Kearney in UCD for providing me with data on gender and textile production in early medieval Ireland.

[135] CL 16; CIH 502.7-519.35.

[136] *The Additamenta*, 11.4 (Bieler, *The Patrician Texts*, p. 174 (text), p. 175 (translation); For a recent study of the legal role of the *Additamenta*, see Andrew Rabin, 'Preventive Law in Early Ireland. Rereading the *Additamenta* in the Book of Armagh', *North American Journal of Celtic Studies* 2:1 (2018), pp 37–55.

[137] O'Brien and Bhreathnach, 'Irish Boundary *Ferta*, their Physical Manifestation and Historical Context', pp 53–64.

[138] Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 26.1-21 (Bieler, *The Patrician Texts*, pp 142-4 (text), pp 143-5 (translation); Bhreathnach, *Ireland in the Medieval World AD 400-1000*, p. 145.

[139] Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 26.1-21 (Bieler, *The Patrician Texts*, pp 142-4 (text), pp 143-5 (translation); Dawson, 'Seeing the Face of God: An Example of Conversion in the Seventh-Century Patrician Lives' p. 39.

[140] O'Brien, *Mapping Death*, pp 62-84.

> *bhethaidh, & iar b-pennainn h-i c-Cluain Mic Nóis, & a h-adhnacal h-i suidhe.*
> Flann, daughter of Dúngal, wife of Máel Sechlainn, son of Máel Ruain, King of Ireland, and who was the mother of Flann Sinna, died after a good life, and after penance at Cluain Mic Nóis, and she was there interred.[141]

Instead of burial in a *ferta*, Flann or Lann's (the two forms of her name are interchangeable) grave is in an ecclesiastical space, but it seems to hold some significance. However, this short entry is in contrast with Frankish sources where a queen's death and burial are recorded in more detail. Usually following a procession and funeral they are buried either with their husband or in a religious foundation of a royal family or a monastery which the queen herself founded and had retired to after marriage.[142] The difference here may well be simply a matter of the sources and what they prioritise for detailed accounts.

Irish queens were distinguished in life as well as death, from other women. In early Irish society what someone wore tells us a great deal about their position in society. Examining the dress and the equipment described in Irish sources is made difficult by the fact that, unlike the English, Merovingians and Carolingians, they did not bury their dead with rich grave goods; simple extended inhumation was the norm and grave goods are either non-existent or limited.[143] However, there are other ways that can aid in analysis, as textile types can be determined from descriptions in early Irish sources, something which will be explored in more detail in chapter 5 for, as Niamh Whitfield has demonstrated, early Irish aristocratic culture was highly textile conscious with defined gender and social differences.[144]

Although not much survives, the equipment used in processing the textiles is available for examination.[145] Moreover, embroidery is associated in a number of texts with aristocratic women. The law tract *Bretha im Ḟuillema Gell*, as already mentioned, discusses how 'the woman who embroiders earns more profit even

---

[141] *s.a*. AFM 886.

[142] Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, pp 188-190.

[143] Whitfield, 'Aristocratic Display in Early Medieval Ireland in Fact and Fiction', pp 159-160; see also, O'Brien, *Mapping Death*, pp 49-102; 103–31 (limited evidence of grave goods).

[144] Whitfield, 'Aristocratic Display in Early Medieval Ireland in Fact and Fiction', pp 159-160.

[145] Edwards, *The Archaeology of Early Medieval Ireland*, p. 81.

than queens'.[146] The law tract examines pledge interests, items of value given by their owners in a deposit to guarantee a legal obligation is fulfilled.[147] Embroidery was seen as being highly valued. It is difficult to distinguish queens through material culture but there are areas which offer very useful insights. In particular, the burial place of a queen may reflect her high status in society. Furthermore, the association between aristocratic women and embroidery shows that this was a skill that was highly valued and socially important.

2.8 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to examine the range of representations of queens in an array of early Irish sources, including, legal materials, chronicles, genealogies, literary narratives, hagiography and material culture. As was demonstrated in the chapter the most obviously historical sources, the annals and genealogies, presented queens as defined by their male counterparts in a male dominated society, a domination reflected in the politics of the chronicles and in the patrilines of the genealogies. Throughout, queens are relatively rarely mentioned, although the chronicles provide a particularly valuable source. However it is also hinted in the law tracts that queens were regarded as having an elevated status compared to other women in society; again direct references are rare, but they are also telling. The literary sources, on the other hand, presented some contrasts, with royal women featuring as major characters. Yet, when examined more closely, it can be seen that the broadly patriarchal bias of the other sources is present. Moreover what is clear is that no matter the source, marriage plays a central factor in the depiction of queens, and this will be explored in different contexts in each chapter. Given that the vast majority of the surviving sources were written by men, mainly in ecclesiastical contexts, this is not a huge surprise. However, there are nuances, some of which are picked up in the material culture of burials as well as in the association of royal women with ornate jewellery and embroidery, which reflects markers of status in early Irish society. As was addressed at the beginning of the chapter, there is no one source which provides a clear picture as to what being a queen entailed. Therefore, it has been

[146] CIH 462.19-477.30; Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, p. 78.

[147] Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, p. 164; Oxenham, *Perceptions of Femininity in Early Irish Society*, p. 59

necessary to examine them broadly while also acknowledging that each has its own aims and objectives.

Chapter 3

The Queen in Society

3.1 Introduction

Having examined a multitude of sources in the previous chapter, a picture emerges of early Irish society as one in which status was a determining factor in how both the law, and society more generally, were structured. While law tracts are relatively quiet in the treatment of queens, as outlined in the last chapter, that does not mean they are absent in society and this chapter will focus on their role, using a range of material, but grounding it in the social world of the early medieval Irish law tracts. Significantly, although queens are not explicitly mentioned in law tracts, when they do feature it is clear they are treated as having a higher standing in society compared to other women. This is partly due to the status of their male relatives or husbands. For example, *Críth Gablach*, which describes the noble and non-noble grades of Irish society and gives information regarding honour prices in terms of status and hierarchy, states that a man's wife, son or daughter is normally entitled to half his honour price.[1] Applied to queens, this gives them a relatively higher status than other women, especially, as will be argued in this thesis, because they formed part of an elite societal group and are the type of women to whom marriage of social equals applied.[2] A queen was likely to be the daughter of a king, meaning her honour price was half that of her father, a king. The king held the highest social grade in the law tracts and was aligned with a bishop and the top ranking of the *filid*, the *ollam*.[3] Thus, while this chapter will

[1] CIH 779.7-8; CIH 563.1-570.32, 777.6-783.38; Binchy, 'Críth Gablach', §125-127; Charles-Edwards, '*Críth Gablach* and the Law of Status', pp 53–73; Oxenham, *Perceptions of Femininity in Early Irish Society*, pp 98-99.

[2] This is the *lánamnas comthinchuir* discussed by Ó Corráin, 'Women in Early Irish Society', p. 2; Ó Corráin, 'Marriage in Early Ireland', p. 7; Ó Corráin, 'Women and the Law in Early Ireland', p. 47; Eska, *Cáin Lánamna*, p. 69.

[3] Power, 'Classes of Women Described in the *Senchas Már*', pp 81-108; Binchy, 'The Legal Capacity of Women in Regard to Contracts', pp 207-234; Ó Corráin, 'Women in Early Irish Society', pp 1-14; Ó Corráin, 'Marriage in Early Ireland', pp 5-24; Ó Corráin, 'Women and the Law in Early Ireland', pp 45–57; Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*; Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession*; for the status of the *filid* see Liam Breatnach, 'Part 1', in *Uraicecht Na Ríar: The Poetic Grades in Early Irish Law*, ed. and tr. Liam Breatnach (Dublin, 1987), pp 20-57; an overview is provided in Johnston, *Literacy and Identity*, pp 134-44.

focus on the queen in society, it will pay particular attention to the degree to which her status was determined by family connections or marriage, a theme that will also be explored more deeply in relationship to the reach of women's familial networks in the next chapter.

To begin with, an examination of Irish marriage laws and practices will form the foundation of an analysis that will enable us to envision the world of royal marriages. The focus will be on how queens fit into royal marriage practices by extrapolating from what is known about marriage in general, combined with an understanding of the importance of relative status. In addition, this chapter will also address whether a woman of high status could, through marrying a king, obtain the title and status of a queen. Furthermore, these contexts will set a foundation for chapter 4 which will more closely examine elite marriage alliances. The examination of royal marriage will also encompass the supposed practice of polygyny, whose application to early medieval Ireland was long accepted as a scholarly consensus but has been recently challenged.[4] This examination will also address the prevalence of divorce. To what extent did the widespread availability of divorce facilitate marriage alliances among the elite and how did it impact upon queens? Could the reputation of individual queens be affected or was serial marriage so commonplace as to rarely merit a remark? Throughout, questions will be addressed relating to the influence of the Church on marriage, a theme that will also act as a foundation for chapter 6 where Frankish and English practices will be analysed and compared with some of the conclusions that will emerge from the material here. Once a queen's position and standing in society has been established the chapter will ask questions about where queens stood in relation to the institution of kingship. For example, to what degree were they associated with succession and regency practices? This will be followed by examining how queens were perceived in society through a different type of source, material culture. The chapter will determine the degree to which the laws regarding status and marriage are practiced and observed in society. This will be

[4] Ó Corráin, 'Women in Early Irish Society', p. 4, Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, p. 70 and Jaski, 'Marriage Laws in Ireland and the Continent in the Early Middle Ages', pp 33-41 give the general position; Liam Breatnach, 'On Old Irish Collective and Abstract Nouns, the Meaning of *Cétmuinter*, and Marriage in Early Mediaeval Ireland', *Ériu* 66 (2016), pp 1-29 challenges the consensus by arguing that *cétmuinter* (primary spouse) should be translated bilaterally and within context.

done to establish the extent to which queens obtained greater status and prestige and how a queen's status was recognised in society.

3.2 Royal marriage in Ireland

Cáin Lánamna 'Law of Full Pairs' is the main legal tract that deals with Irish marriage laws and licit sexual relationships that were considered important for regulating reproduction. As a tract, it is located in the first third of the *Senchas Mar*.[5] Indeed, it is the single most important source for marriage and divorce in early medieval Ireland and has been dated to c. 700 AD.[6] *Cáin Lánamna* focuses on the movement of property, rather than questions of morality, and is mainly concerned with the division of a couple's assets should they divorce. The law tract also provides an insight into the types of familial pairings that were expected.[7] It should be noted that while it is a useful shorthand to describe these as types of marriage, the term *lánamnas* is not an exact equivalent. In context, it refers to a recognised sexual pairing, the most important of which were for the purposes of reproduction.[8] These are detailed enough to help extrapolate how they shaped aristocratic marriage and, in this case, the forms of *lánamnas* used do map onto marriage and this will be the term used through the rest of the chapter. While it is clear that divorce and remarriage was a common and socially important practice it did not fit into the clerical ideal of a lifelong monogamous commitment. The *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis* presents a different picture of marriage from the perspective of canon law. The *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis* c.716-25 was one of the earliest attempts at a systematic collection of canon law and draws on a variety of biblical and patristic writings.[9] It is divided into 67 books

[5] CIH 502.29-519.35; Ó Corráin, Breatnach and Breen, 'The Laws of the Irish', p. 420; Jaski, 'Marriage Laws in Ireland and the Continent in the Early Middle Ages', p. 18; Thurneysen 'Cáin Lánamna', pp 1–80. Good introductions to the marriage laws are Ó Corráin, 'Women in Early Irish Society', pp 1-14; Ó Corráin, 'Marriage in Early Ireland', pp 5-24; Ó Corráin, 'Women and the Law in Early Ireland', pp 45–57; Jaski, 'Marriage Laws in Ireland and the Continent in the Early Middle Ages', pp 16-42; Eska, *Cáin Lánamna*.

[6] CIH 502.29-519.35; Ó Corráin, 'Early Medieval Law, *c*. 700–1200', p. 22; Eska, *Cáin Lánamna*, p. 62.

[7] CIH 502.29-519.35; Eska, *Cáin Lánamna*, p. 1.

[8] See, for example, eDIL, 'Lánamnas' http://www.dil.ie/29549, especially meaning (a).

[9] There are two major editions of this text. Hermann Wassershleben (ed.), *Die Irische Kanonsammlung* (Leipzig, 1874) has long been the standard edition. Recently, Roy Flechner (ed.), *The Hibernensis, Volume 1: A Study and Edition*, Studies in Medieval and Early Modern Canon Law (Washington, D.C, 2019) and Roy Flechner (tr.), *The Hibernensis, Volume 2: Translation, Commentary, and Indexes*, Studies in Medieval and Early Modern Canon Law,

with books 45 and 46 relevant to marriage, covering a range of topics from marriage, adultery, divorce, polygyny and concubinage.[10] The rationale of the book on marriage is moral rather than legal, as would be expected given its sources.[11] It has a 'considerable secular dimension', but as Tatsuki has argued its 'treatment of topics is not detailed or practical enough to be used in actual lawsuits', which contrasts with the legalistic focus of *Cáin Lánamna* and other early Irish law tracts.[12] Thus, while *Cáin Lánamna* and the *Hibernensis* are contemporary, one is more secular, the other religious.[13] It could be argued that one was a clerical ideal and the other a social reality.[14] Of the two, *Cáin Lánamna* is much more closely aligned with what other sources suggest about marital practice and, as a result, will be the main source. For example, its expectations that divorce was commonplace is amply borne out by the behaviour of the Irish elites where they can be traced through annals and genealogies. This suggests that there were important practical limitations to the reach of idealised Christian marriage.

Cáin Lánamna distinguishes between three main types of valid relationships or marriage, *airnaidm* (betrothal), *aititiu* (acceptance or acknowledgement), and *foxal* (abduction).[15] It divides the *airnaidm* (betrothal) into three categories: firstly, *lánamnas comthinchuir,* 'marriage of common contribution', marriage in which both parties contribute equally to the common marital property; secondly, *lánamnas for ferthinchur*, 'marriage on man-contribution', an arrangement by which the majority of the marriage goods are contributed by the man; and thirdly, *lánamnas for bantinchur*, 'marriage on woman contribution', a marriage to which the woman brings the majority of the

(Washington, D.C, 2019), has produced an accessible edition and translation. There is a large commentary on the text and its significance. See for instance, Luned Davis, 'Isidorian Texts and the *Hibernensis*', *Peritia* 11 (1997), pp 207–49; Thomas Charles-Edwards, 'The Construction of the *Hibernensis*', *Peritia* 12 (1998), pp 209–37. The canons on marriage, specifically, are the focus of Thomas O'Loughlin, 'Marriage and Sexuality in the *Hibernensis*', *Peritia* 11 (1997), pp 188-206.

[10] Akiko Tatsuki, 'The Early Irish Church and Marriage: An Analysis of the Hibernensis' *Peritia* 15 (2001), pp 198-199.

[11] Tatsuki, 'The Early Irish Church and Marriage', p. 201.

[12] Tatsuki, 'The Early Irish Church and Marriage', p. 207.

[13] Tatsuki, 'The Early Irish Church and Marriage', p. 196.

[14] Tatsuki, 'The Early Irish Church and Marriage', p. 201; Eska, *Cáin Lánamna,* p. 23.

[15] CIH 502.29-519.35; Jaski, 'Marriage Laws in Ireland and the Continent in the Early Middle Ages', p. 20; Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession*, pp 143-155; Eska, *Cáin Lánamna*, pp 13-18.

property.[16] While the marriage of *lánamnas for ferthinchur* has been interpreted as representing the oldest form of marriage the consensus is that by the end of the seventh century the common form of marriage among the elite was *lánamnas comthinchuir*.[17] *Lánamnas comthinchuir* stipulated that both parties provide equal contribution to the marriage-property and that it must also be a marriage between those of the same social class.[18] Its stipulations around property holding pre-supposes that those practicing it are from the land-owning classes and while these were broader than the aristocracy, they were in the best position to avail of it. Moreover, as will be seen in the next chapter, the annals and genealogies provide evidence that kings most often married women who were the daughters of kings, mirroring the social expectations of *lánamnas comthinchuir*. This suggests that Ó Corráin was correct to identify it as the favoured form of marriage among aristocratic families, including those of kings.[19] This will be a point of comparison with Frankish marriage patterns, which will be discussed later in the dissertation.[20]

Marriages in medieval Ireland were contractual arrangements with varying levels of involvement from the kindred. [21] In this context, the most formal type of marriage contract was that of *airnaidm* (betrothal).[22] It is through this contractual arrangement that a woman could obtain her own private property, especially among the elite.[23] The process involved a man providing a *coibche* (bride-price) to the woman's father, or whichever kinsmen was legally responsible for her, in front of witnesses.[24] The term *coibche* first meant 'contract', then 'marriage contract'.[25] Thurneysen argues that originally the payment was given by the

[16] CIH 502.29-519.35; Ó Corráin, 'Women in Early Irish Society', pp 2-4; Ó Corráin, 'Marriage in Early Ireland', p. 6; Ó Corráin, 'Women and the Law in Early Ireland', pp 46-48; Jaski, 'Marriage Laws in Ireland and the Continent in the Early Middle Ages', p. 20; Eska, *Cáin Lánamna*, p. 73.

[17] CIH 502.29-519.35; Binchy, 'Legal Capacity of Women', p. 210; Ó Corráin, 'Women in Early Irish Society', p. 3; Jaski, 'Marriage Laws in Ireland and the Continent in the Early Middle Ages', p. 22.

[18] CIH 502.29-519.35; Ó Corráin, 'Women and the Law in Early Ireland', p. 47.

[19] Ó Corráin, 'Marriage in Early Ireland', pp 6-7.

[20] See Chapter 6, section 6.2.

[21] CIH 502.29-519.35; Eska, *Cáin Lánamna*, p. 14.

[22] CIH 502.29-519.35; Ó Corráin, 'Women and the Law in Early Ireland', p. 47.

[23] CIH 502.29-519.35; Jaski, 'Marriage Laws in Ireland and the Continent in the Early Middle Ages', p. 23.

[24] CIH 502.29-519.35; Ó Corráin, 'Women and the Law in Early Ireland', p. 47; Eska, *Cáin Lánamna*, p. 14.

[25] CIH 502.29-519.35; Ó Corráin, 'Marriage in Early Ireland', p. 15.

husband to the wife's father, then it became either part of the common marital property or wife's property before becoming to refer to the wife's own property given to her by her father/head of family as a dowry.[26] In the case of *lánamnas comthinchuir* the bride's father kept a percentage of it, which was based on the number of times she had been married as for each successive marriage, his percentage decreased. For a woman's first marriage, her father kept one-half of the *coibche* and gave her the remaining one-half as part of the wealth she took with her into the marriage.[27] The text does not state exactly at what point the couple was considered to be legally married, although one assumes that the giving of a *coibche* would indicate the start of the marriage. [28] The texts are clear that it was necessary for the union to be recognized by each spouse's family, even if the *coibche* had yet to be paid, for it to be considered a legitimate marriage.[29]

The status of the woman, in the case of royal marriage the daughter of a king, would also determine the value of what she contributed to the marriage-property and likely ensured that she had a significant *coibche*. Moreover, excluding what is provided to the joint marriage-property a woman could also retain her own separate and personal property. *Lánamnas comthinchuir* provided a woman with the same contractual capacity as her husband, within the boundaries of running a common household, as well as the ability to practice legal transactions up to her honour price, again in relation to the household.[30] In the case of a queen this provided her with a higher degree of independence then other women in society by virtue of her higher honour price and the resulting greater flexibility in making contracts. If the wife had the same social status as her husband she was called a *bé cuitchernsa* 'a woman of condominium' or 'a woman of joint lordship', which is glossed as *ben is comtigerna dó* (a woman who is co-ruler with him).[31] If this is to be applied to royal marriage we can see how

[26] CIH 502.29-519.35; Thurneysen, 'Cáin Lánamna', p.119; Ó Corráin, 'Marriage in Early Ireland', p. 15; Eska, *Cáin Lánamna*, p. 15.

[27] CIH 502.29-519.35; Ó' Corráin, 'Marriage in Early Ireland', pp 15-16; Eska, *Cáin Lánamna*, p. 14.

[28] CIH 502.29-519.35; Eska, *Cáin Lánamna*, p. 14.

[29] CIH 502.29-519.35; Eska, *Cáin Lánamna*, p. 14.

[30] CIH 502.29-519.35; Ó Corráin, 'Women in Early Irish Society', p. 2; Jaski, 'Marriage Laws in Ireland and the Continent in the Early Middle Ages', p. 23.

[31] CIH 502.29-519.35; CIH 505.36; CIH 506.9; Ó' Corráin, 'Marriage in Early Ireland', p.7; Ó Corráin, 'Women in Early Irish Society', p. 2; Jaski, 'Marriage Laws in Ireland and the Continent in the Early Middle Ages', p. 17; Eska, *Cáin Lánamna,* p. 17.

this could elevate a woman, not only as a wife, but as someone whose outstanding position within the household differentiated her from other women. In fact, the use of the term *tigernas*, which signifies lordship, seems significant as it is a word so closely tied to the aristocracy.[32] On the other hand, it must be stressed that all these rights ultimately flow from the basic acceptance that the husband's status is higher.

There is one other form of marriage which provided some women the opportunity to obtain a higher social standing in society. Termed a 'special case' by Ó Corráin, the marriage of *lánamnas for bantinchur*, 'marriage on woman contribution', was a marriage to which the woman contributed the majority of the property.[33] Such a woman was called a *banchomarbae* (a female heir).[34] Although women could not inherit land, if there were no sons a daughter could inherit a life interest in her father's estate but on her death it would revert back to her father's nearest relatives. In this type of marriage the roles were reversed, a man's status in law depending on that of his wife. For example, he could not make valid contracts without her permission.[35] It is difficult to imagine this being very common, given how rights flowed through the patrilineal kindred, but it was apparently not unknown. The famous opening section of the Book of Leinster recension of *Táin Bó Cúalnge* shows the system in operation, with Queen Medb being presented as a *banchomarbae* by claiming that she brought more property into the union than her husband Ailill, the king of Connacht:[36]

> *Ba maith-se remut', ar Medb.*
> 'I was well-off before marrying you', said Medb. [37]

[32] See See, for example, eDIL, 'Tigernas', online at dil.ie/40740.

[33] CIH 502.29-519.35; Ó Corráin, 'Women in Early Irish Society', pp 3-4; Ó Corráin, 'Marriage in Early Ireland', pp 10-11; Ó Corráin, 'Women and the Law in Early Ireland', pp 49-50; Jaski, 'Marriage Laws in Ireland and the Continent in the Early Middle Ages', p. 20.

[34] CIH 502.29-519.35; Ó Corráin, 'Women in Early Irish Society', pp 3-4; Ó Corráin, 'Marriage in Early Ireland', pp 10-11; Ó Corráin, 'Women and the Law in Early Ireland', pp 49-50; Jaski, 'Marriage Laws in Ireland and the Continent in the Early Middle Ages', p. 20; Eska, *Cáin Lánamna,* p. 240.

[35] Ó Corráin, 'Women in Early Irish Society', pp 3-4; Ó Corráin, 'Marriage in Early Ireland', pp 10-11; Ó Corráin, 'Women and the Law in Early Ireland', pp 49-50; Jaski, 'Marriage Laws in Ireland and the Continent in the Early Middle Ages', p. 20.

[36] Cecile O'Rahilly (ed. and tr.), *Táin Bó Cúalnge: From the Book of Leinster* (Dublin, 1967); James P. Mallory, (ed.), *Aspects of the Táin* (Belfast, 1992), pp 9-10; Kelly, 'The *Táin* as Literature', p. 77.

[37] O'Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúalnge*, p. 1 (text), p. 137 (translation).

Medb's marriages are discussed in a scene called the Pillow-Talk. The interaction also has reference to the term *coibche* from the perspective of a union of *lánamnas for bantinchur:*

> *Tucad chucu a n-éna & a ndabcha & a n-iarnlestair, a mílain & a lóthommair, & a ndrolmacha. Tucait dano cucu a fánne & a falge & a fornasca & a n-órdúse & a n-étguda, eter chorcair & gorm & dub & úaine, buide & brecc & lachtna, odor, alad & riabach. Tucait a murthréta caírech d'aicthib & d'urlannaib & rédib. Ra rímit & ra hármit & ra achnít corbatar cutrumma comméti comlínmair. Acht baí raithi sainemail for caírchaib Medba & ba gabálta I cumail é & boí rethi a frecartha for caírchaib Ailella. Tucait a n-eich & a nechrada & a ngrega férgeltaib & scoraib. Baí ech sainemail ar graig Medba & ba gabálta i cumail.*
>
> I gave you a contract and a bride-price as befits a woman, namely, the raiment of twelve men, a chariot worth thrice seven *cumala* [lit.'female slave' but used as a unit of value], the breadth of your face in red gold, the weight of your left arm in white bronze. Whoever brings shame and annoyance and confusion on you, you have no claim for compensation of for honour-price for it except what claim I have' said Medb, 'for you are a man dependent on a woman's marriage-portion'. [38]

Medb claims that she is a *banchomarbae* and that her marriage to Ailill is *lánamnas bantinchur* or union of an heiress.[39] Ailill is presented as a 'lackland' and an 'outlander' while his spouse Medb is heiress-queen of Connacht and daughter of the high-king of Ireland; she argues that as a result of her status she is superior by birth.[40] Although the figure of queen Medb will be examined in greater detail in chapter 5 it is important to stress a few points now. Her representation as a queen who claims to be the ruler of her own territory is not something seen in other sources. Her attempt at possession of lordship, of *tigernas*, would have been shocking to an early Irish audience, as it upended the social norm. In the tale Ailill contests her statements of lordship and claims that he, in fact, is the main property owner, basically articulating the social consensus. Their dispute about marriage and status ultimately causes war and destruction,

[38] O'Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúalnge*, p. 2 (text), p. 138 (translation).
[39] CIH 502.29-519.35; Ó Corráin, 'Women and the Law in Early Ireland', p. 50.
[40] Ó Corráin, 'Women and the Law in Early Ireland', p. 50.

suggesting that while queens were important they should not attempt to take over the role of kings within the household and the public world. However, one of the reasons the dynamic is so powerful is because of the mirror it places on the world of the law tracts and social expectations, including that a queen should be a member of the elite. The positive emphasis that Ailill places on Medb being the daughter of a king is telling:

> *'ocus gia ferr dam-sa rígan no biad ocum andaí-siu, dáig ingen ardríg Hérend atatchomnaic.' 'Atá dano,' ar Medb, 'is lia mo maith-sea indá do maith-siu'.*
> 'And what better queen could I have than you, for you are the daughter of the high-king of Ireland'. 'Nevertheless' said Medb, 'my property is greater than yours'.[41]

The problem is not Medb's royal genealogy; it is her attempt to go beyond it.

These passages raise the question as to how royal marriages were differentiated within society. As the most common marriage type used by the elite, *lánamnas comthinchuir*, is between those of equal social status it follows that this was likely the primary way in which a woman of the elite was recognised as a queen. We can see that the last quoted excerpt from the *Táin* emphasises Medb being the daughter of a king. This is echoed in many sources and the next chapter demonstrates that a king's wife is almost certainly always the daughter of a king. A further corollary is that the queen's higher status is further strengthened by the status and honour price of her husband, the king. When it comes to royal marriage an important element, which further separates it from others, is the fact that behind a lot of these marriages is the likelihood that political alliances are being underpinned by marital ones.[42] However, there is a limit to how far the argument can be developed as there are no descriptions of marriage ceremonies from early medieval Ireland. It is not even certain that they were marked out all that differently from other contracts which required witnesses and sureties. It is safest to envisage marriage in this environment. The higher the status of those involved in a contract, the greater the number of witnesses, so in this sense a royal marriage would have been a grander affair than those of lower status.

[41] O'Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúalnge*, p. 2 (text), p. 138 (translation).

[42] Ní Dhonnchadha, 'On Gormfhlaith Daughter of Flann Sinna and the Lure of the Sovereignty Goddess', p. 227.

Moreover, the association of the word *feis*, sometimes translated as feast or royal inauguration feast, with sexual activity suggests that a royal marriage would be a time of public feasting and celebration.[43]

3.3 Polygyny and the Royal Household

The understanding of marriage amongst the elites of Irish society is complicated by their apparent practice of polygyny.[44] Where do queens fit into multi-wife households? *Bretha Crólige* acknowledges that there was a dispute surrounding having more than one sexual union,[45] and justifies the practice, in accordance with biblical exemplars drawn from the Old Testament: [46]

> *Direnar do cach a lanamnus a bescnu inse erenn ciapa lin ciapa nuaite. ar ata forcosnam la Fēne cia de as techtta in nilar comperta fa huathad. ar robattar tuiccsi de i (n)nilar lanamnusa, connach airissa a caithiugud oldas a molad.*
> Everyone is paid dire for his union according to the custom of the island of Ireland, whether it be manifold or single. For there is a dispute in Irish law as to which is more proper, whether many sexual unions or a single one: for the chosen [people] of God lived in plurality of unions, so that it is not easier to condemn it than to praise.[47]

While *Bretha Crólige* has reference to the various unions of marriage it is the *Díre* text which goes into greater detail.[48] The text gives an insight into how women are classed in the law. 'How many divisions of quality are fixed for women's *Díre*?' 'How are their offences paid?' 'What is the apportionment of compensation which can be paid for their lives?'[49] We can see from these

---

[43] *Feis* (all related meaning), eDIL, http://www.dil.ie/21506.

[44] Power, 'Classes of Women Described in the *Senchas Már*', pp 81-108; Ó Corráin, 'Women in Early Irish Society', p. 4; Jaski, 'Marriage Laws in Ireland and the Continent in the Early Middle Ages', pp 33-41; Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession*, pp 143-155; Oxenham, *Perceptions of Femininity in Early Irish Society*, pp 63-4; Breatnach, 'On Old Irish Collective and Abstract Nouns, the Meaning of *Cétmuinter*, and Marriage in Early Mediaeval Ireland', pp 1-29.

[45] CIH 2286.24-2305.3; Binchy, 'Bretha Crólige', p. 44 (text), p. 45 (translation); Jaski, 'Marriage Laws in Ireland and the Continent in the Early Middle Ages', p. 35; Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession*, p. 143.

[46] CIH 2286.24-2305.3; Binchy, 'Bretha Crólige', p. 44 (text), p. 45 (translation).

[47] CIH 2286.24-2305.3; Binchy, 'Bretha Crólige', p. 44 (text), p. 45 (translation).

[48] CIH 2286.24-2305.3; CIH 2286.24-2305.3; CIH 463.33-440.31, 922.12-923.10; Binchy, 'Bretha Crólige', p. 44 (text), p. 45 (translation).

[49] CIH 463.33-440.31, 922.12-923.10; Power, 'Classes of Women Described in the *Senchas Már*', p. 81.

questions that women appear to be divided by class and it is not simply one answer or approach used for all women, despite the sweeping comments seen in the law tracts.[50] Closer examination reveals more nuance. The answers to these questions are divided into five different methods of apportionment:

1) *Cétmuinter* or chief wife
2) *Cétmuinter* who has not borne sons
3) A woman who is recognised and who has been betrothed by her kindred
4) A woman who is recognised but who has not been betrothed or ordered
5) A woman who has been abducted in defiance of her father or her kindred[51]

The first two refer to the *cétmuinter* (chief wife / spouse) while the third and fourth group refer to the *adaltrach* (secondary wife).[52] The third is identified in the glosses as an a*daltrach* also, a general term used in the commentaries to denote the second wife, *ind adaltrach urnadhma* (the contracted secondary wife).[53] The commentaries provide detail about the relationship between the chief wife and secondary wife.[54] Moreover, a man could have other licit sexual partners: it is suggested in *Cáin Lánamna* that a range of less binding sexual unions were recognised, although whether this worked in practice is open to conjecture.[55] Theoretically, he could be in a recognised relationship with a *cétmuinter* in a marriage of *lánamnas comthinchuir*, an *adaltrach* in a union of *aititiu* which is divided into two types of union, *lánamnas airite* (union of acceptance by inducement) and *lánamnas fir thathigthe cen urgnam, cen urail, cen tarcud, cen*

[50] CIH 463.33-440.31, 922.12-923.10; Power, 'Classes of Women Described in the *Senchas Már*', p. 81; Jaski, 'Marriage Laws in Ireland and the Continent in the Early Middle Ages', p. 37.

[51] CIH 463.33-440.31, 922.12-923.10; Power, 'Classes of Women Described in the *Senchas Már*', p. 81; Jaski, 'Marriage Laws in Ireland and the Continent in the Early Middle Ages', p. 37.

[52] CIH 463.33-440.31, 922.12-923.10; Power, 'Classes of Women Described in the *Senchas Már*', p. 84; Jaski, 'Marriage Laws in Ireland and the Continent in the Early Middle Ages', p. 37.

[53] CIH 463.33-440.31, 922.12-923.10; Power, 'Classes of Women Described in the *Senchas Már*', p. 84; Jaski, 'Marriage Laws in Ireland and the Continent in the Early Middle Ages', p. 37.

[54] CIH 463.33-440.31, 922.12-923.10; Power, 'Classes of Women Described in the *Senchas Már*', p. 84.

[55] CIH 502.29-519.35; Eska, *Cáin Lánamna*, p. 17; Oxenham, *Perceptions of Femininity in Early Irish Society*, p. 64.

tinól (union of a frequenting man without work, without inducement, without performance, without contribution).[56]

With all this seemingly direct evidence for the practice of polygyny, the terminology surrounding it and the practice itself has recently been called into question by Liam Breatnach.[57] Breatnach has cautioned against using the term to describe the Irish situation. He argues that *cétmuinter* refers not to 'first' or 'chief wife' and instead can be applied to both husband and wife.[58] Breatnach's argument centres on the basis that 'chief wife' is a mistranslation of *cétmuinter*, which he argues has led to the implication that polygyny was practiced, arguing that it is a 'leap for which no justification whatsoever is offered'.[59] He goes further by adding that the use of *cétmuinter* as 'chief wife' does not constitute evidence for multiple wives.[60] However, while Breatnach's argument certainly calls for a more precise understanding of multiple female partners in reproductive contexts, the evidence for them is strong across the sources, especially before 900, when it seems that serial monogamy became the norm, replacing the earlier customs. Given the resource implications of managing a household with multiple partners it is very likely that access to them was confined to the aristocracy. Kelly has pointed to the number of sons begotten to kings in the genealogies, which he argues indicates widespread polygyny among royalty, although this could also be explained by successive spouses increasing the number of offspring through divorce and remarriage.[61] It also seems that it was expected that a king might have sexual partners outside of formal arrangements. For example, in the tract 'Advice to a Prince' it is stated that 'adultery damages every reputation; it is not proper for anyone unless he be a king'.[62] Jaski has suggested that kings practiced

[56] CIH 502.29-519.35; Power, 'Classes of Women Described in the *Senchas Már*', p. 81; Ó Corráin, 'Women in Early Irish Society', pp 2-4; Jaski, 'Marriage Laws in Ireland and the Continent in the Early Middle Ages', p. 20.

[57] Breatnach, 'On Old Irish Collective and Abstract Nouns, the Meaning of *Cétmuinter*, and Marriage in Early Mediaeval Ireland', pp 1-28.

[58] Breatnach, 'On Old Irish Collective and Abstract Nouns, the Meaning of *Cétmuinter*, and Marriage in Early Mediaeval Ireland', p. 6.

[59] Breatnach, 'On Old Irish Collective and Abstract Nouns, the Meaning of *Cétmuinter*, and Marriage in Early Mediaeval Ireland', pp 23-24.

[60] Breatnach, 'On Old Irish Collective and Abstract Nouns, the Meaning of *Cétmuinter*, and Marriage in Early Mediaeval Ireland', p. 26.

[61] O'Brien, *Corpus Genealogiarum Hiberniae*; Ó Corráin, 'Women in Early Irish Society', pp 6-8; Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, p. 70.

[62] Tadhg O'Donoghue (ed. and tr.), 'Advice to a Prince', *Ériu* 9 (1921–1923), p. 50; Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession*, p. 143.

polygyny for its political advantages.[63] How then does the existence of multiple spouses impact royal marriage dynamics and our understanding of royal marriage. Does it affect succession? How does it affect the role and position of a queen?

Comparative perspectives help in this exploration. E.T. Dailey's *Queens, Consorts, Concubines: Gregory of Tours and the Women of the Merovingian Elite* analyses the practice of Merovingian kings in this regard.[64] He strongly advises against the use of the term polygyny, paralleling Breatnach's caution. Dailey critically re-examines Pauline Stafford's argument that if a king had a wife and a concubine at the same time, the arrangement should probably be considered a form of polygyny, although with different rights for different partners.[65] Instead Dailey argues it risks overlooking the distinctions made between the relationships of women with a king, namely how a wife of a king is exclusively a queen and how the *dos* (dowry) and marriage ceremony distinguishes her from a concubine.[66] This is important as it applies to the Irish system also, with the distinction that the *adaltrach*, the secondary spouse, had a more legally defined position than a Merovingian concubine. Thus, while multiple spouse marriages were practiced in Ireland, the distinction must be made that it was the queen who was the *cétmuinter*, alongside her husband who was also *cétmuinter*. This gave her far greater rights within the household and society at large. In this sense, Breatnach's argument is timely as it focuses discussion back onto the primary spouses in Irish marriages, both male and female. The queen as *cétmuinter* had a status that placed her well above other reproductive partners.[67] By not acknowledging this dynamic, there is a danger that the role of the queen as a joint manager of the royal household with the king, someone possessing *tigernas*, may be overlooked or undervalued.

The recognition of the queen as *cétmuinter* also impacts questions surrounding succession. While the annals, genealogies, and saga literature are not concerned about the status of the mothers of royal sons, only that they are

[63] Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession*, p. 143.
[64] Dailey, *Queens, Consorts, Concubines: Gregory of Tours and the Women of the Merovingian Elite*.
[65] Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, p. 73.
[66] Dailey, *Queens, Consorts, Concubines*, p. 112.
[67] Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession*, p. 146.

born of legitimate unions as will see in the next chapter, their social standing, family connections and political affiliations do appear to have had significant weight for their children.[68] Immo Warntjes, for example, argues not all sons had a right to inherit suggesting that, as a result, not all sons were eligible for kingship for they could not legally inherit that portion of land that would accompany the kingship.[69] This argument adds further weight to the recognition of the queen as *cétmuinter* and, ideally, the mother of sons who were potential kings. There is other evidence for this confluence of status with inheritance. For example, *Bretha for Macślechtaib* (Judgements on Categories of Sons) details the rights of inheritance for three categories of son, the *mac óige* (son of a pure woman i.e. son of a *cétmuinter*), *mac aititen* (acknowledged son), and *mac adaltraig(e) urnadma* (the son of a betrothed concubine).[70] The impact of the marriage-status of the mother on the right of inheritance is an influential and determining factor.[71] The first two women were in acknowledged alliances and both kindreds agreed to these marriages.[72] The higher the status of the union, the greater the identification of a woman with her husband and her children.[73] A *cétmuinter* with sons is principally identified with the future, with the next generation.[74] As a result the son of the *cétmuinter* is 'pre-eminent' over the others, a legal echo of their social status.[75] Moreover, this hints that although there was no avenue for a queen to rule or act as regent she could wield influence in other less direct ways, especially through her offspring. As will be made clear in the next chapter, queens were crucial to the networks that not only joined dynasties through marriage but created connections between kindreds and over generations.[76] This function was

[68]Goody, The *Development of the Family and Marriage in Europe*, p. 11; Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe*, p. 578; Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession*, p. 154.

[69] Immo Warntjes, 'Regnal Succession in Early Medieval Ireland', *Journal of Medieval History* 30 (2004), p. 395.

[70] CIH 1296.32-6; Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, pp 70-71; Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession*, p. 146; Warntjes, 'Regnal Succession in Early Medieval Ireland', pp 395-396.

[71] Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, pp 70-71; Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession*, pp 143-156; Warntjes, 'Regnal Succession in Early Medieval Ireland', pp 395-396.

[72] Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession*, pp 143-156; Warntjes, 'Regnal Succession in Early Medieval Ireland', pp 395-396.

[73] Charles- Edwards, *Early Irish and Welsh Kinship*, p. 86.

[74] Charles- Edwards, *Early Irish and Welsh Kinship*, p. 86.

[75] Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession*, p. 146.

[76] Charles- Edwards, *Early Irish and Welsh Kinship*, p. 87.

given social and legal recognition through marital status. The queen as *cétmuinter* of a royal household was central to this status.

We can also see how this can be problematised and can cause tensions for a *cétmuinter*. Legal stipulations do not always match complex social situations. These are depicted in the *Vita Prima* of Brigit*.* Brigid's father, Dubthach, a nobleman, owned a bondmaid, Broicsech who became pregnant.[77] Here we see a relationship between a man of noble status and a slave, something which is comparable with Merovingian royal marriage practices, Bathild being the obvious example.[78] There is also no indication that they have a formal union, and Dubthach's wife is wary that this child could affect the standing of her own children. Dubthach's wife and her brothers eventually get Dubthach to sell Broicsech, but he 'did not sell the offspring which she had in her womb'.[79] However, Broicsech, unlike Bathild, never becomes a ruler, remaining tied to her servile status until Brigit can arrange to buy her freedom.[80] This, once again, highlights the distinction between the queen as *cétmuinter* and other women. The saga *Echtra mac nEchach Muigmedóin* (The Adventures of the Sons of Eochaid Muigmedón), which currently exists in a twelfth century format but is based on earlier material, depicts Eochaid Mugmedón, a high king of Ireland, as the father of Níall Noígiallach*,* legendary ancestor of the Uí Néill kings.**[81]** However, it is unclear from the text whether his mother Cairenn, was a secondary wife or a concubine. She is both a slave and a princess, complicating her status.[82] Similarly to *Vita Prima*, Mongfhinn, the king's wife, and presumably the *cétmuinter* was jealous of the fact that Cairenn's son Niall would be Eochaid's successor.[83] In this

[77] Connolly, 'Vita Prima Sanctae Brigitae', 14 (§1); McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature*, pp 182-183.

[78] Connolly, 'Vita Prima Sanctae Brigitae', 14 (§1); McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature*, pp 182-183.

[79] Connolly, 'Vita Prima Sanctae Brigitae', 15 (§4); McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature*, pp 182-183.

[80] Connolly, 'Vita Prima Sanctae Brigitae', 15 (§17).

[81] Whitley Stokes, (ed. and tr.), 'The Death of Crimthann Son of Fidach, and the Adventures of the Sons of Eochaid Muigmedón', *Revue Celtique* 24 (1903), pp 172–207; Maud Joynt, 'Echtra Mac Echdach Mugredóin', *Ériu* 4 (1908–1910), pp 91–111; McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature*, p. 182; Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession*, pp 162-169.

[82] Joynt, 'Echtra Mac Echdach Mugredóin', pp 93-94; Francis John Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings* (London, 1973), p. 74; Connon, 'A Prosopography of the Early Queens of Tara', p. 252.

[83] Joynt, 'Echtra Mac Echdach Mugredóin', pp 93-94; Connon, 'A Prosopography of the Early Queens of Tara', p. 252.

case, the son of a slave does become king, but his origin serves to mark him as special. In addition, while Cairenn is a slave, she is also of aristocratic origin. What these narratives do is dramatize the rivalries for succession in households where there are multiple heirs from different spouses. They also demonstrate that the social superiority of the queen is grounded in her status as *cétmuinter*, a status that influences the next generation.

At this stage it is worth pointing out that the Irish practice of multiple reproductive partners among the elite is comparable to elsewhere, especially Frankia. However, the main area of difference lies in the influence of the Church in regulating reproduction. In Ireland the Church did not have the same success in opposing multiple wives and concubinage as on the continent.[84] For example, while in Ireland a secondary wife was called an *adaltrach* (adulteress), a borrowing from Latin, which was presumably introduced to discourage the practice of multiple wives, their legal status remained embedded in early Irish law.[85] In contrast, as chapter 6 will outline in more detail, the Merovingian practice, which was similar to that in Ireland, changed with the rise of the Carolingians and associated ecclesiastical reforms. While concubinage was practiced it was within the context of a strict Christian ideal of monogamy.

3.4 The Queen and Divorce

Just as there was a wide variety of marriage practices and reproductive unions corresponding grounds for divorce were also available.[86] Ó Corráin has argued that early Irish law did not moralise divorce but instead focused on the 'equitable division' of property, while Eska has emphasised that the ideal of lifelong monogamy was different from the social reality.[87] *Cáin Lánamna* does not discuss the circumstances whereby a wife could leave her husband but treats it as a normal occurrence, likely by mutual consent.[88] The only reference for the reasoning behind divorce given is that if a husband takes a second wife, in this

[84] Tatsuki, 'The Early Irish Church and Marriage', p. 206.

[85] Power, 'Classes of Women Described in the *Senchas Már*', p. 84; Ó' Corráin, 'Women in Early Irish Society', p. 4; Jaski, 'Marriage Laws in Ireland and the Continent in the Early Middle Ages', p. 38.

[86] Ó' Corráin, 'Women in Early Irish Society', p. 4.

[87] Ó Corráin, 'Marriage in Early Ireland', p. 8; Eska, *Cáin Lánamna,* pp 22-23.

[88] CIH 502.29-519.35; Eska, *Cáin Lánamna,* p. 20.

case his *cétmuinter* could divorce him without penalty, suggesting that this might be seen as a matter of status and honour.[89] For specific grounds one has to turn to Heptads 3[90] and 52.[91] Heptads 3[92] and 52[93] list the circumstance in which a wife may divorce her husband without penalty. Some of the reasons include taking another wife, slandering her, discussing details of the marital bed in public, the husband being in holy orders, impotent or sterile.[94] While there are fascinating details here, the main focus of discussion will be on the role of divorce for a queen. The prevalence of divorce among the elite, combined with the fact that divorce accommodated forming new alliances, makes this particularly significant, something which will also be touched on in the next chapter.[95] For the sake of clarity, and to ground the discussion in actual historical examples, the marriages and divorces of three queens will be analysed to demonstrate the interplay of marriage and divorce for Irish queens.

The first case is Lann (d. 890) daughter of Dúngal mac Fergaile (d. 842), the king of Osraige. She was married three times, to Gáethíne king of the Loígsi, Máel Sechnaill mac Maíle Ruanaid (d. 862) king of Ireland and Áed Findliath (d. 879), also king of Ireland. On Máel Sechnaill's death he was succeeded by Áed Findliath, who took Lann as his wife. In this instance we see a king marrying the widow of his predecessor, a practice that was not uncommon as Anne Connon has demonstrated.[96] This probably bolstered his claim to the throne; however, it also arguably indicates that Lann herself, as a former queen, held an important status of her own that eased the transition in kingships, especially having been married to two previous kings with all the dynastic and political connections that these entailed. It is not clear if Lann was repudiated or if it was divorce by mutual consent but Áed Findliath next married Máel Mhuire daughter of Cináed, the king of Dal Riáta, forming a new set of political alliances.[97] The second case is that of Gormlaith daughter of Flann Sinna (d. 916), king of Ireland. She like Lann, her

[89] CIH 502.29-519.35; Eska, *Cáin Lánamna,* p. 20.
[90] CIH 4.33-5.32.
[91] CIH 47.21-48.26.
[92] CIH 4.33-5.32; Eska, *Cáin Lánamna,* p. 20.
[93] CIH 47.21- 48.26; Eska, *Cáin Lánamna,* p. 20.
[94] CIH 4.33-5.32; Eska, 21; Jaski, 'Marriage Laws in Ireland and the Continent in the Early Middle Ages', p. 31; Eska, *Cáin Lánamna,* p. 21.
[95] See chapter 4, section 4.3 and 4.6.
[96] Connon, 'A Prosopography of the Early Queens of Tara', p. 226.
[97] Bhreathnach, *Ireland in the Medieval World*, p. 84.

grandmother, was married three times. Her husbands were Cormac mac Cuilennáin (d. 908), a bishop and king of Munster, Cerball mac Muirecáin (d. 909), king of Leinster and Niall Glúndub (d. 919), king of Ireland. The late Middle Irish poem, *Eirigh a Ingen an Righ*, a fictional address by Cormac mac Cuilennáin to Gormlaith suggests that Cormac repudiated her in favour of his 'true spouse' the Church.[98] However, it is probable that this is an invention to bolster the cult of Cormac as a saint-like king. In addition, the poem also states that he gave 300 cows, along with twenty ounces of gold and twenty drinking horns, in what appears to be a dowry price for her.[99] A second text found in the Book Leinster recounts the circumstances of Gormlaith's marriage to her second husband, Cerball mac Muirecáin [100] It recounts that he physically abused her, and she fled to her father's house.[101] She does not appear to have divorced him as it was not until after his death that she married Niall Glúndub. However, as already discussed, physical violence was a ground for divorce in Irish law. The final example is Gormlaith (d. 1030) daughter of Murchad mac Finn, king of Leinster. Although her career falls outside of the boundaries of the dissertation, it is worth examining for the way it continues earlier patterns.[102] This later Gormlaith was married to Amlaíb (Óláfr) Cuarán (d. 981), Viking king of Dublin and York and mother to Sitriuc Silkbeard (d. 1042), king of Dublin. After the death of Amlaíb (Óláfr) Cuarán, it is not certain if Gormlaith and Amlaíb were divorced or if she was widowed by his death (981), she married Brian Bórama (Boru) (d. 1014), king of Munster and Ireland. However, the evidence for her having also married Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill (d. 1022), king of Tara is not as certain.

[98] Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, 'Three Weddings and a Funeral: Rewriting Irish Political History in the Tenth Century' in *Seanchas: Studies in Early and Medieval Irish Archaeology, History and Literature in Honour of Francis J Byrne*, ed. Alfred. P. Smyth (Dublin, 2000), p. 215; Ní Dhonnchadha, 'On Gormfhlaith Daughter of Flann Sinna and the Lure of the Sovereignty Goddess', p. 234.

[99] Ní Dhonnchadha, 'On Gormfhlaith Daughter of Flann Sinna and the Lure of the Sovereignty Goddess', p. 236.

[100] Richard Irvine Best, Osborn Bergin, M. A. O'Brien, and Anne O'Sullivan *et al*., *The Book of Leinster, Formerly Lebar na Núachongbála*, 6 Vols (Dublin, 1954–1983), pp 257-259; Ó Cróinín, 'Three Weddings and a Funeral: Rewriting Irish Political History in the Tenth Century', p. 217; Ní Dhonnchadha, 'On Gormfhlaith Daughter of Flann Sinna and the Lure of the Sovereignty Goddess', p. 227.

[101] Ní Dhonnchadha, 'On Gormfhlaith Daughter of Flann Sinna and the Lure of the Sovereignty Goddess', p. 227.

[102] Trindade, 'Irish Gormlaith as a Sovereignty Figure', pp 143–156; Ní Dhonnchadha, 'On Gormfhlaith Daughter of Flann Sinna and the Lure of the Sovereignty Goddess', pp 225–237; Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Tales of the Three Gormlaiths in Medieval Irish Literature', pp 1-24.

The evidence for it comes only from a poem in the Book of Leinster genealogies, which refers to Gormlaith's marriages as 'three leaps', at Dublin, Tara, and Cashel.[103]

The practice of *lánamnas comthinchuir* is evident in these three examples and illuminates how it was practiced by the aristocratic elite in society. It is noteworthy that the marriages highlighted were between those of equal status as these women were the daughters of kings and on their marriages held the title of queen.[104] It seems clear, as well, that the practice of successive marriages and divorces created patterns of serial monogamy through which the Irish dynasties were tightly interconnected, a theme that will be examined in greater detail in the next chapter.[105] It also shows that remarriage did not necessarily affect a queen's or woman's standing in society as Lann and both Gormlaiths had several elite marriages. Previously, these marriages have been analysed as functions of a sovereignty figure, but as the next chapter will argue, they are part of pragmatic royal marital practices in which queens played a key role which has been underappreciated in the scholarship.[106] In fact, the central and acknowledged role of divorce is a contrast with English and Frankish practice, as will be explored later in the dissertation.[107] It is arguable that the ability of Irish queens to remarry after divorce gave them an extended influence and a source of previously unrecognised power.

The influence of the Church on marriage practices will be a point of contrast examined in greater detail in chapter 6. As that chapter will argue Irish marriage and divorce practices appeared to parallel those of the Merovingians. While the Church in Ireland had a set ideal of marriage practices it did not have the same influence to change practices and to implement them.[108] Tatsuki argues

---

[103] *s.a.* AFM 1030.21; Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Tales of the Three Gormlaiths in Medieval Irish Literature', p. 18; Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, *Brian Boru: Ireland's Greatest King?* (Stroud, 2007), p. 31.

[104] The next chapter will examine the use of the title of queen in greater detail but there is evidence of a wide variety of terminology in the annals, *rigan, regina, regina regis Temorie* and *regina regis Temorie.*

[105] Ní Dhonnchadha, 'On Gormfhlaith Daughter of Flann Sinna and the Lure of the Sovereignty Goddess', p. 226; Charles- Edwards, *Early Irish and Welsh Kinship*, p. 87.

[106] A good example is the analysis of the legendary queen Medb's marriages to Ailill, Fergus and Conchobor. See, Kuno Meyer (ed.), 'Ferchuitred Medba' in *Anecdota from Irish Manuscripts*, Vol. 5, *et al*., Osborn Bergin, R. I. Best, Kuno Meyer, and J. G. O'Keeffe (Dublin, 1913), pp 17–22; Tomás Ó Máille, 'Medb Chruachna', *Zeitschrift Für Celtische Philologie* 17 (1928), p. 131; Ní Bhrolcháin, 'Women in Early Irish Myths and Sagas', p. 13.

[107] Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, pp 95-96.

[108] Ó' Corráin, 'Women in Early Irish Society', p. 7.

they adapted, modified and adjusted Continental canons to make them fit the Irish system.[109]

3.5 Perceptions and Realities: the Queen in Society

It has been established that a woman's honour price and subsequently her position in society was determined by that of her husband's rank in society. Due to the lack of evidence in the sources regarding the way in which a woman became queen, such as an *ordo* or ritual of anointing, it must be assumed that it was primarily through marriage to a king. However, this leaves questions regarding how queens were perceived in society. Did they have roles which were substantially greater than being the wives of kings?

Due to the patrilineal structures that determined Irish succession to kingship, queens had limited opportunities for influence. Unlike elsewhere, Ireland had no primogeniture, even in a loose sense, and instead succession was available to a wider group who were members of the *derbfhine* or *gelfhine*.[110] The former included the descendants of a common great grandfather, and the latter were the descendants of a common grandfather. While there was little formal law regulating succession, it has been noticed that the vast majority of those inheriting kingship came from these kin-groups. Beyond the *derbfhine*, it appears that the distance from royal origins became too great. From an Irish perspective this impacts on a queen's opportunities for exercising direct power through a role in regency. Irish kindreds always produced an adult male heir and could choose from many potential successors. This comparison will be further contrasted in chapter 6 with examples of queens such as Brunhild, although an exception,

[109] Tatsuki, 'The Early Irish Church and Marriage', p. 207.

[110] Eoin MacNeill, 'The Irish Law of Dynastic Succession', Studies, 8 (1919), pp 367-82, 640-53, reprinted in Eoin Mac Neill, Celtic Ireland (Dublin, 1921, reprint with new introduction and additional notes by Donnchadh Ó Corráin, Dublin, 1981), pp 114-43; James Hogan, 'Irish Law of Kingship, with Special Reference to Ailech and Cenél Eoghain', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 40 (1932), pp 186–254; Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'Irish Regnal Succession: A Reappraisal', *Studia Hibernica*, no. 11 (1971), pp 7-39 suggests that the role of the *derbfhine* has been overly emphasised; Thomas Charles- Edwards, *Early Irish and Welsh Kinship*; Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession*; Warntjes, 'Regnal Succession in Early Medieval Ireland', pp 377–410.

obtaining power through regency.[111] Among the Irish, a minor could not become king as only males above fourteen who had completed a period of fosterage were eligible.[112]

Although the law tracts provide no instance for the need of an heir or a queen's role in producing one, unsurprisingly the importance of her doing just that features in other sources. Some of the earliest examples are in the hagiography associated with Brigit and Patrick. A number of relevant examples are worth further exploration. The first is from *Vita Prima* and is in relation to Brigit's own birth. We are told that the owner of Brigit's mother, a druid, invites the local king and queen to dine but the queen is unable to come because she was near childbirth.[113] This leads to a series of contrasts in the text which are intended to showcase how Brigit transcends being a woman. It is prophesied that a great leader will be born at dawn. The queen gives birth to a son while Brigit herself is born at sunrise. The inversion is that the special child is the daughter of a slave rather than the son of a queen. The contrast only works if being the son of a queen was important and celebrated.

Vita Prima also portrays kings and queens as a pair, associated with each other socially. As we saw, the druid invited the king and the queen. This gives the impression that it was not unusual for the two to be together in public, suggesting that it would be wrong to view a queen as simply a superior type of wife confined to the household. The implication is that being a queen was, in itself, important and a role in society. Muirchú's *Vita S. Patricii*, presents similar implications where the queen is portrayed as being a member of the royal household of Loíguire mac Néill, imagined as the most powerful Irish king during Patrick's era.[114] It is also king Loíguire's wife who intervenes following one of the confrontations between Loíguire and Patrick:

[111] Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*; Nelson, 'Queens as Jezebels: Brunhild and Balthild in Merovingian History', pp 1-48; Dailey, *Queens, Consorts, Concubines: Gregory of Tours and the Women of the Merovingian Elite*.

[112] Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession*, p. 127.

[113] Connolly, 'Vita Prima Sanctae Brigitae', 15 (§6).

[114] Muirchú, *Vita S.Patricii*, I 18 (Bieler, *The Patrician Texts*, p. 90 (text), p. 91 (translation).

> *Veniensque regina ad Patricium dixit ei; 'Homo iuste et potens, ne perdas regem: ueniens enim rex genua flectet et adorabit dominum tuum* [115]
> And the queen went to Patrick and said to him; 'O just and powerful man, do not bring death upon the king! For the king will come and bend his knees and adore you your Lord [116]

This interaction is important as the queen is a central figure and speaks in her own voice. It may well be the earliest datable example of this in Irish literature. On this occasion she is the one taking control and offering leadership, perhaps a type of leadership that was not uncommon, but which is rarely referenced in the sources. The scene also echoes the role of peace-weaver seen in English texts relating to queens.[117]

The interaction of saint and queen is also explored in *Vita Prima*, but to a more pointed effect in the miracle story which begins when the wife of King Conall's son comes to Brigit to cure her childlessness.[118] This once again emphasises the important role of the queen as mother of future kings. It also raises assumptions about status as one of Brigit's nuns queries why the saint has not asked God for this miracle as she does it often for those of lower status, inverting expectations. These are the expectations that have already been explored in the analysis of early Irish law. Interestingly, Brigit agrees to intervene on behalf of the queen but in a striking statement claims that the royal offspring will shed blood and be accursed.[119]

Material culture also provides insights into perceptions and realities, especially when considered alongside the literature. The description of particular material objects and their associations with gender and hierarchy have the potential to be illuminating. For example, the tract *Bretha im Ḟuillema Gell,* as previously mentioned, associated embroidery with profit, gender and high status.[120] It suggests that the profit from embroidery work can eclipse even that of queens. The tract itself is concerned with pledge interests, items of value given

[115] Muirchú, *Vita S.Patricii*, I 18 (Bieler, *The Patrician Texts*, p. 90 (text), p. 91 (translation).
[116] Muirchú, *Vita S.Patricii*, I 18 (Bieler, *The Patrician Texts*, p. 90 (text), p. 91 (translation).
[117] Carol Parrish Jamison, 'Traffic of Women in Germanic Literature: The Role of the Peace Pledge in Marital Exchange', *Women in German Yearbook* 20 (2004), pp 13-36.
[118] Connolly, 'Vita Prima Sanctae Brigitae', 31 (§31).
[119] Connolly, 'Vita Prima Sanctae Brigitae', 31 (§62).
[120] CIH 462.19-477.30; Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, p. 78.

by their owners in deposit to guarantee a legal obligation is fulfilled.[121] A pledge is most commonly an object that is intimately associated with the pledger.[122] One type of pledge is a needle which the text states specifically related to women:

> *mna ata corui dia tabairt I ngell*
> women are more fit to give it in pledge.[123]

This is an example of how the general limitation placed on the contractual abilities of women did not hold in every instance.[124] As Oxenham points out women are not only being admitted into a male dominated sphere of law but in this pledge it is linked to a highly gendered skill.[125] The pledge, and the text surrounding it, through using the queen as the point of reference gives a clear indication of their importance within the social hierarchy.[126]

Furthermore, the craft of embroidery itself was determined by status as it was pursued by high-ranking girls and women.[127] Kelly and Ní Ghrádaigh have both noted that this is evident from the glosses and commentaries of *Cáin Íarraith* (The Regulation of the Fosterage Fee).[128] The text states that children were to be educated according to their parents' rank and, therefore, a daughter of a lord or

---

[121] Niamh Whitfield, 'Dress and Accessories in the Early Irish Tale "The Wooing Of Becfhola"' in *Medieval Clothing and Textiles 2* , eds Robin Netherton and Gale R. Owen-Crocker (Woodbridge, 2006), p. 9; Jenifer Ní Ghrádaigh, 'Mere Embroiderers? Women and Art in Early Medieval Ireland' in *Reassessing the Roles of Women as 'Makers' of Medieval Art and Architecture*, ed. Therese Martin (Leiden, 2012), pp 93-94; Whitfield, 'Aristocratic Display in Early Medieval Ireland in Fact and Fiction', p. 170; Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, p. 164; Oxenham, *Perceptions of Femininity in Early Irish Society*, p. 59.

[122] Whitfield, 'Dress and Accessories in the Early Irish Tale "The Wooing Of Becfhola", p. 9; Ní Ghrádaigh, 'Mere Embroiderers? Women and Art in Early Medieval Ireland', pp 93-94; Whitfield, 'Aristocratic Display in Early Medieval Ireland in Fact and Fiction', p. 170; Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, p. 164.

[123] CIH 463.30; Oxenham, *Perceptions of Femininity in Early Irish Society*, p. 59.

[124] Binchy, 'The Legal Capacity of Women in Regard to Contracts', pp 207-234; Whitfield, 'Dress and Accessories in the Early Irish Tale "The Wooing Of Becfhola", p. 9; Ní Ghrádaigh, 'Mere Embroiderers? Women and Art in Early Medieval Ireland', pp 93-94; Whitfield, 'Aristocratic Display in Early Medieval Ireland in Fact and Fiction', p. 170.

[125] Whitfield, 'Dress and Accessories in the Early Irish Tale "The Wooing Of Becfhola", p. 9; Ní Ghrádaigh, 'Mere Embroiderers? Women and Art in Early Medieval Ireland', pp 93-94; Whitfield, 'Aristocratic Display in Early Medieval Ireland in Fact and Fiction', p. 170; Oxenham, *Perceptions of Femininity in Early Irish Society*, p. 59.

[126] CIH 462.19-477.30.

[127] Ní Ghrádaigh, 'Mere Embroiderers? Women and Art in Early Medieval Ireland', p. 93.

[128] CIH 1759.6-1770.14; Kelly, *Guide to Early Irish Law*, p. 87; Ní Ghrádaigh, 'Mere Embroiderers? Women and Art in Early Medieval Ireland', p. 93; Whitfield, 'Aristocratic Display in Early Medieval Ireland in Fact and Fiction', p. 169.

king was to be taught sewing and cloth-cutting and embroidery.[129] The *Sechtae* classes the embroideress alongside kings and high-status men as people for whom sick maintenance is difficult as their work must be maintained, and they cannot afford loss of earnings.[130] Furthermore, the skill of embroidery is directly associated with royal women in the early Irish tale *Tochmarc Étaíne*. It demonstrates that skill at embroidery was highly valued in Étaín who is seen as the ideal queen.[131] Jenifer Ní Ghrádaigh has argued that the practice of embroidery points to 'aristocratic women's defined roles' in early Irish society ones which 'relegated the sphere of her activities to the domestic'.[132] Yet, as we have seen, the use of an embroidery needle as a pledge object shows that the domestic was more permeable with the public space for aristocratic women than their lower-ranked counterparts.

An understanding of the aristocratic domestic sphere is further enhanced by the evidence relating to fabric production and the queen's potential role in overseeing it. Fabrics were highly valued. For example *Cáin Lánamna* includes them among the materials of note that are to be divided in the event of divorce.[133] Vernacular literature provides evidence that its production could be associated specifically with royal and aristocratic women. This is seen in the ninth century tale *Cath Maige Mucrama*.[134] The tale recounts how upon Cormac's arrival at Tara he is informed of a judgment made by the king Lugaid Mac Con, which proved to be an unfit judgment. This paves the way for Cormac himself becoming the ruler. The judgment was related to Lugaid's queen. The tale recounts how:

> *Fecht and didiu do-feotar caírcha glassin na rígna indí Lugdach.*
> Now on occasion sheep ate the *glassen* of Lugaid's queen.[135]

[129] CIH 1760.34; Whitfield, 'Aristocratic Display in Early Medieval Ireland in Fact and Fiction', pp 169-170.

[130] CIH 53-.6-21; Oxenham, *Perceptions of Femininity in Early Irish Society*, p. 59.

[131] Máire Bhreathnach (ed. and tr.), 'A New Edition of *Tochmarc Becfhola*', *Ériu* 35 (1984), pp 59–91; Whitfield, 'Dress and Accessories in the Early Irish Tale "The Wooing Of Becfhola"', p. 9.

[132] Ní Ghrádaigh, 'Mere Embroiderers? Women and Art in Early Medieval Ireland', p. 93.

[133] CIH 502.29-519.35; Ní Ghrádaigh, 'Mere Embroiderers? Women and Art in Early Medieval Ireland', p. 112.

[134] Whitley Stokes (ed. and tr.), 'The Battle of Mag Mucrime', *Revue Celtique* 13 (1892), pp 426–474; Máirín O' Daly (ed. and tr.), *Cath Maige Mucrama: The Battle of Mag Mucrama*, Irish Texts Society 50 (Dublin, 1975), p. 58 (text), p. 59 (translation).

[135] O'Daly, *Cath Maige Mucrama: The Battle of Mag Mucrama*, p. 58 (text), p. 59 (translation).

This passage indicates that the queen has her own private woad garden. Woad was a plant whose leaves could be used for dying with the *glassen*, the dye, extracted from it.[136] There is also a parallel here with elsewhere in early medieval Europe where, as Pauline Stafford puts it, 'women create wealth…in weaving and embroidering gifts and adornments.'[137] Rather than being seen as mainly domestic, these activities contributed to status, both in material and visual senses.

Apart from embroidery and fabric production, the use of jewellery in aristocratic display was one of the main ways that women of high status were visually distinguished. Niamh Whitfield, for example, has convincingly demonstrated through ground-breaking analysis of textual and material evidence that a combination of fabric, colour and ornament were extremely important ways of indicating hierarchy for men and women.[138] As pointed out in the Frankish context, the 'best way to display wealth was to wear it'.[139] It may be possible to link these displays and access to decorative objects with queens as patrons. While the role of queens as patrons is reasonably well documented in Merovingian and English sources it is not as clear from an Irish perspective. *Vita Prima* offers a potential insight and example. The following passage is worth analysing in more depth:

> *Regina quædā ad S. Brigidam cum donis venir in quibus erat argentea catena fabrefacta qæ habetat in fummitate formam hominis.*
> A certain queen came to saint Brigit with a gift of good things, among which was a skilfully wrought chain which had a human figure at the end of it.[140]

[136] *Glassen, eDIL* dil.ie/26010; discussed by Ní Ghrádaigh, 'Mere Embroiderers? Women and Art in Early Medieval Ireland', p. 112.

[137] Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, pp 108-109.

[138] Whitfield, 'Aristocratic Display in Early Medieval Ireland in Fact and Fiction', pp 159-188.

[139] Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, pp 108-109.

[140] John Colgan, *Triadis Thaumaturgæ Seu Divorum Patricii, Columbæ et Brigidæ, Trium Veteris et Maioris Scotiæ, Seu Hiberniæ Sanctorum Insulae Communium Patronorum Acta* (Louvain, 1647), p. 532; Connolly, 'Vita Prima Sanctae Brigitae', 26 (§48).

Apart from her role as gift-giver, the implication is that the queen is someone who had access to or used decorative jewellery. The gift is treated as being a considerable one, which aligns with the status of the queen.[141] The act of gift giving can be examined from a comparative perspective. As Stafford has pointed out in regard to Merovingian and English gift-giving queens, gifts given by the royal family took on another meaning and importance.[142] The object was a tangible reminder of their power. Instead of thinking of patronage as primarily involving land and livestock, it would be better to also include expensive objects and their movement across society. From this perspective, the queen of *Vita Prima* is a patron. While outside the scope of the present study, it would be useful to reanalyse early medieval Irish literature for more examples of this dynamic.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has established that status was a determining factor when it comes to how women were treated and perceived in both law and wider society. In addition it is clear that marriage and reproduction are closely intertwined with hierarchy. This chapter has made the argument that it was primarily through marriage that a woman became a queen. This is important as it reinforces what will be discussed in the next chapter, that as a result of marriages taking place between members of the same social class queens formed part of an elite group in society. Therefore, a secondary point is that it was not marriage alone that made a queen but the status of her aristocratic kindred. This was what made it possible for her to become a *cétmuinter* and with that came the running of the royal household. Although queens are rarely directly mentioned in the law tracts this chapter has also demonstrated that this does not mean that they were absent from society. They appear in a range of texts underpinned by the status-driven system described by the laws. Moreover, these texts allow the researcher to broaden considerations to the importance of the royal household and the queen's role within it. Together, these sources portray queens as individuals whose higher

[141] Ní Ghrádaigh, 'Mere Embroiderers? Women and Art in Early Medieval Ireland', p. 94.
[142] Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, p. 108.

status and access to greater resources meant that they stood apart from other women.

Chapter 4

Queenship in the Annals

4.1 Introduction

As the Chronicle of Ireland and its extant descendant texts encompass such a large volume of records their use as sources in this dissertation is invaluable. The annals provide the most substantial record of real Irish queens and their socio-political world. Importantly, the annals aid in establishing the key political events and identifying major figures in Irish society. They provide contemporary year-by-year records of notable happenings from the late sixth century AD to the twelfth century.[1] As outlined in chapter 2, the most complete version of the Irish annals is contained in the Annals of Ulster, which is also the best representative of the Chronicle of Ireland.[2] From 911/12 there is a break in the texts with the emergence of a separate strand of Clonmacnoise-based chronicles, encompassing the Annals of Tigernach, *Chronicum Scotorum* and the Annals of Inisfallen.[3] Finally, the early modern Annals of the Four Masters, which draw on the medieval chronicles, is also valuable. However, as stressed previously, its provenance needs to be acknowledged as well as its own agendas. The entries in the early medieval chronicles are short and concise, usually comprising of anything from reports of battle to environmental disasters but, most commonly, the death notices of powerful individuals such as bishops, abbots and kings.[4] In addition to personal names, the annals provide place-names and genealogical information.[5] As has been evidenced in the previous chapters, the frequency with

[1] Johnston, 'Mapping Literate Networks in Early Medieval Ireland', p. 195.

[2] Hughes, *Early Christian Ireland*; Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill, *The Annals of Ulster, to AD 1131*; Cunningham, *The Annals of the Four Masters*; Evans, *The Present and the Past in Medieval Irish Chronicles*; Johnston, 'Mapping Literate Networks in Early Medieval Ireland'; Flechner, 'The Chronicle of Ireland: Then and Now'.

[3] Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland*, p. 6; Evans, *The Present and the Past in Medieval Irish Chronicles*, pp 67-72; Johnston, 'Mapping Literate Networks in Early Medieval Ireland', p. 198.

[4] Evans, *The Present and the Past in Medieval Irish Chronicles*, p. 1; Ó Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland 400-1200*, p. 8; Johnston, 'Mapping Literate Networks in Early Medieval Ireland', p. 195.

which women are documented in historical sources is scarce so their appearance in the chronicles is invaluable and significant. The women recorded in the annals are mostly of high standing, whether they are in the ecclesiastical or secular life, and their appearance is a striking exception to the generally patriarchal focus of the chronicles, itself a reflection of this basic aspect of Irish society.[6]

The importance of the annals is enhanced because of their contemporaneity and contextualisation, allowing the scholar to place queens within the ebb and flow of the Irish political world**.** The fact that they appear at all supports the point made in the last chapter, that queens were recognised as being more than high-status wives. Moreover, the annals offer the chance to begin to establish a more coherent sense of the role of queens, moving beyond the sometimes artificial framework of the law tracts. Despite its huge potential, there has been no recent in-depth published research on queens in the annals , apart from Anne Connon's important work on the *Banshenchas* which makes use of them as a point of reference.[7] Even Connon's contributions, however, do not focus on the annals as a source in their own right. While the previous chapter showed that queens held a higher status than other women, supporting this through a deep reading of the evidence available, what separates the annals from other sources is how much richer they are; they place queens in context and even hint at the possibility of an emerging institution of queenship to be placed alongside kingship. The chapter will address a number of questions exploring what the annals can tell us about queens in society. Are the attitudes of the laws, examined in chapter 3, reflected in the annals? To what degree did queens form an elite group in society? The chapter will also examine how royal marriage practices are reflected through the annals, in particular how instrumental queens were in marriage alliances. This will provide a very useful point of comparison to the law tracts. The objective of this chapter will be to identify the central role of the queen in aristocratic society, a centrality that has been previously largely unacknowledged.

[6] Johnston, 'Mapping Literate Networks in Early Medieval Ireland', p. 196; Oxenham, *Perceptions of Femininity in Early Irish Society*, pp 94-98.

[7] Connon, 'The Banshenchas and the Uí Néill Queens of Tara', pp 98-108; Connon, 'A Prosopography of the Early Queens of Tara', pp 225-357.

4.2 Representation of queens in the Annals

In order to answer these questions, a systematic approach has been adopted. This chapter's dataset is based on extracting all references to queens in the Irish annals, up to the tenth century. A total of fifty-two annal entries relating to queens have been identified as relevant, drawn from the Annals of Ulster, the Clonmacnoise Chronicle texts and, with caution, from the Annals of the Four Masters. As a general rule, the medieval chronicle texts are given preference. Most of these take the form of obits whose formulaic nature make cross-comparison feasible. So, although the manner in which royal women appear in the annals varies the type of information provided in individual obits is consistent across each of the chronicle texts. They generally associate royal women with terms such as *ingen* or *filia* (daughter) and either as *ben* (wife) of a king or *rígan* or *regina* (queen). The use of the term *ben* (wife) or *ben righ* (wife of the king of) is not seen in the Annals of Ulster until the eleventh and twelfth century, although it is found in *Chronicum Scotorum* from 900 and in the Annals of the Four Masters with regularity. The Latin term *uxor* (wife) features but is rare, only appearing seven times across the Annals of Ulster and the Clonmacnoise group. Only two women are recorded as *uxor* in more than one chronicle.[8] The pattern probably reflects the gradual growth of the use of vernacular terminology within the annals, especially from the ninth century.[9] The linking of a queen to her father or husband is reflective of what is seen in other sources, in particular the law tracts.[10] As we saw, they based the status of a woman relative to her male kindred or husband. It is no surprise then that a royal woman is referred to and identified as a daughter in all but two obits across this range of sources.[11] She is recorded as being a wife in fifteen obits[12] and there are a total of thirty-eight references to the term queen.[13]

[8] *s.a.* CS 487, AT 489.2.

[9] *s.a.* CS 487, AT 489.2, CS 639, AU 639.2, AT 641.3, AU 695.5, AI 1110.4. See, also, the discussion in Johnston, *Literacy and Identity*, pp 99-100.

[10] See for instance, CIH 779.7-8; CIH 563.1-570.32, 777.6-783.38; Binchy, 'Críth Gablach', §125-127; Charles-Edwards, '*Críth Gablach* and the Law of Status', pp 53–73; Oxenham, *Perceptions of Femininity in Early Irish Society*, pp 98-99.

[11] *s.a.* AFM 852.4, CS 854, AI 840, AU 632.

[12] *s.a.* AT 636.3, AFM 642.4, AFM 743.7, AFM 749.6, AFM 763.8, AFM 790.7, AFM 852.4, AFM 886.8, CS 923, AFM 927.16, CS 929, AFM 941.12, CS 943, AFM 951.16, CS 953.

[13] *s.a.* CS 643, AT 644.2, AT 732.5, AU 732. 7, AU 748.6, AT 748.8, AT 754.2, AU 768.5, AU 795.1, AI 795.1, AFM 796.7, AFM 797.11, AU 801.6, AU 802.7, CS 854, AFM 859.5, AU

It must be noted that as six annal collections in all were consulted there is an inevitable overlap in the women being mentioned; the actual number of individual queens is twenty-five. As a companion to this chapter, there is an Appendix which has a table with the names of all queens mentioned in this chapter, including the annal, date they are recorded and their familial connections. Although some entries record the same woman, each of the annals present nuances of terminology and language use, all of which require consideration. Where there are a number of entries recording a single woman, they can vary in syntax and language as can be seen from the examples below which record the same queen:

> *Euginis filia Donnchada, regina regis Temorie, moritur.*
> Euginis daughter of Donnchad, queen of the king of Temair, dies. [14]

> *Euginia,inghen Donnchadha, mic Domhnaill rioghain righ Temhra .i. rígh Bregh d'écc.*
> Euginia, daughter of Donnchadh, son of Domhnall, queen of the King of Teamhair *i.e. of the King of Breagh*, died.[15]

In the first example, drawn from the Annals of Ulster, the obit is in Latin, reflecting how that language is important in the earlier annals. The second, drawn from the Annals of the Four Masters, is entirely in Irish, consistent with the language of that text. It is clearly drawing from the medieval exemplar but is also adding in extra contextual information, taken from the genealogies. This extra information is possible because the Annals of Ulster obit is contemporary while the one in the Annals of the Four Masters draws from the wide range of sources available to Mícheál Ó Cléirigh. However, it is noteworthy that the basic formula is consistent, and this is nearly always the case.

As can be seen, the presentation of the information may appear to be formulaic. For example, Helen Oxenham, while acknowledging the significance of queens appearing in the annals suggests that 'what annals cannot tell us is the

861.2, CS 861, AU 890.5, AFM 916.8, AFM 916.9, CS 918, AU 923.7, CS 928, CS 929, AFM 929.13, AU 931.4, AFM 938.12, CS 940, AU 940.4, AFM 946.9, AFM 951.16, AFM 985.5, AT 986.1, CS 986, AFM 991.8, AT 992.3, CS 992.

[14] *s.a.* AU 802.7.

[15] *s.a.* AFM 797.7.

roles these women undertook: their presence suggests visibility, but nothing more'.[16] At first glance, this seems true but this chapter will argue that this is not the case. On the contrary when obits are re-examined with care they potentially tell us three things about queens: their genealogical links, their marital status, and their role within society. Not all obits have each of these elements but they all contain a combination of them and can be read in relationship to each other. Based on these three components the aim of this chapter will be to explore how the queens in the annals formed part of a social elite group. These women were the daughters and wives of kings and this gave them significant influence through connections with powerful male relatives.[17] The chapter will also show the degree to which these women and their families were interconnected, further emphasising that they were part of an elite aristocratic environment. Obviously, the focus is on a relatively small group but, as will be evident from the entries discussed, many of the women in this chapter are in some way related giving that group great coherency. Moreover, this also helps in the analysis of the role played by queens in marriage alliances that formed a crucial part of the wider political environment.[18] This chapter will expand on this in more detail by arguing that these political dimensions give significant insights into the social realities of these women. The intricateness of marriage alliances will be discussed throughout as will the importance of familial ties, sometimes extending over several generations. The chapter will now look at the women behind the death notices in more detail, exploring these interconnections through the application of social network analysis.[19]

[16] Oxenham, *Perceptions of Femininity in Early Irish Society*, p. 97.

[17] CIH 502.29-519.35; Ó Corráin, 'Women in Early Irish Society', pp 1-14; Ó Corráin, 'Marriage in Early Ireland', pp 5-24; Ó Corráin, 'Women and the Law in Early Ireland', pp 45–57.

[18] Charles- Edwards, *Early Irish and Welsh Kinship*, pp 93-95; Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession*, pp 69-72.

[19] Pádraig Mac Carron and Ralph Kenna, 'Viking Sagas: Six Degrees of Icelandic Separation Social Networks from the Viking Era', *Significance* 10*,* Issue 6 (December 2013), pp 12-17; Joseph Yose, Ralph Kenna, Máirín MacCarron and Pádraig MacCarron, 'Network Analysis of the Viking Age in Ireland as Portrayed in Cogadh Gaedhel Re Gallaibh', *Royal Society Open Science* 5, no. 1 (2017), pp 1-21; Kenna, MacCarron and MacCarron, *Maths Meets Myths: Quantitative Approaches to Ancient Narratives*; Sandra D Prado, Silvio R Dahmen, Ana LC Bazzan, Máirín MacCarron and Julia Hillner, 'Gendered Networks and Communicability in Medieval Historical Narratives', A*dvances In Complex Systems* 23, no. 3 (2020), pp 1-14.

4.3 Annals and network analysis

The reason for this is that network analysis will greatly aid in fulfilling the aims of the chapter. It provides a tool for mapping the complex interconnections that join social groups together. Thus, instead of looking at individuals or events, network theory instead examines and measures the interactions between people and characters. These networks are constituted of a collection of nodes connected by links.[20] In a social network, the nodes represent people – or characters in the case of literature – and the links are relationships or interactions between them. The degree of a node is the number of links associated with a given node.[21] In real social networks, if an individual knows two others, there tends to be a high probability that the two are also acquainted.[22] The programme this chapter used was NodeXL Basic which is a network analysis and visualisation software for Microsoft Excel. Data is inputted, in this case from the annals, cross-referenced with the genealogies, and it generates graphs that visualise the social networks.

In using network theory, the objective will be to portray the extent to which queens played a role in the networks that constituted elite society and how visible that was. The use of networks will also aid in establishing a queen's role and importance in political marriage alliances, usually orchestrated by their fathers, and how central their position was as a result. They will provide a dynamic picture of the totality of a woman's relationship which also incorporates generational links. This latter is very important because it shows how networks functioned over time. The use of networks centres the queen as an historical character while connecting the various political figures through her as a node and the degree, the subsequent links she has with others in society. This approach has not been used in the standard early Irish analyses of genealogies, which are structurally influenced by the overt patrilineal biases of the source texts and the tendency has

[20] Mac Carron and Kenna 'Viking Sagas: Six Degrees of Icelandic Separation Social Networks from the Viking Era', p. 13; Yose, Kenna, MacCarron and MacCarron, 'Network Analysis of the Viking Age in Ireland as Portrayed in Cogadh Gaedhel Re Gallaibh', p. 2; Kenna, MacCarron, and MacCarron, *Maths Meets Myths: Quantitative Approaches to Ancient Narratives*, pp 24-25.

[21] Mac Carron and Kenna 'Viking Sagas: Six Degrees of Icelandic Separation Social Networks from the Viking Era', p. 13; Kenna, MacCarron, and MacCarron, *Maths Meets Myths: Quantitative Approaches to Ancient Narratives*, p. 25.

[22] Mac Carron and Kenna 'Viking Sagas: Six Degrees of Icelandic Separation Social Networks from the Viking Era', p. 13.

been to focus on men. In contrast, the use of social networks allows us to think about the community of relationships created by marriage and the impact of political marriage alliances on both familial and dynastic alliances.

This is appropriate to the sources as the last chapter demonstrated that marriage is the principal element which links women of all status.[23] However, due to their elevated status the role of queens goes further than just the joining of two kindreds because the families joined held social, economic and political significance. These marriages facilitated political agendas in the form of an alliance between kingdoms. Yet, women are usually afterthoughts in the scholarship examining inter-kingdom rivalries and alliances.[24] However, when looked at from the position of the woman, she plays a central part. This can be masked by the terminology of genealogical descent used in vernacular texts. These stress agnatic ascendants and descendants. The terms for categories of female kin are limited to the nuclear family of parents and children with the exception of *amnair* (mother's brother) and *nia* (sister's son).[25] For example there is no female equivalent for *aue* (grandson) and *senmáthair* (grandmother) is rarely used.[26] It is agnatic descent, the rank and position of *athair* (father) and *senathair* (grandfather), which is key. Nevertheless, as Charles-Edwards has shown a woman's role in kinship was that of a 'principle bonding element' in which a woman linked two kindreds.[27] While the kinship of men was static and always tied to the one group, that of women was mobile and as a result a woman's kinship came to have a wider scope.[28] Through these characteristics a woman joins the past and future and one kindred with another, for she not only relates men and kindreds she relates generations.[29] The political implications of this have not been explored in scholarship but it is something which is central to the social networks. Furthermore, in high politics close agnatic kinsmen were much less

[23] Ó Corráin, 'Women in Early Irish Society', pp 1-14; Ó Corráin, 'Marriage in Early Ireland', pp 5-24; Ó Corráin, 'Women and the Law in Early Ireland', pp 45–57; Jaski, 'Marriage Laws in Ireland and the Continent in the Early Middle Ages', pp 16-42.

[24] Examples are too numerous to mention but any reading of the standard accounts of Irish history before 1000 rarely mentions the role played by historical queens.

[25] Dillon, 'The Relationship of Mother and Son, of Father and Daughter, and the Law of Inheritance with Regard to Women', pp 129-179; Charles- Edwards, *Early Irish and Welsh Kinship*, p. 36.

[26] Charles- Edwards, *Early Irish and Welsh Kinship*, p. 36.

[27] Charles- Edwards, *Early Irish and Welsh Kinship*, p. 87.

[28] Charles- Edwards, *Early Irish and Welsh Kinship*, p. 87.

[29] Charles- Edwards, *Early Irish and Welsh Kinship*, p. 86.

natural allies than were relationships created through women.[30] As *lánamnas comthinchuir* specified that marriage be between those of the same social class marriage was not just a potential alliance but also a demonstration of the rank of the kindreds involved.[31] The result was a situation where gender, politics and status influenced each other in complex ways.

These can be teased out with specific examples. Generally, agnatic descent was the most important factor. However, a high rank could also be sustained by maternal kinship, similar to how the previous chapter showed that the status of the mother had an impact on her children.[32] This is seen in the genealogies which set out the descent of Muiredach (d. 760), the ancestor of the Uí Muiredaig, one of the branches of the Uí Dúnlainge kings of Leinster.[33] The genealogy contains a matrilineal line of descent which acts as a base to which patrilines are attached and in doing so the matriline connects agnatic lineages allied by marriage and the birth of children.[34] Charles-Edwards argues that kinship through women was a crucial aspect of *febas* (personal excellence), one of the characteristics of a good king. Furthermore, just as marriages demonstrated status so, for the same reason, does maternal descent.[35] This is evident when a Leinster poet praised his patron Áed mac Díarmata, a descendant of Muiredach, by saying he was 'of the children of a hundred kings and a hundred queens'.[36]

Therefore, returning to the annals: the implications of a queen's marital status, so often mentioned in the obits, has many dimensions. The dynastic links that a queen creates is clearly evident below in fig. 1, which is a social network comprising of kings and queens in the annals, supplemented by genealogies. The network contains the names of all queens from annal entries spanning 632-992

[30] Charles- Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 95.

[31] CIH 502.29-519.35; Charles- Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 94; Ó Corráin, 'Women and the Law in Early Ireland', p. 47.

[32] Charles- Edwards, *Early Irish and Welsh Kinship*, p. 86.

[33] Charles- Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, pp 93-4; Charles- Edwards, *Early Irish and Welsh Kinship*, pp 28-30.

[34] Charles- Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, pp 93-4; Charles- Edwards, *Early Irish and Welsh Kinship*, pp 28-30; Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession*, pp 143-155.

[35] Charles- Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 95; Charles- Edwards, *Early Irish and Welsh Kinship*, pp 28-30; Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession*, pp 143-155.

[36] Whitley Stokes and John Strachan (ed. and tr.), *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus: A Collection of Old-Irish Glosses, Scholia, Prose, and Verse*, 3 Vols (Cambridge, 1901–1910), p. 295; Charles- Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 95; Charles- Edwards, *Early Irish and Welsh Kinship*, pp 28-29.

with the inclusion of annal entries for a queen from 11th century. The kings represented on the network are recorded either in the queen's obit, for example her father or husband or has been supplemented with the inclusion of names from genealogies. In total the graph presents 69 nodes, 29 representing queens and 40 representing kings. The purple nodes denote queens and the green nodes kings. As previously discussed, an element of social network theory is the degree of a node which is the number of people linked to an individual.[37] The highest degree for a given node is 9 and the minimum degree is 1. The average degree which is the extent to which the nodes on the graph are linked is 2.976. The centrality of a node is another measure to deciphering how central a node is. In a network, it is useful to identify influential or central nodes, one measure being the betweenness centrality. [38] This is the total number of shortest paths that pass through a given node.[39] The network has an average betweenness centrality of 51.561 which shows it is a highly connected network.[40] The network portrays the extent to which queens provide that bonding link between families and generations.[41] The network also demonstrates how central a role a queen plays. This is a large and complex network, which helps establish the foundational position of queens in the framework of Irish dynastic politics. The chapter will now give three women from fig.1 more in-depth treatment in order to delve more deeply into how this functioned to create an elite social group.

[37] Kenna and MacCarron, 'A Network Approach to Mythological Epics' in *Maths Meets Myths: Quantitative Approaches to Ancient Narratives,* p. 25.

[38] Kenna and MacCarron, 'A Network Approach to Mythological Epics' in *Maths Meets Myths: Quantitative Approaches to Ancient Narratives,* p. 28.

[39] Kenna and MacCarron, 'A Network Approach to Mythological Epics' in *Maths Meets Myths: Quantitative Approaches to Ancient Narratives,* p. 28.

[40] Robert Gramsch, Máirín MacCarron, Pádraig MacCarron, and Joseph Yose, 'Medieval Historical, Hagiographical and Biographical Networks' in *Maths Meets Myths: Quantitative Approaches to Ancient Narratives,* p. 55.

[41] Charles- Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 87.

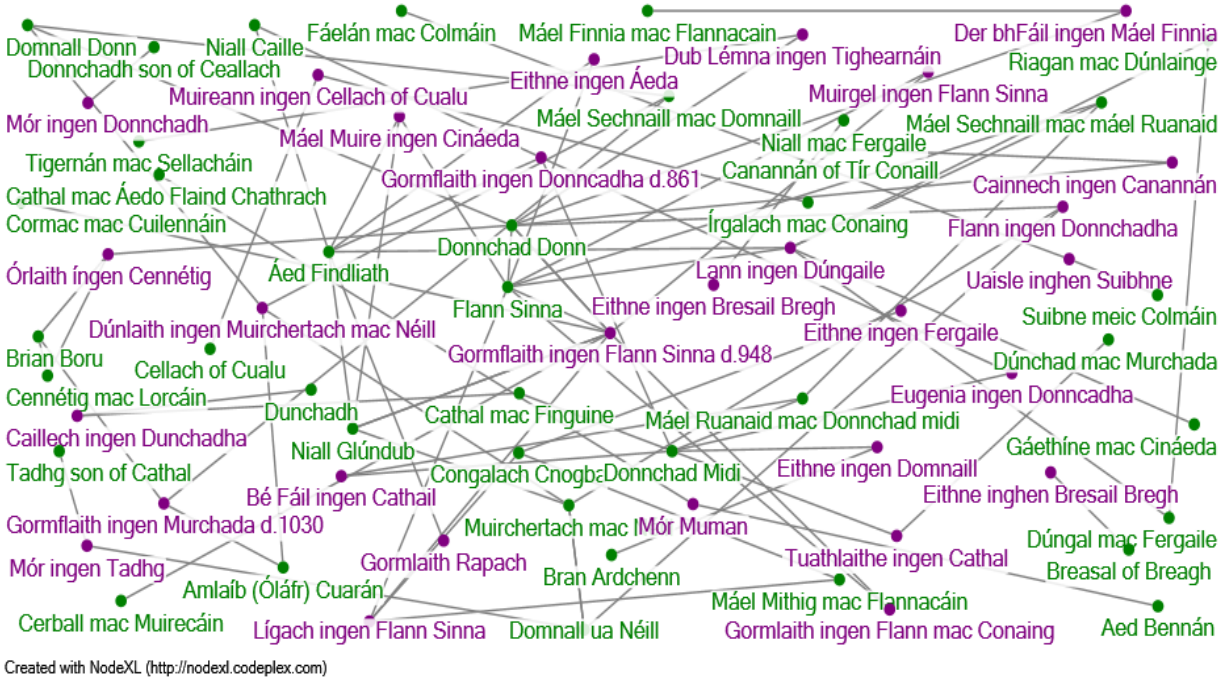


Fig. 1 Purple nodes represent queens and green nodes represent kings.

The two obits below record the death notice of Lann (d. 890) and record that she was the daughter of Dúngal mac Fergaile (d. 842), king of Osraige.

> *Flann ingen Dungaile, rigan righ Temhra, in penitencia dormiuit.*
> Flann daughter of Dúngal, queen of the king of Temair, fell asleep in penance.[42]

> *Flann, inghen Dúnghaile, ben Máil Sechlainn, mic Maol Ruanaidh, rí Ereann, & ba h-isidhe mathair Fhloinn Sionna, d'ég iar n-deigh-bhethaidh, & iar b-pennainn h-i c-Cluain Mic Nóis, & a h-adhnacal h-i suidhe.*
> Flann, daughter of Dunghal, wife of Maelsechlainn, son of Maelruain, King of Ireland, and who was the mother of Flann Sinna, died after a good life, and after penance at Cluain Mic Nois; and she was there interred.[43]

The contemporary Annals of Ulster obit is in a mixture of Latin and Irish while the Annals of the Four Masters is in the vernacular. They both tells us that she was

[42] *s.a.* AU 890.5.
[43] *s.a.* AFM 886.

the wife of Máel Sechnaill mac Maíle Ruanaid (d. 862) king of Ireland,[44] although this is expressed more obliquely in AU through the phrase 'rigan righ Temhra' (queen of the king of Tara). AFM provides the further information that she was the mother of Flann Sinna (d. 916), king of Ireland.[45] The obits present information about her genealogical ties, marital status, and role and status within society. The Annals of Ulster's emphasis on her being a *rígan* (queen) is particularly telling. However by supplementing this material with the genealogies a more complex social network emerges than a reading of the obits alone might indicate.

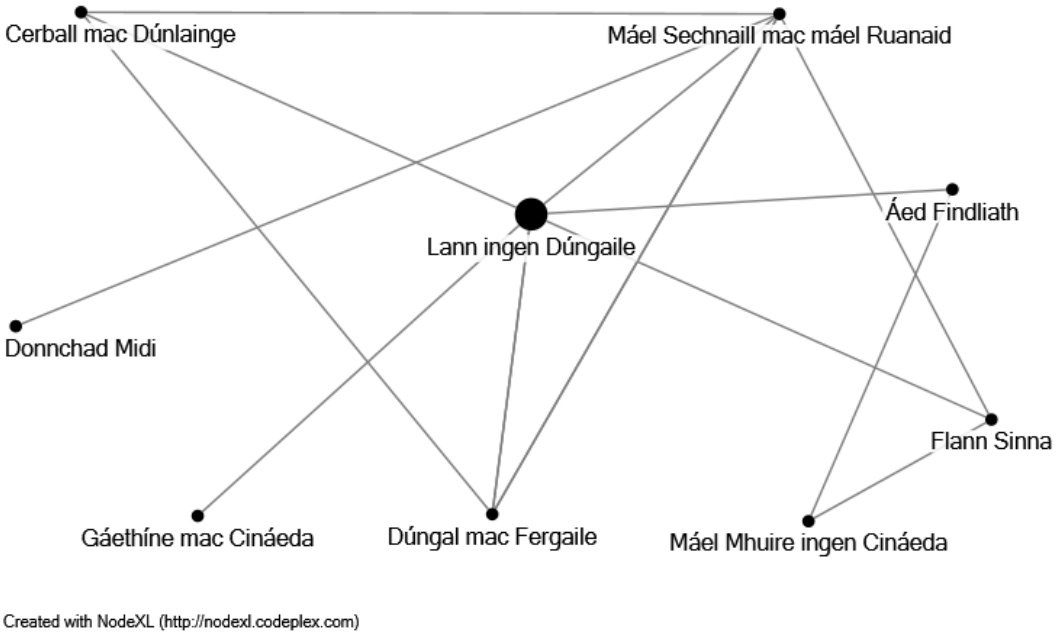


Fig. 2

As previously discussed, a social network contains a set of nodes (people) which are connected by links (interactions).[46] Fig. 2 depicts 9 nodes, representing 7 kings and 2 queens. In this network the central node is Lann. The network represents Lanns connections to other kings and queens in the annals and

[44] Thomas Charles-Edwards, 'Máel Sechnaill mac Máele Ruanaid (d.862)', in Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, online at https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/17770 (accessed 11 August 2021).

[45] Charles Doherty, 'Flann Sinna (Flann mac Máele Sechnaill) (d.948)', in Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, online at https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/50117 (accessed 11 August 2021).

[46] Kenna and MacCarron, 'A Network Approach to Mythological Epics' in *Maths Meets Myths: Quantitative Approaches to Ancient Narratives,* p. 25.

genealogies and these relationships are represented by the links. As discussed, the degree of a node is the number of people linked to an individual.[47] Lann has a degree of 6, meaning she has links to 6 other nodes (people). The network also shows that the graph has a degree average of 2.77. The most central character in the network is Lann whose betweenness centrality is 32.333.[48] The aim of the network is to demonstrate how central Lann is in connections. In this case the node which represents Lann has numerous links which have far reaching effects and show her centrality in alliances.

What will now be looked at is what and who these nodes and links represent. Lann was married three times, and these can be seen on the network. Her first union was with Gáethíne king of the Loígsi.[49] Her second marriage was to Máel Sechnaill mac Maíle Ruanaid, king of Tara, a grandson of Donnchad Midi (d.797) also king, with whom she had a son Flann Sinna, yet another king of Tara, who is seen on the network.[50] This was most likely an alliance orchestrated by her father and brother, Cerball mac Dúngaile (d.888) king of Osraige, who had alliances with Máel Sechnaill mac Maíle Ruanaid.[51] On Máel Sechnaill's death he was succeeded by Áed Findliath (d. 879).[52] Áed took Lann as his wife before setting her aside for Máel Mhuire ingen Cináeda.[53]

These connections demonstrate the nature of marriage for a woman of the status of Lann. Her first marriage likely took place while Cerball was a rising power and influence over the bordering kingdom of Loígis and furthered his agenda to become regionally dominant. Her second marriage facilitated a political alliance in which Lann was the link between the two parties and which highlights the social significance of a queen. Cerball's regional importance was solidified.

---

[47] Kenna and MacCarron, 'A Network Approach to Mythological Epics' in *Maths Meets Myths: Quantitative Approaches to Ancient Narratives,* p. 25.

[48] Robert Gramsch, Máirín MacCarron, Pádraig MacCarron, and Joseph Yose, 'Medieval Historical, Hagiographical and Biographical Networks' in *Maths Meets Myths: Quantitative Approaches to Ancient Narratives,* p. 55.

[49] Bhreathnach, *Ireland in the Medieval World*, p. 84.

[50] Ailbhe Mac Shamhráin, ' Donnchad Midi (d.797)', in *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, online at Donnchad Midi | Dictionary of Irish Biography (dib.ie) (accessed 11 August 2021).

[51] Benjamin T. Hudson, 'Cerball (Cearbhall) mac Dúngaile (d. 888)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online at https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/4972 (accessed 11 August 2021); Bhreathnach, *Ireland in the Medieval World*, p. 84.

[52] Benjamin T. Hudson, 'Áed mac Néill [Áed Findliath mac Néill] (d.879)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online at https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/50072 (accessed 11 August 2021).

[53] Bhreathnach, *Ireland in the Medieval World*, p. 84.

Her third marriage is evidence that Lann as a royal widow retained prestige. For Áed to marry his predecessor's wife demonstrates that Lann herself possessed influence and power. Moreover, it may also have solidified the traditional alternation in the kingship of Tara between the Southern Uí Néill (Máel Sechnaill) and their Northern Uí Néill counterparts (Áed Finnliath). It is not a stretch to see this as a reflection of Lann being more than a wife, but a queen. Fascinatingly, the world of serial marriage that Lann's marital career illustrates is also the one envisaged in the early Irish law tracts, but here given the added weight of real world examples. In addition, the extent to which royal marriages linked kindreds and kingdoms is clear in Lann's case. The complexities of alliances and the mobility of women in linking kindreds is further emphasised with Lann's son, Flann Sinna. On becoming king he married Máel Mhuire, the wife of his predecessor with this link being evident on the netwrok.The interplay between a small elite social group is striking as is the strategic role in marriage underpinning it.

As discussed earlier the genealogies were patrilineal. However, when a woman is placed at the centre, like Lann, a new picture emerges. Lann was the daughter of a king, wife to three kings, the mother of a king of Ireland as well as being the grandmother of one. She was also the grandmother to a queen of the Irish, the explicit title given to her granddaughter in the Annals of Ulster.[54]

> *Gormlaith ingen Donncadha, amenissima regina Scotorum, post poenitentiam obiit.*
> Gormlaith, daughter of Donnchad, a most charming queen of the Irish, died after repentance.[55]

The entry above records Gormlaith (d. 861) as the daughter of Donnchad Midi (d. 797), king of Ireland and as *regina Scotorum* (queen of the Irish), a significant title which accords her very high status. Although the obit provides some information this can be supplemented with the genealogies which provide further detail**.**

[54] *s.a.* AU 948.5.
[55] *s.a.* AU 861.2.

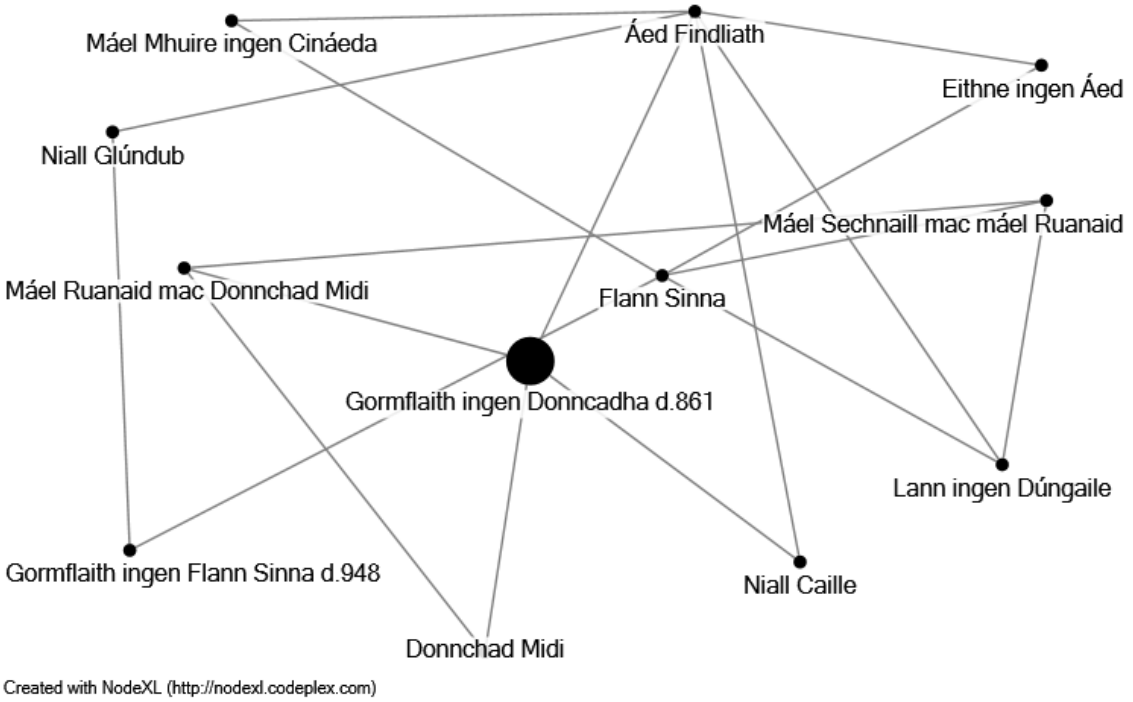


Fig. 3

The obit establishes her father as being Donnchad Midi. Through genealogies we know her husband is Niall Caille (d. 846), king of Ireland, connecting Clann Cholmáin, the dominant branch of Southern Uí Néill with Cenél nEógain, the dominant branch of Northern Uí Néill.[56] Fig.3 presents a network which contains 12 nodes, representing 7 kings and 5 queens. The network places Gormlaith as the central node. The degree of the node representing Gormlaith is 4, meaning that Gormlaith is directly connected to 4 other nodes in this graph. The degree to which the network is connected is an average degree of 2.83 and the betweenness centrality is 10.500. The network also builds on the previous network demonstrating generational links between Lann and Gormlaith. The network displays the link representing her marriage to Niall Caille. Niall and Gormlaith's son being the previously discussed Áed Findliath. The connectivity evident on the graph is seen through the link between Gormlaith and Áed Findliath which highlights the link to Lann. Two of Áed Findliath's children are also linked with Lann's son Flann Sinna. Áed's daughter Eithne, a queen herself, was a wife of Flann Sinna. His son Niall Glúndub (d. 919), king of Ireland, whose

[56] Ailbhe Mac Shamhráin, 'Niall Caille (d. 846)', in *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, online at Niall Caille | Dictionary of Irish Biography (dib.ie) (accessed 11 August 2021).

mother was the previously mentioned Máel Mhuire, was married to Gormlaith ingen Flann Sinna (d. 948).[57] In addition to Gormlaith's own descendants creating a link to Flann Sinna through grandchildren, through her own brother Máel Ruanaid mac Donnchad Midi, she is connected with Lann and Flann Sinna.

The importance of status is again evident as in her own right Gormlaith comes from a royal family, her father and her brother were kings and her sister Eugenia is recorded in the annals as a queen. It is likely that she was the wife of Áed Oirdnide mac Néill (d. 819), king of Ireland.[58] The key role played by marriage between the Northern and Southern Uí Néill is strikingly clear. Marriage joined the two branches closely together and created tight kinship networks that helped mitigate their rivalries and ensure their dominance of the kingship of Tara. It is arguably one of the factors that supported their longevity.

The practice of serial marriage and divorce, discussed in the last chapter, added further layers of complexity. It also emphasizes the degree of flexibility. This flexibility is important to analysing the third of the case studies being highlighted.

> *Gormlaidh ingin Fhlainn m. Mael Sechlainn in penitentia mortua est.*
>
> Gormlaith, daughter of Flann son of Mael Sechnaill, died in penitence.[59]

> *Gormfhlaith, inghen Flaind, mic Maoilechlainn, rioghan Néill Glunduibh, d'écc iar n-aithricche díochra ina tairmtechtaibh & doáilcibh.*
>
> Gormfhlaith, daughter of Flann, son of Maelseachlainn, queen of Niall Glundubh, died after intense penance in her sins and transgressions.[60]

As usual, the first death notice is from AU in a mixture of Latin and Irish, followed by the vernacular of AFM. The latter also adds a type of moral commentary,

[57] Benjamin T. Hudson, 'Niall *mac* Áeda (*called* Niall Glúndub)(d. 919)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online at https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/20077 (accessed 11 August 2021); Elva Johnston, 'Gormlaith (Gormphly) (d. 948)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online at https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/50122 (accessed 11 August 2021).

[58] Thomas Charles-Edwards, 'Áed Oirdnide mac Néill (D. 819)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online at https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/50074 (accessed 11 August 2021).

[59] *s.a.* AU 948. 5.

[60] *s.a.* AFM 946.9.

expanded from the contemporary AU but reflective of how Gormlaith came to be perceived over time, a point that will be touched on again later in the chapter. The Annals of Ulster records Gormlaith as the daughter of Flann Sinna. The obit provides reasonable genealogical detail as it includes references to Flann Sinna's own father Máel Sechnaill. The AFM entry provides the additional information that her husband was Niall Glúndub. It also records that she was *rioghan Néill Glunduibh* (queen of Niall Glúndub).

Gormlaith was married three times, to Cormac mac Cuilennáin (d. 908), king of Munster,[61] Cerball mac Muirecáin (d. 909), king of Leinster[62] and to Niall Glúndub. As a result, through her marriages she linked Clann Cholmáin with the Eóganachta through Cormac mac Cuilennáin, the Uí Dúnlainge with Cerball mac Muirecáin and the Cenél nEógain through her marriage to Niall Glúndub. She was queen of Munster, Leinster and Tara in turn.[63] These relationships were given a narrative weight in later Irish literature as her first husband Cormac was portrayed as a celibate bishop who lived with her chastely, while her second husband Cerball was blamed as being responsible for Cormac's death. Finally, Niall was treated as a great hero who died tragically. This literary Gormlaith is what is being alluded to the Annals of the Four Masters.[64] Significantly, we see Gormlatih is not the only member in her family to have a royal title nor is she the only female to do so. Her brother, Donnchad Donn (d. 944), was king of Ireland and two of her half-sisters are recorded as being queens, Lígach and Muirgel.[65] These connections give a sense of how 'aristocratic' Gormlaith was, and how inter-connected her world. She was a granddaughter of Lann, while her husband Niall was a grandson of Gormlaith ingen Donnchad. Gormlaith will be discussed in greater detail later in the chapter and again in chapter 5.[66]

---

[61] Paul Russell, 'Cormac *mac* Cuilennáin (d. 908)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online at https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/6319 (accessed 11 August 2021).

[62] Ailbhe Mac Shamhráin, 'Cerball (d. 909)', in *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, online at Cerball | Dictionary of Irish Biography (dib.ie) (accessed 11 August 2021).

[63] Trindade, 'Irish Gormlaith as a Sovereignty Figure', pp 143–156; Ní Dhonnchadha, 'On Gormfhlaith Daughter of Flann Sinna and the Lure of the Sovereignty Goddess', pp 225–237; Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Tales of the Three Gormlaiths in Medieval Irish Literature', pp 1-24.

[64] Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Tales of the Three Gormlaiths in Medieval Irish Literature', pp 1-24.

[65] *s.a.* CS 923, CS 854; Charles Doherty, 'Donnchad Donn Mac Flainn (d. 944)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online at https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/50107 (accessed 11 August 2021).

[66] See Chapter 5, section 5.5.



Fig. 4

Fig. 4 represents a network with 16 nodes, 10 kings and 6 queens with the central node depicting Gormlaith. Gormlaith has a degree of 7 which signifies the links with her father, her three marriages and three siblings. The average degree of the network is 3.125 and the betweenness centrality 25.750.

As can be seen from these networks the three women are themselves interconnected with each other. Fig. 5 combines all three networks, which has a total of 22 nodes, 15 kings and 7 queens. The average degree of the network is 3.158. The degree being the number of people linked to an individual which demonstrates the extent to which these queens link kindreds and linked them across generations.

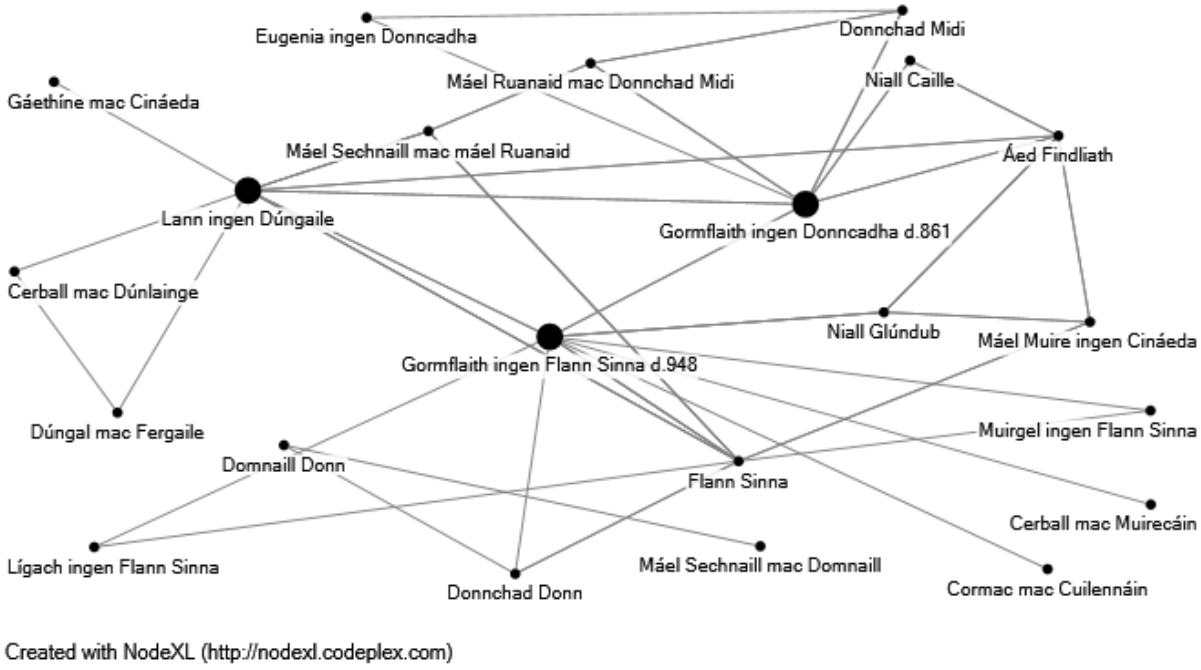


Fig. 5

It reemphasises the fact that although men provide the legally important lineage it is the women who create the links. This underlines the point earlier by Charles-Edwards that in high politics close agnatic kinsmen were much less natural allies than were relations through women.[67] The extent to which these networks demonstrate the generational aspect of the connections is also notable. The women born into these families, daughters, granddaughters, and sisters of kings appear to be elevated due to these connections and their resulting status appears evident through marriage alliances, furthering the point that these women formed an elite social group.

4.4 Queen as a daughter

Having established through network analysis the central role queens played in marriage alliances, the chapter will now examine in further detail what obits can tell us about these women, reinforcing the conclusions drawn from the analysis of the social networks and bringing more queens into the discussion. The first identifier given in an obit is usually a reference to the woman's genealogical link

[67] Charles- Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 95.

through the naming of her father. When this information is not provided, or clearly stated, cross-referencing genealogies and king lists provides more information. The information gleaned from the law texts shows that the annals are in keeping with the patriarchal system in society. Most of the royal women who appear in the annals do so in their connection to men. Moreover, the patronymic is standard for men and women.[68] However, this was also an important means of identification and provides scholars with valuable information.[69] Therefore, the obit can often provide a queen's name and family ties. In a number of entries, and with the assistance of genealogies, it becomes clear, as in the cases already discussed, that queens were drawn from aristocratic families as their fathers too are kings. The fact that the pattern is so common is a sign that the elites were tightly interwoven. For example:

> *Muirenn filia Cellaigh Cualann, regina Irgalaigh, moritur.*
> Muirenn daughter of Cellach of Cualu, Írgalach's queen, dies.[70]

In this obit we can see that Muireann is the daughter of the last Uí Máil king of Leinster Cellach Cualann (d. 715).[71] She is also the wife of Írgalach son of Conaing of the Síl nÁedo Sláine (d. 702), one of the two major dynasties of the Southern Uí Néill.[72] Cellach Cualann had another daughter Derb Forgaill, although the entry in the annals does not include a patronymic.[73] The marriage of two of his daughters into branches of the Síl nÁedo Sláine most likely reflects political strategies of the two dynasties, something seen in the social networks, furthering the point that these women are part of an elite social grouping. The marriage of Muireann was representative of an alliance against a mutual enemy, the Uí Chernaig, and an opportunity for the Uí Chonaing branch of the Síl nÁedo Sláine to create an alliance with the king of Leinster and to not be at a disadvantage with the other branches of their internally fraught dynasty.[74] While

---

[68] Oxenham, *Perceptions of Femininity in Early Irish Society*, p. 96.
[69] Oxenham, *Perceptions of Femininity in Early Irish Society*, p. 96.
[70] *s.a.* AU 748.6.
[71] Charles Doherty, 'Cellach Cualann (d. 715)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online at https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/50090 (accessed 11 August 2021).
[72] Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, pp 87-88; Ailbhe Mac Shamhráin, 'Írgalach (d. 715)', in *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, online at Írgalach | Dictionary of Irish Biography (dib.ie) (accessed 11 August 2021).
[73] *s.a.* AU 684.2; Connon, 'A Prosopography of the Early Queens of Tara', p. 309.
[74] Connon, 'A Prosopography of the Early Queens of Tara', p. 313.

the political ramifications are of importance it cannot be overlooked that queens are central to them.

A queen's role in a marriage alliance is the closest that we come to regularly seeing them demonstrably involved in the political sphere, for better or for worse.

> *Bran Arddcenn rex Lagenentium, occisus est, & regina eius, Eithne ingin Domnaill Midhe. Finshnechta Cetarderc m. Ceallaigh occidit eos h-I Cill Chule Dumai in .ui. nocte post kl. Maii, id est .iiii. feria.*
> Bran Airdchenn, king of Laigen, was slain with his queen, Eithne daughter of Domnall of Mide. Fínnechta Cetharderc, son of Cellach, killed them in Cell Chúile Duma on the sixth night after the Kalends *6th* of May i.e. on the fourth feria *Wednesday*.[75]

The above obit records that Eithne was married to Bran Airdchenn (d. 795)[76] and is the daughter of Domnaill Midi (d. 763)[77] The obit is unusual in that it records the murder of the king and queen. As we saw in the last chapter's discussion of *Vita Prima*, the king and queen are associated with each other as a pairing, although in this case it is in death. Familial links may well have played a role in the murders, a dark reflection of the pattern that at this point has been strongly established. Donnchad Midi, king of Ireland and Eithne's brother, invaded Leinster in 780 for what Charles-Edwards notes was most likely family reasons, to aid in installing his brother-in-law Bran Airdchenn as king and, as a result his sister as queen.[78] The political alliance was again reinforced when Donnchad led an Uí Néill army to aid the Leinstermen in their conflict against the men of Munster.[79] However Bran's marriage alliance with Donnchad may have caused resentment and resulted in his and Eithne's deaths at Cell Cuile Dumai. Both Bran and Eithne were killed in a church in what was thought to be a 'ruthless political gesture'.[80] In this

---

[75] *s.a.* AU 795.1.

[76] Ailbhe Mac Shamhráin, 'Bran Ardchenn (d. 795)', in *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, online at Bran Ardchenn | Dictionary of Irish Biography (dib.ie) (accessed 11 August 2021).

[77] Thomas Charles-Edwards, 'Domnall *mac* Murchada (d. 763)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online at https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/50105 (accessed 11 August 2021).

[78] Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, p. 158; Charles- Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 578.

[79] Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, p. 158; Charles- Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 578.

[80] Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, p. 158; Charles- Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 578;.

case, in addition to being a central figure in the alliance as the sister and wife of both kings, we see a queen being brought directly into the sphere of political action.

The complexities of the interconnections is further highlighted in the next example:

> *Flann ingin Donnchada, righan Ailigh, moritur.*
> Flann daughter of Donnchad, queen of Ailech, dies.[81]

The above obit tells us that Flann is the daughter of Donnchad whose father was Flann Sinna. This death notice, cross-referenced with the use of genealogies, gives a snapshot of six generations. Flann was a descendant of the earlier discussed Domnaill Midi and came from a family of kings that were all interconnected through blood and marital relationships.[82] While on the surface this obit simply records Flann's familial and marital relationships much more can be uncovered. As a woman Flann tied her husband to her father in *clemnas*, the relationship between in-laws.[83] This relationship is politically resonant in the union between a king and the daughter of a king, such as here between Flann and Muirchertach mac Néill king of Ailech (d. 943).[84] Muirchertach's ambition was to become recognized as king of Ireland. In 928 he challenged the right of the king of Tara, Donnchad (Flann's father) to celebrate the Óenach Tailten (Fair of Tailtiu), which was a type of assembly associated with the kingship.[85] Muirchertach again tried to force Donnchad into a battle when he seized the ceremonial site at Tara, which resulted in retaliation from Donnchad in which he led an expedition against Muirchertach, and in 936 he attacked Dublin with considerable success.[86] Following a standoff in 938, it is reported that Donnchad made peace with Muirchertach. It is very likely that at this stage Muirchertach married Donnchad's daughter Flann, establishing peace through *clemnas*

[81] *s.a.* AU 940.4.
[82] CGH, p.159 (143bc 39).
[83] Charles- Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 85.
[84] Ailbhe Mac Shamhráin, 'Muirchertach na Cochall Craicinin (d. 943)', in *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, online at Muirchertach na Cochall Craicinin | Dictionary of Irish Biography (dib.ie) (accessed 11 August 2021).
[85] Mac Shamhráin, 'Muirchertach na Cochall Craicinin (d. 943)'.
[86] Mac Shamhráin, 'Muirchertach na Cochall Craicinin (d. 943)'.

and emphasising the importance of a queen.[87] As this example shows, women such as Flann were a lot closer to politics than often acknowledged.

4.5 Queen as a wife

The central importance of marriage for women is reflected in the annals, as the second piece of information which an obit tells us concerns the queen's marital status. The lack of clarity as to whether a women is acknowledged as a queen as well as a wife can sometimes be teased out if a woman is described as a wife of a king in one set of annals and is referred to as a queen in another obit from a different set. For example, AFM refers to Uaisle as the wife of Fáelán[88] whereas the CS[89] and AT,[90] which are both derived from the Clonmacnoise Chronicle, refer to her as the queen of Fáelán. This is a useful example as it has been shown that AFM is more likely to change titles rather than names in its sources.

This divergence is most evident in AFM as the terminology for kingship differs to other annals, impacting on its portrayal of queens. AFM was structured around the concept of kingship, especially the kingship of Ireland, and this reflects its early modern origin. It consistently upgrades major kings while downgrading more minor rulers.[91] As Bernadette Cunningham has shown, the aim was to provide a history of Ireland as a kingdom, using medieval sources but shaping them to new agendas.[92]. This change in terminology is evident in instances in which we are told a woman's father is a king in contemporary sources such as CS and then downgraded in AFM:

> *Dublena ingen Tigernain righ Breifne ben righ Temrach .i. Donnchadha meic Flainn moritur*.
> Dub Léna daughter of Tigernán, king of Bréifne, wife of the king of Temair, i.e. Donnchad son of Flann, dies. [93]

[87] Mac Shamhráin, 'Muirchertach na Cochall Craicinin (d. 943)'.
[88] *s.a.* AFM 642.4.
[89] *s.a.* CS 643.
[90] *s.a.* AT 644.2.
[91] Cunningham, *The Annals of the Four Masters*, pp 117-118.
[92] Cunningham, *The Annals of the Four Masters*, pp 117-118.
[93] *s.a.* CS 943.

Duibh Lemhna inghen Tighearnáin, tighearna Bréifne, ben Donnchadha mic Floinn, rí Ereann, d'ég.
Duibhleambna, daughter of Tighearnan, i.e. lord of Breifne, and wife of Donnchadh, son of Flann, King of Ireland, died. [94]

Here, Tigernán is changed from being a king to a lord, emphasising the importance of Donnchad as King of Ireland, The likely explanation here is that Mícheál Ó Cléirigh wished to establish clearly, through the use of language, the series of marriages that underpinned kingship and lordship with the kingship of Ireland placed at the pinnacle. His access to king lists and genealogies was a further help.

4.6 Queen as a Title?

Having established that an obit provides genealogical links and marital status the third piece of information is a woman's position in society. The annal references to the terms *rígan/regina* (queen) provide insight into how a queen's role evolved over time, perhaps becoming more analogous to kingship. The term queen first appears in 643[95] in CS and in 644 in AT[96] in which the obit refers to Uaisle, *rigan Faelan ri Laighen* (queen of Faelán king of Laigin). Uaisle was the only woman referred to as a queen in the seventh century.

Báss h-Uaisle filiae Suibne meic Colmáin {.i. rigan Faelan ri Laighen}.
Death of Huaisle daughter of Suibne son of Colmán *i.e. the queen of Faelán king of Laigin*.[97]

The eighth century sees the term being recorded in a much more consistent manner, shedding light on how queens were possibly perceived within wider society. The following example is worth looking at:

Ceallach ingen Dunchada dia Uibh Liathain, regina optima & benigna, dormitauit.

[94] *s.a.* AFM 941.12.
[95] *s.a.* CS 643.
[96] *s.a.* AI 644.2.
[97] *s.a.* CS 643.

> Cellach daughter of Dúnchad of the Uí Liathain, a most excellent and gracious queen, fell asleep.[98]

It is interesting to note that the obit has no reference to a king, indicating that a queen could be commemorated in her own right, without directly mentioning her husband. The eighth century also sees the evolution of the term with the emergence of obits recording women as queens of particular places and of groups of people.

> *Mors Tuathlaithi filie Cathail, regine Laginorum.*
> The death of Tuathlaithi daughter of Cathal, queen of the Leinstermen.[99]

Tuaithlaith is queen of Laigin in this example. This terminology is important as other historical sources do not associate queens with the political world in the same way. Whether being *Regina Laginorum* is a title or a reference to any power she may have wielded is unclear, but the reference alone indicates that queens had a definite visibility within society.

Although the entries still use 'queen of' there is a greater variance in information provided in the ninth and tenth century. There seems to be a clear trend towards greater recognition of women as queens, especially after 800. We see the evolution of the terminology but also its elevation, although whether this is reflective of actual changes in society or of styles of reporting has yet to be completely ascertained. The recording of a woman as a queen, in her own right, like in the previous example is worth considering in this context. For example:

> *Murgel righan Laigen mortua est.*
> Muirgel, queen of Laigin, died.[100]

This is the same Muirgel who is recorded in the AFM[101] as the wife of the King of Leinster. Again, it is a reference to a woman in a position of authority which is not

[98] *s.a.* AU 732.7.
[99] *s.a.* AT 754.2.
[100] *s.a.* CS 854.
[101] *s.a.* AFM 852.4.

seen in other sources. The ninth century also records the first of three instances in the annals to a woman being called queen of Ireland or of the Irish, *bainrioghain Ereann* (queen of Ireland)[102] / *regina Scotorum* and *rigan Gaoidheal* (queen of the Irish).[103] The most notable entries reference Gormlaith daughter of Donnchad, and were discussed earlier.[104] However, it is worth noting her commemoration as Queen of Ireland in this context.

In the tenth century the use of queen is consistent as is the association with places or peoples. Queens are no longer simply identified with husbands or fathers. This association of a woman with a place is something that will be examined in the next chapter which will explore the representation of the sovereignty figure. This is accompanied by examples of women as queens of places strongly associated with kingship. For instance:

> *Der bhFail ingin Mael Finnia m. Flannacain, regina Temrach, mortua.*
> Der bhFáil, daughter of Mael Finnia son of Flannacán, queen of Temair, died.[105]

> *Eithne, inghen Aodha, mic Néill, rioghan Fer m-Bregh, d'écc lá féile Martain.*
> Eithne, daughter of Aedh, son of Niall, queen of the men of Breagh, died on the festival day of St. Martin.[106]

Here we have queens directly connected with the royal site of Tara and the powerful Uí Néill kingdom of Brega respectively.

There are two women for whom the death notices record more than their familial ties and marital status and help provide an insight into queens as individuals and society's perception of them. The first of them, Cailleach, is referred to in two obits, AT and AU, as *regina optima et benigna* (a good and benign queen),[107] *regina optima & benigna* (most excellent and gracious queen),[108] and Eithne, *iar n-airilleadh fochraicce ó Dhia tria déighghníomhaibh* (having deserved reward from God for her good works).[109] This type of

[102] *s.a.* AFM 859.5.
[103] *s.a.* AU 861.2, CS 861.
[104] *s.a.* AU 861.2.
[105] *s.a.* AU 931.4.
[106] *s.a.* AFM 916.8.
[107] *s.a.* AT 732.5.
[108] *s.a.* AU 732.7.
[109] *s.a.* AFM 763.8.

description is significant and shows that in some cases women could be commemorated for their own merit and not simply because of their fathers or husbands.[110] It might even be that these are the type of queens described in *Vita Prima*, who were patrons to the Church and, in turn, received honour from ecclesiastics.

There are only two references to a woman being recorded with all three terms (relating to marital status, genealogical relationships, and role) in their death notice. The first obit in CS is interesting as it is one of two death notices in which Caineach daughter of Canadán is recorded. The first identifies her as a queen and the second, in the following year, provides additional information in which she is identified as a queen and a wife:

> *Cainech ingen Canadain rigan rig Temrach. dermad a leghtoir ni sunna fil a hait.*
> Cainech daughter of Canadán queen of the king of Temair died. [111]

> *Cainech ingen Canadain rigan righ Temrach in penetentia quieuit, ben Donnchadha meic Flainn*.
> Cainech daughter of Canadán, queen of the king of Temair, wife of Donnchad son of Flann, rested in repentance. [112]

In this instance the first death notice simply states her paternal link and that she is a queen of the king of Tara. The second obit, a year later, appears to be amended with more information provided with the addition of information about her husband. The additional information in the second obit tells us that she is the wife of Donnchad, son of Flann. As has been evident from this chapter members of this family are prominent in the annals. Donnchad's four wives are all mentioned in the annals, Cainech,[113] Der bhFáil,[114] Órlaith [115] and Dub Léna.[116] Charles Doherty has put forward the argument that Donnchad's marriage alliances are connected with future powerful families.[117] This can be seen in fig.6 which portrays them through the use of social network analysis. The network

[110] Oxenham, *Perceptions of Femininity in Early Irish Society*, p. 97.
[111] *s.a.* CS 928.
[112] *s.a.* CS 929.
[113] *s.a.* CS 929.
[114] *s.a.* AU 931.4.
[115] *s.a.* CS 941.
[116] *s.a.* CS 943.
[117]Doherty, 'Donnchad Donn mac Flainn (d. 944).

portrays 9 nodes, 6 kings and 3 queens. The degree being 2.88 and a betweenness centrality of 2.88.

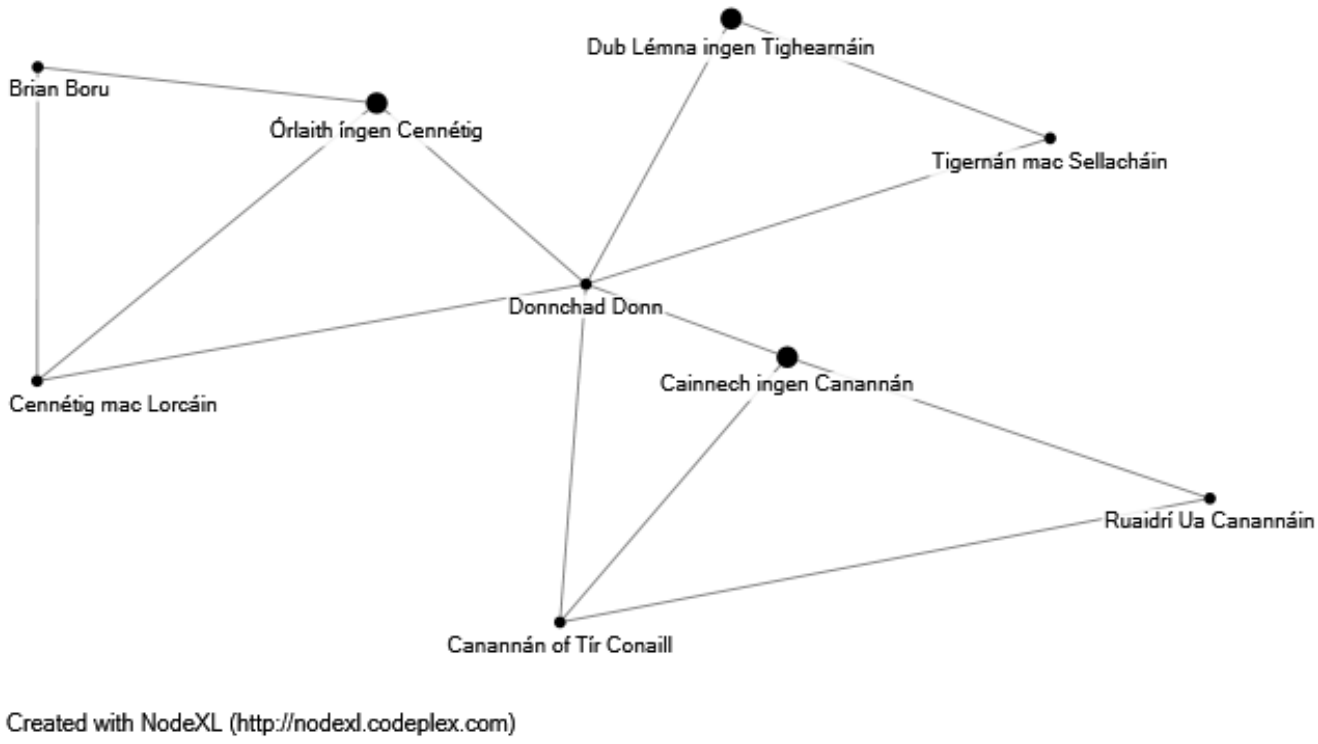


Fig. 6

The marriage to Cainech of the Cenél Conaill foresaw the rise of Ruaidrí Ua Canannáin king of Ailech (d. 950) who belonged to Cenél Conaill, a dynasty of the Uí Néill.[118] Ruaidrí Ua Canannáin king of Cenél Conaill, was the grandson of Canannán, with Cainnech said to possibly be his aunt.[119] According to Doherty the death notice of Cainnech is the first hint of the rising power of the family and her marriage to Donnchad may have facilitated Cenél Conaill's rise to power.[120] Donnchad's marriage to Órlaith saw the rise of the ancestors of the Uí Briain. Órlaith 's father was Cennétig mac Lorcán (d. 951), an overking of north Munster and the first representative of the Dál Cais dynasty to achieve prominence at

[118] Charles Doherty, 'Ruaidrí ua Canannáin (d. 950), in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online at https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/50131 (accessed 11 August 2021).

[119] Ailbhe Mac Shamhráin, 'Ua Canannáin, Ruaidrí (d. 950)', in *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, online at Ua Canannáin, Ruaidrí | Dictionary of Irish Biography (dib.ie) (accessed 11 August 2021).

[120] Doherty, 'Ruaidrí ua Canannáin (d. 950)

national level.[121] She was also the eldest sister of Brian Boru, high king of Ireland (d.1014).[122] The marriage to Dub Léna, daughter of Tigernán mac Cellacháin, king of Bréifne, acknowledged the growing importance of the ancestors of the Uí Ruairc.[123] The obit of Órlaith is also interesting as she was said to have been killed by her husband, Donnchad, after having slept with his son. Seán Duffy has argued that, although the offence was perceived as very grave, it was unusual that she was killed rather than repudiated. As described by the annalist:

> *Orlaith ingen Cinneididh meic Lorcáin do bas la Donnchadh mac Flainn rí Eirenn iarna liudh for Aongus for a mac.*
> Órlaith daughter of Cennétigh son of Lorcán was slain by Donnchad son of Flann, king of Ireland, having been charged with illicit sexual relations with Óengus, his son.[124]

The severity of Donnchad's response could be due to her being expendable, as her family was a lower rank in comparison to that of the king of Tara. It is also suggested that she was a secondary wife to Donnchad, again emphasising the low rank of her family beyond their own region.[125] As was seen in the previous chapter this is evident in the *Cáin Lánamna*. A man could be in more than one type of union, for example a high-status marriage with one woman while having a secondary wife. The secondary wife's legal rights were less than those of the primary wife.[126] However, Duffy argues that the very fact that Donnchad had taken a Dál Cais princess in marriage was acknowledgment that the family was in the ascendant and it seems very unlikely that such a dynasty would arrange for their daughters to be secondary wives.[127] This scenario is similar to the ninth-century saga *Fingal Rónáin* (How Ronan slew his Son) in which Rónáin mac Áeda, king of Leinster remarries after the death of his wife. His new wife is younger and prefers Rónáin's son Máel Fothartaig. When she fails to gain his

[121] Ailbhe Mac Shamhráin, 'Cennétig (d. 951), in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online at Cennétig | Dictionary of Irish Biography (dib.ie) (accessed 11 August 2021).
[122] Seán Duffy, 'Brian Bóruma (Brian Boru) (d. 1014), in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online at https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/3377 (accessed 11 August 2021).
[123] Doherty, 'Donnchad Donn Mac Flainn (d. 944)'.
[124] *s.a.* CS 941.
[125] Sean Duffy, *Brian Boru and the Battle of Clontarf* (Dublin, 2014), pp 75-76.
[126] Eska, *Cáin Lánamna,* p. 17.
[127] Duffy, *Brian Boru and the Battle of Clontarf*, pp 75-76.

attention, she lies and convinces Rónáin that his son loves her. In this tale Rónáin, his wife and his son all die.[128]

The second obit to contain information concerning family, marital status and a royal role is similar in that it appears that the status of the husband is a factor in determining the overall death notice:

> *Eithne, inghen Ferghaile, banrioghan Ereann, ben Congalaigh, mic Maoil Mithigh, d'ég.*
> Eithne, daughter of Fearghal, Queen of Ireland, wife of Conghalach, son of Maelmithigh, died.[129]

AU restricted the use of the title 'king of Ireland' to eight kings of the Uí Néill and four from other dynasties, one of them being Congalach.[130] The fact that he is referred to as king of Ireland may be reflective in how Eithne is herself referred to as queen of Ireland with her status echoing his. He is also found in a kings list, *Haec Sunt Credentium Regum Nomina*[131] and a genealogy, *Genelach Síl Áeda Sláine*.[132] Interestingly we again see links between families: Congalach was the son of Máel Mithig, his mother, Lígach, was the sister of Donnchad Donn, Muirgel and Gormlaith and he was a grandson of Flann Sinna.

Status and family connections may not be the only reason as to why queens appear in the annals. Given the language used it may be that the women were known in the monastery, possibly as a patron, something which was touched on earlier. These obits may also tell us about the lives of these women after marriage. It may be the case that some royal women may have retired to a monastery on the death of her last husband, a practice which was seen on the Continent.[133] Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha in her discussion of terms surrounding veiled women looks to the poems concerning Gormlaith.[134] In one of the poems

---

[128] Claire Dagger, 'Eithne: The Sources', *Zeitschrift Für Celtische Philologie* 43 (1989), p.109; https://celt.ucc.ie/published/T302011.html

[129] *s.a.* AFM 951.16.

[130] *s.a.* AU 956.3, Congalach son of Mael Mithig son of Flannacán son of Cellach son of Congalagh son of Conaing of Cuirrech son of Congalach son of Aed of Sláine, king of Ireland, was killed by the foreigners of Áth Cliath and by the Laigin at Tech Giurann in Laigin; and Aed son of Aichid, king of Tethba, and many others were also killed.

[131] CGH, p.125 (137a 21).

[132] CGH, p.160 (144a 42).

[133] Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, pp 175-190.

[134] Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha, 'Caillech and Other Terms for Veiled Women in Medieval Irish Texts', *Éigse* 28 (1994-5), pp 71-96.

she is presented as spending her widowhood 'in penitence' and in another her diet suggests a penitent regime 'it matters little that I am without food'.[135] Furthermore, a woman retiring to a monastery is indicated in the death notice of Flann which records that she 'died after a good life, and after penance at Cluain Mic Nóis; and she was there interred'.[136] Gormlaith daughter of Donnchad is recorded as having died after repentance[137] and Gormlaith daughter of Flann Sinna is recorded having died in penitence.[138] There is a clear pattern here of the association of widowed queens with retirement to monasteries. It may well have been even more widespread than indicated in the annals.

4.7 The naming patterns associated with queens

Finally, it is worth considering the naming patterns of royal women as these provide another angle of investigation. There appears to be certain names which are given to women of a high-status or groupings within society. There are prominent names for royal women that also appear to be reused as they seem to be family names. This is also evident in the male names being used over generations. There are three names, in particular, which were popular among royal women, Gormlaith,[139] Eithne[140] and Mór.[141] The name Gormlaith is made up of *gorm* 'blue' and *flaith*. The latter was linked with the Irish feminine word for drink *laith* and the feminine word *flaith* meaning lord, lordship or sovereignty.[142] The use of *-flaith* (sovereignty, ale) in final position, strongly reflects a basic

---

[135] Osborn Bergin, *Irish Bardic Poetry: Texts and Translations, Together with an Introductory Lecture* (Dublin, 1970), pp 313-315; Ní Dhonnchadha, 'Caillech and Other Terms for Veiled Women in Medieval Irish Texts', p. 92.

[136] *s.a.* AFM 886.8; *d'ég iar n-deigh-bhethaidh, & iar b-pennainn h-i c-Cluain Mic Nóis, & a h-adhnacal h-i suidhe.*

[137] *s.a.* AU 861; *Gormlaith ingen Donncadha, amenissima regina Scotorum, post poenitentiam obit.*

[138] *s.a.* AU 948; *Gormlaidh ingin Fhlainn m. Mael Sechlainn in penitentia mortua est.*

[139] *s.a.* AFM 810.7, AI 840.1, AFM 859.5, CS 861, AU 861.2, CS 948, AU 948.5, AFM 904.9, AFM 917.7, AFM 946.9, CS 1029, AT 1030.15, AFM 1030.21, CS 1046, AT 1046.7, AFM 1046.7, AU 1063.1, AFM 1063.8, AU 1076.7, AI 1076.7, AT 1077.3, AFM 1077.12, AI 1110.2, AFM 1112.2, AU 1112.4, AI 1112.4, AT 1112.5.

[140] *s.a.* CS 487, AI 492.2, AFM 763.8, AU 768.5, AFM 773.7, AU 778.11, AFM 790.7, AU 795.1, AFM 916.8, AU 917.5, CS 918, AFM 951.16, CS 953, AFM 1015.5, AU 1016.2.

[141] *s.a.* AU 632.5, AT 636.3, AFM 916.9, CS 918, AFM 985.5, AT 986.1, CS 986, AFM 991.8, AT 992.3, CS 992, AFM 1053.12 CS 1088, AT 1088.5, AFM 1088.6, AT 1114.9, AU 1122.4, AI 1122.9, AT 1137.2, AFM 1137.11, AT 1167.3, AFM 1167.4, AI 1201.2, AI 1218.2, AI 1253.4.

[142] Trindade, 'Irish Gormlaith as a Sovereignty Figure', pp 154-155. See also 'flaith', http://dil.ie/22281.

political ideology in which women were seen as embodying but not possessing sovereignty.[143] Interestingly, this name seems to be most noted among aristocratic women. In contrast, the over 200 women recorded in the medieval Irish martyrologies, a major source for naming patterns, rarely use it as an element at all, with Lasar 'flame' being the most popular name.[144] It should be noted though that *flaith* was not only used in female names and it had a more general connection with sovereignty.[145] The other two names also have connections to sovereignty. For example, Mór means big, great and is associated with a number of queens in the annals.[146] It may reflect their status and high lineages. Eithne is the other prevalent name for queens in the annals; it is also found in numerous literary and hagiographical sources.[147]

Gormlaith is probably the best known of the three names. This is because it is the name of the three famous queens already mentioned.[148] These women are an exception, as already indicated, in that the material concerning them is significantly fuller when compared to the more fragmentary sources for other early medieval Irish aristocratic women. The eleventh-century Gormlaith, to a degree, has overshadowed her earlier namesakes and the focus in the following discussion will be on them. As has been established from earlier in the chapter Gormlaith the daughter of Donnchad Midi mac Domnaill was married to Niall Caille who succeeded her brother to the kingship of Tara and her son Áed Findliath also became a king.[149] Gormlaith is unusual in that she appears in two annal entries. Her death notice has already been discussed but the other reference is also of great interest:

---

[143] Elva Johnston, 'Strategies of Sanctity? Female Saints in the Irish Martyrologies, c. 800–1200 CE', in *Saints and their Several Images*, ed. Steffen Hope (London, Forthcoming).

[144] Elva Johnston, 'Strategies of Sanctity'.

[145] Interestingly the use of flaith in names is also seen in male names in the annals when recording kings. The flaith and laith is interesting as it is also seen in some other women's names one is a queen Tuathlaithe/tuathlaithi There are others such as Dúnlaith and Tuileflaith who follow the obit style of who their father is but not their husband. There is a Saerlaith who is recorded as having died aged one hundred. Interestingly there are two other women Coblaith and Foblaith who are abbesses.

[146] eDIL s.v. mór , már or dil.ie/32548 (accessed 19 August 2021).

[147]Dagger, 'Eithne: The Sources', p. 84.

[148] Trindade, 'Irish Gormlaith as a Sovereignty Figure', pp 143–156; Ní Dhonnchadha, 'On Gormfhlaith Daughter of Flann Sinna and the Lure of the Sovereignty Goddess', pp 225–237; Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Tales of the Three Gormlaiths in Medieval Irish Literature', pp 1-24.

[149] Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Tales of Three Gormlaiths in Medieval Irish Literature', p. 5.

> *Fedlimmid do indriud Lethe Cuind óthá Birra co Temraich, & a chostud i Temraich & Gormlaith ingen Murchada, ríg Laigen, do gabail cona banchure, & Indrechtach macc Mail Duin do marbad lais i Temraich.*
> Feidlimid harried Leth Cuinn from Birra to Temuir, and he was checked at Temuir, and he seized Gormlaith, daughter of Murchad, king of Laigin, together with her female train, and Indrechtach, son of Mael Dúin, was killed by him at Temuir.[150]

This incident appears to be a part of an ongoing dispute between Feidlimid mac Crimthainn (d. 847), king of Munster and claimant to the kingship of Ireland, and Niall Caille, Gormlaith's husband.[151] Byrne draws attention to the fact that the annalist has confused her with the better known and later Gormlaith, daughter of Murchad, with Ní Mhaonaigh giving further weight to the argument that the entry is a later insertion.[152] The entry recounts how Feidlimid captured Gormlaith. As Byrne states this was a deliberate insult to a king of Ireland and would have had a symbolic significance which would not have been lost on the contemporary public.[153] There is also a reference to her being captured along with her *banchure* (female retinue).[154] She appears again in the obits recording her death and she is described as being *bainrioghan Ereann* (queen of Ireland),[155] *amenissima regina Scotorum* (a most charming queen of the Ireland). [156] and *rigan Gaoidheal* (queen of the Irish).[157] The death notice found in AFM, quoted earlier, expands upon this suggesting that she did penance for her crimes during life.[158]

The second Gormlaith, as we have seen, was the daughter of Flann Sinna who was a grandson of Máel Ruanaid, a half-brother of our previous Gormlaith.[159] Her father, Flann Sinna became king of Tara on death of Áed Findliath, also a son of the previous Gormlaith. The material surrounding her constitutes a substantial dossier, providing her with a distinct literary personality.[160] There is a

---

[150] *s.a.* AI 840.1.

[151] Ailbhe Mac Shamhráin, 'Fedelmid (Feidlimid) (d. 847)', in *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, online at Fedelmid (Feidlimid) | Dictionary of Irish Biography (dib.ie) (accessed 11 August 2021).

[152] Mac Cana, 'Aspects of the Theme of King and Goddess in Irish Literature (*Suite En Fin*)', p. 62; Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, p. 225; Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Tales of Three Gormlaiths in Medieval Irish Literature', p. 3.

[153] Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, p. 225.

[154] http://dil.ie/search?search_in=headword&q=1%20ben

[155] *s.a.* AFM 859.5.

[156] *s.a.* AU 861. 2.

[157] *s.a.* CS 861.

[158] *s.a.* AU 861. 2.

[159] Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Tales of the Three Gormlaiths in Medieval Irish Literature', p. 6.

[160] Ní Dhonnchadha 'On Gormfhlaith Daughter of Flann Sinna and the Lure of the Sovereignty Goddess', p. 233.

problem, as discussed by Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, in separating fact from fiction in her case.[161] Poems appear in two collections supposedly spoken by her, found in the O'Gara MS (Royal Irish Academy MS 23 F16) and the National Library of Ireland, MS 200.[162] The circumstances of her divorce from Cerball, her second husband, are found in the Book of Leinster.[163] All of these are later compositions and are unlikely to be directly related to the actual Gormlaith. The material concerning Gormlaith, and to an extent the three Gormlaiths, has been argued by some to be related to her supposed role as a sovereignty figure, a theme that will be explored in the next chapter.

The second prominent name is Mór. Two different women named Mór are recorded as the Queen of Ireland.[164] The name is also associated with Mór Muman, from the tale *Mór Muman ⁊ Aided Cuanach meic Ailchine* (Mór Muman and the Death of Cuanu mac Ailchine) and she is also recorded in the annals.[165]

> *Mor Mhughan, ingen Aedha Bennain, mortua est.*
> Mór Muman, daughter of Aed Bennán, died.[166]

> *Mor Muman, ben Fingen quieuit*
> Mór Muman, Fingen's wife, rested.[167]

We can delve deeper behind this obit and see how historical figures can sometimes become distorted in the literature. In the tale, which dates to the tenth century, after the death of Fingen, Mór Muman is said to have married Cathal mac Áedo Flaind Chathrach, but Byrne notes that the author or later scribe confused him with his great grandson Cathal mac Finguine.[168] Cathal mac

---

[161] Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Tales of the Three Gormlaiths in Medieval Irish Literature', p. 6.

[162] Osborn Bergin, 'Consolations' in *Irish Bardic Poetry: Texts and Translations, Together with an Introductory Lecture*, eds Fergus Kelly and David Greene (Dublin, 1970), pp 202-215; Ní Dhonnchadha 'On Gormfhlaith Daughter of Flann Sinna and the Lure of the Sovereignty Goddess', p. 233.

[163] Ní Dhonnchadha 'On Gormfhlaith Daughter of Flann Sinna and the Lure of the Sovereignty Goddess', p.237.

[164] *s.a.* AFM 985.5, CS 986, AT 986.1, AFM 991.8, CS 992, AT 992.3.

[165] T. P. O'Nolan (ed. and tr.), 'Mór of Munster and the Tragic Fate of Cuanu Son of Cailchin', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 30 C (1912–1913), pp 261–282.

[166] *s.a.* AU 632.5.

[167] *s.a.* AT 636.3.

[168] Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, p. 205.

Finguine's wife and daughter are also recorded in the annals. His wife Cellach is the first women referred to as queen in the Annals of Ulster and is described as being a most excellent queen, as discussed earlier.[169] His daughter Tualthlaith is also recorded as a queen of Leinster.[170] Once again, it is striking to see how the Irish elites were so closely bound.

The other significant name, Eithne, is found in numerous literary and hagiographical sources.[171] However, as it is strongly associated with the debate about the sovereignty figure it will be analysed in more detail in the next chapter. Suffice it to say, that there is an argument for seeing an overlap here between queens in literature and queens in life, with the name being a way for them to echo each other. Indeed, all of the names mentioned, Gormlaith, Mór and Eithne may have shared this function. They were special names that had great resonance and they helped underline the status of the queen. This has all the appearance of the existence of a royal naming practice.

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter has concentrated on exploring what the annals tell us about early Irish queens. At first glance the obits themselves seem to say little. However, upon further investigation the annals tell us a great deal about queenship and its evolution from the seventh to tenth century. From the terminology alone we can see the importance of the role as it developed. The death notices can be cross-referenced with other sources such as genealogies, enabling the reconstruction of the social networks of individual queens. Moreover, many of the queens are themselves genealogically connected. When we delve in deeper we can see links between these women and their families. What becomes evident is that they were part of a social elite group which was distinguished even through its use of particular names amongst these women. The significance of the way queens held the framework of Irish political life together is worth emphasising. In fact, understanding their role in this context makes it far easier to interpret dynastic rivalries and alliances.

[169] *s.a.* AU 732.7; Connon, 'A Prosopography of the Early Queens of Tara', p. 320.
[170] *s.a.* AT 754.2.
[171] Dagger, 'Eithne: The Sources', p. 84.

Even more importantly, the annals are a key source for attempting to identify changes in how queens were perceived over time and even as to whether we can begin to talk about queenship to place alongside kingship. As seen from the previous chapter there were no laws relating to queenship specifically; queens held no extra-legal powers independent of their husbands.[172] However as a queen's honour price was relative to that of her husband she would hold more status than other women in society.[173] In addition, chapter 3 concluded that through marriage to a king a woman becomes queen. But was the queen more than the wife of a king? The changing nature of references to queens in the annals, suggests that she was. The most significant development is the gradual identification of queens with specific kingdoms, The usage of 'queen of Tara', 'queen of Ailech' and 'queen of Ireland' mirror their male counterparts while also associating the queen with kingship directly, rather than indirectly. These changes may be an Irish reflex of the emergence of *ordos* elsewhere.[174] While this is speculative, it is important to highlight the possibility of definite change. While the early annal death notices are consistent with the world of the law tracts, by 800, and especially 900, they are arguably telling a different story.

[172] Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, p. 73.

[173] CIH 779.7-8; CIH 563.1-570.32, 777.6-783.38; Binchy, 'Críth Gablach', §125-127; Charles-Edwards, '*Críth Gablach* and the Law of Status', pp 53–73; Oxenham, *Perceptions of Femininity in Early Irish Society*, pp 98-99.

[174] See Chapter 6, section 6.6.

Chapter 5

The Queen and sovereignty in the Irish imagination

5.1 Introduction

The previous two chapters established the status and role of queens in early medieval Ireland through the use of legal sources and chronicles. This chapter will now examine the figure of the queen, interpreted as the sovereignty companion of kings in Irish literature, a figure that has garnered much debate and scholarly attention.[1] In fact, much of the scholarship surrounding the representation of queens in early Irish literature explores what part she plays in the vernacular narratives, how she is identified in the tales, the attributes associated with her and her role when it comes to the granting of kingship.[2] As a result the scholarship presents a complex picture of the representations of queens and sovereignty in early medieval Ireland, one which is related to but also different from what can be reconstructed from more straightforwardly historical sources. The purpose of this chapter will be to address how much of an effect this figure from the Irish imagination has had on the study of historical queens. This will be done by examining the overlap between literary and historical queens. In particular, this chapter will ask whether or not the attributes which identify these women as figures connected to ensuring the sovereignty of the land have

[1] Breatnach 'The Lady and the King a Theme of Irish literature', pp 321-336; Mac Cana, 'Aspects of the Theme of King and Goddess in Irish Literature', pp 76-114; Mac Cana, 'Aspects of the Theme of King and Goddess in Irish Literature (*Suite En Fin*)', pp 59-65; Mac Cana, 'Women in Irish Mythology', pp 7-11; Ní Bhrolcháin, 'Women in Early Irish Myths and Sagas', pp 12-19; Doan, 'Sovereignty Aspects in the Roles of Women in Medieval Irish and Welsh Society', pp 87-102; Trindade, 'Irish Gormlaith as a Sovereignty Figure', pp 143–156; McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature*; Máire Herbert, 'Goddess and King: The Sacred Marriage in Early Ireland' in *Women and Sovereignty*, ed. Louise Olga Fradenburg (Edinburgh, 1992), pp 264-275; Ní Dhonnchadha, 'On Gormfhlaith Daughter of Flann Sinna and the Lure of the Sovereignty Goddess', pp 225–237; Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Tales of the Three Gormlaiths in Medieval Irish Literature', pp 1-24; Mark William, *Ireland's Immortals: A History of the Gods of Irish Myth* (Oxford, 2016); Toner, *Manifestations of Sovereignty in Medieval Ireland*.

[2] Mac Cana, 'Aspects of the Theme of King and Goddess in Irish Literature', pp 76-114; Mac Cana, 'Aspects of the Theme of King and Goddess in Irish Literature (*Suite En Fin*)', pp 59-65; Mac Cana, 'Women in Irish Mythology', pp 7-11; McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature*, p. 110.

incorrectly been applied to historical queens. Is it possible that historical queens have had an influence on the portrayal of sovereignty rather than the other way around?

In order to achieve this, the chapter will begin by examining the terminology of the scholarship before exploring the traditional role and representation of the female sovereignty figure, a particular focus being on her relationship with sacral kingship.[3] It must be noted that due to the volume of scholarship on the topic, in order to integrate this material into the chapter some of the main approaches and discussions will be summarised. The incorporation of the sovereignty woman in this thesis is important as this is the most common representation of queens discussed in scholarship and also the most defined role, approximating to an ideal of queenship as a quasi-institutional role that supported the rulership of kings. Therefore the chapter will provide a comparative analysis between literary portrayals of queenship and what has been seen in the previous chapters from the legal sources and annals. It will ask to what extent historical realities helped shape the sovereignty figure. What similarities do the queens commemorated in the annals have to those of a sovereignty figure? The objective will be to place sovereignty women in a historical context.

The chapter will then address an important question which is the extent to which the figure of the sovereignty goddess and its place in secondary literature has overshadowed historical queens. This will be achieved by interrogating the example of three Irish queens, the three Gormlaiths touched on in some detail in the last chapter, and addressing the debates concerning whether they are sovereignty figures or possess sovereignty traits, examining the degree to which the sovereignty element has overshadowed their historical contexts.

5.2 Sovereignty and Kingship

The concept of the sovereignty figure has been widely popular but how is it defined? Its terminology must first be addressed as it has evolved over time. Gregory Toner discusses how ‘most scholars now eschew’ the term ‘sovereignty

[3] McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature*, pp 107-137.

goddess' when dealing with the literature, instead preferring the more neutral terms 'sovereignty figure' or 'sovereignty woman'. After all, in most cases she is not depicted as an actual goddess but rather as a mysterious or otherworldly figure.[4] Given that the narrative literature comes from a Christian milieu it would be surprising if an actual 'goddess' was regularly mentioned and celebrated.

Without a doubt, however, the sovereignty figure is most associated with sacral kingship rooted in the distant past.[5] The traditional explanation of the figure is that she is a symbol of the land and that her union with the prospective king ensures his sovereignty. Without a union, the so-called *banfheis rígi*, he cannot become a king acceptable to his people.[6] Although this is probably too simplistic an explanation and, as we will see when the literary evidence is analysed in depth, there is a good bit of variation.[7] However, if we accept that the union of king and sovereignty figure was important, and many tales suggest that it was, this union appears to centre around the idea of the land and fertility being personified by a woman and the *banfheis*, sacred marriage, as legitimising that union, paving the way for male rulership.[8] Muireann Ní Bholcháin has described her in the following terms: 'This goddess is the symbol of the land, whose union with the prospective king ensures his sovereignty'.[9]

There is a lot of assumptions to unpack here, beginning with ideas of 'sovereignty' and 'sacred marriage'. Kim McCone argues that sovereignty was an almost 'obsessive concern of medieval Irish writers', something which is evident from the volume of material relating to it.[10] Furthermore, early Irish laws, in particular *Críth Gablach* stresses the relationship between king and people and

---

[4] Toner, *Manifestations of Sovereignty in Medieval Ireland*, p. 1.

[5] Ní Bhrolcháin, 'Women in Early Irish Myths and Sagas', p. 12; McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature*, p. 110; Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession*, pp 63-67; Toner, *Manifestations of Sovereignty in Medieval Ireland*, pp 1-2.

[6] Ní Bhrolcháin, 'Women in Early Irish Myths and Sagas', p. 12; Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession*, pp 63-67; Toner, *Manifestations of Sovereignty in Medieval Ireland*, pp 1-2.

[7] Mac Cana 'Women in Irish Mythology', p. 8; Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession*, pp 63-67.

[8]Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession*, pp 63-64; Connon, 'A Prosopography of the Early Queens of Tara', p. 226.

[9] Ní Bhrolcháin, 'Women in Early Irish Myths and Sagas', p. 12.

[10] MacNeill, 'The Irish Law of Dynastic Succession', pp 367-82, 640-53; Hogan, 'Irish Law of Kingship, With Special Reference to Ailech and Cenél Eoghain', pp 186–254; Ó Corráin, 'Irish Regnal Succession: A Reappraisal', pp 7-39; Charles- Edwards, *Early Irish and Welsh Kinship*; McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature,* p. 107; Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession*; Warntjes, 'Regnal Succession in Early Medieval Ireland', pp 377–410.

how it is of a contractual nature.[11] In the narrative sources, however, the relationship between king and people is portrayed differently, with the image of the 'sacral king' who acts as a mediator between human and divine and between society and nature.[12] Proinsias Mac Cana states that 'his office was a sacred one guarded by an elaborate complex of ritual and tabu, and so closely was he identified with the realm that it reacted in its very substance to his own moral and physical traits'.[13] As we will see, this is a sweeping interpretation that assumes that the vernacular tales about kingship are more consistent than they actually are when examined in detail.

For the purpose of this chapter, however, it is necessary to focus on the gendered dimensions of sovereignty and how this has been interpreted. As Mac Cana continues 'in order to acquire the seal of legitimacy the king must be ritually sacralised… this took the form of a sacred marriage with a goddess'.[14] According to Mac Cana the sacred marriage between a king and the goddess of territory gave a king his sacral aura and established his contact/ relationship with supernatural powers.[15] While the previous chapters explored marriage practices of the elite the sources surrounding the sovereignty woman present another form of marriage, the *banfheis*, meaning wedding feast of kingship.[16]

There is, however, no clear consensus on when this ceremony took place or even if it took place in the way that Mac Cana appears to envisage. O'Rahilly put forward the argument that the name for the ceremony *banfheis rígi* literally

[11] CIH 563.1-570.32, 777.6-783.38; Binchy, *Críth Gablach*; Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, pp 28-39; Charles-Edwards, '*Críth Gablach* and the Law of Status', pp 53–73; Thomas Charles-Edwards, 'A Contract Between King and People in Early Medieval Ireland? *Críth Gablach* on Kingship', *Peritia* 8 (1994), pp 107–119.

[12] McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature,* pp 107-137; Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession*, p. 57.

[13] Mac Cana, 'Women in Irish Mythology', p. 8; McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature,* p. 136; Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession*, p. 57.

[14] Mac Cana, 'Women in Irish Mythology', p. 8; Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession*, p. 57.

[15] Mac Cana, 'Women in Irish Mythology', p. 8; Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession*, p. 58.

[16] T. F. O'Rahilly, 'On the Origin of the Names Érainn and Ériu', *Ériu* 14 (1946), p. 15; Mac Cana 'Aspects of the Theme of King and Goddess in Irish Literature', p. 86; Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession*, p. 63.

[16] O'Rahilly, 'On the Origin of the Names Érainn and Ériu', p. 15; Mac Cana 'Aspects of the Theme of King and Goddess in Irish Literature', p. 86; Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession*, p. 63.

means ‘wife-feast’.[17] This was the ceremony in which the king of Tara was ‘symbolically espoused’ to the goddess Ériu at his inauguration.[18] James Carney further argued that the inaugural ‘kingship-marriage’ took place during the *Feis Temro* (Feast of Tara), highlighting how it is mentioned ‘thrice in the annals’.[19] He goes on to state that *feis* not only means ‘feast’ but ‘mating’ and therefore takes the annalistic entry ‘*Feis Temro* la X’ to mean the mating of (the goddess) Tara with (king) X, with the last *feis* being said to be held by Díarmait mac Cerbaill (d. 565).[20] However, Jaski argues that due to ‘retrospectively added annalistic entries’ the Feast of Tara was celebrated only once during a kings reign, the culmination as oppose an inauguration.[21] It has been suggested that the Feast of Tara traditionally took place during *Samain*, marking the beginning of winter. However Binchy argues that this would be an unsuitable date for a fertility rite.[22] *Samain* marks the time when barriers between the natural world and the otherworld were removed and although this could be argued to be appropriate for a time in which a king and sovereignty goddess interacted Jaski points out it conflicts with the modern interpretation that the sacred marriage was originally a fertility rite.[23] Jaski further adds how it is problematic to view the Feast of Tara as an inauguration ceremony in which a sacred marriage between king and sovereignty woman took place and cannot be held as a model for inaugurations in other parts of Ireland.[24] Moreover, Jaski points how O’Rahilly, Carney and Binchy place ‘great value’ on the entry in the Annals of Connacht regarding Feidhlimidh Ó Conchobhair in 1310.[25] The entry describing the inauguration as a

[17] O'Rahilly, ‘On the Origin of the Names Érainn and Ériu’, p. 15; Mac Cana ‘Aspects of the Theme of King and Goddess in Irish Literature’, p. 86; Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession*, p. 63.

[18] O'Rahilly, ‘On the Origin of the Names Érainn and Ériu’, p. 15; Mac Cana ‘Aspects of the Theme of King and Goddess in Irish Literature’, p. 86; Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession*, p. 63.

[19] *s.a.* AU 454, AU 467.2, AU 560.1; James Carney, *Studies in Early Irish Literature and History* (Dublin, 1955), pp 334-339; Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession*, p. 63.

[20] Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession*, p. 63.

[21] Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession*, p. 63.

[22] D. A Binchy, ‘The Fair of Tailtiu and the Feast of Tara’, *Ériu* 18 (1958), pp 132–138; Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession*, p. 63.

[23] Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession*, p. 63.

[24] Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession*, p. 64,

[25] O'Rahilly, ‘On the Origin of the Names Érainn and Ériu’, p. 15; Carney, *Studies in Early Irish Literature and History,* pp 334-339; Binchy, ‘The Fair of Tailtiu and the Feast of Tara’, pp 132–138; Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession*, p. 64.

banais rige in which the king is married to the Province of Connacht.[26] The entry records 'the most splendid *banais rige* ever celebrated in Connacht'.[27] The term *banfheis rígi* Jaski argues cannot be taken in its literal translation as the annalist who wrote the entry may have borrowed the phrase, as it states the inauguration was performed 'in the manner remembered by the old men and recorded in the old books'.[28] In other sources it is 'silent' regarding sacred marriage and may simply mean 'royal inauguration feast' as no description of either a *banfheis rígi* or *comfled rígi* (wedding feast of kingship) survives which connects it with a sacred marriage between king and goddess.[29] Also, it should be noted that events in fourteenth-century Connacht are unlikely to shed light on early medieval Irish kingship and concepts of sovereignty, so it is important to be careful. [30]

Did the *banfheis* resemble the marriage practices of kings and queens, discussed in the last chapter? Here there are difficulties with the sources for while the vernacular marriage laws, as we have seen, provide context with regards to the processes and the wealth-exchanges involved very little is known about ceremonial practices.[31] The dissertation did speculate that there may well have been a feast involved and the use of the term *feis* seems to indicate this strongly. Moreover, there are other elements of the *banfheis* which are potentially comparative to the role and representation of queens discussed in the last chapter, particularly in terms of their royal status.

5.3 The Representations of queens in early Irish literature

However, at this point it is necessary to delve further into the most notable attributes that are associated with the sovereignty woman. These attributes have been identified by scholars examining a range of vernacular tales. Not every tale has each element but there is usually a combination of several of them. These

[26] Toner, *Manifestations of Sovereignty in Medieval Ireland*, pp 2-3.

[27] Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession*, p. 64; Toner, *Manifestations of Sovereignty in Medieval Ireland*, pp 2-3.

[28] Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession*, pp 64-5.

[29] Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession*, pp 64-5.

[30] Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession*, pp 64-5.

[31] Ó Corráin, 'Women in Early Irish Society', pp 1-14; Ó Corráin, 'Marriage in Early Ireland', pp 5-24; Ó Corráin, 'Women and the Law in Early Ireland', pp 45–57; Jaski, 'Marriage Laws in Ireland and the Continent in the Early Middle Ages', pp 16-42; Eska, *Cáin Lánamna*.

include the importance of the dispensing of a drink, the woman being disguised, her union with a king and therefore subsequent legitimisation of their rule. The tales which will be examined present the sovereignty woman in a role of supporting kings but as will be seen their portrayal is not always consistent and their identification lies in the totality of the contexts rather than in single specific elements.

One of the difficulties in reconstructing the sovereignty woman is that the sources used vary so much in date. This means it is challenging to align the ideology with more specific time periods but, as much as possible, this chapter will be careful in identifying different strata. The first example is *Tochmarc Étaíne* (The Wooing of Étaín) an influential Old Irish saga which is interconnected with a number of other tales, and which appears to have been a classic of vernacular literature.[32] In the tale there are a number of attributes associated with Étaín, the main female character, which characterise her as having a particular role within the text and these associate her with kingship. Étaín is depicted as being a 'maiden that surpasses all the maidens in Ireland in form' and is 'the dearest and gentlest and loveliest in Ireland', establishing her as holding the physical perfection that was also ideally expected of kings.[33] In the tale, her first love is Midir, a man of the supernatural world of the *síd* who is already married to Fuamnach.[34] Due to Fuamnach's jealousy Étaín undergoes a number of physical transformations, one being a purple fly 'so long as that fly was attending upon him, he (Midir) never took to himself a wife, and the sight of her would nourish him'.[35] When Étaín is reborn a mortal woman it is as the daughter of a king. She

[32] Étaín appears in a range of sources. In *Tochmarc Étaíne,* Osborn Bergin and R. I. Best (ed. and tr.), 'Tochmarc Étaíne', *Ériu* 12 (1934–1938), pp 137–196. She also appears in the *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*, Whitley Stokes (ed. and tr.), 'The Destruction of Dá Derga's Hostel', *Revue Celtique* 22 (1901), pp 9–61, 165–215, 282–329, 390–437, 260; Vernam Hull 'Togail Bruidne Da Derga: The Cín Dromma Snechta Recension', *Zeitschrift Für Celtische Philologie* 24 (1954), pp 131–132.

[33] Bergin and Best, 'Tochmarc Étaíne', p.148 (text), p. 149 (translation). For the idea that kings were meant to be physically perfect see, for example, Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, pp 494-95 (the disfigurement of Congal Cáech).

[34] The *síd* were envisioned as entry places to a supernatural otherworld and usually identified as mounds in the landscape such as at Newgrange or hills like Knockainy in Co. Limerick. The people who inhabited them were the Áed Síde (people of the *Síd*) who have been interpreted as being ultimately rooted in native beliefs. There is a large literature. A basic introduction is John Carey, 'Otherworld', in *Celtic Culture: A Historical Encyclopedia*, ed. John Koch (Santa Barbara, Ca., 2006), pp 1403-06.

[35] Bergin and Best, 'Tochmarc Étaíne', p.154 (text), p. 155 (translation).

is pursued by the king of Tara, Eochaid Airem, as his followers believe that a union with Étaín would legitimise his rule as king of Ireland. The tale states that the men of Ireland 'would not convene the Festival of Tara for a king that had no queen: for Eochaid had no queen when he took the kingship'.[36] This is a reference to the *Feis Temro* already discussed. It also solidifies him as king. Eochaid's marriage to Étaín can be compared to a king marrying a woman of high status. In the annals we see kings only marrying the daughters of kings or the wives of a king's predecessor and these assumptions are also contained in this saga. The reference to Étaín legitimising Eochaid's rule is comparable to another text of an early date *Longes mac nUislenn* (The Exile of the Sons of Uisliu).[37] The text recounts how the king of Alba is told in reference to Deirdre and the legitimisation of his rule 'I have not found,' he said, 'a woman equal to you until today. Along with Noisiu son of Uisliu there is a woman worthy of the king of the Western World'.[38] In both texts it is assumed that a true king cannot exist without a queen.

The motif of the dispensing of a drink is also central to *Tochmarc Étaíne*. The tale sees Eochaid set out to find Étaín now his wife, who at this point has left him for Midir. He attacks the supernatural world of the *síd*. The people of the *síd* respond by having fifty women appear at Tara, all identical in appearance to Étaín. Eochaid is asked to choose one of them who will then accompany him. The king believes that the choice will come down to which of the women serves drink best as Étaín was the best at serving drink of all women in Ireland, the tale remarking that the 'serving of drink was a special gift of hers'.[39] However, it backfires on the king, and he ends up selecting his daughter rather than Étaín. This in turn serves as the backstory to *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* (The Destruction

[36] Bergin and Best, 'Tochmarc Étaíne', p. 163 (text), p. 162 (translation).

[37] Vernam Hull (ed. and tr.), *Longes Mac n-Uislenn: The Exile of the Sons of Uisliu* (New York, 1949). For commentary, focusing on Deirdre and sovereignty see Máire Herbert, 'The Universe of Male and Female: A Reading of the Deirdre Story', in *Celtic Languages and Celtic Peoples: Proceedings of the Second North American Congress of Celtic Studies Held in Halifax*, *August 16–19, 1989*, *et al*., Cyril J. Byrne, Margaret Harry and Pádraig Ó Siadhail (Halifax, 1992), pp 53–64; Maria Tymoczko, 'Animal Imagery in *Loinges Mac nUislenn', Studia Celtica* 20/1 (1985-86), pp 145-66; Johnston, 'Kingship Made Real? Power and the Public World in *Longes Mac nUislenn*', pp 193-206.

[38] The text reads *Ni-fúaramar-ni,' or-se, 'mnaí do dingbála-so cosin diu. Atá i fail Noísen maic Uislenn ben dingbála ríg íarthair domuin*: Hull, *Longes Mac n-Uislenn: The Exile of the Sons of Uisliu*, p. 46 (text), p. 64 (translation).

[39] Bergin and Best, 'Tochmarc Étaíne', p.183 (text), p. 182 (translation); Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession* , p. 67; Connon, 'A Prosopography of the Early Queens of Tara', pp 44-45.

of Da Derga's Hostel), one of the most important early Irish texts concerned with the duties and dangers of kingship.[40]

Other sources echo in broad outline the pattern of *Tochmarc Étaíne*. For instance, the much-cited *Baile in Scáil* (The Phantoms frenzy), an eleventh-century text, is another example of a narrative in which a woman dispensing drink is seen as being highly symbolic in relationship to kingship.[41] While the text is later than the period under the discussion, it is worth citing because it distils so many of the features of earlier sources such as *Tochmarc Étaíne*. The narrative purports to be a prophecy recited by an Otherworld phantom in the presence of Conn Cétchathach, king of Tara, detailing all the future kings of Tara that would descend from him.[42] The female character in the tale is described as the sovereignty of Ireland:

> *Et bas ii ind ingen boí isin taig ara cind flaith hÉrenn ...*
> 'And the girl who was in the house awaiting them was the Sovereignty of Ireland'.[43]

The use of the term *flaith*, as mentioned in the last chapter in reference to the name Gormlaith, indicates both drink and sovereignty. The two ideas are explicitly connected here, even more clearly than in *Tochmarc Étaíne*. The prophetic text further emphasises that the woman dispensing drink was of high status: her clothing indicates that she is royalty 'a young girl in a crystal chair with a golden crown on her head wearing a cloak edged with gold'.[44] This description of the female character is important as it aligns with other texts that evoke material culture (dress, jewellery) in descriptions of females of royal standing, an area that has been usefully analysed in detail by Niamh Whitfield.[45] So, what we are seeing here, across a broad range of literature, is the association of royal women with

[40] Stokes, 'The Destruction of Dá Derga's Hostel', pp 9–61, 165–215, 282–329, 390–437, 260; Hull 'Togail Bruidne Da Derga: The Cín Dromma Snechta Recension', pp 131–132; Ralph O'Connor, *The Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel: Kingship and Narrative Artistry in a Mediaeval Irish Saga* (Oxford, 2013).
[41] Murray, *Baile in Scáil*.
[42] Murray, *Baile In Scáil*, p. 1.
[43] Murray, *Baile In Scáil*, p. 33 (text), p. 51 (translation).
[44] Murray, *Baile In Scáil*, p. 33 (text), p. 51 (translation).
[45] Whitfield, 'Aristocratic Display in Early Medieval Ireland in Fact and Fiction', p. 175.

kingship, symbolised through motifs focusing on both appearance (physical beauty) and actions (dispensing drink). However, these texts raise other questions as well. Chapters 3 and 4 concluded that there is no evidence of a queen or wife of a king being included in inaugurations or in the succession process. The only comparable role that a queen had in terms of bestowing kingship would be through her role as a mother and the influence that she gained informally through her children. However, as seen in chapter 3 the status of the mother of a potential king had a bearing on succession practices.[46] Perhaps, this is being echoed in *Baile in Scáil*, with the sovereignty woman as a type of mother of the kings, although the text is using the language of an imagined ideology rather than describing reality.

Finally, there is another attribute which points to a woman's role in legitimising a kings rule, her representation as the 'loathly lady' who is transformed into a beautiful woman by the future rightful king.[47] In some ways this is a subset of the queen being a beautiful woman but given greater narrative prominence through the process of transformation. Early Irish literature has many examples of the supernatural woman as ugly, one famous example being in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*.[48] Here the appearance of a fearsome hag is one of the many omens that denote the passing of Conaire's kingship. *Echtra mac nEchach Muigmedóin* (The Adventures of the Sons of Eochaid Muigmedóin) is a later text that depicts how its hero's 'chosen' status is interlinked with his interaction with an otherworldly female figure in disguise.[49] The hero, Niall, was the legendary ancestor of the Uí Néill. Work by Donnchadh Ó Corráin has connected the extant tale with twelfth-century politics centred around the Ua Conchobair kings of Connacht and Ireland, although there may have been an earlier version.[50] In the

[46] CIH 1296.32-6; Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, pp 70-71; Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession*, p. 146; Warntjes, 'Regnal Succession in Early Medieval Ireland', pp 395-396.

[47] Mac Cana 'Aspects of the Theme of King and Goddess in Irish Literature (Suite En Fin)', pp 63-64.

[48] Stokes, 'The Destruction of Dá Derga's Hostel', pp 9–61, 165–215, 282–329, 390–437, 260.

[49] Whitley Stokes (ed. and tr), 'The Death of Crimthann Son of Fidach, and the Adventures of the Sons of Eochaid Muigmedón', *Revue Celtique* 24 (1903), pp 172–207; Connon, 'A Prosopography of the Early Queens of Tara', p. 173; Toner, *Manifestations of Sovereignty in Medieval Ireland*, pp 7-10.

[50] Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'Historical Need and Literary Narrative' in *Proceedings of the Seventh International Congress of Celtic Studies, Held at Oxford, from 10th to 15th July, 1983*, *et al*., D. Ellis Evans, John G. Griffith, and E. M. Jope (Oxford, 1986), pp 141–158.

text, Niall and his brothers in turn go looking for water after hunting. They find a well which is guarded by a hideous hag who demands a kiss in return for water. Only Niall kisses her properly, and she is revealed as a beautiful maiden who declares *Misi in Flaithius* (I am Sovereignty).[51] She grants Niall not only water but the kingship for many generations.[52] The representation of sovereignty as hideous is interpreted within the tale as an analogy for how kinship may be rough at first but as she has transformed into something beautiful so will his rule be similarly successful.[53] What is fascinating about this example is that it is consciously positioning itself into a wider literary tradition in which royal women are connected very closely with kingship.

So, how can this be summed up in relationship to what has been already discussed. First of all, a woman providing the legitimisation of a kings rule is a common occurrence, sometimes associated with physical appearance, sexual activity, the dispensing of drink or a combination of these elements.[54] For example, *Tochmarc Étaíne* stressed Étaín's appearance, her serving of drink and has implied sexual activity (she gives birth to a daughter).[55] In *Baile in Scáil* the drink motif is a strong symbol of sovereignty as the woman dispenses drink to the future kings of Tara. Both it and *Echtra mac nEchach* have the female character declare that they are the Sovereignty of Ireland. This role in the legitimisation of kingship is the basis of the modern 'sovereignty goddess' concept.

As we have seen then, the representation of the sovereignty figure over time demonstrates her importance in the ideology of kingship. In some ways she resembles historical queens (of high status) and in others is different

---

[51] Stokes, 'The Death of Crimthann Son of Fidach, and the Adventures of the Sons of Eochaid Muigmedón, p. 200 (text), p. 201 (translation).

[52] Stokes, 'The Death of Crimthann Son of Fidach, and the Adventures of the Sons of Eochaid Muigmedón, p. 200 (text), p. 201 (translation); Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession*, p. 165.

[53] Amy C. Eichhorn-Mulligan, 'The Anatomy of Power and the Miracle of Kingship: The Female Body of Sovereignty in a Medieval Irish Kingship Tale', *Speculum* 81, no. 4 (October 2006), p. 1034; Herbert, 'Goddess and King: The Sacred Marriage in Early Ireland', p. 271.

[54] Breatnach 'The Lady and the King a Theme of Irish Literature', pp 321-336; Mac Cana, 'Aspects of the Theme of King and Goddess in Irish Literature', pp 76-114; Mac Cana, 'Aspects of the Theme of King and Goddess in Irish Literature (*Suite En Fin*)', pp 59-65; Mac Cana, 'Women in Irish Mythology', pp 7-11; Ní Bhrolcháin, 'Women in Early Irish Myths and Sagas', pp 12-19; Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession*, pp 67-69.

[55] Bergin and Best, 'Tochmarc Étaíne', p.183 (text), p. 182 (translation); Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession*, p. 67; Connon, 'A Prosopography of the Early Queens of Tara', pp 44-45.

(supernatural). Perhaps, the greatest difference lies in the active role as seen in later tales such as *Echtra mac nEchach*. It may well be that these later tales are themselves commentaries upon the earlier sources and reflect the changing status of royal women from the eleventh century, something which is beyond the bounds of this thesis. However, as indicated, the greatest point of comparison is in terms of status and marriage. The last chapter demonstrates that queens constituted a small elite group and for them marriage ensured political advantages. This was illustrated through the dynamic social networks to which they were of central importance.

5.4 Queen Medb: Sovereignty and History

This area of comparison raises another issue: the scholarship on sovereignty rarely emphasises how the role of the sovereignty figure reflects society at the time, treating it instead as a timeless literary theme.[56] However, connecting the figures with society helps in comparing how similar and/or different their representations are to historical queens. This will be done by examining and analysing the roles of familial links and marriage practices within literary representation and historical reality. In order to achieve this, a well-attested character in the literature who has been interpreted as a sovereignty figure has been selected, Medb of Connacht, a legendary queen who was believed to have lived around the time of Christ. She is one of the major figures of the Ulster Cycle of tales and the chief instigator in the saga the *Táin Bó Cúailgne* (The Cattle-Raid of Cooley).[57] How did she come to be defined as a sovereignty figure? As was discussed earlier a woman dispensing a drink in particular circumstances was seen as being an embodiment of sovereignty. This connection was first made in relation to Medb by Tomás Ó Máille.[58] He noted that her name derived from the Indo-European word for 'mead'; it was also argued that it could be interpreted as 'she who intoxicates' endorsing the narrative that a king gains power by drinking

[56] Doan, 'Sovereignty Aspects in the Roles of Women in Medieval Irish and Welsh Society', p 89.

[57] O'Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúalnge*; Mallory, *Aspects of the Táin*; Kelly, 'The *Táin* as Literature', pp 69-102.

[58] Tomás Ó Máille 'Medb Chruachna', *Zeitschrift Für Celtische Philologie* 17 (1928), pp 129–146.

a sacred liquor from a vessel handed to him by a goddess.[59] However, a name can be just a name and the very first Medb mentioned in early Irish literary sources is a priest attested by Tírechán in his seventh-century Life of St Patrick.[60] There is also a Medb, mother of Fróech, found on an ogam inscription near Rathrcroghan, which may be connected with the Queen of the Ulster Cycle as Fróech is also a character in these tales.[61] It is possible that the names on the ogam helped inspire the subsequent narratives. Moreover, the Medb of the Ulster Cycle is not simply a representation of sovereignty: as we have already seen she claims rulership in her own right, a striking difference from the reality of Irish queens.[62] Furthermore, Medb has been interpreted as an anti-goddess by some scholars.[63] Erica Sessle views Medb as being anti-sovereignty goddess, for instance, but one who can still be interpreted within the framework of the sovereignty figure ideology.[64] She argues that Medb needs to find a suitable king but both Ailill and Fergus are both flawed, and the lack of appropriate mate transforms her into an anti-goddess, with her personality as opposed to her body being transformed.[65] Therefore, the disastrous events in the *Táin* are a result of the lack of rightful union between Medb and a king. Sessle argues against the idea that Medb's negative character is not a result of her trying to 'play a man's role unsuccessfully but is a result of her successfully rejecting flawed kings' in her role as a sovereignty goddess.[66] One problem with this interpretation, however, is that it reduces the *Táin*'s many themes to a sovereignty test and obscures the extent to which it is meant to comment upon many aspects of medieval Irish society.

---

[59] Ó Máille 'Medb Chruachna', pp 143-146; Kelly, 'The *Táin* as Literature', p. 78; Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession*, pp 67-69; Connon, 'A Prosopography of the Early Queens of Tara', p. 47; Doan, 'Sovereignty Aspects in the Roles of Women in Medieval Irish and Welsh Society', p. 87.

[60] Tírechán, *Collectanea* 33 (1) (Bieler, *The Patrician Texts*, p. 150 (text), p. 151 (translation).

[61] CIIC 12, Rathcroghan 1.

[62] Cecile O'Rahilly, (ed. and tr.), *Táin Bó Cúailnge: Recension I* (Dublin, 1976), p.1 (text), p. 126 (translation); Kelly, 'The *Táin* as Literature', p. 77; Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, p. 68.

[63] Erica J. Sessle, 'Exploring the Limitations of the Sovereignty Goddess Through the Role of Rhiannon', *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium* 14 (1994), pp 9-13; Toner, *Manifestations of Sovereignty in Medieval Ireland*, pp 4-5.

[64] Erica Sessle, 'Misogyny and Medb: Approaching Medb with Feminist Criticism' in *Ulidia: Proceedings of the First International Conference on the Ulster Cycle of Tales* eds J.P Mallory and Gerard Stockman (Belfast, 1994), p. 136.

[65] Sessle, 'Misogyny and Medb: Approaching Medb with Feminist Criticism', p. 138.

[66] Sessle, 'Misogyny and Medb: Approaching Medb with Feminist Criticism', p. 138.

These multi-faceted concerns are addressed by Patricia Kelly in an important contribution. She suggests that although Medb in some contexts is identifiable as a sovereignty figure within the parameters of the *Táin*, this was not the text's main objective.[67] She follows O'Rahilly who notes that 'she is no longer a goddess but a masterful woman…her character has sadly degenerated…she is no better than a strong-willed virago with unconcealed leanings towards a multiplicity of husbands and paramours'.[68] Kelly suggests that presenting Medb in this negative light is a serious thematic concern of the *Táin*, as the narrative judges her in accordance with the traditional criteria for the male role she aspires to and the female roles that she fails, related to the expectations of being a king or queen.[69] Thus, it is arguable that in order to fully comprehend Medb's role in the *Táin* it is necessary to strip away the assertion that she is a sovereignty figure. We must look at Medb as a queen and we must instead place her character within that context. The *Táin* presents Medb in a non-traditional female sphere of society whether in battle or as a sovereign in her own right. Kelly points to the fact that Medb's acknowledgment of herself as not a true ruler can be compared to a legal tract on kingship in which a characteristic of a just king is 'for he whom the living do not glorify either blessings is not a true ruler'.[70] This rhetoric is strongly opposed to the idea of a female ruler and can also be found in texts such as *Tecosca Cormaic (*The Instructions of King Cormac*)*, dated to around 800, which lists allegations against women.[71] In this light, the *Táin* can be interpreted as a reflection of what society deems unacceptable, a female leader.

Medb is also presented in an unfavourable light when it comes to her marriage practices and how they reflect on her as a woman. Medb's marriage status and her husbands are catalogued in a tale, *Ferchuitred Medba* (Medb's Husband Allowance).[72] They include Ailill and Fergus, and also Conchobar son

[67] Kelly, 'The *Táin* as Literature', p. 78.

[68] O'Rahilly, 'On the Origin of the Names Érainn and Ériu', pp 15-16; Kelly, 'The *Táin* as Literature', p. 78.

[69] Kelly, 'The *Táin* as Literature', p. 77.

[70] Kelly, 'The *Táin* as Literature', p. 83.

[71] Kuno Meyer (ed. and tr.), *The Instructions of King Cormac Mac Airt* (Dublin, 1909); Kelly, 'The *Táin* as Literature', p .83.

[72] Kuno Meyer (ed.), 'Ferchuitred Medba' in *Anecdota from Irish Manuscripts*, Vol. 5, ed. Osborn Bergin et al., (Dublin, 1913), pp 17–22; Ó Máille 'Medb Chruachna', pp 130-136.

of Ness, her antagonist during the *Táin*.[73] Once again the debate about the sovereignty figure is important. Ó Maille argued that her multiple marriages are an indication of her role as a sovereignty goddess.[74] Yet, as we saw in the last two chapters, the practice of multiple marriages and divorce was normal amongst the elite. As chapter 3 discussed, the pillow-talk section of the *Táin* portrays Medb as a *banchomarbae* claiming that her marriage to Ailill is *lánamnas bantinchur* or union of an heiress. From this point, she argues that she is the ruler. This could not have happened historically as women were not a part of the succession process as outlined in chapter 3. Medb's attempt to claim rulership would have been seen negatively by an early medieval audience. In fact, when stripped of the sovereignty motif Medb is similar to the queens we have seen in the annals in both her aristocratic status and her multiple marriages. The primary difference is that she wishes to go beyond them and wield power independently.

Significantly, the idea that a queen would be expected to have multiple spouses is reflected in the portrayal of Medb's namesake, Medb Lethderg of Tara who is described as being a Leinster reflex to the Connacht Queen.[75] Mac Cana argued that Medb Lethderg and Medb Cruachan are the same and are the personification of the sovereignty of Ireland, in which to gain possession of Medb was to gain possession of the kingship.[76] This is reflected by her number of husbands, in particular how they span many generations.[77] She is recorded as being the wife to many in one family, Art Óenfher, Cormac Mac Airt, Fedelmid Rathmar, Eochaid Finn Fuath nAirt, all important legendary kings.[78] There is a further statement in the Book of Leinster that she would not tolerate a king who

[73] Ó Máille 'Medb Chruachna', p. 131; Ní Bhrolcháin, 'Women in Early Irish Myths and Sagas', p. 13.

[74] Ó Máille 'Medb Chruachna', pp 140-141; Ní Bhrolcháin, 'Women in Early Irish Myths and Sagas', p. 13.

[75] Connon, 'A Prosopography of the Early Queens of Tara', p. 235.

[76] Mac Cana 'Aspects of the Theme of King and Goddess in Irish Literature', p. 76; Herbert, 'Goddess and King: The Sacred Marriage in Early Ireland', p. 264; Connon, 'A Prosopography of the Early Queens of Tara', p. 235.

[77] Mac Cana 'Aspects of the Theme of King and Goddess in Irish Literature', p. 76; Herbert, 'Goddess and King: The Sacred Marriage in Early Ireland', p. 264; Connon, 'A Prosopography of the Early Queens of Tara', p. 235; Toner, *Manifestations of Sovereignty in Medieval Ireland*, p. 4.

[78] Connon, 'A Prosopography of the Early Queens of Tara', pp 234-235.

did not take her as a wife.[79] Various sources record a variety of marriages but no one source names Medb as wife of all these men, so the picture is confused.[80] Scholars have argued that she fulfilled the role of sovereignty for Leinster as Medb Cruachan does for Connacht, although as we have seen Medb of Connacht reads uneasily as a sovereignty figure and it might be best to see them as related but distinct.[81]

One way they are related is that like Medb of Connacht she is described as being a ruler in her own right. In the Old Irish tale *Esnada Tige Buchet* (The Melodies of Buchet's House) she is said to have taken over the kingship of Ireland following Art's death and at first prevents Cormac, his successor, from taking control.[82] Mac Cana analyses the tale as an example of the role of the sovereignty goddess.[83] The tale describes how Cormac, king of Tara, upon learning of Eithne the daughter of the king of Leinster, Cathaír Már, seeks to marry her, but Buchet, her foster-father, refuses. Cormac rapes her and the result is the conception of Coirpre Lifechair, a future king of Tara.[84] Eithne herself has been identified as a sovereignty goddess of Tara, although as we have seen sex with the sovereignty woman is usually consensual or demanded by the woman.[85] The connection of Eithne with sovereignty or even being a queen is, however, echoed in other sources.[86] It is noteworthy how prevalent the name is amongst royal women in the annals.[87] So while there may not be a simple connection between queens and sovereignty figures, there are echoes that suggest a complex relationship.

---

[79] R.I Best, Osborn Bergin and M. A. O'Brien, *The Book of Leinster, Formerly Lebar Na Núachongbála*, Vol. 1 (Dublin, 1954), pp 213-214; Connon, 'A Prosopography of the Early Queens of Tara', p. 235.

[80] Connon, 'A Prosopography of the Early Queens of Tara', pp 234-5.

[81] Herbert, 'Goddess and King: The Sacred Marriage in Early Ireland', p. 266; Kelly, 'The *Táin* as Literature', p.78; Connon, 'A Prosopography of the Early Queens of Tara', p. 235

[82] Whitley Stokes (ed. and tr.), 'The Songs of Buchet's House', *Revue Celtique* 25 (1904), pp 18–38, 225-227; Connon, 'A Prosopography of the Early Queens of Tara', p. 236.

[83] Stokes, 'The Songs of Buchet's House', pp 18–38, 225–227; Mac Cana 'Aspects of the Theme of King and Goddess in Irish Literature', p. 87; Connon, 'A Prosopography of the Early Queens of Tara', pp 243-244; Eichhorn-Mulligan, 'The Anatomy of Power and the Miracle of Kingship: The Female Body of Sovereignty in a Medieval Irish Kingship Tale', pp 1021-1022.

[84] Connon, 'A Prosopography of the Early Queens of Tara', p. 166.

[85] Ó Cathasaigh, *The Heroic Biography of Cormac Mac Airt*, p. 75.

[86] Eithne is also viewed as a sovereignty goddess in the tale *Aislinge Cormaic* (Cormac's dream Vision), which sees Eithne sleep with Ulster king Eochu Gunnat and Cormac's druids interpreting it as Cormac's temporary loss of the kingship of Tara to Eochu. The dream indicates how Eithne has what appears to be serial marriages, James Carney (ed. and tr.), 'Nia Son of Lugna Fer Trí', *Éigse* 2 (1940), pp 187–197.

[87] See Chapter 4, section 4.7.

This relationship can be further interrogated by constructing social networks for the literary queens to be paralleled with those in the last chapter. Are these networks similar and do they show that the literary queens are placed into relationships resembling those in society?

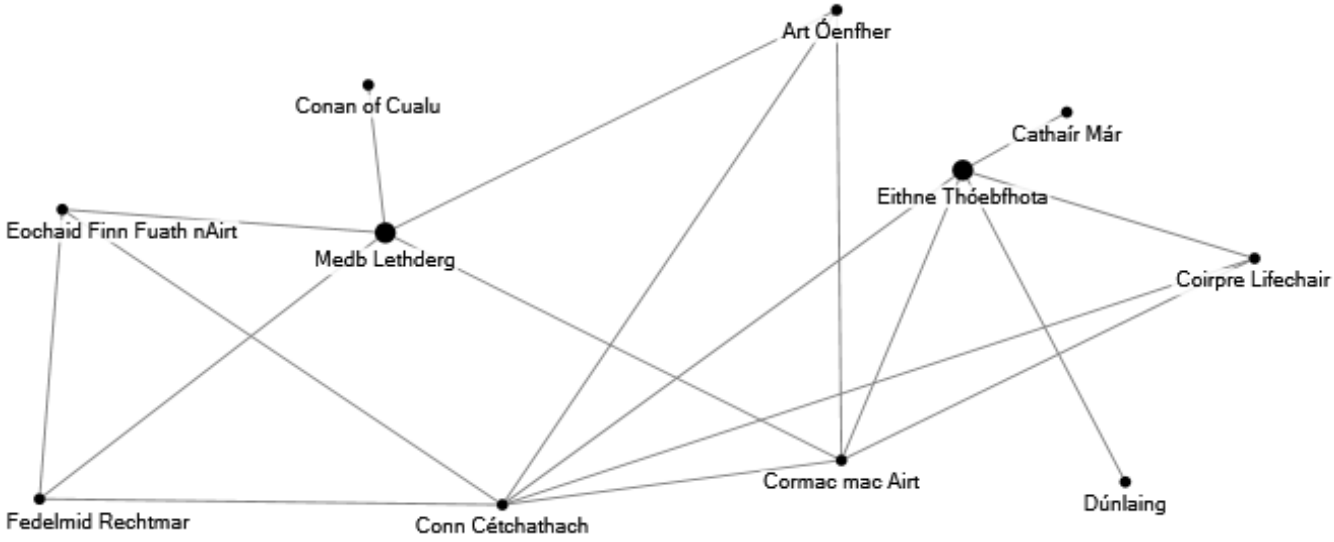


Fig. 1

The network in fig. 1 contains 11 nodes, 9 kings and 2 queens. While different to the networks in chapter 4 due to generational and source differences it is similar in showing the numerous edges which link these women. As previously discussed in chapter 4, an element of social network theory is the degree of a node which is the number of people linked to an individual.[88] The average degree, number of times which nodes on the graph are linked is 3.090, demonstrating the network has a high level of interaction. The degree of each queen is Medb has a degree of 5 and Eithne a degree of 5 meaning the number of times each of the nodes on the graph is linked to another node. They are both linked to Cormac. Eithne in *Echtra Airt meic Cuind ⁊ tochmarc Delbchaíme ingine Morgáin* (The Adventure

[88] Kenna and MacCarron, 'A Network Approach to Mythological Epics' in *Maths Meets Myths: Quantitative Approaches to Ancient Narratives,* p. 25.

of Art Mac Cuinn and the Wooing of Delbcháem Ingen Morgáin) is married to Conn, father of Art and husband of Medb.[89] As a result both women are connected with men in the same family. It must be noted that due to the information in the chart being taken from various sources it is an amalgamation. However it does reflect what was seen in chapter 4, the role of queens as nodes in dynastic relationships. Queens and sovereignty figures are both central to them. The main difference is that sovereignty women link dynasties across generations because they are not tied to a single timeframe like historical women.

5.5 Problematising the Sovereignty Figure

Having established the debates around the sovereignty figure and tentatively identified some of her roles, the question which must now be addressed is the degree to which it has overshadowed the study of historical queens. In particular the presentation of the sovereignty figure, or women such as Medb portrayed as leaders, has prompted a misunderstanding that women in positions of higher status in society had more power, historically, than they did. Sometimes the literature has a greater pull than the history. The portrayal of marriage has also affected how we view historical queens and the assumption that they echo the sovereignty figure rather than vice versa. The practice of serial marriage, seen as an attribute to the sovereignty figure, in fact reflects the marriage practices attested to in the law tracts and the annals. Therefore it is necessary to separate the literary representations of queenship from historical queens and begin to consider whether the historical queens are the inspiration of the sovereignty figures.

Toner has not only drawn attention to the term used when referring to women seen as sovereignty figures but also what constitutes this figure. He suggests, there has been a tendency to treat a wide variety of women associated with kingship as sovereignty goddesses, often without much justification, and in reality we must distinguish a range of characters not all of whom can be linked to sovereignty at all.[90] He goes on to argue that the sovereignty figure has been

[89] R.I Best (ed. and tr.), 'The Adventures of Art Son of Conn, and the Courtship of Delbchaem', *Ériu* 3 (1907), p. 150 (text), p. 151 (translation).

[90] Toner, *Manifestations of Sovereignty in Medieval Ireland*, pp 1-2.

distilled down to such a small number of bare essential characterises that almost any female associated with a king could be identified as a goddess.[91] Toner further argues there is a danger of losing sight of historical queens to the narrative of the sovereignty goddess, something with which the dissertation is in agreement.

The dominance of the sovereignty figure in the discourse around queens is not surprising, however. As was seen from the previous chapter the sources which relate to women are almost always centred around marriage, with serial marriages common amongst historical queens, that is central to the portrayal of the sovereignty figure. Mac Cana has argued for the literary influence of sovereignty figures on historical figures and especially attributes relating to the sovereignty goddess.[92] Similarly, Máire Herbert has suggested that the theme of female sovereignty espoused to a male sovereign 'exercised an influence on recorded history as late as the eleventh century'.[93] But, as we have seen, this can be reversed. Are the attributes of historical queens ones that influenced the development of the sovereignty figure? It is one thing to have serial marriages as an attribute for identifying a sovereignty figure but when it is used to try to portray historical queens as a sovereignty goddess are we taking something which is historically verifiable, the ease of marriage and divorce among the Irish aristocracy, and elevating it into a an almost mythic ideology while ignoring the pragmatic realities of the social networks that it created and facilitated? This is the most evident in the cases of the three Gormlaiths which have been categorised by some scholars as being reflective of a sovereignty goddess and who were discussed in the last chapter.[94] These are Gormlaith daughter of Donnchada, Gormlaith daughter of Flann Sinna and Gormlaith daughter of Murchada who all are indirectly related to each other by marriages across generations. This is worth considering in more detail in the context of this chapter.

[91] Toner, *Manifestations of Sovereignty in Medieval Ireland,* pp 2-3.
[92] Mac Cana 'Aspects of the Theme of King and Goddess in Irish Literature', p. 76.
[93] Herbert, 'Goddess and King: The Sacred Marriage in Early Ireland', p. 264.
[94] Mac Cana 'Aspects of the Theme of King and Goddess in Irish Literature', pp 76-114; Trindade, 'Irish Gormlaith as a Sovereignty Figure', pp 143-156.

Ann Trindade argued that the three Gormlaiths embodied elements of the sovereignty goddess.[95] Trindade presents the argument that the three Gormlaiths include elements that are 'reasonable approximations of real life' in the form of serial marriages but that ultimately the tales about Gormlaith are a mixture of myth and history.[96] She argues that aspects of the stories written about them are 'accurately enough a social and political reality of the period' when it comes to marriage practices.[97] When it comes to Gormlaith daughter of Donnchada, Trindade sees her as a 'more shadowy figure' in comparison to the other two Gormlaiths.[98] She presents her as a 'pawn in a dynastic struggle' with her abduction recorded in the annals belonging to a persuasive and significant pattern.[99] She argues that the abduction of Gormlaith is the assumption by the Munster king of the kingship of Tara.[100] It is true that the abduction is important but the entry in AU must be looked at with caution. As noted in chapter 4 the annals record the abduction of Gormlaith daughter of Murchad and not Gormlaith daughter of Donnchad. Mac Cana, similarly, argues for the sovereignty attributes of the middle and later Gormlaiths.[101] Mac Cana suggests that the presentation of Gormlaith daughter of Flann Sinna as a sovereignty woman was to shape the 'idea of a Tara kingship with suzerainty over the whole of Ireland'.[102] Trindade follows on from Mac Cana arguing that a lost tale entitled *Serc Gormlaithe do Niall Glúndub* deliberately invoked the theme of the goddess and the king to justify the Tara kingship for the benefit of the Uí Néill kingship.[103] Trindade points specifically to a number of poems compiled after her death. One line in particular *Ro charas trícha fo thrí,/ ro charas a naoi fo naoi…* (I have loved three times

[95] Trindade, 'Irish Gormlaith as a Sovereignty Figure', p. 152; Ní Dhonnchadha, 'On Gormfhlaith Daughter of Flann Sinna and the Lure of the Sovereignty Goddess', p. 229-231; Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Tales of Three Gormlaiths in Medieval Irish Literature', p. 2; Toner, *Manifestations of Sovereignty in Medieval Ireland*, pp 3- 4.

[96] Trindade, 'Irish Gormlaith as a Sovereignty Figure', p. 152; Toner, *Manifestations of Sovereignty in Medieval Ireland*, pp 3- 4.

[97] Trindade, 'Irish Gormlaith as a Sovereignty Figure', pp 151-152.

[98] Trindade, 'Irish Gormlaith as a Sovereignty Figure', p. 145.

[99] Trindade, 'Irish Gormlaith as a Sovereignty Figure', p. 146.

[100] Trindade, 'Irish Gormlaith as a Sovereignty Figure', pp 152-153; Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Tales of Three Gormlaiths in Medieval Irish Literature', pp 2-3.

[101] Mac Cana 'Aspects of the Theme of King and Goddess in Irish Literature', pp 76-114; Ní Dhonnchadha, 'On Gormfhlaith Daughter of Flann Sinna and the Lure of the Sovereignty Goddess', pp 230-231.

[102] Proinsias Mac Cana, *The Learned Tales of Medieval Ireland* (Dublin, 1980), p. 48.

[103] Trindade, 'Irish Gormlaith as a Sovereignty Figure', p. 231; Dhonnchadha, 'On Gormfhlaith Daughter of Flann Sinna and the Lure of the Sovereignty Goddess', p. 231.

thirty,/ I have loved nine time…).[104] However, it must be pointed out that it is a stretch to argue that a historical woman echoed a sovereignty figure on the basis of a tale that is no longer extant and whose contents are assumed from other sources. Moreover, Ní Dhonnchadha argues that tales about Gormlaith daughter of Flann Sinna were not influenced by the sovereignty myth and that the emphasis on goddess has 'obscured from view the coherence with which Gormlaith is represented across a whole range of texts…'.[105]

Finally, it is worth considering the example of the third Gormlaith, daughter of Murchad mac Finn, king of Leinster, although she falls outside of the time frame of this dissertation. As the three Gormlaiths are so often considered together it would be artificial to exclude her from the discussion. She was married to Amlaíb Cuarán, the Viking king of Dublin and York, Brían Bóruma the King of Munster and King of Ireland and, although not definite, likely with Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill, Uí Néill king of Ireland. In the genealogies her three successive marriages are called 'three leaps' into Dublin, Tara, and Cashel.[106] Her marriages have been seen as being indicators of her functioning as a sovereignty figure but, once again it must be remembered that this was common among historical queens and was a practical function of marriage and kingship networks.[107] She is a prominent character in the twelfth century *Cogad Gáedel Re Gallaib* (The War of the Irish with the Foreigners) which is a narrative work on the achievements of Brían Bóruma, especially those against the Vikings written by his descendants.[108] Máire Ní Mhaonaigh argues that Gormlaith's role as an evil schemer within the text was 'less pronounced' in this account than it was later to become: eventually she was portrayed as an antagonist.[109] These, to some extent, echo Medb's portrayal in the *Táin* and fear of powerful women going beyond the expectations of their roles as queens.

[104] Bergin, 'Consolations', p. 212.

[105] Ní Dhonnchadha, 'On Gormlaith Daughter of Flann Sinna and the Lure of the Sovereignty Goddess', p. 233; Toner, *Manifestations of Sovereignty in Medieval Ireland*, p. 4.

[106] O'Brien, *Corpus Genealogiarum Hiberniae*, p. 13.

[107] Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Tales of Three Gormlaiths in Medieval Irish Literature', p. 19.

[108] James Henthorn Todd (ed. and tr.), *Cogadh Gaedhel Re Gallaibh: The War of the Gaedhil with the Gaill, or The Invasions of Ireland by the Danes and Other Norsemen* (London, 1867); Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, 'The Date of *Cogad Gáedel Re Gallaib*', *Peritia* 9 (1995), p. 354.

[109] Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Tales of Three Gormlaiths in Medieval Irish Literature', p. 20.

Why have the three Gormlaiths been linked so pervasively with sovereignty? Apart from their names, incorporating the *flaith* element, they were inter-connected across generations, as the network below shows in fig. 2, something which on the surface connects with sovereignty figures such as Eithne. Fig. 2 depicts a network representing the links between all three Gormlaiths, demonstrating the extent to which these queens linked kindreds across generations. The graph represents 22 nodes, 15 kings and 7 queens. The average degree of the network is 3.158 demonstrating the high level of connectivity between the nodes. The node with the highest degree is Flann Sinna with a degree of 7, followed by Gormlaith ingen Donncadha, Áed Findliath and Gormlaith ingen Murchada with a degree of 5. This is reflective of how prominent they are in the annals.

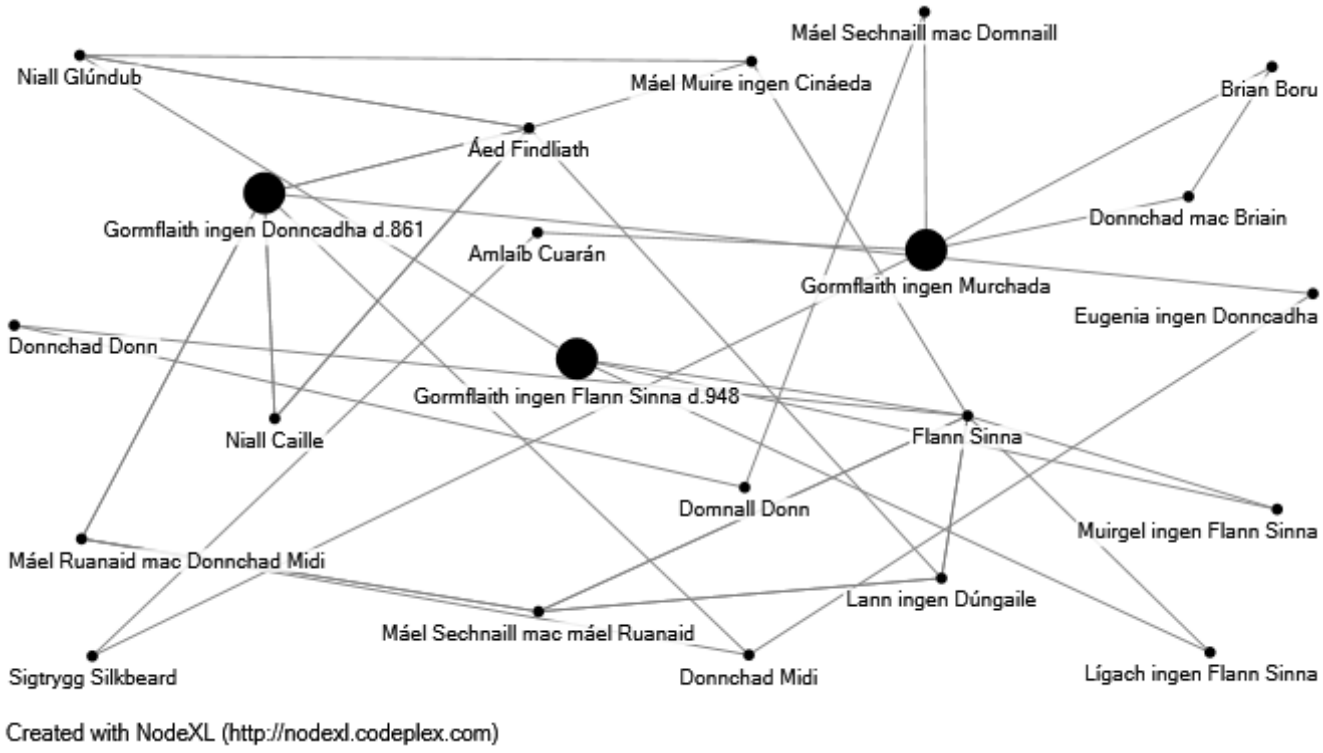


Fig.2

However, when looked at in more detail identifying them as sovereignty figures is problematic. Ní Mhaonaigh traces their development as distinct literary entities in order to shed light on the process whereby an historical figure is transformed

into a complex literary character.[110] The marriage attributes, in particular serial marriage and association with powerful kings has contributed to this narrative. Both are as a result of their status and place in society. Apart from marriage status to a king and insight into terminology of queens in the annals there are no other contemporary indicators of their role, although as the above network shows this was tied into their family connections. Their marriage to powerful kings is a result of their familial status. And as already argued their marriages do not differ from other queens in the annals.

5.6 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to examine the topic of the sovereignty figure from a different perspective. It has been so dominant in the way that queens are portrayed in scholarship that it could not be overlooked. In order to do this it was necessary to firstly present the traditional roles associated with the sovereignty figure in broad outline. In particular the sovereignty attributes related to marriage practices are a crucial point. This point also enabled an exploration of the similarities between sovereignty figures and historical queens. Moreover, applying the methodologies used in the last chapter, especially establishing the role of queens in social networks demonstrated a strikingly similar pattern, with the distinction that legendary women of sovereignty could be multi-generational. Nonetheless, legendary queens such as Medb Lethderg and Eithne connected dynasties in the same way as historical queens. The cases of the three Gormlaiths provided an important counterbalance as between them the multi-generational role of queens in a social network could be tested. Once again, it emerged that the practical realities are almost certainly the underpinnings of the literary characters. Scholars have for a long time looked to the literature rather than the annals. As a result this chapter establishes that the ideal of sovereignty was influenced not by the sovereignty figure but by historical queens. Kings, on a pragmatic level, benefitted from the alliances that they created with queens, helping solidify their rule. The defined role of the sovereignty figure also suggests

[110] Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Tales of Three Gormlaiths in Medieval Irish Literature', p. 1.

that queenship was seen as having a special significance in the Irish imagination. Its popularity over many centuries supports the argument in the last chapter that as queens became more powerful they were associated more closely and more directly with kingdoms and peoples. Perhaps here we can see the beginnings of an institution aligned with kingship.

Chapter 6

Comparing Queens: Frankia, England, Ireland

6.1 Introduction

The objective of this chapter is to address a number of questions in order to identify potential disparities or similarities between Irish queenship and contemporary practices in other European contexts, specifically England and Frankia. This chapter will examine queenship from the latter half of the Merovingian dynasty. This thesis will therefore not look to the Carolingian period as Carolingian society develops differently and is therefore outside the scope of this thesis. This will be the major Continental point of comparison and makes sense because of the range of source material and the ongoing contacts between Ireland and the Frankish realms. A particular focus will be an examination of the marriage practices of the Merovingians. A further comparison will be made with early Anglo-Saxon legal texts regarding marriage practices as England was such a near and closely connected neighbour. These will provide a framework for situating the Queen in Frankia and England. The chapter will then examine the differences and parallels with the role queens play in institutional politics. The chapter will explore how certain queens upon widowhood assumed leadership roles through regency. There will be a consideration of the practice of anointing queens and how this signalled the elevation of the role.

As has been seen in previous chapters Irish queenship is interlinked with the Irish system of kingship; as a result, the chapter will ask the question to what degree do systems of kingship for the Merovingians and Anglo-Saxons influence queenship. Comparisons between queenship in Ireland, Frankia and England will also highlight other similarities and contrasts, especially to the extent to showing how each of these societies differed. These differences are also reflected in the types of sources that were produced. One focus is the greater continuity in laws and language in Ireland from Late Antiquity. This contrasts with Frankia and England which were both transformed during Late Antiquity and the Early Middle

Ages by the creation of new political systems. A question which this chapter hopes to address and answer from an Irish perspective is having looked at other examples of queenship is whether or not Irish queenship was a role, institution or a title? This question has, obviously, been mentioned frequently but it cannot be fully answered unless all the contexts are considered.

6.2 Queens and marriage in Frankia

As has been evident throughout this thesis, queens were most prominent in the context of marriage and queens in England and Frankia were no different. Chapter 4 demonstrated that Irish women of a higher status and from royal households had more visibility through marriage than other women in society. A marriage could become a political affair and women played a key role in marriage alliances. This section will set out to demonstrate an overview of the marriage practices of the Merovingians and see if there are meaningful points of comparison.

Similarly to Ireland, under Merovingian law, which was an assimilation of Roman and Germanic law, an unmarried woman was protected by the status of her father and a married woman by the status of her husband.[1] As was discussed in chapter 3 there were three types of valid marriage or unions in Ireland, *airnaidm* (betrothal), *aititiu* (acceptance) and *foxal* (abduction).[2] This is comparable to what is practiced in Germanic societies such as among the Franks.[3] These included *Kaufehe* (marriage by purchase), *Friedelehe* (mutual consent) and *Raubehe* (capture).[4] A further comparison can be made in the practice of bride price and dowry. The Irish term for the payment a man gives a woman is *coibche,* which first meant 'contract', then 'marriage contract'.[5] In a marriage of equal contribution, as outlined in chapter 3, a woman gave a dowry of equal amount,

[1] Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, p. 27.

[2] Corráin, 'Women and the Law in Early Ireland', p. 47; Jaski, 'Marriage Laws in Ireland and the Continent in the Early Middle Ages', p. 20; Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession*, pp 143-155.

[3] Jaski, 'Marriage Laws in Ireland and the Continent in the Early Middle Ages', p. 20; Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession*, pp 143-155.

[4] Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, p. 12; Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe*, p. 128; Jaski, 'Marriage Laws in Ireland and the Continent in the Early Middle Ages', p. 21.

[5] Ó Corráin, 'Marriage in Early Ireland', p. 15.

which was seen to formalise a marriage.[6] This practice was equivalent to the Roman and early Germanic *dos* (dowry).[7] For Merovingians the practice of giving the *dos* signified a woman was both the wife of a king and his queen.[8] The Merovingian practice can to some extent be compared to the Irish royal marriage practices. As Chapter 3 and 4 demonstrated marriage to a king meant that a woman of high status was both the wife of a king and his queen.

One of our best sources for the career of Frankish Queens is Gregory of Tours *Decem Libri Historiarum*, better known as the *History of the Franks*.[9] This crucial work contains numerous examples of queens and their marriages. Its author, Gregory of Tours (d. 594), was a Gallo-Roman bishop, originally from the Auvergne, who was a prominent writer connected to many high-ranking women. However, he was highly political and must be consulted with caution.[10] He knew many of the women he wrote about and portrays them in numerous lights, often depending on his own political positions.[11] For example, Gregory, in his discussion of various marriages of kings in Book IV, links a man's marriage choice with political stability or instability.[12] Gregory uses the example of the marriage of Clovis (d. 511) and Chlothild (d. 545) as an ideal marriage and choice of bride. Chlothild was seen to be 'good bearing and wise'.[13] This description of the qualities of a woman are similar to the ninth-century Triads of Ireland discussed in chapter 2 and can be widely paralleled, expressing what are common aristocratic attitudes about a proper wife.[14]

E.T. Dailey's *Queens, Consorts, Concubines* provides a detailed discussion of Gregory's recounting of the marriages of Sigibert (d. 575) and

---

[6] Ó Corráin, 'Marriage in Early Ireland', p. 15.

[7] Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, pp 62-63; Jaski, 'Marriage Laws in Ireland and the Continent in the Early Middle Ages', p. 25.

[8] Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, pp 101-105; Dailey, *Queens, Consorts, Concubines*, p. 112.

[9] Bruno Krusch and Wilhelm Levison (eds), *Gregorii Episcopi Turonensis. Libri Historiarum X*, MGH Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum (Hanover, 1884); Ernest Brehaut (tr.), *History of the Franks by Gregory, Bishop of Tours* (New York, 1916).

[10] Alexander C. Murray, *A Companion to Gregory of Tours* (Boston, 2015), pp 20-24; Dailey, *Queens, Consorts, Concubines*, p. 1.

[11] Dailey, *Queens, Consorts, Concubines*, p. 4.

[12] Brehaut, *History of the Franks by Gregory, Bishop of Tours*, p. 38; Dailey, *Queens, Consorts, Concubines*, p. 80.

[13] Brehaut, *History of the Franks by Gregory, Bishop of Tours*, p. 38; Dailey, *Queens, Consorts, Concubines*, pp 80-81.

[14] Meyer, *The Triads of Ireland*; Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, p. 284.

Chilperic (d. 584).[15] For Gregory, Sigibert's good choice of bride can be seen in his description of Brunhild of Austrasia (d. 613) in which she is described as being 'a maiden beautiful in her person, lovely to look at, virtuous and well-behaved, with a good sense and a pleasant address'.[16] Of course, the same Brunhild is condemned in Jonas' *Vita Columbani*, written in 642/43 in full hindsight after her political fall and execution in 613.[17] Like Gregory's praise, Jonas' condemnation shows how a queen's portrayal could be highly political. Gregory also commends Sigibert for his marriage practices as he never took another wife or concubine, and their son went on to inherit the kingdom.[18] He then contrasts this with Sigibert's brother Chilperic who looked to marry Brunhild's sister Galswinth (d. 568), while already having 'too many wives'.[19] Although originally dismissing his 'wives', he rekindled his affair with Fredegund (d. 597), while Galswinth sought to leave.[20] Galswinth was murdered, with Gregory casting blame on Fredegund. Gregory recounts how Chilperic's brothers, thinking Galswinth was killed on their brother's orders threw him out of the kingdom with Sigibert beginning a war against his brother Chilperic.[21]

Throughout, Gregory shows that for Merovingian queens the 'rank of queen conferred distinct privileges'.[22] However, it is also clear from the *History of the Franks* that the Merovingian system of marriage did not align with Gregory's 'uncompromising monogamy', as it has been termed.[23] As Dailey points out Gregory contradicted himself, as while he promoted that a king should take only one wife he also stressed the importance of succession.[24] Yet, interestingly, in his criteria for a suitable royal bride fertility is not mentioned.[25] Therefore, securing

[15] Dailey, *Queens, Consorts, Concubines*.

[16] Brehaut, *History of the Franks*, p. 89; Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, p. 13; Dailey, *Queens, Consorts, Concubines*, p. 95.

[17] Alexander O'Hara and Ian Wood (trans) *Jonas of Bobbio: Life of Columbanus, Life of John of Réomé, and Life of Vedast* (Liverpool, 2017); Alexander O'Hara, *Jonas of Bobbio and the Legacy of Columbanus: Sanctity and Community in the Seventh Century* (Oxford, 2018).

[18] Brehaut, *History of the Franks*, p. 90;

[19] Brehaut, *History of the Franks*, p. 90; Dailey, *Queens, Consorts, Concubines*, p. 96.

[20] Brehaut, *History of the Franks*, p. 90; Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, pp 39-40; Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, p. 73.

[21] Brehaut, *History of the Franks*, p. 90; Dailey, *Queens, Consorts, Concubines*, p. 96.

[22] Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, p. 63; Dailey, *Queens, Consorts, Concubines*, p. 109.

[23] Brehaut, *History of the Franks*; Dailey, *Queens, Consorts, Concubines*, p. 113.

[24] Brehaut, *History of the Franks*; Dailey, *Queens, Consorts, Concubines*, p. 113.

[25] Brehaut, *History of the Franks*, p. 38; Dailey, *Queens, Consorts, Concubines*, p. 114.

succession was a rationale for a king having many women and producing sons while sorting out the status of heirs and mothers at a future point.[26] As was seen in the previous chapters, this contrasts with the Irish system of succession in which a mother's status can have an influence on the future of her son, forming part of the *febas* (excellence) that made him eligible for kingship.[27] Merovingian kings also took women of lower status as wives, benefitting from the fact that they were outside the political sphere.[28] Moreover, although they did not provide their own wealth or bring allies it meant they also had no enemies from among the king's high-ranking rivals.[29] Dailey further argues how Gregory's views on the choice a king made and marriage practices could collide with the secular practices of kings.[30] For example, while Gregory was in favour of kings marrying women of high status in society a highborn woman could seek the dismissal of all other women from the kings side.[31] This was a practice that affected succession and will be discussed later in the chapter. In addition, aristocratic women were harder to dismiss then a woman of lower status or a concubine. In contrast Irish marital practices of divorce accommodated remarriage, although as the case of Órlaith's execution in chapter 4 showed, this was not always the situation.

There is another comparison with Irish marriage practices, and indeed the Irish social system, which can be made, and this is related to the importance on status. For Merovingian kings, the Franks did not always 'make a moral issue of marriages across class lines' and this can be applied to queens as well.[32] In the seventh century at least three queens are known to have started their careers as slaves, Bilichild (d. 610), Nantechild (d. 642) and Balthild (d. 680).[33] In contrast, the Irish law-tracts stress a proper marriage had to be between equals with the

[26] Dailey, *Queens, Consorts, Concubines*, p. 114.
[27] Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, pp 70-71; Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession*, pp 143-156; Warntjes, 'Regnal Succession in Early Medieval Ireland', pp 395-396.
[28] Dailey, *Queens, Consorts, Concubines*, p. 115.
[29] Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, p. 38; Dailey, *Queens, Consorts, Concubines*, p. 114.
[30] Dailey, *Queens, Consorts, Concubines*, p. 113.
[31] Dailey, *Queens, Consorts, Concubines*, p. 114.
[32] Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, p. 55; Dailey, *Queens, Consorts, Concubines*, pp 114-116.
[33] Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, p. 57.

slave status of a potential spouse being a problem.[34] Indeed, this forms an important plot element at the beginning of *Vita Prima*.[35] In this, the anonymous hagiographer is at pains to emphasise that the slave status of Brigit's mother does not pass onto the saint.[36] This is because, normally it did: the child of an aristocrat and a slave had the status of a slave and would not be eligible for kingship. For Merovingian kings a system was in place which allowed kings flexibility in securing heirs while allowing them control over marriages and alliances.[37] In Ireland, this flexibility was also present through allowing for a secondary spouse, but there were important distinctions such as slavery.[38] So, in a sense, both societies identified similar issues around royal succession and came up with answers, some of which were similar and others which were not.

The marriage practices, as seen in Ireland also, not only apply to the marriages between a king and a queen but also to other women with which a king had a relationship. As demonstrated in detail earlier in the dissertation, Irish law tracts allowed the possibility of a man having recognised relationships with women of different status. Similarly, the Merovingians fell short of Gregory of Tours idea of marriage, with the practice of multiple marriages, and concubines. However, a system appears to have emerged which recognised that the title 'wife' was applied exclusively to a queen.[39] The use of the term 'wives' by Gregory has led to an understanding that Merovingian kings practiced polygyny which was related to ancient Germanic customs.[40] Chapter 3 examined Dailey's reappraisal of so-called Merovingian polygyny. It is worth looking in a little more detail here as to why he ultimately rejects it as a useful analysis. In particular, Dailey argued against Wemple's interpretation that Chlothar, Charibert, Chilperic and Dagobert practiced polygyny, suggesting serial monogamy instead.[41] Dailey concludes that Chlothar had, over a fifty-year reign, two wives, one failed attempt at arranging

[34] Ó Corráin, 'Women in Early Irish Society', p. 2; Ó Corráin, 'Marriage in Early Ireland', p. 7; Ó Corráin, 'Women and the Law in Early Ireland', p. 47; Eska, *Cáin Lánamna*, p. 69.

[35] Connolly and Picard, 'Cogitosus' *Life of St Brigit*: Content and Value', pp 5-27; Connolly, 'Vita Prima Sanctae Brigitae: Background and Historical Value', pp 5-49.

[36] Picard, 'Cogitosus: Life of St. Brigit', pp 14-16.

[37] Dailey, *Queens, Consorts, Concubines*, p. 166.

[38] Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, pp 95-97.

[39] Dailey, *Queens, Consorts, Concubines*, p. 101.

[40] Dailey, *Queens, Consorts, Concubines*, p. 102.

[41] Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, p. 38; Dailey, *Queens, Consorts, Concubines*, p. 103.

another and three or four identifiable concubines possibly kept simultaneously.[42] He stresses that Gregory's use of language that is often 'vague, imprecise, or inaccurate' relates back to how he perceives certain women and the choices of some kings.[43] The example of the earlier discussed Chilperic who had 'many wives' is a case in which Gregory only identified two, Fredegund and Audovera, his earlier queen.[44] Dailey strongly advises against the use of the term polygyny if a king had a wife and concubine simultaneously. Instead, he argues that it risks overlooking the distinctions made between the relationships of women with a king namely how a wife of a king is exclusively a queen and how the *dos* and marriage ceremony distinguishes her from a concubine.[45] Furthermore, as the wife of a king, a queen had greater power than concubines. They were primarily chosen to produce heirs. Simply stating that kings practice polygyny overlooks these elements of Merovingian marital policy. In many respects this is similar to the division of rights between a *cétmuinter* (chief wife) and *adaltrach* (second wife) in Irish vernacular law, which was discussed in detail in chapter 3, alongside a reanalysis of the Irish pattern of men taking multiple spouses.[46] What separates the practices is that in Ireland a man could have a marriage with a *cétmuinter* and have an *adaltrach* in a lower form of marriage but with each woman seen as being 'lawful women'. The union of the secondary wife was not as loose and was legally more defined than Merovingian customs. In other ways it resembles Merovingian norms as the *adaltrach* could provide sons if the *cétmuinter* did not. So, once again, we see the Irish and Frankish elites dealing in analogous, but not identical, ways with the same issues. In the Irish case, one important factor was that the vernacular legal system, while having ecclesiastical influences, was further from Roman law influences that existed elsewhere.

Taken together there are noteworthy comparisons and contrasts. The Merovingian marriage practices align to those in Ireland with the existence of multiple female partners, ranging from spouse to concubines. A point of comparison is the recognition of the importance of status of both partners in the

[42] Dailey, *Queens, Consorts, Concubines*, p. 106.
[43] Dailey, *Queens, Consorts, Concubines*, p. 103.
[44] Brehaut, *History of the Franks*, p. 90; Dailey, *Queens, Consorts, Concubines*, p. 107.
[45] Dailey, *Queens, Consorts, Concubines*, p. 112.
[46] Breatnach, 'On Old Irish Collective and Abstract Nouns, the Meaning of *Cétmuinter*, and Marriage in Early Mediaeval Ireland', p. 22.

Irish context. In general, the Irish legal practice is less loose but, in effect, the end result is similar.

6.3 Queens and marriage in Anglo-Saxon England

The chapter will now look to the marriage practices of Anglo-Saxon England to broaden the points of comparison. The legal material which contains the most references to women are in relation to marriage, reflecting what is seen in Irish sources. These laws are mainly found in legislation surviving from the seventh through to the eleventh centuries, in the law codes of Æthelberht of Kent (601-4), Ine of Wessex (688-95), Alfred of Wessex (871-901) and the Second Code of Cnut (1020-3).[47] Due to the nature of the sources there is no clear picture of the types of marriage distinguished. Moreover, it is difficult to discern what were considered ideal forms of marriage.[48] The law codes that do discuss marriage have been described as 'cryptic' and 'terse'.[49] They are not 'intended as a complete statement of the law' but instead a 'reference to and modification of customs already known'.[50] In addition this is further complicated by the fact there is no one legal system in place for the English kingdoms as a whole, which can be contrasted with the Irish legal system.[51] The latter, theoretically, at least, was envisioned as applying to all the island. Evidence from other sources, as we saw, do suggest that there was not a huge variance in custom among different Irish regions.

From a strict legal standpoint, there is no indication that early English law distinguished an institution of marriage but references to marriage are found in the codes of Æthelberht of Kent and Ine of Wessex.[52] Although Æthelberht's code acknowledges the acceptable types of sexual unions, for the people of Kent, it

[47] Felix Liebermann (ed. and tr.), *Die gesetze der Angelsachsen* (Halle, 1903), pp 3-8, 88-123, 46-89, 308-371; Klinck, 'Anglo-Saxon Women and the Law', p. 108.

[48] Lorraine Lancaster, 'Kinship in Anglo-Saxon Society: I', *The British Journal of Sociology* 9, no. 3 (1958), pp 239-240; Pauline Stafford, 'The Laws of Cnut and the History of Anglo-Saxon Royal Promises', *Anglo-Saxon England* 10 (1982), pp 173-190.

[49] Fell, *Women in Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 56; Hough, 'Women and the Law in Seventh-Century England', p. 207.

[50] Klinck, 'Anglo-Saxon Women and the Law', p. 108.

[51] Klinck, 'Anglo-Saxon Women and the Law', p. 108; Fell, *Women in Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 56.

[52] Liebermann, *Die gesetze der Angelsachsen*, pp 3-8, 88-123; Margaret Clunies Ross 'Concubinage in Anglo-Saxon England', *Past and Present,* no. 108 (1985), p. 11.

would appear that there were several ways of entering into a recognized sexual union with a woman and that unions were relatively easy to dissolve.[53] The marriage laws found in Æthelberht's code are obscure, but record that the process involved the payment of a bride price, provided for the woman's rights if she had children, and seems to have allowed an easy separation including the means for a wife to initiate the separation.[54] The law code of Ine 31 mentions the bride price and legislates in the event the marriage does not take place.[55] The two law codes, although not discussing the process of marriage, focus on the economic aspects of the marriage and what occurs in the case of a separation, which appears to reflect similar concerns to what is seen in *Cáin Lánamna*.[56] Like these English examples, *Cáin Lánamna* had a strong economic and practical focus within contexts where marriages were not necessarily expected to be permanent.

Due to the nature of the sources, it is difficult to fully see the extent to which concubinage was practiced. It is believed that it was mostly prevalent amongst the upper classes, and especially the members of royal kindreds.[57] Similar to Dailey's and Breatnach's reappraisal of polygyny Margaret Clunies Ross argues that:

> 'I prefer to use the term concubinage rather than polygyny to describe what I believe to have been Anglo-Saxon custom'… 'circumstances in which a man might have a plurality of sexual partners, specifically where one of these is a legal spouse and the other a concubine with customary privileges but without legal recognition'.[58]

[53] Liebermann, *Die gesetze der Angelsachsen*, p. 8; Ross 'Concubinage in Anglo-Saxon England', p. 11.

[54] Liebermann, *Die gesetze der Angelsachsen*, p. 8; Fell, *Women in Anglo-Saxon England*, pp 56-57; Lancaster, 'Kinship in Anglo-Saxon Society: I', p. 243; Hough, 'Women and the Law in Seventh-Century England', p. 222; Frederick Pollock and Frederic William Maitland, *The History of English Law Before the Time of Edward I* (Indiana, 2010), p. 383.

[55] Liebermann, *Die gesetze der Angelsachsen*, p. 102; Frederick Attenborough, *The Laws of the Earliest English Kings* (Cambridge, 2015), p. 47; Hough, 'Women and the Law in Seventh-Century England', p. 217.

[56] CIH 502.29-519.35; Ó Corráin, 'Women in Early Irish Society', pp 1-14; Ó Corráin, 'Marriage in Early Ireland', pp 5-24; Ó Corráin, 'Women and the Law in Early Ireland', pp 45–57; Eska, *Cáin Lánamna*.

[57] Ross 'Concubinage in Anglo-Saxon England', p. 3.

[58] Ross 'Concubinage in Anglo-Saxon England', pp 5-6.

Ross argues that the difference between the wife and concubine is that the latter does not receive a defined legal status as she has not been betrothed and would be without a dowry.[59] The practice of concubinage amongst kings is most noted in the case of King Æthelbald of Mercia (d. 757) who was rebuked by the Church when Boniface wrote to him and reproached him for not taking a legitimate wife and only having concubines:

> 'If the English race, as people in the provinces say and as the French, Italians and even the heathens insultingly proclaim, are despising lawful marriage and living in open adultery like the people of Sodom, then we must expect that from such intercourse with harlots, a people degenerate, degraded and mad with lust will be begotten'.[60]

However, concubinage is only rarely mentioned explicitly to in the laws. For instance, the laws of Æthelberht refer to several types of sexual union between men and women, but do not mention concubinage. The only reference to possible concubinage is in the Law of Wihtred c.695 which mentions illicit unions: 'men living in illicit cohabitation' are urged to regularize their relationships.[61] The later Law of Cnut, which is based on Wihtred's legislation states:

> 'And if anyone has a lawful wife and also a concubine, no priest is to do for him any of the offices which must be done for a Christian man, until he desists and atones for it as deeply as the bishop directs him, and desists from such for ever'.[62]

Ross concludes that the reason for the silence on the subject of concubinage is that the relationship between a man and his concubine was characterized by 'continuity and public or semi-public recognition' and not by a formal betrothal and exchange of gifts between the contracting parties.[63] Similar to the discussion of Merovingian customs this contrasts with the relatively greater legal recognition given to Irish secondary spouses.

---

[59] Ross 'Concubinage in Anglo-Saxon England', p. 6.

[60] Tangl, *Die Briefe Des Heiligen Bonifatius*, p. 63; Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, p. 71; Barbara Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms of Early Anglo-Saxon England* (London, 1990), p. 175.

[61] Liebermann, *Die gesetze der Angelsachsen*, p. 26; Ross 'Concubinage in Anglo-Saxon England', p. 13.

[62] Liebermann, *Die gesetze der Angelsachsen*, pp 308-371; Attenborough, *The Laws of the Earliest English Kings*, p. 25; Ross 'Concubinage in Anglo-Saxon England', pp 13-14.

[63] Ross 'Concubinage in Anglo-Saxon England', pp 13-14.

6.4 Divorce in Frankia and Anglo-Saxon England

Divorce for the Merovingians was seen as a simple affair.[64] A man was able to repudiate his wife, for adultery or inability to bear children while a wife was not allowed the same.[65] However, divorce was allowed by mutual consent.[66] In Ireland, as already discussed, divorce was accessible for both parties and bilateral arrangements were much fuller.[67] In terms of the role of the Frankish Church, apart from the Council of Agde of 506, men could not repudiate their wives without presenting their charges to an ecclesiastical court, providing a Church oversight not present in Ireland.[68] In addition, the Council of Orléans of 533 approached the question of divorce, forbidding it on grounds of illness.[69] Nevertheless, there is no evidence of any other attempts by the Frankish Church to legislate on divorce until the second half of the eighth century.[70] As reflected in Gregory of Tours the system that emerged in practice enabled divorce.[71] This system allowed kings to dismiss and repudiate highborn women in favour of brides from lower ranks of society.[72] Again this system is similar to Irish royal marriage practices. As seen in chapter 3 the prevalence of divorce among the elite, combined with the fact that divorce accommodated forming new alliances, echoes the Merovingian system.[73]

The English practice of divorce follows the Merovingian pattern, although there is less detail available. Early sources seem to demonstrate that divorce was widely available but, with growing Church influence, a stricter approach was introduced. For example, in the early law code of Æthelberht the practice of

---

[64] Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, p. 42; Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, p. 79; Dailey, *Queens, Consorts, Concubines*, p. 115.

[65] Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, p. 42.

[66] McNamara and Wemple, 'Marriage and Divorce in the Frankish Kingdom', p. 100; Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, p. 42; Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, p. 80.

[67] Ó' Corráin, 'Women in Early Irish Society', p.4; Jaski, 'Marriage Laws in Ireland and the Continent in the Early Middle Ages', p. 31.

[68] McNamara and Wemple, 'Marriage and Divorce in the Frankish Kingdom', p. 100; Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, p. 43; Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, p. 79.

[69] McNamara and Wemple, 'Marriage and Divorce in the Frankish Kingdom', p. 100; Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, p. 43; Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, p. 79.

[70] Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, p. 43; Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, pp 80-81.

[71] Dailey, *Queens, Consorts, Concubines*, p. 115.

[72] Dailey, *Queens, Consorts, Concubines*, p. 115.

[73] See chapter 4, section 4.3 and 4.6.

divorce is recorded whereby a woman could leave her marriage and if she took the children, she was entitled to half the property:

> *79 Gif mid bearnum bugan wille, healfne scæt age*
> If she wishes to go away with the children, she is to have half the goods.
>
> *80 Gif ceorl agan wile: swa an bearn*.
> If the husband wishes to keep [the children], [she is to have the same share] as a child.[74]

However, Carole Hough has argued that these specific laws apply to widows, and that the sequencing of material in the text is interrupted. She points out that that this section of the laws is focused mainly on widows so it would make sense that this is the context of these stipulations as well.[75] Hough puts forward the idea that the laws instead demonstrate that two courses of action are open to the woman. She either remains celibate, retaining her legal inheritance and custody of her children, or she may remarry, forfeiting the former and possibly the latter. The first alternative is outlined in law 79, the second in law 80.[76] Christine Fell in her discussion of these laws, although not going as far as Hough, does state that the instance of a woman walking away from her marriage is not seen in the later sources.[77]

However, the absence of divorce laws in later material could be due to the fact that a couple of decades after Æthelberht's laws the Synod of Hertford, presided over by Archbishop Theodore (d. 690) and quoted by Bede was more specific stating:

> *Decimum capitulum pro coniugiis: 'Vt nulli liceat nisi legi/timum habere connubium; Nullus incestum faciat; nullus coniugem propriam nisi, ut sanctum euangelium docet, fornicationis causa relinquat. Quod si*

[74] Liebermann, *Die gesetze der Angelsachsen*, p. 8; Attenborough, *The Laws of the Earliest English Kings*, p. 25; Ross 'Concubinage in Anglo-Saxon England', p. 15.

[75] Liebermann, *Die gesetze der Angelsachsen*, p. 8; Carole Hough, 'The Early Kentish 'Divorce Laws': A Reconsideration of Æthelberht, Chs. 79 and 80', *Anglo-Saxon England* 23 (1994), p. 20.

[76] Liebermann, *Die gesetze der Angelsachsen*, p. 8; Hough, 'The Early Kentish 'Divorce Laws': A Reconsideration of Æthelberht, Chs. 79 and 80', p. 34.

[77] Fell, *Women in Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 57.

> *quisquam propriam expulerit coniugem legitimo sibi matrimonio coniunctam, si Christianus esse recte uoluerit, nulli alteri copuletur, sed ita permaneat, aut propriaereconcilietur coniugi.*
> On marriage. That nothing but lawful wedlock be allowed to anyone. No one shall commit incest, no one shall leave his own wife, unless on account of fornication, as the holy gospel teaches. And if anyone divorces his own wife, joined to him by lawful wedlock, he shall take no other, if he wishes truly to be a Christian; but remain as he is, or be reconciled with his own wife.[78]

In his later Penitential, Theodore broadened his concept of separation, in particular in the high value placed by the Church on chastity and morality in marriage which led to another type of separation available to a married couple.[79] It was possible for either spouse to vow himself or herself to chastity and enter a monastery.[80] This is seen in the case of Ecgfrith of Northumbria and Æthelthryth, in which he divorced her due to her decision to not consummate the marriage and Æthelthryth was repudiated and sent to the family nunnery.[81]

There are some scholarly debates surrounding the account. Pauline Stafford states repeatedly that Ecgfrith divorced Æthelthryth to marry Iurminburg because Æthelthryth was sterile, arguing that he claimed that she had failed to consummate the marriage and had a religious vocation so that he could secure the divorce.[82] Stephanie Hollis suggests that Æthelthryth is the sole abbess in the *Ecclesiastical History* who commands Bede's enthusiasm and as a reigning queen who entered the monastic life she 'represented a polemical opportunity too good to miss'.[83] Katherine Bullimore argues the interesting point that the most likely reason Ecgfrith would have wanted to stay married to Æthelthryth was that the alliances the marriage brought him were too valuable to lose as Æthelthryth was the daughter of Anna, a king of the East Angles and during her marriage to Ecgfrith East Anglia was ruled successively by her uncle Æthelwold and first

[78] Bede, *HE*, IV 5 (Colgrave and Mynors, p. 352 (text), p. 353 (translation)); Lancaster, 'Kinship in Anglo-Saxon Society: I', pp 246-247.
[79] Lancaster, 'Kinship in Anglo-Saxon Society: I', pp 246-247.
[80] Lancaster, 'Kinship in Anglo-Saxon Society: I', pp 246-247.
[81] Bede, *HE*, IV 19 (Colgrave and Mynors, pp 390-392 (text), pp 391-393 (translation)); Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, p. 81.
[82] Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, pp 74, 81.
[83] Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women and the Church*, p. 67.

cousin Ældwulf.[84] This once again demonstrates, that whether it is the kingdoms of the Uí Néill or Northumbria, queens were crucial in political alliances.

These examples taken together show that the major contrast between Ireland compared to the Merovingians and English is that older looser customs of marriage dissolution remained commonplace. The gradual reform of marriage in England and Frankia, in particular under the Carolingians, with its impact upon the queen as wife, simply never happened in Ireland during this period. On the one hand, the tightening of rules around divorce meant that a queen probably gained status as the king's wife because it became harder to put her aside. On the other, Irish queens had the expectation that they were not necessarily tied to one marriage.

6.5 Regency and Leadership

Having examined the marriage practices of Frankia and Anglo-Saxon England, the chapter will now look to an area in which the Irish sources are completely silent, the potential of queens to become regents. Not only are Irish sources silent, it is very likely that it was not something that was ever envisaged as happening. As a queen's power, position, and status was dependant on her husband, widowhood left queens in an uncertain situation.[85] For the majority of queens in the Frankish and English realms there were two choices when they found themselves a widow, entry into a nunnery or remarriage.[86] However, for a minority the opportunity arose to become regent to their son.[87] Due to the frequency of the succession of minors, especially among the Merovingians, a queen mother was often in a strong position.[88] Thus, in some cases widowhood, although a precarious situation to be in, could enable a woman to be influential as a mother rather than a wife in a way that was much more concrete than an Irish queen contributing to her son's royal *febas*. Thus, queens could attain the

[84] Katherine Bullimore, 'Unpicking the Web: The Divorce of Ecgfrith and Æthelthryth', *European Review of History—Revue Européenne D'Histoire* 16 (2009), pp 838-839.

[85] Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, pp 174-177.

[86] Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, p. 146.

[87] Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, p. 61; Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, p. 152.

[88] Nelson, 'Queens as Jezebels: Brunhild and Balthild in Merovingian History', pp 7-8.

height of their careers not as royal wives but as mothers and regents.[89] There are several important examples. Fredegund, born into a low-ranking family and mentioned briefly earlier, following the death of her husband Chilperic I became regent for their son Chlothar II.[90] Nantechild was a widow of Dagobert I and became regent for her son Clovis II, then a minor from 639 until her death in 642.[91] Balthild married Clovis II, making her daughter-in-law to Nantechild.[92] After the death of Clovis she became regent for her son Chlothar III. Balthild ruled as regent for Chlothar III from 657 until her death in 680.[93]

The most notable example is that of Brunhild, probably one of the most famous of all Merovingian queens. Brunhild, a Visigoth princess, was married to Sigibert of Austrasia. On the death of her husband she 'linked her fate' with her young son Childebert II and began her first role as a regent.[94] She entered into an almost equal partnership in power with her son although she shared power with his *nutrior* (male nurse), who was also named regent, Gogo.[95] On the death of Childebert Brunhild became a regent for the second time in her career, this time to her two grandsons, half-brothers Theudebert and Theuderic. Theudebert's coming-of-age saw Brunhild's expulsion from Austrasia, most likely due to the noble factions that were hostile to her.[96] Soon after, he married Bilichild, a former slave of Brunhild's and this was a hostile relationship as the two had previously engaged in what Stafford calls a bitter war of poisonous

[89] Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, p. 63; Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, p. 146.

[90]Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, p. 65; Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms 450*-751, pp 124-125; Dailey, *Queens, Consorts, Concubines*, pp 96-97.

[91] Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, p. 65; Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, p. 150.

[92]Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, p. 64; Nelson, 'Queens as Jezebels: Brunhild and Balthild in Merovingian History', pp 17-18.

[93] Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, p. 150; Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms 450*-751, p. 125.

[94] Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, pp 65-67; Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, p. 146; Nelson, 'Queens as Jezebels: Brunhild and Balthild in Merovingian History', p. 12; Dailey, *Queens, Consorts, Concubines*, p. 143.

[95] Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, pp 65-67; Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, p. 146; Nelson, 'Queens as Jezebels: Brunhild and Balthild in Merovingian History', pp 7-8; Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms 450*-751, p. 129; Dailey, *Queens, Consorts, Concubines*, p. 143.

[96] Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, pp 65-67; Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, p. 147; Nelson, 'Queens as Jezebels: Brunhild and Balthild in Merovingian History', p. 15.

taunts.[97] Brunhild took refuge in the court of her other grandson Theuderic.[98] Wemple has argued that Brunhild wanted to hold onto power and that is was upon her suggestion Theuderic did not marry and instead had concubines.[99] She had a third and last attempt at regency through her great grandson but without support this never came to fruition and it ultimately ended with her execution by dynastic rivals. Brunhild's portrayal is varied due to the number of sources in which she is found and, perhaps, because while she wielded great power over an extraordinary career, she was eventually defeated.[100] As has been seen earlier in the chapter Brunhild is discussed by Gregory of Tours whose account is positive; however, it was a decade and a half after his death that Brunhild fell from power.[101]

As there is no Irish equivalent of Brunhild to which she can be compared, her interactions with the Irish missionary Columbanus takes on a special interest.[102] Their interactions are recorded in the *Vita Columbani*, written by the Italian monk Jonas of Bobbio, and it has been shown that his work had strong political biases.[103] Brunhild and her family were central to Columbanus's career. It is arguable that her son Childebert II was the saint's patron of Luxeuil. [104] Although it must be noted that his identity is suppressed by Jonas and replaced

[97] Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, pp 65-67; Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, p. 147.

[98] Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, pp 65-67; Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, p. 147; Nelson, 'Queens as Jezebels: Brunhild and Balthild in Merovingian History', p. 15.

[99] Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, pp 65-67; Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, p. 147; Nelson, 'Queens as Jezebels: Brunhild and Balthild in Merovingian History', p. 15.

[100] Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms 450-*751, p. 126.

[101] Dailey, *Queens, Consorts, Concubines*, p. 119.

[102] O'Hara and Wood, *Jonas of Bobbio: Life of Columbanus, Life of John of Réomé, and Life of Vedast*.

[103] Yaniv Fox, *Power and Religion in Merovingian Gaul: Columbanian Monasticism and the Frankish Elites*, (Cambridge, 2014); Yaniv Fox, 'The Political Context of Irish Monasticism in Seventh-Century Francia: Another Look at the Sources' in *The Irish in Early Medieval Europe: Identity, Culture and Religion*, eds Roy Flechner and Sven Meeder (New York, 2016), pp 53–67; O'Hara and Wood, *Jonas of Bobbio: Life of Columbanus, Life of John of Réomé, and Life of Vedast*.

[104] VC 1. 6; Alexander O'Hara, 'Columbanus ad Locum: The Establishment of the Monastic Foundations', *Peritia* 26 (2015), p. 147; Elva Johnston, 'Movers and Shakers? How Women Shaped the Career of Columbanus' in *Columbanus and the Peoples of Post-Roman Europe*, ed. Alexander O'Hara (Oxford, 2018), p. 77.

with that of his father, Sigibert I, presumably to minimize any suggestion that either Brunhild or her descendants helped Columbanus.[105]

In contrast to Gregory of Tours, Brunhild is portrayed negatively by Jonas as he refers to her as a second Jezebel 'the ancient serpent entered the mind of his grandmother, Brunhild – a second Jezebel'.[106] Brunhild sought the blessing of Columbanus for her great grandsons, Theudebert and Theuderic.[107] Jonas relays that Columbanus refused due to the status of their concubine mother.[108] In addition, Jonas records that Theuderic visited Columbanus to seek his prayers.[109] However, Jonas records how Columbanus admonishes Theuderic for his adulterous relations with his concubine 'why did he not satisfy himself with comforts of a lawful wife…royal offspring should be born to an honourable queen'.[110] This section gives an insight into how the above marriage practices clashed with Church teaching. Although written by Jonas, the scene may still echo the perspective of an Irish cleric on marriage practices. Here, Columbanus is far more extreme than what we have seen was the situation in Ireland where legitimacy was broad.[111] It might possibly echo the impact of the status of a mother on a son's standing, in particular the sons of women of lower marriage status found in Irish custom.[112] However, the position of Columbanus is far more extreme than the Irish norm that this dissertation has explored. As discussed earlier while practices of polygyny and divorce were not unknown especially amongst the Merovingian elite, they took place within a framework in which the

[105] VC 1. 6; O'Hara, 'Columbanus ad Locum: The Establishment of the Monastic Foundations', p. 147; Johnston, 'Movers and Shakers? How Women Shaped the Career of Columbanus', p. 77.

[106]VC 1. 18, p. 86; Nelson, 'Queens as Jezebels: Brunhild and Balthild in Merovingian History', pp 29-31; O'Hara and Wood, *Jonas of Bobbio: Life of Columbanus, Life of John of Réomé, and Life of Vedast*, p. 133; Johnston, 'Movers and Shakers? How Women Shaped the Career of Columbanus', p. 77.

[107] VC I.19, pp 187– 93.

[108] Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, pp 67-68; O'Hara and Wood, *Jonas of Bobbio: Life of Columbanus, Life of John of Réomé, and Life of Vedast*, p. 134.

[109] VC 1. 18, p. 87; Nelson, 'Queens as Jezebels: Brunhild and Balthild in Merovingian History', pp 29-31.

[110] VC 1. 18, p. 87; O'Hara and Wood, *Jonas of Bobbio: Life of Columbanus, Life of John of Réomé, and Life of Vedast*, p. 133.

[111] Johnston, 'Movers and Shakers? How Women Shaped the Career of Columbanus', p. 77.

[112]CIH 1296.32-6; Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, pp 70-71; Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession*, p. 146; Warntjes, 'Regnal Succession in Early Medieval Ireland', pp 395-396.

boundaries of Gregory's monogamous ideal were emphasized.[113] These contrasts with Irish practices on which a multitude of reproductive unions were acknowledged in law.[114] The rejection of this monogamous ideal may not yet have taken firm hold in Columbanus's time, although it was evident soon after the middle of the seventh century when the vernacular laws began to take written form. It can therefore be suggested that Columbanus was already familiar with the array of reproductive unions accepted among the Irish aristocracy, unions that he opposed, and he brought this opposition with him to the Merovingian kingdoms.[115]

In addition to the marriage practices described here it must also be noted that Brunhild as a queen and regent is a woman of a type that Columbanus would not have encountered in Ireland.[116] As we have seen, ruling queens, such as Medb of Connacht, are found only in the literature but not in contemporary sources such as vernacular law and annals. On the other hand, it should also be noted that Columbanus never once mentions Brunhild or his dealings with her and Theuderic in his extant writings, so the account of Jonas needs to be approached with caution.[117]

There is not the same wealth of evidence for female regency among English queens but there are some pointers. Seaxburh of Wessex (d. 674) was the first and only ruling queen of an Anglo-Saxon kingdom and the only female ruler apart from Æthelflæd (d. 918) Lady of the Mercians.[118] As the widow of King Cenwalh (d. 672) of the West Saxons she is recorded as his successor in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle which states:

---

[113] Johnston, 'Movers and Shakers? How Women Shaped the Career of Columbanus', p. 77.

[114] Johnston, 'Movers and Shakers? How Women Shaped the Career of Columbanus', p. 77.

[115] Johnston, 'Movers and Shakers? How Women Shaped the Career of Columbanus', p. 77.

[116] Johnston, 'Movers and Shakers? How Women Shaped the Career of Columbanus', p. 77.

[117] Johnston, 'Movers and Shakers? How Women Shaped the Career of Columbanus', p. 78.

[118] Timothy Venning, *The Kings and Queens of Anglo-Saxon England* (Gloucestershire, 2013), p. 64; Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms of Early Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 135; Fell, *Women in Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 25; Klein, *Ruling Women*, p. 10.

> A. 672. This year king Kenwalk died, and Sexburga his queen reigned one year after him.[119]

The length of the reign is short but the fact that she ruled seems unambiguous. Moreover, Seaxburh is the only woman to appear in a regnal list.[120] It is not known whether she ruled as Cenwalh's widow, as a regent for his sons or in her own right.[121] In contrast to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, Bede reports that the kingship lapsed for ten years after Cenwalh's death 'his underrulers took upon them the kingdom of the people, and dividing it among themselves, held it ten years'.[122] It is worth speculating whether Bede has erased Seaxburh or whether her rule was lost in the uncertainty following Cenwalh's death. Short as it is, however, there is no equivalent passage in the Irish Annals. There was no need as succession within the wider kindred, meant that there was always a potential adult male successor.[123] Minors would not be considered as they were not fit for rule.[124]

The only other woman to be recorded in a leadership role is Æthelflæd daughter of Alfred the Great (d. 899). She was married to the independent ruler of Mercia, Æthelred, Lord of the Mercians (d. 911), a king in all but name.[125] When Æthelred died, his widow Æthelflæd administered the province while ruling in her own right.[126] Similarly to Seaxburh she too is recorded in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, detailing her role in battles against the Vikings.[127] Æthelflæd is unusual as she became regent on behalf of her husband and this is even more unusual as she was sonless.[128] An interesting point of comparison with chapter 4 is that her death is recorded in the Annals of Ulster:

---

[119] J.A Giles (ed. and tr.), *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (London, 1914), p. 24.

[120] Stafford, 'The King's Wife in Wessex 800-1066', p. 6; Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms of Early Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 147.

[121] Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, p. 173; Barbara Yorke, *Wessex in the Early Middle Ages* (London, 1995), p. 283.

[122] Bede, *HE*, IV 12 (Colgrave and Mynors, p. 368 (text), p. 369 (translation)).

[123] MacNeill, 'The Irish Law of Dynastic Succession', pp 367-382; MacNeill, 'The Irish Law of Dynastic Succession: Part II', pp 640-653; Ó' Corráin, 'Irish Regnal Succession: A Reprisal', pp 7-39; Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*; Charles-Edwards, *Early Irish and Welsh Kinship*; Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession*; Warntges, 'Regnal Succession in Early Medieval Ireland', pp 377-410.

[124] Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession*, p. 127.

[125]Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, p. 140; Mary Dockray- Miller, *Motherhood and Mothering in Anglo-Saxon England* (London, 2000), p. 56.

[126] Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, p. 140

[127] Giles, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, p. 67.

[128] Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, p. 173.

Eithilfleith, famosissima regina Saxonum, moritur.
Ethelfled, a very famous queen of the Saxons, dies.[129]

There is also an account in the Fragmentary Annals of Ireland in which her role as a leader is clearly recorded:

Beatha & sláinte o rígh Saxan atá a n-galor, & ó na ríoghain, 'ga f-fuil uile neart Saxan.
Life and health to you from the King of the Saxons, who is ill, and from the Queen, who holds all authority over the Saxons.[130]

It is noteworthy that Æthelflæd is recorded as *regina* and *ríoghain* (queen) whereas the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle refers to her as Lady. It aligns linguistically and syntactically to Gormlaith daughter of Donnchad, the *Regina Scotorum*.[131] Gormlaith's death notice is earlier than Æthelflæd's but it is worth considering what the annalists were attempting to convey in terms of a queen's authority. The reality, however, does suggest that Gormlaith could not have wielded the same direct power as her English counterpart.

6.6 Ordination and Anointing

As marriage practices changed so too did the concepts of queenship and its role within politics. Discussed earlier in the chapter, it is clear that among the Merovingians a woman being referred to as a queen signified a legitimate wife and the early ceremonies demonstrate it was associated with marriage.[132] The anointing of a queen goes further as a woman who is anointed is not only linked to a king through marriage, but she now sits at the king's right hand in a recognised and influential way.[133]

The earliest example of this process is Bertrada (d.783). Bertrada was the wife of the first Carolingian king Pepin (d. 768) and was anointed in 751, making her the first Carolingian queen formally inaugurated alongside her husband.[134]

---

[129] *s.a* AU 918.5.
[130] Fragmentary Annals of Ireland 918.
[131] *s.a* AU 861.2, CS 861.
[132] Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, pp 127-128; Dailey, *Queens, Consorts, Concubines*, p. 112.
[133] Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, pp 127-128; Nelson, 'Early Medieval Rites of Queen-Making and the Shaping of Medieval Queenship', p. 313.
[134] Julie Ann Smith, 'The Earliest Queen-Making Rites', *Church History* 66, no.1 (1997), p. 19.

While the sources are not specific as to whether she was anointed at the same time as her husband and sons, they do state that she was ritually inaugurated to her new position:[135]

> 'Pippin…by the consecration of bishops and by the subjection of lay magnates, together with the queen Bertrada as the rules of ancient tradition require was elevated into the kingdom'. [136]

As has been clear throughout this chapter the change of power from the Merovingians to the Carolingians required ecclesiastical support and legislation. This gives a particular context for Bertrada's ordination as it was part of the transfer of succession from one family to another.[137] This type of change, requiring ecclesiastical legitimisation was not a factor for Irish rulers, although the imagery around the sovereignty figure may answer to a similar need, to give royal women a position within the overall organisation of kingship.

The history of queens and queen making in England in the eighth and ninth century is obscure. While the West Saxons appear not to have had queens, which will be discussed shortly, there seems to have been no customary practice across all kingdoms.[138] There are however some notable examples of the practice of some kingdoms elevating a king's wife to a queen. Cynethryth (d. c.798) was the wife of Offa the king of Mercia (d. 796). She was designated Queen of the Mercians by 770 when she began to witness Offa's charters as *Cyneöryö Regina Merciorum*.[139] The anointing of a queen, although elevating her position, was intended to legitimise a son's place in succession, especially if a king had other sons from another marriage. As Stafford points out 'What better way than to

[135] Julie Ann Smith, *Queen-Making and Queenship in Early Medieval England and Francia* (unpublished PhD, University of York, 1993), pp 78-79; Nelson, *King and Emperor: A New Life of Charlemagne*, p. 70.

[136] Continuator of Fredegar, chap 33, *The Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar and its Continuators*, ed. and tr. J. M Wallace-Hadrill (London, 1960), p. 102; Nelson, 'Early Medieval Rites of Queen-Making and the Shaping of Medieval Queenship', p. 302.

[137] Stafford, 'Charles the Bald, Judith and England', p. 146; Smith, *Queen-Making and Queenship in Early Medieval England and Francia*, p. 78.

[138] Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, p. 132; Stafford, 'Charles the Bald, Judith and England', pp 147-148; Venning, *The Kings and Queens of Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 101.

[139] Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, p. 132; Stafford, 'Charles the Bald, Judith and England', pp 147-148; Smith, *Queen-Making and Queenship in Early Medieval England and Francia*, p. 88.

enhance the status of the mother who bore them?'[140] Offa elevated Cynethryth to queen to secure succession of his son Ecgfrith (d. 796) and enhance the 'throne worthiness' of his son, an equivalent in some ways of the Irish idea that worthiness to be a king partly originated in the mother.[141] Although it is not known if she was anointed in a ceremony her title was cemented as the first coins with a queen's name outside of Italy had *regina Merciorum* inscribed on them.[142]

Eadburh (d. 802), the daughter of Offa and Cynethryth, married King Beorhtric (d. 802) of the West Saxons in 789.[143] It was said that her behaviour as queen is what led to the West Saxons ending the use of the term queen. Asser, in his Life of King Alfred, claimed that she attempted to dominate Beorhtric's court and poisoned those she 'could not woo' until accidently killing her own husband.[144] However, it is difficult to separate fact from fiction as by late ninth century Asser may well have been heavily influenced by how her reputation was perceived over time.[145] According to Asser her behaviour led to the West Saxons no longer allowing a queen to sit beside the king, She was no longer a *regina* (queen) but instead a *regis coniugem* (king's wife), an odd but coincidental echo of the Irish annals identification of the wife of the king of Tara, discussed in chapter 4.[146]

Charles the Bald (d. 877) arranged for the anointing of his wife Ermentrude of Orléans, even though she was already his queen and they had been married for over twenty years.[147] The purpose of her consecration was to ensure that any heirs after the anointing would be suitable to rule as Charles was dissatisfied with his earlier children. [148] Stafford points to the fact that such ceremonies are less

---

[140] Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, pp 130-131.

[141] Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, p. 132; Smith, *Queen-Making and Queenship in Early Medieval England and Francia*, p. 148.

[142] Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, p. 132; Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms of Early Anglo-Saxon England*, pp 115-116; Smith, *Queen-making and Queenship in Early Medieval England and Francia*, pp 217-218.

[143] Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, p. 18; Klein, *Ruling Women*, pp 12-13.

[144] W. H. Stevenson (ed. and tr.), *Asser's Life of King Alfred: Together with the Annals of Saint Neots Erroneously Ascribed to Asser* (Oxford, 1904), pp 11-12;Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, p. 18.

[145]Stevenson, *Asser's Life of King Alfred*; Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, p. 18; Klein, *Ruling Women*, pp 12-13.

[146] Stevenson, *Asser's Life of King Alfred*, p. 11.

[147] Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, p. 131.

[148] Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, p. 131; Stafford, 'Charles the Bald, Judith and England', p. 146; Smith, 'The Earliest Queen-Making Rites', p. 28; Valerie L. Garver, *Women and Aristocratic Culture in the Carolingian World* (London, 2009), p. 218.

about transferring power to a queen but to underline her function as the producer of heirs to the throne.[149] It can be compared with the anointing of her daughter, Judith of Flanders (d. c.870).[150] Judith was married at a very young age to a king of Wessex, Æthelwulf (d. 858), who had two sons from a previous marriage and by being anointed she aimed to bolster the position of her future sons.[151] Furthermore, her father Charles wanted to enhance Judith's position in the court of Wessex.[152] Hincmar of Rheims adapted a king's *ordo* as the basis for the queen, implying that no queen's *ordo* was available to him.[153] The *ordo* was divided into two parts, a nuptial blessing and the royal consecrations.[154] Given the relationship between king and Church it is no surprise that the *ordo* contained a full Christian marriage and anointing.[155] Part of the *ordo* focused on fertility and emphasised that an anointed queen was a changed woman blessed by God and that, moreover, her male offspring would be especially entitled to rule.[156] As it happened, she had no children with the king of Wessex and remarried upon his death.

Once again, these examples contrast with what appears to have been the experience of Irish queens. There is no evidence of any ecclesiastical ceremonies which marked a woman as becoming queen or as reaffirming their position as queen and wife. There are probably some political reasons. For example, we have seen that the Irish situation was closest to that of the Merovingians. The practice of anointing a queen emerged under the Carolingians. It seems very likely that this was part of a process of legitimising them. The anointing was not only for the benefit of the woman herself but helped bolster her as the mother of royal offspring.

---

[149] Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, pp 130-131.

[150] Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, pp 130-131; Smith, *Queen-Making and Queenship in Early Medieval England and Francia,* pp 98-107; Smith*,* 'The Earliest Queen-Making Rites*',* pp 23-24.

[151] Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, pp 130-131.

[152] Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, pp 130-131.

[153] Nelson, 'Early Medieval Rites of Queen-Making and the Shaping of Medieval Queenship', pp 303-306; Story, *Carolingian Connection: Anglo-Saxon England and Carolingian Francia, c.750-870*, p. 241.

[154] Smith*,* 'The Earliest Queen-Making Rites*'*, p. 25.

[155] Stafford, 'Charles the Bald, Judith and England', p. 145; Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith: Queenship and Women's Power in the Eleventh Century England*, p. 165.

[156] Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, pp 130-131; Garver, *Women and Aristocratic Culture in the Carolingian World*, p. 218.

6.7 Conclusion

The objective of this chapter was to address a number of questions in order to identify potential disparities or similarities between Irish queenship and contemporary practices in other European contexts. A major point of comparison was explored through royal marriage practices. Irish customs were similar to the Merovingians. They both also had strategies that enabled kings to have multiple partners, although the mechanics differed. The main area of contrast was in status: Merovingians kings sometimes married women of lower status as this gave them political benefits of the type that was not possible in Irish society. Carolingian Church reforms gradually reshaped marriage among the aristocracy to something closer to the Christian ideal and this involved making divorce far more difficult. There is some similarity with the English patterns, although these are less clear-cut. It seems that multiple partners were allowed, although this began to be phased out and writers such as Bede portrayed diverse but idealised portraits of queens in royal marriages.

However, the biggest difference that separates Irish from Frankish and English queenship is how each one fits into the respective systems of kingship and succession. For Frankish as well as English queens the importance of producing an heir, and the subsequent possibility of a role as regent, opened possibilities not available to an Irish queen. In addition, over time queenship gradually becomes recognised as an institution in Frankia while in England there was more of a variety of practice. Ireland lies further down the spectrum than Frankia and perhaps closer to the English. As we have seen, an evolving terminology associated with queens in the annals alongside a concept of the queen as important to sovereignty suggests that there was a growing acknowledgement of status. Finally, the difference in source type is significant. It is very difficult to actually reconstruct the biographies of Irish queens in the absence of a Gregory of Tours or a Bede.

Final Conclusion

This thesis has presented a new approach to identifying and analysing the historical evidence relating to Irish queens and queenship. As was discussed, the extensive representations of queens in early Irish literature resulted in historical royal women being overshowed: as a result they have not received the attention that they deserve as important contributors to early Irish society as a group. In particular, this thesis has demonstrated that Irish queens and queenship can be examined through a new lens which, for the very first time, placed them in a firm context. The primary aim of this research has been to provide an updated study of Irish historical queens and queenship. In order to achieve this it was necessary to disentangle legend from reality. As the thesis outlined, this presented a challenge as there is no one source which provides a clear picture as to what Irish queenship entailed. As a result, the research required that an array of sources be examined in order to obtain the greatest insight into queenship in early Irish society. In this re-examination the main aim was to explore and identify where early Irish historical queens fitted into society and how society perceived them. Having established the status and place of queens in society the dissertation examined whether the sources allow us to think of queenship as forming a distinct institution and / or title or role. This was achieved by addressing a number of research questions with a particular focus on a queen's status in society, the marriage practices of the elite and a queen's relationship to the institution of kingship. Another objective of the thesis was to address how similar or dissimilar Irish queens and queenship was compared to their Frankish and English counterparts.

This thesis has argued throughout that although the law tracts are relatively quiet in the treatment of queens this does not mean they were absent in society. Through looking at the evidence from legal tracts, annals, genealogies, hagiography and material culture it emerged that queens formed an elite group in Irish society who received increasing recognition over time, especially in the annals. Due to the status-driven nature of Irish society women who were daughters of kings obtained a higher degree of status through their honour price. Due to their paternal links they were conduits through which political alliances

were made. As has been evident throughout this work marriage laws provide the most insight into the lives of women and this is no different for queens. The royal marriage practices of the elite uncovered a great deal in terms of how royal marriage operated. In particular, the practice of successive marriage and divorce appears to have facilitated political alliances, placing queens at the forefront. Royal marriage practices also revealed that due to the nature of remarriage queens held a high degree of status even after divorce. The annals and genealogies provide the evidence for this and demonstrate that royal marriages took place amongst a small elite group.

This insight into royal marriage practices also raised a point not previously examined which is how do these women become queens? Although no evidence of marriage ceremonies exist it is evident that through marriage to a king a woman was elevated to the position of a queen. The annals provide evidence that this is something which evolved over time, beginning with a woman being the wife of a king to being recognised as the queen of a king by 800. Another question which this thesis addressed was the queen's relationship to the institution of kingship. Was queenship an institution as well? That queens held their own titles and played such a central role in alliances through marriage is evidence that a structure was in place which facilitated this. The evidence from the annals and the insights provided by hagiography demonstrate that queenship was an institution separate to that of kingship. The annals and genealogies, analysed through network theory, indicated the central role queens played in royal society. Although queens did not hold institutional roles of leadership, such as regency, their influence in politics cannot be dismissed drawing them into a political environment not previously systematically acknowledged.[1] This was partly a consequence of their role in linking kindreds, leading to prominent roles in forming alliances. Similarly, although not having a legally defined role in succession their influence can be seen in the way that the status of a mother was an important determinant in succession to the kingship. This, to a degree, has been obscured through interpreting it as an aspect of the sovereignty figure when, it seems much

[1]For example, the political careers of the Gormlaiths have been considered by Trindade, 'Irish Gormlaith as a Sovereignty Figure', pp 143–156, Ní Dhonnchadha, 'On Gormfhlaith Daughter of Flann Sinna and the Lure of the Sovereignty Goddess', pp 225–237 and Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Tales of the Three Gormlaiths in Medieval Irish Literature', pp 1-24 but there has not been a sustained analysis of the political roles open to Irish queens as a group.

more likely that this is a practical outcome of the interplay of status and serial marriages. Therefore, it has been argued in the dissertation that although serial marriage is often interpreted as a trait of the sovereignty figure it was also a practical part of royal marriages.

Due to the nature of Irish sources, which are often prescriptive, in order to get a more complete picture of the potentials of early medieval queenship it was necessary to look outside the Irish material. This thesis presented the first sustained comparison of early medieval Irish with contemporary Frankish and English queenship. This included material on betrothal, marriage, succession and regency. There were a number of striking contrasts, such as the practice of regency and ordos: the system of kingship in Frankia, in particular, allowed for a woman to emerge as regent, something which could not have happened in Ireland for legal reasons. However, similarities also cannot be overlooked. Ireland's marriage practices were comparable to the Merovingians, especially the role played by successive marriage and divorce. It is the emergence of the Carolingians and the growing influence of the Church that results in a divergence taking place between Ireland and Frankia in these areas. The Irish Church did not have the same influence on royal practices compared to Frankia and England.

Finally, one aim of the dissertation was to analyse whether the sources allow us to think of queenship as forming a distinct institution and / or title or role. The answer is not straightforward. However, the title of queen was identified in many sources, from the legal tracts, annals, hagiography and literature. The chronological nature of the annals suggest that it was one that gained greater recognition over time in early Irish society. The change from wife of a king to a queen signifies a growing importance and visibility. Moreover, terms identifying women as queens of a territory show that the title itself was widely accepted and used within society.[2] A title implies a role, and this research has helped uncover that role, showing it to be greater than often assumed in secondary literature. As chapter 5 illustrated the ideal of the female sovereignty figure was deeply influenced by historical queens. The annals in particular, provide the greatest insight into a queen's influence within society, an influence which was shown to be the bedrock of marital alliances through the use of social network theory. The

[2] *s.a.* AU 861. 2, AU 940.4.

thesis provided evidence that Irish queens played a much more central role in political affairs then previously acknowledged: as chapter 3 and 4 show the marriage practices of the elite, enabled queens to maximise their influence through multiple marriages.

However, can this combination of roles be described as an institution? A woman's relationship to kingship is dependent on marriage: a woman becomes a queen through marriage to a king. The marriage links the two, but does this mean that the queen is anything more than the king's wife? For example, while queens played a role in alliances through marriage the system of kingship itself, in particular succession, excluded queens from directly participating. On the other hand, the sources demonstrate that the queen became recognised as more important over time. Moreover, the defined role of the sovereignty figure suggests that queenship was placed in a complementary position to the institution of kingship. The annals again provide further evidence along these lines. Obits which record a woman as a queen of a place and group of people indicates that there was a growing appreciation of queenship as an institution that operated alongside kingship as opposed to within it.[3] While the law tracts do not identify an institution of queenship, it is arguable that it developed after the period that they were first redacted. While it is difficult to point to definite institutional aspects of Irish queenship, it is arguable that they were beginning to emerge.

Finally, this thesis has presented an updated study on Irish queens. It has provided evidence as to where early Irish historical queens fitted into society and how society perceived them. It has also uncovered the previously understated role that queens play in politics through marriage. This is also the first thesis which compares Irish queens to their counterparts in Frankia and England. The thesis also provided new research in terms of what the title of queens meant and what the role entailed. It also presented questions regarding where queens and the institution itself fit in society.

[3] *s.a.* AU 861. 2, AU 940.4.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Bergin, Osborn. *Irish Bardic Poetry: Texts and Translations, Together with an Introductory Lecture*. Dublin, 1970.

Bergin, Osborn, and R. I. Best, ed. and tr. 'Tochmarc Étaíne'. *Ériu* 12 (1934–1938), pp 137–196.

Best, R.I, ed. and tr. 'The Adventures of Art Son of Conn, and the Courtship of Delbchaem'. *Ériu* 3 (1907), pp 149–173.

Best, R.I, Osborn Bergin, M. A. O'Brien, and Anne O'Sullivan, eds. *The Book of Leinster, Formerly Lebar Na Núachongbála*, 6 Vols. Dublin, 1954–1983.

Bieler, Ludwig, ed. *Four Latin Lives of St. Patrick: Colgan's Vita Secunda, Quarta, Tertia, and Quinta*. Dublin, 1971.

———, ed. and tr. *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh*. Dublin, 1979.

Binchy, D.A. 'Bretha Crólige'. *Ériu* 12 (1938), pp 1−77.

———, ed. *Corpus Iuris Hibernici*. 6 Vols. Dublin, 1978.

———, ed. *Críth Gablach*. Dublin, 1941.

Bourke, Angela, Siobhán Kilfether, Maria Ludddy, Margaret Mac Curtain, Gerardine Meaney, Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha, Mary O'Dowd, and Clair Wills, eds. *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing Vol IV: Irish Women's Writing and Traditions*. Cork, 2002.

Brehaut, Ernest, tr. *History of the Franks by Gregory of Tours*. New York, 1916.

Byrnes, Michael. 'An Edition of Esnada Tige Buchet from MS Rawlinson B. 502'. In *Essays on the Early Irish King Tales* edited by Dan M. Wiley, pp 102-103. Dublin, 2008.

Carney, James, ed. and tr. 'Nia Son of Lugna Fer Trí'. *Éigse* 2 (1940), pp 187–197.

Colgan, John. *Triadis Thaumaturgæ Seu Divorum Patricii, Columbæ et Brigidæ, Trium Veteris et Maioris Scotiæ, Seu Hiberniæ Sanctorum Insulae Communium Patronorum Acta*. Louvain, 1647.

Colgrave, Bertram, and R. A. B. Mynors, ed. and tr. *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*. Oxford, 1969.

Connolly, Sean, tr. '*Vita Prima Sanctae Brigitae*: Background and Historical Value'. *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 119 (1989), pp 5– 49.

Connolly, Sean, and J.M. Picard, tr. 'Cogitosus' Life of St. Brigit: Content and Value'. *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 117 (1987), pp 5–27.

Delehaye, Hippolyte. *Les Légends Hagiographiques*. Brussels, 1905.

Dillon, Myles. 'The Relationship of Mother and Son, of Father and Daughter, and the Law of Inheritance with Regard to Women'. In *Studies in Early Irish Law*, edited by Rudolf Thurneysen, Nancy Power, Myles Dillon, Kathleen Mulchrone, D.A. Binchy, August Knoch and J.S. Ryan, pp 129−79. Dublin, 1963.

Flechner, Roy. *The Hibernensis, Volume 1: A Study and Edition*. Washington, D. C, 2019.

———.*The Hibernensis, Volume 2: Translation, Commentary, and Indexes*. Washington, D. C, 2019.

Giles, J.A, ed. and tr. *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.* London, 1914.

Greene, David, ed. *Fingal Rónáin and Other Stories*. Dublin, 1955.

Hennessy, William M., ed. and tr. *Chronicum Scotorum: A Chronicle of Irish Affairs from the Earliest Times to A.D. 1135: With a Supplement Containing the Events From 1141 to 1150.* London, 1866.

Henthorn Todd, James, ed. and tr. *Cogadh Gaedhel Re Gallaibh: The War of the Gaedhil with the Gaill, or The Invasions of Ireland by the Danes and Other Norsemen.* London, 1867.

Howlett, David, ed. *Muirchú Moccu Macthéni's 'Vita Sancti Patricii': Life of Saint Patrick*. Dublin, 2006.

Hull, Vernam, ed. and tr. *Longes Mac n-Uislenn: The Exile of the Sons of Uisliu*. New York, 1949.

———.'Togail Bruidne Da Derga: The Cín Dromma Snechta Recension'. *Zeitschrift Für Celtische Philologie* 24 (1954), pp 131–132.

Joynt, Maud. 'Echtra Mac Echdach Mugredóin'. *Ériu* 4 (1908-1910), pp 91–111.

Krusch, Bruno, and Wilhelm Levison, ed. *Gregorii Episcopi Turonensis. Libri Historiarum X*, MGH Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum. Hanover, 1884.

Liebermann, Felix, ed. and tr. *Die gesetze der Angelsachsen*. Halle, 1903.

Mac Airt, Seán, and Gearóid Mac Niocaill, eds. and trans. *The Annals of Ulster, to AD 1131*. Dublin, 1983.

Mac Airt, Seán, ed. and tr. *The Annals of Inisfallen: MS. Rawlinson B. 503*. Dublin, 1951.

Mac Giolla Léith, Caoimhín. 'From Saga to Folktale: 'The Deirdre Story' in Gaelic Tradition'. In *Bryght Lanternis: Essays on the Literature of Medieval and Renaissance Scotland*, edited by J. D. McClure and M. Spiller, pp 405–19. Aberdeen, 1989.

———. '*Oidheadh Chloinne hUisneach*: The Transmission of a Gaelic Romance'. In *Texte und Zeittiefe*, edited by Hildegard L. C. Tristram, pp 439–454. Tübingen, 1994.

McCarthy, Daniel P. 'Topographical Characteristics of the *Vita Prima* and *Vita Cogitosi Sanctae Brigitae*'. *Studia Celtica* 35 (2001), pp 245–270.

Meyer, Kuno, ed. 'Ferchuitred Medba'. In *Anecdota from Irish Manuscripts*, edited by Osborn Bergin, R. I. Best, Kuno Meyer, and J. G. O'Keeffe, pp 17–22. Dublin, 1913.

———, ed. and tr. *The Instructions of King Cormac Mac Airt*. Dublin, 1909.

———, ed. 'The Laud Genealogies and Tribal Histories'. *Zeitschrift Für Celtische Philologie* 8 (1912), pp 291–338.

———, ed. and tr. *The Triads of Ireland*. Dublin, 1906.

Murphy, Denis, ed. *The Annals of Clonmacnoise, Being Annals of Ireland from the Earliest Period to A.D.1408, Translated into English, A.D.1627 by Conell Mageoghagan*. Dublin, 1896.

Murray, Kevin, ed. and tr. *Baile in Scáil: 'The Phantom's Frenzy'*. London, 2004.

Ó Cathasaigh, Tomás. *The Heroic Biography of Cormac Mac Airt.* Dublin, 1977.

Ó Corráin, Donnchadh. 'Early Medieval Law, *C*. 700−1200'. In *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing Vol IV: Irish Women's Writing and Traditions*, edited by Angela Bourke, Siobhán Kilfether, Maria Ludddy, Margaret Mac Curtain, Gerardine Meaney, Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha, Mary O'Dowd and Clair Wills, pp 1−44. Cork, 2002.

O' Daly, Máirín, ed. and tr. *Cath Maige Mucrama: The Battle of Mag Mucrama*. Dublin, 1975.

O'Donovan, John, ed. and tr. *Annala Rioghachta Eireann: Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland, by the Four Masters, From the Earliest Period to the Year 1616*. Dublin, 1856.

O'Rahilly, Cecile ed. and tr. *Táin Bó Cúailnge from the Book of Leinster*. Dublin 1967.

———, ed. and tr. *Táin Bó Cúailnge: Recension I.* Dublin, 1976.

———,ed. *The Stowe Version of Táin Bó Cuailnge*. Dublin, 1961.

Picard, Michael. 'Cogitosus: Life of St. Brigit'. *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 117 (1987), pp 11-27.

Stevenson, W. H., ed. and tr. *Asser's Life of King Alfred: Together with the Annals of Saint Neots Erroneously Ascribed to Asser*. Oxford, 1904.

Stokes, Whitley*,* ed. and tr. 'The Annals of Tigernach (Part 1)'*. Revue Celtique* 16 (1895), pp 374–419.

———, ed. and tr. 'The Annals of Tigernach (Part 2)'*.* Revue C*eltique* 17 (1896), pp 6-33, 119-262, 337-420.

———, ed. and tr. 'The Annals of Tigernach (Part 3)'. *Revue Celtique* 18 (1897), pp 9-59, 150-198, 267-303*.*

———, ed. and tr. 'The Battle of Mag Mucrime*'. Revue Celtique* 14 (1893), pp 426– 474.

———, ed. and tr. 'The Death of Crimthann Son of Fidach, and the Adventures of the Sons of Eochaid Muigmedón'. *Revue Celtique* 24 (1903), pp 172–207.

———, ed. and tr. The Destruction of Dá Derga's Hostel'. *Revue Celtique* 22 (1901), pp 9–61, 165–215, 282–329, 390–437, 260.

———, ed. and tr. 'The Songs of Buchet's House'. *Revue Celtique* 25 (1904), pp 8–38, 225–227.

———, ed. and tr. *The Tripartite Life of Patrick with Other Documents Relating to that Saint*. London, 1887.

Stokes, Whitley, and John Strachan, ed. and tr. *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus: A Collection of Old-Irish Glosses, Scholia, Prose, and Verse*. Cambridge, 1901– 1910.

O'Nolan, Thomas P., ed. and tr. 'Mór of Munster and the Tragic Fate of Cuanu Son of Cailchin'. *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 30 C (1912–1913), pp, 261–282.

Tangl, M., *Die Briefe Des Heiligen Bonifatius* (Berlin, 1919).

Thurneysen, Rudolf. 'Cáin Lánamna'. In *Studies in Early Irish Law*, edited by Rudolf Thurneysen, Nancy Power, Myles Dillon, Kathleen Mulchrone, D.A. Binchy, August Knoch and J.S. Ryan, pp 1−80. Dublin, 1936.

———, ed. *Zu Irischen Handschriften und Litteraturdenkmälern*. Berlin, 1912.

Thurneysen, Rudolf, Nancy Power, Myles Dillon, Kathleen Mulchrone, D.A. Binchy, August Knoch, and J.S. Ryan, eds. *Studies in Early Irish Law*. Dublin, 1936.

Wallace-Hadrill, M, ed. and tr. *The Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar and its Continuators.* London, 1960.

Wassershleben, Hermann, ed. *Die Irische Kanonsammlung*. Leipzig, 1874.

Secondary Sources

Airlie, Stuart .'Private Bodies and the Body Politic in the Divorce Case of Lothar II'. *Past and Present ,* no. 161 (November, 1998), pp 3-38.

Attenborough, Frederick. *The Laws of the Earliest English Kings*. Cambridge, 2015.

Bartlett, Robert. *How Can the Dead Do Such Great Things? Saints and Worshippers from the Martyrs to the Reformation*. Princeton, 2013.

Baumgarten, R. *Bibliography of Irish Linguistics and Literature 1942–71*. Dublin, 1986.

Best, R.I. *Bibliography of Irish Philology and Printed Irish Literature.* Dublin, 1913.

Bhreathnach, Edel. 'The Airgíalla Charter Poem: The Political Context'. In *The Kingship and Landscape of Tara*, edited by Edel Bhreathnach, pp 95-99. Dublin, 2005.

———. *Ireland in the Medieval World AD 400-1000: Landscape, Kingship and Religion*. Dublin, 2014.

———. ‘*Níell Cáich Úa Néill Nasctar Géill*: The Political Context of *Baile Chuinn Chétchathaig*’. In *The Kingship and Landscape of Tara*, edited by Edel Bhreathnach, pp 49-68. Dublin, 2005.

———. *The Kingship and Landscape of Tara*. Dublin, 2005.

Binchy, D. A. ‘Appendix: Family Membership of Women’. In *Studies in Early Irish Law*, edited by Rudolf Thurneysen, Nancy Power, Myles Dillon, Kathleen Mulchrone, D.A Binchy, August Knock, John Ryan, S.J, pp 180-186. Dublin, 1936.

———. ‘Irish History and Irish Law’. *Studia Hibernica* 15 (1975), pp 7-36.

———. ‘Secular Institutions’. In *Early Irish Society*, edited by Myles Dillon, pp 52–65. Dublin, 1954.

———. ‘The Fair of Tailtiu and the Feast of Tara’. *Ériu* 18 (1958), pp 113–138.

———. ‘The Legal Capacity of Women in Regard to Contracts’. In *Studies in Early Irish Law* edited by R. Thurneysen, Nancy Power, Myles Dillon, Kathleen Mulchrone, D.A Binchy, August Knock, John Ryan, S.J, pp 207 234. Dublin, 1936.

———. ‘The Linguistic and Historical Value of the Irish Law Tracts’. *Proceedings of the British Academy* 29 (1943), pp 195–227.

Bitel, Lisa. ‘Women’s Monastic Enclosures in Early Ireland: A Study of Female Spirituality and Male Monastic Mentalities’. *Journal of Medieval History* 12 (1986), pp 15–36.

Brady, Lindy. *Framing History in the British Isles: The Origin Legends of England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales*. Forthcoming 2022.

Breatnach, R.A. ‘The Lady and the King a Theme of Irish Literature’. *An Irish Quarterly Review* 42 (1953), pp 321-336.

Breathnach, Liam. *A Companion to the Corpus Iuris Hibernici*. Dublin, 2005.

———, ed. and tr. ‘Canon Law and Secular Law in Early Ireland: The Significance of *Bretha Nemed*’. *Peritia* 3 (1984), pp 439–459.

———. ‘On Old Irish Collective and Abstract Nouns, the Meaning of *Cétmuinter*, and Marriage in Early Mediaeval Ireland’. *Ériu* 66 (2016), pp 1-31.

———. ‘On the Original Extent of the “*Senchas Már*”’. *Ériu* 47 (1996), pp 1–43.

———. *The Early Irish Law Text Senchas Már and the Question of its Date*, E. C. Quiggin Memorial Lectures 13. Cambridge, 2011.

———, ed. and tr. *Uraicecht Na Ríar: The Poetic Grades in Early Irish Law.* Dublin, 1987.

Brundage, James A. 'Concubinage and Marriage in Medieval Canon Law'. *Journal of Medieval History*, no. 1 (1975), pp 1-17.

———. *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe*. Chicago,1987.

Byrne, Francis John. *Irish Kings and High-Kings*. Dublin, 1973.

Byrnes, Michael. 'An Edition of Esnada Tige Buchet from MS Rawlinson B. 502'. In *Essays on the Early Irish King Tales* edited by Dan M. Wiley, pp 91–103. Dublin, 2008.

Bullimore, Katherine. 'Unpicking the Web: The Divorce of Ecgfrith and Æthelthryth'. *European Review of History—Revue Européenne D'Histoire* 16 (2009), pp 835–854.

Bullough, V.L, and James A Brundage. *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*. New York, 1996.

Brown, Peter. The *Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*. Chicago, 1981.

Campbell, James. *Essays in Anglo-Saxon History*. London, 1986.

Carey, John. 'Otherworld'. In *Celtic Culture: A Historical Encyclopaedia*, edited by John Koch, pp 1403-06. Santa Barbara, Ca., 2006.

———. 'Tara and the Supernatural'. In *The Kingship and Landscape of Tara*, edited by Edel Bhreathnach, pp 32-48. Dublin, 2005.

———. 'The Three Things Required of a Poet'. *Ériu* 48 (1987), pp 41-58.

———. 'The Name Tuatha Dé Danann'. *Éigse* XVIII (1981), pp 291–294.

Charles-Edwards, Thomas. 'A Contract Between King and People in Early Medieval Ireland? *Críth Gablach* on Kingship'. *Peritia* 8 (1994), pp 107–119.

———. '*Críth Gablach* and the Law of Status'. *Peritia* 5 (1986), pp 53–73.

———. *Early Christian Ireland*. Cambridge, 2000.

———. *Early Irish and Welsh Kinship*. New York, 1993.

———. *The Chronicle of Ireland.* Liverpool, 2006.

———. 'The Construction of the *Hibernensis*'. *Peritia* 12 (1998), pp 209–37.

Clunies Ross, Margaret. 'Concubinage in Anglo-Saxon England'. *Past and Present,* no. 108 (1985), pp 3-34.

Connon, Anne. ‘A Prosopography of the Early Queens of Tara’. In *The Kingship and Landscape of Tara*, edited by Edel Bhreathnach, pp 225–327. Dublin, 2005.

———. ‘The Banshenchas and the Uí Néill Queens of Tara’. In *Seanchas: Studies in Early and Medieval Irish Archaeology, History and Literature in Honour of Francis J. Byrne*, edited by Alfred P. Smyth, pp 98–108. Dublin, 2000.

Cunningham, Bernadette. *The Annals of the Four Master: Irish History, Kingship and Society in the Early Seventeenth Century*. Dublin, 2010.

Dagger, Claire. ‘Eithne: The Sources’. Zeitschrift Für Celtische Philologie 43 (1989), pp 84-124.

Dailey, E.T. *Queens, Consorts, Concubines: Gregory of Tours and Women of the Merovingian Elite*. Leiden, 2015.

Dawson, Elizabeth. ‘Seeing the Face of God: An Example of Conversion in the Seventh-Century Patrician Lives’. In *Treasures of Irish Christianity: People and Places, Images and Texts*, edited by Salvador Ryan and Brendan Leahy, pp 37-9. Dublin, 2012.

Davis, Luned. ‘Isidorian Texts and the *Hibernensis*’. *Peritia* 11 (1997), pp 207–49.

Dillon, Myles. *Early Irish Literature*. Chicago, 1969.

———. *The Archaism of Irish Tradition*. London, 1948.

Doan, James. ‘Sovereignty Aspects in the Roles of Women in Medieval Irish and Welsh Society’. *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium* 5 (1985), pp 87- 102.

Dockray- Miller, Mary. *Motherhood and Mothering in Anglo-Saxon England.* London, 2000.

Doherty, Charles. ‘Kingship in Early Ireland’. In *The Kingship and Landscape of Tara*, edited by Edel Bhreathnach, pp 3-31. Dublin, 2005.

Doris, Edel. ‘Early Irish Queens and Royal Power: A First Reconnaissance’. In *Ogma: Essays in Celtic Studies in Honour of Próinséas Ní Chatháin*, edited by Michael Richter and Jean-Michel Picard, pp 1-19. Dublin, 2002.

Duffy, Sean. *Brian Boru and the Battle of Clontarf.* Dublin, 2014.

Duggan, Anne J. *Queens and Queenship in Medieval Europe: Proceedings of a Conference Held at King’s College London April 1995*. Woodbridge, 1997.

Dumville, David. ‘Latin and Irish in the Annals of Ulster, A.D. 431–1050’. In *Ireland in Early Medieval Europe: Studies in Memory of Kathleen Hughes,* edited by Dorothy Whitelock, Rosamund McKitterick and David N. Dumville, pp 320–341. Cambridge, 1982.

Dyson, R.W. *Sedulius Scottus: De Recttoribus Christianis ‘On Christian Rulers’.* Woodbridge, 2010.

Earenfight, Theresa. *Queenship in Medieval Europe*. Hampshire, 2013.

Edwards, Nancy, ed. *The Archaeology of Early Medieval Ireland.* London, 1990.

———. *The Archaeology of the Early Medieval Celtic Churches: Proceedings of a Conference on the Archaeology of the Early Medieval Celtic Churches, September 2004*. London, 2009.

Eichhorn-Mulligan, Amy C. ‘The Anatomy of Power and the Miracle of Kingship: The Female Body of Sovereignty in a Medieval Irish Kingship Tale’. *Speculum* 81, no. 4 (2006), pp 1014–1054.

Eska, Charlene M. *Cáin Lánamna: An Old Irish Tract on Marriage and Divorce Law*. Leiden, 2010.

———. ‘Marriage by Purchase in Early Irish Law’. In *Tome: Studies in Medieval Celtic History and Law in Honour of Thomas Charles-Edwards*, edited by Fiona Edmonds and Paul Russell, pp 183–191. Woodbridge, 2011.

Evans, Nicholas. *The Present and the Past in Medieval Irish Chronicles*. Woodbridge, 2010.

Ewig, Eugen. ‘Studien Zur Merowingischen Dynastie’. *Frühmittelalterlichen Studies* 8 (1974), pp 29-36.

Fell, Christine. *Women in Anglo-Saxon England*. London, 1984.

Findon, Joanne. *A Woman’s Words: Emer and Female Speech in the Ulster Cycle*. Toronto, 1997.

Flanagan, Marie Therese ‘High-Kings with Opposition, 1072–1166’. In *A New History of Ireland : Prehistoric and Early Ireland, Vol. 1*, edited by Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, pp 899-932. Oxford, 2005.

———. ‘Negotiating Across Legal and Cultural Borders: Aife, Daughter of Diarmait Mac Murchada, King of Leinster, and Marriage, Motherhood and Widowhood in Twelfth-century Ireland and England’. *Peritia* 30 (2019), pp 71- 95.

Flechner, Roy. ‘The Chronicle of Ireland: Then and Now'. *Early Medieval Europe* 21 (2013), pp 422-454.

Flechner, Roy and Sven Meeder. *The Irish in Early Medieval Europe: Identity, Culture and Religion*. London, 2016.

FitzPatrick, Elizabeth. ‘Assembly Places and Elite Collective Identities in Medieval Ireland’. *Journal Of The North Atlantic* 8 (2015), pp 52-68.

———. ‘Royal Inauguration Mounds in Medieval Ireland: Antique Landscape and Tradition’. In *Assembly Places and Practices in Medieval Europe*, edited by Aliki Pantos and Sarah Semple, pp 44–72. Dublin, 2004.

Fox, Yaniv. *Power and Religion in Merovingian Gaul: Columbanian Monasticism and the Frankish Elites*. Cambridge, 2014.

———. ‘The Political Context of Irish Monasticism in Seventh-Century Francia: Another Look at the Sources’. In *The Irish in Early Medieval Europe: Identity, Culture and Religion*, edited by Roy Flechner and Sven Meeder, pp 53–67. New York, 2016.

Garver, Valerie. L. *Women and Aristocratic Culture in the Carolingian World*. New York, 2009.

Gibson, Margaret T., and Nelson, Janet. *Charles the Bald: Court and Kingdom*. Hampshire, 1990.

Goody, Jack. *The Development of the Family and Marriage in Europe*. Cambridge, 1983.

Grabowski, Kathryn, and Dumville, David, ed. *Chronicles and Annals of Mediaeval Ireland and Wales: The Clonmacnoise-Group Texts*. Woodbridge, 1984.

Heffernan, Thomas. *Sacred Biography: Saints and their Biographers in the Middle Ages*. Oxford, 1998.

Herbert, Máire. ‘Goddess and King: The Sacred Marriage in Early Ireland’. In *Women and Sovereignty* edited by Louise Olga Fradenburg, pp 264-275. Edinburgh, 1992.

———. ‘The Universe of Male and Female: A Reading of the Deirdre Story’. In *Celtic Languages and Celtic Peoples: Proceedings of the Second North American Congress of Celtic Studies Held in Halifax* edited by Cyril J. Byrne, Margaret Harry and Pádraig Ó Siadhail, pp 53–64. Halifax, 1992.

Hollis, Stephanie. *Anglo-Saxon Women and the Church.* Woodbridge, 1992.

Hough, Carole. ‘The Early Kentish 'Divorce Laws': A Reconsideration of Æthelberht, Chs. 79 and 80’. *Anglo-Saxon England* 23 (1994), pp 19-34.

———. ‘Women and the Law in Seventh-Century England’. *Nottingham Medieval Studies LI* (2007), pp 207-230.

Howlett, David. ‘*Vita I Sanctae Brigitae*’. *Peritia* 12 (1998), pp 1–23.

Hughes, Kathleen. *Early Christian Ireland: Introduction to the Sources*. Cambridge, 1972.

Jackson, K. H. *The Oldest Irish Tradition: A Window on the Iron Age*. Cambridge, 1964.

Jaski, Bart, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession*. Dublin, 2000.

———. ‘Marriage Laws in Ireland and the Continent in the Early Middle Ages’. In *The Fragility of Her Sex?: Medieval Irish Women in their European Context*, edited by Christine E. Meek and Katharine Simms, pp 16-42. Dublin, 1996.

Jesch, Judith. *Women in the Viking Age*. Woodbridge, 1991.

Jochens, Jenny. *Women in Old Norse Society*. New York, 1995.

Johnston, Elva. ‘Kingship Made Real? Power and the Public World in *Longes Mac nUislenn*’. In *Tome: Studies in Medieval Celtic History and Law in Honour of Thomas Charles-Edwards*, Studies in Celtic History 31, edited by Fiona Edmond and Paul Russell, pp 193–206. Woodbridge, 2011.

———. ‘Mapping Literate Networks in Early Medieval Ireland’. In *Maths Meets Myths: Quantitative Approaches to Ancient Narratives*, edited by Ralph Kenna, Máirín MacCarron, and Pádraig MacCarron, pp 195-211. Cham, 2017.

———. ‘Movers and Shakers? How Women Shaped the Career of Columbanus’. In *Columbanus and the Peoples of Post-Roman Europe*, edited by Alexander O’Hara, pp 69–89. Oxford, 2018.

———.‘Powerful Women or Patriarchal Weapons? Two Medieval Irish Saints’. *Peritia* 15 (2001), pp 302–310.

———. ‘Strategies of Sanctity? Female Saints in the Irish Martyrologies, c. 800–1200 CE’. In *Saints and their Several Images*, edited by Steffen Hope. Forthcoming.

———. ‘The ‘Pagan’ and ‘Christian’ Identities of the Irish Female Saint’. In *Celts and Christians: New Approaches to the Religious Traditions of Britain and Ireland*, edited by Mark Atherton, pp 60–78. Cardiff, 2002.

———. ‘Transforming Women in Irish Hagiography’. *Peritia* 9 (1995), pp 197–220.

Kelleher, John. ‘The Pre-Norman Irish Genealogies’. *Irish Historical Studies* 16, no. 62 (1968), pp 138-153.

Kelly, Fergus. *A Guide to Early Irish Law. Dublin*, 1998.

———. *Marriage Disputes: A Fragmentary Old Irish Law-Text*. Dublin, 2014.

Kelly, Patricia. ‘The Táin as Literature’. In *Aspects of the Táin*, edited by J.P Mallory, pp 69–102. Belfast, 1992.

Kenna, Ralph, Máirín MacCarron, and Pádraig MacCarron, *et al. Maths Meets Myths: Quantitative Approaches to Ancient Narratives* (Cham, 2017).

Kenney, James F. *The Sources for the Early History of Ireland: Ecclesiastical: An Introduction and Guide*. Dublin, 1979.

Kissane, D.N. ‘*Vita Metrica Sanctae Brigitae*: A Critical Edition with Introduction, Commentary and Indexes’. *PRIA* 77 C (1977), pp 57–192.

Klein, Stacy. *Ruling Women: Queenship and Gender in Anglo-Saxon Literature*. Indiana, 2006.

Klinck, Anne L. ‘Anglo-Saxon Women and the Law’. *Journal of Medieval History* 8, no. 1 (1982), pp 107-121.

Lancaster, Lorraine. ‘Kinship in Anglo-Saxon Society: I’. *The British Journal of Sociology* 9, no. 3 (1958), pp 230-250.

———. ‘Kinship in Anglo-Saxon Society: II’. *The British Journal of Sociology* 9, no. 4 (1958), pp 359-377.

Lapidge, Michael, and Richard Sharpe, eds. *A Bibliography of Celtic-Latin Literature 400–1200.* Dublin, 1985.

Lifshitz, Felice. ‘Beyond Positivism and Genre: ‘Hagiographical’ Texts as Genre’. *Viator: Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 25 (1994), pp 95–113.

Mac Cana, Proinsias. ‘Aspects of the Theme of King and Goddess in Irish Literature’. *Etudes Celtiques* 7 (1955), pp 76-114.

———. ‘Aspects of the Theme of King and Goddess in Irish Literature (*Suite En Fin*)’. *Etudes Celtiques* 8 (1958), pp 59-65.

———. *The Learned Tales of Medieval Ireland*. Dublin, 1980.

———. ‘Women in Irish Mythology’. *The Crane Bag* 4*,* no. 1 (1980), pp 7-11.

MacCarron, Pádraig, and Ralph Kenna. ‘Viking Sagas: Six Degrees of Icelandic Separation Social Networks from the Viking Era’. *Significance* 10*,* issue *6* (December 2013), pp 12-17.

MacCarron, Máirín. *Bede and Time: Computus, Theology and History in the Early Medieval* World. London, 2020.

———. *Brides of Christ, Royal Marriage and the Conversion of the English in Bede’s Historia Ecclesiastica.* Unpublished PhD Thesis, University College Cork, 2007.

———. ‘Royal Marriage and Conversion in Bede’s *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*’. *The Journal of Theological Studies, NS* 68, Pt 2 (2017), pp 650-670.

———. ‘The Adornment of Virgins: Æthelthryth and Her Necklaces’. In *Listen, O Isles, Unto Me: Studies in Medieval Word and Image in Honour of Jennifer O’Reilly* edited by Elizabeth Mullins and Diarmuid Scully, pp142-155. Cork, 2011.

MacCurtain, Margaret. *Women in Irish Society.* Dublin, 1978.

MacNeill, Eoin. ‘The Irish Law of Dynastic Succession’. *Studies* 8, no. 31 (1919), pp 367-382.

———. ‘The Irish Law of Dynastic Succession: Part II’. *Studies* 8, no. 32 (1919), pp 640-653.

Mallory, J.P. *Aspects of The Táin*. Belfast, 1992.

McCarthy, Daniel P. *The Irish Annals: Their Genesis, Evolution and History*. Dublin, 2008.

McCone, Kim. ‘Brigit in the Seventh Century: A Saint with Three Lives?’. *Peritia* 1 (1982), pp 107–145.

———. ‘Dubthach Maccu Lugair and a Matter of Life and Death in the Pseudo-Historical Prologue to the *Senchas Már*’. *Peritia* 5 (1986), pp 1–35.

———. *Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature*. Maynooth, 1990.

McCone, Kim, and Katharine Simms, eds. *Progress in Medieval Irish Studies* (Maynooth, 1996).

McKitterick, Rosamond. *Charlemagne: The Formation of a European Identity.* Cambridge, 2008.

———. *History and Memory in the Carolingian World*. Cambridge, 2004.

———. *The Carolingians and the Written Word*. Cambridge, 1989.

McLeod, Neil, *Early Irish Contract Law*. Sydney, 1992.

McNamara, Jo Ann, and Suzanne Wemple. 'Marriage and Divorce in the Frankish Kingdom'. In *Women in Medieval Society*, edited by Susan Mosher Stuard, pp 95-124. Pennsylvania, 1976.

———. 'The Power of Women Through the Family in Medieval Europe, 500-1100'. In *Women and Power in the Middle Ages* edited by Mary Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski, pp 83-101. London, 1998.

Meek, Christine E., and Katharine Simms. *The Fragility of Her Sex?: Medieval Irish Women in their European Context*. Dublin, 1996.

Mistry, Zubin. 'Ermentrude's Consecration (866): Queen-Making Rites and Biblical Templates for Carolingian Fertility'. *Early Medieval Europe* 27 (2019), pp 567-588.

Mitchell, Kathleen, and Ian Wood. *The World of Gregory of Tours*. Leiden, 2002.

Murray, Alexander C. *A Companion to Gregory of Tours*. Boston, 2015.

Murray, Kevin. 'The Manuscript Tradition of *Baile Chuinn Chétchathaig* and its Relationship with *Baile in Scáil*'. In *The Kingship and Landscape of Tara*, edited by Edel Bhreathnach, pp 69-72. Dublin, 2005.

Mulchrone, Kathleen. 'The Rights and Duties of Women with Regard to the Education of their Children'. In *Studies in Early Irish Law* edited by R. Thurneysen, Nancy Power, Myles Dillon, Kathleen Mulchrone, D.A Binchy, August Knock, John Ryan, S.J, pp 187-206. Dublin, 1936.

Nelson, Janet. *Charles the Bald.* London, 1992.

———. 'Early Medieval Rites of Queen-Making and the Shaping of Medieval Queenship'. In *Queens and Queenship in Medieval Europe: Proceedings of a Conference Held at King's College London April 1995*, edited by Anne J. Duggan, pp 301-315. Woodbridge, 1997.

———. *King and Emperor: A New Life of Charlemagne.* California, 2019.

———. 'Kingship and Empire in the Carolingian World'. In *Carolingian Culture: Emulation and Innovation*, edited by Rosamond McKitterick, pp 52-87. Cambridge, 1994.

———. ‘Queens as Jezebels: Brunhild and Balthild in Merovingian History’. In *Politics and Ritual in Early Medieval Europe*, edited by Janet Nelson, pp 1-48. London, 1986.

———. 'Religion and Politics in the Reign of Charlemagne'. In *Religion and Politics in the Middle Ages: Germany and England by Comparison* edited by Ludger Körntgen and Dominik Waßenhoven, pp 17-29. Berlin, 2013.

———. ‘The Merovingian Church in Carolingian Retrospective’. In *The World of Gregory of Tours* edited by Kathleen Mitchell and Ian Wood, pp 241-259. Leiden, 2002.

———. ‘Women at the Court of Charlemagne: A Case of Monstrous Regiment’. In *Medieval Queenship* edited by John Carmi Parsons, pp 43-61. Gloucestershire, 1993.

Ní Bhrolcháin, Muireann. *An Introduction to Early Irish Literature*. Dublin, 2009.

———. ‘Women in Early Irish Myths and Sagas’. *The Crane Bag* 4, no. 1 (1980), pp 12-19.

Ní Dhonnchadha, Máirín. ‘Caillech and Other Terms for Veiled Women in Medieval Irish Texts’. *Éigse* 28 (1994-5), pp 71-96.

———. ‘On Gormfhlaith Daughter of Flann Sinna and the Lure of the Sovereignty Goddess’. In *Seanchas: Studies in Early and Medieval Irish Archaeology, History and Literature in Honour of Francis J Byrne* edited by Alfred. P. Smyth, pp 225–237. Dublin, 2000.

Ní Ghrádaigh, Jenifer. ‘Mere Embroiderers? Women and Art in Early Medieval Ireland’. In *Reassessing the Roles of Women as ‘Makers’ of Medieval Art and Architecture*, edited by Therese Martin, pp 93-128. Leiden, 2012.

Ní Mhaonaigh, Máire. *Brian Boru: Ireland’s Greatest King?*. Gloucestershire, 2007.

———. ‘*Gogad Gáedel Re Gallaib*: Some Dating Considerations’. *Peritia* 9 (1995), pp 354-377.

———. ‘Tales of the Three Gormlaiths in Medieval Irish Literature’. *Ériu* 52 (2002), pp 1-24.

Oakley- Brown, Liz, and Louise J Wilkinson. *The Rituals and Rhetoric of Queenship: Medieval to Early Modern*. Dublin, 2009.

O’Brien, Elizabeth. ‘Pagan or Christian? Burial in Ireland During the 5th to 8th Centuries AD’. In *The Archaeology of the Early Medieval Celtic Churches*, edited by Nancy Edwards, pp 135–154. Leeds, 2009.

O'Brien, Elizabeth, and Edel Bhreathnach. ‘Irish Boundary *Ferta*, their Physical Manifestation and Historical Context’. In *Tome: Studies in Medieval Celtic History and Law in Honour of Thomas Charles-Edwards*, edited by Fiona Edmonds and Paul Russell, pp 53–64. Woodbridge, 2011.

O'Brien, M. A, ed. *Corpus Genealogiarum Hiberniae*. Dublin, 1962.

Ó Corráin, Donnchadh, ed. *Clavis litterarum Hibernensium: Medieval Irish Books*, 3 Vols. Turnhout, 2017.

———. ‘Creating the Past: The Early Irish Genealogical Tradition’. *Peritia* 12 (1998), pp 177–208.

———. ‘Historical Need and Literary Narrative’. In *Proceedings of the Seventh International Congress of Celtic studies, Held at Oxford, from 10th to 15th July, 1983*, edited by D. Ellis Evans, John G. Griffith, and E. M. Jope, pp 141–158. Oxford, 1986.

———. ‘Irish Regnal Succession: A Reprisal’. *Studia Hibernica*, no.11 (19701), pp 7-39.

———. ‘Marriage in Early Ireland’. In *Marriage in Ireland,* edited by A. Cosgrove. pp 5-24. Dublin 1985.

———. ‘Nationality and Kingship in Pre-Norman Ireland’. In *Nationality and the Pursuit of National Independence*, edited by T.W Moody, pp 1–35. Belfast, 1987.

———. ‘Women in Early Irish Society’. In *Women in Irish Society: The Historical Dimension*, edited by Margaret MacCurtain and Donnchadh Ó Corráin, pp 1-14. Dublin, 1978.

———. ‘Women and the Law in Early Ireland’. In *Chattel, Servant or Citizen: Women’s Status in Church, State and Society* edited by Mary O'Dowd and Sabine Wichert, pp, 45–57. Belfast, 1995.

Ó Corráin, Donnchadh, Liam Breatnach and Aidan Breen. ‘The Laws of the Irish’. *Peritia* 3 (1984), pp 382–438.

O’Croínín, Dáibhí. ‘Three Weddings and a Funeral: Rewriting Irish Political History in the Tenth century’. In *Seanchas: Studies in Early and Medieval*

Irish Archaeology, History and Literature in Honour of Francis J. Byrne edited by Smyth, Alfred P, pp 212- 224. Dublin, 2000.

O'Dowd, Mary, and Sabine Wichert. *Chattel, Servant or Citizen: Women's Status in Church, State and Society.* Belfast, 1995.

O'Hara, Alexander, and Ian Wood, tr. *Jonas of Bobbio: Life of Columbanus, Life of John of Réomé, and Life of Vedast*. Liverpool, 2017.

O'Hara, Alexander. 'Columbanus ad Locum: The Establishment of the Monastic Foundations'. *Peritia* 26 (2015), pp 143-170.

O'Hara, Alexander. *Jonas of Bobbio and the Legacy of Columbanus: Sanctity and Community in the Seventh Century*. Oxford, 2018.

———. 'The *Vita Columbani* in Merovingian Gaul'. *Early Medieval Europe* 17 (2009), pp 126–153.

O'Loughlin, Thomas. 'Marriage and Sexuality in the *Hibernensis*'. *Peritia* 11 (1997), pp 188-206.

Ó'Máille, Tomás. 'Medb Chruachna'. *Zeitschrift Für Celtische Philologie* 17 (1928), pp 129–146.

———. *Feastdays of the Saints: A History of Irish Martyrologies.* Brussels, 2006.

O'Rahilly, T.F. *Early Irish History and Mythology*. Dublin, 1946.

———. 'On the Origin of the Names Érainn and Ériu'. *Ériu* 14 (1946), pp 7–28.

O'Sullivan, Aidan, ed. *Early Medieval Ireland, AD 400-1100: The Evidence from Archaeological Excavations.* Dublin, 2013.

O'Sullivan, Anne. 'Triamhuin Ghormlaithe'. *Ériu* 16 (1952), pp 189–199.

Oxenham, Helen. *Perceptions of Femininity in Early Irish Society*. Woodbridge, 2016.

Page, R.I. *Life in Anglo-Saxon England*. London, 1972.

Palmer, James T. *Early Medieval Hagiography.* Amsterdam, 2018.

Parrish Jamison, Carol. 'Traffic of Women in Germanic Literature: The Role of the Peace Pledge in Marital Exchange'. *Women in German Yearbook* 20 (2004), pp 13-36.

Parsons, John Carmi. *Medieval Queenship*. Gloucestershire, 1993.

Pollock, Frederick, and William Maitland. *The History of English Law Before the Time of Edward I*. Indiana, 2010.

Power, Nancy. 'Classes of Women Described in the *Senchas Már*'. In *Studies in Early Irish Law* edited by R. Thurneysen, Nancy Power, Myles Dillon,

Kathleen Mulchrone, D.A Binchy, August Knock, John Ryan, S.J, pp 81-108. Dublin, 1936.

Rabin, Andrew. 'Preventive Law in Early Ireland. Rereading the *Additamenta* in the Book of Armagh'. *North American Journal of Celtic Studies* 2:1 (2018), pp 37–55.

Sessle, Erica J. 'Exploring the Limitations of the Sovereignty Goddess Through the Role of Rhiannon'. *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium* 14 (1994), pp 9-13.

———. 'Misogyny and Medb; Approaching Medb with Feminist Criticism'. In *Ulidia: Proceedings of the First International Conference on the Ulster Cycle of Tales* edited by J.P Mallory and Gerard Stockman, pp 135–138. Belfast, 1994.

Sharpe, Richard. *Medieval Irish Saints' Lives: An Introduction to Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae.* Oxford Press, 1991.

———. '*Vitae S Brigidae*: The Oldest Texts'. *Peritia* 1 (1982), pp 81–106.

Smith, Julie Ann. *Queen-Making and Queenship in Early Medieval England and Francia.* Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of York, 1993.

———. 'The Earliest Queen-Making Rites'. *Church History* 66, no.1 (1997), pp 18-35.

Stacey, Robin Chapman. *Dark Speech: The Performance of Law in Early Ireland*. Pennsylvania, 2007.

Stafford, Pauline. 'Charles the Bald, Judith and England'. In *Charles the Bald: Court and Kingdom*, edited by Margaret T. Gibson and Janet Nelson. pp 139-153.Hampshire, 1990.

———. 'Emma: The Powers of the Queen in the Eleventh Century'. In *Queens and Queenship in Medieval Europe: Proceedings of a Conference Held at King's College London April 1997* edited by Anne Duggan, pp 3-23. Woodbridge, 1997.

———. 'The Laws of Cnut and the History of Anglo-Saxon Royal Promises'. *Anglo-Saxon England* 10 (1982), pp 173-190.

———. *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers: The King's Wife in the Early Middle Ages*. London, 1983.

———. *Queen Emma and Queen Edith: Queenship and Women's Power in the Eleventh Century England*. Oxford, 1997.

———. ‘The King’s Wife in Wessex 800-1066’. *Past and Present*, no. 91 (1981), pp 3-27.

Story, Joanna. *Carolingian Connection: Anglo-Saxon England and Carolingian Francia, c.750-870*. Hampshire, 2003.

Tatsuki, Akiko. ‘The Early Irish Church and Marriage: An Analysis of the Hibernensis’. *Peritia* 15 (2001), pp 195–207.

Thacker, Alan. ‘Bede and History’. In *The Cambridge Companion to Bede* edited by Scott DeGregorio, pp 170– 189. Cambridge 2010.

———. ‘Bede and the Ordering of Understanding’. In *Innovation and Tradition in the Writings of The Venerable Bede*, edited by Scott Degregorio, pp 37-64. Morgantown, 2006.

———. ‘Bede’s Ideal of Reform’. In *Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society* edited by P. Wormald, D. Bullough and R. Collins, pp 130– 153. Oxford, 1983.

Thornton, David E. *Kings, Chronologies, and Genealogies: Studies in the Political History of Early Medieval Ireland and Wales*. Oxford, 2003.

Toner, Gregory. *Manifestations of Sovereignty in Medieval Ireland*. Cambridge, 2018.

Trindade, W. Ann. ‘Irish Gormlaith as a Sovereignty Figure’. *Études Celtiques* 23 (1986), pp 143–156.

Tymoczko, Maria. ‘Animal Imagery in Loinges Mac nUislenn’. *Studia Celtica* 20/1 (1985-86), pp 145-66.

Waidler, Sarah. ‘Sanctity and Intertextuality in Medieval Munster: The Unusual Life of St Findchú of Brí Gobann’. *Peritia* 30 (2019), pp 215-34.

Warntges, Immo. ‘Regnal Succession in Early Medieval Ireland’. *Journal of Medieval History* 30 (2004), pp 377-410.

Wemple, Suzanne. *Women in Frankish* Society: *Marriage and the Cloister 500-900*. Philadelphia, 1981.

Whitfield, Niamh. ‘Aristocratic Display in Early Medieval Ireland in Fact and Fiction: The Dazzling White Tunic and Purple Cloak’. *Peritia,* 27 (2016), pp 159- 188.

———. ‘The Tara’ Brooch: An Irish Emblem of Status in Its European Context’. In *From Ireland Coming: Irish Art from the Early Christian to the Late Gothic Period and Its European Context*, edited by Colum Hourihane, pp 211-247. Princeton, 2001.

Williams, Mark. *Ireland's Immortals: A History of the Gods of Irish Myth.* Oxford, 2016.

Wood, Ian. 'The Individuality of Gregory of Tours.' In *The World of Gregory of Tours* edited by Kathleen Mitchell and Ian Wood, pp 29-46. Leiden, 2002.

———. *The Merovingian Kingdoms 450-751.* London, 1994.

———. 'The Mission of Augustine of Canterbury to the English'. *Speculum* 69, no. 1 (1994), pp 1-17.

Wormald, Patrick. *The Times of Bede, 625–865: Studies in Early English Christianity and Its Historian*. Oxford 2006.

Yorke, Barbara. *Conversion of Britain, The: Religion, Politics and Society in Britain, 600-800*. Harlow, 2006.

———. *Kings and Kingdoms of Early Anglo-Saxon England.* London, 1990.

———. *Wessex in the Early Middle Ages*. London, 1995.

Venning, Timothy. *The Kings and Queens of Anglo-Saxon England*. Gloucestershire, 2013.

Yose, Joseph, Ralph Kenna, Máirín MacCarron and Pádraig MacCarron. 'Network Analysis of the Viking Age in Ireland as Portrayed in Cogadh ` Gaedhel Re Gallaibh'. *Royal Society Open Science* 5, no. 1 (2017), pp 1-21.

Electronic Resources

Dictionary of Irish Biography: Dictionary of Irish Biography | Dictionary of Irish Biography (dib.ie)

eDIL electronic Dictionary of Irish Language: eDIL - Irish Language Dictionary

Oxford Dictionary of National Biography: Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (oxforddnb.com)

Queens Recorded in the Annals

Name	Annal and Date	Familial Link
Mór Muman	AU 632.5 AT 636.3	Daughter of Aed Bennán Wife of Cathal mac Áedo Flaind Chathrach
Uaisle/ Huaisle	AFM 642.4 CS 643 AT 644.2	Daughter of Suibhne Wife of Faelan
Caillech/ Cellach	AU 732.7 AT 732.5	Daughter of Dunchadh Wife of Cathal mac Finguine
Muireann	AFM 743.7 AU 748.6 AT 748.8	Daughter of Cellach of Cualu Wife of Írgalach
Tuathlaithe	AT 754.2	Daughter of Cathal mac Finguine Wife of Dúnchad mac Murchada
Eithne	AFM 763.8 AU 768.5	Daughter of Breasal of Breagh Wife of Niall mac Fergaile
Eithne	AFM 790.7 AU 795.1 AI 795.1	Daughter of Domnaill Midi Wife of Bran Airdcheann Sister of Donnchad Midi
Befhail/ Be Fáil	AFM 796.7 AU 801.6	Daughter of Cathal Wife of Donnchadh Midi
Euginia/ Euginis	AFM 797.7	Daughter of Donnchad Midi

	AU 802.7	Wife of Áed Oirdnide mac Néill
Muirgheal	AFM 852.4 CS 854	Daughter of Flann Sinna Sister of Donnchad Donn Sister Gormlaith ingen Flann Sinna
Gormlaith	AFM 859.5 AU 861.2 CS 861	Daughter of Donnchad Midi Wife of Niall Caille
Flann	AFM 886.8 AU 890.5	Daughter of Dúngal mac Fergaile Wife of Gáethíne, Máel Sechnaill mac Maíle Ruanaid, Áed Findliath Mother of Flann Sinna
Eithne	AFM 916.8 CS 918	Daughter of Áed Findliath
Mór	AFM 916.9 CS 918	Daughter of Cerball mac Dúnlainge
Lígach	AU 923.7 CS 923	Daughter of Flann Sinna Wife of Máel Mithig
Caineach	AFM 927.16 CS 928 CS 929	Daughter of Canadán Wife of Donnchad son of Flann Sinna
Dearbhail/ Der bhFáil	AFM 929.13 AU 931.4	Daughter of Mael Finnia son of Flannacán Wife of Donnchad son of Flann Sinna
Flann/ Lann	AFM 938.12 CS 940 AU 940.4	Daughter of Donnchad, son of Flann Sinna

		Wife of Muirchertach mac Néill
Duibhleambna/Dub Léna	AFM 941.12 CS 943	Daughter of Tighearnan Wife of Donnchad son of Flann Sinna
Óralith	CS 941	Daughter of Cennétig mac Lorcán Sister of Brian Boru Wife of Donnchad son of Flann Sinna
Gormlaith /Gormfhlaith	AFM 946.9 AU 948.5	Daughter of Flann Sinna Wife of Niall Glúndub, son of Áed Findliath
Eithne	AFM 951.16 CS 953	Daughter of Fearghal Wife of Conghalach, son of Máel Mithig, his mother, Lígach
Mór	AFM 985.5 AT 986.1 CS 986	Daughter of Donnchadh son of Ceallach
Mór	AFM 991.8 AT 992.3 CS 992	Daughter of Tadhg son of Cathal Wife Domnall ua Néill
Gormlaith	CS 1029 AT 1030.15 AFM 1030.21	Daughter of Murchadh Wife of Amlaíb Cuarán, Brian Boru and possibly Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill