

## **Ruminating about Anglo-Saxons in South Munster?**

What exactly happened at Berihert's Kyle to leave so many smashed cross including high crosses there by the pool?

The physical topography of the landscape which lies between Tullylease and Ardane is dominated by the Galtee mountains. Ardane lies in the great plain, a *maighe* in Gaelic, known as the Glen of Aherlow. To the south lies the Knockmaeldown Mountains its southern slopes stretching down by Ballysaggart (home-place of the priests) to Lismore. Seemochuda (Saint Mochuda's seat) lies in this locality. It was a hermitage. In the early 7th century St. Mochuda (also known as *Cártach* which has been poorly Anglicised as Carthage) founded the great monastery and demesne known as Lismore i.e. the great *lios* enclosure. He came to this locality as a result of a dispute at another monastic foundation further to the north and is said to have brought several hundred monks with him. Were they intent on battle for land or was it acquired peacefully?

It is of interest that the land acquired for this monastery was just beyond the eastern boundary of the Fermoy (*Fir Maighe*) kingdom and close to where Saint Flanaid / Flanait a princess of the *Fir Maighe* had her cell, her nunnery at Clondulane (*Cluain dá Lann*, the hermitage meadow of two chapels) below where the rivers Blackwater and Funcheon meet. Mochuda and Flanaid were closely linked in a folk tale about an apple he gave her which healed her withered arm and because of his influence on her becoming a nun. Mochuda is said to have been a young bard at the court in Cashel, Tipperary, before becoming a monk. Iffa and Offa barony lies within the diocese of Lismore and Mocollop. Was Lismore an early bishopric before the diocese came to be post 12th century?

But to return to Berihert. If he and his Anglo-Saxon monks spread from the Tullylease area e.g. due to a growing demand for agricultural land (and perhaps urged by additional members including secular tenants and those of *monaig* status and their families?), eastwards along the foothills of the Galtees then would that explain his presence at Berihert's Kyle? Would it explain what appear to be the smashed remnants of a Hiberno monastic tradition? The western side of Iffa and Offa stretches towards the foothills of the Galtee mountains. If the name Offa as used in the barony name did not originate as an anglicisation of a Gaelic clan name then what possibility that not only did *Tuath Saxon* exist in North Cork but that it spread its influence and acquisitions to the eastern side of the Galtees - and the River Suir for trade and travel connections abroad via Waterford Harbour? The Lismore monastery was able to access the sea via the Blackwater River. Did *Tuath Saxon's* influence reach to Ardpatrik monastery and if so was there any impact?

Did Offa of Mercia have any influence on land acquisition in South Munster and did his name survive as a designation for a land unit which survived as a distinct land unit until Norman times when it became a barony subsequently to be amalgamated with that of Iffa (*Aoife*)? If Anglo-Saxon land acquisition activity was happening in the 7th or 8th century AD then was Berihert part of one of these events and was there more than one such event across these two or even three centuries i.e. 7th to 9th century? If so how would it tie in with Viking activity in the 9th century?

How many Hibernian monasteries kept to their own tradition after Whitby and was there a geographic element to their survival i.e. did they shift westward in to rougher, more remote landscapes surviving in those landscapes of the west which remained Gaelic and under Gaelic control long after the east of Ireland Saxon and then Norman? Why did the older

Orthodox tradition of choosing the date for Easter survive up to the 19th century at Skellig Michael island and Ballinaskelligs in County Kerry? .....memories of the Skellig Lists for those wishing to marry. How many efforts did Anglo-Saxon Christianity make, if any, towards eliminating the Hiberno monastic tradition? Was the Raid on Brega (County Meath - where the ancient seat of Ireland's high kingship at Tara) one of several raids by Anglo-Saxons in Ireland, others taking place in South Munster? An article in History Ireland by Anthony Cronin entitled **When Saxon strangers first came to Ireland: the raid on Brega, AD 684** in Issue 6 (Nov/Dec 2011), Volume 19) speaks of the 'commander in the field' of the Brega raid being an Ealdorman named **Berht**. The raid was 'authorised by Ecgrith, king of Northumbria'. He also says that Anglo-Saxon cleric and venerable scholar historian Bede 'relates how clerics, including Ecgbert, a Saxon bishop working in Ireland, warned against such a course of action'.

Was **Berht** a form of the name **Berihert** (Bericeart in Gaelic)? If it is him are we dealing with a 'commander in the field' of an Anglo-Saxon army from the kingdom of Northumbria who eventually becomes the founder of a Cork great monastery (Tullylease plus the petty kingdom of Tuath Saxon and further east leaves his name at Berihert's Kyle in the Glen of Aherlow where smashed celtic crosses abound) and becomes remembered as a saint? Would this have been unusual? What of *Finncú* (Fanahan....*Finncú*, *Fionn Cú* meaning White or Fair Hound) of Brigown (Mitchelstown) nearby on the south side of the Galtees from Berihert's Kyle on the north side? *Finncú* was also a warrior before becoming the founder of a monastery and doing great penance having seven sickle blades made for him by the smiths at Brigown (place of furnaces) and suspending himself from them. Reparation for warrior events earlier in life? *Finncú* came from the nearby *Fir Maighe* (Fermoy) kingdom that of Saint Flanaid - and a place familiar to *Mochuda*, and possibly followed the Funcheon River from its junction with the Blackwater

beside Kilcrumper ( meaning Cell of the Presbyter, founded by St. *Abbán*) and Clondalane (*Cluain dá Iann*) northwards to Brigown by Michelstown in the Golden Vale. Was the same *Finncú* also the Abbot of Bangor Abbey, County Down, for a time during the 7th century? If so what brought him back to North Cork? His family were said to have come from the north having been driven out because of some dispute. They were received by the king of Fermoy (*Fir Maighe*) and given a home at Rathealy (*Ráth Ealla?*) which is close to Fermoy town and close to the Funcheon and Blackwater; especially if the king of Fermoy was situated at Manning townland on the Funcheon at that time. The Antiphony of Bangor abbey speaks of Irish monasticism as the 'true vine of Egypt'. How would this have resonated with Anglo-Saxon / Roman christianity, especially after Whitby in 664 AD?

Did Berihert avoid the kingdom of the *Fir Maighe* if he moved from the Tullylease area to the Glen of Aherlow or was his route the other way around i.e. from Aherlow to Tullylease? How did the *Fir Maighe* react to him? Was he contemporary with *Finncú* ? *Finncú*, being of the *Fir Maighe*, how would he have reacted to Berihert if Berihert attacked his homeland seeking to usurp or destroy a Hibernian monastic estate?

About 50 km more or less directly to the south of Tullylease lies Donoughmore the site of a once very large monastic demesne which occupied an area roughly from the southern bank of the Blackwater River to the northern bank of the River Lee plus a little further south into Aglish (*Église* in French) parish. Within this large demesne area were smaller monastic land areas which would become civil parishes, such as that of Aghabulloge. In Aghabulloge there is the townland of Kilberihert (Kilberehert) which means the Cell of Berihert. Was this Berihert the same as that at Tullylease or someone else? Was Berihert a common Anglo-Saxon name? In a ringfort at Kilberihert a two chambered clay-cut souterrain was discovered

in a ringfort during the 19th century. I would classify the site as a C1 type i.e. a cell for an individual. If it is Berihert of Tullylease, then does it represent a particular phase in his life? The Donoughmore monastery in later Medieval times was a place of warrior monks which at one time engaged in great slaughter against the monks (and tenants?) of Saint Finbarr's great monastery and demesne of Gill Abbey stretching west from where Cork city now stands. In later times the Knight's Templar had a commandary at Mourne Abbey which abuts Donoughmore townland...and the precincts of the monastery which once stood there, a wealthy one, famous for the shrine of St. Lachteen's arm, now in the National Museum of Ireland Dublin.

Donoughmore was in the tribeland of the *Muscraighe* people (Muskerry). Donoughmore with the Blackwater on its northern boundary, its *Inis Luinge* (ship island beside the pool where the Dripsey tributary joins it) on the Lee to the south. The Lee giving access to the sea at Cork Harbour, or to a marshland channel before the harbour area formed after a tsunami in the 9th century? The *Fir Maighe* (Fermoy) kingdom was situated a short distance east along the north side of the Blackwater and stretching south to a degree. What comparable tribal group and landscape occupied Duhallow? Duhallow in a part of which Tuath Saxon, fits, roughly, as a petty kingdom? In Duhallow barony also, along the upper course of the Blackwater River, was where by Killaseragh, Cullen and Drishane Berihert's reputed sisters (*Lasair*, *Latiaran* and *Inghen Buidhe* i.e. the yellow haired daughter, had their cells - like the three sisters from an early version of the *Ancrene Weiss* perhaps, and where his brother John was a hermit on Musheran Mountain. Did Berihert at some stage in his life stay with them? Were these persons earlier than Berihert's Tuath Saxon or contemporary with it? Was this locality in some way connected with the Northumbrian kingdom if all were of Anglo-Saxon origin? Might there have been a marriage association? Why did Brehon Law allow two wives? Where in Ireland was Anglo-Saxon Bishop Ecgbert active circa

the time of the raid in Meath in 684 i.e. 20 years after Whitby? What communities did he create or tend to? What local saints were subsequently derived from his presence?

Were *Lasair*, *Latiaran*, *Ingen Buidhe* and John, local and Gaelic in origin and therefore somehow, subsequently, folklore memory connected them with Berihert because their geographical areas were in close proximity?

Why is there such a huge number of souterrains known from the locality? Were they mostly created for use as habitable cells? How many were in ringforts originally?

Was there interaction between *Tuath Saxon* and Donoughmore's **Hiberno** monastery (*Domhnach Mór*) to give Anglo-Saxons access to the sea via the Blackwater? In the 7th century did the Blackwater flow into the sea at Whiting Bay beside St. Declan's great **Hiberno** monastery at Ardmore i.e. in the lands of the *Déise* people before a tsunami in the circa the 820s AD changed its lower course to the Youghal area of the *Uí Mochaille* people?

The 17th century Gaelic historian, Seathrún Céitinn (Geoffrey Keating) a Gaelic native and priest in South Tipperary, close to Berihert's Kyle, mentions Anglo-Saxon raiding / invasion in his history *Foras Feasa ar Eireann*. Why is Berihert's Kyle not remembered and explained by him? He was located so close to it.

**They were 'Making the Land boy!' said he.**

*Fir Maighe* i.e. the Men of the Plain. But who made the 'plain' and when and why? Geomorphologically the plains of South Munster are what? Flatlands, flat lands between ridges in a generalised sense. Correct? In the case of the *Fir Maighe* the plain in question is in the Fermoy (*Fir Maighe*) locality. Where

exactly was it? Was it overlooked by the hillfort at Carn hill? What human geography surrounded this plain? How much of it was used as pasture land, how much for crops? What other plains were there in South Munster? Was there a part of Muskerry, an outlier in East Cork (Imokilly and north) which was known as *Muscarighe Trí Maighe* i.e. Muskerry of the three plains? North of the town of the town of Lismore, Co. Waterford lies the Vee Gap/Pass, a mountain from south Tipperary to north County Waterford, or vice versa, which gives access /views of part of the Golden Vale plain between the Galtee Mountains and the Knockmaeldowns. What does Vee derive from? An anglicisation of the Gaelic word *Mhaighe*... '*Mhai*' is pronounced as 'Vee' or 'Wee' depending on local dialect at some point in time. So, the Golden Vale as a plain, a '*mhaighe*' viewed northwards from a mountain pass which became known as the Vee ( the pass leading over the mountain to this plain)? In Muskerry proper there was Canovee (*Ceann an Mhaighe*, head of the plain), a plain stretching east west. How much more evidence of 'plains' (*maighe*) is there in the place-name and physical geography of South Munster? How old are they, to what extent were they early creations of human settlement in the region, forest land being cleared for pasture and agriculture as well as human settlement? What vegetational impact, from cultivated to wild, did time and circumstance unfold across the field and hedgerows and river banks and 'inches', meadows etc, each little land 'corner', each *cùile*, or land patch by cottage or stream or burgh or cell or monastery, from nature then abandoned to it being slowly embraced by it again?

Once, when at Brow Head in West Cork I asked a local man who had made the circular enclosing wall which appeared to radiate small fields from a central place above a beach. Something reminded me of a *cahir* monastic enclosure or a ringfort i.e. a drystone built *lios* or *rath*. He replied 'making the land' and mentioned seaweed being brought from the beach ( in creels?) to create soil in such fields; a folklife, a daily life of earlier times. It reminded me

of Kerryman John B. Keane's famous drama called 'The Field' and the motion picture made of it.

How were the plains, these *maighe* made after forests were cut down and the fertile plains of great rivers and their tributaries exposed in South Munster? How was the land area apportioned, and these portions identified, and who owned it, who was its lord? What histories of lives and times and stories lie in its place-names and simple landmarks? What monumental tombs of great ough stones were built to overlook these plains with pride of achievement and lasting presence through ensuing centuries and millenia? What fabled gods and ancestors from the Paps of Anu to the Harps of Cliu? From *Eoghan Mór* to Scotia were said to lie in such mounded tombs? What local people groups remembered their ancestry from them through ensuing generations?