

CHAPTER I

Prehistory - Celtic conquests – Tuatha Kingdoms – Advance into England - Capital Dublin – The Bards – The Druids – Gaelic language – Ciarraige Tribe – Roman pressure – The Vikings - River Shannon - Lough Derg - Niall – Irish Clan Lands – Southern and Northern Uí Néill - Behons – Cashels – Pole houses.

Celtic conquests from Gaul - over Neolithic, Iron and Bronze Age people, took place during the second half of the millennium BC. They built up and established many small kingdoms called 'tuatha'. This race of people – from the kingdom of Galatia, originating from the Upper Danube, Italy and Spain - formed the northern branch, which they ruled from their capital, Dublin. Their land extended over all Ireland, Wales, western and southwestern Britain, up England's western coast, over the border, into Scotland.

The Celtic race relied upon the bards – the High king's soothsayers, who foretold the tribe's destiny through story – they were the purveyors of myth and legend, who passed on aspects of community, which drew the people together. They were members of the aristocracy and did not sit with the musicians, entertainers and mercenaries - who were placed near the door, but alongside the raised dais – close to the lords table. These bardic singers and storytellers extolled tales of heroes and gallant deeds; they were honoured and feted. It was a form of entertainment, which included the broadcast of news, everyday events and tales of the past. As an important side issue, which may not have been intended, the bards educated listeners in the facility and use of language that brought people together - instilling common cause and continuity; it gave the people a sense of belonging that lasted for generations.

The religion – a cult built upon nature and ruled by druids, priests and prophets, were later called 'brehons'; they maintained influence by occultism, and a knowledge seasonal changes - of things affected by the calendar - sun, wind and rain. Any matters the brehons could not explain were wrapped in mysticism - as matters concerning 'the other world'.

The bulk of the inhabitants were farmers and stockholders working small rectangular fields, operating a cross ploughing technique. They built dry-stone boundary walls and drainage ditches, lived in timber roundhouses or pole-houses, and stored surplus grain in pits.

Ireland's people lived in a land of mountain and forest, bog and grassland... never far away from well-stocked lake and grazed pasture. The people calculated their wealth by the size of their herd and the amount of land under cultivation. Their gods reflected this concern and love of the land.

The Romans never invaded Ireland although they did stop the encroachment of Celtic people in Britain... gradually the Roman influence inflicted a pressure that forced them back - a socio-political and economic force rather than a physical one. The Romans, assessing rightly that the Celts offered no real threat - continued their march northwards... leaving their expansion into metal bearing, western areas, until later.

The army that made up the Roman force was Germanic... an altogether stronger, fitter and more advanced people than the Celtic farmers and stockbreeders. They were a tried and tested body of people from a number of tribes, hardened by their transient life - fighting, building roads and bridges, organizing logistics... the Celts were no match for them.

Ptolemy listed, in the second century AD, the names of Irish people in the P Celtic form, which was the language of Britain and Gaul. The group of people we are interested in were recorded in his writings. They are the Cruithni who were linked to the Ciarraige tribe of Conbnacht and north Kerry... we continue, still in the land of the Munu - Munster.

This book relates to central south-western Ireland: the northern half of Counties Limerick, Tipperary and Offaly. These three counties are bordered to their north by the river Shannon that bears a two Loughs, Derg and Ree. Inland, south of the river, the gentle rising land sweep up to a range of mountains: Mullaghareirk, Galtee, Slieveardagh Hills, and Slieve Bloom.

The early Christian church had as one of the Twelve Apostles of Ireland Saint Ciaran Saighir [the Elder]. He was the first bishop of Ossary - one of the four who preceded Saint Patrick. He founded Seir-Kieran, County Offaly. Ciaran is an Irish personal name meaning 'Little Dark One'. He is thought to be related to Ciar who was son of Fergus, King of Ulster. The name is associated to Ciardha, being one of Ciar's People.

The Atlantic sweeps into the mouth of the Shannon until it reaches Limerick, under two bridges past the Salmon Weir onwards to the entrance of Lough Derg at Killaloe. South of the estuary of the River Shannon, river and loch, populated by a tribe recorded as the Medon Mairtine. Over time, they became weakened by war – by the encroaching raiders and warring neighbours, their lands appropriated by the thrusting Eoghanachta... a southern tribe expanding northwards. These people flourished, and as all tribal grouping, made up of extended families, some closely related others not so but all contributing to the main group...

The ruling suzerain – High king, held this land called Munster, it was sometimes referred to as Cashel [cashel: the term used to describe a stepped walled settlement] relying on a hierarchical system based on obligations owed – obligations to pay for protection, farm the land, take part in social gatherings, contribute to clan activities and share benefits. These obligations once accepted were never withdrawn - in life or death, but continued through the succeeding generations... The leader, Muiredach 325-355, maintained his position by strength of arms proved in battle. His position was no sinecure – because extended families were large, particularly the chief's, there was always those envying his position perhaps disputing his leadership, so he had to be always on guard!

Muiredach's son Eochaid 356-365, married Mongfind of Munster. From this union future kings of Connacht reigned. His second wife Cairrenn was daughter of a Saxon king and an ancestor of the Uí Néill, prince of the Connachta. She was also mother to Niall NoínGiallach of the Nine Hostages 379-405, so called because of the nine tributary tribes that owed him homage. He was High king of Erin, Ard Ri, the Gaelic form of High king, referred to as, 'king of Tara'. Niall, who eventually becoming one of the supreme rulers of all Ireland, founded this ruling body.

The marriage of Eochaid and Cairrenn brought together an alliance between the Saxons, Irish, and Picts... a royal line called Uí Néill [descendants of Niall]. This continued for almost a thousand years... only being broken by Brian Boru, king of Cashel, who, although reigning king, and afterwards by others, never ousted the name and fact of Uí Néill - as representing true national identity. When Niall died, Connacht and the kingship of Ireland passed to his nephew. His sons, Eoghan, Conall and Enda, took over smaller parts of the kingdom in northern and central-southern Ireland. It was Eoghan of Aileach, who now ruled as High king of Munster and from his eldest son was born Fiacha. It was in this fashion that the Eoghanacht line was born.

Ailill the king is vanished
Vanished Croghan's fort:
Kings to Clonmacnoise now
Come to play their court

Aileach ruled from a great stone castle built on a 600-foot hill... at one time the stronghold of Bronze Age kings. A treaty was drawn up between all the clans, which divided Ireland into two parts – the dividing line passed between Dublin and Galway, partway, following the river Shannon. The king of the southern part was recognised as the High king of Cashel.

Cashel, Tipperary, is situated in a fertile plain sitting on a rock holding a stone fort. It was built in the 400s as the seat of the King of Munster. St Patrick 432-459, preached there converting Aengus, the King. In 1101 it passed into the hands of the church that bestowed it upon Murtough O'Brien

Osraighe or Ossory covered the present county of Kilkenny and the southern portion of Leix - populated by the Ciarraige tribe [*Ciar refers to a nondescript colour it could be black, grey, brown, or tan. This could describe the people's clothes, hair, or skin. It is also a family name... they becoming part of Ciar's People*]. They became vassal people [*owed them allegiance*] of the Eoganachta who were the successors of the holy Carthach tribal lands, including all those affiliated clans with similar names and family connections. The clan was under royal protection of Ui Neill, descended from the Connachta when Ciar Culdub was slain...

The hierarchy of kings was adapted to the older structure of provinces - Ulster, Munster, Connacht, and Leinster, within these there were two kings vying for supremacy. They were competing for the revenues and title... provincial kings claiming over lordship, over lesser kings, one of which was the forebears of the O'Ciardha. Often these kings had to fight to enforce their claim... both admitted the supremacy of the High King of Ireland.

It is almost impossible either to work out the dominance of a particular tribe over another or to form a linearity of leading clans, especially if you try to put a date to each. It has to be pure conjecture for there are no compatible pieces of evidence to back them up. All one can do is assessing the likelihood that one was, 'at the time of'

Britain's fifth century history revolves around the return of the Roman Army to Italy and the disintegration of almost five-hundred years of Roman influence. The roads remained, the buildings suffered from lack of maintenance but the language and social mores remained, to be adapted. Irishmen were to some degree unaffected by the turbulence, which followed the Romans retreat back to Rome. Christianity spread from the monasteries of Gaul reaching Ireland at about the same time. It was then that there were great changes to the Irish language.

By about 540AD, the time of Finnian, the monks had begun to take over some of the power of the Brehons. Finnian died in the plague about ten years after the foundation of Clonard. By then both Ciaran and Columba of Terryglass were in their twenties. Saint Ciaran of Clonmacnoise from Connaught was the founder of the Abbey near Lough Ree and Columba, the greatest of the later generation monks, founded Iona. St Ciaran was another of The Twelve Apostles of Ireland. He died on the 9th September 546 at the age of 32 - buried in his little church attached to the Abbey.

The rural society of this time was not one based upon towns or villages but ring-forts, lake dwellings and later, monastery-settlements. The people populated smaller communities of much cruder construction with little or no stonework but simple pole houses... often with an open roof, built on an earthen mound with ring ditches and offset entrances.

**Origins of the O'Ciardha Clan of Munster,
part, of a northern Celtic Race.**

**Southwestern, Tribal people,
made up of minor tribal groups.**

Mumu
Múscraighe [Musciarraige]
Cenel Ciarpri
Niall 450AD

Ciar's People
Southern Uí Neill
Uí Raibne, owned the site of Kilkeary.
King Duibhrea, St Ciardha's father.
St Ciardha, 620-680, [Cill Cheire] Church of Keary.

'It may be naive to attempt to make a genealogical list especially when there is little evidence to go on. However, it maybe helpful - give a feel of time and place... Therefore, I make no apology.'