

**Early Irish Church organisation:
the case of Drumlease and the
Book of Armagh**

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Early Irish church organisation: the case of Drumlease and the Book of Armagh

Colmán Etchingham and Catherine Swift

Were we dependent on the pre-Norman Irish annals alone, we should know nothing of the early history of the church of Drumlease, near Drumahair, Co. Leitrim. Like many of the other churches of Connacht, Drumlease suffers from the comparative neglect of the western province's early ecclesiastical history on the part of the surviving collections of annals. The 'Patrician' texts in the Book of Armagh, however, provide a snap-shot of Drumlease in the later seventh and eighth century, indicating that it was a church of considerable significance in north Connacht at that time.¹ This study comprises two parts. The first, by Colmán Etchingham, introduces the references to Drumlease in the Book of Armagh and examines in detail the relevant passages of the eighth-century text known as the *Additamenta*. The second part, by Catherine Swift, places Tírechán's reference to Drumlease in the broader context of that seventh-century clergyman's portrayal of the Patrician churches of Connacht in general.

I Drumlease and the *Additamenta*

The Book of Armagh, a manuscript of the early ninth century, contains a collection of texts relating to the cult of Saint Patrick, including the earliest surviving copy of the *Confessio*, the work of Patrick himself. The importance of the Book of Armagh depends chiefly, however, on the other Patrician texts it contains, some of which are unique copies. These Patrician texts were written by devotees of Saint Patrick's cult in the seventh and eighth centuries to glorify the saint's reputation. Such material belongs to the category of literature known as hagiography. The most substantial items of hagiography in the Book of Armagh are two: a partly historical but mostly legendary account of Patrick, written in the late seventh century by a certain Muirchú, and a catalogue of Patrick's reputed conversions and church foundations, also written in the later seventh century by one Tírechán. These works of hagiography are not reliable evidence for the doings of the historical Saint Patrick who, it is generally agreed, was active in

¹ There is a postulated, but by no means certain, early reference to Drumlease as the site of a *basilica*, perhaps a church with a shrine or relic-repository: C. Doherty, 'The basilica in early Ireland', *Peritia* 3 (1984), 303-15: 311; cf. C. Etchingham, *Church organisation in Ireland AD 650-1000* (Maynooth, 1999), p. 52.

Ireland in the fifth century.² The works of Muirchú and Tírechán reflect, primarily, the period of composition, that is, the seventh century. They show what devotees of the cult of Patrick, two centuries after the saint's own era, thought Patrick had achieved, or ought to have achieved. Muirchú's and Tírechán's accounts are not simply made up, however. Rather, they seem to draw on existing local traditions about the conversion-period and about Patrick. It may never be possible to determine how far Muirchú and Tírechán embellished such traditions as they had available to them, to suit their propagandist, hagiographical purpose of promoting the cult of Patrick. Equally, whether such local traditions were themselves essentially legendary, or contained some grains of truth about the fifth century, can hardly now be determined satisfactorily. Scholars today are generally sceptical that Muirchú and Tírechán add anything but legend to what can be learned about the real, historical Patrick from the saint's own writings. What Muirchú, Tírechán and slightly later texts in the Book of Armagh undoubtedly offer, however, is invaluable information about the organisation and political position of the church in Ireland in the seventh and eighth centuries.

The earliest surviving reference to Drumlease is by Tírechán, whose invaluable picture of the church in seventh-century Connacht is preserved only in the Book of Armagh. In the course of detailing in Latin Patrick's reputed activities in Connacht, Tírechán (who was a Mayoman) noted briefly that Patrick *exiit ad regiones Callrigi Tre Maige et fecit aelessiam iuxta Druim Leas et bapitizauit multos* 'went out to the regions of the Callrige Tre Maige and built a church at Drumlease and baptised many'.³ Did local tradition connect Drumlease with Patrick before Tírechán claimed that the church was a foundation of Patrick's? We cannot tell, and we may also be sceptical, or at least open-minded, as to whether the historical Saint Patrick of the fifth century had any connection with Drumlease. It is clear, however, that, by the later seventh century, Drumlease could be credibly portrayed as a Patrician foundation. In doing so, Tírechán uses a formula that hints at seventh-century ideas about the connection between a church foundation, attributed to a famous saint, and the local population, concerning which more below. For the present, we may note that

- 2 The arguments of some scholars, however, would tend to place Patrick in the fourth century, or at any rate earlier than Palladius, who was sent to Ireland by the pope in 431: see M. Esposito, 'The Patrician problem and a possible solution', in *Irish Historical Studies* 10 (1956-7), pp 131-55; J.T. Koch, '*Cothairche, Esposito's theory and neo-Celtic lenition', in *Britain 400-600: language and history*, ed. A. Bammesberger and A. Wollmann (Heidelberg, 1990), pp 179-202.
- 3 L. Bieler, *The Patrician texts in the Book of Armagh* (Dublin, 1979), pp 158-9 § 46; Bieler's translation is here slightly modified; for *iuxta* 'at' and for the significance of *Tre Maige* (literally 'three plains'), see part II, below.

Drumlease is located in the territory of a specified local lordship or minor kingdom, the Callraige Trí Maige (here normalising the spelling to an Old Irish standard). Moreover, the foundation of Drumlease is associated by Tírechán with a mass-baptism of the local people by Patrick.

Alongside Tírechán's brief notice, we may take account of a sequence of more extended passages on Drumlease that is contained in another work uniquely preserved in the Book of Armagh. Known as the *Additamenta* or 'Additions', this is a collection of short texts about Patrick's activities. It is written in a mixture of Latin and Irish and dates to the eighth century.⁴ The relevant part of the *Additamenta* begins by relating in Latin how Patrick arrived *in finem Calrigi* 'in the territory of the Callraige' and baptised two individuals, named Mac Cáirthin and Caíchán. They then granted 'to God and Patrick' a parcel of land known as 'Caíchán's portion' — *quinta pars Caicháin*, literally 'Caíchán's fifth' = Old Irish *cóiced*, Modern Irish *cúige* — *et liberauit rex Deo et Patricio* 'and the king exempted it for God and Patrick'. Beginning in Latin but soon turning to Irish, the next passage details the extent of the land granted. This part of the text concludes by reformulating in Irish the royal endorsement of the grant already expressed in Latin: *Atrópert flaith 7 aithech in so huile i tosach iar tabuirt bathais duaib* 'Lord and client granted all this at the outset, after they were given baptism'. The king/lord (*rex/flaith*) was presumably the local over-lord of the Callraige — was he Mac Cáirthin? — and the client (*aithech*) was presumably Caíchán.⁶

In detailing the extent of the lands granted by Caíchán, the *Additamenta* mention many local place-names, none of which has been identified to date.⁷ A systematic attempt to rectify this deficiency would require a thorough trawl through all records that might shed light on the place-names of the area of Drumlease. Such research is beyond the scope of the present study, however. A cursory examination suggests that there is a correspondence between some of these names and items on the relevant Ordnance Survey 6" map (Co. Leitrim sheet 15, 1840 edition). *Conaclid* (genitive *Conacolto*), mentioned twice, at the beginning and end of the detail of lands granted, perhaps leaves a trace

4 See Bieler, *Patrician texts*, pp 49, 246.

5 See T.M. Charles-Edwards, *Early Irish and Welsh kinship* (Oxford, 1993), p. 321.

6 For all of this, see Bieler, *Patrician texts*, pp 172-3 § 8.1-3, to whose translation, however, I have not always adhered.

7 Bieler, *Patrician texts*, index, relies for its attempted identifications of place-names largely on E. Hogan, *Onomasticon goedelicum locorum et tribuum Hiberniae et Scotiae* (Dublin 1910, reprinted 1993), supplemented by the comments of Éamonn de hÓir; for a detailed study of Connacht place-names in Tírechán, see Catherine Swift, 'The social and ecclesiastical background to the treatment of the Connachta in Tírechán's seventh-century *Collectanea*' (unpublished D.Phil. thesis, Oxford, 1994).

in the town-land-name Conaghil, about a mile and a half north-east of Drumlease. Could *descert Léni* 'southern Léne' be reflected in Killaleen Lough and the town-land of Killaleen, between half a mile and a mile east of Drumlease? *Sescenn Dá Cor* 'marsh of the two pools (?)' clearly contains the place-name-element anglicised as Sheskin and found in the name of a town-land about three miles north-east of Drumlease. *Sescenn* is, however, a very common place-name-element. The Sheskin in question here is adjoined to the south by the town-land of Corratawy, containing an element that may reflect the *corr* of *Sescenn Dá Corr*. These observations are of the most superficial kind, but they suggest that the place-name data for the locality might repay a thorough investigation in the light of the *Additamenta* specifications.

Following the account of Caíchán's grant of land, the *Additamenta* then announce in Irish Patrick's foundation 'in *Druim Daro*, that is, *Druim Lías*' after its grant [to him]' (*farna idpuirt*).⁸ This evident reference to Caíchán's grant seems to imply that its terms included the site of *Druim Daro* 'ridge of the oaks', alias Drumlease, itself, although neither the names *Druim Lías* nor *Druim Daro* is mentioned among the details of the grant. It may be significant, however, that four places called *Daire* — *Daire Mór* 'great oak-wood', *Daire Medóin* 'middle oak-wood', *Daire Fidas* 'oak-wood of F.' and *Daire Méil* 'oak-wood of M.' — are listed, together with *Druim Toidached* 'ridge of T.', near the end of the grant-specifications. Might *Druim Daro* 'ridge of the oaks' be an alternative name for the latter, referring to the nearby oak-woods? However that may be, Patrick is said to have assigned his new foundation at Drumlease to his pupil or disciple (*daltae*) Benignus, who dwelt there seventeen years. It is then stated that a certain Lassar daughter of Anfolmíth, *di cheniúl Caícháin* 'of the kin of Caíchán', received the veil from Patrick and dwelt at Drumlease for no less than sixty years after Benignus. Thus, although Patrick's disciple (and thus presumably a cleric) Benignus, obtained authority over Drumlease, the kindred of the endowing landowner, Caíchán, was believed in the seventh century to have maintained a link with the church of Drumlease, in the person of the nun Lassar. The implications of this will be considered further below.

The final section of the *Additamenta* sequence on Drumlease⁹ is

8 For what follows see Bieler, *Patrician texts*, pp 172-3 § 8.4.

9 The passage immediately following, at Bieler, *Patrician texts*, pp 172-3 § 10.1, names two supposed nephews of Patrick, *quos reliquit ibi Patricius* 'whom Patrick left there', the apparent implication being that 'there' refers to Drumlease, the subject of the preceding sections of the *Additamenta*. Since, however, § 10.1-2 appear to comprise discontinuous notes about Patrician traditions in the Sligo/Leitrim area of north Connacht, rather than a consecutive narrative, it is not certain that *ibi* here does, in fact, refer to Drumlease. For discussion of this problem I am grateful to Adrian Corcoran.

what purports to be the testamentary disposition of a certain Féith Fio, concerning the succession to the ruling office at Drumlease:

Is sí inso coibse Féitho Fio 7 a edocht di bliadin re mbás dáu du manchuib Drommo Lías 7 du maithib Callrigi iter crochaingel 7 altóir Drommo Lías:

Nadcon fil finechas for Druimm Léas act cenél Féitho Fio, ma beith nech bes maith diib, bes cráibdech, bes chuibsech din chlaind. Mani pé, du-écastar dús in étar di muintir Drommo Lías no di a manchib. Mani étar du-bber déorad di muintir Pátricc inte.

This is Féith Fio's declaration and his testament, (made) between the chancel and the altar of Drumlease, two years before his death, to the *manaig* of Drumlease and to the nobles of Callraige:

That there is no right of kindred in Drumlease but (that of) the kindred of Féith Fio, if there be one of the descendants who is good, who is devout, who is conscientious [or perhaps 'able', reading *coimsech*]. Should there be none, let it be seen whether one may be obtained from among the "family" of Drumlease or from among its *manaig*. If one be not obtained, an outsider from Patrick's "family" may be installed in it.¹⁰

There is a certain disjuncture between this passage and the immediately preceding statements relating to Patrick's foundation of Drumlease. In particular, the identity of Féith Fio is not disclosed. Kathleen Hughes was inclined to identify him as the landowner, possibly taking her cue from J. B. Bury, and also perhaps because she seems to have attached to *audacht* here the strict sense of a bequest, whereas it may also mean a more general testamentary disposition. Eoin Mac Neill, on the other hand, was in no doubt that Féith Fio was the Patrician disciple Benignus, 'first abbot of Druimm Lias, not to be confused with Benignus son of Sescén' (Patrick's reputed successor at Armagh).¹¹ Thomas Charles-Edwards and Fergus Kelly took a similar

10 Bieler, *Patrician texts*, pp 172-3 § 9, with modified translation.

11 Hughes, 'The church and the world in Early Christian Ireland', in *Irish Historical Studies* 13 (1962), pp 99-116: 101; Hughes, *The church in early Irish society* (London, 1966), pp 160-1; Bury, *The life of Saint Patrick* (London, 1905), pp 175-6; Mac Neill, 'The earliest Lives of Saint Patrick', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 58 (1928), 1-21: 2-3, identified Benignus of Drumlease with Binean filius Lugu, noticed in the previous passage but one of the *Additamenta*; J. Carney ('St. Patrick's *Confessio*', *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* 97 (1962), pp 148-54: 152) presumably followed Mac Neill's identification of Féith Fio; Tírechán mentions another Connacht Benignus, *frater Cethiaci, de genere Aillello*, seemingly associated with Kilbennan, near Tuam (Bieler, *Patrician texts*, pp 148-9 § 30); see further, part II, below.

line to Mac Neill, maintaining that 'Féith Fio appears to be the *érlam*, founder of the monastery'. Charles Doherty also followed this line of interpretation, describing Féith Fio as 'the bishop or abbot'.¹²

In earlier publications I endorsed, more or less cautiously, this latter interpretation, as against the identification of Féith Fio with the landowner.¹³ Several considerations prompted me to favour the equation of Féith Fio with Benignus, the first head of Drumlease, who is cast as Patrick's *daltae* 'disciple, pupil' and was thus presumably in clerical orders. That Féith Fio was the endowing landowner, Caíchán, seems unlikely in the absence of any explanation as to why a layman should be known by two different vernacular names. The application of alternative names — one vernacular and the other Latin — to a clerical leader is not unheard of, however. A possible parallel occurs elsewhere in the *Additamenta*, when Iserminus, a bishop and reputed associate of Patrick's and a founder of Leinster churches, is apparently accorded without explanation an Irish-language alias, *epscof Fith*. One may also compare Tírechán's reference to the baptismal renaming — as *Agnus Dei* — of Senach of Aghagower, Co. Mayo, an example drawn to my attention by Catherine Swift.¹⁴ Moreover, as outlined above, the *Additamenta* indicate that Patrick founded Drumlease and assigned it to his disciple Benignus after a grant of the site and lands, which the king/lord confirmed, with an exemption from royal exactions. This extinguished both the landowner's proprietary interest and the tributary interest of the king/lord in Drumlease. Did that grant also preclude any subsequent interest on the part of the landowner's kin in the head-ship of the church there? There is no statement explicitly connecting Caíchán's descendants with the ruling office and, of course, if Féith Fio were indeed identical with Benignus, any such claim would be expressly excluded by the terms of his testamentary disposition quoted above. The nobles of the Callraige, overlords of Caíchán and his kin, are depicted merely as witnesses to Féith Fio's pronouncement.

While a case may be argued along these lines for identifying Féith Fio with Benignus, it must be admitted that it is far from compelling. In particular, it now seems to me that a very specific significance may attach to the story that Lassar daughter of Anfolmith, of the kindred of Caíchán, received the nun's veil from Patrick and was 'at' Drumlease for sixty years after Benignus. I will return presently to the question of precisely which interest is represented by the figure of Féith Fio. First, however, let us consider the other items in Féith Fio's testamentary

12 Charles-Edwards and Kelly, *Bechbretha* (Dublin, 1983), 159; Doherty, 'The cult of St. Patrick and the politics of Armagh in the seventh century', in *Ireland and northern France AD 600-850*, ed. J.-M. Picard (Dublin, 1991), pp 53-94: 78-9.

13 Etchingam, 'The implications of *paruchia*', in *Ériu* 44 (1993), 139-62: 159-60; *Church organisation*, pp 230-2.

14 Bieler, *Patrician texts*, pp 150-3 § 37; 174-7 § 12 and 174, note on line 15.

disposition regarding the succession at Drumlease, and the light shed on this passage by the prescriptions of early Irish law.

Féith Fio's disposition accords four different elements, in descending order, an option on the head-ship of the church of Drumlease. Should Féith Fio's kin, which had first claim on the office, fail to come up with a suitably qualified candidate, one might be sought from among the *muinte* 'family, community', or the *manaig* 'monks, ecclesiastical clients/dependants'. The distinction between *muinte* and *manaig* is important, since other sources indicate that *muinte* and the corresponding Latin term *familia* could designate an ecclesiastical community or "family" in general, including its tenants or client-dependants (*manaig*). In the Drumlease text, however, the *muinte* are distinguished from the church's clients/dependants (*manaig*), from whom the former group apparently take precedence as regards succession to the head-ship of the church. *Muinte* here must accordingly denote the community apart from the *manaig* and so, perhaps, refers to the clerical and/or strictly monastic members of the community. A comparison may be made with the distinction in *Cáin Adomnáin* — a major piece of ecclesiastical legislation enacted in 697 — between the *muinte* and the *laích dligthig* 'lawful lay folk'. The position of these 'lawful lay folk' seems effectively identical with that of the *manaig* or ecclesiastical client-dependants.¹⁵ In any event, if Féith Fio's kin, the *muinte* of Drumlease and its *manaig* each in turn fail to supply a suitable leader of the community, the last resort should be an outsider (*déorad*) belonging to the *muinte* or "family" of Patrick. The *déorad Dé*, literally 'exile of God' often appears in early Irish sources as a venerated holy man of high status and repute, on account of his impartiality, for he was an outsider, with no kinship or other ties in the locality. In the Drumlease disposition this 'pious outsider' is required to be a member of the community of Armagh, or of one of the churches acknowledging the head-ship of Armagh. Armagh is evidently the 'primary/mother-church' (*andóit*) to its subordinates, a concept of Irish ecclesiastical law, of which more shortly. Féith Fio's disposition indicates that Armagh, or any of the subordinate churches comprising Armagh's wider *familia* 'family', could provide the ruler of Drumlease, in the event that none of the specified categories of the local community should produce a suitable candidate.

The broader significance of the section of the *Additamenta* on Drumlease that deals with succession to the office of ecclesiastical head is that it agrees, in essentials, with the treatment of this question in contemporary Irish law. Forty years ago Hughes noted in passing a similarity between the provisions for succession in the Drumlease

15 On *muinte* and *manaig* see Etchingam, *Church organisation*, pp 173-7 and, on the last point see idem, 250, and K. Meyer, *Cáin Adomnáin: an Old Irish treatise on the law of Adamnán* (Oxford, 1905), § 34.

material contained in the *Additamenta*, and those in Middle Irish glosses on the Old Irish legal tract *Córus Bésgnai*. More recently, I have discussed the various elements of these legal prescriptions on ecclesiastical succession at some length.¹⁶ What follows is a summary of the salient points.

The original Old Irish text of *Córus Bésgnai* was written in the same era as the Drumlease material in the Book of Armagh *Additamenta* (i.e. eighth century). A good part of the Old Irish text survives only as fragments, but a continuous passage of *Córus Bésgnai* outlines the order in which different elements had a right to provide the head of a church. Like the *Additamenta*, *Córus Bésgnai* places the claims of these elements in descending order, with the interest of the second and subsequent categories conditional on the failure of the preceding category to produce a candidate. Prior right to provide the head of the church rests with the *fine* 'kindred'; specifically, the *fine griain* or kin of the landowner who had endowed the church, according to Middle Irish (i.e. tenth to twelfth century) explanatory glosses on the Old Irish text. Failing a suitable candidate from this kin-group, a candidate might be drawn from among the *manaig*; failing that, one might be provided by the *andóit* or 'mother-church' or, as a last resort, an outsider or *déorad* might be appointed.¹⁷ The broad similarity of this to the schema of Féith Fio's disposition for Drumlease, discussed above, is obvious, but there are two appreciable differences. *Córus Bésgnai* does not distinguish as two separate claims that of the *muintir* 'family, community' and that of the *manaig* 'ecclesiastical clients/dependants', whereas these two are distinguished in the *Additamenta* Drumlease text. Secondly, *Córus Bésgnai* does differentiate between the interest of the 'mother-church' (*andóit*) and that of the pious outsider, whereas the *Additamenta* Drumlease text amalgamates the two in the 'outsider from Patrick's "family"'.¹⁸

That part of the original Old Irish text of *Córus Bésgnai* that survives only as fragments elaborates on this model. In particular, these fragments show that the lawyers expected that, in different churches, precedence would be taken by different groups. In some churches those who claimed kinship with the founder/patron saint (*fine érlama*) had first call on the succession to governing office, while in other churches this was the prerogative of those claiming kinship with the endowing landowner (*fine griain*). A third variation on the system was envisaged, where these two interests were amalgamated, in what is called a 'church of the founding/patron saint's and landowner's kin as one' (*eclais fine érlama 7 griain immalle*). Middle Irish explanatory glosses define this

16 Hughes, 'The church and the world', p. 101, note 14; Hughes, *Church*, pp 160-1; Etchingham, 'Paruchia', pp 153-7; Etchingham, *Church organisation*, pp 224-9.

17 D.A. Binchy, *Corpus iuris Hibernici* (6 vols, Dublin, 1978), 530.9-11, pp 13-16; see Etchingham, *Church organisation*, pp 224-5.

as a church established on the kin-land of the founding or patron saint. A fourth variant was a *cell manach* 'church of *manaig*', in which the *fine manach* 'kindred of *manaig*' had first claim on the head-ship.¹⁸

The fragmentary portion of *Córus Bésgnai* thus countenances four different types of churches, each distinguished by the particular element of the indigenous community that is accorded first call on the office of head. Reference is also found in the fragmentary part of the Old Irish text to the *déorad Dé* 'exile of God', or pious outsider, as a category of last resort, should local interests fail to produce an acceptable candidate. The *andóit* 'primary foundation/mother-church', noticed in the continuous passage of text, is not mentioned in the fragments where, however, the founder's/patron saint's kin (*fine érlama*) could be understood as covering the claim of the mother-church. If so, the various possibilities envisaged in the fragments would involve the same four interests as in the passage of continuous text: that of the land-owning kin, that of the ecclesiastical clients/dependants (*manaig*), that of the founder or mother-church and that of the pious outsider as last resort. Alternatively, according to a Middle Irish commentary on these Old Irish legal provisions, the founder's/patron saint's kin could be a local interest distinct from the external interest of the mother-church.¹⁹ Such a distinction may be applicable to the case of Drumlease, as we shall see.

Having outlined the lawyers' prescriptions, let us return now to Féith Fio's disposition on succession to ruling office at Drumlease. There are four categories of candidates identified in Féith Fio's declaration: his own kin, the 'family/community' (*muintir*) of Drumlease, the ecclesiastical clients/dependants (*manaig*) and an outsider (*déorad*) of Patrick's 'family'. The first three of these are local interest groups. *Córus Bésgnai* and its associated legal commentaries all countenance at least two local interests in any church, those of the landowner's kin and of the *manaig*. The kindred of the *érlam*, the founding or patron saint, might also be a local interest or, alternatively, might embody the claim of an external, superior primary/mother-church, an *andóit*. All the legal texts agree that a pious outsider might be summoned where local elements had failed to provide a suitable leader. By contrast with the Drumlease text, however, the *déorad Dé* or pious outsider is always distinguished by the lawyers of *Córus Bésgnai* from the primary/mother-church. The legal prescriptions also allow that, in different churches, different pecking orders obtained between these potential claimants.

In view of these various legal permutations, let us reformulate the

18 Binchy, *Corpus iuris*, 1820.8-1821.16; see Etchingham, *Church organisation*, pp 227-9.

19 Binchy, *Corpus iuris*, 1820.13-20; Etchingham, *Church organisation*, p. 228.

question as to whether Féith Fio is to be identified with the first, apparently clerical, leader, Benignus, or the landowner. Whose was the *finechas* 'right of kindred' for which Féith Fio claimed precedence at Drumlease? Was Drumlease (1) a 'church of the founder's/patron saint's kin' — where they had first claim on the *apdaine* 'abbacy, ruling office' — or (2) a 'church of the landowner's kin' — where the latter retained priority when it came to the succession — or, conceivably, (3) a 'church of the founding / patron saint's and landowner's kin as one', where these two interests had coalesced? In seeking to answer this, we may also bear in mind the distinction, drawn in Middle Irish commentary on *Córus Bésgnai*, between the (internal) interest of the kin of the local founding or patron saint (*érlam*), on the one hand, and on the other, the (external) interest of the 'primary foundation/mother-church' (*andóit*).

As already pointed out, I was previously inclined to favour the identification of Féith Fio with Benignus. On this basis I deduced that Drumlease was, in terms of the lawyers' categories, a 'church of the founder's / patron saint's kin' (*eclais fine érlama*). Most recently, I suggested that 'the interest of the original proprietors of the land, Cenél Caícháin, was subsumed — perhaps by means of Anfolmith — under that of the local saint's kin',²⁰ Anfolmith, it may be recalled, being the father of the nun Lassar. I would now draw a different conclusion, however. In the first place, I would now argue that that the Drumlease section in the Book of Armagh *Additamenta* is a compilation, of which Féith Fio's declaration is merely the final component, both textually and chronologically.²¹ In the Patrician traditions of Drumlease, in other words, Féith Fio's disposition regarding the head-ship of Drumlease is a sequel to a narrative of an earlier era, that of Patrick, Benignus and Caíchán.

An apt parallel is another section of the *Additamenta*, one that has attracted the interest of several commentators. This recounts first the origin-legend of Sleaty, Co. Laois, involving Patrick and his chosen disciple Fíacc, founder / patron saint of Sleaty. The story is followed by a paragraph documenting the formal submission of Sleaty to Armagh in the later seventh century, in which the chief actor is Bishop Áed of Sleaty († 700).²² In Sleaty's case, therefore, a narrative involving Patrick provides the backdrop to and explanation of the disposition, legally

20 Etchingam, *Church organisation*, p. 231; cf. 'Paruchia', p. 159.

21 This realisation I owe to discussion with Catherine Swift; the compilatory nature of the Drumlease material is revealed by the way in which it is subdivided in the manuscript of the Book of Armagh, something which can be readily appreciated by consulting the diplomatic edition: J. Gwynn, (ed.), *Liber Ardmachanus: the Book of Armagh* (Dublin, 1913), p. 33.

22 Bieler, *Patrician texts*, 176-9, §§ 13-16; see K.R. McCone, 'Brigit in the seventh century: a saint with three Lives?', *Peritia* 1 (1982), pp 107-45: 143-4; Doherty, 'Cult of Patrick', 75-8; Etchingam, *Church organisation*, p. 232.

formalising Sleaty's links with Armagh about AD 700. While Féith Fio of Drumlease, unlike Áed of Sleaty, is not historically documented independently of the *Additamenta*, his function and chronological position in Drumlease's traditions seems eminently comparable to those of Áed in the traditions of Sleaty. If, in fact, Féith Fio can be identified with neither Benignus nor Caíchán, but is represented as dwelling in a later era, then the question of which kindred interest Féith Fio represents is entirely open.

In a 'church of the founder's/patron saint's kin', according to the Middle Irish commentator on the law-text *Córus Bésgnai*, this kin has first right of succession to the 'abbacy' or 'ruling office', even if their candidate should be no more than a *salmchétlaid* 'psalmist'. The psalmist was one of the three sub-grades tacked on to the seven grades of clergy in Hiberno-Latin and vernacular law of the eighth century. The lawyers' assumption, evidently, was that the candidate of the founder's/patron saint's kin would be in clerical orders, even if only in minor orders.²³ This is no more than one would expect of an element of the ecclesiastical community that claimed kinship with the saintly founder of the church. It may be recalled, however, that what Féith Fio ordained, according to the Drumlease disposition, was that his own kindred (*cenél*) would rule Drumlease 'if there be one of the descendants who is good, who is devout, who is conscientious [or perhaps 'able']'. It is striking that, by contrast with the terms of the legal commentary, clerical orders — even minor orders — are not stipulated. Goodness, devotion and conscientiousness or ability would appear, on the face of it, characteristics that might be manifested by laymen with a high level of Christian commitment.

If one can no longer sustain the identification, previously proposed, of Féith Fio with Benignus, neither do I now consider that Drumlease was a 'church of the founder's/patron saint's kin'. In fact, to identify Féith Fio with the kin of the founder/patron saint gives rise to a problem concerning the interest-groups represented at Drumlease, compared with those listed in the legal material. I have in mind the absence from the Drumlease disposition of any mention of the *fine griain* or landowner's kin. Previously I suggested that the interest of the endowing landowner, Caíchán, and his kin, was in some sense 'subsumed' under that of the local saint's (i.e. Benignus's) kin. It must be admitted, however, that there is no positive evidence for this hypothesis, which now seems to me unnecessary. I am inclined, instead, to think that Féith Fio's kindred was the landowner's kin; furthermore, that the statement in the *Additamenta* that Lassar, daughter of Anfolmith, of Cenél Caícháin, was 'in' Drumlease for sixty years after Benignus is

23 Binchy, *Corpus iuris*, 979.7-10, 1820.8-10; L. Breatnach, *Uraicecht na Riar* (Dublin, 1987), p.85; Etchingam, *Church organisation*, p. 227.

a pointed claim. While Caíchán had renounced any title to the lands he granted Drumlease, it seems that those who considered themselves Caíchán's kindred persisted up to the eighth century with a claim to first call on the ruling office in the church there. Drumlease was, then, in terms of the lawyers' categories, a 'church of the landowner's kin' (*eclais fine griain*).

At this point we may note a further possible parallel with the procedure for succession to ruling office at Drumlease. This occurs in the very first section of the *Additamenta*, dealing with the foundation of Trim, Co. Meath. Like the Drumlease and Sleaty episodes, a foundation-legend connecting Trim with the mission of Patrick and, especially, with his reputed disciple Lommán, is the backdrop to a statement of relevance to the period around AD 700. In Trim's case, the contemporary element is a list of kinsmen that supplied bishops and governors (*principes*) of Trim and maintained an allegiance to Armagh. The preceding narrative has it that the local ruler, Fedelmid mac Loíguiri, granted his land and his son Foirterch to Patrick and Lommán, thus facilitating the establishment of Trim. When Lommán later attempted to appoint Foirterch as his successor, *recussauit Foirterch n tenere hereditatem patris sui, quam obtulit Deo et Patricio* 'Foirterch refused to take the heritage of his father, which he had offered to God and Patrick'. Foirterch was eventually prevailed upon to relent, but consented to hold the head-ship (*principatus*) for only three days, before relinquishing it *Cathlaido peregrino* 'to Cathlaíd the exile/outsider'. In this scenario Lommán is the local patron saint, and both he and the landowner's kin hold office in turn, before the pious outsider is called upon to serve.

The course of the narrative thus reflects the kind of pecking order envisaged in the more legalistic statements of the Drumlease disposition and *Córus Bésgnai*. At Trim Foirterch mac Fedelmltheo obviously represents the kin of the endowing landowner (*fine griain*). Notwithstanding his reluctance, he effectively establishes the interest of his kindred in the ruling office. The episode concludes with a list of the 'ecclesiastical succession (*progenies*) of Fedelmid'.²⁴ The Trim episode thus conveys the impression that a claim on ruling office on the part of the landowner's kin was deemed normal. We should, accordingly, expect to find this interest group included among those present at Drumlease.

If the kindred of Féith Fio is to be equated with the kin of the endowing landowner, this will account for the absence of any other reference to this category in the Drumlease disposition. One might object that this merely shifts the problem, for there would then appear to be no allusion to any interest on the part of those claiming kinship

²⁴ Bieler, *Patrician texts*, pp 166-71 §§ 1-4.

with the local patron saint, Benignus. Of course, such an interest, distinct from that of the 'primary foundation/mother church' — in this case Armagh or one of its subordinates — may not have been a part of the system at Drumlease: the legal prescriptions indicate that it was a possible permutation and not an essential feature of every church. However, a peculiarity of the Drumlease text may suggest that the local cult of Benignus did give rise to a distinct interest group with a claim on the head-ship. I have already remarked on the distinction drawn in the Drumlease disposition between the *muinte* 'family' of Drumlease and its ecclesiastical clients/dependants (*manaig*). I proposed that *muinte* here refers to the strictly monastic and/or clerical element of the community. Since it is precisely this category that is most likely to have identified with the local patron saint, Benignus, who was presumably in at least minor clerical orders, I would now suggest that the *muinte* is distinguished from the *manaig* because the former effectively corresponds to the legal category of *fine érlama* 'kin of the founder/patron saint'.

Two points of general significance emerge from this comparison of the early Irish legal prescriptions with the Drumlease material. In the first place, both these witnesses testify that local interests have prior right of succession to ecclesiastical ruler-ship. The Old Irish *Córus Bésgnai* admits of at least two local interests, those of the landowner's kin and of the *manaig* 'ecclesiastical clients/dependants'. The distinction drawn by the Middle Irish commentator on *Córus Bésgnai* between the *fine érlama* 'kin of the founding or patron saint', and the *andóit* 'primary/mother-church', raises the possibility of a third local interest, namely the kindred of a local patron saint. Some such distinction apparently underlies the Drumlease disposition where, I suggest, the element designated the *muinte* 'family, community' may be, in effect, the *fine érlama*, those who claimed to be the local saint's kin. The origin-legend of Drumlease portrays Patrick as founder and the interest he represents is readily identifiable with the lawyers' category of 'primary/mother-church'. The Drumlease narrative does not attempt to suppress what we may surmise was the local cult of Benignus, who is, instead, represented as a disciple of Patrick. Indeed, if Benignus of Drumlease were one and the same as the Benignus who, in Armagh tradition, is reputed to have been Patrick's successor, a possibility considered below by Catherine Swift, then his portrayal in the Drumlease material as Patrick's *daltae* 'disciple, pupil' may assume more than anecdotal significance. A ninth- or tenth-century verse commentary on the legal prescriptions of *Córus Bésgnai* adds, to the list of those elements that might provide a church head, the *eclais dalta* 'disciple-church'.²⁵ In other words, a subordinate Patrician church such

²⁵ Binchy, *Corpus iuris*, 1820.26-7; Etchingham, *Church organisation*, p. 228.

as Drumlease might aspire, under certain conditions, to provide a candidate for the head-ship of Armagh itself. Is the depiction of Benignus as Patrick's disciple an attempt to flatter Drumlease pretensions that were soundly based on Irish ecclesiastical legal principles?²⁶

However that may be, an apposite parallel for the precedence of local claims upon the office of church head is again provided by the case of Sleaty, aforementioned, which Tírechán and the *Additamenta* alike associate with one Fiacc. He was ordained by Patrick, it is claimed, and his relics are said by Muirchú to be revered in Sleaty. Once again, there is an apparent distinction between the interest of a primary/mother-church, personified by Patrick, and that of the local patron saint, Fiacc. As we have seen, the *Additamenta*'s fuller account suggests that Sleaty in reality joined itself to Armagh only towards AD 700. Acceptance of Armagh's ultimate authority was accompanied by recognition of Sleaty's local autonomy. This is reflected both in the hagiographical motif of Fiacc as local patron saint — who readily fits the description *érlam* — and in the document recording submission to the rulers of Armagh by two consecutive late seventh-century heads of Sleaty, whose local jurisdiction was then confirmed by Armagh.²⁷

The second point of general significance concerns the prerogatives of the primary/mother-church. In cataloguing specific subject churches, the Patrician hagiographical dossier in particular often notes acts such as foundation or ordination, although ownership of churches is also claimed. In the case of Drumlease, for example, we have seen that, in the seventh century, Tírechán's summary mention simply states that Patrick founded a church there and baptised many. The *Additamenta* subsequently link the grant of land for the foundation of Drumlease with the baptism of the benefactors. Patrician hagiography contains other such claims. As baptism is vital to the pastoral mission, the linkage between the two acts is a pointer to the pastoral function of the church thus founded. At the same time the consecration of churches and, in the view of some, their foundation also, was, at least in theory, a jealously guarded function of episcopal jurisdiction.²⁸ The lawyers' prescriptions do not highlight the pastoral and clerical aspect of the presiding church's authority. Nevertheless, in the Drumlease material, the presence of the nobles of the Callraige at Féith Fio's declaration would suggest that Drumlease was the focus of pastoral jurisdiction in the territory of the Callraige Trí Maige. The Drumlease material and *Córus Bésgnai* draw

26 One might compare Doherty's suggestion that Armagh gave apostolic relics to Drumlease to cement their relationship: 'The basilica', p. 312.

27 Bieler, *Patrician texts*, 92 I § 19 (18), 162 § 51, 176-8 §§ 13-16; see McCone, 'Brigit in the seventh century', pp 143-4; Doherty, 'The cult of Patrick', pp 75-8.

28 Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials* (Dublin, 1963), 56-8 §§ 23, 24; Hermann Wasserschleben (ed.), *Die irische Kanonensammlung* (Leipzig, 1885), XLIII § 4.

attention to a jurisdictional implication of the act of church foundation. This fairly common hagiographical motif takes on a new significance when one realises that the prerogatives of the church or churches associated with the presiding cult — in this case that of Patrick — included a right to provide the rulers of subject churches, when local interest-groups failed to do so.

II Drumlease and Tírechán

Patrick, Brigit and Columcille or Columba are the three most famous saints of early Ireland and the churches we associate them with are Armagh, Kildare and Iona respectively. In addition, however, there were a number of less famous churches where the inhabitants also identified themselves as followers of these saints. Thus, in addition to Iona, Durrow in Co. Offaly, Swords in Co. Dublin or Drumcliff in Co. Sligo are also described on occasion as churches belonging to the *familia* or community of Columba. The exact nature of the links between the various churches that favoured the cult of the same saint is still not fully understood. It seems clear, however, that these links changed and developed over time and that no one explanation holds true for all churches at all periods of Irish medieval history. In the first part of this paper, Colmán Etchingham argues that, in the case of Drumlease, one of the entitlements of the *familia* of Patrick was the opportunity to provide a leader for the settlement on those occasions when local interest groups proved unable to agree on a suitable candidate.

Interestingly, the best early evidence for the churches following the cult of Patrick comes not from the north-east of Ireland around Armagh but rather from west of the Shannon. This is because the first account of the regional distribution of Patrician churches deals in most detail with church foundations in the north-west of Ireland. It is the work of a seventh-century Bishop Tírechán, who identifies himself as a member of the *aeclessia magna Patricii in silua Fochlithi*²⁹ or the Great Church of Patrick in the wood of Fochloth. Although the wood of Fochloth does not apparently survive as a place-name in its own right,³⁰ sites which

29 Bieler, *Patrician texts*, p. 134 §15.

30 In 1929, Eoin Mac Neill argued for an identification of *silva fochlithi* as follows: the *aeclessia magna Patricii* was established following a grant by Conall son of Ende. Mac Neill cited a Mayo placename *Caille Conaill* or 'land of Conall'. Within this area was a village known in modern times as Fóchoill or Foghill in English which Mac Neill links to the wood of Fochloth; see E. Mac Neill, 'The origin of the Tripartite Life of St. Patrick', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 59 (1929), pp 1-15: 6. *Fó* is an Old Irish word meaning good or alternatively prince or lord (Royal Irish Academy, *Dictionary of the Irish Language* (Dublin, 1913-76), F 175-6) so that the place-name is likely to mean good wood. There is no obvious etymological link between *fóchoill* and *fochlith* in any of the various forms in which the latter name is recorded in the early Patrician material. The name Conall is a common one in Old Irish and *Caille Conaill* as a place-name derives only from late

Tírechán associates with the wood mean that we can locate it in the general area of the town-lands of Crosspatrick, Killroe and Mullaghfarry, south-west of Killala Bay.³¹ Bishop Tírechán was thus a Mayoman and the emphasis on Connacht in his work means that we have a very clear context for the Drumlease material from the Book of Armagh and can compare that settlement with a number of other churches adhering to Patrick's cult in Connacht at roughly the same period.

Tírechán was particularly interested in Patrick as church founder and his account deals in the main with church foundations and conversions rather than miracle stories. He organised his material in the form of a missionary journey which Patrick is said to have taken, from Meath to Mayo, over the space of a year. Both Tírechán and his contemporary, Muirchú, agree that Patrick spent his first Easter in Ireland confronting the Uí Néill kings of Tara in and around the two Uí Néill centres of Tara and Tailtiu (Teltown). Tírechán, however, adds to the story of that confrontation a commitment by Patrick to spend the second Easter at the wood of Fochloth whence he had heard the voices of children calling to him from their mother's wombs and asking him to evangelise Ireland. Whether or not Patrick ever undertook such a journey we cannot of course tell; as Etchingham points out above, Tírechán is a source for the seventh-century legends associated with the cult of a saint and not for the fifth-century man who wrote the *Confessio*. Tírechán's reference to Drumlease occurs after the celebration of that second Easter, when Patrick is said to have travelled back to Meath and the Uí Néill kingdoms by way of a northern journey through Leitrim, Donegal and Antrim.

The general pattern in Tírechán's work was to identify both the secular unit in which a church was founded and the ranking the church held within an episcopal hierarchy. In Connacht, for example, he identified churches whose founding saints were deacons (*diaconi*) priests (*prespiteri*), bishops (*episcopi*) or over-bishops – entitled *episcopi episcoporum* in the Irish penitentials³² or *ollam uasal epscop* in the vernacular laws.³³ There are cases of church founders in Tírechán's writings who are identified as *abbas* or abbot but these are very much the exception – in Connacht only Iarnascus of the Cíarraige nÁirne is so designated. (This people can be identified with the area of Mannin Lough on the borders of the modern parishes of Began and Annagh, Co.

genealogical material in the fourteenth-century *Book of Lecan*. Thus Mac Neill's argument lacks logical credibility and the identification of *fochloth* with Foghill must be regarded as unproven.

31 Swift, 'Social and ecclesiastical background', pp 297-9, pp 317-40.

32 Bieler, *Penitentials*, 174 §9.

33 Binchy, *Corpus iuris*, 1618.5.

Mayo.)³⁴ The clerical hierarchy of churches appears to reflect the political standing of the seventh-century kingdoms within which they were located; the over-bishops being associated with the great over-kingdoms and the other ranks with smaller political units. The notice of Drumlease – *et exiit ad regiones Callrigi Tre Maige et fecit aeclessiam iuxta Druim Leas et baptizauit multos* "and he (Patrick) went out to the regions of the Callraige Trí Maige and built a church at Drumlease and baptised many" fits with this general pattern.

et exiit ad regiones Callrigi Tre Maige

Tírechán's use of the word *regiones* or regions appears to have been reasonably precise. In Classical Latin, this word is translated as 'a part of a larger area or space, an administrative sub-division or district, a division or parcel of land'.³⁵ In Tírechán's usage, these administrative sub-divisions are ruled by dynasties descended from a single ancestor. Thus, for example, Patrick is said to have encountered the *fili Amolngid* or sons of Amolngad at Tara; these people all had their own *regiones* within the larger unit known as *campus Domnon* or the area currently comprising the baronies of Tirawley and Erris in north-west Mayo.³⁶ Tírechán's contemporary, Adomnán, who wrote the seventh-century life of St Columba, identifies one of these *regiones* as Erris itself when he speaks of *regio quae ultra Modum fluium sita, Eirros Domno dicitur* "the region which is situated beyond the river Moy, which is called Erris of [*campus*] *Domnon*".³⁷ Similarly, Tírechán makes a reference to *regiones Maicc hErcae* or the regions of the sons of Ercae – apparently the group who later became known as the Fir Chera, who were located around Castlebar³⁸ – and to the *regiones nepotum Maini* or the regions of the descendants of Maine. This is a related group that is identified, in the life of Mochua of Balla, as descended from a son of Maine son of Mac Ercae.³⁹

On occasion, Tírechán fails to specify whether there is any genealogical connection between the rulers of the various *regiones* whilst at the same time making it clear that they belong to a single population grouping. So, for example, he refers to *regiones* of the Corcu

34 Bieler, *Patrician texts*, 151 § 33. This people is mentioned in the *Annals of Connacht* under the year 1224 and is identified with Manin Lough in a text compiled c. 1682: R. Downing, 'Description of the County of Mayo', MS 883/2 (TCD) referred to by J. O'Donovan, *Annals of the Four Masters* (Dublin, 1856) iii, pp 215-6, footnote n.

35 P.G.W. Glare, *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (Oxford 1982), 1599.

36 Swift, 'A square earthen church in seventh-century Mayo' *Trowel* 4 (1993), pp 32-37, 32-3.

37 M.O. Anderson, *Adomnán's life of Columba* revised ed. (Oxford, 1991), p. 30 § 16.

38 Swift, 'Social and ecclesiastical background', pp 222-5.

39 Swift, 'Social and ecclesiastical background', pp 226-30; W. Stokes, *Lives of the saints from the Book of Lismore* (Oxford, 1890), pp 141-2.

Temne (which apparently contained the site later recorded as Slanpatrick⁴⁰ in the parish of Aglis, Co. Mayo); *regiones Conmaicne* (including sites between Lough Mask and Lough Corrib) and, in Co. Meath, the *regiones Cenachtae* or the regions of the Cíanachta. This usage is corroborated by his contemporary, Muirchú, who refers to the *regiones Cruidnenorum* (regions of the Cruithni or Dál nAraidi of Co. Antrim), *regiones Ulothorum* regions belonging to the Ulaid of the north-east coast and *regiones Orientalium* – regions of the Airthir of Armagh.⁴¹

It is this last usage which best conforms to the Drumlease reference – Tírechán appears to be referring to sub-divisions amongst the Callraige. On analogy with his usage elsewhere, we may postulate that the rulers of these different Callraige sub-divisions all claimed genealogical kinship but this is not stated explicitly in his work. Genealogical material in the twelfth-century manuscript Rawl. B. 502, however, identifies the Callraige as the *trebulchallraige* or ‘three-fold Callraige’, descended from the single figure of Lugaid Cal and extending west of the Uí Néill territories bordering Lough Erne.⁴² The same genealogical tract states that they are *aithechthúatha* or a subordinate people, that they are in client-ship to Uí Néill dynasts and that they are not reckoned as members of the Connachta.

A three-fold division of the Callraige explains the epithet that Tírechán attaches to these people. They are the *Calrige Tre Maige*, or Callraige of three areas, each known as *mag*. *Mag* is an Irish word which Tírechán explicitly links to the Latin word *campus*⁴³ and, in his usage, it refers to an area of relatively clustered settlement, surrounded by largely waste borderland which he terms *deserta* or deserts.⁴⁴ Thus, where *regio* refers to sub-divisions of people, *mag* or *campus* for Tírechán refers to the land controlled by each *regio*. The fact that the Callraige control three *maige* is, therefore, an indication that their territory was composed of three separate districts and this is underlined by their title *trebulchalraige* in the genealogical tract.

et fecit ecclesiam iuxta Druim Leas et baptizavit multos

The verb *fecit* ‘he made’ is a somewhat unusual choice for Tírechán to use in describing Patrick’s church foundations but is by no means unique. Far more commonly, he uses the phrase *fundauit aeclessiam* ‘he

40 K.W. Nicholls, ‘Tobar Finnmuighe – Slán Pádraig’ *Dinnseanchas* 2 (1966-67), pp 87-98.

41 Bieler, *Patrician texts*, pp 78, 80, 102, 108, § I 11, § I 12, § I 23, § I 24.

42 M.A. O’Brien, *Corpus genealogiarum Hiberniae* (Dublin, 1962), 153-5. For a discussion of the relationship between the Callraige in Munster and the Corcu Lóigde see D. Ó Corráin, ‘Lugaid Cál and the Callraige’, *Éigse* 13 (1969-70), pp 225-6.

43 Bieler, *Patrician texts*, p. 144 § 27.

44 Swift, ‘Social and ecclesiastical background’, pp 111-2, 186-7.

founded a church’. Within his text, I have counted twenty-four instances of *fundauit*; six instances each of *posuit* ‘he placed’ and *plantaui* ‘he set in place’; one instance of *aedificauit* ‘he built’ and one problematical example of *ordinauit* ‘he ordained’. The grammar in this last instance, in an extract dealing with the foundation of Aghagower, is difficult to understand and the scribe may have mistranscribed the verb owing to the occurrence of *ordinatus* in the preceding phrase: *qua ordinatus est Senachus quia Patricius ordinauit aeclessiam*.⁴⁵

I have counted ten instances of the verb *fecit* used in conjunction with church foundations. Interestingly, every one of the ten appears in the second half of Tírechán’s text. The division between the two halves is marked by a note, apparently written by Tírechán himself, which states that what he has cited up to this point he has found either in the text of his mentor Bishop Ultán of Ardraccan or from other seniors of the church. It may be, therefore, that the distribution of *fecit* reflects the different sources that Tírechán used in the second half of his work. To date, I have not, however, been able to identify any particular link between the ten churches which Tírechán designated by the phrases *fecit aeclessiam* or *aeclessias* (used eight times) and *fecit cellam* or *cellas* (used twice).

If Tírechán wrote Classical Latin, *iuxta Druim Leas* would be understood as beside Drumlease. Tírechán’s Latin is, however, heavily influenced by the fact that his native tongue was an early form of Old Irish and there is a tendency, therefore, to use Latin prepositions in a way which reflects Irish language norms. There are at least two examples of *iuxta* in his text which cannot easily be interpreted as ‘next to’ or ‘beside’. These are:

*inuenierunt eum inconuallibus montanis iuxta laborem artificiorum*⁴⁶ ‘they found him in mountain valleys “next to” the work of craftsmen’;

*posuerunt episcopos iuxta sanctam aeclessiam hi tamnach*⁴⁷ ‘they placed bishops “next to” the holy church in Tarnach’.

Here, the preposition that Tírechán appears to have in mind is Irish *oc*. The editors of the *Dictionary of the Irish Language* identify this word with a locative sense ‘at’, ‘beside’ or ‘close to’ but it can also be used with a third singular neuter pronoun in the sense of ‘at it’ or ‘engaged therein’ and referring to a noun.⁴⁸ Thus *oc* can be used of

45 Bieler, *Patrician texts*, p. 152 § 37.

46 Bieler, *Patrician texts*, p. 140 § 22.

47 Bieler, *Patrician texts*, p. 142 § 25.

48 *Dictionary of the Irish Language*, O 82-3. For discussion of Tírechán’s use of Latin see further Swift, ‘Reflexes of Early Old Irish in Tírechán’s *Collectanea*’ (unpubl. M. Phil thesis, Dublin University, 2000).

somebody being 'at the work of craftsmen' or in other words, doing the work of a craftsman. Given this interpretation of Tírechán's use of *iuxta*, it seems most likely that he is referring to a church at Drumlease itself and not to one in its general vicinity.

Probably the most important element in this phrase is *baptizauit multos* – he baptised many. It might be thought that such an action normally accompanied church foundation but in fact Tírechán uses this phrase relatively rarely and then only in fairly precise circumstances. It occurs, for example, in his account of Patrick's actions at Tara, the great ceremonial centre of the Uí Néill over-kingdom, where Patrick is said to have baptised *tot milia hominum* or many thousands of men. When Patrick visited the centre of the Uí Briúin over-kingdom at Dumae Selcae, *baptizauit filios Broin* or he baptised the sons of Brion.⁴⁹ The name *dumae* implies the existence of a mound, possibly a prehistoric monument, at this site while Tírechán also indicates that there were inscribed standing stones on the site, halls belonging to the leaders of the dynasty and some form of fort, possibly a *ráith*. At Cruachain, the ceremonial centre of the Connacht provincial kingdom, Tírechán provides us with an extensive description of the baptism of Loíguire mac Néill's two daughters.⁵⁰ This begins with a series of questions put by Patrick to the girls, paralleling the series of questions in the *Ordo Baptismi* of the Stowe Missal⁵¹ and it culminates with the death and burial of the two girls in a pagan-style monument next to a well. At a location named *Foirrgea*, which Tírechán specifies as the site where the

49 Bieler, *Patrician texts*, pp 146-8 § 30. The exact location of Dumae Selcae is unclear; the seventeenth-century antiquary, Dubhaltach Mac Fírhisigh locates the site at Carn Fraích, a place-name recorded from the ninth century and famously identified in the *Annals of Connacht* — ed. A.M. Freeman (Dublin, 1944) — *sub annis* 1225, 1228, 1310, 1315 & 1407 as the inauguration site of the later medieval Ó Conchobair, who claimed descent from the Uí Briúin. See M.V. Duignan, 'The Uí Briúin Bréifní genealogies', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, 64 (1934), pp 90-137, 213-256: 103 § IIIa. Carn Fraích in turn was located at the town-land of CARNS by John O'Donovan in the mid nineteenth century; *Ordnance Survey Letters: Co. Roscommon* ed. M. O'Flanagan (Bray, 1927), ii 27. Given the existence of many prehistoric monuments in this area, O'Donovan's identification of this town-land with Carn Fraích is an unprovable assumption. An alternative location for Carn Fraích — put forward by Fr M.J. Connellan in 1953-4 — is at the town-land of KILREE, recorded in the seventeenth-century *Books of Survey and Distribution* as KILFREE and in the early fourteenth-century *Ecclesiastical Taxation* as KILLAFRY: M.J. Connellan, 'Where on Cruachain was Sendomnath Maighe Ai?', *Journal of the Galway Archaeological and Historical Society* 25 (1953-4), pp 78-80, 79. Neither identification, however, is closely associated with a lake, a feature which Tírechán specifies as being present at Dumae Selcae. For further discussion of the possible location of Dumae Selcae and its identification as the political centre of the Uí Briúin kingdom, see Swift, 'Social and ecclesiastical background', pp 142-155.

50 Bieler, *Patrician texts*, p. 144 § 26.

51 G.F. Warner, *The Stowe Missal* 2 vols (London, 1906-1915), p. 31.

over-kingdom of Mag Domnon was sub-divided between the various sons of Amolngad, a boy was baptised in his mother's womb and she was subsequently buried on the site.⁵²

Other occasions where baptism is mentioned are, perhaps, less obviously associated with the political ceremonial centre of a kingdom, but a case can be made that they, too, should be identified with such locations. When Patrick crossed the Shannon, for example, he came to the *mons filiorum Aillelo* or mountain of the Uí Aillelo, where holy Maneus was baptised. The site is described as *tumulus gradi* or — in somewhat corrupt form — the (burial) mound of rank. From the specifications given, we know that this site also includes a ford, a border crossing, and something that looked like a stone altar, located on the mountainside.⁵³ Again, this is likely to have been a prehistoric monument. When referring to Deacon Iustus of Fuerty, there is reference to the baptism of *nepotes* — a word that Tírechán uses as a parallel for the Irish *Uí*.⁵⁴ Unfortunately, the text is corrupt at this point and it is not clear who the *nepotes* were though one might suspect the Uí Maine, the leading dynasty of the area. (In a later compilation about Patrick, the *Vita Tripartita*, which draws heavily on Tírechán, the equivalent passage specifies the Uí Maine.⁵⁵)

Less explicit again is the instance when Patrick is said to have come to *campus Caeri*, where there is reference to both a church and a possible fort and where he *baptizauit multos*.⁵⁶ Finally in the example which best parallels Drumlease, Tírechán states that Patrick *uenit in regiones Corcu Temne ad fontem sini in qua baptizauit milia hominum multa* — he came to the various sub-divisions of the Corcu Temne to the well of *Sin...* in which he baptised many thousands of men.⁵⁷ If Patrick is described in summary form as coming to various districts simultaneously, it seems reasonable to assume that he is coming to the area seen as the political centre of those districts. Similarly, when Tírechán says that Patrick came to *regiones Calrigi Tre Maige* to Drumlease and there *baptizauit multos*, the contexts in which he uses this phrase indicate that Drumlease is probably to be seen as the political as well as the ecclesiastical centre of this tripartite kingdom. On analogy with the other political centres which he describes, we may further postulate that the site of Drumlease is likely to have included an area for high-ranking burial, some form of dwelling place associated with the leading dynasty, a well and possibly some evidence for prehistoric activity.

52 Bieler, *Patrician texts*, p. 158 § 44.

53 Bieler, *Patrician texts*, pp 138-40 § 19.

54 Bieler, *Patrician texts*, p. 146 § 28.

55 K. Mulchrone, *Bethu Phátraic: the Tripartite Life of Patrick* (Dublin, 1939), p. 65.

56 Bieler, *Patrician texts*, p. 150 § 35.

57 Bieler, *Patrician texts*, p. 152 § 39.

Tírechán and the Drumlease material in the *Additamenta*.

Tírechán adds no further details to his short description of the site of Drumlease but his work can be used, I believe, to shed further light on the summary section which completes the account in the *Additamenta*. This states that Patrick founded a settlement at Drumlease, that he left Benignus, his *daltae* 'disciple or pupil' there and that Lassar, a woman belonging to the dynasty which had given Patrick the land, took the veil from Patrick.⁵⁸

Gwynn and Bieler both suggested that this Benignus might be the brother of Cethiacus, and a man whom Tírechán specifies as having been associated with a *cellola Benigni*, normally identified with Kilbennan in Co. Galway.⁵⁹ These brothers were members of the Uí Ailello who controlled the area to the south of Drumlease. A connection with Benignus, Patrick's successor as bishop of Armagh was rejected without discussion by Mac Neill⁶⁰ but it is, I think, worth pointing out that Tírechán indicates on two occasions that Benignus of Armagh had connections with Patrician churches in Connacht. When Patrick visited Dumae Selcae, the political centre of the Uí Briúin over-kingdom, both Benignus *heres Patricii* (heir of Patrick) and Benignus *frater Cethiachi* (brother of Cethiacus) are said to have accompanied him. Even more interestingly, a woman who is identified as Mathona, *soror Benigni successoris Patricii* or Mathona, sister of Benignus the successor of Patrick, is said by Tírechán to have been given the veil by Patrick and to have founded a free church at Tamnach. He locates Tamnach in the vicinity of the *mons filiorum Ailello*, or mountain of the Uí Ailello, and the site can be identified with the church recorded as ATANAGH in the early fourteenth-century *Ecclesiastical Taxation*⁶¹, as TAMNAGH BÓ CHAOICE in the *Annals of Loch Cé* under the year 1586 and as the modern town-land and parish of Tawnagh in the barony of Tirerrill. This church is only some sixteen kilometres south-west of Drumlease as the crow flies.

Clearly, the case that Benignus of Drumlease was the founder of Kilbennan cannot be proven given that Tírechán's writings indicate so clearly that he believed there were two characters called Benignus connected to the general area of the Sligo/Leitrim borderlands in Patrick's day. Either of these, or indeed a third and unrelated character who bore the name may have been Benignus of Drumlease. It is, perhaps, in the light of these three possible candidates that one should note that Benignus of Drumlease is given no title, and is described only

58 Bieler, *Patrician texts*, p. 172 § 6.8.

59 Gwynn, *Liber Ardmachanus*, lxix; Bieler, *Patrician texts*, p. 172.

60 Mac Neill, 'Earliest Lives', pp 2-3.

61 H.S. Sweetman & G.F. Handcock, *Calendar of Documents relating to Ireland preserved in Her Majesty's Public Record Office, London 1302-7* (London, 1886), p. 224.

as *daltae* of Patrick, although the norm for the early Patrician texts is to specify the clerical title acquired during the course of a disciple's career. Furthermore, the Benignus who remained at Drumlease for seventeen years is not said to have died there; all the text states is that Lassar remained at the site *tar ési mBenigni* or 'after Benignus'. Was the writer of the *Additamenta* text using the cult of 'a' Benignus at Drumlease to create the image of a prestigious past for the settlement without tying his account to specific details?

In favour of a Benignus who was otherwise known to the Patrician cult, Tírechán makes it clear that a number of the early Patrician disciples had, in his view, spent time in widely dispersed parts of Ireland. The clearest example is that of Bishop Cethiacus, who, as a member of the Uí Ailello, is linked to the area of the Suck river in south Roscommon, to the site of the 'great church of Patrick' west of the Moy and possibly to the site of Inishkea off the coast of Mayo. He is also, however, said to have spent Easter in the vicinity of Kells in Co. Meath because his mother was a member of the Cíanachta. Benignus of Armagh is said to have been the first Irishman to be converted to Christianity when the saint landed on the eastern Irish coast near Skerries, leaving his home near the river Delvin to do so. He subsequently visited the Uí Briúin centre of Dumae Selcae and he became Patrick's successor at Armagh. Bishop Brón of Killaspugbrone, (between Sligo airport and the sea), is described as ordaining Maneus at the *mons filiorum Ailello* in Tirerrill and he also helps Bitteus of Ail Find (Elphin) to ordain bishops at Tamnach. Along with his two colleagues Benignus of Armagh and Benignus of Kilbennan, Brón was present at Dumae Selcae and he was one of two foster-fathers, together with Olcán of Kilmoremoy, of Macc Ercae mac Maicc Dregin, whom Tírechán locates along the coastline between the Moy and Sligo Bay. These references locate Bishop Brón in the general vicinity of modern Co. Sligo with only one visit south, to Cruachain but in another text, the *Vita Prima Brigittae*, which may also belong to the seventh century, Bishop Brón attends an assembly at Taitiu or Teltown in Co. Meath.⁶² Tírechán himself, as he makes clear, had been a *discipulus* 'disciple – equivalent of *daltae*? –' of Ultán of Ardraccan (also in Co. Meath) whilst hailing from the Uí Amolngaid territories west of the river Moy.

In short, the evidence from Tírechán makes it clear that there is nothing preventing the identification of Benignus of Drumlease with Benignus of Armagh and a certain amount to recommend it. I would suggest, in fact, that the foundation story summarised at the end of the Drumlease material *may* (and I stress *may*) refer to the possibility that Benignus of Armagh had spent part of his early career at Drumlease.

62 S. Connolly, 'Vita Prima Sanctae Brigittae: background and historical value', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 119 (1989), pp 5-49: 21.

Such a possibility would then form part of the hagiographical explanation for the link between Drumlease and Armagh. Indeed, the fact that Benignus of Drumlease is not given a genealogical identification, or even a title but instead is identified only as Patrick's *daltae*, could lead one to infer that, together with Patrick himself, he personifies the claims of the *andóit* church of Armagh. As Etchingham has outlined above, the community of Patrick as *andóit* 'primary foundation/ mother-church' is, in Féith Fio's declaration, given ultimate responsibility for leadership of the church of Drumlease. The importance of the wider Patrician community would thus be underlined by an origin legend which states that not only did Patrick found the church but that he left behind his *daltae* as the first leader of the settlement. This in no way prevents the subsequent development of a *fine érlama* at Drumlease or, in other words, that Drumlease's clergy identified Patrick's original *daltae* as the first and thus ancestral clergyman who had been appointed by the authorities of Armagh. In this sense, it seems likely that Benignus of Drumlease is to be seen primarily as the personification of the *fine érlama* as argued above by Etchingham.

As already mentioned, Gwynn and Bieler preferred another candidate for leader of Drumlease, the figure of Benignus of Kilbennan. As a brother of Bishop Cethiachus, the latter is identified as a member of the Uí Aillello, the people who gave their name to the modern barony of Tirerrill, immediately to the south-west of Drumlease. Tírechán indicates however, that in his day, their name was also linked to the sites in Roscommon, in particular, that of *Dumecha nepotem Aillello* 'bank/mound of the Uí Aillello'.⁶³ This site can be identified with a fifteenth-century reference to SENCHELL DUMCHA 'the old church of the bank/mound' which appears to be the town-land of SHANKILL south of Elphin.⁶⁴ In addition, Tírechán identifies the *regio propria* of Cethiachus as also being to the south of Elphin, possibly including the church site that he founded by the river Suck. This site was Brí Garad 'hill of G...., later Úaran Garad 'well of G....', which is recorded in the fourteenth-century *Ecclesiastical Taxation* as FORAN, which, in turn, became the modern parish of Oran.⁶⁵ Thus the Uí Aillello are identified by Tírechán as controlling lands within the territory known as Mag nAí, the heartland of the early Connacht provincial kingdom based on Cruachain. As a member of this dynasty, therefore, Benignus of

63 Bieler, *Patrician texts*, p. 140 § 23.

64 K. Nicholls, 'Some Patrician sites of Eastern Connacht', *Dinnseanchas* 5 (1973), pp 114-18: 114; Swift, 'Social and ecclesiastical background', pp 100-02.

65 For discussion of this evidence in greater detail and further material on the early history of the Uí Aillello, see Swift, 'Social and ecclesiastical background', pp 96-105 and, in summary form, T.M. Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* (Cambridge, 2000), pp 40-2.

Kilbennan can be identified as somebody of the highest importance within Connacht. If he is to be identified as leader of the community of Drumlease, the inference must be that such a role was considered to be one worthy of being held by families of high political status.

One fact which may strengthen the case for the identification of Benignus of Drumlease with Benignus of Kilbennan is the fact that Tírechán also specifies that another of this man's brothers, Mucneus, was located at the 'great church of Patrick' south-west of Killala Bay in the wood of Fochloth.⁶⁶ This settlement consisted of a cluster of sites, two of which are termed *Bertriga*. These appear to refer to the area of the island of Bartragh, an island in the mouth of the Moy which acted as the northern-most crossing point of the river in the eighteenth century.⁶⁷ A later life of Patrick, the *Vita Tripartita*, indicates that a group of Callraige, known as Callraige Cúile Cernadán, were resident in the vicinity of this island, on the eastern side of the Moy.⁶⁸ This would make Benignus of Kilbennan the brother of a man whose church was located at the borders of a Callraige kingdom. If Benignus of Kilbennan is also to be identified as leader of Drumlease, he was, therefore, being depicted as a member of a prestigious clerical dynasty who had links to many parts of Connacht, including other Callraige kingdoms.

Whosoever was Patrick's *daltae* at Drumlease, it seems reasonable to assume that he was a cleric, given Tírechán's emphasis on Patrick's role in ordaining bishops and priests during his missionary career in Ireland.⁶⁹ If it is Benignus of Armagh, then he was clearly not only a man following a clerical career but one who attained episcopal rank since Tírechán states quite specifically that he ruled in Armagh as a bishop.⁷⁰ If, on the other hand, the Drumlease leader was Benignus of Kilbennan, we know that he was the brother of two bishops (Cethiachus and Mucneus) and held his *cella* (at Kilbennan) from Patrick and Cethiachus⁷¹ but we do not know his precise status. The reference to the baptism of many would, however, imply that pastoral care was a concern of Drumlease, as Etchingham points out above. That, in turn, makes it rather more likely that its leader belonged to a clerical hierarchy. Etchingham has further argued that the figure of Benignus in the *Additamenta* material represents the clerical interest at Drumlease and that they were the second most powerful interest group in the settlement after the landowner's kin. Taken in conjunction, the probable status of Drumlease as political centre of the Callraige Trí Maige, the high status attached to being a *daltae* of Patrick and the episcopal

66 Bieler, *Patrician texts*, p. 156, § 42.

67 G.T. Stokes, *Pocock's Tour in Ireland in 1752* (Dublin, 1891), p. 78.

68 Mulchrone, *Bethu Phátraic*, p. 146.

69 See especially, Bieler, *Patrician texts*, p. 126, § 6.

70 Bieler, *Patrician texts*, p. 127 § 5.

71 Bieler, *Patrician texts*, pp 148, 156 §§ 30, 42.

connections of the two known candidates, render it likely that Benignus of Drumlease was a bishop, rather than a cleric of more junior rank.

A further pointer to the fact that Drumlease belonged to a diocesan system of organisation is that Lassar is identified as a member of the community who was given the veil by Patrick. In Tírechán's writings women who take the veil appear relatively frequently but almost always in association with bishops. Mathona of Tawnagh, the sister of Bishop Benignus, for example, is identified as a *monacha* 'female monastic' of both Patrick and the priest Rodanus. She was also the founder of an *aeclessia libera* 'free church', but bishops appointed by the leaders of Elphin were subsequently placed at her church.⁷² At Aghagower, the holy maiden who received the veil was the sister of the local bishop, Senachus. After Patrick consecrated her brother and founded a church for the sister, he said to both siblings: "there will be good bishops here and from their seed there will be blessed people in this see for ever".⁷³ Bishop Felartus of the Uí Ailello is linked to the *aeclessia magna Saeoli* 'great church of (Mag) Saeoli'⁷⁴ whilst his sisters are associated with churches of the Conmaicne. A bishop *cum sorore una* 'with one sister' of the Corcu Theimne were located together outside their kin-lands in Mag Tochuir.⁷⁵ Contemporaneously, Adomnán mentions the holy virgin Maugina *filia Daimeni* 'daughter of Daimíne' who lived at the site of the bishopric of *Clochur filiorum Daimeni* 'Clogher of the sons of Daimíne'.⁷⁶ Similarly, the early traditions about Brigid make it clear that a bishop was resident at Kildare and seen as head of the clerical hierarchy of the surrounding region or indeed of the province of Leinster.⁷⁷

According to eighth-century Irish canon law, women who took the veil had to live *sub manu pastoralis regiminis* – under the hand of the pastoral regime or, in other words, under the jurisdiction of the local bishop. In a passage attributed to Augustine, the eighth-century *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis* distinguishes between the two types of women who took the veil. On the one hand, there are the *virgines* or

72 Bieler, *Patrician texts*, pp 140-2 §§ 24, 25.

73 Bieler, *Patrician texts*, p. 152 §37.

74 *Mag Saeoli* is the territory of the Uí Briúin Seolai as identified in the *Vita Tripartita*, Mulchrone, *Bethú Phátraic*, p. 59. This dynasty occurs in the annals from the ninth century while one king, Cellach mac Rogellaig, is identified as Cellach Locha Cimbí in verses from the *Fragmentary Annals of Ireland*, ed. J.N. Radner (Dublin, 1978), p. 52. Hardiman identified Loch Cimbe with Lough Hackett, Co. Galway, following the settlement of the area by an Anglo-Norman family in the thirteenth century; see J. Hardiman, *A Chorographical Description of West or h-Iar Connaught written AD 1684 by Roderic O'Flaherty* (Dublin, 1846), p. 148.

75 Bieler, *Patrician texts*, p. 160, § 47.

76 Anderson, *Columba*, p. 100 § II 5.

77 Etchingam, 'Kildare before the Normans: an episcopal and conventual see', *Journal of the County Kildare Archaeological Society* 19 (2000), pp 7-26.

virgins who imitated the body and dress of Mary while on the other, there are *penitentes*, who imitated Anna. In the *Collectio*, the first group are compared to bishops and the second to priests or *seniores*.⁷⁸ The virgins are said to live together, separated from the sight of many men, whilst the penitents are seen as subordinate to them.

In terms of the topographical relationship, the dependence of a female house on the local bishopric could vary. Senachus' sister was intimately associated with the fortunes of Aghagower while the churches of Felartus' sisters were located at some distance from their brother's church and in the lands of another population group.⁷⁹ At the 'great church of Patrick' south-west of Killala Bay, the church of the two maidens formed part of a loose cluster of ecclesiastical sites.⁸⁰ In the case of Tawnagh, the church is some thirty-four kilometres to the north of Elphin.

The two elements that appear common to Tírechán's references to female foundations are a dependence on the local bishop and a tendency to identify the female founder as the bishop's kinswoman. The one exception is the case of Adrochta of the Greagraige at Lough Gara (the modern parish of Killaraght, Co. Sligo)⁸¹ who is not linked to any particular bishop but was reportedly given patens and a chalice by Patrick.⁸² The law text *Ríagal Phátraic* or 'Rule of Patrick' states that a church with such equipment had basic community duties; an ordained man should provide baptism and communion and the singing of the intercession for *manaig* (inhabitants of an ecclesiastical settlement). Offering should be made on properly appointed altars on Sundays and feast-days.⁸³ Though apparently founded by a female, who is not associated explicitly with an episcopal authority, Killaraght is said by Tírechán to have the basic equipment for providing pastoral care to the surrounding region. (It seems likely that such care was, in this case, in the charge of a cleric of less than episcopal rank and that this, in turn, underlines the subordinate status of the Greagraige.)

Where the female founder is identified by Tírechán as a kinswoman of the local bishop, this would seem to reflect *eclais fine érlama* 'a church of the founder's/patron saint's kin'. It could also be, as appears to be the case at Aghagower, an *eclais fine érlama ocus griain immalle* 'a church of the founder's/patron saint's and landowner's kin as one'. In

78 Wassersleben, *Kanonensammlung*, p. 183 § XLV 14.

79 Bieler, *Patrician texts*, pp 148, 150, 140, §§ 30, 37, 22.

80 Bieler, *Patrician texts*, p. 158, §§ 43, 44; Swift, 'Social and ecclesiastical background', pp 317-338.

81 This church is listed as CELL ATHRACHTA in the *Annals of Connacht* under the years 1315, 1361, 1421 & 1463 and as KILLARAGH parish in *A Census of Ireland c. 1659* ed. S. Pender (Dublin, 1939), pp 602-3.

82 Bieler, *Patrician texts*, p. 148, § 31.

83 J. O'Keeffe, 'The rule of Patrick', *Ériu* 1 (1904), pp 216-224: 219.

the first part of this article, Etchingam put forward good reasons for believing this was not, in fact, the case at Drumlease, where the pointed identification of Lassar as descendant of the original donor Caíchan implies the existence of an *eclais fine griain* or church of the landowner's kin, with external allegiance to Armagh as *andóit* 'primary foundation/mother church'.

I would argue that the role played by Lassar also implies that Drumlease included a women's foundation which, in turn, is likely to have been linked to a bishopric. The fact that a male *daltae* was appointed by Patrick to the site, regardless of whether such a man was Benignus of Armagh, Benignus of Kilbennan or another Benignus altogether, would imply that this bishopric was also located at Drumlease. Such an arrangement, with the female foundation in close proximity to the seat of the bishopric, parallels the cases of Aghagower or the 'great church of Patrick' south-west of Killala. As argued above, both candidates for identification with Benignus of Drumlease, of whom Tírechán gives details, do, in fact, have episcopal associations. Both of these men would appear also to have been of extremely high status within the Patrician community; in Tírechán's terms, we may be talking of the first man to adopt Christianity in Ireland and who subsequently became Patrick's successor at Armagh or, alternatively, a member of what is described as the most prominent clerical dynasty amongst the adherents of Patrick's cult in Connacht.

The postulated high status of the clergy at Drumlease (or in the legal terminology, the *fine érlama*), is, in turn, consistent with the fact that Drumlease was identified as the settlement within the locality where multiple baptisms took place, implying that it served as centre of pastoral care for the district. On analogy with other baptismal centres described by Tírechán, it has been argued that Drumlease was probably the political as well as the ecclesiastical centre of the three districts of the Callraige Trí Maige. It may also have been the location for high status burials and possibly some form of residence for the leading dynasty within the tripartite kingdom. In short, though the precise evidence given by Tírechán on seventh-century Drumlease is scanty, by looking at the context which he provides, we can add considerable detail to the statement "Patrick went out to the regions of the Callraige Trí Maige and built a church at Drumlease and baptised many."