

Iffa and Offa including comments on *Lios* versus *Ráth*. [needs some editing!]

Iffa and Offa were once two distinct baronies i.e. barony is a concept of land divisioning which derives from the 12th century Norman Conquest. After the conquest these two baronies were united into one. The sizes and shapes of baronies changed over time due to various forms of land transactions. How large were the baronies of Iffa and Offa originally? What were these land areas prior to the Norman Conquest? Were they clan or tribelands with distinct identities? What local Irish nobilities had them as patrimonies before the advent of the Normans? Were they the clan lands of two peoples called *Uíbh (Uí) Eoghain* and *Uíbh (Uí) Fhathaidh*?

The known distribution for souterrains fro counties Tipperary and Limerick are to a large extent in South Tipperary north of the Suir river i.e. Iffa and Offa, and in South East County Limerick with some of Tipperary's Clanwilliam barony above it. The Limerick distribution is focussed in the barony of Coshlea spreading north into Small County barony. In this area of the county are the Galtee Mountains, Sliabh Reagh, The Harps of Cliu, Cush (site of an early Christian settlement on a Bronze Age cemetery) and Knockainey site of an ancient *aonach* (festival). The distribution spreads across lands which contain the above and the distribution spreads eastwards to the eastern foothills of the Galtee Mountains. Below the Galtees lie the Knockmealdown Mountains in the plain of the Golden Vale.

This district where four counties meet i.e. Cork, Limerick, Waterford and Tipperary represents a distinct landscape area which runs westward from where the course of the River Suir turns from a vertical north to south path close to Ardfinnan meaning the High Place of *Fionnáin* (his 'seat' / retirement hermitage e.g. as at Seemchuda further south i.e. Mochuda's 'seat', a monastic concept also found in the East Mediterranean?) to follow a west to east course to the sea at Waterford Harbour. This is a landscape area with a rich ecclesiastical tradition and heritage from early times. From the western side of the Galtees there is low lying land where the Golden Vale continues until one reaches the foothills of the Mullachareirke Mountains near Tullylease where Berihert founded his monastic community and where Tuath Saxon came to be, on the western Cork, Limerick, Kerry border [check]. The Blackwater River rises in the above mountains and runs through the plain of the Sliabh Luachra district. In this locality are the abutting civil parishes of Drishane (rocky place e.g. mountain foothills) and Cullen (an *cúile*, the corner place or better land area?) the parishes are divided from each other by the Blackwater [check]. On the south side of this plain lies the Derrynasaggart (Dair/ Deir, a mountain monastery of the priests i.e. *sagairt*?) Mountain range and the plain is overlooked by the cairn bearing peaks known as the Paps of Anu.

There is a very high concentration of souterrains known for the parishes of Drishane and Cullen but without more survey detail it is not possible, for the present, to say what range of architectural forms they represent. These parishes are associated with the 'three sisters' of Saint Berihert who, tradition would relate, had a nunnery or hermitage in the locality. Located a short distance to the south east of this place is a mountain known as *Mushera* (in West Muskerry in the parish of Kilcorney (*Cill / Cell of Coirne*)) where a hermit named John lived; or roamed the mountain. Tradition sees him as a brother of Berihert. Why are these persons located in this place, in this plain between two mountain ranges and beside a major river giving access to the sea? If travelling inland, and frequently doing so, by river they would have passed by Ardmore's monastic settlement (before circa 820 AD), by that at Lismore, by that at Clondalane and Kilcrumper where the Funcheon River meets the Blackwater, passed the various cells and their land-strips by the river banks some of which would in time become small civil parishes, passed the northern boundary of the Donoughmore monastic settlement at Kilshannig (meaning old cells).

So, taking a wide view, the total landscape from the River Suir to *Sliabh Luachra* is a landscape spread which runs westwards from Ardfinnan, County Tipperary (on the River Suir at about where the north south course of the river turns into a west to east one before emptying into the sea at Waterford Harbour; having been joined by the Rivers Nore and Barrow i.e. The Three Sisters).

From Ardfinnan (County Tipperary) to Kilfinnane (Cell of *Fionáin*) County Limerick (near Ardpatrick medieval monastery and its ruined round tower), the lands are within the scope of the Golden Vale. From there the land runs to the *Sliabh Luachra* district in north west Cork encompassing a little of south Limerick. The, not precisely defined, *Sliabh Luachra* district stretches on its west side into County Kerry. In total, as defined above, the landscape area which spreads from Ardfinnan to where the plain of *Sliabh Luachra* ends in County Kerry is a landscape of mountains and plains, of ridges and valleys. It is a well-drained landscape of rich soils to the east and rougher lands to the west. Across its area are mountain ranges and their foothills, the Blackwater river and its tributaries, the very fertile soils and cattle lands of the Golden Vale at the east side of the area.

Though there are ogham stones from this region e.g. Ardmore, Donoughmore or the Lismore locality at Seemochuda, they are, apparently, absent from the monastic settlements at Kilcrumper and Drishane / Cullen. If not just the outcome of 'loss over time' or lack of discovery, then was there a reason as to why there is such an absence of them from north Cork?

Was Berihert an ecclesiastic or a military person? Did the former identity evolve into the latter in the course of his life? If so how common was this process? Did *Finn cú* of Brigown and *Fir Maighe* do the same after a period of penance? Did he become a saint according to the criteria for sainthood of his time? Was he a saint only to those who were of his community? Anthony Cronin writing for *History Ireland* (see ref. below) speaks of an Anglo-Saxon commander in the field, an ealdorman, who was named **Berht** and who led an Anglo-Saxon invasion force into Ireland in 684 AD i.e. only 20 years after the Synod of Whitby, and who attacked the kingdom of Brega in County Meath i.e. the royal province, where the ancient seat of Ireland's high kingship was, where the royal site of Tara lay. What happened before? What happened afterwards?

Is this **Berht** the same name as **Berihert**? Is this the same person? This piece published in *History Ireland* speaks of Anglo-Saxon king Ecgrith of Northumbria (the same locality as the Synod of Whitby) as being responsible for the invasion. M.F. Cusack speaks in her *Illustrated History of Ireland*, published 1868, of how the 7th/8th century English Benedictine scholar the Venerable Bede, though a boy perhaps of only 11 or 12 years (or somewhat older?), at the time of the invasion, is said to have reacted in later years by denouncing the destruction of monasteries, churches and the carrying off of slaves which occurred as a result of the invasion. Was Berihert's Kyle in South Tipperary one of the places in Ireland targeted, and does that explain the large number of broken crosses still remaining at the site? When Ecgrith died, St. Adomnán of Iona (who died circa 704 AD) went to Northumbria and had the captives released according to Cusack.

Did this invasion succeed; or at least partly so? Did it result in Berihert creating Tuath Saxon in north Cork where this petty kingdom took the form of an Anglo-Saxon monastic establishment and its large demesne lands? Did the Cork landscape above the north bank of the Blackwater see a significant presence of Anglo-Saxon associations stretching across the landscape there from *Sliabh Luachra* in the west to the banks of the River Suir in the east i.e. to the Barony of Iffa and Offa in South Tipperary? Was TiSaxon (Saxon house i.e. monastic house) at Kinsale at the mouth of the Bandon river in some way also connected to this and was there also activity further inland along the Bandon river with conflict between Hibernian and Saxon monastic traditions at Macloneigh and Kilmichael? Writing in the mid 18th century the Dungarvan apothecary, Trinity College Dublin scholar, antiquarian and South Munster topographer / chirographer, believed (via his informants both local and at the Society of Antiquaries in London?) that the name Offa as used in this barony name derived from Offa the Anglo-Saxon king of Mercia in Britain.

One of two well known names for ringforts across the Irish landscape are Lios (Lis) and Rath. They are a very common element in local placenames, along with names such as *cluain*, *cill*, *dún* etc. , across the civil parishes, townlands and towns of Ireland. Lioses and raths are essentially enclosed spaces of various sizes from small to very large. Frequently they are earthworks created by digging a trench and using the displaced soil to pack up an internal bank or banks. Sometimes drywall facing internal or external is used, sometimes a drystone wall is used to create the enclosed space. Words like cahir or caiseal are commonly used names in such cases. Souterrains are frequently found either in, or in close proximity to, both earthwork and drystone enclosure forms. It is difficult, due to lack of data, to say to what extent all of the architectural forms known for souterrains in South Munster have been discovered in ringforts. Some souterrains contain one or several ogham stones used in their construction, others have none. Why?

Current dating for these structures (rath and lios) place their floruit across the Irish landscape as being after or from the 7th century AD. There are various estimates of how many were actually constructed with estimates ranging from 30,000 upwards; some would suggest 60,000 upwards. They lasted in use in some places up to the 17th century and it is also noticeable that some had tower-houses or 'planter's castles' or parish churches built within them or beside them representing a concept of continuity, and associations, as a focal point in local communities which lasted a very long time in some communities and still does.

What was the definition of what Gaelic Ireland was actually composed of culturally, ethnographically, genetically, and socially? What identities were blended through the centuries from native and foreign, from the Iron Age/ Age of Rome to the 17th century and the death knell of Gaelic society as a defining cultural ethos among the islands inhabitants?

The word **Rath** is an interesting word. In Medieval Germany, and later, the word Rath was used to refer to a rammed earth structure. But was it the name for a type of vernacular architecture structure initially or did the word define a process i.e. any structural form created by ramming or packing earth or clay to make a hard, solid structure? Its an important point in so far as if the word refers to a process of construction then the form/shape of the structure itself does not matter. there were links between Ireland and Germany in early medieval times and ecclesiastical connections shared between South Munster and Bavaria [check]. Both places have souterrains. the same appears to be true of Saxony. How far back in time? How old is the etymology of the **Rath** word in German? The Saxons who invaded England in the aftermath of Roman Britannia's collapse came from Saxony. Why no ringforts / raths in England, or Wales, as far as I know? What exactly was this

invasion? Was it just a power grab or land grab among elites or was it a major settlement of new people? What degree of impact did it have and did it cause any large scale movement of native peoples elsewhere? How much changed, how much remained the same?

Why no ringforts or souterrains in Roman Britain if it was a Celtic tribal landscape before Rome's arrival? If certain tribes moved from Celtic Britain to Ireland due to Roman conquest there, where did they settle in Ireland? If, as is apparently the case from Ptolemy's map, there was a Brigantes people in South Leinster rather than Waterford, then is that in some way indicative of why there are so few souterrains known for South Leinster? Did a branch of the British Brigantes move to south east Ireland as a consequence of Rome's invasion of Britain?

Placename distributions are an interesting subject. The O'Flanagans (2002) has distribution maps for the words Lios and rath in Irish placenames. If the densities on these maps are anything, in any way accurate, given losses over time, then it is interesting to note that east of a notional diagonal line from south County Down to roughly Cork City the highest density of **Rath** placenames occurs. To the west of this line **Lios** predominates, to a large extent. At the boundary area of this line the two distribution patterns overlap. If accurate rather than coincidence, and if a true reflection of some cultural process in earlier times, what does this say? Do they reflect different languages or dialects or cultural origins etc?

The author of the history of this locality at clerihan.ie has a convincing, sensible, logical and plausible explanation for the name - along with a documented transmission from Gaelic tribe origin to barony name form, but is there still room for doubt e.g. were there any inheritances which might have introduced the name Offa to a land area here? Were there any inheritance issues which might have introduced the name Iffa (Aoife?) here? What if Iffa were a land area given as a dowry and therefore defined and named as such for such purposes? What if it is to be annexed to a land area already claimed by someone called Offa? In such circumstances would they be 8th century creations? What happens in South Munster when Anglo-Saxon England gives way to Norman England? What if the Gaelic tribe/clan names associated with these two South Munster land areas are the outcome of attempted Gaelicisation and absorption by two tribes / clans in times subsequent to the Norman conquest in England? Do they easily become Norman baronies as a consequence of inheritances, with or without conflict, with familial or cordial relations?

How often does one come across folklore stories and legends of Irish people, royal or otherwise, travelling to family in Britain or Scotland or further afield, and either returning sometime soon, or after a long period of time?

One might listen to a *seanachai* [Gaelic folk name for a fireside storyteller] style story told from Lady Gregory's collection of Irish stories or a story embedded in a translation of early Irish text by German Celticist Kuno Meyer or others. What might the imagery and thrust of some of these literary stories tell us about seamlessness between Gaelic South Munster and Anglo-Saxon or Pictish petty kingdoms and their relationships? This was a world of small independent kingdoms with a channel of water (Irish Sea) between those on the Irish landscape side and those on the British landscape side, one easily crossed on a daily basis. It was not a world of nation states. It was not a world of social geographies and relationships as we know them today, especially in formal settings. Paradigms of inter-relatedness and identity were different. And perhaps more culturally intertwined?

Refs:

The website clerihan.ie states that the names were corrupted from the original Gaelic clan/tribe names i.e. Iffa deriving as Ivowening, Ivowen or Iffowyn from *Uí Eoghain*, and Offa deriving from the clan name *Uí Fathaidh*.

Cronin, Anthony (2011) When Saxon strangers first came to Ireland: the raid on Brega, AD 684. **IN** History Ireland, Issue 6 (Nov/Dec 2011), Volume 19.

O Flanagan, Deirdre and Laurence (2002) Irish Place Names. Gill and Macmillan, Dublin. pp.111 and 135.

Note: FitzStephen, one of the Norman land grantees at Cork Harbour i.e. Rostellan) became MacSwiney (how one wonders...is this an attempted Gaelicisation of the Norman name which seems unlikely or alternatively did it derive from intermarriage or from land transfers or sales in subsequent years?) such Normans and their descendants, as some would say, 'became more Irish than the Irish themselves'.

Random thoughts and Anglo-Saxons:

1. *Baile Mac Óda* (Ballymacoda) in East Cork lies beside Pilmore, an abandoned harbour with a Norman circular castle/keep (Inchiquin castle) at the point where the Womanagh river meets the 'harbour'. How similar is this structure to Reginald's tower in Waterford city or to some architectural circular aspects of the coastal castle at Dungarvan? Pilmore comes from *Puill / Poll Mór* which means a 'big hole' a term used in Gaelic to refer to a pool in a river or to a large pool at the the sea coast which in turn can refer to a harbour, a term used both in the Irish and Welsh languages.
2. Who was Óda? Was he an Anglo-Saxon or a Viking or a Gael? Was he an ecclesiastic? Was there an Anglo-Saxon bishop in England called Óda who interacted with the Vikings? Why would someone be described as a

'son' of his...follower or 'son in Christ'? Why would a 'son' of Óda have land named after him beside the banks of a 'once upon a time' large Pilmore Harbour? How ancient was this harbour? How much shipping activity between the peoples of the *Uí Mochaille* (Imokilly) and *Déise* tribelands with mariner merchants from abroad and Roman naval ships out of Britannia, did it see during the Iron Age and on into the early Medieval period? Did it see activity during the Bronze Age as a river highway linking to the Castlemartyr area of Cork, to its metal furnaces and its burial mounds?

3. Or was it originally Odo, a Norman knight who participated in the Norman invasion of England, and subsequently, members of whose family assisted in the invasion of Ireland with their relative Robert FitzStephen (who occupied and had a castelations / burgh initially at Rostellan by Cork Harbour in Imokilly?). Was Pilmore, now an abandoned harbour in Imokilly (East Cork) where the Womannah rivers the sea and where the early Norman keep Inchiquin castle is situated at a point beside where the river joins the harbour, a point of entry for some family members while other went to the next great harbour area west i.e. Cork Harbour? If so, then at a place where the Cell and its supporting land, of someone called the son of Donagh, already existed did one of them found a settlement area beside a once very busy Pilmore harbour which became Ballymacoda. The baile 'homeplace' of a 'son' or grandson of Odo? With a rectangular earthwork enclosure (a grange?) a short distance beyond towards Knockadoon (*Cnoc an Dún* i.e. the Hill of the Dún)? The large barony area on the west side of Imokilly is that known as Barrymore from the long lineage of DeBarry ('Dubarry' in the French branch) family whose ancestor was the knight Odo. Geraldus Cambrensis, chronicler of the Norman invasion of Ireland, was also of this family. Did the extent of Barrymore stretch slightly more eastward than today, to Ballymacoda once, and if so did its name derive from Odo and not from someone called Oda?
4. Why is the village of Ballymacoda at that townland in East Cork so closely associated with another place name which is *Cill Mac Donagh* meaning 'the cell of a son of Donagh'? Who was Donagh? Was he a monastic person? Was he connected with Clonpriest (*Cluain Pruachais* ...hermitage meadow of the hut or hovel...a *bothán*, above or underground)? Was there any connection between Donagh and Óda?
5. What is the history of areas of South Munster's landscape in terms of land holdings whose earliest title deeds, head-rents etc. were in the possession and ownership, in the muniments chests, of monastic

mother-houses in Normandy and England? Did any of these stretch back to Anglo-Saxon times in England? What is the history of monastic landownership in South Munster prior to the Norman conquest? Did monastic orders such as the Cistercians (White Monks) when they began to establish themselves across the Irish landscape during the 12th century acquire and absorb the lands owned by Hiberno monastic houses? Did they syncretise the pre-existing early medieval traditions in the localities they acquired by establishing narratives of continuity e.g. did the early foundations of Kilcrumper and its related Clondalane at Fermoy become absorbed by them and did *Abbán* (White Abbot) come in to being as a sobriquet for an early Munster missionary bishop of Cashel called *Ailbe* or was he *Cárthach*? He much similar absorption, if any, took place after *Whitby* in the 7th century? How much social overlap was there between the inhabitants of South Munster's Cluains and Cills and small monastic houses and hermitages abroad? Did some of those abroad grow in stature as time progressed? How and why might some small cluains, cills and lyras (all hermitages?) have become abandoned due to the ongoing circumstances and fortunes of such houses, be they due to internal politics, regional politics, or larger scale events such as Viking invasion or Norman?

6. Is there any genealogical source material on the Internet which links Gaelic princesses of ***Mumhan*** (i.e. the Province of Munster in Ireland) with Anglo-Saxons in England, or in South East Scotland with Pictish (Cruithne), royal houses? If so then what Munster houses provided such princesses as brides with or without consent...think of *Cranat's* response to her brother's attempts to marry her off locally in spite of the fact that she was already a hermit nun with her own community (Kilcranathan townland i.e. *Cill Cranat* meaning the place of the Cell of St. Cranat?) i.e. Rathcormac locality, North East Cork area? Did not *Ecgrith* of Northumbria have problems of a somewhat similar nature in relation to his marriage? What might their children or later descendants have inherited as patrimony in South Munster? How would they claim it?
7. To what degree, if any, did connections between communities in Anglo-Saxon England and Scottish Pictland exist in South Munster in early Medieval times? Why the tradition of *Berihert's* 'sisters' at *Drishane / Cullen* in north West Cork and his 'brother' there at *Mushera Mountain* near *Macroon*?
8. In Britain, in terms of continuities of an Anglo-Saxon world post Norman invasion (how many elites and how many settlers and what long term impact) or indeed an even older cultural and genetic continuity of a Celtic and Viking world (at sub-elite and sub 'model community' level) was there?

9. When Strongbow (Norman knight Richard de Claire) married the daughter of exiled King of Leinster *Diarmuid MacMurrough* (who invited them to help reclaim his lands), the marriage being at Waterford 'City' as it then was (likely that this was at nearby Viking **Woodstown** recently discovered, and not the subsequent Norman 'city' we call Waterford?) , as the invaders burned the 'city', a story told romantically in Corkman Daniel Maclise's imagery. In the 1160s what was the dowry for Aoife? What land area composed the dowry? Was what was to become the independent barony of Iffa, in today's southern County Tipperary on the northern bank of the Suir River from County Waterford, part of it? If so how old was the identity configuration of the land area known as Iffa and how old was its definition as such? Was it of a similar age to its neighbour known as Offa?
10. Why go into all this querying? Its helpful to query a land area context (e.g. a barony area or a civil parish) when it comes to questioning why some places had souterrains created in the course of their histories and others, neighbours even, did not. Its particularly interesting if there appears to be little difference or no obvious statements of difference in terms of material culture as yet discovered by archaeology. Were there cultural differences in terms of mentafacts (or social relations, origins or orientations) among differing clans and tribes, rather than artefacts, and did such influence ecclesiastical traditions and origins within individual tribe-lands? Or do some of the souterrain architectural forms, if derived from religious needs rather than secular, reflect differences between how secular landscape areas in a region e.g. farms, were worked compared with how monastic land and farms were used and managed in the same region?
10. The 17th century Gaelic historian and researcher, *Seathrún Céitinn* (Geoffrey Keating) was a person who, like other contemporary scholars of his time-phase attempted to capture a projected haemorrhage of cultural loss and identity as a result of the final defeat of Gaelic Ireland in the 17th century, mentions Anglo-Saxon invasion in Ireland but it is odd that he does not, apparently, speak specifically about Iffa and Offa or about Berihert and his 'sisters' or 'brother'.

Why? Was he unaware of this material or was it the case that there was no documentary evidence, of a reliable nature, in those monastic libraries across Ireland he visited during his research? What was the state, were he circumstances of access, to these library resources when he visited? Did he travelled far and wide for his material? Did he go to, lets say, Timoleague as *O Cléirigh* did? If so, when and what state was it, its community and its library/scriptorium in when he visited? How would

these circumstances have affect the informational quantity and quality he collected for his work? As a native of and subsequent priest in south Tipperary, in the Iffa and Offa locality, and very close to Berihert's Kyle in the Glen of Aherlow why is he so short of information in this regard as it would seem logical that if folk traditions survived he would have pursued them?

When young, he was educated at the Cistercian monastery and township of Inislounaght beside the Suir River. Did his education through their pedagogy / scholarship condition how he approached his historiology and the construction of his narrative which we know as *Foras Feasa ar Eireann*? All told he was a South Tipperary man and Berihert's Kyle was close by him. Was there no local folk memory of what might once have happened there; about 1,000 years before? Did the Cistercians of Inislounaght and their library have no folk memory or record of anything of this nature happening close by in earlier times?