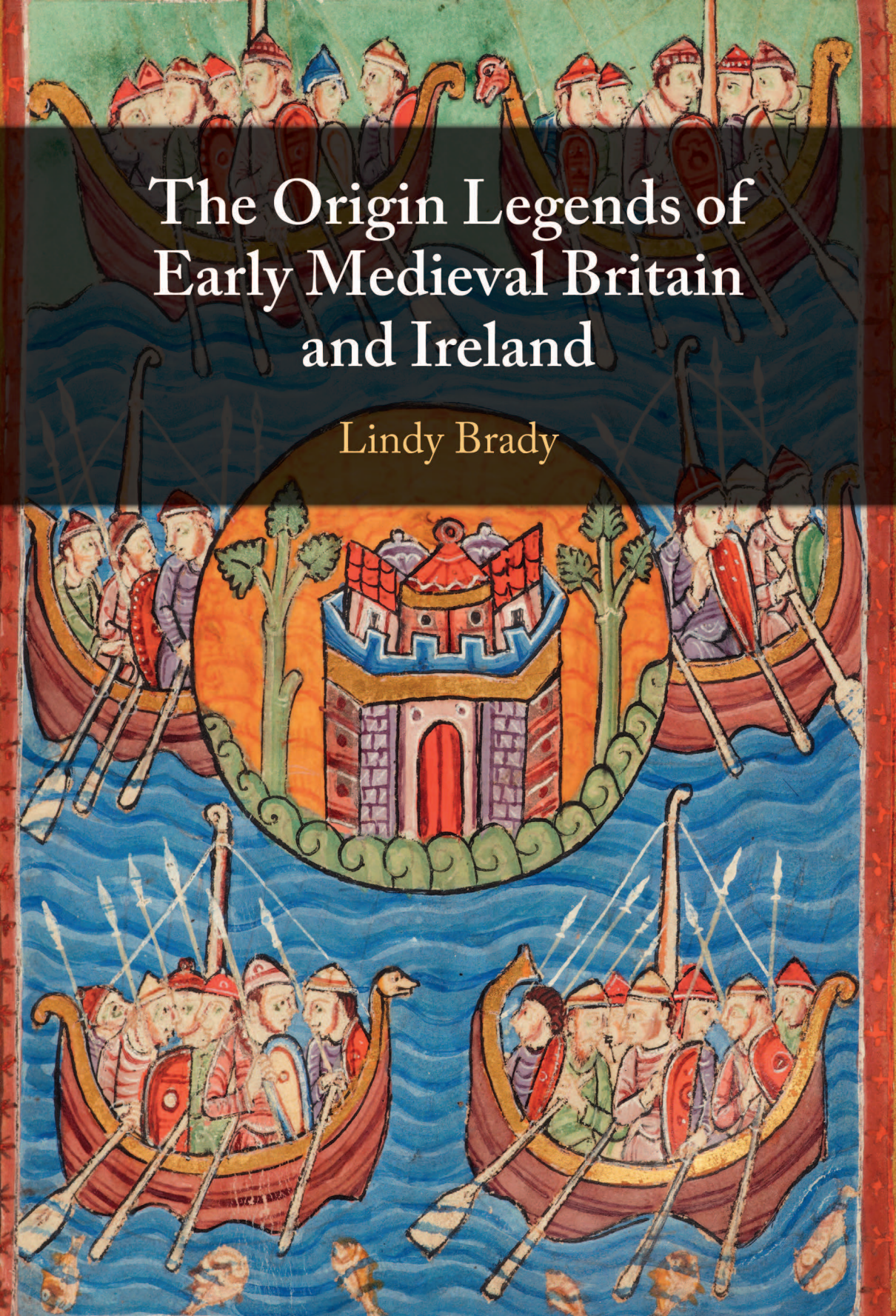
The Origin Legends of Early Medieval Britain and Ireland

Lindy Brady



The Origin Legends of Early Medieval Britain and Ireland

The inhabitants of early medieval Britain and Ireland shared the knowledge that the region held four peoples and the awareness that they must have originally come from 'elsewhere'. *The Origin Legends of Early Medieval Britain and Ireland* studies these peoples' origin stories, an important genre that has shaped national identity and collective history from the early medieval period to the present day. These multilingual texts share many common features that repay their study as a genre, but have previously been isolated as four disparate traditions and used to argue for the long roots of current nationalisms. Yet they were not written or read in isolation during the medieval period. Individual narratives were in constant development, written and rewritten to respond to other texts. This book argues that insular origin legends developed together to flesh out the history of the region as a whole.

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For Marios

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Lindy Brady
Dún Laoghaire, Ireland
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Introduction: Framing History

The ninth-century British Latin pseudohistorical narrative known as the *Historia Brittonum*[1] opens by situating the island of Britain and its inhabitants temporally, geographically, and historically. After carrying the common late antique and early medieval set of calculations known as the *sex aetates mundi* (six ages of the world) through to the present day,[2] the author of the *Historia Brittonum* writes:[3]

Brittania insula a quodam Bruto, consule Romano, dicta. Haec consurgit ab Africo boreali ad occidentem versus. D CCC in longitudine milium, CC in latitudine spatium habet. In ea sunt viginti octo civitates et innumerabilia

[1] John Morris (ed. and trans.), *Nennius: British History and the Welsh Annals* (London: Phillimore & Co., 1980), from which all citations and translations are taken; the text of this edition is a reprint of Edmond Faral, *La légende arthurienne: Études et documents, Les plus anciens textes*, 3 vols. (Paris: Champion, 1929), vol. 3, 4–62. The *Historia Brittonum* was likely first compiled in 829–30 in north Wales. On its complex textual tradition, see David N. Dumville, 'Some Aspects of the Chronology of the *Historia Brittonum*', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* 25 (1972): 439–45; '"Nennius" and the *Historia Brittonum*', *Studia Celtica* 10/11 (1975–76): 78–95; 'Sub-Roman Britain: History and Legend', *History* 62 (1977): 173–92; *The Historia Brittonum, vol. 3: The 'Vatican' Recension* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1985); and 'The Historical Value of the *Historia Brittonum*', *Arthurian Literature* 6 (1986): 1–26; also Thomas Charles-Edwards, 'The Arthur of History', in Rachel Bromwich, A.O.H. Jarman, and Brynley F. Roberts (eds.), *The Arthur of the Welsh* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1991), 15–32. Throughout this book, editions and translations from which primary source material will be cited are introduced in an initial footnote. Uncited translations are my own.

[2] This tradition became popular in the medieval west from Augustine's *De civitate Dei* onward. For good recent discussions of the *sex aetates mundi* in insular tradition, see Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, '"The Metaphorical Hector": The Literary Portrayal of Murchad mac Bríain', in Ralph O'Connor (ed.), *Classical Literature and Learning in Medieval Irish Narrative* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2014), 140–61 at 144–5 and Michael Clarke and Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, 'The Ages of the World and the Ages of Man: Irish and European Learning in the Twelfth Century', *Speculum* 95 (2020): 467–500.

[3] The identity of the author of the *Historia Brittonum* has been debated: Dumville, '"Nennius" and the *Historia Brittonum*', has argued for the Nennian preface as a late addition to the *Historia Brittonum*; its authenticity has been defended by P.J.C. Field, 'Nennius and His History', *Studia Celtica* 30 (1996): 159–65 and most recently Ben Guy, 'The Origins of the Compilation of Welsh Historical Texts in Harley 3859', *Studia Celtica* 49 (2015): 21–56.

promuntoria cum innumeris castellis ex lapidibus et latere fabricatis, et in ea habitant quattuor gentes: Scotti, Picti, Saxones atque Brittones.

(The island of Britain is so called from one Brutus, a Roman consul. It reaches from the south-west northward, and lies to the west. It is 800 miles long, 200 broad. In it are twenty-eight cities and headlands without number, together with innumerable forts built of stone and brick, and in it live four nations, the Irish, the Picts, the Saxons and the British.)[4]

These short sentences contain a great deal of information about the tradition within which the author of the *Historia Brittonum* was writing and the narrative of history he envisioned for his text. Four key features are particularly noteworthy. The first is the legendary origin story that the island of Britain took its name from Brutus, a Roman consul. This eponymous ancestral figure, introduced as our first known piece of information about Britain, offers an origin narrative that explains the singularity of the island's prehistory whilst simultaneously tying it to the known history of the broader world. Yet several other features of this passage are also remarkably important to the framing of the *Historia Brittonum* and underscore some key arguments of this book as a whole. The geographical and physical description of Britain, while seemingly unremarkable, reveals that the author of the *Historia Brittonum* was aware of and participating in a long and learned intellectual tradition of geographical and historical texts extending back to the late antique period.[5] In other words, while the *Historia Brittonum* is the only sustained historical narrative from Wales to survive from the earlier medieval period,[6] it was far from written in isolation. The *Historia Brittonum* drew on a long tradition of previous material, just as subsequent insular histories would come to encompass this text in turn.[7]

These introductory sentences in the *Historia Brittonum* not only describe Britain's geographical location within the known world, they also place great weight on its status as an island. Unsurprisingly, the peoples who inhabited early medieval Britain and Ireland had a heightened sense of themselves as island-dwellers.[8] Living on an island

[4] Morris, *Nennius*, 59 and 18.
[5] See A.H. Merrills, *History and Geography in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
[6] For the later period, see Owain Wyn Jones, *Historical Writing in Medieval Wales* (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Bangor University, 2013).
[7] See Robert W. Hanning, *The Vision of History in Early Britain: From Gildas to Geoffrey of Monmouth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), chapter IV.
[8] See Nicholas Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking in Anglo-Saxon England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 49 and 53 and *Writing the Map of Anglo-Saxon England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 133–6; and for the extension of these themes in the later medieval period, Kathy Lavezzo, *Angels on the Edge of the World: Geography, Literature, and English Community, 1000–1534* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press,

had an immediate and visible impact on the rhythms of daily life, from food production to travel, communication, and trade. These islands were also identified as such in intellectual tradition, by a long chain of classical and late antique geographical texts.[9] Crucially, awareness of their island status also shaped their inhabitants' understanding of their histories. A place that is only accessible via a sea crossing underscores, more so than other landscapes, the necessity that one's ancestors 'must' have originally traveled to Britain or Ireland from somewhere else. The brief introduction to Brutus in the *Historia Brittonum*'s opening passage crystallises these issues. When writing the history of their region, early medieval insular peoples sought to provide answers to some obvious questions. Who were their ancestors? Where did they come from? And why did they leave their homelands?

The introductory remarks of the *Historia Brittonum* also emphasise one crucial final fact: the awareness of early medieval historians and chroniclers that early medieval Britain and Ireland were inhabited by four peoples: the Irish, the Picts, the Anglo-Saxons, and the British.[10] To turn to another passage slightly later in the same text, the *Historia Brittonum*'s (British) author makes clear that early medieval peoples were interested not only in their 'own' origins when he writes, 'si quis autem scire voluerit quando vel quo tempore fuit inhabitabilis et deserta Hibernia, sic mihi peritissimi Scottorum nuntiaverunt' (if anyone wants to know when Ireland was inhabited and when it was deserted, this is what the Irish scholars have told me).[11] Early medieval authors thus sought to provide answers to the same questions about their neighbours as they did about themselves. Who were their ancestors? Where did they come from? And why did they leave their homelands?

Over the course of the early medieval period, a discourse of origin narratives developed within the insular region. By the time of the Norman Conquest of England in 1066, an expansive origin legend had become attached to each of the four peoples who inhabited Britain and Ireland. This book explores the development of these origin stories in the early medieval period from (roughly) the departure of the Romans to the arrival of the Normans, i.e. the fifth to eleventh centuries CE, before turning to an examination of how they were treated by early modern chroniclers writing histories with a more nationalist bent. The key words here are 'discourse' and 'development'. As has been well documented, these origin legends were literary constructs that reflect contemporary

2006) and Sebastian I. Sobecki (ed.), *The Sea and Englishness in the Middle Ages: Maritime Narratives, Identity and Culture* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2011).

[9] Merrills, *History and Geography in Late Antiquity*, 254–60.

[10] For a discussion of the terminology used to reference peoples throughout this book, see the discussion in Chapter One, 28–33.

[11] Morris, *Nennius*, 62 and 21.

concerns at the time of their composition and not any historical reality of the so-called 'migration era' or 'dark ages'.[12] They open a window into the period in which they were written, not the period in which they are set. This book explores the development of these stories – the origins of origin legends – as they were written in the early medieval period and later repurposed in early modern chronicles.

This book's main arguments are usefully crystallised in the opening passage of the *Historia Brittonum*. The question of origins was heightened by an appreciation of geography. The reality that Britain and Ireland were a group of islands naturally brought narratives of travel and migration to the forefront, creating a logical foundation for the construction of a corpus of origin legends. As we have seen, the origin stories of the early medieval insular world were not written in isolation. They were embedded into broader historical chronicles, texts which themselves demonstrated significant participation in a longer intellectual tradition that stretched both backward and forward in time. The authors of these chronicles and histories demonstrated an awareness of all four peoples who inhabited the region and the desire to know the origin stories of each of them. Drawing these threads of investigation together for the first time, this book lays out the ways in which legendary origin narratives in early medieval Britain and Ireland formed a cohesive corpus that grew and developed together. Origin stories did not preserve 'authentic' memories from a people's prehistory that were passed down unaltered through oral tradition until they could be safely embedded within later written chronicles and historical narratives.[13] They were literary constructs: fluid, dynamic, and constructed to reflect contemporary concerns. This book traces the development of these origin stories over the course of the early medieval period, demonstrating that the corpus of insular origin legends evolved together to flesh out the history of the region. Individual origin narratives were in constant development, written and rewritten to respond to other works in the early insular corpus of historical and pseudohistorical works. Together, these legends were constructed not to form four distinct 'national' histories but rather to fill in the blanks of prehistory for the early medieval insular region as a whole.

The Anachronism of Nationalism

The origin legends of the peoples of early medieval Britain and Ireland formed an important genre. They provided their subjects with both

[12] See discussion below on 'The Anachronism of Nationalism', 4–13.

[13] On this point see most trenchantly Walter Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History (A. D. 550–800): Jordanes, Gregory of Tours, Bede, and Paul the Deacon* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), discussed further below, 4–13.

a collective identity and a connection to broader world history, and have influenced the construction of national identities from the early medieval period right down to the present day. Yet they have never been interrogated all together, nor have their interrelationships been properly examined. This book, the first comprehensive study of how insular origin narratives were constructed before the twelfth century and repurposed in the early modern period, fills that gap.

The texts which contain these stories were written in Latin and a range of difficult vernaculars,[14] meaning that they have until now been studied as the products of four disparate traditions by modern scholars whilst simultaneously being used to argue for the long roots of current nationalisms in the popular imagination. Yet insular origin narratives were neither written nor read in isolation during the early medieval period, and this book demonstrates the widespread circulation of this material across perceived geographical and linguistic boundaries. By studying these origin legends in the context within which they were written in their earliest permutations – as part of a broader set of histories of the insular region as a whole – we can learn much more about these texts and the peoples who wrote them than we can if we examine them in linguistic or 'national' isolation.

Part of the reason that these origin legends have been studied separately from one another in the current era comes as a consequence of the impact of modern nationalism on the study of medieval texts. The *longue durée* of the concept of nationalism itself has been much debated, and I should be clear that use of this term in reference to the Middle Ages suggests a heightened awareness of and advocacy for one's 'own' nation without necessarily possessing the modern implications of a desire for national independence and political self-determination. In the early medieval period, a range of terms was used to describe groups of peoples with a (perceived) shared identity of some sort: *gens*, *natio*, *populus*, and *regnum* were most common in Latin, alongside corresponding phrases in various vernaculars.[15] The definitions of these terms were fuzzy. Although often translated by modern scholars as 'people' (*gens* and *populus*), 'nation' (*natio*), and 'kingdom' (*regnum*), in reality they could be used fairly interchangeably to refer to a range of

[14] Discussed in detail below, 'Sources, Legends, and Arguments', 22–7.

[15] See Patrick J. Geary, 'Ethnic Identity as a Situational Construct in the Early Middle Ages', *Mitteilungen der Anthropologischen Gesellschaft in Wien* 113 (1983): 15–26; B. Zientara, 'Populus – Gens – Natio. Einige Probleme aus dem Bereich der ethnischen Terminologie des frühen Mittelalters', in Otto Dann (ed.), *Nationalismus in vorindustrieller Zeit* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1986), 11–20; F. Lošek, 'Ethnische und politische Terminologie bei Iordanes und Einhard', in H. Wolfram and W. Pohl (eds.), *Typen der Ethnogenese unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Bayern* 1 (Vienna: Denkschriften der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, philosophisch-historische Klasse 201, 1990), 147–52.

common identities: family groups; those perceived to share descent from a common ancestor; people with the same language, set of laws or customs, or geographical region; or those united under a (loose) political structure. As Hans-Werner Goetz, Jörg Jarnut, and Walter Pohl write:

> For simplicity's sake we may just call the (somehow) 'ethnic' and political bodies of the early medieval communities 'peoples' and 'kingdoms', whilst constantly bearing in mind the ambiguity of these terms. This coincides with the equally ambivalent and wide-ranging meanings of Latin terms (such as *gens* or *natio*, or even *regnum*), and, of course, there is a vast gap or shift of meaning between early medieval and modern terminology.[16]

Indeed, this ambiguity was such that terms were often used interchangeably by the same author. Barbara Yorke writes, for example, that 'the terms *natio* or *populus* were alternatives to *gens* which Bede – like Isidore of Seville – used interchangeably'.[17]

Medieval understandings of group identities thus do not correspond neatly to modern identity categories, or even to an internally consistent set of definitions.[18] However, this is not to say that medieval peoples lacked the means to conceptualise groups who shared an identity.[19] Most medieval authors (and modern scholars) attempting to define identity categories in the early medieval period have followed the guideposts of the influential *Etymologies* of Isidore of Seville.[20] Isidore wrote that:

[16] Hans-Werner Goetz, Jörg Jarnut, and Walter Pohl (eds.), with the collaboration of Sören Kaschke, *Regna and Gentes: The Relationship between Late Antique and Early Medieval Peoples and Kingdoms in the Transformation of the Roman World* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 'Conclusion', 598.

[17] Barbara Yorke, 'Political and Ethnic Identity: A Case Study of Anglo-Saxon Practice', in William O. Frazer and Andrew Tyrrell (eds.), *Social Identity in Early Medieval Britain* (London: Leicester University Press, 2000), 69–89 at 71. On Isidore, Merrills, *History and Geography in Late Antiquity*, 177, notes: '. . . the very ambiguity of Isidore's work testifies to the complexity of conceptions of ethnicity within late Antiquity. The precise significance of the terms *natio* and *gens* have been the subject of considerable study in recent years, but it seems evident that the linguistic ambiguities of the terms were as evident in the seventh century as they are today. In the *Origines*, for example, Isidore appears to have been indiscriminate in his use of such terms, and *gens* and *natio* are virtual synonyms within the work.'

[18] As Kim M. Phillips, 'Race and Ethnicity: Hair and Medieval Ethnic Identities', in Roberta Milliken (ed.), *A Cultural History of Hair in the Middle Ages* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), 123–36 at 124, writes: 'It has been widely accepted that cultural factors including religion, myths of origin, shared territory, military organization, customs, language, and legal identities prevailed in early medieval societies as markers of group difference, while somatic elements such as body, skin, and hair type were less frequently remarked.'

[19] Discussed further below in the section on 'Origin Legends and the Construction of Identities in the Early Medieval West', 17–21.

[20] Stephen A. Barney, W.J. Lewis, J.A. Beach, and Oliver Berghof (trans.), with the collaboration of Muriel Hall, *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). All translations of Isidore are from this edition.

A nation (*gens*) is a number of people sharing a single origin, or distinguished from another nation (*natio*) in accordance with its own grouping … The word *gens* is also so called on account of the generations (*generatio*) of families, that is from 'begetting' (*gignere*, ppl. *genitus*), as the term 'nation' (*natio*) comes from 'being born' (*nasci*, ppl. *natus*).[21]

Yet Isidore was not dogmatic in his explications,[22] and elsewhere identifies criteria other than common ancestry by which *gentes* could be distinguished from one another, namely shared law, language, or custom.[23] It is thus important to bear in mind that medieval peoples had both a range of criteria through which to define shared identities and a variety of terms to denote them with.[24]

The question, then, as to what extent nationalism (or something approaching it) existed in the medieval period has been hotly debated. A significant body of publications in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries argued that nationalism had long roots stretching back to the Middle Ages; however, many of these claims were constructed in support of the Nazis (and other fascist groups) and have been both debunked and denounced by modern scholars from the second half of the twentieth century onward.[25] As Ingo R. Stoehr writes,

any serious attempt at placing the medieval tradition within literary history has to acknowledge the political appropriation of the Middle Ages by National Socialism [Nazism], which infused a medieval literature that is – despite its own internal tensions between intolerance and inclusiveness – usually understood as characterised by the absence of nationalism, with a nationalism of the most violent kind.[26]

[21] Isidore, *Etymologies* IX.ii.1, 192.

[22] As Sigbjørn Olsen Sønnesyn, *William of Malmesbury and the Ethics of History* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2012), 117, notes: 'Linguistic affinity and difference can therefore not in itself be the decisive factor of the genesis of *gentes*, as indeed is clear from Isidore's own definition of the term, in which biology and language predominates. Isidore's account displays the difficulties of reconciling the biblical account of the tower and confusion of Babel with the obvious etymological roots of the term *gens*. His encyclopaedia may be a very useful collection of classical and patristic statements on a variety of subjects, but its lack of internal coherence makes it a very insecure foundation for eliciting general medieval notions of complex concepts.'

[23] Isidore, *Etymologies* V.vi.1; IX.i.14; and IX.ii.97.

[24] See also Walter Pohl, 'Ethnonyms and Early Medieval Ethnicity: Methodological Reflections', *Hungarian Historical Review* 7 (2018): 5–17.

[25] See discussion in Patrick J. Geary, *The Myth of Nations: The Medieval Origins of Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), chapter 1, 'A Poisoned Landscape: Ethnicity and Nationalism in the Nineteenth Century', 15–40.

[26] Ingo R. Stoehr, '(Post)Modern Rewritings of the *Nibelungenlied* – Der *Nibelungen Roman* and Armin Ayren as *Meister Konrad*', in Albrecht Classen (ed.), *Medieval German Voices in the 21st Century: The Paradigmatic Function of Medieval German Studies for German Studies* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), 165–78 at 167.

The modern study of nationalism is usually credited to Hans Kohn's highly influential *The Idea of Nationalism*, published in 1944.[27] In more recent scholarship, the idea that nationalism – or proto-nationalist sentiments – can be found in the Middle Ages has enjoyed a resurgence,[28] with the case having been made for Wales,[29] Ireland,[30] Scotland,[31] and Anglo-Saxon (and later medieval) England.[32] Debate on these issues was reignited with the publication of Benedict Anderson's much-discussed 1991 monograph *Imagined Communities*, which argued strongly for the modern roots of nationalisms.[33] Anderson's book has been characterised by

[27] Hans Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism: A Study in its Origins and Background* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1944).

[28] See Simon Ford, Leslie Johnson, and Alan V. Murray (eds.), *Concepts of National Identity in the Middle Ages* (Leeds: University of Leeds, 1995).

[29] R.R. Davies, 'Law and National Identity in Thirteenth-Century Wales', in R.R. Davies, Ralph Griffiths, Ieuan Gwynedd Jones, and Kenneth Morgan (eds.), *Welsh Society and Nationhood* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1984), 51–69; Huw Pryce, 'British or Welsh? National Identity in Twelfth-Century Wales', *English Historical Review* 116 (2001): 775–801; R.R. Davies, 'The Identity of "Wales" in the Thirteenth Century', in R.R. Davies and Geraint H. Jenkins (eds.), *From Medieval to Modern Wales: Historical Essays in Honour of Kenneth O. Morgan and Ralph Griffiths* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004), 45–63; and Euryn Rhys Roberts, 'A Surfeit of Identity? Regional Solidarities, Welsh Identity and the Idea of Britain', in Andrzej Pleszczyński, Joanna Sobiesiak, Michał Tomaszek, and Przemysław Tyszka (eds.), *Imagined Communities: Constructing Collective Identities in Medieval Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 247–78.

[30] Thomas Finan, *A Nation in Medieval Ireland? Perspectives on Gaelic National Identity in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2004); Brendan Bradshaw, '*And so began the Irish Nation': Nationality, National Consciousness and Nationalism in Pre-Modern Ireland* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015).

[31] Dauvit Broun, 'The Origin of Scottish Identity', in Claus Björn, Alexander Grant, and Keith J. Stringer (eds.), *Nations, Nationalism and Patriotism in the European Past* (Copenhagen: Academic Press, 1994), 35–55; *The Irish Identity of the Kingdom of the Scots in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 1999); *Scottish Independence and the Idea of Britain: From the Picts to Alexander III* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007).

[32] Sarah Foot, 'The Making of *Angelcynn*: English Identity before the Norman Conquest', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 6th ser. 6 (1996): 25–49; Kathleen Davis, 'National Writing in the Ninth Century: A Reminder for Postcolonial Thinking about the Nation', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 28 (1998): 611–37; Alfred P. Smyth, 'The Emergence of English Identity, 700–1000', in Alfred P. Smyth (ed.), *Medieval Europeans: Studies in Ethnic Identity and National Perspectives in Medieval Europe* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 24–52; Thorlac Turville-Petre, *England the Nation: Language, Literature and National Identity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996). For a survey of scholarship on Anglo-Saxon England, see Lindy Brady, 'Constructing Identity in Anglo-Saxon Literature: Review of Current Scholarship', *South Atlantic Review* 81 (2016): 111–27.

[33] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1991). The literature on this subject is vast: see most usefully Ernst Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983); Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986); and Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* (London: Canto, 1991), in addition to works cited below.

some scholars as 'an account of nation that medievalists love to hate',[34] and there has been pushback by those arguing for a sense of national identity (or various degrees of 'imagined communities') in the premodern period[35] – yet the matter is far from settled, even amongst medievalists.[36]

Current scholarly consensus on the matter, insofar as there is one, occupies a middle ground. Most scholars would agree that while proto-nationalist sentiments can occasionally be found in individual texts from the medieval period, widespread nationalism – that is, a primary identification with a nation-state that transcends other shared identities (such as with kin groups, religions, cities or territories, professional guilds, etc.) – is a modern phenomenon. The biggest stumbling block for claims of nationalism in the Middle Ages is class: only some small fraction of written texts from the early medieval period survive, and they represent the viewpoints of a literate, educated, wealthy, politically attuned (and almost exclusively male) elite. As Jean W. Sedlar writes: 'Although sentiments of a nationalist type can occasionally be found as long ago as ancient Egypt or classical Greece, nationalism was not then a large-scale phenomenon. In both ancient and medieval Europe, the distinctions of social class, rank, and religion were vastly more significant.'[37] John Hutchinson notes that 'while there is evidence of an elite medieval nationalism, it is often unclear how far this carried down the social scale'.[38] The conclusions of this study add further weight to those who have not found widespread evidence of nationalism in the early medieval period. Origin stories of all four peoples in Britain and Ireland were compiled together in early insular historical and pseudohistorical texts. The legends belonging to various peoples were not viewed as somehow 'superior' to one another in the early medieval period,

[34] Patricia Clare Ingham, *Sovereign Fantasies: Arthurian Romance and the Making of Britain* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 8.

[35] E.g. Kathy Lavezzo (ed.), *Imagining a Medieval English Nation* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2004); Pleszczyński et al. (eds.), *Imagined Communities*.

[36] Anthony D. Smith, 'National Identities: Modern or Medieval?', in Ford, Johnson, and Murray (eds.), *Concepts of National Identity in the Middle Ages*, 21–46 at 35, writes that: 'It is only from the late fifteenth century that we can confidently speak of a growing sense of English national identity, in a wider national state'; Derek Pearsall, 'The Idea of Englishness in the Fifteenth Century', in Helen Cooney (ed.), *Nation, Court and Culture: New Essays on Fifteenth-Century English Poetry* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001), 15–27 at 15, argues that 'there was no steadily growing sense of national feeling' prior to the Reformation.

[37] Jean W. Sedlar, *East Central Europe in the Middle Ages, 1000–1500* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1994), 401.

[38] John Hutchinson, *Nationalism and War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 22; see also Lauryn S. Mayer, *Worlds Made Flesh: Reading Medieval Manuscript Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 32–66.

but rather, were drawn together to construct the history of the region as a whole.

It is clear, however, that from roughly the early modern period onward, as concepts of nationalism took hold in academic and popular understanding, antiquarians and later scholars attempted to isolate the history and legends of 'their' countries alone.[39] Several key studies have been particularly instrumental in interrogating the extent to which crucial presuppositions about late antique and early medieval origin legends – such as their historicity, antiquity, and stability over time – were in fact imposed externally by romantic nationalists (and fascists) seeking to construct their own origin narratives of ethnicity in the modern era.[40] A comprehensive overview of the situation is provided by Patrick Geary's invaluably lucid *The Myth of Nations: The Medieval Origins of Europe*. This lays out – as his dedicatory preface remarks – 'the importance of the past for the present and the difference between the two', and his chapter on 'Ethnicity and Nationalism in the Nineteenth Century' provides a particularly valuable overview of how we got from the medieval texts we actually have to the nationalist interpretations they have often been given.[41] Another recent survey of these issues is Ian Wood's *The Modern Origins of the Early Middle Ages*.[42]

In terms of the scholarship itself, those works which form the products of a long-running (and at often times heated) debate between scholars from the 'Toronto' and 'Vienna' schools of thought over the validity of a cohesive 'Germanic' identity have advanced our understanding of identity formation in the late antique and early medieval periods.[43] The most significant contributions to the 'Vienna School' – which sought to explore the ethnogenesis of 'Germanic' (and later other) identities in the early medieval period without, to be clear,

[39] As discussed in detail in Chapter Five. For a recent survey, see Lotte Jensen (ed.), *The Roots of Nationalism: National Identity Formation in Early Modern Europe, 1600–1815* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016).

[40] A selection of relevant papers is also collected in Thomas F. X. Noble (ed.), *From Roman Provinces to Medieval Kingdoms* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

[41] Geary, *Myth of Nations*, chapter 1, 'A Poisoned Landscape: Ethnicity and Nationalism in the Nineteenth Century', 15–40.

[42] Ian Wood, *The Modern Origins of the Early Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[43] For good overviews and contextualisations of this debate, see Mischa Meier, *Geschichte der Völkerwanderung: Europa, Asien und Afrika vom 3. bis zum 8. Jahrhundert n. Chr.* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2019), 61–74 and James M. Harland and Matthias Friedrich, 'Introduction: The "Germanic" and Its Discontents', in Matthias Friedrich and James M. Harland (eds.), *Interrogating the 'Germanic': A Category and Its Use in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde 123 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021), 1–18.

subscribing to Nazi ideals – have come from Reinhard Wenkus, Herwig Wolfram, and Walter Pohl and explore the ways in which collective identities were constructed and articulated in the period surrounding the end of the Roman empire in late antique and early medieval Europe.[44] The 'Toronto School', following the work of Walter Goffart,[45] has argued for medieval authors who were self-aware and writing in response to contemporary political and cultural concerns, rather than preserving 'ancient' traditions unaltered. As Shami Ghosh writes (in a summary that he notes is 'something of a caricature'), the position of the Toronto School

> can sometimes seem to be that there is in fact no authentic material (that is to say, genuinely ancient, or at least genuinely barbarian, and not derived from written Roman sources) in any of the narratives, and nothing in them derives from oral tradition of any kind: these narratives are entirely constructed on the basis of earlier Latin and Greek texts, . . .

whereas 'the Vienna School can read information provided in an eighth-century source in the light of later, thirteenth-century material from Scandinavia, primarily on the basis of both sources being "Germanic"'.[46] Debate has thankfully moved forward from some of the more polarised publications of the late twentieth century, and most recent scholarship on 'barbarian' or other early medieval identities tends to acknowledge the difficulties of the source material, the necessity of unpicking assumptions made by earlier generations of scholars working in a more nationalistic vein, and the agency of medieval authors in actively constructing shared identities that reflected the political and cultural realities of their times.

In sum, then, contemporary scholars have been working to undo the damage caused by nationalist interpretations of medieval texts in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and demonstrate that the works containing medieval origin legends were constructed by their authors for

[44] Reinhard Wenkus, *Stammesbildung und Verfassung: Das Werden der Fruhmittelalterlichen Gentes* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1961); Herwig Wolfram, *Geschichte der Goten, von den Anfangen bis zur Mitte des sechsten Jahrhunderts: Entwurf ener historischen Ethnographie* (Munich: Beck, 1979); Walter Pohl (ed.), *Kingdoms of the Empire: The Integration of Barbarians in Late Antiquity* (Leiden: Brill, 1997); 'Ethnic Names and Identities in the British Isles: A Comparative Perspective', in John Hines (ed.), *The Anglo-Saxons from the Migration Period to the Eighth Century: An Ethnographic Perspective* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1997), 7–32; Walter Pohl and Helmut Reimitz (eds.), *Strategies of Distinction: The Construction of Ethnic Identity Communities 300–800* (Leiden: Brill, 1998); Walter Pohl, H.-W. Goetz, and J. Jarnut (eds.) *Regna and Gentes: The Relationship between Late Antique and Early Medieval Peoples and Kingdoms in the Transformation of the Roman World* (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

[45] Goffart, *Narrators of Barbarian History*.

[46] Shami Ghosh, *Writing the Barbarian Past: Studies in Early Medieval Historical Narrative* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 17.

particular political and cultural purposes at the time of their composition. As Goffart puts it, 'the distant past, of which no one has a direct memory, bears on what persons want their collectivity to be or to become'.[47] Helmut Reimitz's 2015 monograph, *History, Frankish Identity and the Framing of Western Ethnicity, 550–850*, demonstrates these approaches in action for the origin stories of the Frankish kingdom.[48] As he writes in the introduction to his study:

> This book is thus not a history of *the* Franks. It is a history of how people in late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages used and shaped images and imaginations of Frankish identity in their efforts to make sense of their social world, and a history that reveals how early medieval people reflected on questions about who the Franks had been, what they had become and what they should be.[49]

This approach provides valuable insights into the construction of identities in the early medieval period. Yet such methodologies have not yet been applied to the origin legends of the early medieval insular region as a whole.

Relatedly and concurrently to the rise of nationalism in the modern era, the growth of philology as an academic field of study was a significant contributing factor to the fracturing of material from the early medieval insular region along modern national lines.[50] Ironically, at the same time as the discovery of the Indo-European language family unearthed relationships between European languages which for the most part had been previously unknown, philology and nationalism worked hand-in-hand to segregate the study of each of these languages (and the texts written 'in' them, both linguistically and geographically) into separate departments and fields: as Ghosh has noted, 'for the most part, the Latin "national" histories . . . have not been studied in conjunction with the epics and brief vernacular narratives . . . the one group is thought to be "history", while the other is "literature", and they have accordingly largely been examined by scholars of different disciplines'.[51] At best, schools of Celtic Studies taught medieval Irish and Welsh while those of Germanic Studies focused on Old English and Old Norse. While there were some notable exceptions – amongst whom Hector Munro Chadwick and Nora Kershaw Chadwick and Kenneth Hurlstone Jackson in particular were

[47] Walter Goffart, 'Does the Distant Past Impinge on the Invasion Age Germans?' in Andrew Gillett (ed.), *On Barbarian Identity: Critical Approaches to Ethnicity in the Early Middle Ages* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2002), 21–37; repr. in Noble (ed.), *From Roman Provinces to Medieval Kingdoms*, 91–109 at 93.

[48] Helmut Reimitz, *History, Frankish Identity and the Framing of Western Ethnicity, 550–850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

[49] Reimitz, *Frankish Identity*, 2–3 (emphasis original).

[50] See Geary, *Myth of Nations*, 29–40.

[51] Ghosh, *Writing the Barbarian Past*, 6.

responsible for shaping the field of comparative insular studies[52] – overall, the result has been a situation where material from disparate linguistic traditions was rarely studied together, and thus early medieval origin legends have been separated on romantically conceived 'nationalist' grounds.

Intellectual Connections in Early Medieval Britain and Ireland and the Case for Comparative Study

Yet as this book demonstrates, the situation on the ground in the early medieval insular region was rather different from modern prejudices – that people in the Middle Ages were linguistically and geographically isolated – would have us believe. The Northumbrian monk Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, completed in the early eighth century, provides an illustrative snapshot of such connections. When surveying the island of Britain and its inhabitants, Bede remarks:

Haec in praesenti iuxta numerum librorum quibus lex diuina scripta est, quinque gentium linguis unam eandemque summae ueritatis et uerae sublimitatis scientiam scrutatur et confitetur, Anglorum uidelicet Brettonum Scottorum Pictorum et Latinorum, quae meditatione scripturarum ceteris omnibus est facta communis.

(At the present time, there are five languages in Britain, just as the divine law is written in five books, all devoted to seeking out and setting forth one and the same kind of wisdom, namely the knowledge of sublime truth and of true sublimity. These are the English, British, Irish, Pictish, as well as the Latin languages; through the study of the scriptures, Latin is in general use among them all.)[53]

[52] All have extensive bibliographies, but the Chadwicks are perhaps best remembered for their joint comparative study, *The Growth of Literature*, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932–40), Nora for her edited volume *Celt and Saxon: Studies in the Early British Border*, Cambridge Studies on Early Britain 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), and Jackson for his *Language and History in Early Britain* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1953). For biographical details, see their respective entries in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*; for bibliographies, their respective entries in CODECS: Collaborative Online Database and e-Resources for Celtic Studies, published by the A.G. van Hamel Foundation for Celtic Studies (www.vanhamel.nl/codecs/Home) at www.vanhamel.nl/codecs/Show:Bibliography/Browse/Contributors; and for both biographical detail and bibliographies, see the respective chapters in Michael Lapidge (ed.), *Interpreters of Early Medieval Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 2002).

[53] All citations to the *Historia Ecclesiastica* will be given by book, chapter, and page number to Bertram Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors (ed. and trans.), *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969; repr. 2007), from which all translations are taken; here i.1, 16–17. See also Michael Lapidge (ed.), *Beda: Storia Degli Inglesi (Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum)*, with Italian translation by Paolo Chiesa, 2 vols: vol.

Bede's survey emphasises that Latin serves as a connective *lingua franca* amongst the peoples of Britain at the same time as he introduces their respective vernaculars.

The *Historia Ecclesiastica* also contains numerous examples of groups and individuals moving matter-of-factly across perceived linguistic boundaries.[54] The substantial Irish influence in Northumbria and on the early Anglo-Saxon church that the *Historia Ecclesiastica* documents has been well studied.[55] Yet Bede also shows us Northumbrian kings who spoke fluent Old Irish thanks to their time in exile, to the extent that:

> Vbi pulcherrimo saepe spectaculo contigit, ut euangelizante antistite, qui Anglorum linguam perfecte non nouerat, ipse rex suis ducibus ac ministris interpres uerbi existeret caelestis, quia nimirum tam longo exilii sui tempore linguam Scottorum iam plene didicerat.
>
> (It was indeed a beautiful sight when the bishop was preaching the gospel, to see the king acting as interpreter of the heavenly word for his ealdormen and thegns, for the bishop was not completely at home in the English tongue, while the king had gained a perfect knowledge of Irish during the long period of his exile.)[56]

Elsewhere throughout the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, we witness such historical realities as the political alliance between the pagan Anglo-Saxon King Penda of Mercia and the British King Cadwallon of Gwynedd,[57] or even the disastrously divisive conference between British bishops on the one hand and Augustine and Æthelberht on the other, followed by Æthelfrith of Northumbria's slaughter of 1200 unarmed monks from Bangor-is-y-coed.[58] While Bede makes no direct comment on the linguistic features of such scenes, the reality of historical moments such as these is

I (books I–II) and vol. II (books III–V) (Milan: Fondazione Lorenzo Valla, 2008 and 2010) and J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People: A Historical Commentary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988; repr. paperback 1993).

[54] For more on this subject, see Walter Pohl, 'Telling the Difference: Signs of Ethnic Identity', in Pohl and Reimitz (eds.), *Strategies of Distinction*; repr. in Noble (ed.), *From Roman Provinces to Medieval Kingdoms*, 120–67 at 124–7 and Elizabeth M. Tyler (ed.), *Conceptualizing Multilingualism in England, c. 800–1250* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011).

[55] For a recent comprehensive survey, see Sarah McCann, *Bede's 'Plures De Scottorum Regione': The Irish in the 'Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum'* (Unpublished PhD Thesis, National University of Ireland, Galway, 2013); see also Dorothy Whitelock, Rosamund McKitterick, and David Dumville (eds.), *Ireland in Early Mediaeval Europe: Studies in Memory of Kathleen Hughes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Próinséas Ní Chatháin and Michael Richter (eds.), *Ireland and Europe in the Early Middle Ages: Texts and Transmission/Irland und Europa im früheren Mittelalter: Texte und Überlieferung* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2002); and Roy Flechner and Sven Meeder (eds.), *The Irish in Early Medieval Europe: Identity, Culture and Religion* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

[56] HE iii.3; Colgrave and Mynors, 220–1. [57] HE ii.20. [58] HE ii.2.

that people had to understand one another in order to form political alliances or conduct theological debates. Each glimpse we have into the early medieval insular region reveals the extent to which perceived geographical and linguistic boundaries were in fact extremely porous.

A vibrant network of intellectual connections thus existed in historical reality amongst the peoples of early medieval Britain and Ireland. Yet these connections have not simply been unearthed by modern historians. Rather, they are acknowledged within the corpus of texts which forms the foundations of the present study. I have already mentioned the learned geographical tradition underlying the description of Britain in the beginning of the *Historia Brittonum*. An explicit acknowledgement of the intellectual debts that underlay a text such as this can be found in the famous 'Nennian' preface. This preface (which appears only in the 'Nennian recension' of the *Historia Brittonum*) reads:[59]

> Ego Nennius Sancti Elbodugi discipulus aliqua excerpta scribere curavi, quae hebitudo gentis Britanniae deiecerat, quia nullam peritiam habuerunt neque ullam commemorationem in libris posuerunt doctores illius insulae Britanniae. Ego autem coacervavi omne quod inveni tam de annalibus Romanorum quam de cronicis sanctorum patrum, et de scriptis Scottorum Saxonumque et ex traditione veterum nostrorum.
>
> (I, Nennius, pupil of the holy Elvodug, have undertaken to write down some extracts that the stupidity of the British cast out; for the scholars of the island of Britain had no skill, and set down no records in books. I have therefore made a heap of all that I have found, both from the Annals of the Romans and from the Chronicles of the Holy Fathers, and from the writings of the Irish and the English, and out of the tradition of our elders.)[60]

A long tradition of early scholarship took this statement and others like it at face value. As David Dumville put it, 'this has allowed historians of the post-War generation to believe that from this dolt's [Nennius's] uncritical heap can be extracted a quantity of usable historical evidence for the fifth to seventh centuries, deriving from good early sources which he has largely left unaltered'.[61] Dumville's work has made clear that earlier scholarly beliefs that medieval authors could be taken at their word when they cast themselves as guileless compilers only can no longer stand.[62] Current

[59] See Dumville, '"Nennius" and the *Historia Brittonum*'; Field, 'Nennius and His History'; and Guy, 'The Origins of the Compilation of Welsh Historical Texts in Harley 3859'. The 'Nennian recension' is preserved only in marginal notes to a copy of the 'Gildasian recension' in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 139 and the *Historia Brittonum*'s translation into Irish in the *Lebor Bretnach*; a strong case for its authenticity has nonetheless been made by Guy, 'The Origins of the Compilation of Welsh Historical Texts in Harley 3859'.

[60] Morris, *Nennius*, 50 and 9.

[61] Dumville, 'The Historical Value of the *Historia Brittonum*', 5.

[62] See bibliography in n. 1 above.

scholarly consensus reflects the historical reality – as Goffart and others have also demonstrated for the 'narrators of barbarian history' – that medieval authors were self-aware creators possessed of their own political agendas. Their texts were very much consciously shaped as the products of their time and cannot be treated as mere carbon copies of earlier sources, preserved largely unaltered.

Yet in arguing for the authorial agency which underlies texts like the *Historia Brittonum*, we must be careful that our scepticism of the Nennian preface's ostensible methodology does not cause us to overlook the valuable information it contains about the intellectual landscape of the insular region. The Nennian preface indicates that a wide range of sources were available to early medieval authors. 'The Annals of the Romans' indicates the circulation of historical texts from the classical and late antique intellectual traditions, while 'the Chronicles of the Holy Fathers' point to saints' lives, Biblical sources, and patristic commentary. 'The writings of the Irish and the English' reflect the availability of annals and historical and pseudohistorical narratives from the other peoples who inhabited the insular region, while 'the tradition of our elders' suggests that information about British history was indeed being passed down – perhaps orally? – despite the preface's earlier claims that British scholars set nothing down in books.[63] Indeed, throughout the text of the *Historia Brittonum*, we find the author matter-of-factly commenting on his access to external sources, in asides such as 'si quis scire voluerit quo tempore post diluvium habitata est haec insula, hoc experimentum bifarie inveni' (if anyone wants to know when this island was inhabited after the Flood, I find two alternative explanations)[64] or 'si quis autem scire voluerit quando vel quo tempore fuit inhabitabilis et deserta Hibernia, sic mihi peritissimi Scottorum nuntiaverunt' (if anyone wants to know when Ireland was inhabited and when it was deserted, this is what the Irish scholars have told me).[65]

The *Historia Brittonum* again serves as a valuable microcosm of the intellectual connections which form the focus of the present study. The peoples of early medieval Britain and Ireland did not exist in isolation and neither did their intellectual outputs. On the contrary, insular authors were deeply engaged with the broader world and drew on every set of materials at their disposal in order to construct narratives that contained as much detail as possible. A vibrant strand of recent scholarship has highlighted the extent to which transcultural connections shaped the early insular world.[66]

[63] Discussed further in Chapter One below, 45–58. [64] Morris, *Nennius*, 60 and 19.
[65] Morris, *Nennius*, 62 and 21.
[66] K.L. Maund, *Ireland, Wales and England in the Eleventh Century* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1991); Broun, *The Irish Identity of the Kingdom of the Scots*; Clare Downham, *Viking Kings of Britain and Ireland: The Dynasty of Ívarr to A.D. 1014* (Edinburgh: Dunedin

This book reveals that such intellectual connections included the origin stories of others than themselves. Early insular authors strove to write historical narratives that were complete: that is, of the region as a whole. This book thus underscores the connections that existed across Britain and Ireland before the twelfth century. The following chapters will draw together the intellectual connections that occurred across this corpus of material, the connections between the legendary ancestors of the peoples of Britain and Ireland that they themselves understood to be part of their origin stories, and the connections that formed across time as these origin legends grew as a corpus, building on one another to evolve into a story about the history of the early medieval insular region as a whole, before examining how these connections began to break down during the early modern period.

Origin Legends and the Construction of Identities in the Early Medieval West

The mode of historical writing discussed in this book can trace its beginnings to the end of the western Roman empire in the late fifth century. As the Romans had spread across the early medieval world, they contrasted the 'civilised' *populus Romanus* with the 'barbarian' *gentes* they encountered (many of whom, of course, would themselves become gradually absorbed into the Roman empire).[67] Firsthand written information about non-Roman peoples during this time does not exist, and it is only after the collapse of the Roman empire in the west, from roughly the sixth century onwards, that their stories (referred to in scholarship as 'native' or 'barbarian' histories) began to emerge.[68] In addition to the texts under study in this book – discussed in greater detail below – some of the most significant works of this nature include the following: a now-lost history of the Goths by Cassiodorus (early sixth century); the *De origine actibusque*

Academic Press, 2007); Patrick Sims-Williams, *Irish Influence on Medieval Welsh Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); T.M. Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons 350–1064* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Judith Jesch, *The Viking Diaspora* (London: Routledge, 2015); Lindy Brady, *Writing the Welsh Borderlands in Anglo-Saxon England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017); and Fiona Edmonds, *Gaelic Influence in the Northumbrian Kingdom: The Golden Age and the Viking Age* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2019).

[67] The literature on this subject is vast: for a balanced overview of the Roman impact on medieval Europe, see Chris Wickham, *The Inheritance of Rome: A History of Europe from 400–1000* (London: Allen Lane, 2009); for discussion of Roman ethnography and 'barbarian' ethnogenesis, see Geary, *The Myth of Nations*, 41ff.

[68] For good recent surveys of this process, see the introductions to Robert W. Rix, *The Barbarian North in Medieval Imagination: Ethnicity, Legend, and Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2015) and Ghosh, *Writing the Barbarian Past*.

Getarum of Jordanes (*c.*551, referred to as the *Getica*), which incorporates information from Cassiodorus; the *Decem Libri Historiarum* of Gregory of Tours (*c.*591, commonly referred to as the *Historia Francorum*); Isidore of Seville's *Historia de regibus Gothorum, Vandalorum et Suevorum*, *c.*624; the anonymous Frankish *Chronicle of Fredegar*, *c.*660; the anonymous *Origo Gentis Langobardorum* (late seventh century); the anonymous *Liber Historiae Francorum*, *c.*727; and Paul the Deacon's *Historia Langobardorum*, *c.*795. As these histories were written, they incorporated more than just contemporary events or those within living memory: their narratives stretched back into unrecorded prehistory to include accounts of the origins of peoples, *origo gentis* (pl. *origines gentium*).

Origin stories are pseudohistorical myths or legends about the emergence of a given people. They can be found in every culture and every time period, but origin legends in the early medieval European west often shared common characteristics because they relied on the same limited set of source materials (which grew and expanded over time). In her seminal article on *origines gentium*, Susan Reynolds classified them into four categories: those in some way derived from the text known as the 'Frankish Table of Nations';[69] those stemming ultimately from biblical genealogies (following the influence of Isidore of Seville); origin legends claiming descent from Troy; and those professing Scandinavian ancestry.[70] The origin legends of early medieval Europe have been well-served in recent scholarship, and this book is indebted to several foundational studies (in addition to those works already mentioned by Wolfram, Goffart, Geary, and Pohl). Alheydis Plassmann's *Origo gentis: Identitäts- und Legitimitätsstiftung in früh- und hochmittelalterlichen Herkunftserzählungen* and Magali Coumert's *Origines des peuples: les récits du haut moyen âge occidental (550–850)* are both meticulously written, exhaustive works which have surveyed a large swath of the texts containing origin material from the early medieval period in order to discover their relationship to the process of identity formation during the time in which they were written.[71] Both authors employ a welcome comparative approach in a field which has

[69] Walter Goffart, 'The Supposedly "Frankish" Table of Nations: An Edition and Study', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 17 (1983): 98–130; repr. in Walter Goffart, *Rome's Fall and After* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1989), 132–65; and Patrick Wadden, 'The Frankish Table of Nations in Insular Historiography', *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies* 72 (2016): 1–31. See discussion in Chapter One below, 54–5.

[70] Susan Reynolds, 'Medieval *Origines Gentium* and the Community of the Realm', *History* 68 (1983): 375–90. For a recent survey of these categories, see Rix, *The Barbarian North*, 15–19 (Rix condenses to three categories: Trojan, biblical, and Northern).

[71] Alheydis Plassmann, *Origo gentis: Identitäts- und Legitimitätsstiftung in früh- und hochmittelalterlichen Herkunftserzählungen* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2006); Magali Coumert, *Origines des peuples: les récits du haut moyen âge occidental (550–850)* (Paris: Institut d'études augustiniennes, 2007; dist. Turnhout: Brepols, 2007).

tended to focus rather narrowly on stories of 'Germanic' origins, and both are also careful to situate individual texts in the time and place of their composition and to explore, as much as is possible, the aims of individual authors in writing them.

Plassmann studies how origin legends themselves could shape group identities, as well as how the texts containing them could be written to legitimise identities which already existed. Moving from the early medieval period to the high Middle Ages, she finds evidence of a shift away from origin stories centred around a *gens* and towards those written to support individual kingdoms or noble families. Coumert's book challenges the theory of ethnogenesis, tracing the reliance of medieval works containing origin narratives on earlier Latin, Greek, and biblical texts. Her conclusions focus on the instability of supposedly 'national' origin legends from one generation to the next and the crucial role of political elites in shaping them. While Plassmann's book has been associated with the 'Vienna School' and Coumert's with the 'Toronto School' of methodologies, the two are united in giving us close studies of the works containing early medieval origin material in their historical and textual context and reminding us of the importance of contemporary political concerns to our understanding of these works. Other foundational studies and important recent examinations of early medieval origin legends have been made by Ian Wood, Peter Heather, Guy Halsall, Thomas S. Burns, Alexander Callander Murray, Michael Kulikowski, Andrew Gillett, Patrick Amory, and Helmut Reimitz.[72] These studies of the continental material have underscored the constructed nature of early medieval origin stories. Current methodological approaches focus on a careful unpicking of the complex textual histories of the works containing origin legends in order to understand as much as possible of the aims of the authors who included them in their narratives.

Much of the focus of the academic study of early medieval origin legends has sought to uncover the extent to which these stories had an

[72] Each of these scholars has a substantial bibliography, and the following should be taken as representative samples: Ian Wood, 'Defining the Franks: Frankish Origins in Early Medieval Historiography', in Ford, Johnson, and Murray (eds.), *Concepts of National Identity in the Middle Ages*, 47–57; Peter Heather, *Goths and Romans, 332–489* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991); Guy Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West, 376–568* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Thomas S. Burns, *Rome and the Barbarians, 100 B.C.–A.D. 400* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003); Alexander Callander Murray, 'Reinhard Wenskus on "Ethnogenesis", Ethnicity, and the Origin of the Franks' (39–68) and Michael Kulikowski, 'Nation versus Army: A Necessary Contrast?' (69–84) in Gillett (ed.), *On Barbarian Identity*; Patrick Amory, *People and Identity in Ostrogothic Italy, 489–554* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); and Reimitz, *History, Frankish Identity, and the Framing of Western Ethnicity*.

impact on the process of identity formation.[73] Reynolds expresses a position typical of those scholars who have argued for strong links between the two when she writes, 'from the sixth to the fourteenth centuries at least, peoples (*gentes*, *populi*, *nationes*) were normally thought of as social and political communities and ... myths of the common origin of a people served to increase or express its sense of solidarity'.[74] Yet as detailed above, scholarship on origin legends and identity formation has often dovetailed with a search for an extended nationalism, and the two can be difficult to untangle. Scholarship on early medieval origin legends still holds many unanswered questions. How unified were the identities expressed in these stories? Do they represent the perspectives of anyone other than a tiny group of elite authors and patrons? Who were the texts containing origin material written for, and who ultimately read (or heard) them? We can guess at some of the answers to some of these questions, but our understanding is nowhere near complete, and that means conclusions about the role of origin stories in the process of identity formation must be made with great care. As Ghosh writes, 'the existence of narratives of origins does not really provide us with a guide to how to interpret them or understand their significance among any contemporary audience; in most cases, we do not even know who the audience was'.[75] This book, therefore, is concerned with the available evidence that can be studied, namely the texts containing early medieval origin material and their relationship to one another.

My conclusions thus do not follow the Wenkus/Wolfram model, which argues for some degree of a cohesive ethnic identity perpetuated

[73] See e.g. Herwig Wolfram, '*Origo et religio*: Ethnic Traditions and Literature in Early Medieval Texts', *Early Medieval Europe* 3 (1994): 19–38; Harmut Kugler, 'Das Eigene aus der Fremde. Über Herkunftssagen der Franken, Sachsen und Bayern', in Harmut Kugler (ed.), *Interregionalität der deutschen Literatur im europäischen Mittelalter* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1995), 175–93; Jonathan Barlow, 'Gregory of Tours and the Myth of the Trojan Origins of the Franks', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 29 (1995): 86–95; Eugen Ewig, 'Trojamythos und fränkische Frühgeschichte', in Dieter Geuenich (ed.), *Die Franken und Alemannen bis zur 'Schlacht bei Zülpich'*, Ergänzungsband zum Reallexikon für Germanische Alterumskunde 19 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1998), 1–30; Hans-Hubert Anton, 'Troja-Herkunft, origo gentis und frühe Verfaßtheit der Franken in der gallisch-fränkischen Tradition des 5. bis 8. Jahrhunderts', *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung* 108 (2000): 1–30; Herwig Wolfram, Walter Pohl, Hans-Hubert Anton, Ian Wood, and Matthias Becher, 'Origo Gentis', in *Reallexikon für Germanische Altertumskunde*, 2nd edn., vol. 22 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003), 174–210; and Walter Pohl, 'Narratives of Origin and Migration in Early Medieval Europe: Problems of Interpretation', *The Medieval History Journal* 21 (2018): 192–221.

[74] Reynolds, 'Medieval *Origines Gentium*', 375; see also the essays in Yitzhak Hen and Matthew Innes (eds.), *The Uses of the Past in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

[75] Ghosh, *Writing the Barbarian Past*, 20.

by a self-aware group (albeit a small group of elites). For that reason, the focus of this study will remain textual, rather than introducing archaeological or DNA evidence. Scholars such as Sebastian Brather, Florin Curta, Robin Fleming, and many others have explored the limitations of attempting to draw direct lines between archaeological objects and 'ethnic' identities.[76] As Goetz, Jarnut, and Pohl write in their concluding remarks to *Regna and Gentes*: 'A comparable problem is inherent in the archaeological evidence which consists mainly of grave goods, whereas there is comparatively little evidence which could throw a light on the settlements themselves. Grave goods, however, are as much a reflection of the concept of "the other world" as they are a mirror of earthly society.'[77] Likewise, stable isotope analysis may be able to tell us where someone spent his or her early childhood, but it cannot reveal to which group(s) a person considered himself or herself to belong during his or her lifetime. The present study is less focused on how origin stories shaped ethnic identities than how the texts containing those stories were shaped by one another, and my conclusions are thus more closely aligned with Coumert's, in arguing that early medieval origin legends were in constant development. This position to a certain degree follows that of Goffart and the Toronto School, the difference being that while the latter looks backward to the influence of classical and late antique texts, the present study also looks 'sideways' to contemporary sources (and acknowledges that these could be oral as well as written).[78] An oversimplified summary of both the Toronto and Vienna School positions would find them both invested in a single version of the past: for Vienna 'an' ethnic identity; for Toronto a single authorial vision. In some way, that is, most previous studies have focused on the ways in which medieval authors looked to 'their' past. This book, however, focuses on how the history of a region – rather than a single people – was written, arguing that early insular origin legends shaped one another as medieval authors worked to fill in the blanks of their shared history.

[76] Sebastian Brather, *Ethnische Interpretationen in Der Frühgeschichtlichen Archäologie: Geschichte, Grundlagen Und Alternativen* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004); Florin Curta, *The Making of the Slavs: History and Archaeology of the Lower Danube Region, c. 500–700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) and 'Some Remarks on Ethnicity in Medieval Archaeology', *Early Medieval Europe* 15 (2007): 159–62; Robin Fleming, *Britain after Rome: The Fall and Rise, 400–1070* (London: Allen Lane, 2010).

[77] Goetz, Jarnut, and Pohl (eds.), *Regna and Gentes*, 'Conclusion', 602.

[78] The possibility of oral sources for origin stories has been much discussed; good recent summaries are in Rix, *The Barbarian North*, 19ff. and Ghosh, *Writing the Barbarian Past*, 11ff. This book holds with recent scholarly consensus by accepting the likelihood that early medieval authors incorporated oral as well as written sources into their works, while retaining a certain amount of scepticism that any oral sources were 'preserved' in an unaltered state. Because my focus is on textual influence over time, oral sources are not treated at length in the discussion to follow.

Sources, Legends, and Arguments

This book focuses on two different types of textual material, and so it will be helpful at the outset to survey each corpus and briefly describe the relationship between them. Origin legends are brief pseudohistorical narratives about the origins of a given people. In early medieval Britain and Ireland, they were embedded within longer historical and pseudohistorical narratives that sought to relate what was known about the region as a whole from prehistory up to the present day. In chronological order, then, the main sources for this book are the sixth-century British Gildas's *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae*;[79] the Anglo-Saxon monk Bede's (672–735) *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, which was completed in 731;[80] the ninth-century British Latin *Historia Brittonum*, written in 829–30;[81] the *Lebor Bretnach*, an eleventh-century Irish translation and expansion of the *Historia Brittonum*;[82] and the *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, a compilation of Irish origin material first put together in the eleventh century but which clearly drew on older literary traditions that no longer survive independently.[83] This book's main focus, then, is a corpus of

[79] Michael Winterbottom (ed. and trans.), *Gildas: The Ruin of Britain and Other Works* (London: Phillimore, 1978). This is based on the earlier edition in Theodore Mommsen (ed.), *Chronica Minora Saec. IV. V. VI. VII*, vol. III, MGH Scriptores, Auctores Antiquissimi XIII (Berlin: Weidmann, 1898), 1–85.

[80] See bibliography in n. 53 above.

[81] See bibliography in n. 1 above.

[82] There are two editions of this text. J.H. Todd (ed. and trans.), with additional notes by A. Herbert, *Leabhar Breathnach Annso Sis: The Irish Version of the Historia Britonum of Nennius* (Dublin, 1848), while thorough in its inclusion of all material present in the manuscripts containing the *Lebor Bretnach*, relegates additions to the *Lebor Bretnach* (where the material is not present in the *Historia Brittonum*) to the end of what is deemed the *Lebor Bretnach* proper, the appendices, and the additional notes. Todd also did not have access to one manuscript containing the *Lebor Bretnach* (the Book of Ui Maine) which was still in private hands at the time of his edition. The most recent edition is A. G. van Hamel, *Lebor Bretnach: The Irish Version of the Historia Britonum Ascribed to Nennius* (Dublin: Stationary Office, 1932), though here too there are problems: van Hamel's stemma were quickly refuted; see Ferdinand Lot's review of van Hamel's edition in *Nennius et l'historia brittonum: étude critique suivie d'une édition des diverses versions de ce texte* (Paris: Champion, 1934). See David N. Dumville, 'The Textual History of the "Lebor Bretnach": A Preliminary Study', *Éigse* 16 (1976): 255–73. Text of the *Lebor Bretnach* is taken from van Hamel's edition and translations are modernised from Todd's.

[83] The sole edition of this text is R.A. Stewart Macalister (ed. and trans.), *Lebor Gabála Érenn: The Book of the Taking of Ireland*, 5 vols. (London, 1938–56), from which text and modernised translations are cited. For discussion of the *Lebor Gabála*'s textual difficulties and the challenges of working with Macalister's very problematic edition, see Liam Ó Buachalla, 'The *Lebar Gabála* or Book of Invasions of Ireland: Notes on Its Construction', *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archeological Society* 67 (1962): 70–79; R. Mark Scowcroft, '*Leabhar Gabhála* Part I: The Growth of the Text', *Ériu* 38 (1987): 81–142 and '*Leabhar Gabhála* Part II: The Growth of the Tradition', *Ériu* 39 (1988): 1–66; John Carey, *A New Introduction to Lebor Gabála Érenn, The Book of the Taking of Ireland* (Dublin: Irish Texts Society, 1993) and *The Irish National Origin-Legend: Synthetic Pseudohistory* (Cambridge: Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic, 1994); and

longer historical and pseudohistorical narratives written in Britain and Ireland roughly before the coming of the Normans. While previous studies have considered some of this material in comparison, no study to date has examined the origin legends of all four insular *gentes* together, despite their close historical, textual, and cultural connections. Yet it is only by doing so that we are able to understand the full picture of the development of origin stories in the early medieval insular world.

The challenge of working with this corpus of texts, apart from its obvious linguistic diversity, is that roughly half of them have complicated manuscript traditions and lack complete modern editions. A comparatively small amount of material from Anglo-Saxon England has survived, and Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* has long had an excellent modern edition. (It is, however, illustrative that the vernacular *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, which has a more complicated manuscript tradition than Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, only recently received a complete edition of all its manuscripts.)[84] The same is true for Gildas's *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae*. Although both Gildas's highly allusive Latin and the murky history of the events he narrates are notoriously difficult to untangle,[85] the text itself is uncomplicated and has a stable modern edition. Unfortunately, this is not the case for the remainder of the British and Irish material. The *Historia Brittonum* had several nineteenth- and early twentieth-century editions, none of them satisfactory.[86] David Dumville has published excellent individual editions of three recensions of the *Historia Brittonum*.[87] However, to date there are not editions of all the recensions, nor is there an edition that seeks to take all the recensions into account. Much about it remains uncertain.[88] The most recent edition of the Old Irish *Lebor Bretnach* presents a good base text, but its editor A.G. van Hamel's proposed manuscript stemma were quickly refuted,[89] meaning that understanding additions and alterations in each recension – crucially

the essays in John Carey (ed.), *Lebor Gabála Érenn: Textual History and Pseudo-History* (Dublin: Irish Texts Society, 2009).

[84] David Dumville and Simon Keynes (gen. eds.), *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1983–): Janet M. Bately, *Volume 3: MS A* (1986); Simon Taylor, *Volume 4: MS B* (1983); Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe, *Volume 5: MS C* (2001); Patrick W. Conner, *Volume 10: The Abingdon Chronicle, AC 956–1066 (MS C, with Reference to BDE)* (1996); G.P. Cubbin, *Volume 6: MS D* (1996); Susan Irvine, *Volume 7: MS E* (2004); and Peter S. Baker, *Volume 8: MS F* (2000).

[85] See e.g. Michael Lapidge and David Dumville (eds.), *Gildas: New Approaches* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1984).

[86] See discussion in Dumville, 'The Historical Value of the *Historia Brittonum*', 3–4.

[87] Dumville (ed.), *The 'Vatican' Recension; The Historia Brittonum, vol. 7: The Sawley and Durham Recensions* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1986); and *The Historia Brittonum, vol. 2: The Chartres Recension* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1988).

[88] See Guy, 'The Origins of the Compilation of Welsh Historical Texts in Harley 3859'.

[89] See bibliography in n. 82 above.

important to an appreciation of the development of the text over time – is still very difficult. And as for the final text in our corpus, the manuscript tradition of the medieval Irish *Lebor Gabála Érenn* is enormously complicated, and it has received only one modern edition, which is so notoriously difficult to work with that it has become a truism among scholars of early medieval Irish literature that 'obscurities in the text of the printed edition can be cleared up' by turning back to the manuscripts.[90]

These textual difficulties are not insignificant and have prevented the comprehensive study of much of this material. However, this book takes the position that waiting for ideal editions – which may never in fact be published – has impeded interdisciplinary scholarship and thus our understanding of these texts. My policy in this book is therefore to work with the most complete published edition of each work that exists, noting faults and problems and the extent to which they affect interpretation, in order to understand the intellectual landscape of the early medieval insular region as a whole.

I shall now turn to the origin legends themselves. This will by necessity be a brief survey of complicated material that will be treated at length in the chapters to follow. Again, however, it will be helpful to provide a short summary at the outset of the 'plot' of each origin legend under study, condensed in each case out of one or more of the works listed above. The British origin legend follows eponymous ancestor Brutus, exiled from Italy for killing his mother (in childbirth) and his father (with an arrow in a hunting accident) as prophesied before his birth. Brutus wanders the earth before arriving in Britain, then founded in his name. The Irish are said to have had several waves of ancestors who came from continental Europe – particularly Spain – before being killed off *en masse* as punishment for a series of sins. Eventually, one group survives long enough to populate the island, after defeating its supernatural previous inhabitants. The Picts are reported to have come from Scythia, in the form of seven brothers and one sister who fled from a series of kings attempting to marry the sister without a dowry. They first attempt to settle in Ireland, but are instead given Irish wives and sent away to settle in the north of Britain. Finally, the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes are tribes of mercenaries from the continental Germanic regions who are hired by the Britons to defend them from the predations of the Picts and Irish after the Roman withdrawal from Britain. They do so but turn on the Britons and claim territory as their own, remaining in southern Britain and expanding gradually westward over the next several hundred years.

[90] Scowcroft, '*Leabhar Gabhála* Part I', 83, quoting (in another context) E.G. Quin, 'An Unpublished Fragment of "Feis Tighe Chonáin"', *Éigse* 4 (1943): 1–5.

Needless to say, these origin legends do not preserve an accurate record of the history of 'dark ages' Britain and Ireland. Rather, these stories reflect narratives that insular peoples between the sixth and twelfth centuries found politically or culturally useful at the time they were writing broader historical narratives. In exploring these origin narratives as legendary texts, this book also makes the important point that they were never stable literary objects, either. No 'original' origin story existed for each of the four peoples of the early medieval insular region, passed down unaltered across the generations, better preserved in some texts than others. This book demonstrates that these stories are expansions of narratives shaped in response to a corpus of stories that had been previously written. Early medieval origin narratives grew and changed over time due to the influence of other texts in the insular corpus, and the origin material in the region was shaped in response to the corpus as a whole.

This book does not present the origin stories of the four insular peoples separately, because one of its key arguments is that these legends were not treated as distinctive during the early medieval period. In each of the longer historical and pseudohistorical works containing insular origin legends, these stories are simply presented together. The present study is thus structured thematically and demonstrates how a shared set of concerns within the corpus of early insular origin narratives grew and influenced one another over time. Each origin legend from the region focuses on an ancestor exiled from a former homeland before arriving to Britain or Ireland, and as we shall see, themes of exile, kin-slaying, intermarriage and incest grew to take on particular significance within the early medieval insular corpus of origin material. This is not to say these concerns themselves are unique – as noted above, every culture has myths of origin, and these common elements have been well explored in other late antique and early medieval intellectual traditions. Yet what this book adds to the conversation is the extent to which the connections present in the corpus of texts containing early insular origin legends shaped these narratives themselves.

Chapter One, therefore, lays out the extent of the intellectual and textual connections that existed across this corpus of early medieval insular material. Specialists on individual texts and manuscripts will already be aware of many of these connections, yet they have never been comprehensively articulated for the corpus of insular historical and pseudohistorical writing as a whole. This chapter thus provides the 'hard evidence' for the extent to which the corpus of texts containing origin narratives influenced one another during the early medieval period. Chapter One demonstrates that early medieval chroniclers, historians, and scholars were interested

not solely in writing the story of their own people, but also in collecting together the histories of the peoples of the insular region as a whole.

The central chapters of this book – Chapters Two, Three, and Four – focus on the development and growth of these origin legends over time by studying a key subset of themes that came to take on particular significance within this corpus, namely exile (Chapter Two), kin-slaying (Chapter Three), and intermarriage and incest (Chapter Four). Tracing the expansion and increasing centrality of these themes over time allows us to witness the influence that individual texts within the corpus of material containing early insular origin legends had on the development of these legends themselves. Each of these core chapters follows a common pattern. First, I examine the relationship of these central themes to the biblical, classical, and late antique sources that influenced later insular texts. Origin stories in early medieval Britain and Ireland were not *sui generis*, but rather participated in longstanding intellectual traditions that they built on, and expanded as they sought to explain the origins of peoples in the insular region. Second, for each of these core themes, each chapter will introduce relevant legal and historical sources for each of the four peoples under consideration in this book. While both laws and historical incidents having to do with exile, kin-slaying, and intermarriage and incest are known by specialists of Anglo-Saxon, Irish, British and Pictish history, they have never been comprehensively studied from a comparative perspective, nor has the legal and historical material been placed alongside these origin legends. Doing so allows us to better understand why these themes had particular cultural relevance during the time and place that these origin stories were written and expanded. Third, using the textual connections previously discussed in Chapter One, I demonstrate the growth and expansion of each of these key themes within the corpus of insular origin material due to the influence of other works. The texts containing these origin stories were interconnected in complex ways, and the legends themselves grew and developed together as the corpus expanded.

Finally, Chapter Five looks forward in time to explore the transformation of this early medieval origin material in historical chronicles written by the first nationalist antiquarians and scholars in the early modern period. The origin legends which were first developed in the early medieval period were further expanded during the high Middle Ages, with great enthusiasm. The proliferation of historical writing during the so-called 'twelfth-century renaissance' has been well-studied in general.[91] In the insular

[91] The classic study is Charles Homer Haskins, *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1927); see further Paul Magdalino (ed.), *The Perception of the Past in Twelfth-Century Europe* (London: The Hambledon Press,

region, there was an explosion of interest in origin legends after the appearance of Geoffrey of Monmouth's influential *De gestis Britonum* in the first half of the twelfth century.[92] However, while the corpus of legendary origin stories from the high Middle Ages has been well studied,[93] the ends of the historical narrative have not been fully joined together. Antiquarians writing in the early modern period were including the same origin legends that we find in our sources from the early medieval period in their later chronicles, yet they were using them in very different ways. While – as this book demonstrates – the origin narratives of the early medieval period are used to form cohesive histories of the insular region as a whole, early modern chronicles used this origin material to shift away from holistic insular narratives and towards a divisive nationalism. Chapter Five focuses on four representative samples from the voluminous corpus of late medieval and early modern historical works: John of Fordun's *Chronica gentis Scotorum* (1385), later continued by Walter Bower as the *Scotichronicon* (1447); Holinshed's *Chronicles* (first edition 1577; second edition 1587); William Camden's *Britannia* (first edition 1586); and Seathrún Céitinn / Geoffrey Keating's *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn* (completed 1634). This final chapter reveals how early medieval origin material was put to new uses during the early modern period as part of a shift towards a divisive nationalism from what had been an encyclopaedic approach to the history of the insular region as a whole.

1992); C. Warren Hollister (ed.), *Anglo-Norman Political Culture and the Twelfth-Century Renaissance: Proceedings of the Borchard Conference on Anglo-Norman History, 1995* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1997); Peter Damian-Grint, *The New Historians of the Twelfth-Century Renaissance: Inventing Vernacular Authority* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1999); and R.N. Swanson, *The Twelfth-Century Renaissance* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999).

[92] See Joshua Byron Smith and Georgia Henley (eds.), *A Companion to Geoffrey of Monmouth* (Leiden: Brill, 2020).

[93] See discussion below in Chapter Five.

1 Textual Connections

A key argument of this book is that it is impossible to separate the growth of any one of the insular origin narratives from that of the larger corpus of historical and pseudohistorical writing which contained them. This initial chapter therefore presents the evidence for the textual connections between these works in one place, while the chapters to follow will analyse the historical, literary, and cultural implications of these connections. A crucial part of this discussion will of course centre around known connections between texts in the corpus of insular historical and pseudohistorical works, and so this chapter outlines the sources and later reuses of each major work under consideration. This survey is, by necessity, in part a synthesis of the work of previous scholars. It is presented here because while studies of the individual texts discussed below are generally well-aware of their connections to other works in the insular corpus, broader scholarship on the early medieval period still treats so-called 'Irish', 'Welsh', 'Anglo-Saxon', and 'Scottish' literary and historical traditions as disparate. Yet as Robert W. Rix has noted, 'the understanding of the end product is enriched by making sense of the sources utilized to create its authority'.[1] In compiling scholarship on the transcultural nature of the works which contained insular origin material and explicating the layers of textual connection between them, this chapter follows the methodology of scholars such as Goffart, Plassmann, Coumert, and Reimitz in overturning the common perception that the authors of these texts were working in proto-national isolation and instead revealing the textual connections that shaped the intellectual landscape of the early medieval insular region.[2]

Compiling this information in one place, moreover, allows me to make the new connections and conclusions which form the bulk of this chapter's arguments. My focus is on three simple yet important points, whose

[1] Rix, *The Barbarian North*, 19.
[2] Goffart, *Narrators of Barbarian History*; Plassmann, *Origo gentis*; Coumert, *Origines des peuples*; Reimitz, *History, Frankish Identity and the Framing of Western Ethnicity*.

impact has not yet been fully appreciated. The first is that three out of the four early insular origin legends are first recorded in a work whose author was writing outside that group itself. In other words, the Anglo-Saxon origin legend is first recorded by the British Gildas; the Pictish origin legend by the Anglo-Saxon Bede; and the Irish origin legend by the British author of the *Historia Brittonum*. The textual ghosts on which these authors drew shed invaluable light onto the web of intellectual connections within the corpus of works containing early insular origin material, as they reveal moments where a given text has got its information from a source that no longer survives.[3] They also show us that early insular authors were not as interested in writing the histories of their 'own' people in a vacuum as much as they were with filling in gaps in the historical narrative from every available source.

My second simple point is the frequency with which moments of direct connection between texts in the corpus of early insular works containing origin material are acknowledged within these works themselves; that is, moments in which a text declares that it has got its information about a given episode from another source. When these moments are compiled, their cumulative weight and commonplace nature both demonstrate the intellectual connectivity of this corpus and underscore the extent to which its authors sought out all available information as they wrote. The third and final point that this chapter explores is that these texts draw no value distinctions between 'internal' and 'external' versions of a given people's origin story. In other words, the author of the *Historia Brittonum* does not prioritise 'the tradition of our elders' over 'the writings of the Irish and the English'.[4] The narratives of early insular origin legends were not treated as codified by the texts that preserved them. Any information that added knowledge was welcomed, demonstrating the important role of the corpus of insular historical works as a whole in shaping the growth of these narratives. Together, these patterns of textual transmission underscore the interconnected nature of the corpus of works containing origin material in the early medieval insular region.

Before I turn to the texts themselves, it is important to clarify the terminology used throughout this book. My focus is the origin stories of the peoples who inhabited the islands of Britain and Ireland from roughly

[3] This process functions in the same way that references to *deperdita* in surviving documentary sources nonetheless provide valuable information: see Warren Brown, Marios Costambeys, Matthew Innes, and Adam Kosto, 'Introduction', in Warren Brown, Marios Costambeys, Matthew Innes, and Adam Kosto (eds.), *Documentary Culture and the Laity in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 1–16 at 15.

[4] Morris, *Nennius*, 50 and 9.

the fifth to the twelfth centuries. As we have seen in the Introduction, early medieval insular authors recorded their understanding that contemporary Britain and Ireland were inhabited by four distinct *gentes*, around each of whom, as this book demonstrates, increasingly complex origin legends gradually began to accrete. As the author of the *Historia Brittonum* wrote:

In ea [Brittania] sunt viginti octo civitates et innumerabilia promuntoria cum innumeris castellis ex lapidibus et latere fabricatis, et in ea habitant quattuor gentes: Scotti, Picti, Saxones atque Brittones.

(In it [Britain] are twenty-eight cities and headlands without number, together with innumerable forts built of stone and brick, and in it live four nations, the Irish, the Picts, the Saxons and the British.)[5]

Here delineated as four *gentes*, the insular peoples were also commonly distinguished by language, as in Bede's remarks that

Haec in praesenti iuxta numerum librorum quibus lex diuina scripta est, quinque gentium linguis unam eandemque summae ueritatis et uerae sublimitatis scientiam scrutatur et confitetur, Anglorum uidelicet Brettonum Scottorum Pictorum et Latinorum, quae meditatione scripturarum ceteris omnibus est facta communis.

(At the present time, there are five languages in Britain, just as the divine law is written in five books, all devoted to seeking out and setting forth one and the same kind of wisdom, namely the knowledge of sublime truth and of true sublimity. These are the English, British, Irish, Pictish, as well as the Latin languages; through the study of the scriptures, Latin is in general use among them all.)[6]

Following the vocabulary of my sources, I have used the terms British, Irish, Pictish and Anglo-Saxon to refer to the four *gentes* depicted in insular origin narratives. To be clear, the present study is an analysis of these origin stories and the texts containing them. By no means can it be extrapolated that early medieval peoples who spoke a common language would have understood themselves to have a shared an 'ethnic' identity. Much good work has underscored the reality that in the early medieval period, insular peoples identified primarily with kinship or dynastic groups (and later kingdoms or regions).[7] However, the authors who

[5] Morris, *Nennius*, 59 and 18.
[6] Colgrave and Mynors, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, i.1, 16–17.
[7] See e.g. Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*; Elva Johnston, *Literacy and Identity in Early Medieval Ireland* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2013); Fleming, *Britain after Rome*; Barbara Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms of Early Anglo-Saxon England* (London: B. A. Seaby Ltd, 1990; repr. London: Routledge, 2003); D.P. Kirby, *The Earliest English Kings*, 2nd rev. edn. (London: Routledge, 2000); David Wyatt, *Slaves and Warriors in Medieval Britain and Ireland, 800–1200* (Leiden: Brill, 2009); Alex Woolf, *From Pictland to*

wrote early medieval histories and pseudohistories collected within them the origin stories of four distinct *gentes*. Let me explain what I mean, and do not mean, when I use the words 'British', 'Irish', 'Pictish', 'Anglo-Saxon', and other associated terminology throughout this book.

'Britain' and 'Ireland' refer to the islands of those names (Latin *Britannia* and *Hibernia*) as they were known during the early medieval period, not to any modern political entities. The term 'British' is used throughout texts containing early insular origin material and consequently throughout this book to refer to speakers of a language in the Brittonic family living in southern Britain from the post-Roman period to the twelfth century. Following the conclusions made by Huw Pryce in his seminal article 'British or Welsh? National Identity in Twelfth-Century Wales', I use the term 'Welsh' to refer to those Brittonic speakers who inhabited western Britain after the arrival of the Normans and 'Wales' for the region, following an internal shift in preferred terminology.[8]

As is evident in the passages from the *Historia Brittonum* and Bede discussed above, early medieval authors writing in Latin used the term *Scoti* or *Scotti* to refer to the Gaelic-speaking peoples who inhabited Ireland, parts of northern Britain, and the Isle of Man. Because this term would eventually come to signify the Scottish kingdom and people of northern Britain after the ninth century, I follow a scholarly convention which avoids confusion by offering more precise translations. The term 'Irish' encompasses Gaelic speakers living in Ireland who were characterised as belonging to a shared *gens* by contemporary sources. 'Gaelic' is used when referring to the entire Gaelic-speaking population of the insular region as a whole, and the Dál Riata to the Gaelic-speaking kingdom that stretched across Britain and Ireland.[9] In insular texts, the 'Picts' are a distinct *gens* who inhabited northern Britain in the early medieval period. After the ninth century, the Pictish and Gaelic inhabitants of northern Britain formed one kingdom, known first as Alba and later Scotland, for which I use the terms 'Scotland' and 'Scottish'.[10]

Finally, the phrase 'Anglo-Saxons' refers to speakers of the Germanic language known as Old English who inhabited southern Britain before the arrival of the Normans in the eleventh century. Bede describes the 'Anglorum siue Saxonum gens' (the race of the Angles or Saxons) using the singular *gens*, writing, 'aduenerant autem de tribus Germaniae

Alba, 789–1070, The New Edinburgh History of Scotland (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007).

[8] Pryce, 'British or Welsh?'.

[9] On which see Broun, *The Irish Identity of the Kingdom of the Scots* and Ewan Campbell, 'Were the Scots Irish?', *Antiquity* 75 (2001): 285–92.

[10] See Woolf, *From Pictland to Alba*.

populis fortioribus, id est Saxonibus, Anglis, Iutis' (they came from three very powerful Germanic tribes, the Saxons, Angles, and Jutes).[11] Early medieval sources preserved this origin legend that the purported 'Anglo-Saxon' *gens* sprang from disparate locations (as opposed to the British, Irish, and Pictish *gentes*). Throughout the pre-Norman period, individual kingdoms populated by Old English speakers continued to be identified as 'Anglian' or 'Saxon', and 'Anglo-Saxon' and analogous phrases were used, both internally and externally, to describe the collective of those kingdoms in pre-Norman Britain, inhabited primarily by Old English speakers and thus perceived by their contemporaries as distinct from the regions which were populated primarily by speakers of Celtic languages. I use the terms 'England' and 'English' to refer to the same population during the period following the Norman Conquest.

When it came to the Brittonic-speaking inhabitants of southern Britain, Pryce was able to answer the question 'British or Welsh?' by surveying the frequency with which these terms were used over time. For the Old-English-speaking inhabitants of pre-Norman Britain, the answer to the analogous question 'Anglo-Saxon or English?' has been made more complicated by the fact that sorting the evidence is often a case of 'translator's choice': ought 'Anglian' and 'Saxon' to be translated as 'Anglian' and 'Saxon', or as 'English'?[12] The point in time at which a sense of 'English' national identity began to develop has been much discussed.[13] I have outlined the shaky foundations of attempts to project a unified 'English' identity back into the pre-Norman period in the Introduction above. This book is an analysis of origin legends as they were written by early medieval authors and not of any real-world process of ethnogenesis. Nonetheless, it is worth restating my objections to claiming early medieval texts as evidence of supposedly 'national' or proto-national identities. First of all, our sources are so limited that any arguments towards a unified 'English' (or 'British', or 'Irish', or 'Pictish') identity can only apply to a tiny, elite fraction of the overall (male) population. Secondly, the documentary evidence which does survive from the early insular world reveals that violence and warfare took place 'internally' as often as 'externally' when

[11] Colgrave and Mynors, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, i.15, 50–1.

[12] For evidence of a political distinction throughout the pre-Norman period, see Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons* and Brady, *Writing the Welsh Borderlands*.

[13] See Introduction, n. 32 above; Susan Reynolds, 'What Do We Mean by "Anglo-Saxon" and "Anglo-Saxons"?', *Journal of British Studies* 24 (1985): 395–414; and recently Susan Oosthuizen, *The Emergence of the English*, Past Imperfect (Leeds: Arc Humanities Press, 2019). I disagree with the very early point at which Oosthuizen argues for a unified sense of 'Englishness', and it is fair to say that most scholars of early British history would find difficulties with the extent of her 'peaceful assimilation' theory. See review by John Hines, *The Antiquaries Journal* 100 (2020): 464–6.

it came to these purported ethnic groups. Irish kingdoms fought against other Irish kingdoms far more often than they did against Anglo-Saxon ones, and vice versa. As I have argued elsewhere, language cannot be understood as a proxy for political alliance.[14] In sum, then, while the origin legends treated in this study appear in larger works which are often understood as 'historical', it is important to bear in mind that the origin narratives themselves are literary objects. This book is not a study of real-world identities, but rather, it investigates the ways in which insular authors wrote about the origin legends of the four *gentes* whom they understood to inhabit Britain and Ireland in the pre-Viking period.

Part I: Gildas's *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae* and the Origin Legend of the Anglo-Saxons

A remarkable illustration of the interconnected nature of the corpus of early insular works containing origin material is the fact that three out of four of these origin legends were first recorded in a work from the literary-historical tradition of another people. These stories, moreover, were preserved in reverse 'historical' order. According to the corpus of insular origin legends – which, needless to say, do not reflect historical or archaeological reality – the ancestors of the British, Irish, Pictish and Anglo-Saxon peoples were perceived to have come to the insular region in that order. Yet the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons, the 'newest' inhabitants of the region, is first recorded in the British Gildas's *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae*, the oldest text in the insular corpus of works containing origin material. The supposed second-most-recent arrivals, the Picts, have their origin story first preserved by the Anglo-Saxon Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, the second-oldest text in the corpus. Finally, the origin legends of the peoples said to be the oldest inhabitants of the region – the Irish and the British – are first preserved together in the third-oldest text in the insular corpus, the British *Historia Brittonum*. The chronology in which these origin stories were recorded is our first indication of the highly literary, intertextual nature of the corpus in which they were preserved. The body of works containing origin legends as a whole began by recording current history before working backwards to fill in the gaps in knowledge, underscoring the literary and constructed nature of this corpus.

The earliest work in the corpus of insular texts containing origin material is Gildas's *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae*. Gildas was by his own admission British, but little else about him or the *De Excidio* can be stated

[14] Brady, *Writing the Welsh Borderlands*.

with confidence: as Patrick Sims-Williams puts it, 'all trustworthy information about him comes from his own words'.[15] The *De Excidio* has traditionally been dated to the mid-sixth century, but this is based on rather slender corroborating evidence, in which 'all we can say is that by the early tenth century an Irish annalist thought that Gildas flourished in the mid-sixth century and that his opinion was acceptable to a Welsh annalist'.[16] An earlier date cannot be ruled out, as Guy Halsall has noted:

> There is some evidence for an 'early Gildas', writing in the late fifth century. This includes Gildas' rhetorical education, his Latin style, his theological concerns, and a rereading of his historical section and where he places himself within it. I tend towards this interpretation, although it cannot be proven. It is unlikely that Gildas wrote before 480/490 or much after about 550; beyond that we cannot go.[17]

I follow current consensus in referring to Gildas as a 'sixth-century' author. As Sims-Williams writes: 'I shall be content to regard the *De Excidio* simply as a sixth-century work, written earlier than Columbanus' reference to it *c.* 600, and later than the fifth century, because of Gildas's vagueness about the known history of the early part of that century'.[18] When discussing the *De Excidio*, it is also important to bear in mind that this is not a work of history which conforms to our modern understanding of such. Rather, it is most frequently (and accurately) characterised as a jeremiad. Gildas's *De Excidio* is rich in biblical allusions and forms a *cri de coeur* against the sins, as Gildas understands them, of his fellow Britons, which have brought about their downfall from a height of Roman civilisation to the despair of contemporary times.

This singular work is the first insular text to preserve the origin story of the Anglo-Saxons.[19] Gildas situates their arrival to Britain in the aftermath of Roman departure, when the Picts and *Scotti* from the north were attacking the Britons:

> Itaque illis ad sua remeantibus emergunt certatim de curucis, quibus sunt trans Tithicam vallem evecti, quasi in alto Titane incalescenteque caumate de artissimis foraminum caverniculis fusci vermiculorum cunei, tetri Scottorum Pictorumque greges . . .

[15] Patrick Sims-Williams, 'Gildas and the Anglo-Saxons', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 6 (1983): 1–30 at 1.
[16] See Sims-Williams, 'Gildas and the Anglo-Saxons', 2–5 at 4.
[17] Guy Halsall, *Worlds of Arthur: Facts & Fictions of the Dark Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 54.
[18] Sims-Williams, 'Gildas and the Anglo-Saxons', 5.
[19] On Gildas, see also Plassmann, *Origo gentis*, 36–49 and Coumert, *Origines des peuples*, 383–402.

(As the Romans went back home, there eagerly emerged from the coracles that had carried them across the sea-valleys the foul hordes of Scots and Picts, like dark throngs of worms who wriggle out of narrow fissures in the rock when the sun is high and the weather grows warm . . .)[20]

Tum omnes consiliarii una cum superbo tyranno caecantur, adinvenientes tale praesidium, immo excidium patriae ut ferocissimi illi nefandi nominis Saxones deo hominibusque invisi, quasi in caulas lupi, in insulam ad retundendas aquilonales gentes intromitterentur . . .

Tum erumpens grex catulorum de cubili leaenae barbarae, tribus, ut lingua eius exprimitur, cyulis, nostra longis navibus, secundis velis omine auguriisque, quibus vaticinabatur, certo apud eum praesagio, quod ter centum annis patriam, cui proras librabat, insideret, centum vero quinquaginta, hoc est dimidio temporis, saepius vastaret . . .

(Then all the members of the council, together with the proud tyrant, were struck blind; the guard – or rather the method of destruction – they devised for our land was that the ferocious Saxons (name not to be spoken!), hated by man and God, should be let into the island like wolves into the fold, to beat back the peoples of the north . . .

Then a pack of cubs burst forth from the lair of the barbarian lioness, coming in three *keels*, as they call warships in their language. The winds were favourable; favourable too the omens and auguries, which prophesied, according to a sure portent among them, that they would live for three hundred years in the land towards which their prows were directed, and that for half the time, a hundred and fifty years, they would repeatedly lay it waste . . .)[21]

The aim of *De Excidio* is to explicate the moral decline of the British (as Gildas sees it) which brought about the divine punishment of the Saxon invasion. *De Excidio* is a highly allusive and difficult text, and there are still many points throughout this long invective where the historical background to Gildas's words remains unclear.[22] This is because, as Sims-Williams has aptly stated,

as far as the *De Excidio* is concerned, we can best follow Wulfstan and describe Gildas not as a historian but as a prophet, a prophet not in the sense of a foreteller of the future, but in the Old Testament sense: a fearless critic of the evils of the present age who refers to past events and past prophecies only insofar as they

[20] Winterbottom, *Gildas*, 94–5 and 23. [21] Winterbottom, *Gildas*, 97 and 26.

[22] See Neil Wright, 'Did Gildas Read Orosius?', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 9 (1985): 31–42; Michael Lapidge, 'Gildas's Education and the Latin Culture of Sub-Roman Britain', in Lapidge and Dumville (eds.), *Gildas: New Approaches*, 27–50; Michael Winterbottom, 'The Preface of Gildas' *De Excidio*', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1975): 277–87; Karen George, *Gildas's De Excidio Britonum and the Early British Church* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2009); and Thomas O'Loughlin, *Gildas and the Scriptures: Observing the World through a Biblical Lens* (Leiden: Brepols, 2013).

reveal the pattern of history, the origins of the present order, and the inevitable consequences of disregarding the moral laws of God.[23]

Though as T.M. Charles-Edwards reminds us, Gildas 'thought of himself as both prophet and historian'.[24]

In the narrative of the *De Excidio*, then, the coming of the Saxons is understood as a divine punishment for the Britons' sinful behaviour, explaining Gildas's allusive language. Despite these difficulties, we can see that the fundamental core of the Anglo-Saxon migration legend is present in his account: three ships full of mercenaries arrive from the continental Germanic lands at the invitation of the Britons and remain to lay waste to increasingly greater swaths of southern Britain as a whole. Gildas's *De Excidio* preserves the earliest recorded version of this origin legend, which – as we shall see – would come to be widely reproduced throughout the corpus of insular texts containing origin material. It is worth pausing to consider the fact that the earliest extant version of the Anglo-Saxon origin legend is preserved in a British source. This underscores the clear interest that all origin stories held for the authors of early insular historical and pseudohistorical works. Those who wrote these texts were interested not only in the origins of their own people, but also of everyone else who inhabited the region.

Yet while the British Gildas was the first insular author to record the Anglo-Saxon origin legend,[25] details in this narrative reveal the textual ghost of his now-lost source(s).[26] The story of the *adventus Saxonum* clearly drew upon an external source – whether written or oral – that had been in some amount of contact with Germanic peoples. Several key pieces of evidence indicate that Gildas did not invent the Anglo-Saxon origin story out of whole cloth. Linguistic evidence – that Gildas knew the

[23] Sims-Williams, 'Gildas and the Anglo-Saxons', 2; see throughout for Gildas's difficult historicity, as well as Ian McKee, 'Gildas: Lessons from History', *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies* 51 (2009): 1–36; Nicholas John Higham, 'Gildas, Roman Walls, and British Dykes', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 22 (1991): 1–14; Bernard S. Bachrach, 'Gildas, Vortigern and Constitutionality in Sub-Roman Britain', *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 32 (1988): 126–40; Dumville, 'Sub-Roman Britain: History and Legend'.

[24] Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, 203.

[25] There is a very good survey of the various versions of the Anglo-Saxon origin legend in Richard Sowerby, 'Hengest and Horsa: The Manipulation of History and Myth from the *adventus Saxonum* to *Historia Brittonum*', *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 51 (2007): 1–19, though he is more concerned with how this legend might have fit into historical reality than I am here.

[26] Alex Woolf, 'An Interpolation in the Text of Gildas's *De Excidio Britanniae*', *Peritia* 16 (2002): 161–7, has argued that this passage is a later interpolation. Whether or not this is true, as Sowerby, 'Hengest and Horsa', 2 n. 8 notes, 'this does not undermine the earlier judgment on this episode that "the details come from the Saxons themselves"' (quoting Sims-Williams, 'Gildas and the Anglo-Saxons', 22–3).

Old English word *cyules* (*keels*) – suggests an Anglo-Saxon source. So too does the cultural evidence that he was familiar with their particular custom of auguries.[27] Historical evidence – Gildas knew that the Saxons were collecting tribute from the church in Britain – also suggests that he was in close contact with their culture.[28] Origin legends are of course 'notoriously unreliable' as historical sources, as this book is one of many studies to demonstrate.[29] Yet in focusing on what Gildas's account of the Anglo-Saxon origin story reveals about the process of textual transmission rather than historical fact, it is clear that some external source stood behind Gildas's version of this narrative, and there are good reasons to suspect that it was an Anglo-Saxon one.[30] Thus, even the earliest text in the corpus of insular historical writing relied on an external source for its origin material. Gildas's early work illustrates the process by which the corpus of insular origin narratives grew: absorbing external pieces of information from all available sources in order to relate a coherent narrative of the history of the region as a whole.

Another key point first illustrated by Gildas's *De Excidio* which is carried on throughout the corpus of early insular works containing origin material is the extent of intertextual connectivity that these works possessed. As Michael E. Jones has pointed out, 'Gildas "Sapiens" enjoyed great learned repute in the Middle Ages, but he subsequently came to be seen as an isolated, obscure, and peculiar Latin stylist.'[31] Yet Gildas was not writing in isolation, as has been painstakingly demonstrated by a host of scholars, particularly François Kerlouégan and Neil Wright.[32] As their work has confirmed, Gildas was familiar with a wide range of texts, which he drew on as he composed the *De Excidio*. These included (or potentially included) the following works: the Bible, Jerome (*De Viris Illustribus*, the *Epistolae*, and the *Vita S. Pauli*), Euagrius's translation of Athanasius's *Vita S. Antonii*, Sulpicius Severus's *Vita S. Martini*, a lost *Passio S. Albani*,

[27] Barbara Yorke, 'Anglo-Saxon Origin Legends', in Julia Barrow and Andrew Wareham (eds.), *Myth, Rulership, Church and Charters: Essays in Honour of Nicholas Brooks* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 15–29.

[28] Nicholas John Higham, *The English Conquest: Gildas and Britain in the Fifth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 165. For general discussion on these points see Stefan J. Schustereder, *Strategies of Identity Construction: The Writings of Gildas, Aneirin and Bede* (Bonn: Bonn University Press, 2015).

[29] Sims-Williams, 'Gildas and the Anglo-Saxons', 22.

[30] See Sims-Williams, 'Gildas and the Anglo-Saxons', 22–3.

[31] Michael E. Jones, *The End of Roman Britain* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 122.

[32] François Kerlouégan, *Le De Excidio Britanniae de Gildas. Les destinées de la culture latine dans l'île de Bretagne au VI^e siècle* (Paris: Presses de La Sorbonne, 1987) and Neil Wright, 'Gildas's Prose Style and Its Origins', in Lapidge and Dumville (eds.), *Gildas: New Approaches*, 107–28.

a Pelagian tract on virginity which may have been composed by a British author, Eusebius's *Historia Ecclesiastica* via the Latin translation by Rufinus, and Orosius's *Historia aduersum Paganos*. The *De Excidio* also contains potential parallels to the works of Livy, Cicero, Juvenal, Persius or Martial, and Claudian, as well as certain borrowings from Virgil's *Aeneid* (and potentially the *Georgics* as well) – to say nothing of those texts which his style parallels.[33] Thus, although Gildas has often been characterised as working in intellectual isolation, the *De Excidio* was actually in conversation with a number of prior and subsequent works. As Charles-Edwards has commented,

> the significance of Gildas's *De Excidio Britanniae* lies partly in the way it allows us to see the cultural connections between late Roman Britain and Britain and Ireland in the seventh and eighth centuries. Because of the assumptions that Gildas must have made about his readership, it shows that a late Antique rhetorical education persisted into the sixth century for laymen as well as for clerics.[34]

In participating in these broader intellectual conversations, Gildas's *De Excidio* models the process of composition of the corpus of works containing insular origin material as a whole.

In turn, the *De Excidio* became very well known throughout early medieval Britain and Ireland in the centuries after Gildas wrote. As is the case for many other early medieval texts, 'the existing manuscripts of the *De excidio* are all considerably later than the composition of the text itself'.[35] The oldest manuscript of the *De Excidio* is London, British Library, MS Cotton Vitellius A.vi, which dates to the mid-tenth century.[36] Other important manuscripts include Avranches Public Library, MS no. 162 (twelfth century), Cambridge University Library, MS Ff. I. 27 (thirteenth century), and Cambridge University Library MS Dd. I. 17 (*c.*1400).[37] However, we know that Gildas was well known and used throughout the early insular world thanks to references and excerpts in subsequent works. As Thomas D. O'Sullivan notes, 'the oldest important witnesses to the text are the extensive quotations in the Venerable Bede, which however are sometimes paraphrases, and the glosses on *De excidio* which are preserved in the late eighth century Leyden and Corpus

[33] Wright, 'Gildas's Prose Style', 107–114 for sources and 115–28 for style.
[34] Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, 218; see 202–19 for thorough discussion of Gildas's intellectual/cultural background.
[35] Thomas D. O'Sullivan, *The De Excidio of Gildas: Its Authenticity and Date* (Leiden: Brill, 1978), 3, and see also Paul Grosjean, 'Notes d'hagiographie celtique, no. 30: la tradition manuscrite du *De excidio* attribué à Gildas', *Analecta Bollandiana* 75 (1957): 185–8.
[36] It was damaged in the Ashburnham House fire of 1731.
[37] O'Sullivan, *The De Excidio of Gildas*, 3–4 for discussion of the surviving manuscript tradition, of which these form the bulk.

glossaries'.[38] Gildas's *De Excidio* became a foundational text for many later authors, both those who were and were not interested in the origins of insular peoples in their writings. A sampling of early medieval authors who were familiar with Gildas's *De Excidio* and used it in their own writing includes Columbanus, Bede, Alcuin, Theodore and Hadrian at the Canterbury School, the author of the *Historia Brittonum*, Wulfstan, and Geoffrey of Monmouth.[39] These reuses of Gildas's text further underscore the interconnected nature of the corpus of early insular historical writing and the willingness of early medieval authors to utilise every available source at their disposal.[40]

These intellectual chains of connection, moreover, continued throughout the centuries. Within the corpus of early insular texts containing origin material, Bede drew upon Gildas,[41] the author of the *Historia Brittonum* drew upon both Gildas and Bede,[42] and this material in turn spread from the *Historia Brittonum* into Irish tradition through the *Lebor Bretnach* and the *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, as will be explicated further below.[43] There exists, in other words, a consistent pattern of connection to earlier works that runs throughout the corpus of early medieval insular texts containing origin material. These intertextual connections underscore the development of the corpus as a whole over time, with regular references back to earlier works.

As Gildas's *De Excidio* is thus the earliest text in the corpus to demonstrate, three out of four insular peoples' origin legends were first recorded not by a historian of their 'own' people. This fact highlights the interest within the corpus of early insular historical and pseudohistorical texts about the origins of the region as a whole. Such textual ghosts – moments in which we know an author was relying on an earlier source that is now lost – also showcase the intertextual nature of the corpus, in which no work was written in intellectual isolation. So too does the fact that no distinction is drawn between 'native' and 'foreign' sources of information in the *De Excidio*, a pattern that likewise holds true throughout the rest of

[38] O'Sullivan, *The De Excidio of Gildas*, 3.
[39] Brian Christopher Hardison, 'Words, Meanings, and Readings: Reconstructing the Use of Gildas's *De excidio Britanniae* at the Canterbury School', *Viator* 47 (2016): 1–22.
[40] See Diarmuid Scully, 'Bede, Orosius and Gildas on the Early History of Britain', in Stéphane Lebecq, Michel Perrin, and Olivier Szerwiniack (eds.), *Bède le Vénérable: entre tradition et posterité*, Centre de Recherche sur l'Histoire de l'Europe du Nord-Ouest 34 (Lille: Villeneuve d'Ascq, 2005), 30–42.
[41] Colgrave and Mynors, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, xxx–xxxiv; Molly Miller, 'Bede's Use of Gildas', *English Historical Review* 90 (1975): 241–61.
[42] Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, 437–52.
[43] For a good overview of the texts in the Irish tradition and their difficulties, see Joseph Lennon, *Irish Orientalism: A Literary and Intellectual History* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2004), 5–57.

the corpus. While Gildas was relying on an Anglo-Saxon source for his account of their migration legend, he does not dismiss their historical traditions as worthless or biased, but rather incorporates this narrative into his history without commenting on its source. Gildas's *De Excidio* is the first of many texts to illustrate the key ways in which the insular corpus of historical writing was built upon a complex web of intertextual connection.

Part II: Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* and the Origins of the Picts

Gildas's *De Excidio* is the earliest surviving work in the corpus of texts containing insular origin material by two centuries. The next work in this corpus is the Anglo-Saxon monk Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, which he completed in 731.[44] Bede spent his life as a monk at Wearmouth-Jarrow in Northumbria after joining the community at age seven. He was a prolific writer – the *Historia Ecclesiastica* is one of over forty works authored by Bede, and he has enjoyed a reputation as an eminent scholar and historian from his own time to the present day.[45] The *Historia Ecclesiastica* covers the history of (southern) Britain from the time of Julius Caesar's first invasion in 55 BCE until Bede's lifetime, focusing on the gradual conversion of the Anglo-Saxons to Christianity after the Roman mission of Augustine to Kent in 597 CE. The *Historia Ecclesiastica* has always been an important source for the history of early Anglo-Saxon England. While earlier studies tended to take Bede's statements at face value, more recent scholarship has underscored the biases inherent in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, most notably its Northumbrian-centric focus. Deeply learned and steeped in late antique and early medieval intellectual traditions, Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* draws on Gildas and other authors to relate the prehistory of Britain in a way that situates the origin legend of the Anglo-Saxons in broader world history.

It is here that the origin legend of the Picts – the second-most-recent people to arrive in the insular region, according to legendary tradition – was first recorded. Like the Anglo-Saxon migration story first documented in Gildas, the Pictish origin legend was first preserved in the historical

[44] On the origin material in Bede, see Plassmann, *Origo gentis*, 51–84 and Coumert, *Origines des peuples*, 403–40.

[45] For Bede's life and works, see Michelle P. Brown, 'Bede's Life in Context', in Scott DeGregorio (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Bede* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 3–24 and George Hardin Brown and Frederick M. Biggs, *Bede, Part I, Fascicles 1–4*, Sources of Anglo-Saxon Literary Culture (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017).

tradition of another people, which itself drew on now-lost external sources. Yet Bede draws no value distinction between the historicity of the Pictish and Anglo-Saxon origin legends even though (as discussed further below) the Pictish origin legend derives from either a Pictish or an Irish source which now no longer survives. The Pictish origin legend has often been treated as exceptional because it depicts a 'lost people' from whom very little native textual material survives.[46] However, one of the aims of this chapter's survey is to suggest that even if early Pictish historical narratives did survive, they would likely not depict the Pictish origin narrative much differently than did Anglo-Saxon or Irish works. Texts containing early insular origin legends drew information from wherever they could without making value distinctions between 'native' and 'foreign' source material. Understanding the process via which these origin legends grew makes clear the intertextuality of the corpus of insular origin material as a whole.

Of the Picts, Bede writes:

Et cum plurimam insulae partem incipientes ab austro possedissent, contigit gentem Pictorum de Scythia, ut perhibent, longis nauibus non multis Oceanum ingressam, circumagente flatu uentorum, extra fines omnes Brittaniae Hiberniam peruenisse, eiusque septentrionales oras intrasse atque, inuenta ibi gente Scottorum, sibi quoque in partibus illius sedes petisse, nec inpetrare potuisse . . . Ad hanc ergo usque peruenientes nauigio Picti, ut diximus, petierunt in ea sibi quoque sedes et habitationem donari. Respondebant Scotti quia non ambos eos caperet insula, 'sed possumus' inquiunt 'salubre uobis dare consilium, quid agere ualeatis. Nouimus insulam esse aliam non procul a nostra contra ortum solis, quam saepe lucidioribus diebus de longe aspicere solemus. Hanc adire si uultis, habitabilem uobis facere ualetis; uel, si qui restiterit, nobis auxiliariis utimini.' Itaque petentes Brittaniam Picti habitare per septentrionales insulae partes coeperunt; nam austrina Brettones occupauerant. Cumque uxores Picti non habentes peterent a Scottis, ea solum condicione dare consenserunt, ut ubi res ueniret in dubium, magis de feminea regum prosapia quam de masculina regem sibi eligerent; quod usque hodie apud Pictos constat esse seruatum.

(After they [the Britons] had got possession of the greater part of the island, beginning from the south, it is related that the Pictish race from Scythia sailed out into the ocean in a few warships and were carried by the wind beyond the furthest bounds of Britain, reaching Ireland and landing on its northern shores. There they found the Irish race and asked permission to settle among them but their request was refused . . . The Picts then came to this island, as we have said, by

[46] 'The first obstacle to a study of literacy in Pictland is the complete lack of any surviving Pictish manuscripts', writes Katherine Forsyth, in 'Literacy in Pictland', in Huw Pryce (ed.), *Literacy in Medieval Celtic Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 39–61 at 39. On the Pictish legend, see Gearoid S. Mac Eoin, 'On the Irish Legend of the Origin of the Picts', *Studia Hiberica* 4 (1964): 138–54 and Marjorie O. Anderson, *Kings and Kingship in Early Scotland* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1973).

sea and asked for the grant of a place to settle in. The Irish answered that the island would not hold them both; 'but', said they, 'we can give you some good advice as to what to do. We know of another island not far from our own, in an easterly direction, which we often see in the distance on clear days. If you will go there, you can make a settlement for yourselves; but if any one resists you, make use of our help.' And so the Picts went to Britain and proceeded to occupy the northern parts of the island, because the Britons had seized the southern regions. As the Picts had no wives, they asked the Irish for some; the latter consented to give them women, only on condition that, in all cases of doubt, they should elect their kings from the female royal line rather than the male; and it is well known that the custom has been observed among the Picts to this day.)[47]

As was the case in Gildas's *De Excidio*, Bede's use of an external source for the Pictish origin narrative is not made explicit here. Yet as a number of scholars have demonstrated, it is nonetheless likewise clear from the contents of this passage.[48] As A.H. Merrills states, Bede

assembled these short passages from a disparate array of sources, including, in all likelihood, annalistic material from the Irish foundation at Iona, circulating British and perhaps Pictish traditions and the ambiguous account of the *Picti* and *Scotti* provided by Gildas. Other than the *De excidio Britanniae*, few of Bede's sources have survived in contexts that can be examined with great confidence, but it seems clear that the historian represented only a single stage in an ongoing tradition of origin writing among these communities. Bede did not compose the prehistories of the *Brettones* and their neighbours from scratch, but nor did he inherit fully formed origin myths from his sources.[49]

This intricately constructed origin legend was thus, again, not invented by Bede out of whole cloth but rather incorporated into the *Historia Ecclesiastica* from a non-Anglo-Saxon source.

While the external nature of Bede's source is thus clear, there has been some debate over whether the source(s) in question for this particular passage were Pictish or Irish. Those in favour of a Pictish source have pointed to the narrative's sustained focus, also noting that Bede seems to imply firsthand knowledge of Pictish culture with his statement that 'it is well known that the custom has been observed among the Picts to this day'.[50] Pictish expert Molly Miller even-handedly concluded that Bede's version of the Pictish origin legend was 'polite in manner and

[47] Colgrave and Mynors, *Bede*, i.1, 16–19.
[48] D.P. Kirby, 'Bede's Native Sources for the *Historia Ecclesiastica*', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 48 (1966): 341–71; McCann, *The Irish in the 'Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum'*; A.M.M. Duncan, 'Bede, Iona, and the Picts', in R.H.C. Davis and J.M. Wallace-Hadrill (eds.), *The Writing of History in the Middle Ages: Essays Presented to Richard Williams Southern* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 1–42.
[49] Merrills, *History and Geography in Late Antiquity*, 282.
[50] Colgrave and Mynors, *Bede*, i.1, 16–19.

literary in mode, historically it is Pict-centred, but could have come to Bede immediately from a Pictish, north-country Brittonic or Dalriadic source, secular or ecclesiastical, or have been common to all'.[51] The case for a non-Pictish source for this narrative relies on its similarity to Irish pseudohistorical writing and the fact that apart from Bede, the Pictish origin legend is preserved only in Irish texts. These, however, are much later in date than the *Historia Ecclesiastica* and are in actuality much likelier to have sourced the Pictish origin story from Bede than the other way around (discussed further below). The details of the narrative itself are also suggestive of an ultimate Irish origin for this tale. What Bede presents us with is not simply a legend about the origins of the Picts. Rather, it is a complicated narrative about the relationship between the Picts and the Irish in which the Irish are depicted as having gained a significant political upper hand in this encounter: they are able to both prevent the Picts from settling in their lands and ensure that future Pictish kings will be of Irish descent. In this legend, as I will discuss further in Chapter Four below, taking wives from another people seems to place political power into the hands of those who provided them.

This interpretation of the narrative would seem to point towards non-Pictish tradition as the ultimate source for this origin legend. Such a reading has indeed been suggested by Alfred P. Smyth, who writes that this origin story was 'foisted on the Picts by the Irish'.[52] Yet at the same time, James E. Fraser has argued that this narrative can be interpreted within the context of contemporary Pictish politics. He writes:

> This sequence of notions surrounding the Gaelo-Pictish relationship makes it virtually certain that the legend was composed *c*. 700, about the time that Adomnán was completing *Vita Columbae*. Why? The man who became king of Picts in 696 or 697, another Bridei, appears to have based his claim to the kingship on being the son of Der-Ilei his (almost certainly Pictish) mother, his father Dargart having probably been Dargart of Cenél Comgaill. As a Pictish king who claimed the kingship through his mother's patrimony, Bridei's situation is made perfectly and suspiciously legitimate by the origin legend, right down to the case of doubt – the expulsion of his predecessor – required for the mobilisation of the matrilineal argument. He was also a man of Gaelo-Pictish heritage – the origin legend suspiciously normalises that by assigning such heritage to all Picts. It is, therefore, intriguing that the legend also normalises Pictish recourse to Gaelic support in looking to make new settlements in Britain.[53]

[51] Molly Miller, 'Matriliny by Treaty: The Pictish Foundation-Legend', in Whitelock, McKitterick, and Dumville (eds.), *Ireland in Early Mediaeval Europe*, 133–61 at 134–5.
[52] Alfred P. Smyth, *Warlords and Holy Men: Scotland AD 80–1000* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1984), 60–1.
[53] James E. Fraser, *From Caledonia to Pictland: Scotland to 795*, The New Edinburgh History of Scotland (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 239.

Thus, there is a case to be made for either a Gaelic or a Pictish source for this legend, or – as is perhaps most likely – a blend of both, thanks to the proximity of Pictish territory to the kingdom of the Dál Riata in early medieval Britain.[54] (The close intellectual ties between these regions are discussed further below in the context of the *Lebor Bretnach*'s place of composition.)

Yet regardless of precisely where Bede's narrative of Pictish origins came from, the fact that the Anglo-Saxon author's *Historia Ecclesiastica* is the earliest text in the insular corpus to preserve this material underscores the desires of early medieval historians to draw together the origin stories of the region as a whole. Bede's reliance upon an external, now-lost source for the Pictish origin legend reflects the level of intertextuality in the corpus of early insular historical writing while also reminding us how much written material has simply been lost from the early medieval period. Yet at the same time, such connections to now-lost texts demonstrate that a burgeoning corpus of insular origin material already existed at the time that Bede was writing. As he incorporated this material into the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, he did not distinguish between the value of Anglo-Saxon, Irish, Pictish, or British source texts. Rather, the Pictish origin legend simply became part of the history of the early medieval insular region.

Bede also drew heavily on Gildas's *De Excidio* while writing the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, continuing the chain of connections between texts in the corpus of insular historical writing.[55] Like Gildas, Bede was in turn also used heavily by later texts. The *Historia Ecclesiastica* was immediately and widely popular in the medieval period, and very early manuscript copies have survived: 'Bede's *History* is one of the very few works written in Latin before the Carolingian renaissance which have come down to us in copies virtually contemporary with their authors.'[56] There are over 160 surviving manuscripts of the *Historia Ecclesiastica* from both insular and continental Europe, where Bede enjoyed wide respect as a historian throughout the whole of the Middle Ages.[57] The *Historia Ecclesiastica* served as a source

[54] For historical and political background on Bede's relationship to the Irish and British, see Clare Stancliffe, 'British and Irish Contexts', in DeGregorio (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Bede*, 69–83.

[55] Colgrave and Mynors, *Bede*, xxx–xxxiv.

[56] Colgrave and Mynors, *Bede*, xxxix.

[57] See M.L.W. Laistner, with the collaboration of H.H. King, *A Hand-List of Bede Manuscripts* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1943), which received a flurry of updates and corrections by individual scholars. More recently, Colgrave and Mynors, *Bede*, xxxix–lxxiv for discussion of significant manuscripts and recensions, and see the updated handlist of 'Complete or Once-Complete Copies of the *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*', in Joshua Allan Westgard, *Dissemination and Reception of Bede's Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum in Germany, c.731–1500: The Manuscript Evidence* (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 2005),

for the author of the *Historia Brittonum*,[58] and Bede's work was also more widely known throughout the Anglo-Saxon period, incorporated into a variety of later works in the centuries after his death.[59] The *Historia Ecclesiastica* was also known to Irish scholars: though it has been little discussed outside of Irish scholarship, a fragmentary Irish translation of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* survives.[60] It was incorporated into a manuscript containing the *Lebor Bretnach*, which in turn became a source for the *Lebor Gabála Érenn*. These two later Irish texts were crucial in promulgating the spread of insular origin narratives, as discussed in greater detail below. Like Gildas, Bede was an exceptionally learned author who drew heavily on numerous external sources while writing the *Historia Ecclesiastica*.[61] Yet the Pictish origin story reminds us that while many of Bede's sources are known and survive elsewhere, that is not the case for all of them. Many have either been lost or were originally oral in nature, and crucially, by no means were all of them Anglo-Saxon.[62] Although Bede is now remembered as the quintessential Anglo-Saxon historian, his presentation of the Pictish origin legend underscores the extent to which the corpus of insular origin material was multilingual, transnational, and heavily intertextual in nature.

Part III: The *Historia Brittonum* and the Origins of the Irish and the British

Within the body of insular origin tales, the Irish and the British were the two peoples believed to have inhabited the islands of Britain and Ireland for the longest period of time. The complete narratives of both Irish and British origins are first preserved in the third-youngest-surviving text to contain insular origin material, the ninth-century British text known as the *Historia Brittonum*, written a century after Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*

135–41. New manuscripts are still being discovered – see e.g. Nicholas A. Sparks, 'An Insular fragment of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*', *Anglo-Saxon England* 42 (2013): 27–50.

[58] Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, 437–52.

[59] See Sharon M. Rowley, 'Bede in Later Anglo-Saxon England', in DeGregorio (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Bede*, 216–28.

[60] O.J. Bergin, 'A Middle-Irish Fragment of Bede's Ecclesiastical History', in O.J. Bergin, R.I. Best, Kuno Meyer, and J.G. O'Keeffe (eds.), *Anecdota from Irish Manuscripts*, vol. 3 (Halle, 1910), 63–76; Próinséas Ní Chatháin, 'Bede's Ecclesiastical History in Irish', *Peritia* 3 (1984): 115–30; and Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Of Bede's "Five Languages and Four Nations": The Earliest Writing from Ireland, Scotland and Wales', in Clare Lees (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Early Medieval English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 99–119.

[61] Colgrave and Mynors, *Bede*, xxx–xxxiv; Brown and Biggs, *Bede, Part I, Fascicles 1–4*.

[62] On Bede's potential use of oral sources, see e.g. Kirby, 'Bede's Native Sources for the *Historia Ecclesiastica*', and Roger Ray, 'Bede's *Vera Lex Historiae*', *Speculum* 55 (1980): 1–21.

in 829–30, the fourth year of the reign of Merfyn Frych, king of Gwynedd.[63] Like the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, the narrative of the *Historia Brittonum* encompasses the history of Britain from prehistory to Roman Britain to the early medieval period. Unlike Bede, however, the author of the *Historia Brittonum* did not extend his history forward to the present day (the most recent events discussed are in the late seventh century). As Charles-Edwards writes, the *Historia Brittonum* was

> more a history of the Britons than of Britain, but it was one in which their relationships with other peoples – with the Romans, the English, and the Irish – occupied the centre of the stage. The effect was that it ranged over the British Isles as a whole and gave the Britons a place in the scheme of world history.[64]

In constructing this insular narrative of world history, the *Historia Brittonum* included the origin legends of the British and Irish *gentes*. Yet continuing the pattern we have already seen for the origins of the Anglo-Saxons and Picts in the works of Gildas and Bede, the British and Irish origin narratives in the *Historia Brittonum* came not from British sources, but from now-lost external ones. Yet here, too, the presence of the Irish origin narrative in the *Historia Brittonum* alongside that of the British and Anglo-Saxons underscores the desire within insular historical writing as a genre to including the history of the region as a whole, even within works which ostensibly focused on one *gens*.

In the *Historia Brittonum*, moreover, both the Irish and the British origin legends are given conflicting, competing versions, illustrating how much of this material was circulating in the region at the date when the *Historia Brittonum* was composed. These competing origin narratives are also a testament to the value that was placed on all information within the insular historical corpus. Even though these legends were contradictory, no attempt was made to reconcile them into one cohesive narrative. At the point when the *Historia Brittonum* was written, competing versions of the same people's origin story were incorporated unproblematically alongside one another because all information on the history of the region was equally valued. Indeed, as was the case with Gildas and Bede, the author of the *Historia Brittonum* does not make value judgements between the worth of 'internal' and 'external' sources to his narrative. The *Historia Brittonum*, like the works of Gildas and Bede before it, illustrates the continued

[63] See bibliography in Introduction, n. 1 above. On the origin material in the *Historia Brittonum*, see Plassmann, *Origo gentis*, 85–106 and Coumert, *Origines des peuples*, 441–502.

[64] Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, 438.

intertextual nature of the corpus of insular origin writing as it grew over time.

The Irish origin narrative in the *Historia Brittonum* is confused and contradictory because it originally came from a now-lost Irish source and was preserved as best as possible in its earliest surviving form within this British text. The *Historia Brittonum*, when discussing the origins of the Irish, writes:

Novissime autem Scotti venerunt a partibus Hispaniae ad Hiberniam. Primus autem venit Partolomus cum mille hominibus, de viris et mulieribus, et creverunt usque ad quattuor milia hominum, et venit martalitas super eos, et in una septimana omnes perierunt et non remansit ex illis etiam unus. Secundus venit ad Hiberniam Nimeth, filius quidam Agnominis, qui fertur navigasse super mare annum et postea tenuit portum in Hibernia, fractis navibus ejus, et mansit ibidem per multos annos, et iterum navigavit cum suis, et ad Hispaniam reversus est. Et postea venerunt tres filii militis Hispaniae cum triginta ciulis apud illos et cum triginta conjugibus in unaquaque ciula et manserunt ibi per spatium unius anni. Et postea conspiciunt turrim vitream in medio mare, et homines conspiciebant super turrim, et quaerebant loqui ad illos, nunquam respondebant, et ipsi uno anno ad oppugnationem turris properaverunt cum omnibus ciulis suis et cum omnibus mulieribus, excepta una aiula, quae confracta est naufragio, in qua erant viri triginta totidemque mulieres. Et aliae naves navigaverunt ad expugnandam turrim, et, dum omnes descenderent in litore, quod erat circa turrim, operuit illos mare, et demersi sunt, et non evasit unus ex illis. Et de familia illius ciulae, quae relicta est propter fractionem, tota Hibernia impleta est usque in hodiernum diem. Et postea venerunt paulatim a partibus Hispaniae et tenuerunt regiones plurimas.

(But later the Irish came from Spain to Ireland more recently. Partholon came first with a thousand, men and women, and they grew until they were four thousand, men and women, and a plague came upon them, and in one week they all died, and there remained not a one of them. Nemet, son of Agnoman, came second to Ireland, and is said to have sailed over the sea for a year and a half, and then made port in Ireland, by shipwreck, and stayed there many years, and set sail again with his people, and returned to Spain. Later, three sons of a warrior of Spain came with thirty keels between them, and thirty wives in each keel, and stayed there for the space of a year. Later, they saw a glass tower in the midst of the sea, and saw men upon the tower, and sought to speak with them, but they never replied; and in the one year they made haste to attack the tower, with all their keels and all their women, except one keel, that was shipwrecked, in which were thirty men and as many women. The other ships sailed to attack the tower, and when they all disembarked on the shore that was around the tower, the sea overwhelmed them, and they were drowned, and not one of them escaped; and from the crew of that one ship that was left behind because of the shipwreck all Ireland was filled, to the present day; and afterwards they came over gradually from Spain, and held many districts.)[65]

[65] Morris, *Nennius*, 61 and 20.

Like the origins of the Anglo-Saxons in Gildas's *De Excidio* and the Picts in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, this legendary history of the Irish in the *Historia Brittonum* most likely came from an external source that no longer survives, in this case an Irish one. As many studies have demonstrated, the Irish origin legend had already undergone many layers of accretion that combined native Irish, classical and late antique, and contemporary medieval sources to create the form that this narrative takes in the *Historia Brittonum* by the time this work was composed in the early ninth century.[66] Work by scholars such as Heinrich Zimmer, Kuno Meyer, A.G. van Hamel, R. Mark Scowcroft, and John Carey has demonstrated that while the Irish origin legend undoubtedly preserves much native mythological material, it was shaped equally by the influence of imported intellectual tradition, notably biblical history, Jerome's translation of the Chronicle of Eusebius, Orosius's *History against the Pagans*, the writings of Isidore of Seville, and even the *Historia Brittonum* itself.[67] Carey's work has shown that while the *Historia Brittonum* preserves the earliest complete prose copy of the Irish origin legend, there are earlier poetic references to the figures in this narrative, indicating that the Irish origin narrative was circulating before it was recorded in its surviving form in the *Historia Brittonum*.[68] A recent important study by Michael Clarke has also demonstrated the likelihood of Carolingian influence on insular origin material, including the British and Irish origin legends in the *Historia Brittonum* as well as the *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, discussed further below.[69] Yet these early texts are allusive, and no earlier complete narrative of the Irish origin legend has survived. The fact that the first place to preserve it is the British *Historia Brittonum* again illustrates the intertextuality of the corpus of insular origin material and the vibrant intellectual community that existed in this region during the early medieval period.

The evidence surrounding the Irish origin legend in the *Historia Brittonum* gives us a clearer picture of that which can only be filled in from the negative impressions left in the texts of Gildas and Bede, namely that there was a substantial corpus of earlier origin material that no longer

[66] See bibliography in Introduction, n. 83 above.

[67] Heinrich Zimmer, *Nennius Vindicatus. Über Entstehung, Geschichte und Quellen der Historia Brittonum* (Berlin, 1893); Kuno Meyer, 'Partholón mac Sera', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 13 (1919–21): 141–2; A.G. van Hamel, 'On *Lebor Gabála*', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 10 (1915): 97–197; Scowcroft, '*Leabhar Gabhála* Part I' and '*Leabhar Gabhála* Part II'; and Carey, *A New Introduction to Lebor Gabála Érenn* and *The Irish National Origin-Legend*.

[68] Carey, *A New Introduction to Lebor Gabála Érenn* and *The Irish National Origin-Legend*.

[69] Michael Clarke, 'The *Leabhar Gabhála* and Carolingian Origin Legends', in Pádraic Moran and Immo Warntjes (eds.), *Early Medieval Ireland and Europe: Chronology, Contacts, Scholarship: A Festschrift for Dáibhí Ó Cróinín*, Studia Traditionis Theologiae 14 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), 441–79.

survives circulating widely throughout the insular region and that the growth of individual origin narratives was contingent upon that of the corpus as a whole. As Carey writes, the '*Historia Brittonum* gives us only the outline of what was already a flourishing tradition of legendary speculation' at the time of its composition.[70] Even the earliest surviving narrative of the Irish origin legend shows the influence of the accretion of layers of material over time. The *Historia Brittonum*'s version of this narrative is so confused because, as many scholars have painstakingly demonstrated, it underwent patterns of narrative doubling as it grew.[71] By the time that the surviving version in the *Historia Brittonum* was written down, Ireland had not one eponymous ancestor, but rather several waves of invaders.

These waves of invaders would only continue to grow over time. By the time the *Lebor Gabála Érenn* was compiled a few centuries later (discussed below), Ireland was believed to have been populated by six groups. First came a wave of settlers accompanying the antediluvian Cessair, then those following Partholón, then those of Nemed. After them came the Fir Bolg (descendants of Nemed's people who had left Ireland, been enslaved in Greece, and returned), the supernatural Tuatha Dé Danann, and the Milesians or the sons of Míl Espáne. As numerous studies have shown, the influence of other texts stands behind these ancestral groups. Carey writes that, 'Partholón and Míl Espáne look like scholarly constructs, the figments of men steeped in Jerome and Isidore; but Nemed and the Fir Bolg cannot be so easily accounted for, and they appear to reflect – at whatever remove – indigenous memories and speculations about the peopling of Ireland.'[72] Partholón is the Irish form of the Christian name Bartholomew. As Meyer first argued, this name was likely given to the first man to settle in Ireland after the flood because it was interpreted by the early church fathers as meaning 'the son of the one who holds up the waters'.[73] The Milesians also owe their existence to the corpus of circulating origin material rather than to native Irish tradition. As Carey has argued, 'the name *Míl Espáne* is neither more nor less than a direct borrowing into Irish of the Latin phrase *miles Hispaniae* which we find in the *Historia [Brittonum]*',[74] meaning that 'the sons of Míl themselves seem much likelier to be the creations of medieval scholars than the heroes of a primordial tradition'.[75] As van Hamel first suggested, the original impetus for this moment of genesis can in turn be traced back

[70] Carey, *The Irish National Origin-Legend*, 11.
[71] See bibliography in Introduction, n. 83 above.
[72] Carey, *The Irish National Origin-Legend*, 9.
[73] Meyer, 'Partholón mac Sera' and Carey, *The Irish National Origin-Legend*, 8.
[74] Carey, *The Irish National Origin-Legend*, 8.
[75] John Carey, 'Did the Irish Come from Spain?', *History Ireland* 3 (2001): 8–11.

to late antique intellectual tradition – he noted that the Spanish ancestry of the Irish might come from Isidore of Seville's depiction of Spain as the 'mother of races'.[76] Carey has built on these conclusions to demonstrate the influence of Orosius's *History against the Pagans* in connecting Ireland and Spain geographically and as a source for the tower of Bregon episode in the *Lebor Gabála*. He also finds Isidorian influence behind the idea that the Irish originally came from Spain, via Isidore's derivation of the Latin name of Ireland [(H)ibernia] from that of Spain [(H)iberia].[77] Thus, even this earliest extant version of the Irish origin legend reflects the influence of a corpus of material that developed together as the legend grew.

So too does the continued lack of value distinction between internal and external source material. Nowhere is this more clearly illustrated than in the *Historia Brittonum*, which unproblematically presents two versions of the origin stories of both the Irish and the British side by side. The *Historia Brittonum* was thus less concerned with ensuring its information was 'correct' or its narrative perfectly synthesised than it was with collecting as much material on the history of the insular region as possible. Both versions of the British origin story, discussed further below, focus on the eponymous ancestor Brutus, who is given an alternate genealogy in the second variant. The two Irish origin narratives are quite different from one another: while the first, as we have just seen, combines native Irish with classical and late antique intellectual traditions to describe waves of invaders coming to the island, the second is modelled around Christian and biblical history and makes the Irish into a second tribe of Israelites.

However, a close reading of these two narratives reveals that this doubling is not actually contradictory. Rather, within the narrative of the *Historia Brittonum*, these origin stories are attached to two different Gaelic populations, one in Ireland proper and the other in Britain in the kingdom of the Dál Riata, as an apparent attempt to separate two conflicting origin legends for the same people. The second Irish origin tale in the *Historia Brittonum* reads as follows:

Si quis autem scire voluerit quando vel quo tempore fuit inhabitabilis et deserta Hibernia, sic mihi peritissimi Scottorum nuntiaverunt. Quando venerunt per Mare Rubrum filii Israhel, Aegyptii venerunt, et secuti sunt et demersi sunt, ut

[76] van Hamel, 'On *Lebor Gabála*', 173. See Barney et al., *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, and for recent studies see John Henderson, *The Medieval World of Isidore of Seville: Truth from Words* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Andrew Fear and Jamie Wood (eds.), *Isidore of Seville and His Reception in the Early Middle Ages: Transmitting and Transforming Knowledge*, Late Antique and Early Medieval Iberia, vol. 2 (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016); and Andrew Fear and Jamie Wood (eds.), *A Companion to Isidore of Seville* (Leiden: Brill, 2020).

[77] Carey, 'Did the Irish Come from Spain?'.

in Lege legitur. Erat vir nobilis de Scythia cum magna familia apud Aegyptios, et expulsus est a regno suo, et ibi erat quando Aegyptii mersi sunt, et non perrexit ad sequendum populum Dei. Illi autem qui superfuerant inierunt consilium ut expellerent illum, ne regnum illorum obsideret et occuparet, quia fortes illorum demersi erant in Rubrum mare, [iste gener Pharaonis erat, id est mas Scotte, filie Pharaonis, a quo ut fertur Scocia appellata fuit] et expulsus est. At ille, per XLII annos ambulavit per Africam, et venerunt ad aras Filistinorum et per lacum Salinarum, et cenerunt inter Rusicadam at montes Azariae, et venerunt per flumen Malvam, et transierunt per Maritaniam ad columnas Erculis, et navigaverunt Tyrrenum mare, et pervenerunt ad Hispaniam usque, et ibi habitaverunt per multos annos, et creverunt et multiplicati sunt nimis, et gens illorum multiplicata est nimis. Et postea venerunt ad Hiberniam post MII annos, postquam mersi sunt Aegyptii in Rubrum mare, et ad regiones Darieta, in tempore quo regnabat Brutus apud Romanos, a quo consules esse coeperunt, deinde tribuni plebis ac dictatores. Et consules rursum rempublicam obtinuerunt per annos CCCCXLVII, quae prius regia dignitate damnata fuerat.

(If anyone wants to know when Ireland was inhabited and when it was deserted, this is what the Irish scholars have told me. When the children of Israel crossed through the Red Sea, the Egyptians came and pursued them and were drowned, as may be read in the Law. Among the Egyptians was a nobleman of Scythia, with a great following, who had been expelled from his kingdom, and was there when the Egyptians were drowned, but did not join in the pursuit of the children of God. The survivors took counsel to expel him, lest he should attack their kingdom and occupy it, for their strength had been drowned in the Red Sea [for his wife was Scotta, the daughter of Pharoah, from whom Scotia, Ireland, is said to be named]. He was expelled and he wandered for 42 years through Africa, and they came to the Altars of the Philistines, by the Salt Lake, and through Rusicade and the Mountains of Axaria, and by the river Muluya, and crossed through Morocco to the Pillars of Hercules, and sailed over the Tyrrhene Sea, and came to Spain, and there they lived for many years, and grew and multiplied exceedingly, and their people multiplied exceedingly. After they had come to Spain, and 1002 years after the Egyptians had been drowned in the Red Sea, they came to the country of Dal Riada, at the time when Brutus was ruling among the Romans, with whom the Consuls began, and then the Tribunes of the Plebs and the Dictators. The Consuls however held the State for 447 years, which had previously suffered the rule of Kings.)[78]

The author of the *Historia Brittonum* was clearly familiar with two origin legends for the Irish, since this passage begins by characterising itself as the origin narrative for Ireland, *Hibernia*. Wanting to include both, yet aware that they conflicted with one another, he appears to have split them and attached one to the Gaels in Ireland and the second to the Gaels in the Dál Riata. This doubled legend reminds us that early insular authors wanted to include as much information as they had, even when their sources conflicted with one another. It also underscores the extent to

[78] Morris, *Nennius*, 62 and 21.

which the corpus of insular origin material was growing and spreading, even in the early ninth century when the *Historia Brittonum* was written. Finally, this origin story for the Gaels of the Dál Riata underscores the ways in which insular origin legends were deliberately crafted to match biblical and Christian history, shaped to parallel them over time.

The Irish origin legend in the *Historia Brittonum*, then, continues the patterns we have seen throughout the corpus of texts containing insular origin material. Its earliest surviving occurrence was in a text written by a British author, reflecting the existence of an extended corpus of origin narratives which has since been lost. In mentioning his use of these Irish sources, the author of the *Historia Brittonum* also demonstrates the intertextuality of this corpus. The fact that no distinction is drawn between the validity of the two different Irish origin legends underscores the *Historia Brittonum*'s interest in compiling all known information together. The *Historia Brittonum*, like other works containing origin material in the early insular region, has often been characterised as a synchronising history, a work that seeks to combine 'all the available, and often wildly contradictory, witnesses into a slick, coherent, and "official" whole'.[79] While the *Historia Brittonum* certainly can be seen to compile its evidence into a narrative which tells the story of the insular region over time, this text is less concerned with constructing one unified vision of insular history than has often been assumed. Indeed, the *Historia Brittonum* has so often been unfavourably compared to Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* precisely because of the multiple and contradictory accounts of given events still present in this text, as its author seemingly sought to incorporate all or most of the information at his disposal into his work. This text illustrates the complex layers of connection between the works containing early insular origin material.

In addition to its narratives of Irish origins, the *Historia Brittonum* was also the first place to preserve the origin story that the British are descended from eponymous ancestor Brutus of Troy. This legend enjoyed significant popularity in the Middle Ages thanks to its inclusion in Geoffrey of Monmouth's influential *De gestis Britonum*.[80] Yet it was first recorded in the *Historia Brittonum*, where like the Irish origin legend, it was introduced in two contradictory accounts which derived from external, now-lost sources. The narrative runs as follows:

Si quis scire voluerit quo tempore post diluvium habitata est haec insula, hoc experimentum bifarie inveni. In annalibus autem Romanorum sic scriptum est.

[79] Dumville, 'The Historical Value of the *Historia Brittonum*', 5–6.
[80] See Thea Summerfield, 'Filling the Gap: Brutus in the *Historia Brittonum*, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* MS F, and Geoffrey of Monmouth', in Juliana Dresvina and Nicholas Sparks (eds.), *The Medieval Chronicle VII* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011), 85–102.

Aeneas post Troianum bellum cum Ascanio filio suo venit ad Italiam et, superato Turno, accepit Laviniam, filiam Latini, filii Fauni, filii Saturni, in coniugium et, post mortem Latini, regnum obtinuit Romanorum vel Latinorum. Aeneas autem Albam condidit et postea uxorem duxit, et peperit ei filium nomine Silvium. Silvius autem duxit uxorem, et gravida fuit, et nuntiatum est Aeneae quod nurus sua gravida esset, et misit ad Ascanium filium suum, ut mitteret magum suum ad considerandam uxorem, ut exploraret quid haberet in utero, si masculum erandam uxorem, ut exploraret quid haberet in utero, si masculum vel feminam. Et magus consideravit uxorem et reversus est. Propter hanc vaticinationem magus occisus est ab Ascanio, quia dixit Ascanio quod masculum haberet in utero mulier et filius mortis erit, quia occidet patrem suum et matrem suam et erit exosus omnibus hominibus. Sic evenit: in nativitate illius mulier mortua est, et nutritus est filius, et vocatum est nomen eius Britto. Post multum intervallum, iuxta vaticinationem magi, dum ipse ludebat cum aliis, ictu sagittae occidit patrem suum, non de industria, sed casu. Et expulsus est ab Italia, et arminilis fuit, et venit ad insulas maris Tirreni, et expulsus est a Graecis causa occisionis Turni, quem Aeneas occiderat, et pervenit ad Gallos usque, et ibi condidit civitatem Turonorum, quae vocatur Turnis. Et postea ad istam pervenit insulam, quae a nomine suo accepit nomen, id est Brittaniam, et inplevit eam cum suo genere, et habitavit ibi. Ab illo autem die habitata est Brittannia usque in hodiernum diem.

(If anyone wants to know when this island was inhabited after the Flood, I find two alternative explanations. The version in the Annals of the Romans is that after the Trojan War Aeneas came to Italy with his son Ascanius, defeated Turnus and married Lavinia, daughter of Latinus, son of Faunus, son of Picus, son of Saturn; and after Latinus' death, he acquired the kingdom of the Romans and the Latins. Aeneas founded Alba, and then married a wife, who bore him a son named Silvius. Silvius married a wife, who became pregnant, and when Aeneas was told that his daughter-in-law was pregnant, he sent word to his son Ascanius, to send a wizard to examine the wife, to discover what she had in the womb, whether it was male or female. The wizard examined the wife and returned, but he was killed by Ascanius because of his prophecy, for he told him that the woman had a male in her womb, who would be the child of death, for he would kill his father and his mother, and be hateful to all men. So it happened; for his mother died in his birth, and the boy was reared, and named Britto [Brutus]. Much later, according to the wizard's prophecy, when he was playing with others, he killed his father with an arrow shot, not on purpose, but by accident. He was driven from Italy, and came to the islands of the Tyrrhene Sea, and was driven from Greece, because of the killing of Turnus, whom Aeneas had killed, and arrived in Gaul, where he founded the city of Tours, which is called Turnis; and later he came to this island, which is named Britannia from his name, and filled it with his race, and dwelt there. From that day, Britain has been inhabited until the present day.)[81]

This legendary narrative, like the others presented in this chapter, underscores the intertextuality of the corpus of works containing insular origin

[81] Morris, *Nennius*, 60 and 19.

material. When introducing the Brutus narrative, the author of the *Historia Brittonum* writes: 'Si quis scire voluerit quo tempore post diluvium habitata est haec insula, hoc experimentum bifarie inveni. In annalibus autem Romanorum sic scriptum est . . . ' (If anyone wants to know when this island was inhabited after the Flood, I find two alternative explanations. The version in the Annals of the Romans is . . .).[82] The direct source of this first legend is unknown, though reference to the 'Annals of the Romans' is also made in the eighth-century Hiberno-Latin *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis*.[83] Dumville writes that, 'whether or not it had an origin before the writing of *Historia Brittonum* is unknown, although if the author's words be taken at face-value he derived it from an earlier source, *annales Romanorum*'.[84] As Charles-Edwards has explained, the 'Annals of the Romans' 'must have contained an origin-legend of the Britons', namely, 'a narrative outline of the events commemorated in Virgil's Aeneid'.[85] While the exact source of this first episode is lost to us, here we see that the author of the *Historia Brittonum* unproblematically incorporates two competing versions of the British origin legend into his text. No value distinction is drawn between them, but rather each is included to create as comprehensive a historical narrative as possible.

This is reiterated when the *Historia Brittonum*'s author introduces the second British origin narrative by commenting, 'aliud experimentum inveni de isto Bruto ex veteribus libris veterum nostrorum' (I found another explanation about Brutus in the old books of our elders),[86] repeating after he has related this version that 'hanc peritiam inveni ex traditione veterum' (this learning I found in the tradition of our elders).[87] The author of the *Historia Brittonum* cites his sources, but does not draw value distinctions between them. This second narrative of British origins derives from an early medieval genealogical tradition dubbed by its most recent editor, Walter Goffart, as 'The Supposedly "Frankish" Table of Nations'.[88] A recent study by Patrick Wadden has underscored the myriad ways in which the Frankish Table of Nations' genealogical tradition was put to use within different recensions of the *Historia Brittonum* as

[82] Morris, *Nennius*, 60 and 19.
[83] Hermann Wasserschleben (ed.), *Die irische Kanonensammlung*, 2nd edn. (Leipzig: Tauchnitz, 1885) and Roy Flechner (ed. and trans.), *The Hibernensis*, 2 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2019).
[84] David N. Dumville, '*Historia Brittonum*: An Insular History from the Carolingian Age', in Anton Scharer and Georg Scheibelreiter (eds.), *Historiographie im frühen Mittelalter* (Vienna: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1994), 406–34 at 408.
[85] Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, 445 and 'Origin Legends in Ireland and Celtic Britain', in Lindy Brady and Patrick Wadden (eds.), *Origin Legends in Early Medieval Western Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2022).
[86] Morris, *Nennius*, 63 and 22. [87] Morris, *Nennius*, 63 and 22.
[88] Goffart, 'The Supposedly "Frankish" Table of Nations'.

well as throughout insular historiography in general.[89] While this second tradition is included in the *Historia Brittonum* 'almost begrudgingly', as Wadden puts it, its presence is nonetheless a reminder that the author of the *Historia Brittonum* was reluctant to jettison any information, no matter how contradictory it appeared.[90]

This pattern is even more obvious when multiple versions of events are included despite the fact that they are not just contradictory, but distasteful. After the version of the Brutus narrative said to be from the Roman annals, a side comment in some manuscripts of the *Historia Brittonum* notes,[91] 'haec est genealogia istius Bruti exosi, nunquam ad se, nos id est Britones, ducti, quadoque volebant Scotti, nescientes originis sui, ad istum domari' (this is the genealogy of that Brutus the Hateful, who has never been traced to us, when the Irish, who do not know their origin, wished to be under him).[92] Why would an early medieval author not want to be connected to Brutus, or consider him hateful? The explanation is found in his competing genealogies. In the version from the 'Annals of the Romans', we read, 'Brutus vero fuit filius Silvii f. Aschanii f. Enee f. Anchise f. Capen f. Asaraci f. Tros f. Erectonii f. Dardani filii Iupiter, de genere Cam filii maledicti videntis et ridentis patrem Noe' (Brutus was the son of Silvius, son of Ascanius, son of Aeneas ... of the race of Ham, the accursed son who saw his father Noah and mocked him).[93] There is thus good reason why a *gens* would want to distance themselves from an ancestral figure who is part of the race of Ham. Thus, in the alternative explanation of British origins, said to be from 'the old books of our elders', Brutus's genealogy is different. The full passage reads:

Aliud experimentum inveni de isto Bruto ex veteribus libris veterum nostrorum. Tres filii Noe diviserunt orbem in tres partes post diluvium. Sem in Asia, Cham in Africa, Jafeth in Europa dilataverunt terminos suos.

(I found another explanation about Brutus in the old books of our elders. The three sons of Noah divided the world into three parts after the Flood. Sem extended his boundaries in Asia, Ham in Africa, Japheth in Europe.)[94]

[89] Wadden, 'The Frankish Table of Nations in Insular Historiography'.
[90] Wadden, 'The Frankish Table of Nations in Insular Historiography', 31.
[91] The recensions of the *Historia Brittonum* are discussed further below. Morris's edition was a reprint of Faral, *La légende arthurienne*, itself an edition of the Harleian recension based on the text of London, British Library, MS Harley 3859. Morris included additional material from other recensions in brackets, taken from Mommsen (ed.), *Chronica Minora saec. IV. V. VI. VII.*, vol. III, 111–222.
[92] Morris, *Nennius*, 60 and 19.
[93] Morris, *Nennius*, 60 and 19.
[94] Morris, *Nennius*, 63 and 22. Japheth's connections to Europe stem from the biblical division of the world among Noah's three sons (Genesis 9 and 10), though the concept of 'Europe' was initially quite fluid: see Denys Hay, *Europe: The Emergence of an Idea* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1957). The linkage of Japheth, Shem, and

In this version of British origins, Brutus remains the founding ancestor, yet his genealogy is switched from the shameful race of Ham to that of Japheth, from whom all the peoples of Europe were believed to descend. It is easy to see why Brutus's genealogy was altered in this way, yet my larger point is that both versions of his origins were nonetheless included in the *Historia Brittonum*. Another illustration of the same point can be seen when the author of the *Historia Brittonum* writes, 'in veteri traditione seniorum nostrorum septem imperatores fuerunt a Romanis in Brittannia, Romani autem dicunt novem' (in the ancient tradition of our elders, there were seven emperors in Britain, but the Romans say there were nine).[95] The complexities of the *Historia Brittonum*'s sources underscore the intertextuality of the insular corpus as a whole.

In crafting his own work, the author of the *Historia Brittonum* drew upon Gildas and Bede, but also a wide range of other sources that have not yet been fully investigated: Roman annals, the *Annales Cambrie* and the 'Chronicle of Ireland', and Continental sources including Jerome's translation of the Chronicle of Eusebius, continued by those of Prosper and Isidore.[96] As Dumville has summarised,

> the text is built on two processes of harmonisation of source-material. On the one hand the author set to bring together texts of Irish, British, English, and Continental origins, to adapt and in some measure reconcile the information of each with that of the others in order to provide a narrative sequence. On the other hand, the author sought to tie the Insular events of his account to a more general history – biblical, then Roman; he did so by peppering the earlier part of his History with deliberate synchronisms.[97]

He also notes that 'what is perhaps most striking about our author's source-material is the extent to which it is derived from Ireland and England. This writer was notably outward-looking: it remains unclear whether his attitude was the result of choice or of necessity.'[98] Not only

Ham to specific regions of the world was further developed by late antique authors – notably Josephus, Jerome, Augustine, and Isidore – and had become widespread by the early medieval period; see James M. Scott, *Geography in Early Judaism and Christianity: The Book of Jubilees* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) and Tristan Major, *Undoing Babel: The Tower of Babel in Anglo-Saxon Literature* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), 27–77.

[95] Morris, *Nennius*, 65 and 25.

[96] Dumville, '*Historia Brittonum*: An Insular History from the Carolingian Age', 420 n. 91: 'A detailed study of the use of these sources remains to be made: all present scholarship relies on the *apparatus fontium* provided in Chronica Minora Saec. IV.V.VI.VII (ed. Theodor Mommsen, 3 vols, MGH, Auctores Antiquissimi, 9, 11, and 13, 1891–8) vol. III, 111–222 (with reference to his own editions of Prosper and Isidore in the same work).'

[97] Dumville, '*Historia Brittonum*: An Insular History from the Carolingian Age', 419–20.

[98] Dumville, '*Historia Brittonum*: An Insular History from the Carolingian Age', 425. One could argue that the answer to the question of whether the *Historia Brittonum*'s

the information contained within the *Historia Brittonum*, but also its structure, drew inspiration from external sources: 'Irish pseudohistory provided a model (perhaps one among several) for the integration of an *origo gentis* with world-history ... more particularly, the Irish national pseudohistory provided a model for the integration of a latinate world-history with national legend and a detailed example of synthetic method.'[99] Collectively, then, the *Historia Brittonum*'s patterns of source use illustrate the extent to which early insular texts drew upon as wide a range of sources as possible to compile comprehensive histories of the region.

Finally, like Gildas and Bede before it, the *Historia Brittonum* had a long afterlife. It was a popular text which survives in about thirty-five manuscripts (not including the five main manuscript witnesses of the *Lebor Bretnach*, discussed further below).[100] Our understanding of the *Historia Brittonum* is complicated by the fact that these manuscripts represent a number of distinct recensions, the most important of which are the Harleian, Chartres, Vatican, Nennian, Gildasian, and Sawley recensions.[101] The oldest manuscript of the *Historia Brittonum*, Chartres, Bibliothèque Municipale, MS 98, was destroyed during World War II. It has been dated by various editors to the ninth/tenth and more recently eleventh centuries.[102] In terms of recensions, there is general consensus that the Harleian recension 'preserves best the work as it was originally composed, probably in the year 829–30', and thus it is this text which has been used throughout the present study.[103] Also of note is that there has been significant debate over the authenticity of a preface to the *Historia Brittonum*, found only in the Nennian recension, which attributes authorship of this work to someone named Nennius. Dumville has argued strongly that the Nennian preface is a later interpolation to the *Historia Brittonum*, but more recent arguments for its authenticity have been made by P.J.C. Field and Ben Guy.[104] The *Historia Brittonum* was widely known throughout the medieval period. Most germane to the focus of this book is the fact that the *Historia Brittonum* was

complexity was the result of 'choice or necessity' is 'both' – its author chose to write within a tradition that already, by the beginning of the ninth century, tended to encourage its authors to coagulate material from different sources and traditions.

[99] Dumville, '*Historia Brittonum*: An Insular History from the Carolingian Age', 427.

[100] Dumville, '"Nennius" and the *Historia Brittonum*', 78.

[101] See David N. Dumville, *The Textual History of the Welsh-Latin Historia Brittonum* (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1975).

[102] Dumville, *The Textual History of the Welsh-Latin Historia Brittonum*, 301–7.

[103] Dumville, '"Nennius" and the *Historia Brittonum*', 78.

[104] See Dumville, '"Nennius" and the *Historia Brittonum*'; Field, 'Nennius and His History'; and Guy, 'The Origins of the Compilation of Welsh Historical Texts in Harley 3859'.

the basis of the vernacular Gaelic translation known as the *Lebor Bretnach*, which in turn influenced the *Lebor Gabála Érenn* and subsequent works of Irish pseudohistory, as discussed below. Most famously, the *Historia Brittonum* would later serve as a significant source for Geoffrey of Monmouth's wildly influential *De gestis Britonum*.[105] The *Historia Brittonum* thus continued the synchronising process of writing history that we have witnessed throughout the early medieval insular region.

Part IV: The *Lebor Bretnach*, the *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, and the Continuation of the Corpus

All of the origin legends discussed in this book have now been introduced, but not yet all of the texts that contain them. The last main works to be discussed in this book, the vernacular *Lebor Bretnach* and *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, engage in the same process of pseudohistorical synchronisation of a broad pool of sources into one cohesive narrative. The *Lebor Bretnach* is a translation of the *Historia Brittonum* into early Middle Irish.[106] It has received less attention than many of the other texts in the insular historiographical corpus because it is a translation, yet this work is more than an Irish duplication of its Latin source. Extant manuscripts of the *Lebor Bretnach* reveal significant alterations to the text of the *Historia Brittonum* in both form and content, via the rearranging, omission, and addition of material. The differences between the Irish and Latin texts have of course been observed, but scholarship on the *Lebor Bretnach* has largely focused on its value for reconstructing an earlier Latin recension of the *Historia Brittonum* and as a source for the legendary history of the Picts, which is nearly the sole focus of its additional material. While these approaches have much to offer, the text of the *Lebor Bretnach* has been less often discussed as a unified vision of insular history in its own right.

The *Lebor Bretnach*, like the *Historia Brittonum*, has a complicated textual history that has impeded its study: no single manuscript contains the complete Irish translation of the *Historia Brittonum* and the additional material that together create the '*Lebor Bretnach*' as it appears in modern editions. As A.G. van Hamel, the text's most recent editor in 1932, states the problem: 'We shall divide the "complete" *Lebor Bretnach* into twenty-two sections; it must be borne in mind, however, that these are found combined in none of our MSS'.[107] The *Lebor Bretnach* is attributed to Irish historian Gilla Coemáin and was composed in the eleventh

[105] See Hanning, *The Vision of History in Early Britain*, 121–72 and Jones, *Historical Writing in Medieval Wales*.
[106] See bibliography in Introduction, n. 82 above. [107] van Hamel, *Lebor Bretnach*, v.

century,[108] to when the earliest of its five main manuscript witnesses, *Leabhar na hUidhre*, can also be dated. These five manuscripts contain six individual copies of the *Lebor Bretnach*, representing three recensions of the text.[109] Each of these recensions includes additional material on the legendary history of the Picts, but none contains all of the added material in its entirety. As Dumville remarks, 'it is an interesting coincidence ... that both sides of the tradition attracted Pictish material: "Version I" (La) has §4 and "Version III" has §§4, 6, and 7; "Version II", on the other hand, has §§47-53'.[110] The additional material in Versions I and II consists of a brief prose Pictish origin legend and Pictish king-lists. Version III also contains one of these king-lists in addition to longer prose and poetic versions of the Pictish origin legend and a narrative on the miracles of St Cairnech (discussed further in Chapter Three below).

In sum, the surviving manuscripts of the *Lebor Bretnach* preserve three versions of the text, one fragmentary and two fairly complete, each of which includes additional material not present in the *Historia Brittonum* but none of which includes all of that additional material. Dumville has argued that 'the position of §§4, 6–7, and 24–25 as interpolations' means that 'these must be dismissed from the text presented by a new edition'.[111] Similarly, he writes that the texts of Version II

> enjoy in common the feature of being followed by the Pictish and Scottish king-list and by the version of Bede. For reasons best known to himself, Van Hamel chose to print these (as §§47–58) as if they were an integral part of *Lebor Bretnach*, which they are certainly not. (§§47–58 must also be dismissed from a new edition.)[112]

While these points that the Pictish material was not part of the *Lebor Bretnach* in its earliest iteration are important, the text as it stands nonetheless shows us how the Gaelic-speaking world perceived insular history. The Pictish material became quickly linked to the *Lebor Bretnach* by those who recopied and circulated the vernacular version of this text, and as the

[108] Dumville, 'The Textual History of the "Lebor Bretnach"', 272: 'The original translation, made during the eleventh century (and perhaps about the middle), derives from the so-called "Nennian" recension of the Latin text, which can itself hardly have been written at a very much earlier date', noting further that 'An attribution of the translation of *Lebor Bretnach* to Gilla Coemáin, the "synthetic" historian of the later eleventh century (*fl.* 1071/2), had become attached to the work not later than the first half of the fourteenth century ... The authorship of Gilla Coemáin must be viewed with a certain scepticism, particularly in view of the early date of the derivative text in U, but no certain decision is yet possible.'

[109] Dumville, 'The Textual History of the "Lebor Bretnach"'.

[110] Dumville, 'The Textual History of the "Lebor Bretnach"', 266.

[111] Dumville, 'The Textual History of the "Lebor Bretnach"', 266.

[112] Dumville, 'The Textual History of the "Lebor Bretnach"', 266.

following chapters discuss in greater detail, these additions altered the narrative of insular history in some significant ways.

Thomas Owen Clancy has convincingly argued that the original translation of the Nennian recension of the *Historia Brittonum* into Gaelic as the *Lebor Bretnach* took place in Scotland rather than in Ireland.[113] His conclusions further underscore the extent to which engagement with the corpus of texts containing origin materials stretched across the insular region. The *Lebor Bretnach* is an intellectual output of the Gaelic-speaking world, which encompassed both Britain and Ireland in the early medieval period. This text illustrates the circulation of historical and pseudohistorical material throughout the insular region, as Gaelic intellectual tradition in both Scotland and Ireland valued the *Historia Brittonum* enough to translate it and circulate that translation widely. Of similar relevance is the survival of a fragmentary Irish translation of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*.[114] While its incomplete survival means that we know less about this text than the *Lebor Bretnach*, its existence likewise reflects the circulation and value of historical material across the insular intellectual world.

The *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, the last text chronologically in the corpus of insular works containing origin material, also represents the connectivity of this body of material. The *Lebor Gabála Érenn* is a compilation of Irish origin material which was first put together in the eleventh century but which clearly drew on older literary traditions that no longer survive independently in addition to the known material that it incorporates.[115] The *Lebor Gabála* incorporates a wide range of sources including classical and late antique geographical and encyclopaedic works, biblical texts, contemporaneous Irish material, and the other texts in the early insular corpus of historical and pseudohistorical works. Bart Jaski has recently demonstrated the complicated extent to which the *Lebor Gabála* drew on a wide range of insular texts as sources,[116] and as Clarke has

[113] Thomas Owen Clancy, 'Scotland, the "Nennian" Recension of the *Historia Brittonum*, and the *Lebor Bretnach*', in Simon Taylor (ed.), *Kings, Clerics, and Chronicles in Scotland, 500–1297: Essays in Honour of Marjorie Ogilvie Anderson on the Occasion of Her Ninetieth Birthday* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000), 87–107.

[114] Bergin, 'A Middle-Irish Fragment of Bede's Ecclesiastical History'; Ní Chatháin, 'Bede's Ecclesiastical History in Irish'; and Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Of Bede's "Five Languages and Four Nations"'.

[115] See bibliography in Introduction, n. 83 above, but particularly Scowcroft, '*Leabhar Gabhála* Part I' and 'Part II' and Carey, *A New Introduction* and *The Irish National Origin-Legend*. See also R. Mark Scowcroft, 'Mediaeval Recensions of the *Lebor Gabála*', in Carey (ed.), *Lebor Gabála Érenn: Textual History and Pseudo-History*, 1–20.

[116] Bart Jaski, 'The Irish Origin Legend: Seven Unexplored Sources', in Carey (ed.), *Lebor Gabála Érenn: Textual History and Pseudo-History*, 48–75; see also his '"We Are of the Greeks in Our Origin": New Perspectives on the Irish Origin Legend', *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies* 46 (2003): 1–53.

recently argued, there is also a strong likelihood of significant Carolingian influence on the structure of the origin material in this text.[117] As Scowcroft has pointed out, the textual history of the *Lebor Gabála* is so complex that

> the most appropriate stemma for *Lebor Gabála*, could we construct it, would be the reverse of the classical stemma: scores of sources, tracts, poems and postulated versions would converge and sift together, in recension after recension – the work of generations of authors – until at the bottom would stand *omega*: the recension of Míchaeál Ó Cléirigh [written in the seventeenth century].[118]

Unlike most classical and some medieval works in which an initially 'clean' authorial text becomes confused through inexpert copying over time, there was never a sole initial authoritative version of the *Lebor Gabála*. As Donnchadh Ó Corráin has pointed out, 'the MSS exhibit reworkings of many kinds, creative and otherwise – re-writings, rearrangements, contamination of differing versions (extant and lost), interpolations, &c. – and they represent rather specimens of a copious and dissonant written tradition from which modern scholars struggle to reconstruct "originals" often of their own imagining'.[119] Each medieval recension willingly added new material that only became synthesised when Ó Cléirigh set out to compile a comprehensive version of the work in the early modern period. These difficulties are compounded by those of working with R.A. Stewart Macalister's mid-twentieth-century edition: in Scowcroft's words, 'woefully incomplete, riddled with errors, and all but impossible to read' and a publication which has 'inhibited rather than encouraged critical enquiry' into the *Lebor Gabála*.[120] Two important studies by Scowcroft have greatly clarified the situation, dividing the *Lebor Gabála*'s numerous manuscripts into four main recensions and providing a concordance to Macalister's edition.[121] Although the *Lebor Gabála* – like Gildas's *De Excidio*, Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, and the *Historia Brittonum* – is primarily a history of one people, it nonetheless draws together a significant range of sources to compose this history. It, like the rest of the works in the corpus of insular historical writing, underscores the intellectual connectivity of this region in the early Middle Ages.

[117] Clarke, 'The *Leabhar Gabhála* and Carolingian Origin Legends'.
[118] Scowcroft, '*Leabhar Gabhála* Part I', 88.
[119] Donnchadh Ó Corráin, *Clavis litterarum Hibernensium*, 3 vols. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017), item 1141.
[120] Scowcroft, '*Leabhar Gabhála* Part I', 82–3.
[121] Scowcroft, '*Leabhar Gabhála* Part I' and 'Part II'.

Conclusions

This chapter has explicated the intellectual connectivity within the corpus of works containing insular origin material. Individual texts both borrowed from earlier works and in turn themselves became the source material for later authors as the corpus grew over time. Illustrating this pattern of growth and influence, we can see the expansion of the origin narratives themselves over time as well. In our first text, Gildas's *De Excidio*, only the Anglo-Saxons – the newest inhabitants of Britain – are given an origin story, while the British, Irish, and Picts who predate them are presented as if they have always lived in Britain and Ireland. Bede provides origin stories for the Anglo-Saxons and Picts, and the *Historia Brittonum* for the Anglo-Saxons, British, and Irish. Over time, every one of the insular *gentes* was provided with a complete origin narrative, including ancestors and a story of exile from an original homeland. These legends were written in response to one another, as a gap in insular history – where one *gens* had an origin story but their neighbours did not – led to curiosity about what events might have filled that gap.

The above discussion has drawn on textual evidence to articulate the ways in which early insular origin legends were created and preserved as part of an entangled corpus of history and pseudohistory. The next three chapters examine these connections more deeply through an extended study of three themes that grew to be particularly important in the origin stories of this region: exile, kin-slaying, and intermarriage and incest. This chapter has already introduced some of the ways in which origin legends gave each people in the insular region ancestral figures and a homeland from which they had originally come. The next chapter explores the concept of exile, the reason why a people's ancestors were said to have left that homeland in the first place. Chapter Three focuses on the concept of kin-slaying, which grew to become understood as the reason why that exile had originally taken place. Chapter Four is an extended study of the significant political roles that intermarriage between groups of peoples and incest within a group came to play after they arrived in their new insular homes. Studying these themes explicates the continued growth and mutual dependency of these origin narratives in the early medieval insular world.

2 Exile

Chapter One surveyed patterns of circulation and influence within the corpus of texts containing insular origin narratives. The present chapter begins a shift from the material transmission of these works to the dissemination and transformation of the ideas within them. Treating these origin legends as an insular textual corpus rather than four distinct national traditions allows us to usefully and productively analyse broader shared thematic patterns within this material. One of the central arguments of this book is that these patterns developed in tandem and that shared thematic elements appeared in some origin legends within the insular cultural zone based on the influence of others which were written earlier. Themes of exile, kin-slaying, intermarriage, and incest developed organically within this textual corpus as these origin legends were rewritten and expanded in response to one another. Reading the corpus of insular origin material as a whole allows us to see these important connections. The next three chapters explore key concepts of exile (Chapter Two), kin-slaying (Chapter Three), and intermarriage and incest (Chapter Four) within the body of insular origin material, examining both the growth and metamorphoses of these ideas over time and the historical resonance of these key topics in the region before roughly the twelfth century. In doing so, these chapters not only present the first comparative study of these important motifs in the corpus of insular origin narratives, but they also explain why these particular themes developed such resonance in the historical moment of their composition.

The next three chapters share the same basic structure. First, I will survey the concepts of exile, kin-slaying, and intermarriage and incest within the corpus of classical, biblical, and late antique material which informed the narrative structure of insular origin legends. These texts were not *sui generis*, but rather drew on, and then extended, a long intellectual tradition. Second, I explore the historical resonance of these motifs in the insular region during the period that these texts were written, as each chapter compiles legal and historical data from early medieval Britain and Ireland about exile, kin-slaying, intermarriage, and incest to

demonstrate why these concepts took on increasing importance within insular origin narratives. Finally, the next three chapters demonstrate the growth over time of these concepts in the insular origin corpus itself. As these legends grew in depth and complexity, motifs of exile, kin-slaying, intermarriage, and incest became intrinsic to the structure of insular origin stories.

Influenced most overtly in the west by the biblical myth of Exodus, the idea that a moment of exile had been a defining one in a people's history stood at the heart of many medieval origin legends and was not unique to the insular region.[1] Nonetheless, as the corpus of insular works containing origin narratives grew and developed over time, the concept of exile took on central importance. Arising from Gildas's foundational description of Britain as an island on the outermost fringes of the known world, the centrality of exile to insular origin stories grew increasingly central after the ninth-century *Historia Brittonum* introduced the influential legend that Britain's founding ancestor was Brutus, an exile from Troy. From there, the concept of exile came to have increasing thematic importance within insular origin narratives. The sentence of exile provided an ancestral figure (or family group) with a reason for departing his homeland and seeking a new one. It also gave him an explanation for traveling alone, thus ensuring that all of his subsequent descendants could trace their ancestry back to a single foundational figure and, through him, connect themselves to the broader known world. An exiled ancestral figure provided a link to the classical past without allowing the people from that ostensible homeland any rights to claim the new land for themselves. As the corpus of insular origin narratives expanded over time, the idea of exile gained increasing popularity as an explanation of how each people's foundational ancestor initially arrived in the region. This important thematic element expanded organically as ideas were transferred and transformed between key texts.

Part I: Exile in Classical, Biblical, and Late Antique Tradition

As surveyed in Chapter One, historical and pseudohistorical works containing insular origin material drew heavily on classical, biblical, and late antique sources.[2] As Patrick Geary writes,

> to describe the origins of a 'people' in terms derived from biblical and classical prototypes ... is exactly what authors at the end of Antiquity and in the early

[1] For Carolingian influence of this motif on insular origin material, particularly the *Lebor Gabála*, see Clarke, 'The *Leabhar Gabhála* and Carolingian Origin Legends'.
[2] See Chapter One.

Middle Ages did when they wrote accounts of the origins of the Goths, the Lombards, the Franks, the Anglo-Saxons, and, later, of the Serbs, the Croats, and the Hungarians ... authors such as Jordanes, the historian of the Goths; Gregory of Tours, writing about the Franks; or Constantine Porphyrogenitus, describing the Slavs, while claiming explicitly or implicitly to convey ancient oral traditions, were casting their peoples in Romano-Christian categories. Names of leaders, the divisions of peoples into tribal or familial units, epochal battles and legendary wanderings, all carried great symbolic value and were frequently linked to the history of the Hebrew *Exodus* narrative and traditions of Greco-Roman ethnography.[3]

These comments highlight the fact that the two most popular models on which later medieval origin legends were patterned were Exodus and the Greco-Roman legendary past.[4] The influence of Exodus and legends derived from Virgil's *Aeneid* can be seen in the insular region as well, where the Israelites and the Trojans became attractive ancestral models for centuries of literary and historical works to follow. Exodus and the *Aeneid* were such popular foundational narratives in part because they told the stories of peoples who were defined by their exile and separation from a homeland. These legends tied the descendants of the Israelites and the Trojans to the broader history of the Christian west, yet the core of their narratives defined the identities of these peoples by severing them from everyone around them. Both Exodus and the *Aeneid*, moreover, explicitly serve as foundation myths for broader world history, as the Israelites and the Trojans were cast as the ancestors of various peoples throughout the course of their wanderings. This embedded genealogical framework paved the way for insular authors to choose these narratives as a framework for their own peoples' stories of origin.

There are three subcategories of event related to the concept of exile which must be distinguished from one another at the outset: the exile of an individual, the exile of a larger group, and a group's migration. Migration – the voluntary movement of a people from one location to another – formed an important strand of many medieval origin legends, particularly on the continent.[5] It has points of obvious overlap with exile in that the exile of a group from one location might lead to its migration through several others before founding a new, permanent settlement. The focus of this chapter is largely on involuntary exile, both of individuals and of larger groups. In the medieval west, the *Aeneid* became a popular way to conceptualise the former and Exodus the latter. Exodus provided

[3] Geary, *Myth of Nations*, 164. [4] Reynolds, 'Medieval *Origines Gentium*'.
[5] See Walter Goffart, *Barbarian Tides: The Migration Age and the Later Roman Empire* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006) and Plassmann, *Origo gentis*.

a popular narrative framework for the involuntary exile of a people because it could be scaled up or down to fit an ancestral group of any size.

Exodus, the second book of the Bible, relates the story of the Israelites' escape from Egypt to Canaan under the leadership of Moses. The Israelites are enslaved by the Pharaoh of Egypt, and after God sends ten plagues to punish the Egyptians – culminating in the death of every firstborn in the land – the Pharaoh tells Moses that he may take his people and go out of Egypt: 'Vocatisque Mosen et Aaron nocte ait surgite egredimini a populo meo et vos et filii Israhel; ite immolate Domino sicut dicitis' (And Pharao, calling Moses and Aaron, in the night, said: Arise and go forth from among my people, you and the children of Israel. Go, sacrifice to the Lord as you say).[6] The Israelites are brought out of Egypt: 'et in eadem die eduxit Dominus filios Israhel de terra Aegypti per turmas suas' (and the same day the Lord brought forth the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt by their companies).[7] They make a covenant with God and are promised a fruitful homeland in return

cumque te introduxerit Dominus in terram Chananei et Hetthei et Amorrei et Evei et Iebusei; quam iuravit patribus tuis ut daret tibi; terram fluentem lacte et melle; celebrabis hunc morem sacrorum mense isto.

(and when the Lord shall have brought thee into the land of the Chanaanite, and the Hethite, and the Amorrhite, and the Hevite, and the Jebusite, which he swore to thy fathers that he would give thee, a land that floweth with milk and honey: thou shalt celebrate this manner of sacred rites in this month.)[8]

Pharaoh and the Egyptians pursue the Israelites, but are drowned in the Red Sea. God provides for the Israelites in the desert and relates the Ten Commandments to Moses, which his people agree to live by.

For the Christian peoples of the medieval west, the biblical myth of Exodus became particularly attractive as the basis for subsequent origin legends because it provided a narrative structure that understood the movement of a people as linked to their favour in God's sight. In the insular region, Exodus became a highly influential pattern for origin legends from Gildas's *De Excidio* onwards.[9] Nicholas Howe's 1989

[6] Exodus 12:31, in Robert Weber and Roger Gryson (eds.), *Biblia Sacra: Iuxta Vulgatam Versionem* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1st edn. 1969; 5th edn. 2007) and *The Douay-Rheims Bible* (New York: The Douay Bible House, 1941; repr. Fitzwilliam, NH: Loreto Publications, 2013). All biblical quotations and translations will be taken from these editions, given by book, chapter, and verse, and are from the Latin Vulgate, as it was the most widespread translation of the Bible in medieval western Europe.

[7] Exodus 12:51. [8] Exodus 13:5.

[9] On Gildas and the Old Testament generally, see George, *Gildas's De Excidio Britonum and the Early British Church*.

monograph *Migration and Mythmaking in Anglo-Saxon England* made a compelling case that the Anglo-Saxon origin narrative had been patterned around the legend of Exodus from Gildas's work forward throughout the Anglo-Saxon period.[10] As Howe describes the process: 'Because Gildas set the Germanic migration within Christian rather than British history, later writers could draw on his material without any confusion in historical explanation … Gildas believed the Old Testament history of the Israelites could stand as a model for ordering the history of a later people'.[11] From Gildas, the idea that the prehistory of the Anglo-Saxon *gens* could be modelled on that of the Israelites was taken up by Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* (and its later Old English translation), the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, and other works.[12]

This framework of modelling local history on the skeleton of the biblical became influential in the insular region from Gildas onwards, so that the Irish, British, and Pictish origin legends also grew to contain stories of exile mirroring that of Exodus at their core.[13] As Karen Jankulak writes, 'the tales of Irish origins found in *Historia Brittonum* and later *Lebor Gabála Érenn* eschewed the Trojan context entirely, and concentrated on a wandering ancestor connected to a Scythian nobleman who lived at the time of the Exodus', in which 'the search for the promised land' was 'both connected to and paralleling the Exodus story'.[14] Máire Ní Mhaonaigh elucidates the situation in Ireland: 'At the heart of what was a broader Christian learned heritage was the biblical concept of a people chosen by God … the wandering Irish … are identified with the exodus of the Israelites'.[15] Likewise, the

[10] Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking*.

[11] Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking*, 35, citing Hanning, *The Vision of History in Early Britain*, 103.

[12] Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking*, 35. Studies of this topic have been numerous, but for some of the most recent comprehensive investigations of this topic, see Daniel Anlezark, *Water and Fire: The Myth of the Flood in Anglo-Saxon England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006); Michael Fox and Manish Sharma (eds.), *Old English Literature and the Old Testament* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012); Samantha Zacher, *Rewriting the Old Testament in Anglo-Saxon Verse: Becoming the Chosen People*, Religion and Literature Series (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013); and Catherine E. Karkov, 'The Franks Casket Speaks Back: The Bones of the Past, the Becoming of England', in Eva Frojmovic and Catherine E. Karkov (eds.), *Postcolonising the Medieval Image* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 37–61.

[13] See Martin McNamara, 'The Multifaceted Transmission of the Bible in Ireland, A.D. 550-1200', in Bradford A. Anderson and Jonathan Kearney (eds.), *Ireland and the Reception of the Bible: Social and Cultural Perspectives*, Scripture Traces 1 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2018), 25–42.

[14] Karen Jankulak, *Geoffrey of Monmouth*, Writers of Wales (Cardiff: University of Wales, 2010), 40 and 26.

[15] Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Perception and Reality: Ireland c.980–1229', in Brendan Smith (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Ireland, Volume I: 600–1550* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 131–56 at 141, citing John Carey, '*Lebor Gabála* and the

biblical influences on the British origin narrative from the *Historia Brittonum* onwards have long been observed. As David C. Fowler writes, 'the influence of biblical tradition is especially evident, however, in the chronicles of Gildas and Nennius . . . in these chronicles we find the Britons, identified with the Israelites as the chosen people of God'.[16] The same held true for stories of Pictish and later Scottish origins, which were likewise influenced by the echoes of Exodus found within the earlier insular origin narratives on which they were patterned.[17] The process of textual influence was a multi-layered one, yet it is clear that the widespread myth of Exodus in the Christian medieval west was fundamentally influential to the important role given to narratives of ancestral exile in the origin legends of the early medieval insular region.

Additionally, widespread knowledge of classical Greco-Roman history – particularly the narrative laid out in Virgil's *Aeneid* and subsequent retellings of this story – also proved influential in the exile narratives which underlay insular origin legends. The *Aeneid* related the wanderings of Trojan hero Aeneas after the fall of Troy, when he fled to Italy and became the legendary ancestor of the Romans. The *Aeneid* remained widely popular throughout the Middle Ages,[18] as did works derived from it, most notably an account attributed to a purported Trojan 'eye-witness', Dares Phrygius, which in actuality dates to the sixth century (*Daretis Phrygii de excidio Trojae historia*).[19] Like the story of Exodus, the *Aeneid* rapidly became a popular narrative to which to link an origin legend, as 'to connect the destiny of Trojan refugees or their descendants with the origins of European nations became a common resource for

Legendary History of Ireland', in Helen Fulton (ed.), *Medieval Celtic Literature and Society* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2005), 32–48 and the essays in his (ed.) *Lebor Gabála Érenn: Textual History and Pseudo-History*.

[16] David C. Fowler, 'Some Biblical Influences on Geoffrey of Monmouth's Historiography', *Traditio* 14 (1958): 378–85 at 379.

[17] Roy James Goldstein, *The Matter of Scotland: Historical Narrative in Medieval Scotland* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1993).

[18] Domenico Comparetti, *Vergil in the Middle Ages*, trans. E.F.M. Benecke, with a new introduction by Jan M. Ziolkowski (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997); Christopher Baswell, *Virgil in Medieval England: Figuring the Aeneid from the Twelfth Century to Chaucer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); M. Geymonat, 'The Transmission of Virgil's Works in Antiquity and the Middle Ages', trans. Nicholas Horsfall, in Nicholas Horsfall (ed.), *A Companion to the Study of Virgil* (Leiden: Brill, 1995; 2nd rev. edn. 2001), 293–312; Sinéad O'Sullivan, 'From Troy to Aachen: Ancient Rome and the Carolingian Reception of Vergil', in Rosalind Brown-Grant et al. (eds.), *Inscribing Knowledge in the Medieval Book: The Power of Paratexts* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), 185–96.

[19] Louis Faivre d'Arcier, *Histoire et géographie d'un mythe. La circulation des manuscrits du De excidio Troiae de Darès le Phrygien (VIII^{e}–XV^{e} siècles)*, Mémoires et documents de l'école des chartes 82 (Paris: École nationale des chartes, 2006).

authors'.[20] The narrative of Aeneas's wanderings provided the means to tie a people's movements to a glorious classical ancestry and history.

The Trojan legend was widespread in the insular region throughout the Middle Ages.[21] In Ireland and Wales, as Helen Fulton notes, 'the appropriated legend served a similar purpose in both cultural landscapes, as part of a complex process of contemporary identity-formation'.[22] Emily Wingfield has traced the same process for Scotland in her 2014 monograph on *The Trojan Legend in Medieval Scottish Literature*,[23] and the influence of the Trojan legend on medieval English literature and historical writing has long been well-known.[24] As Jankulak notes:

> The *Aeneid*'s account of the Trojan diaspora provided a convenient slot in which historians of post-Roman kingdoms could situate their origins – origins that must have been particularly attractive in their proximity and indeed anteriority to the origins of Rome itself. The notion of Trojan ancestry is found in medieval histories of Franks … Scandinavians … and Normans … *Historia Brittonum* is unique, however, in the genealogical complexity of the claim to Trojan ancestry. No other versions of the Frankish Table locate their Old Testament-derived schemes within a Trojan context.[25]

As described in Chapter One, the *Historia Brittonum*'s precise source for the Brutus legend is unknown.[26] Yet regardless of this narrative's ultimate route of transmission into the insular region, it was the *Historia Brittonum* which popularised the Trojan story of exile within this context.

[20] André Mucenieks, *Saxo Grammaticus: Hierocratical Conceptions and Danish Hegemony in the Thirteenth Century* (Kalamazoo, MI: Arc Humanities Press, 2017), 55.

[21] See Elizabeth M. Tyler, 'Trojans in Anglo-Saxon England: Precedent without Descent', *The Review of English Studies* NS 64 (2013): 1–20; Brent Miles, *Heroic Saga and Classical Epic in Medieval Ireland* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2011).

[22] Helen Fulton, 'History and *Historia*: Uses of the Troy Story in Medieval Ireland and Wales', in O'Connor (ed.), *Classical Literature and Learning in Medieval Irish Narrative*, 40–57 at 40. See also Helen Fulton, 'Troy Story: The Medieval Welsh *Ystorya Dared* and the *Brut* Tradition of British History', in Dresvina and Sparks (eds.), *The Medieval Chronicle VII*, 137–50; Jones, *Historical Writing in Medieval Wales*; Erich Poppe, *A New Introduction to Imtheachta Aeniasa, the Irish Aeneid: The Classical Epic from an Irish Perspective* (London: Irish Texts Society, 1995); and Helen Fulton, 'Historiography and the Invention of British Identity: Troy as an Origin Legend in Medieval Britain and Ireland', in Brady and Wadden (eds.), *Origin Legends in Early Medieval Western Europe*.

[23] Emily Wingfield, *The Trojan Legend in Medieval Scottish Literature* (Cambridge: Boydell, 2014).

[24] C. David Benson, *The History of Troy in Middle English Literature* (Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 1980); Sylvia Federico, *New Troy: Fantasies of Empire in the Late Middle Ages* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

[25] Jankulak, *Geoffrey of Monmouth*, 40.

[26] See Dumville, '*Historia Brittonum*: An Insular History from the Carolingian Age' and Charles-Edwards, 'Origin Legends in Ireland and Celtic Britain'.

These narratives of exile which stood at the heart of Exodus and the *Aeneid* were popular frameworks upon which many medieval peoples overlaid their own origin legends. This was certainly the case in the insular region, where the migration stories of the Israelites and Trojans provided the spark of inspiration to narratives centred around exile. While these external influences on insular origin legends have been well-studied, the impact that these texts had on one another has been less understood. This chapter traces this process from Gildas's *De Excidio* onward, underscoring the ways in which an ancestral moment of exile became increasingly central to insular origin narratives as time progressed.

Part II: Exile in Law and History in the Insular Region

In the early medieval insular region, exile was more than a trope from mythological or literary narratives: it was a legal punishment with numerous historical examples from the societies under study here.[27] As Maurizio Lupoi writes, 'every type of community has mechanisms of exclusion which stop short of actually killing the person to whom they are applied'.[28] Modern societies use prisons for this type of societal exclusion, as did parts of the classical and late antique worlds.[29] However, the communities of early medieval northwest Europe lacked both the physical and political infrastructures necessary for imprisonment to be a viable legal option.[30] Most crimes were settled via the payment of fines on a legally designated scale of severity according to the offence committed. In the earliest law codes, such recompense went largely to the victim of the crime (or to his or her surviving relatives, if the crime in question was murder or manslaughter). As time went by and the governing of societies in the insular region began to grow in size and complexity,

[27] On the region as a whole, see Elisabeth van Houts, 'The Vocabulary of Exile and Outlawry in the North Sea Area around the First Millennium', in Laura Napran and Elisabeth van Houts (eds.), *Exile in the Middle Ages: Selected Proceedings from the International Medieval Congress, University of Leeds, 8–11 July 2002* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), 13–28.

[28] Maurizio Lupoi, *The Origins of the European Legal Order*, trans. Adrian Belton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000; repr. 2006), 368. Originally published in Italian as *Alle radici del mondo giuridico europeo* (Rome: Instituto Poligrafico E Zecca Dello Stato, 1994).

[29] See Julia Hillner, *Prison, Punishment and Penance in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

[30] In the early medieval period, the closest societal parallel was the taking or exchange of (usually high-status) political hostages, on which see Adam J. Kosto, *Hostages in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) and Matthew Bennett and Katherine Weikert (eds.), *Medieval Hostageship c.700–c.1500: Hostage, Captive, Prisoner of War, Guarantee, Peacemaker* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

a portion of the fine would often be due to a king or lord – and later, the church – as well.[31]

Inevitably, however, there were some crimes which either the perpetrator could not or would not provide a financial settlement for, or that the community as a whole deemed serious enough that no financial settlement would be acceptable. Exile and outlawry were the solutions to such crimes and thus became a central feature of early medieval insular legal systems.[32] Exile meant being expelled from a community, both physically and societally: 'A person banished from the community was to be given neither shelter nor nourishment'.[33] Outlawry was banishment from both a community and its legal system. An exile could not be aided, but an outlaw could be killed without consequence: 'the worst punishment would therefore be to deprive an individual of his peace, since he thereby lost the protection of the law and became equivalent to any enemy who could be killed with impunity'.[34] Of course, real world examples of exile and outlawry were much fuzzier than these neat legal definitions suggest. As C.P. Lewis nicely summarises:

> 'Exile' had multiple meanings. Sometimes it implied formal judicial banishment, but other individuals who went into exile had clearly not gone through a legal process of any kind, rather had been sent away against their will, with or without actual or threatened coercion. Some exiles had left of their own volition, choosing absence as a means, perhaps, of avoiding political difficulties at home. Others had journeyed away for reasons unconnected with politics. In short the idea of exile, at its edges, dissolves into soft focus, merging variously into banishment, flight, enforced removal, captivity, voluntary departure, and many other types of displacement.[35]

A wide range of situations involving exile were thus at play in the early medieval period. Below, I will briefly survey the legal and historical realities of exile before examining its narrative role in insular origin material.

There is a good deal of both legal and historical evidence for exile and outlawry in the societies under consideration in this book.[36] For the

[31] See Lupoi, *Origins of the European Legal Order*, chapter 9: 'Public Allegiance'.
[32] See Paul Dresch, 'Outlawry, Exile, and Banishment: Reflections on Community and Justice', in Fernanda Pirie and Judith Scheele (eds.), *Legalism: Community and Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 97–124.
[33] Lupoi, *Origins of the European Legal Order*, 370.
[34] Lupoi, *Origins of the European Legal Order*, 370.
[35] C.P. Lewis, 'Gruffudd ap Cynan and the Reality and Representation of Exile', in Napran and van Houts (eds.), *Exile in the Middle Ages*, 39–51 at 39.
[36] The concepts of exile and outlawry, of course, were not unique to the insular region: see e.g. William Ian Miller, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking: Feud, Law, and Society in Saga Iceland* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1990); Karl Shoemaker, *Sanctuary and Crime in the Middle Ages, 400–1500* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011); William Chester Jordan, *From England to France: Felony and Exile in the High Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015); and Napran and van Houts

period before the twelfth century, a large body of vernacular legal material survives from both Anglo-Saxon England and Ireland.[37] A substantial amount of vernacular legal material also survives from medieval Wales.[38] The situation here is more complicated in that the Welsh legal manuscripts all post-date the Norman Conquest: 'they together constitute almost all the information we have on native law in Wales before the Conquest'.[39] There is good evidence that the surviving Welsh law texts are an extension of an earlier tradition,[40] but that tradition was a living one: as Robin Chapman Stacey writes, 'they were teaching texts, composed by and for lawyers and judges, rather than laws issued by kings ... most of all they are literary compositions rather than legislation or objective accounts'.[41] The surviving Welsh and Irish legal material shares this in common – our extant knowledge of the laws comes solely from texts written by and for lawyers – whereas a substantial proportion of extant Anglo-Saxon legal material survives in the form of royal law codes. Nonetheless, as we shall see, the similarities across these bodies of surviving legal material make a comparative approach fruitful in understanding the legal significance of exile and outlawry within the early medieval insular region.

As for the region that would later become Scotland, unfortunately very little Pictish written material has survived at all, let alone any legal texts.[42] There is a corpus of surviving texts associated with the Dál Riata, some of the most noteworthy of which are a genealogical tract known as the *Senchus Fer n-Alban* / *Míniugud Senchusa Fher n-Alban*;[43] literary outputs

(eds.), *Exile in the Middle Ages*. However, the insular legal material contains enough points of overlap to make a comparative study of the region fruitful.

[37] Edited in Felix Liebermann, *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 3 vols. (Halle: Niemeyer, 1903–16) and D.A. Binchy, *Corpus Iuris Hibernici*, 6 vols. (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1978), respectively.

[38] Edited in Aneurin Owen, *Ancient Laws and Institutes of Wales* (London: Commissioners on the Public Records of the Kingdom, 1841). Owen's edition was published simultaneously in folio and quarto editions (in which the pagination does not match); references to this work are thus by section rather than page number. For the Welsh, Anglo-Saxon, and Irish legal material it is the case that more recent editions have been published of individual texts; however, Liebermann, Binchy, and Owen remain the sole comprehensive editions in each field.

[39] Robin Chapman Stacey, 'Law and Lawbooks in Mediaeval Wales', *History Compass* 8 (2010): 1180–90 at 1182.

[40] See T.M. Charles-Edwards, *The Welsh Laws*, Writers of Wales (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1989).

[41] Stacey, 'Law and Lawbooks', 1182.

[42] See Forsyth, 'Literacy in Pictland'.

[43] See John Bannerman, *Studies in the History of Dalriada* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1974); Benjamin T. Hudson, *Prophecy of Berchán: Irish and Scottish High-Kings of the Early Middle Ages* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996); David N. Dumville, 'Cethri prímchenéla Dáil Riata', *Scottish Gaelic Studies* 20 (2000): 170–91; Richard Sharpe, 'The Thriving of Dalriada', in Taylor (ed.), *Kings, Clerics, and Chronicles in Scotland*, 47–61; David N. Dumville, 'Ireland and North Britain in the Earlier Middle Ages: contexts for *Míniugud senchusa fher nAlban*', in Colm Ó Baoill and Nancy

from the monastery of Iona, including Adomnán's *Vita S. Columbae*, *De Locis Sanctis*, and *Cáin Adomnáin*;[44] and a reference to laws made by eighth-century king Áed Find / Áed mac Echach, which do not themselves survive.[45] While our knowledge of the legal evidence for outlawry from the early medieval insular region is thus drawn from Irish, Anglo-Saxon, and Welsh material, the overlap between these traditions suggests that the concepts of exile and outlawry would have been reasonably similar throughout the insular world. Overall, exile and outlawry formed a crucially important feature of the legal systems of this region, helping to explain why these motifs were embraced in insular origin legends. Exile and outlawry were not abstract concepts but rather a key legal principle in the societies which produced these stories, making their inclusion in these narratives meaningful to contemporary authors and audiences.

The oldest and most extensive amount of surviving legal material from the early medieval insular region comes from Ireland and Anglo-Saxon England. Old Irish law texts date to the seventh and eighth centuries in their oldest form,[46] and the surviving material fills a six-volume, text-only edition.[47] Exile and outlawry formed a central part of the Old Irish legal system. As Fergus Kelly notes, under Old Irish law, 'a person may be deprived of his of her rights for a wide range of criminal or anti-social activities'.[48] However, there are suggestions that outlawry could only be imposed after it was publicly declared: the *Tecosca Cormaic*, for instance, states that 'urraid cách co fócra' (every one is a citizen till he is proclaimed).[49] Once banished, it seems likeliest that exiles would have sought to start anew in another location. Reference in the Irish legal material is made to the fact that 'is urrad imorro in deorad crenus selb'

R. McGuire (eds.), *Rannsachadh na Gàidhlig 2000* (Aberdeen: An Cló Gaidhealach, 2002), 185–212. This text is discussed in greater detail in the Conclusion below.

[44] Denis Meehan (ed.), *Adamnan's De locis sanctis*, Scriptores Latini Hiberniae 3 (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1958); Alan Orr Anderson and Marjorie Ogilvie Anderson (eds.), *Adomnan's Life of Columba* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, 1961; rev. edn. Oxford: Oxford University Texts, 1991); Thomas Owen Clancy and Gilbert Márkus, *Iona: The Earliest Poetry of a Celtic Monastery* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995); Richard Sharpe, *Adomnán of Iona: Life of St Columba* (London: Penguin Books, 1995); Gilbert Márkus, *Adomnán's 'Law of the Innocents' – Cáin Adomnáin: A Seventh-Century Law for the Protection of Non-Combatants*, 2nd edn. (Kilmartin: Kilmartin House Trust, 2008).

[45] See below, p. 80 and n. 93.

[46] Fergus Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1988), 1–16 and 225–41.

[47] Binchy, *Corpus Iuris Hibernici* (henceforth cited as *CIH* by page and line number).

[48] Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, 222–3, citing *CIH* 324.7, 2298.2–3, 11.27, 55.1–6, 15.7–8, 2121.5, 1397.11, 1631.1 and *Tecosca Cormaic* §31.17.

[49] Kuno Meyer, *The Instructions of King Cormac Mac Airt: Tecosca Cormaic*, Todd Lecture Series 15 (Dublin, 1909), 46–7.

(an exile who buys property is a citizen), which suggests that a reversal of the process was possible.[50] The possibility of exile overseas is depicted memorably in the Old Irish saga *Togail Bruidne Dá Derga* ('The Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel'), which marks the beginning of King Conaire's downfall with his refusal to sentence his foster-brothers to death after they repeatedly ravage Ireland. He spares their lives by exiling them to Britain instead: 'ní crochfaiter ind fir, acht eirget senóri leósom corrálat a ndíbeirg for firu Alpan' (the men shall not be hung; but let veterans go with them that they may wreak their rapine on the men of Alba).[51] Interestingly, there is no evidence in the surviving Old Irish legal material that sentences of outlawry were imposed for particular time limits, suggesting that they could potentially be reversed.[52]

It is also noteworthy that exile was not solely a punishment in early medieval Ireland. Exile in a religious context (*peregrinatio*) was highly respected.[53] Traditions surrounding the biography of St Columba position his exile from Ireland – whether externally imposed or his own decision – as the impetus behind his founding of the abbey on Iona, which would quickly become one of the most remarkable centres of intellectual activity in the early medieval insular region. The same holds true of Columbanus's exile to the continent,[54] as well as that of numerous other Irish scholars (Dicuil, Sedulius Scotus, Marianus Scotus, Johannes Eriugena, etc.).[55] The historical records of early medieval Ireland are also replete with instances of political exile,[56] good surveys of which have been undertaken by Fiona Edmonds for the earlier period and K.L. Maund for the later.[57] 'Medieval Irish literature is also full of

[50] *CIH* 1631.1.
[51] Whitley Stokes, *Togail Bruidne Dá Derga: The Destruction of Dá Derga's Hostel* (Paris, 1902), 22.
[52] Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, 223–4.
[53] On ascetic and penitential exile – known as *peregrinatio* – see Thomas Charles-Edwards, 'The Social Background of Irish *peregrinatio*', *Celtica* 11 (1976): 43–59; Clare Stancliffe, 'Red, White and Blue Martyrdom', in Whitelock, McKitterick, and Dumville (eds.), *Ireland in Early Mediaeval Europe*, 21–46; and Katja Ritari, *Pilgrimage to Heaven: Eschatology and Monastic Spirituality in Early Medieval Ireland* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2016).
[54] Aidan Breen, 'Columbanus' Monastic Life and Education in Ireland', *Seanchas Ardmhacha: Journal of the Armagh Diocesan Historical Society* 23 (2011): 1–21; Alexander O'Hara, *Jonas of Bobbio and the Legacy of Columbanus: Sanctity and Community in the Seventh Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).
[55] See Lisa M. Bitel, *Isle of the Saints: Monastic Settlement and Christian Community in Early Ireland* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 222–34.
[56] See also Catherine Marie O'Sullivan, *Hospitality in Medieval Ireland, 900–1500* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2004), which surveys the hospitality due to exiles.
[57] Edmonds, *Gaelic Influence in the Northumbrian Kingdom*, esp. 23–71 and Maund, *Ireland, Wales and England in the Eleventh Century*, esp. 156–82.

exiled nobility fleeing to the enemy camp',[58] some of the most memorable examples of which are the exiled Ulster leader Fergus mac Róich in the *Táin Bó Cuailnge* and the characters in *Longes mac nUislenn* ('The Exile of the Sons of Uisliu'). Exile, then, was a central feature of early medieval Irish society. It would have been very familiar indeed to those writing origin legends in early Ireland, not just as a narrative trope, but also as a legal consequence of severe crimes, an aspirational state for early Irish ascetics, and an opportunity for those whose political fortunes had turned against them to forge alliances and rewrite their fates.

A body of legal material that is both early and extensive likewise survives from Anglo-Saxon England.[59] As was the case in Ireland, the concepts of exile and outlawry were crucial components of Anglo-Saxon laws.[60] Kristen Carella has identified the earliest surviving expression for outlawry in Anglo-Saxon England within the Legatine Capitulary, written in Northumbria in 786.[61] Over the centuries, as surviving legal material from Anglo-Saxon England grew in both completeness and complexity, the centrality of exile and outlawry to Anglo-Saxon law became increasingly evident,[62] though it should be noted that the bulk of surviving references to outlaws within the Anglo-Saxon legal material are focused on penalties for those who harbour them rather than the outlaws themselves. II Æthelstan, for instance, prescribes that the kinsmen of lordless men (*hlafordleasum mannum*) must obtain homes and lords for their relatives so that they can be brought within the law. If this is not done by an appointed deadline, a lordless man becomes an outlaw (*flyma*), who can be killed with impunity.[63] The text known as I Edgar, or the *Hundred Ordinance*, requires men to ride in pursuit of cattle thieves as soon as the theft is known. Any man who fails to

[58] Philip Freeman, *Ireland and the Classical World* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2001), 61.

[59] See Patrick Wormald, *The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century. Volume I: Legislation and its Limits* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999) and Lisi Oliver, *The Beginnings of English Law* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002).

[60] See Felix Liebermann, 'Die Friedlosigkeit bei den Angelsachsen', in *Festschrift für Heinrich Brunner zum siebzigsten Geburtstag dargebracht von Schülern und Verehren* (Weimar: Hermann Böhlaus Nachfolger, 1910), 17–37; Julius Goebel, *Felony and Misdemeanor: A Study in the History of English Criminal Procedure*, vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University School of Law, 1937); and van Houts, 'The Vocabulary of Exile and Outlawry in the North Sea Area around the First Millennium'.

[61] Bryan Carella (now Kristen Carella), 'The Earliest Expression for Outlawry in Anglo-Saxon Law', *Traditio* 70 (2015): 111–43.

[62] Melissa Sartore, *Outlawry, Governance, and Law in Medieval England* (New York: Peter Lang, 2013), 19.

[63] All citations of Old English legal material are to Liebermann, *Die Gesetze*, by code; here II Æthelstan 2.

uphold this obligation once, twice, or three times is fined an increasingly steep amount, and on the fourth occasion, he loses all his goods and is outlawed (*beo utlah*).[64] III Æthelred proclaims that 'ælc flyma beo flyma on ælcum lande, þe on anum sy' (anyone who is an outlaw in one place shall be an outlaw in every land).[65] References to historical incidents of outlawry are also present in extra-legal material, such as the Fonthill Letter, which details the outlawry of a man named Helmstan after a series of thefts.[66]

In Anglo-Saxon England, then, as in early medieval Ireland, exile and outlawry formed a crucial component of the basic legal structure in cases where compensation could not or would not be paid or in which the crime had been deemed too serious to settle with a fine.[67] It was also a way to lighten the financial burden on an offender's family, as in Anglo-Saxon England 'sending a killer into exile is recognized as a way of relieving his kinsmen of half their liability for the wergild he incurred'.[68] Here too, there were degrees of banishment from a community, the most severe of which was full outlawry, which 'meant that anyone could kill you without fear of legal repercussion: an outlaw had the same condition as a convicted felon condemned to be executed'.[69]

Outlawry and exile were well attested in Anglo-Saxon England, where 'historical and legal records provide numerous instances of banishment imposed on persons judged undesirable for the orderly development of society'.[70] On the legal side, Patrick Wormald's 'Handlist of Anglo-Saxon Lawsuits' reveals many real-world cases in which outlawry was imposed as a penalty.[71] There are also numerous examples in which outlawry was clearly occasioned for political, rather than strictly legal, purposes, as historically speaking, 'most

[64] I Edgar 2–3. [65] III Æthelred 10.

[66] Simon Keynes, 'The Fonthill Letter', in Michael Korhammer, Karl Reichl, and Hans Sauer (eds.), *Words, Texts and Manuscripts: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Culture Presented to Helmut Gneuss on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1992), 53–97.

[67] For a recent survey of outlawry in Anglo-Saxon literature, see Sarah Harlan-Haughey, *The Ecology of the English Outlaw in Medieval Literature: From Fen to Greenwood* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 23–68.

[68] Tom Lambert, *Law and Order in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 98.

[69] Timothy S. Jones, *Outlawry in Medieval Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 23 and see further 13–50.

[70] Jones, *Outlawry in Medieval Literature*, 26.

[71] Patrick Wormald, 'A Handlist of Anglo-Saxon Lawsuits', *Anglo-Saxon England* 17 (1988): 247–81; nos. 25 (S 1445), 43 (S 1377), 50 (R 40), 51 (R 40), 56 (S 886), 71 (S 916), 75 (S 926), 101 (DB ii.310v–311r), 160 (ASC 1020), 163 (ASC 1052), 164 (ASC 1055), and 165 (ASC 1065).

accounts of exile and banishment in Anglo-Saxon sources refer to enemies who have been cast out of England in efforts to gain or to mislead political control of a territory or over a people'.[72] Evidence from Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* alone reveals a steady drip of Anglo-Saxon exiles to friendlier destinations – particularly British and Irish kingdoms – over the course of the early medieval period,[73] as many Anglo-Saxon kings were exiled in their youth by political rivals. Some of the most noteworthy figures from the earlier period include Northumbrian brothers Oswald and Oswiu, exiled to the Dál Riata; Eanfrith of Bernicia, exiled amongst the Picts; and Edwin of Northumbria, whose exile was most likely spent in Mercia and Gwynedd.[74] Later on, Anglo-Saxon exiles were a byword for the tumultuous politics of the eleventh century, including figures such as Ælfgar of Mercia and the Godwinsons. Overall, then, exile was a common feature of society in Anglo-Saxon England and would have been very familiar to those writing origin legends during this time. Exile and outlawry formed a crucial component of legal and historical reality, and as the numerous instances of political exile found throughout Anglo-Saxon history remind us, exile was not always imposed upon a guilty party for their commission of a crime.

The dual role of exile as both a legal punishment and a risk of political disfavour amongst the nobility was prevalent in early medieval Wales as well. An extensive legal corpus also survives from medieval Wales, though surviving manuscripts are later than those of Ireland and Anglo-Saxon England, dating from the thirteenth century onward.[75] While associated with the name of tenth-century king Hywel Dda, Welsh law 'is better seen as the gathering of a legal tradition'[76] which was still a living one when its various manuscripts were written. Welsh law was also regional in nature, yet unified by a shared understanding of common concepts and procedures.[77] Some broad generalisations can thus be drawn about medieval Welsh law as a whole, and it seems clear that – as in Ireland

[72] Sartore, *Outlawry, Governance, and Law in Medieval England*, 20–1.
[73] See Edmonds, *Gaelic Influence in the Northumbrian Kingdom* and Maund, *Ireland, Wales and England in the Eleventh Century*.
[74] See Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, *The Kings Depart: The Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon Royal Exile in the Sixth and Seventh Centuries*, Quiggin Memorial Lectures 8 (Cambridge: Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic, 2007).
[75] For the most recent comprehensive study of medieval Welsh legal tradition, see Robin Chapman Stacey, *Law and the Imagination in Medieval Wales* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018).
[76] Gilbert Márkus, *Conceiving a Nation: Scotland to AD 900* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 190–1.
[77] R.R. Davies, *Conquest, Coexistence, and Change: Wales 1063–1415* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 18.

and Anglo-Saxon England – exile was once again a familiar concept. Both Latin and vernacular versions of Welsh law tracts exist, and 'the Latin texts of the laws seem to use the word *exul* in two differing senses: in provisions about banishment as a legal punishment, but also as the equivalent of the Welsh *alltud*, "an alien, a foreigner"'.[78]

Yet the word *alltud* itself encapsulated ideas of exile via banishment, suggesting both inherent foreignness and the ability to place oneself outside Welsh society through exile. T.M. Charles-Edwards notes that in Wales, 'two types of *alltud* were distinguished in law, the exile from overseas, the Irish *cú glas*, and the exile from within Britain, but outside Wales'.[79] As R.R. Davies remarks, 'to cross *Clawdd Offa* was, and is, to go into England and thereby to become an exile (W. *alltud*)',[80] and 'according to Welsh law, exiles who left their lords "were not to dwell in this island this side of Offa's Dyke or this side of the sea"'.[81] In reference to *alltudion*, Welsh legal tradition states that

Ac os or ỳnỳs hon ỳd henỳnt nỳ dỳlỳant trỳgau ỳn un lle ỳ tu ỳma ỳ glaud Offa. Ac os tra mor ỳd henỳnt nỳ dỳlỳant trỳgau ỳma namỳn hỳt arỳ gwỳnt kỳntaw ỳ cafoent uỳnet ỳ eu glat ac o thrỳgant ỳmgỳuỳlent ac eu ceỳthỳwet ual kỳnt.

(And, if they be natives of this island, they are not to dwell in any place on this side of Offa's dyke. And, if they come from beyond sea, they are not to remain here, except until they can obtain the first favourable wind to go to their country; and, if they remain, let them return to their bondage, as before.)[82]

Unlike the Anglo-Saxon legal material, which concerns itself primarily with the categories of offences that could lead to a sentence of outlawry, references to *alltudion* in the Welsh legal texts are focused largely around the rights due to those holding the status of an *alltud*. Extant references, however, make clear that the status of outlawry in medieval Wales would have been caused by similar crimes to those we have seen in Ireland and Anglo-Saxon England. For example, when we read

ac nỳt ỳ uellỳ ỳ dỳsgỳn dỳn oe prỳodolder ỳnỳ uo ỳn alldut canỳs ỳ gỳureỳth a dỳweỳt o deruỳd ỳ dỳn [bot] ỳgwlat arall aỳ o achaus dỳhol aỳ o [achaus] alanas aỳ o [acha6s] agheneu ereỳll mal na alho [ef] cafael ỳ wlat ỳn brỳduerth [e kỳureỳth a deweỳt] na dỳfỳt ỳ priodolder ew hỳt ỳ nauuetdỳn pa amser bỳnnac ỳdel ỳu ouỳn ac onỳ bỳd ereỳll arỳ tỳr wedỳ eu hesgỳnnu ỳn brỳodorỳon [ene erbỳn en eỳsted ar e tỳr] dỳlỳu [o hona6] ỳn gubỳl or aedewỳs

[78] Lewis, 'Gruffudd ap Cynan', 47.
[79] T.M. Charles-Edwards, 'Some Celtic Kinship Terms', *The Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* 24 (1971): 105–22 at 116.
[80] Davies, *Conquest, Coexistence, and Change*, 3.
[81] Davies, *Conquest, Coexistence, and Change*, 3. n. 1, citing Dafydd Jenkins (ed.), *Llyfr Colan* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1963), paragraph 634.
[82] Owen, *Ancient Laws and Institutes*, VC II.xvi.24–25.

(but a person does not in the same manner lapse from his propriety until he becomes an *alltud*; for the law says, if a person remain in another country, whether on account of being banished, or for murder or other urgencies, so that he cannot revisit his country freely, the law says, that his title is not extinguished until the ninth man, at what time soever he may come to claim it; and unless there be others occupying the land, grown into proprietors, in opposition to him possessing the land, he is entitled to all that he left),

it is clear that a sentence of exile or the commission of a serious crime would have brought about one's status as an *alltud*.[83]

In Wales as well, there are numerous historical examples of exiled figures throughout the early medieval period. As was the case with Ireland and Anglo-Saxon England, this included not only those who were forced into exile for legal or political reasons, but also those for whom self-imposed exile offered more appealing prospects than the fraught dynastic rivalries in which they found themselves enmeshed. Davies points out that in internal dynastic contests of noble Welsh families, 'for the loser the result was death, mutilation, or, if he were lucky, exile in Ireland'.[84] Indeed, 'it became common for thwarted dynasts in Ireland and Wales to escape into temporary exile in the other country'.[85] One of the most well-known of these exiled figures is the late-eleventh-/early-twelfth-century Gruffudd ap Cynan, whose remarkable biography of criss-crossing the Irish Sea is preserved in both vernacular and Latin recensions. C.P. Lewis's careful study of 'the reality and representation of exile' in the biography of Gruffudd ap Cynan has illuminated the fact that – perhaps surprisingly, from a modern perspective – Gruffudd's movements are rarely characterised as exile per se by his biographer, but are rather presented as a straightforward series of shifts across the Irish Sea.[86] Yet Gruffudd ap Cynan's career was not unique: seventh-century king Cadwallon ap Cadfan was said to have spent time in exile in Ireland, and in the later period, a slew of high-profile exiles from the eleventh century – Hywel ab Edwin in 1044, Rhys ap Tewdwr in 1088, Gruffudd ap Rhys in 1093, and Cadwgan ap Bleddyn (alongside Gruffudd ap Cynan) in 1098 – followed suit, demonstrating the ongoing political relevance of exile throughout the period. In early medieval Wales as well, then, exile was a legal, political, and historical reality. Here too, it was known not solely as a punishment, but also as an opportunity to accumulate support for one's eventual political advancement.[87]

[83] Owen, *Ancient Laws and Institutes*, VC II.xiv.1.
[84] Davies, *Conquest, Coexistence, and Change*, 73–4.
[85] Sims-Williams, *Irish Influence on Medieval Welsh Literature*, 18.
[86] Lewis, 'Gruffudd ap Cynan'.
[87] While I will not have time to discuss it here, exile during the Viking Age was similarly widespread and held the potential for productivity: see Neil S. Price, 'Ship-Men and Slaughter-Wolves: Pirate Polities in the Viking Age', in Stefan Eklöf Amirell and

Finally, we come to the Picts, where the circumstances are a little murkier due to the lack of surviving written material from the region as a whole.[88] Gilbert Márkus has surveyed the situation in detail, and notes that the only legal text which can be geographically connected to the region that would eventually become Scotland in this early period is the Old Irish *Cáin Adomnáin*, produced by the Gaelic monastery of Iona in the kingdom of the Dál Riata.[89] Yet as Márkus points out, a Pictish king and a Pictish bishop (Bruide mac Derile and Curetán) guaranteed *Cáin Adomnáin* at the Synod of Birr at which it was promulgated. This is one of several reasons which give us cause to suspect that the broad similarities between early Irish, Anglo-Saxon, and Welsh legal traditions would not have been foreign to the early Picts. The acceptance of *Cáin Adomnáin* suggests 'some compatibility between the structures of the Irish and Pictish legal systems, making possible the promulgation, enforcement and administration of a Gaelic law in Pictish territory'.[90]

Similarly, while 'no early Anglo-Saxon law survives' from the region which would eventually become Scotland, 'a good deal of material survives from Northumbria and other parts of England, and there is no good reason to believe that the laws in Northumbrian southern Scotland differed radically from the laws in English Northumbria'.[91] Márkus concludes that 'we must be more cautious in using laws from elsewhere in England, but it is surely legitimate to use the [Northumbrian] material as evidence for the culture and society of Anglo-Saxon communities in southern Scotland'.[92] To this I would add the evidence of an allusion to laws made by eighth-century king Áed Find / Áed mac Echach, which are themselves no longer extant. The Poppleton Manuscript (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Latin MS 4126) records that 'during the reign of Domnall mac Ailpín (858–62) "the judgements and laws of Aed mac Echach" (*iura et leges regni Edi filii Ecdach*) were adopted by the Gaels'.[93]

Leos Müller (eds.), *Persistent Piracy: Maritime Violence and State-Formation in Global Historical Perspective* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 51–68 and Christian Cooijmans, *Monarchs and Hydrarchs: The Conceptual Development of Viking Activity across the Frankish Realm (c. 750–940)* (New York: Routledge, 2020). There is also a large body of scholarship on the anthropology of exile; see e.g. Edward W. Said, 'Reflections on Exile', in *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 173–86; David P. Lumsden, 'Broken Lives? Reflections on the Anthropology of Exile and Repair', *Refuge* 18 (1999): 30–9; and Andreas Hackl, 'Key Figure of Mobility: The Exile', *Social Anthropology* 25 (2017): 55–68.

[88] See Forsyth, 'Literacy in Pictland'.
[89] Márkus, *Conceiving a Nation*, 189–90.
[90] Márkus, *Conceiving a Nation*, 190.
[91] Márkus, *Conceiving a Nation*, 190.
[92] Márkus, *Conceiving a Nation*, 190.
[93] Peter E. Busse and John T. Koch, entry on 'Aed Find', in John T. Koch (ed.), *Celtic Culture: A Historical Encyclopedia*, 5 vols. (Santa Barbara: ABC-Clio, 2006), vol. 1; see also Alan Orr Anderson, *Early Sources of Scottish History, AD 500–1286*, 2 vols.

Tentative though any conclusions concerning nonexistent material must be, reference to Pictish law codes promulgated under the name of a king, as the Anglo-Saxon laws were, suggests that at some point, there was some degree of perceived compatibility between the two systems. There is also good evidence that triangulation of the legal situation of Britons in the region which would become Scotland can be undertaken relatively reasonably. While 'the British-speaking peoples of southern Scotland have likewise left little legal writing to modern scholars', it is nonetheless 'likely that their laws were akin to those of the British communities further south which form part of the background to medieval Welsh law'.[94] Significantly, cognates exist between the terminology of Welsh and Irish laws, and 'the use of such cognate terms for similar legal concepts encourages us to see the medieval Welsh laws as embodying an earlier British legal tradition that bore some similarity to early Gaelic laws'.[95]

On the whole, then, while no Pictish legal material survives per se, there is a reasonably strong suspicion that the situation on the ground would have been relatively similar to that of early medieval Ireland, Anglo-Saxon England, and Wales. In other words, offences were likely to have been settled first via fine. When a fine could not be paid – either financially or logistically – or the crime was so serious that financial compensation was deemed inadequate, a sentence of exile would be imposed.[96] We know, at the very least, that the Picts were familiar with the concept of exile because they hosted exiles from other kingdoms, such as seventh-century king Eanfrith of Bernicia, mentioned above, whose exile resulted in his marriage to a Pictish princess and the birth of a son, Talorgan, who would himself become a Pictish king from 653–57. As Bede writes,

siquidem tempore toto quo regnauit Eduini, filii praefati regis Aedilfridi, qui ante illum regnauerat, cum magna nobilium iuuentute apud Scottos siue Pictos exulabant, ibique ad doctrinam Scottorum cathecizati et baptismatis sunt gratia recreati.

(during the whole of Edwin's reign the sons of King Æthelfrith his predecessor, together with many young nobles, were living in exile among the Irish or the Picts where they were instructed in the faith as the Irish taught it and were regenerated by the grace of baptism.)[97]

The assumption that exile would have been a familiar concept in the region which would eventually become Scotland is further supported by triangulation from a different direction. The twelfth-century Scottish

(Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1922), 1.431–43; Anderson, *Kings and Kingship in Early Scotland*, 189–90; and Smyth, *Warlords and Holy Men*, 179, 181–2, and 188.

[94] Márkus, *Conceiving a Nation*, 190. [95] Márkus, *Conceiving a Nation*, 191.

[96] Márkus, *Conceiving a Nation*, 193–8. [97] Colgrave and Mynors, *Bede*, iii.1, 212–13.

legal document known as the *Leges inter Brettos et Scottos* invokes outlawry as a penalty for those who have defaulted on an initial fine or pledge.[98] Thus, surviving evidence in the form of both legal and societal parallels suggests that exile was likely to have played a significant role in the legal structure of early medieval Pictland as it did in Ireland, Anglo-Saxon England, and Wales.

The legal, historical, and written evidence for exile in the insular region reminds us of 'the central tension between the reality and the representation of exile in the central Middle Ages: exile was both an event in the real world and a narrative construct'.[99] As an 'event in the real world', exile functioned in many different ways. It was a significant legal sentence for serious crimes or abandonment of one's legal responsibilities to the broader community. Perhaps most relevant to the present study, however, is the fact that exile held a dual societal role in the insular region: it was not only a punishment; it was also an opportunity. The self-imposed exile of religious figures was highly valued, with ascetics and hermits accorded theological and cultural respect. Historical annals are brimming with stories of kings who spent a portion of their youth as exiles or high-status hostages in neighbouring kingdoms before political fortunes turned in their favour and they were able to (re)claim power. Such periods as an exile or a hostage provided the opportunity for valuable political connections, intermarriages and alliances (more on which in Chapter Four below), and opportunities to encounter a new culture, religion, or language which were transferred geographically upon the exile's return. Towards the turn of the first millennium, the figure of the 'roguish exile' also gained traction in the insular region, particularly around the Irish Sea. Many high-status figures who found themselves politically frustrated at home were able to successfully leverage brief periods of exile – self-imposed or not – to their eventual advantage. Thus, culturally, exile was not solely a negative legal sentence, meaning that those who underwent it were not always viewed with suspicion. In the insular region, exile was both an imposed punishment and a chosen method of political advancement. While exile was always, by definition, a period of separation from one's community, in historical and literary sources of the period, it was just as often presented as the result of an extralegal political persecution of a rival or a voluntary strategy for personal gain. Exile was thus a legal and historical reality in the insular region

[98] Alice Taylor, *The Shape of the State in Medieval Scotland, 1124–1290* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 143 n. 151 and '*Leges Scocie* and the Lawcodes of David I, William the Lion and Alexander II', *The Scottish Historical Review* 88 (2009): 207–88 at 281 (2.).

[99] Lewis, 'Gruffudd ap Cynan', 41.

at the time that origin stories were being written. However, it was not always cast in a negative light. This opportunity for personal growth and political gain that exile presented made it an attractive narrative strategy to attach to one's ancestors in early insular origin legends.

Part III: Exile in Insular Origin Narratives

I argue that Gildas's description of Britain in his *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae* was enormously influential in shaping the corpus of insular origin narratives and the central role that exile came to play within these stories. Gildas's foundational text underscores both the importance of Britain and Ireland as islands and their perceived remoteness and distance from the rest of the known world. His description of Britain had particular staying power. Gildas introduces the island by writing,

> Brittannia insula in extremo ferme orbis limite circium occidentemque versus divina, ut dicitur, statera terrae totius ponderatrice librata ab Africo boriali propensius tensa axi, octingentorum in longo milium, ducentorum in lato spatium, exceptis diversorum prolixioribus promontoriorum tractibus, quae arcuatis oceani sinibus ambiuntur, tenens, cuius diffusiore et, ut ita dicam, intransmeabili undique circulo absque meridianae freto plagae, quo ad Galliam Belgicam navigatur . . .
>
> (The island of Britain lies virtually at the end of the world, towards the west and north-west. Poised in the divine scales that [we are told] weigh the whole earth, it stretches from the south-west towards the northern pole. It has a length of eight hundred miles, a width of two hundred: leaving out of account the various large headlands that jut out between the curving ocean bays. It is fortified on all sides by a vast and more or less uncrossable ring of sea, apart from the straits on the south where one can cross to Belgic Gaul . . .)[100]

At the outset of the *De Excidio*, Gildas emphasises Britain's isolation from the rest of the known world and highlights the great efforts needed to access it. He characterises Britain as 'virtually at the end of the world' and 'fortified on all sides by a vast and more or less uncrossable ring of sea' and places great weight on its status as an island. This description of Britain deliberately casts it as a place which is set apart from the rest of the known world. Slightly later in the *De Excidio*, when describing the coming of Christianity to Britain, Gildas again emphasises Britain's sense of separation. He writes:

> Interea glaciali frigore rigenti insulae et velut longiore terrarum secessu soli visibili non proximae verus ille non de firmamento solum temporali sed de summa etiam caelorum arce tempora cuncta excedente universo orbi praefulgidum sui coruscum ostendens, tempore, ut scimus, summo Tiberii Caesaris, quo absque ullo impedimento eius propagabatur religio, comminata senatu nolente a principe

[100] Winterbottom, *Gildas*, 89–90 and 16.

morte delatoribus militum eiusdem, radios suos primum indulget, id est sua praecepta, Christus.

(Meanwhile, to an island numb with chill ice and far removed, as in a remote nook of the world, from the visible sun, Christ made a present of his rays [that is, his precepts], Christ the true sun, which shows its dazzling brilliance to the entire earth, not from the temporal firmament merely, but from the highest citadel of heaven, that goes beyond all time. This happened first, as we know, in the last years of the emperor Tiberius, at a time when Christ's religion was being propagated without hindrance: for, against the wishes of the senate, the emperor threatened the death penalty for informers against the soldiers of God.)[101]

Here too, we find Gildas emphasising Britain's distance from the rest of the known world both intellectually and geographically, as he characterises it as 'an island numb with chill ice and far removed, as in a remote nook of the world, from the visible sun'.

This historical polemic cast a very long shadow. As Catherine Karkov writes:

From the beginning, the Anglo-Saxons were keenly aware of their own status as exiles. In his *De excidio britanniae*, written in the late fifth or early sixth century, the monk Gildas described the coming of the Angles and Saxons to Britain in their warships, and the remoteness of the island in which they settled ... the myth became one of exile without return.[102]

Britain had long been characterised as remote by classical and late antique geographers, and this trope was carried forward in insular writing from Gildas onward.[103] A heightened awareness of the geography of Britain and Ireland was extremely influential to the centrality that the trope of an exiled ancestor gained within the corpus of insular historical and pseudo-historical works. Building on Gildas, these texts open with a description of the geography of the insular region that highlights Britain's and Ireland's statuses as islands.[104] This geographical repetition emphasises the region's distance and inaccessibility from the rest of the known world. An audience is left with the impression that travel there is difficult and would therefore only be undertaken deliberately and with good reason. Thus, the conceit that Britain stood at the outer reaches of the world was one of the most significant reasons why the insular origin legends all featured exiles at the hearts of their narratives. Only someone who had been cast out of his own homeland, the logic goes, would have come to the

[101] Winterbottom, *Gildas*, 91 and 18–19.
[102] Karkov, 'The Franks Casket Speaks Back', 41.
[103] See Lindy Brady, 'Echoes of Britons on a Fenland Frontier in the Old English *Andreas*', *The Review of English Studies* 61 (2010): 669–89.
[104] See Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking* and *Writing the Map of Anglo-Saxon England*; Lavezzo, *Angels on the Edge*; and Merrills, *History and Geography in Late Antiquity*.

furthest corner of the known world to found his own dynasty. From the earliest moments of insular historical and pseudohistorical writing, then, Gildas's characterisation of Britain as a place at the edge of the world paved the way for the idea of an exile as a founding ancestor to take root.

Yet while Gildas emphasised Britain's isolation – and certainly cast the Anglo-Saxons as severed from their ancestral homelands – he did not himself introduce the concept of an exiled founding figure. Rather, Gildas laid the foundation in his characterisation of Britain as a place so set apart that it can only be accessed with great difficulty. Let us therefore examine how the theme of exile became integral to the corpus of insular origin material. Gildas has nothing to say about the origins of the British. He simply writes, 'haec erecta cervice et mente, ex quo inhabitata est, nunc deo, interdum civibus, nonnumquam etiam transmarinis regibus et subiectis ingrata consurgit' (ever since it was first inhabited, Britain has been ungratefully rebelling, stiff-necked and haughty, now against God, now against its own countrymen, sometimes even against kings from abroad and their subjects).[105] While the Anglo-Saxons, as recent arrivals to Britain, beg explanation, Gildas is interested in relating the Britons' contemporary sins rather than their ancestral past. He also does not include origin legends for the Irish and the Picts, the Britons' contemporaries whose presence in the insular region is likewise simply assumed.

The concept of exile is present in the *De Excidio*, but it emerges as the contemporary flight of some Britons to the continent (identified in other sources as Gaul) after the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons.[106] Gildas writes, discussing how he will convey the narrative of British history,

> quantum tamen potuero, non tam ex scriptis patriae scriptorumve monimentis, quippe quae, vel si qua fuerint, aut ignibus hostium exusta aut civium exilii classe longius deportata non compareant, quam transmarina relatione, quae crebris inrupta intercapedinibus non satis claret.
>
> (I shall do this as well as I can, using not so much literary remains from this country [which, such as they were, are not now available, having been burnt by enemies or removed by our countrymen when they went into exile] as foreign tradition: and *that* has frequent gaps to blur it.)[107]

After the Anglo-Saxons arrive and turn on the Britons, Gildas enumerates the fates of his people: some were caught and killed in the mountains, others gave themselves up as slaves, 'alii transmarinas petebant regiones cum ululatu magno ceu celeumatis vice hoc modo sub velorum sinibus cantantes' (others made for lands beyond the sea; beneath the swelling

[105] Winterbottom, *Gildas*, 90 and 17.
[106] Winterbottom, *Gildas*, 150–1 n. 25.1.
[107] Winterbottom, *Gildas*, 90 and 17.

sails they loudly wailed, singing a psalm that took the place of a shanty), and some hid in the wilderness.[108] Exile is thus present in the narrative of the *De Excidio*, but it is presented as a contemporary means of escape rather than an ancestral legacy.

The *De Excidio* and the *Historia Ecclesiastica* had similar messages, but were written with different motivations. Where Gildas saw the Britons as a previously favoured people who had been punished for their sins by the Anglo-Saxon conquest, Bede wrote a history of the Anglo-Saxons after their conversion to Christianity in which they were positioned as God's chosen people while the Britons were understood as having been punished for their failure to convert them. Bede repeated the Anglo-Saxon origin legend from Gildas, with some expansions. He also did not include much about the origins of the British. Bede merely reports that

> in primis autem insula Brettones solum, a quibus nomen accepit, incolas habuit; qui de tractu Armoricano, ut fertur, Brittaniam aduecti australes sibi partes illius uindicarunt.
>
> (to begin with, the inhabitants of the island were all Britons, from whom it receives its name; they sailed to Britain, so it is said, from the land of Armorica, and appropriated to themselves the southern part of it.)[109]

Bede does introduce the origin narrative of the Picts (discussed further in Chapter Four below), but does not provide an explanation as to why they left their ancestral homeland. As was the case with Gildas, the Irish are also presented as simply inhabiting Ireland without explanation. In the earliest texts in the corpus of insular historical and pseudohistorical works, then, no explanation is given for the arrival of many people to the region. Most of the region's *gentes* are presented as simply having lived there since time immemorial or are given a place they have sailed from without an explanation of why they left.

The British gained an origin legend when the story of eponymous ancestor Brutus of Troy appeared in the *Historia Brittonum*. At the same time, this narrative introduced the themes of exile and kin-slaying which would hold continued importance within the corpus of texts containing insular origin material. These themes drove the narrative action of this legend, in which foundational ancestor Brutus was exiled after he accidentally killed both his mother and father. The *Historia Brittonum* relates the legend as follows:

> Aeneas post Troianum bellum cum Ascanio filio suo venit ad Italiam et, superato Turno, accepit Laviniam, filiam Latini, filii Fauni, filii Saturni, in coniugium et,

[108] Winterbottom, *Gildas*, 98 and 27–8. [109] Colgrave and Mynors, *Bede*, i.1, 16–17.

post mortem Latini, regnum obitinuit Romanorum vel Latinorum. Aeneas autem Albam condidit et postea uxorem duxit, et peperit ei filium nomine Silvium. Silvius autem duxit uxorem, et gravida fuit, et nuntiatum est Aeneae quod nurus sua gravida esset, et misit ad Ascanium filium suum, ut mitteret magum suum ad considerandam uxorem, ut exploraret quid haberet in utero, si masculum erandam uxorem, ut exploraret quid haberet in utero, si masculum vel feminam. Et magus consideravit uxorem et reversus est. Propter hanc vaticinationem magus occisus est ab Ascanio, quia dixit Ascanio quod masculum haberet in utero mulier et filius mortis erit, quia occidet patrem suum et matrem suam et erit exosus omnibus hominibus. Sic evenit: in nativitate illius mulier mortua est, et nutritus est filius, et vocatum est nomen eius Britto. Post multum intervallum, iuxta vaticinationem magi, dum ipse ludebat cum aliis, ictu sagittae occidit patrem suum, non de industria, sed casu. Et expulsus est ab Italia, et arminilis fuit, et venit ad insulas maris Tirreni, et expulsus est a Graecis causa occisionis Turni, quem Aeneas occiderat, et pervenit ad Gallos usque, et ibi condidit civitatem Turonorum, quae vocatur Turnis. Et postea ad istam pervenit insulam, quae a nomine suo accepit nomen, id est Brittaniam, et inplevit eam cum suo genere, et habitavit ibi. Ab illo autem die habitata est Brittannia usque in hodiernum diem.

(After the Trojan War Aeneas came to Italy with his son Ascanius, defeated Turnus and married Lavinia, daughter of Latinus, son of Faunus, son of Picus, son of Saturn; and after Latinus' death, he acquired the kingdom of the Romans and the Latins. Aeneas founded Alba, and then married a wife, who bore him a son named Silvius. Silvius married a wife, who became pregnant, and when Aeneas was told that his daughter-in-law was pregnant, he sent word to his son Ascanius, to send a wizard to examine the wife, to discover what she had in the womb, whether it was male or female. The wizard examined the wife and returned, but he was killed by Ascanius because of his prophecy, for he told him that the woman had a male in her womb, who would be the child of death, for he would kill his father and his mother, and be hateful to all men. So it happened; for his mother died in his birth, and the boy was reared, and named Britto [Brutus]. Much later, according to the wizard's prophecy, when he was playing with others, he killed his father with an arrow shot, not on purpose, but by accident. He was driven from Italy, and came to the islands of the Tyrrhene Sea, and was driven from Greece, because of the killing of Turnus, whom Aeneas had killed, and arrived in Gaul, where he founded the city of Tours, which is called Turnis; and later he came to this island, which is named Britannia from his name, and filled it with his race, and dwelt there. From that day, Britain has been inhabited until the present day.)[110]

Some key features of this story had a long afterlife within the larger corpus of insular origin narratives. This legend gave the Britons a history and genealogy which tied them into the broader history of the world, as well as a country and people of origin. The figure of Brutus provides a single male

[110] Morris, *Nennius*, 60 and 19.

ancestral figure who was exiled from his homeland for the crime of kin-slaying (discussed more extensively in Chapter Three below) and wandered the world before becoming Britain's founding ancestor. The logic of this narrative formed a foundational pattern. Geography dictated that an ancestral figure must have come from elsewhere in order to arrive in the insular region. Why would he leave his homeland? Exile provides a very good explanation indeed. What crime would be serious enough to bring about a sentence of exile? As explored in detail in Chapter Three below, kin-slaying was one of the offences which warranted a legal penalty of exile in the societies under consideration in this book. We can see this pattern repeated throughout other texts in the corpus of insular origin narratives written after the *Historia Brittonum*.

To begin, once the Brutus legend was introduced as an origin story for the British, it stuck. The Brutus narrative was one of the most central features of medieval British historiography and quickly became widely accepted and repeated after its inclusion in the *Historia Brittonum*. It appears nearly verbatim in the *Lebor Bretnach*, and the widespread circulation of this legend afterwards owed a great deal to its inclusion in Geoffrey of Monmouth's enormously popular *De gestis Britonum*, which was itself widely disseminated through translations in Norman French (Wace's *Roman de Brut*), Middle English (Laȝamon's *Brut*, a translation and expansion of Wace's text), and Welsh (the *Brutiau* tradition).[111] Once introduced, then, the popularity of the Brutus legend meant that it was repeated throughout the rest of the corpus of texts containing insular origin material. This might seem a small point, but practically speaking, it meant that at least one story of ancestral exile and kin-slaying featured in insular origin narratives from the *Historia Brittonum* onwards. Yet as we shall see, the influence of the Brutus narrative was even more pronounced. The popularity of this legend precipitated an increase in the use of exile as a motif within insular origin narratives. As Chapter One has demonstrated, these texts were in conversation with one another. Over time, a shift occurred from a bare description of a given people's geographical origins to a longer narrative in which an explanation for their arrival to the insular region was provided.

The Anglo-Saxon origin legend underwent precisely that shift in the *Historia Brittonum* itself as a potential consequence of the Brutus narrative. The two earlier texts containing the Anglo-Saxon origin story, Gildas's *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae* and Bede's *Historia*

[111] See J.S.P. Tatlock, *The Legendary History of Britain: Geoffrey of Monmouth's Historia regum Britanniae and Its Early Vernacular Versions* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1950); Jankulak, *Geoffrey of Monmouth*; Jones, *Historical Writing in Medieval Wales*; and Smith and Henley (eds.), *A Companion to Geoffrey of Monmouth*.

Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum, characterise the Anglo-Saxons not as exiles but rather as paid mercenaries whom the Britons invited to the island in order to defend them from the depredations of the Irish and the Picts. The *Historia Brittonum* alters this narrative so that the Anglo-Saxons were not invited by the Britons, but rather arrived in Britain of their own initiative as a result of their exile from their homeland. As the *Historia Brittonum* relates:

> Guorthigirnus regnavit in Brittannia, et dum ipse regnabat in Brittannia, urgebatur a metu Pictorum Scottorumque et a Romanico impetu, nec non et a timore Ambrosii. Interea venerunt tres ciulae a Germania expulsae in exilio in quibus erant Hors et Hengist, qui et ipsi fratres erant, filii Guictglis, filii Guitta ... filii Fodepald, filii Geta, qui fuit, ut aiunt, filius Dei: non ipse est Deus deorum, amen, Deus exercituum, sed unus est ab idolis eorum, quod ipsi colebant. Guorthigirnus suscepit eos benigne et tradidit eis insulam quae in lingua eorum vocatur Tanet, britannico sermone Ruoihm.
>
> (Vortigern ruled in Britain, and during his rule in Britain he was under pressure, from fear of the Picts and the Irish, and of a Roman invasion, and, not least, from dread of Ambrosius. Then came three keels, driven into exile from Germany. In them were the brothers Horsa and Hengest, sons of Wichtgils, son of Witta, ... son of Folcwald, son of Geta, who said they were son of God, but he was not the God of Gods, Amen, the God of Hosts, but one of the idols they worshipped. Vortigern welcomed them, and handed over to them the island that in their language is called Thanet, in British Ruoihm.)[112]

The Anglo-Saxon origin legend has undergone a shift from its earlier versions in that the Britons do not invite their future oppressors as mercenaries. Rather, the Anglo-Saxons set out themselves 'in three keels, driven into exile from Germany'. In this alteration of the narrative, we can see the immediate impact of the Brutus legend on other origin stories. Exile would also have provided a good explanation for the Anglo-Saxons' initial arrival in Britain, so that facet of the Brutus legend could have become doubled within the *Historia Brittonum* and added to the origin story of the Anglo-Saxons.[113]

Indeed, as was the case with the Britons, this facet of the Anglo-Saxon origin legend – that they were not just mercenaries, but exiles – persisted in texts written after the *Historia Brittonum*. It was repeated nearly

[112] Morris, *Nennius*, 67 and 26.

[113] This same pattern repeats in later medieval literature. Jones, *Outlawry in Medieval Literature*, 33, notes that in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *De gestis Britonum*, Wanius and Melga (the ostensible leaders of the Picts and Huns) are depicted as mercenary pirates; by the time of their depiction in Laȝamon's *Brut*, they have become outlaws from Denmark and Norway.

verbatim in the *Lebor Bretnach*, the eleventh-century Irish translation and expansion of the *Historia Brittonum*, as follows:

Dorala thra iarsin cath remrate ⁊ iar marbad na taisech Romanach co bad thri la Bretnu ⁊ iar tochaithim doib .ix. mbliadan .xl. ar .cccc. fon cis Romanach, Goirthigern mac Guitil do gabail ardrige Breatan. Co tortromthai he o uaman Cruithneach ⁊ Gaeidel ⁊ o niurt Ambrois ri Frangc ⁊ Breatan Letha. Tancadar tri ciuile asin Germain .i. tri barca for indarba hi rabadar na da brathair .i. Ors ⁊ Heigist o fuilit Saxain. Is he imorra a geinlach . . .[114]

(Now it happened after the aforementioned battle, and after the slaughter of the Roman chieftains three times by the Britons, after they had been four hundred and forty-nine years under the Roman tributes, that Gortigern, son of Gudal, took the chief kingship of Britain, and he was oppressed by the fear of the Picts and Gaels, and by the power of Ambrose, King of France and Letavian Britain. There came three keels out of Germany [i.e. three barks] into exile, in which were the two brothers, Ors and Engist, from whom are the Saxons; this is their genealogy . . .)[115]

While it may seem a subtle distinction, the shift in the portrayal of the Anglo-Saxons from invited mercenaries to exiles ultimately brought their origin story into closer alignment with that of the Britons.

The Pictish origin legend underwent the same type of shift in which an explanation for the founding ancestors' exile was added over time. Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, the earliest text to preserve the Pictish origin legend, does not give a reason why they left their homeland. Bede merely writes,

Et cum plurimam insulae partem incipientes ab austro possedissent, contigit gentem Pictorum de Scythia, ut perhibent, longis nauibus non multis Oceanum ingressam, circumagente flatu uentorum, extra fines omnes Brittaniae Hiberniam peruenisse, eiusque septentrionales oras intrasse atque, inuenta ibi gente Scottorum, sibi quoque in partibus illius sedes petisse, nec inpetrare potuisse.

(After they [the Britons] had got possession of the greater part of the island, beginning from the south, it is related that the Pictish race from Scythia sailed out into the ocean in a few warships and were carried by the wind beyond the furthest bounds of Britain, reaching Ireland and landing on its northern shores. There they found the Irish race and asked permission to settle among them, but their request was refused.)[116]

The *Historia Brittonum* does not give an explanation for the Picts' arrival in Britain either, stating simply:

Post intervallum multorum annorum, non minus octingentorum Picti venerunt et occupaverunt insulas quae vocantur Orcades, et postea ex insulis vastaverunt

[114] van Hamel, *Lebor Bretnach*, 42. [115] Todd, *Leabhar Breathnach*, 75 and 77.
[116] Colgrave and Mynors, *Bede*, i.1, 16–19.

regiones multas, et occupaverunt eas in sinistrali plaga Brittanniae, et manent ibi usque in hodiernum diem. Tertiam partem Brittaniae tenuerunt et tenent usque in hodiernum diem.

(After an interval of many years, not less than 800, Picts came and occupied the islands called Orkney, and later from the islands they wasted many lands, and occupied those in the northern part of Britain, and they still live there today. They held and hold a third part of Britain to this day.)[117]

Thus in early insular historical and pseudohistorical material, the Picts – like the Britons – were depicted as simply arriving to the insular region without being given a backstory.

Yet by the time of the *Lebor Bretnach*, the Pictish legend had grown to include an explanation for their arrival in the Irish Sea region. The legend reads,

A tir Thraicia tra thancadar Cruithnich .i. clanda Gaeleoin meic Ercail iat. Agathirsi a n-anmanda. Seser taisech tancadar .i. Solen, Ulfa, Nechtan, Drostan, Aengus, Leithenn. Fath a tiachtana: Poilicornius ri Traicia dorad grad dia siair corothriall a breth cen tochra. Lodar iarsin tar Romanchu co Frangcu. ⁊ cumdaigsed cathair ann .i. Pictauis a Pictis .i. o n-armthib ⁊ dorad rig Frangc grad dia siair. Lotar for muir iar n-eg in tshinnsir brathar .i. Leitind. I cind da laa iar ndul tar muir adbath a siur.[118]

(The Picts came from the land of Thrace; they are the race of Gueleon, son of Ercal. Agathyrsi was their name. Six brothers of them came at first, that is, Solen, Ulfa, Nechtan, Drostan, Aengus, Leithenn. The cause of their coming was namely that Policornus, king of Thrace, fell in love with their sister, and proposed to take her without giving a dowry. They after this passed across the Roman territory into France and built a city there, that is, Pictavis, called à pictis, i.e. from their arms. And the king of France fell in love with their sister. They put to sea after the death of the sixth brother, Leithinn; and in two days after going on the sea their sister died.)[119]

I will return to this fascinating narrative in Chapter Four below, which explores the power dynamics behind intermarriages within the corpus of insular origin narratives. For the moment, it suffices to flag the pattern of development over time in which origin legends grew to include both an exiled ancestor (or set of ancestors) and a reason for that exile.

Several later texts of the Irish origin legend also show evidence of having been inspired by the Brutus narrative's themes of exile (discussed here) and kin-slaying (discussed in the following chapter). As we have seen, the earliest complete iteration of the Irish origin legend is found in the *Historia Brittonum*, where it is presented in two versions,

[117] Morris, *Nennius*, 61 and 20. [118] van Hamel, *Lebor Bretnach*, 8.
[119] Todd, *Leabhar Breathnach*, 121 and 123.

a mythological and a biblical variant. The biblical version already includes exile as a central narrative feature. There is no earlier complete narrative version of the Irish origin story to compare it to, so it is impossible to know if the *Historia Brittonum* added this feature or not. As we have seen to be the case for several other early versions of insular origin narratives as well, the Irish are not given an origin legend in the works of Gildas or Bede. They are named as inhabitants of Ireland with no explanation as to how they initially arrived. The *Historia Brittonum* fills in this gap by providing the Irish origin story, which, as Chapter One discussed, was derived from a now-lost external source. Regardless of whether or not exile was central to the Irish origin narrative prior to its inclusion in the *Historia Brittonum*, it nonetheless demonstrates that exile was a pervasive concern throughout this text – a concern which would likewise be adapted in later versions of the Irish origin legend. This version of the legend reads:

Si quis autem scire voluerit quando vel quo tempore fuit inhabitabilis et deserta Hibernia, sic mihi peritissimi Scottorum nuntiaverunt. Quando venerunt per Mare Rubrum filii Israhel, Aegyptii venerunt, et secuti sunt et demersi sunt, ut in Lege legitur. Erat vir nobilis de Scythia cum magna familia apud Aegyptios, et expulsus est a regno suo, et ibi erat quando Aegyptii mersi sunt, et non perrexit ad sequendum populum Dei. Illi autem qui superfuerant inierunt consilium ut expellerent illum, ne regnum illorum obsideret et occuparet, quia fortes illorum demersi erant in Rubrum mare, [iste gener Pharaonis erat, id est mas Scotte, filie Pharaonis, a quo ut fertur Scocia appellata fuit] et expulsus est. At ille, per XLII annos ambulavit per Africam, et venerunt ad aras Filistinorum et per lacum Salinarum, et cenerunt inter Rusicadam at montes Azariae, et venerunt per flumen Malvam, et transierunt per Maritaniam ad columnas Erculis, et navigaverunt Tyrrenum mare, et pervenerunt ad Hispaniam usque, et ibi habitaverunt per multos annos, et creverunt et multiplicati sunt nimis, et gens illorum multiplicata est nimis. Et postea venerunt ad Hiberniam post MII annos, postquam mersi sunt Aegyptii in Rubrum mare, et ad regiones Darieta, in tempore quo regnabat Brutus apud Romanos, a quo consules esse coeperunt, deinde tribuni plebis ac dictatores. Et consules rursum rempublicam obtinuerunt per annos CCCCXLVII, quae prius regia dignitate damnata fuerat.

(If anyone wants to know when Ireland was inhabited and when it was deserted, this is what the Irish scholars have told me. When the children of Israel crossed through the Red Sea, the Egyptians came and pursued them and were drowned, as may be read in the Law. Among the Egyptians was a nobleman of Scythia, with a great following, who had been expelled from his kingdom, and was there when the Egyptians were drowned, but did not join in the pursuit of the children of God. The survivors took counsel to expel him, lest he should attack their kingdom and occupy it, for their strength had been drowned in the Red Sea [for his wife was Scotta, the daughter of Pharoah, from whom Scotia, Ireland, is said to be named]. He was expelled and he wandered for 42 years through Africa, and they came to the Altars of the Philistines, by the Salt Lake, and through Rusicade and the

Mountains of Axaria, and by the river Muluya, and crossed through Morocco to the Pillars of Hercules, and sailed over the Tyrrhene Sea, and came to Spain, and there they lived for many years, and grew and multiplied exceedingly, and their people multiplied exceedingly. After they had come to Spain, and 1002 years after the Egyptians had been drowned in the Red Sea, they came to the country of Dal Riada, at the time when Brutus was ruling among the Romans, with whom the Consuls began, and then the Tribunes of the Plebs and the Dictators. The Consuls however held the State for 447 years, which had previously suffered the rule of Kings.)[120]

This Irish origin legend of exile was again repeated first by the *Lebor Bretnach*, including the same details of the noble ancestor's double banishment.

Where themes of exile were most greatly expanded in the Irish origin legend, however, was the *Lebor Gabála* and its subsequent redactions and continuations. The *Lebor Gabála* was a massive undertaking, comprising five volumes in its modern edition:

> bringing together a heterogeneous body of legends and speculations regarding the ancient history of the country and the origins of its people, and fitting them into a single comprehensive framework, *Lebor Gabála* provided a narrative extending from the creation of the world to the coming of Christianity, and beyond – a national myth which sought to put Ireland on the same footing as Israel and Rome.[121]

While there is not space here to discuss the *Lebor Gabála* in full, as a complete examination of themes of exile in this text would comprise a monograph in and of its own right, in what follows I shall briefly summarise and survey some examples of the ways in which the motif of exile is woven throughout the narrative fabric of this text.

The *Lebor Gabála* begins with a *précis* of biblical history which by default is structured around scenes of exile. Lucifer is expelled from heaven:

> Ro immarbsaigestar Lucifuir for Nim ar úail ⁊ díumus fri Día, co ro hindarbadh i cinaigh in díumsa sin do Neimi, co triun slúaig aingeal laiss, in nIffrinn.
>
> (Lucifer made an assault upon Heaven, because of pride and haughtiness against God, so that he was expelled, for the crime of that haughtiness, out from Heaven, [with a third of the host of angels in his company], into Hell.)[122]

Adam and Eve are expelled from paradise: 'Conid aire sin ro innarbbad Adam a Pardus hi talmain coitchind' (Wherefore Adam was expelled from Paradise into common earth).[123] Cain wanders the earth as a fugitive after

[120] Morris, *Nennius*, 62 and 21. [121] Carey, *The Irish National Origin-Legend*, 1.
[122] Macalister, *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, vol. I, 26–7.
[123] Macalister, *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, vol. I, 18–19.

the murder of his brother Abel (discussed further in Chapter Three below), being told: 'Agus in tan oibridfeasu in talamh sin, ni thibradh a toirtha dhuit: ⁊ biasu faelnedach ⁊ teitheach a hinud i n-inud for talmhaiu' (And when thou shalt till the earth, she shall not yield her fruits unto thee: and thou shalt be a wanderer and a fugitive [from place to place] upon the earth).[124]

After the text transitions from biblical history to the legendary ancestors of Ireland, the legendary Irish ancestor (Sru) who was cast out of Egypt after the death of the Pharaoh is retained from earlier origin narratives in the *Historia Brittonum* and *Lebor Bretnach*: 'Srú mac Easrú meic Gáidhil, is é ba táiseach do Gáedelaibh agan indarba a Héigipt ó ra báitheadh Forand im Muir Rúaidh an dheagaidh Mac nIsrahel' (Sru [s. Esru s. Gaedel], he it is who was chieftain for the Gaedil at that expulsion [from Egypt, after Pharao was drowned in the Red Sea, in the wake of the Sons of Israel]).[125] So too is the story of their second expulsion prior to arriving in Ireland:

> conad aire sin ro hindarbadh síl nGáedil for muir, .i. Agnomain ⁊ Lámfind a mac, co mbadar secht bliadna for muir a timcoll in domain a túaidh.
>
> (for that reason were the descendants of the Gaedel driven forth upon the sea, that is Agnomain and Lamfind his son, so that they were seven years on the sea skirting the world on the northern side.)[126]

Exile informs the legend of another wave of ancestors (the Milesians) as their movements are also prompted by the exile of their leader Míl: 'doluid Miled for longais íarsain' (thereafter Mil came into exile).[127] This is also the case with a later wave of invaders, led by ancestral figure Partholon, who came to Ireland fleeing from the kin-murder of his mother and father after seeking the kingship for his brother (discussed further in Chapter Three below):

> Mad áil a fis cid ara tánic Partholón assa thír, ninsa. Partholón ro marb a máthair ⁊ a athair, ic iarraid ríge dia bráthair: co táinic co Hérind ar teched a finghaile.
>
> (If you wish to know why Partholon came forth from his land, that is not difficult. Partholon slew his mother and his father, seeking kingship for his brother: so he came to Ireland fleeing from his kin-slaying.)[128]

While I am glossing over these stories rapidly for reasons of space, each of the above-mentioned ancestral figures serves as the narrative structure for

[124] Macalister, *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, vol. I, 84–7.
[125] Macalister, *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, vol. II, 64–5.
[126] Macalister, *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, vol. II, 74–5.
[127] Macalister, *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, vol. II, 38–9.
[128] Macalister, *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, vol. III, 8–9.

a significant portion of the *Lebor Gabála*. Throughout the text, innumerable other sets of ancestors are also seen wandering the world as the result of violence or oppression. Perhaps the most notorious of the latter are the Fir Bolg:

> A tírib Gréc táncatar, for teched in chíssa doratsat Gréic fortho, .i. tarrudh úire for leccaib lomma, comtar muighe for scothaib. Dorigensat na fir sin sithchurchu dóib dona bolcaib i mbertis in úir, ⁊ táncatar dochum nÉrenn, do ascnom a n-atharda.
>
> (From the lands of the Greeks they came, fleeing from the impost which the Greeks had laid upon them – carrying clay on to bare rock-flags and making them flowery plains. Those men made them long canoes of the bags in which they were wont to carry the clay, and they came to Ireland, in quest of their patrimony.)[129]

The Fir Bolg come to Ireland but must later flee again after their defeat by the Tuatha De Danann.[130] In the *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, then, themes of exile which had begun to develop in earlier insular origin material are expanded to form a significant structuring principle for the text as a whole, nicely illustrating the process that we have already seen elsewhere in insular origin narratives as they developed and expanded over time.

Exile, then, was a feature of insular origin narratives not present in their earliest iterations. The earliest internal accounts of the region emphasised the distance and isolation of Britain and Ireland from the rest of the known world, underscoring the efforts it would have taken for a given people's ancestors to arrive in this region. As time progressed and origin stories grew more detailed, ancestral figures were given backstories that included exile as a reason for their wanderings and eventual arrival in the insular region. Through the spread of these stories of ancestral exile, we can see the impact that insular origin narratives had on one another within the corpus as a whole.

Conclusions

This chapter has not argued that the motif of exile was a central part of every text within the corpus of insular origin legends, or that each exile narrative followed the same pattern. Rather, this and subsequent chapters demonstrate that the corpus of texts containing insular origin material was in conversation and that over time, narratives expanded in shared ways. Throughout the corpus as a whole, there is a movement from

[129] Macalister, *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, vol. IV, 14–15.
[130] Macalister, *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, vol. IV.

narrative sparseness in the texts which are chronologically the earliest towards more fully fleshed out narratives as the centuries progressed. Exile emerged organically as an important narrative motif, due first to the influence of Gildas's *De Excidio* and the perceived geographical isolation of the insular region from the rest of the known world, and second to the widespread influence of the Brutus legend in the *Historia Brittonum*. The concept of exile spread and became increasingly important within early insular origin narratives as they expanded so that each people was eventually given a foundational ancestor with a known backstory. Over time, the addition of details such as these to very sparse origin narratives expanded them, revealing the extent to which the texts containing these narratives were in conversation with one another. The corpus of insular origin narratives was a fluid one which changed and grew over time due to the mutual influence of texts on one another as it developed.

As we have seen, the motif of exile in insular writing was an inherited one. Exile had a long textual and literary history in the European west thanks to the widespread influence of the biblical Exodus and Greco-Roman stories of the aftermath of Troy. Moreover, exile was familiar to the peoples of the early medieval insular region as a contemporary legal sentence for several types of crimes and as a penalty which was frequently carried out historically. Yet as is evident from not only the biblical, classical, and late antique material but also numerous historical examples from around the insular region during the time that these origin stories were written, exile was far more than a legal sentence for someone who had committed a terrible crime. It also functioned as a chance for opportunity. Many who were exiled or exchanged as political hostages in their youth went on not only to regain their fortunes, but also to use the connections formed during periods of exile for later political advantage. Hermits and ascetics under self-imposed exile removed themselves from society to achieve greater spiritual depths and were well-respected for their efforts. Unhappy nobles could choose to exile themselves, gaining valuable support abroad before returning to contest a challenger.

In origin legends from the insular region, these dual themes of rejection and opportunity are present throughout narratives of exiled ancestral founding figures. As we have seen, exile cuts one off from one's original kin-group, society, and homeland – yet simultaneously provides them with the opportunity to found a new dynasty in ways which would not have been possible in the shadows of their ancestors. An exiled ancestor who founded a new land had a clear narrative function in isolating and defining a people. Each of the exiled ancestral figures we have seen in this chapter retains genealogical and historical ties to their homeland, allowing the people of the insular region to place themselves within a global

historical and genealogical framework. Yet at the same time, their ancestors' exile allowed for the creation of something new. These striking narrative possibilities explain why the motif of exile became so quickly embedded within the fabric of insular origin legends.

Once the concept of exile became introduced into the origin narratives of the early medieval insular region, authors naturally sought out an explanation for why their foundational ancestors had been exiled in the first place. Chapter Three demonstrates that within the insular corpus, kin-slaying emerged as the most frequent explanation for why an ancestor or group of ancestors had left their original homeland. This might seem surprising, as we would expect an honoured ancestor to be heroic rather than criminal. Yet, like exile, kin-slaying had a long and influential biblical, classical, and late antique textual history. Also like exile, it offered interesting narrative opportunities at the same time as being a serious crime, historically punishable by exile in the insular region. Chapter Three surveys the narrative inheritance of kin-slaying from biblical, classical, and late antique texts before enumerating its contemporary legal and historical resonances. With this background, Chapter Three then studies kin-slaying throughout the corpus of insular origin material, beginning with the long influence of the *Historia Brittonum*, the first text to incorporate this motif.

3 Kin-Slaying

Another key concept that emerged as a shared idea between insular origin narratives which grew and transformed as it was transmitted between the texts containing them was that a foundational ancestor had committed the crime of kin-slaying. Like the motif of exile, kin-slaying did not feature in the earliest texts but was introduced via the Brutus story in the ninth-century *Historia Brittonum* to dramatic effect. From there, the idea spread as an explanation for the initial exile of a foundational ancestor. As we have seen in Chapter Two, the idea of an exiled founding figure became popular in insular origin legends. As these stories expanded, their authors came to recognise the narrative need for an explanation of that ancestral exile. Kin-slaying proved convenient, for several reasons. Legally, it was a crime whose punishment would have been exile in the societies under consideration in this book, and numerous historical examples attest to its contemporary resonances. Narratively, biblical and classical precedents remembered kin-slayers Cain and Romulus, whose stories were widespread and influential, as the founders of cities and dynasties. Moreover, kin-slaying also offered insular authors a crucial narrative feature: it provided a means for a given people to retain ties with an ancestral homeland, making them a part of broader Christian and world history, whilst simultaneously curtailing the potential for political ties between that homeland and the newly founded settlement. In practical terms, that is, it would be impossible for anyone from a people's ancestral homeland to lay a claim upon their new settlement if the founder of that settlement had severed ties by committing a kin-slaying. As a narrative motif, kin-slaying allowed a people to retain the prestige of ties to ancient dynasties while making clear that they had broken with the past and were now an independent people in their own right.

This chapter, then, takes kin-slaying as its focus. It first explores the shared inheritance of the two most influential kin-slaying narratives on the medieval western world, namely those of Cain and Abel from biblical tradition and Romulus and Remus from classical and late antique tradition. Second, I examine the contemporary legal and historical evidence of

kin-slaying from the insular region, illustrating the frequency of this crime, some of the societal concerns brought about by its commission, and its close relationship to exile, which was its legal sentence. Finally, this chapter analyses the motif of kin-slaying as a shared theme within the early insular origin corpus, one which spread outwards from the ninth-century *Historia Brittonum* and the legend of Brutus of Troy onwards. From this foundational text, kin-slaying became an increasingly widespread idea within the corpus of early insular origin material as it continued to develop.

Part I: Kin-Slaying in Classical, Biblical, and Late Antique Tradition

As was the case with exile, stories involving kin-slaying were widespread throughout classical, biblical, and late antique literary and historical tradition. As was also the case in the previous chapter, two narratives of kin-slaying in particular emerged as the most widely influential on the medieval world: the biblical myth of Cain and Abel and the classical legend of Romulus and Remus. These tales held some important narrative features which came to play a central role in the medieval texts they influenced as well. Firstly, in the legend of Cain and Abel, kin-slaying and exile were inextricably linked: after Cain killed his brother, God cursed him to wander the earth as an exile from the rest of humanity. Medieval iterations of the Cain and Abel legend strengthened these associations, defining Cain as both a kin-slayer and an exiled, outlaw figure. Second, in the case of both Cain and Romulus, it was the slayer – and not the slain – of the brothers who despite their crimes went on to found cities and dynasties, becoming remembered simultaneously for their act of violence but also for more lasting contributions to posterity. These foundational legends were widespread throughout the Middle Ages. In the stories of Cain and Romulus, we can see how the groundwork was laid to produce a figure who was both guilty of a terrible crime and remembered as a founding ancestor in the medieval imagination. From the influence of these stories, legendary narratives of an ancestral figure who had committed kin-slaying arose within the insular origin corpus.

The myth of Cain and Abel has captured literary, historical and genealogical imaginations ever since its first biblical appearance. It was the most important and widely influential story of kin-slaying in the medieval Christian world, as according to biblical history it was both the world's first murder and the world's first occurrence of kin-slaying. As such, the narrative pattern of Cain's exile from society and subsequent wanderings throughout the world after he had slain his brother set a powerful

precedent. While this chapter does not have space to study the myth of Cain and Abel in depth, two points are particularly relevant to its influence on insular origin legends. First of all, like the myth of Exodus, the story of Cain and Abel was widely known throughout the medieval world, and it was developed and expanded by later medieval authors who saw the narrative of Cain's wanderings as a convenient framework upon which to hang previously murky histories and genealogies.[1] Second, the story of Cain and Abel firmly aligned kin-slaying with exile from known society. The biblical narrative in Genesis reads:

Dixitque Cain ad Dominum: maior est iniquitas mea quam ut veniam merear. Ecce eicis me hodie a facie terrae, et a facie tua abscondar, et ero vagus et profugus in terra: omnis igitur qui invenerit me occidet me. Dixitque ei Dominus: nequaquam ita fiet: sed omnis qui occiderit Cain septuplum punietur. Posuitque Dominus Cain signum ut non eum interficeret omnis qui invenisset eum. Egressusque Cain a facie Domini, habitavit in terra profugus, ad orientalem plagam Eden.

(And Cain said to the Lord: My iniquity is greater than that I may deserve pardon. Behold, thou dost cast me out this day from the face of the earth, and I shall be hidden from thy face, and I shall be a vagabond and a fugitive on the earth: everyone, therefore, that findeth me, shall kill me. And the Lord said to him: No, it shall not be so: but whosoever shall kill Cain, shall be punished sevenfold. And the Lord set a mark upon Cain, that whosoever found him should not kill him. And Cain went out from the face of the Lord, and dwelt as a fugitive on the earth, at the east side of Eden.)[2]

Cain's curse clearly casts him as an exile and a wanderer, leading to an unsurprising 'medieval understanding of Cain as an outlaw'.[3] As Timothy S. Jones has noted, 'in the medieval imagination Cain, like Lucifer in the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, became the father of the outsider, the person who exists outside the physical, moral, religious, or cultural boundaries'.[4]

Knowledge of the Cain and Abel legend, as well as its linkage of Cain to exiles and outlaws, was widespread throughout the medieval world. Moreover, these motifs were expanded as individual texts picked up and elaborated the story of Cain and Abel throughout the period.[5]

[1] On the legend overall, see Ruth Mellinkoff, *The Mark of Cain* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1981); John Byron, *Cain and Abel in Text and Tradition: Jewish and Christian Interpretations of the First Sibling Rivalry* (Leiden: Brill, 2011); and Brian Murdoch, *The Apocryphal Adam and Eve in Medieval Europe: Vernacular Translations and Adaptations of the Vita Adae et Eva* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[2] Genesis 4:13–16.

[3] Jones, *Outlawry in Medieval Literature*, 32.

[4] Jones, *Outlawry in Medieval Literature*, 29.

[5] See Oliver F. Emerson, 'Legends of Cain, Especially in Old and Middle English', *PMLA* 21 (1906): 831–929; Keith Glaeske, 'The Children of Adam and Eve in Medieval Irish Literature', *Ériu* 56 (2006): 1–11; and Jones, *Outlawry in Medieval Literature*, 29–32.

While I do not have space to give a complete survey, a famous passage from the Old English epic poem *Beowulf* serves as an illustration of the types of connections that were being drawn by medieval authors between the kin-slayer Cain and exile. Grendel, the poem's monstrous antagonist, is described as a descendant of Cain who must dwell outside of human society on account of the ancestral crime of fratricide:[6]

> Wæs se grimma gæst Grendel haten,
> mære mearcstapa, se þe moras heold,
> fen ond fæsten; fifelcynnes eard
> wonsæli wer weardode hwile,
> siþðan him scyppen forscrifen hæfde
> in Caines cynne – þone cwealm gewræc
> ece Drihten, þæs þe he Abel slog;
> ne gefeah he þære fæhðe, ac he hine feor forwræc,
> metod for þy mane mancynne fram.
> Þanon untydras ealle onwocon,
> eotenas ond ylfe ond orcneas,
> swylce gigantas, þa wið Gode wunnon
> lange þrage; he him ðæs lean forgeald.[7]
>
> (The grim spirit was called Grendel. He was a notorious boundary-walker who held the moors, fen and fastness. The wretched creature lived for a while in the land of monstrous races, after God had cursed them as Cain's kin. The eternal lord avenged that killing in which he slew Abel. He found no joy in that feud, but God banished him far from all mankind for that crime. Then all evil things were descended from him: trolls and elves and orcs, also the giants who strove against God for a long time. He gave them their reward for that.)
>
> . . . Grendles modor,
> ides aglæcwif yrmþe gemunde,
> se þe wæteregesan wunian scolde,
> cealde streamas, siþan Cain wearð
> to ecgbanan angan breþer,
> fæderenmæge; he þa fag gewat,
> morþre gemearcod mandream floen,
> westen warode. Þanon woc fela
> geosceaftgasta; wæs þæra Grendel sum,
> heorowearh hetelic . . .[8]

[6] See Andy Orchard, *A Critical Companion to Beowulf* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2003; repr. paperback 2007), 68 nn. 57 and 58 for a survey of bibliography on this subject.
[7] *Beowulf*, ll. 102–14; R.D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork, and John D. Niles (eds.), *Klaeber's Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 6–7.
[8] *Beowulf*, ll. 1258(b)–1267(a); Fulk, Bjork, and Niles (eds.), *Klaeber's Beowulf*, 44.

> (Grendel's mother, the enemy woman, remembered her sorrow, she who must dwell in the terrible water, the cold streams, after Cain became the killer of his only brother, his father's kin. After that Cain went doomed as an outlaw, marked as a murderer, to flee the joys of men. He dwelled in the wilderness. Thence from him awoke many a cursed spirit. One of these was Grendel, a hostile outlaw.)

Beowulf illustrates the link between Cain's fratricide and his exile in the medieval imagination. Moreover, the poem underscores the ways in which the sentence of exile could be extended to Cain's descendants as well.[9]

As noted above, the link between Cain and exile was widespread in medieval texts. Yet Cain's exile was a 'productive' one, as the narrative of Genesis goes on to depict him founding a city and a dynasty:

> Cognovit autem Cain uxorem, suam quae concepit et peperit Enoch: et aedificavit civitatem vocavitque nomen eius ex nomine filii sui Enoch. Porro Enoch genuit Irad; et Irad genuit Maviahel; et Maviahel genuit Matusahel; et Matusahel genuit Lamech.
>
> (And Cain knew his wife, and she conceived, and brought forth Henoch: and he built a city, and called the name thereof by the name of his son Henoch. And Henoch begot Irad; and Irad begot Maviael, and Maviael begot Methusael; and Mathusael begot Lamech.)[10]

The contradictions inherent in the narrative of Cain were immediately noticeable, and were remembered and expanded in the medieval period. As Brian Murdoch likewise notes of Cain's descendent Lamech (Genesis 4:19–24), there is

> a curious mixture of positive and negative: his two wives, Ada and Sella, provide him with children – Jabel, Jubal and Tubalcain (plus a daughter, Noema) – all of whom look like culture-heroes, giving the world tentmaking, music and metalwork. And yet he utters a bloodthirsty sword-song to those two wives, claiming apparently to have killed a man and a young man – the text is not clear and may rest upon a parallelism – and reminding us of the curse upon his ancestor, Cain.[11]

The duality of the Cain narrative persisted in the medieval period. Cain was certainly not a wholly positive figure, as he was first remembered as a kin-slayer and an exile. Nevertheless, his afterlife as a founder of cities and dynasties held an equal role in medieval historical and genealogical

[9] See John Block Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981; repr. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 87–107.

[10] Genesis 4:17–18.

[11] Brian Murdoch, *The Medieval Popular Bible: Expansions of Genesis in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2003), 70.

texts. All these nuances of the Cain legend would prove influential in insular origin narratives, which associated kin-slaying with exile but also with the founding of new societies and dynasties.

An interesting coda to the legend of Cain and Abel – one which also has to do with kin-slaying – is the apocryphal tradition which grew to surround Cain's own death, ostensibly at the hands of his descendant Lamech. The relevant passage from Genesis is terse and confusing:

> Dixitque Lamech uxoribus suis Adae et Sellae: audite vocem meam uxores Lamech auscultate sermonem meum: quoniam occidi virum in vulnus meum et adulescentulum in livorem meum. Septuplum ultio dabitur de Cain de Lamech vero septuagies septies.
>
> (And Lamech said to his wives Ada and Sella: Hear my voice, ye wives of Lamech, hearken to my speech: for I have slain a man to the wounding of myself, and a stripling to my own bruising. Sevenfold vengeance shall be taken for Cain: but for Lamech seventy times sevenfold.)[12]

What biblical tradition left unclear, apocryphal tradition soon expanded. Lamech's reference to the curse of Cain right after his mention of a murder in Genesis firmly linked the two in the classical, late antique, and medieval imagination; and Lamech was thus understood to be the slayer of his ancestor: 'throughout the Middle Ages, however, Lamech is a killer with a specific and non-biblical victim – the word "murderer", though often used, is not precisely apposite – and the man he kills is Cain, plus sometimes another man, who is occasionally seen as his own son, Tubalcain'.[13] In apocryphal tradition, then, the kin-slayer Cain begat Lamech who would go on to slay him in turn.

Even more interesting to insular origin material is the purported manner of Cain's death in apocryphal stories circulating by the medieval period: 'later apocrypha do have the aged and blind Lamech killing Cain with an arrow or with a stone (sometimes he seems to have both projectiles with him), but describe him as having killed his boy by accident when he brings his hands together in horror'.[14] In this tradition, the blind hunter Lamech is guided by his son, and fires an arrow (or slingshot) which accidentally slays Cain instead of the game he was intending to kill. The legend of Lamech as an accidental murderer was widespread in the medieval period.[15] It held clear mythological resonance, as expressed perhaps most famously in the Scandinavian legend of the death of Baldr.[16] After universally beloved Baldr has a prophetic dream of his

[12] Genesis 4:23–4. [13] Murdoch, *Medieval Popular Bible*, 72.
[14] Murdoch, *Medieval Popular Bible*, 73. [15] Murdoch, *Medieval Popular Bible*, 70–95.
[16] Related in greatest detail in the *Prose Edda* of Snorri Sturluson; Anthony Faulkes, *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning* (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2005).

death, everything on earth swears a vow never to harm him, except mistletoe. As the gods amuse themselves by throwing objects at Baldr which leave him unharmed, trickster Loki places a mistletoe-spear in the hand of Baldr's blind brother Höðr, leading to a predictably tragic outcome. Thus, in the medieval imagination, the legend of Cain spawned another legendary narrative of kin-slaying in which the slayer was perceived to be faultless. As we shall see below, the legend of Lamech has clear resonances with the insular origin legend of Brutus, eponymous ancestor of the Britons. The myth of Lamech expanded upon that of Cain, creating a narrative in which kin-slaying could be accidental and a slayer could therefore be understood as a less problematic founder of a dynasty.[17]

An equally important story of kin-slaying to the narrative of world history in the medieval west was the legend of Romulus and Remus.[18] Like that of Cain and Abel, the story of Romulus and Remus centres around a foundational pair of brothers, the murderous one of whom (Romulus) would go on to found a city (Rome) and a dynasty. The two stories share clear narrative parallels, and indeed, they were firmly linked in the medieval imagination. Perhaps the most famous illustration of this link was made by Augustine in his *De civitate Dei*, Book 15.[19] Augustine writes, 'Natus est igitur prior Cain ex illis duobus generis humani parentibus, pertinens ad hominum civitatem, posterior Abel, ad civitatem Dei' (Cain then was the first-born of these two parents of the human race, one who belonged to the city of men; Abel was born later and belonged to the City of God).[20] Cain and Romulus are then linked as those who both founded earthly cities and committed fratricides. *De civitate Dei* 15.5 is 'de primo terrenae civitatis auctore, fratricida cuius impietati Romanae urbis conditor germani caede responderit' (on the first founder of the

[17] In the insular region, the Gosforth Cross, which combines images of Scandinavian and Christian mythology, serves as a perfect example of precisely this type of syncretism. See Judith Jesch, 'The Norse Gods in England and the Isle of Man', in Daniel Anlezark (ed.), *Myths, Legends, and Heroes: Essays on Old Norse and Old English Literature in Honour of John McKinnell* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 11–24 and Lilla Kopár, *Gods and Settlers: The Iconography of Norse Mythology in Anglo-Scandinavian Sculpture* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012).

[18] On the legend overall, see Walter Donlan, 'The Foundation Legends of Rome: An Example of Dynamic Process', *The Classical World* 64 (1970): 109–14 and T.P. Wiseman, *Remus: A Roman Myth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

[19] Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, 15.5; Philip Levine (ed. and trans.), *Augustine, City of God, Volume IV: Books 12–15*, Loeb Classical Library 414 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966). See also P.G. Walsh (ed. and trans.), *Augustine: De Civitate Dei / The City of God: Books XV & XVI*, Aris & Phillips Classical Texts (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2018).

[20] Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, 15.1; trans. Levine, 412–13.

earthly city, the fratricide whose wickedness was repeated by the founder of Rome when he slew his own brother).[21] Augustine writes,

primus itaque fuit terrenae civitatis conditor fratricida; nam suum fratrem, civem civitatis aeternae in hac terra peregrinantem, invidentia victus occidit . . . sic enim condita est Roma quando occisum Remum a fratre Romulo Romana testatur historia.

(the first founder of the earthly city was consequently a fratricide; for, overcome by envy, he slew his own brother, who was a citizen of the eternal city sojourning upon this earth . . . this is indeed the way that Rome was founded when Remus, as the history of Rome tells us, was slain by his brother Romulus.)[22]

As Jonathan R. Lyon writes, 'in the Western tradition, the first person in human history to have a brother [Cain] was also the first person to commit fratricide . . . when Romulus later killed his brother, Remus, at the founding of Rome, the sibling bond became even more closely associated with violence'.[23] Fratricide was one of the defining events of this narrative in the medieval imagination: 'though the legend of Romulus and Remus was told in many versions with variable details, two events are of particular importance in later political evocations of the myth: the twins' early life as leaders of a band of shepherds and the fratricide – when Romulus is building the walls of Rome, he kills his brother'.[24] The story of Romulus and Remus, then, was another well-known and highly influential episode of kin-slaying with a long literary and historical afterlife.

The legend of Romulus and Remus, like that of Aeneas discussed in Chapter Two, was well known in the medieval period. This story was preserved in many sources from the classical world,[25] one of which was Livy's *History of Rome* (*Ab Urbe Condita*). Portions of this text are now lost, but the legend of Romulus and Remus was included as part of the first 'Decade' (Books 1–10) of the *History*, which circulated widely throughout the Middle Ages (about 200 medieval manuscripts survive).[26] Again, without time for a full discussion, a few examples will suffice. A Middle Irish prose version of the legend of Romulus and Remus survives,[27] and

[21] Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, 15.5; trans. Levine, 426–7.
[22] Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, 15.5; trans. Levine, 426–7.
[23] Jonathan R. Lyon, *Princely Brothers and Sisters: The Sibling Bond in German Politics, 1100–1250* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013), 232.
[24] Cynthia J. Bannon, *The Brothers of Romulus: Fraternal Pietas in Roman Law, Literature, and Society* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 158.
[25] See Wiseman, *Remus*.
[26] Marielle de Franchis, 'Livian Manuscript Tradition', in Bernard Mineo (ed.), *A Companion to Livy* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2015), 3–23 and L.D. Reynolds, *Texts and Transmission: A Survey of the Latin Classics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983).
[27] Philip M. Freeman, 'A Middle-Irish Version of the Romulus and Remus Story', *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium* 11 (1991): 1–13.

its knowledge in Anglo-Saxon England is most famously attested by the Franks Casket, an early eighth-century carved whalebone casket whose decorative panels depict a mix of classical, Christian, and Germanic iconography.[28] Like the legend of Cain and Abel, the story of Romulus and Remus had a long afterlife and was widely known as a story of kin-slaying in the Middle Ages.

Yet also like the story of Cain – perhaps even more so – Romulus's tale of fratricide was strongly associated with his founding of a city and a dynasty. As we have seen, Augustine's *De civitate Dei* draws parallels between Cain and Romulus that resonated strongly in the medieval imagination: both fratricides, both founders of important dynasties – the earthly city and the Roman republic.[29] Thus, in the cases of both Cain and Abel and Romulus and Remus, we can see that tales of kin-slaying were well known to medieval peoples from biblical and classical sources; yet the central figures of these tales were remembered in a more complex manner than they might first appear, as 'both fratricides and founders of cities'.[30] Kin-slaying was a crime, yet Cain and Romulus went on to found dynasties after they had killed their brothers. These legends influenced the nuanced depictions of kin-slaying that we find within later medieval origin stories. It was certainly understood as a serious crime – particularly, one linked to the sentence of exile – yet legendary ancestral figures who had committed an act of kin-slaying were nonetheless remembered as a significant part of their people's subsequent history.

Part II: Kin-Slaying in Law and History in the Insular Region

Chapter Two surveyed our knowledge of laws from the insular region as well as similarities between the legal traditions of these societies. As was the case for exile in Chapter Two, there is also good evidence for shared patterns surrounding the crime of kin-slaying amongst the surviving legal material. In insular society as a whole, kin-slaying was one of the most serious crimes that could be committed, because it resulted in a legal paradox that was difficult to solve with payment alone. For this reason, the sentence of exile was frequently imposed for kin-slaying in both law and historical reality. The two were closely linked in the early medieval insular imagination.

[28] See Carol Neuman de Vegvar, 'The Traveling Twins: Romulus and Remus in Anglo-Saxon England', in Jane Hawkes and Susan Mills (eds.), *Northumbria's Golden Age* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1999), 256–67 and Catherine E. Karkov, *The Art of Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2011), 146–53.
[29] Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, 15.5.
[30] Karsten Friis Johansen, *A History of Ancient Philosophy: From the Beginnings to Augustine*, trans. Henrik Rosenmeier (London: Routledge, 1998; repr. 2005), 636.

Kin-slaying was a particularly notable crime not only because of the severity of the social bonds it broke, but also because legal and ethical paradoxes prevented its easy resolution. As we have seen in Chapter Two, most crimes in the early insular world were resolved through a system of compensation for injured parties that was designed to stop feuds from spiralling out of control. Compensation was not possible in cases of kin-slaying, however, since both the killer and the victim belonged to the same kin-group; this also meant that the victim's kin could not take revenge on the killer without becoming kin-slayers themselves. Kin-slaying was therefore understood to be 'a crime of particular horror'.[31]

The difficulties of resolving kin-slaying, and its subsequent close ties to a sentence of exile, are borne out by legal and historical evidence of the severity with which it was treated and the penalties which were imposed in the early medieval insular region. Kin-slaying (Old Irish *fingal*) is highlighted as a very serious crime in the early Irish legal material.[32] For instance, one text states '[a]tait .uii. rig la Féniu na dligh dire na logh enech' (there are seven kings in Irish law who lose their compensation and honour-price), the seventh of which is a 'ri dogne fingal' (a king who commits kin-slaying).[33] Elsewhere, kin-slaying is said to be one of three things which bring about the downfall of a king: 'trí dofortat cach flaith: góu, forsnaidm, fingal' (three things that ruin every chief: falsehood, overreaching, murder of relations).[34] *Audacht Morainn* ('The Testament of Morann') condemns kin-slaying in the strongest terms, warning of the dire consequences it brings about, in language that mirrors the biblical penalties linked to Cain and Lamech as noted above:

Abbair fris, fingal nisnderna. Mairg forsndoirter, mairg ondoirter! Dofechar ō Dia co nómad noe, condéni duthaini ⁊ garsecli, doforti a orddan ⁊ a anai, dobádi a greit ⁊ a athgabáil, dollega a chlanda ⁊ a chomarbbu, fofera mór nuilcc sund, fo secht sechtdiabul dofechar tall.

(Tell him he should not commit kin-slaying. Woe to him on whom it is inflicted; woe to him who inflicts it! It is avenged by God to the ninth degree, so that it causes transience and short life; he loses his honour and his prosperity, it destroys his valour and his pledges, he destroys his kinsmen and his heirs, he brings about great evil here, he will thence be punished seven times sevenfold.)[35]

[31] Márkus, *Conceiving a Nation*, 197.
[32] See Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, 18–21, 127–8, and 219–21. On the concept of kin itself, see T.M. Charles-Edwards, *Early Irish and Welsh Kinship* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).
[33] Heptad 13; *CIH* 14.34–15.4.
[34] Triad 186; Kuno Meyer, *The Triads of Ireland*, Todd Lecture Series 13 (Dublin, 1906), 24–5.
[35] *Audacht Morainn* §38; Rudolf Thurneysen, 'Morands Fürstenspiegel', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 11 (1917): 56–106 at 85.

As we have seen, the particular horror of kin-slaying in Irish law lay in the impossibility of its resolution. A kin-slaying could neither be compensated for by payment to the victim's kin nor avenged by them.[36]

The seriousness of kin-slaying is reflected by the consequences it brought about. We have already seen that a king who committed kin-slaying lost his honour-price;[37] likewise, '[a]tait .uii. nduine na dlegat dire nad lo enech' (there are seven forts which lose their compensation and their honour-price), one of which is 'dun a ndentar fingal' (a fort in which kin-slaying is committed).[38] A man who committed kin-slaying could also be disinherited.[39] Significantly for our purposes, kin-slaying in early medieval Ireland was also linked to a sentence of exile.[40] Legal texts make reference to a 'fuidir cinad o muir' (one who has been ransomed of a crime from the sea),[41] and this punishment is linked to the crime of kin-slaying: 'uair fingal indethbiri dogni an duine ann sin; ⁊ is ann is dilis a cur ar muir' (in the case when someone commits unnatural kin-slaying, it is right that he be put out to sea).[42] In this case, the judgement of a crime was left up to God: a sentence of exile allowed a kin group to punish their kinsman who had committed *fingal* without killing him and thus committing the same crime themselves.

The procedure for the penalty of setting adrift is described in more detail in *Cáin Adomnáin* (written on Iona, in the kingdom of the Dál Riata, as introduced in Chapter Two above).[43] *Cáin Adomnáin* specifically addresses crimes committed by a woman, but seems to refer to the same sentence:

Ar is ed bás dlegair do banscāil dia marbad fir nō mnā, nō di thabairt neime dia n-abbalar, nō di loscad, nō di fochlaid ecalse .i. cor in-nói ōinślūaisti for murchreth hi fairrge do techt le gaeth di thīr. Long menathcha do breith lee. La Dīa brithimnacht furi īsin.

(For a woman deserves death for killing a man or woman, or for giving poison whereof death ensues, or for burning, or for digging under a church, that is to say, she is to be put into a boat of one paddle as a sea-waif (?) upon the ocean to go with

[36] Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, 127. [37] Heptad 13; *CIH* 14.34–15.4.
[38] *CIH* 14.1–16. [39] *CIH* 535.1–2.
[40] See Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, 219–21; Mary E. Byrne, 'On the Punishment of Setting Adrift', *Ériu* 11 (1932): 97–102; and Pamela O'Neill, 'Old Irish *Muirchrech* "Sea-Boundary"', *Ériu* 67 (2017): 1–9.
[41] Heptad 72; *CIH* 428.11–12. [42] Digest B10; *CIH* 1301.39–40.
[43] For this geographical region in the later medieval period, see Taylor, '*Leges Scocie*'; Jenny Wormald, 'Bloodfeud, Kindred and Government in Early Modern Scotland', *Past and Present* 87 (1980): 54–97; and Alexander Grant, 'Murder Will Out: Kingship, Kinship and Killing in Medieval Scotland', in Stephen Boardman and Julian Goodare (eds.), *Kings, Lords and Men in Scotland and Britain, 1300–1625: Essays in Honour of Jenny Wormald* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 193–226.

the wind from the land. A vessel of meal and water to be given with her. Judgement upon her as God deems fit.)[44]

Other references throughout the corpus of early Irish legal material are fairly consistent that this punishment involved being cast adrift in a small boat with one oar and a small portion of food.[45] Interestingly enough, in the case of other crimes that were punished by setting adrift, the criminal was taken back into the community if washed back ashore. The understanding appeared to have been that God had passed judgement in allowing them to live.[46] The greater severity of kin-slaying's impact on a community is perhaps reflected in the fact that the same did not hold true for one who committed *fingal*: '7 ma ina tir fein dotochra doridhis, is foghnam mu[g]saine uadh .i. fognam fuidhre' (and if he comes again into his own land, he must render the service of a slave, that is, the service of a *fuidir*).[47]

As we have already seen in the case of exile, the legal abhorrence of kin-slaying belies the frequency with which it occurred in historical reality. This was due in no small part to the fact that one's closest kinsmen and fiercest political rivals were likelier than not to be one and the same: 'if his position in the kindred made him a candidate for a position of power, it would do the same for his brothers and his cousins', and 'as only one candidate could normally succeed to a particular kingship or lordship, and as his principal rivals often included his close relations, violence might well ensue'.[48] Contention amongst extended kin-groups for limited positions of political power meant that in historical reality, acts of kin-slaying more often resulted in successful reigns than sentences of exile. For example, seventh-century Leinster king Rónán mac Colmáin (also known as Rónán mac Áedo) was immortalised in the text known as *Fingal Rónáin* ('The Kin-Slaying of Rónán') as the slayer of his son Máel Fothartaig.[49] The final stanza of the king-list poem *Baile Chuinn Chétchathaig* states: 'Dos-n-icfa fer fingalach esmbrethach. Íbthus co deirc ndomuin. Saxain imchil. Immus- aue Coircc -ebla. Is é reithe Muman márlaithe i Temuir' (A kin-slaying man of unjust judgments will come to it. He will drink it to the very bottom. Very wicked Saxons.

[44] Kuno Meyer, *Cáin Adamnáin: An Old-Irish Treatise on the Law of Adamnan*, Anecdota Oxoniensia, Mediaeval and Modern Series 12 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905), §45, 30–1; see further O'Neill, 'Old Irish *Muirchrech*', who argues convincingly for a reading of *muirchrech* as 'sea-boundary'.

[45] O'Neill, 'Old Irish *Muirchrech*'. [46] Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, 220.

[47] Digest B10; *CIH* 1301.41–1302.1. [48] Márkus, *Conceiving a Nation*, 198.

[49] Also known as *Aided Maelfothartaig meic Rónáin*. David Greene, *Fingal Rónáin and Other Stories*, Mediaeval and Modern Irish Series 16 (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1955). This text is discussed further in Chapter Four below.

The descendants of Corcc will pursue them. He is the overlord of Munster of great princes in Tara).[50] This is usually understood as a reference to powerful eighth-century Munster king Cathal mac Finguine, but regardless of whether or not this attribution is correct, the presence of a kin-slaying man (*fingalach*) in this list of kings reminds us that acts of kin-slaying were likelier to bring about an accession to political power than they were to cause exile from it.

Another characteristic real-world example comes from the *Annals of Ulster*, which in 865 record that 'Tadgg m. Diarmata, rex nepotum Cennselaig, interfectus est dolose a fratribus suis ⁊ a plebe sua' (Tadc son of Diarmait, king of the Uí Cheinnselaig, was killed by his own kinsmen and his people).[51] The slayer of Tadc was his brother Coirpre mac Díarmata, who took the kingship only to himself be slain by his kin in turn a decade later: 'Coirpri m. Diarmata, rex nepotum Cennselaig, a fratribus suis occisus est' (Cairpre son of Diarmait, king of Uí Cheinnselaig, was killed by his own kinsmen).[52] Thus while the legal penalties for kin-slaying stressed its disruption to the fabric of early Irish society, the historical reality is that an act of kin-slaying quite often marked the beginning of a successful reign.

In Anglo-Saxon England as well, kin-slaying was understood as a crime that stood out for both its moral threat to the fabric of society and the legal difficulties that it presented.[53] As Paul R. Hyams notes, 'all right-thinking men naturally viewed with profound revulsion violence within the kindred, that is, fratricide and parricide'.[54] Kin-slaying in Anglo-Saxon England appears to have been viewed with equal distaste in both secular and ecclesiastical contexts: 'the Church had always treated this sort of fratricidal or parricidal killings with special seriousness',[55] as Anglo-Saxon penitentials assigned harsher penalties the closer the degree of kinship was between slayer and slain.[56] Here, too, the paradoxical inability to resolve a kin-slaying was recognised as what made the crime so

[50] Edel Bhreathnach and Kevin Murray, '*Baile Chuinn Chétchathaig*: Edition', in Edel Bhreathnach (ed.), *The Kingship and Landscape of Tara* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2005), 73–94 at 86–7, §35.

[51] Seán mac Airt and Gearóid mac Niocaill, *The Annals of Ulster (to A.D. 1131), Part I: Text and Translation* (Dublin: School of Celtic Studies, Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1983; repr. 2004), 320–1, s.a. 864 = 865.

[52] mac Airt and mac Niocaill, *Annals of Ulster*, 332–3, s.a. 875 = 876.

[53] On the concept of kinship generally, see H.R. Lyon, 'Kinship in Anglo-Saxon England', *Anglo-Saxon England* 3 (1974): 197–209.

[54] Paul R. Hyams, *Rancor & Reconciliation in Medieval England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 203.

[55] Hyams, *Rancor & Reconciliation*, 54.

[56] See Allen J. Frantzen, *The Literature of Penance in Anglo-Saxon England* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1983), 7–8, 67, 75–6.

significant. *Beowulf* again provides a famously illustrative example. Though here the killing described is accidental rather than deliberate – one brother (Hæthcyn) has accidentally slain another (Herebeald) in a hunting accident – the poem speaks movingly of their father Hreðel's grief at being unable to avenge his son's death:

> Wæs þam yldestan ungedefelice
> mæges dædum morþorbed stred,
> syððan hyne Hæðcyn of hornbogan,
> his freawine flane geswencte,
> miste mercelses ond his mæg ofscet,
> broðor oðerne blodigan gáre.
> Þæt wæs feohleas gefeoht, fyrenum gesyngad,
> hreðre hygemeðe; sceolde hwæðre swa þeah
> æðeling unwrecen ealdres linnan . . .
>
> . . . Swa Wedra helm
> æfter Herebealde heortan sorge
> weallinde, wæg; wihte ne meahte
> on ðam feorhbonan fæghðe gebetan;
> no ðy ær he þone heaðorinc hatian ne meahte
> laðum dædum, þeah him leof ne wæs.
> He ða mid þære sorhge, þe him sio sar belamp,
> gumdream ofgeaf; Godes leoht geceas.[57]
>
> (For the eldest, an unfitting death-bed was prepared by the deeds of a kinsman when Hæthcyn struck his friend and lord down with an arrow from his bow. He missed his mark and shot his kinsman. One brother slew the other with a bloody arrow. That feud could not be settled. It was a grievous wrong, the worst pain, that the noble youth must be parted from life unavenged . . .
>
> Thus the leader of the Wederas endured his heart swelling with sorrow for Herebeald. He could not at all settle the feud with his son's slayer, nor could he harm him with hateful deeds, though he was not dear to him. Because of that sorrow which sorely afflicted him, he abandoned the joys of life; chose God's light.)

Kin-slaying in Anglo-Saxon England, as elsewhere in the early medieval insular region, was recognised as a troubling act.[58] *Beowulf* highlights a father's grief at the death of a son whom he is unable to properly avenge: no crime has occurred here. Yet this passage underscores the familiar

[57] *Beowulf*, ll. 2435–43 and 2462b–69; Fulk, Bjork, and Niles (eds.), *Klaeber's Beowulf*, 83–5.

[58] On similarities across the region, see further Neil McLeod, 'Parallel and Paradox: Compensation in the Legal Systems of Celtic Ireland and Anglo-Saxon England', *Studia Celtica* 16–17 (1981–82): 25–72.

legal paradox that kin-slaying, whether accidental or deliberate, brought about.

An act of kin-slaying could not be settled with compensation, and thus in Anglo-Saxon England as well, it was linked to sentences of exile or outlawry. The situation here requires slightly more unpacking, however, in that kin-slaying itself does not populate the Anglo-Saxon legal material in the same way that *fingal* appears throughout the corpus of early Irish evidence.[59] Old English terms for kin-slaying such as *mægbana*, *mægcwealm*, *mægmorðor*, *mægmyrða*, etc. are known, but appear infrequently, as glosses on Latin *parricidium* or in a homiletic context rather than in the laws themselves.[60] Rather, in Anglo-Saxon England, kin-slaying belonged to a category of offences for which compensation was impossible and thus exile or outlawry became understood as appropriate punishments. As Bruce R. O'Brien has explained in an excellent study, the broader range of offences known during the Anglo-Saxon period as *morð* and *morðor* was composed of two sub-categories: 'a kind of killing for which there could be no compensation' and 'a crime of betrayal against one's lord and the sympathetic punishment for such treason'.[61] Kin-slaying fell into the former category of crimes which were impossible to settle by means of compensation. O'Brien's main point is that 'throughout the Anglo-Saxon period *morð* and *morðor* do not mean exclusively, or even generally, secret killings, as has often been argued'.[62] Instead, these terms encompassed a range of deaths that together formed part of the category of criminal offences which were *botleas* – that is, they could not be settled with compensation, and were consequently linked to penalties of exile and outlawry.

Thus *morð (or)*, unlike 'mere' slaying (*ofslea*), was a *botleas* crime, as in II Cnut 64: 'husbryce ⁊ bærnet ⁊ open ðyfð ⁊ æbere morþ ⁊ hlafordswice æfter woroldlage is botleas' (in secular law, *botleas* [unpardonable] crimes are housebreaking, arson, open theft, blatant murder, and treason against one's lord).[63] It is also linked to outlawry, as in Edward and Guthrum:

[59] On the lack of legal specificity for kin-slaying, see Liebermann, *Die Gesetze*, vol. III, 44 (Alf. El. 14 n. 2) and Stefan Jurasinski, *The Old English Penitentials and Anglo-Saxon Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 25 n. 10.

[60] See entries in T. Northcote Toller (ed.), *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary, Based on the Manuscript Collections of the Late Joseph Bosworth* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1898) and *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Supplement* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921).

[61] Bruce R. O'Brien, 'From *Morðor* to *Murdrum*: The Preconquest Origin and Norman Revival of the Murder Fine', *Speculum* 71 (1996): 321–57 at 345 and 346; see also T. B. Lambert, 'Theft, Homicide and Crime in Late Anglo-Saxon Law', *Past & Present* 214 (2012): 3–43.

[62] O'Brien, 'From *Morðor* to *Murdrum*', 343.

[63] II Cnut 64.

Gyf he man to deaðe gefylle, beo he ðonne utlah, ⁊ his hente mid hearme ælc ðara ðe riht wylle. ⁊ gyf he gewyrce, þæt hine man afylle, þurh þæt he ongean Godes riht oððe ðæs cynges geonbyrde, gyf man þæt gesoðige, licge ægylde.

(If he fells a man to death, he is then an outlaw, and anyone who desires justice can seize him with harmful intentions. And if it comes about that any man kills him because he opposed God's law or the king's justice, if a man does that truthfully, he lies uncompensated.)[64]

Kin-slaying thus appears to have been understood as a *botleas* offence for which a sentence of outlawry could be imposed in Anglo-Saxon England.

Of course, as we have seen in early medieval Ireland as well, the historical reality was rather different than any imagined legal ideal. Most scholars commenting on attitudes towards kin-slaying in Anglo-Saxon England have turned to *Beowulf* as an exemplar. Beowulf speaks quite harshly in charging Unferth with kin-slaying during their flyting match, telling him, 'þeah ðu þinum broðrum to banan wurde / heafodmægum; þæs þu in helle scealt / werhðo dreogan, þeah þin wit duge' (though you became a killer to your brother, your close kinsman; for that you must endure torment in hell, though your council is worthy).[65] In his own death-speech, Beowulf remarks on his joy that he cannot be reproached with kin-slaying: 'Ic ðæs ealles mæg / feorhbennum seoc gefean habban / forðam me witan ne ðearf waldend fira / morðorbealo maga, þonne min sceaceð / lif of lice' (I – sick with mortal wounds – may have joy for all of that, because the ruler of men has no need to charge me with kin-murder when my life departs from my body).[66] Yet the history of Anglo-Saxon England, like early medieval Ireland, reflected the uncomfortable reality that here too, kin-slaying seemed to have been a frequent means through which unwanted political rivals were removed, with little evidence of subsequent exile in sight.

The messy realities of kin-slaying are illustrated by the well-known feud of Cynewulf and Cyneheard, preserved in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* under the year 755 [*recte* 757]. The narrative begins when Cynewulf deposes Sigeberht, who is also his kin. Sigeberht is killed in vengeance for an earlier death, and Cynewulf wishes to also drive out Cyneheard: Sigeberht's brother, and thus also Cynewulf's kin. Cyneheard surrounds and attacks Cynewulf when he is in the company of a woman in Merton. Much fighting ensues, and the next day, Cynewulf's retainers ride out and surround Cyneheard's remaining troops. Cyneheard offers them compensation to settle the feud: particularly, 'heom cydde þet heora maga

[64] Edward and Guthrum 6, 6–7.
[65] *Beowulf*, ll. 587–89; Fulk, Bjork, and Niles (eds.), *Klaeber's Beowulf*, 22.
[66] *Beowulf*, ll. 2739b–2743a; Fulk, Bjork, and Niles (eds.), *Klaeber's Beowulf*, 93.

him mid wæron ða þe him fram noldon' (he told them that their kinsmen were there with him and did not wish to leave him), to which the response is 'þa cweðon hig þet heom nænig mæg leofra nære þone heora hlaford ⁊ heo næfre his banan folgian noldon' (they said that no kinsmen were more beloved than their lord, and they would never wish to follow his slayer).[67] Their relatives inside are made the same offer and reject it. The story of Cynewulf and Cyneheard not only illustrates the frequency with which strife between members of the same kin-group took place at the upper end of the political spectrum, it also demonstrates how easily any warrior could become enmeshed in a kin-slaying situation. Caught between loyalty to one's kin and loyalty to one's lord, there were no good choices; but loyalty to one's lord seems to have been held paramount.

Incidents of kin-slaying abound in the Anglo-Saxon historical records, and they most often appear to be politically motivated. For instance, in 757, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* records that Oswulf, son of Eadberht of Northumbria, succeeded his father to the kingship for one year before 'hine ofslogon his hiwan' (his household slew him).[68] Kin-violence pervades the life of seventh-century Northumbrian king Oswiu. Firstly, when he comes to the throne

translato ergo ad caelestia regna Osualdo, suscepit regni terrestris sedem pro eo frater eius Osuiu, inuuenis xxx circiter annorum, et per annos xxviii laboriosissime tenuit, inpugnatus uidelicet et ab ea, quae fratrem eius occiderat, pagana gente Merciorum et a filio quoque suo Alhfrido necnon et a fratruo, id est fratris sui qui ante eum regnauit filio, Oidilualdo.

(after Oswald had been translated to the heavenly kingdom, his brother Oswiu succeeded to his earthly kingdom in his place, as a young man of about thirty, and ruled for twenty-eight troubled years. He was attacked by the heathen people, the Mercians, who had slain his brother, and in addition, by his own son Alhfrith and his nephew Oethelwald, the son of his brother and predecessor.)[69]

Oswiu is both attacked by his son and nephew and slays a kinsman in turn, as he was responsible for the death of Deiran king Oswine, his kinsman through his wife Eanflæd. Oswine is betrayed by one of his thanes and murdered at the command of Oswiu, and the seriousness of this act is reflected by the fact that Oswiu later builds a monastery, at Eanflæd's request, at which prayers are offered for the soul of both victim and murderer.[70]

Bede also records the murder of seventh-century king Sigeberht at the hands of his kinsmen:

cumque tempore non pauco in praefata prouincia, gaudente rege, congaudente uniuerso populo, uitae caelestis institutio cotidianum sumeret augmentum,

[67] Irvine, *MS E*, s.a. 755. [68] Irvine, *MS E*, s.a. 757.
[69] Colgrave and Mynors, *Bede*, iii.14, 254–5. [70] *HE* iii.14 and *HE* iii.24.

contigit ipsum regem instigante omnium bonorum Inimico, propinquorum suorum manu interfici. Erant autem duo germani fratres, qui hoc facinus patrarunt.

(for a long time the instruction of the people in the heavenly life prospered day by day in the kingdom, to the joy of the king and the whole nation; but it then happened that the king was murdered, at the instigation of the enemy of all good men, by his own kinsmen. It was two brothers who perpetrated the crime.)[71]

Interestingly enough, the brothers' stated reason for killing Sigeberht is that they were angry because he was too quick to pardon his enemies for their crimes, which Bede frames as a virtue of the king's Christian piety. In his death, we can see the difficulties that a Christian understanding of forgiveness presented to a justice system in which it was expected that all crimes would be compensated or avenged.

Even the threat of kin violence pervades the Anglo-Saxon historical record, underscoring the extent of its impact on contemporary politics. After Northumbrian king Edwin was killed at the Battle of Hatfield Chase, his wife, Æthelburh, fled to Kent with Edwin's daughter, son, and grandson, whom she sent to be raised in Gaul for fear of kings Eadbald and Oswald – the former being her own brother.[72] In the Battle at the Winwæd at which Penda of Mercia is killed,

filius autem Osualdi regis Oidiluald, qui eis auxilio esse debuerat, in parte erat aduersariorum, eisdemque contra patriam et patruum suum pugnaturis ductor extiterat, quamuis ipso tempore pugnandi sese pugnae subtraxerat, euentumque discriminis tuto in loco exspectabat.

(but Oethelwald, King Oswald's son, who ought to have helped them, was on the side of his foes and was leading the enemies of his own uncle and of his native land; he withdrew, however, in the hour of battle and awaited the outcome in a place of safety.)[73]

As in the story of Cynewulf and Cyneheard, we can see the impact of divided loyalties on real-world conflicts. Crucially, however, none of these historical cases of kin-slaying resulted in the exile of the perpetrators. In Anglo-Saxon England, like early medieval Ireland, kin-slaying was linked to a sentence of exile in the legal and literary imaginations, but in reality it was extremely prevalent in contemporary politics as the means through which contested kingships were often secured.

As was the case with exile, the legal evidence for kin-slaying in early medieval Wales is a bit later than that of Ireland and Anglo-Saxon England, but nonetheless, what survives suggests reasonable alignment

[71] Colgrave and Mynors, *Bede*, iii.22, 284–5.
[72] *HE* ii.20.
[73] Colgrave and Mynors, *Bede*, iii.24, 290–1.

with that of the other insular societies. We know that historically, Wales had a similar legal structure in which feud (and the settlement of feud) was central, while the importance of kinship ties was also paramount in the settlement of feud, as Charles-Edwards has elucidated.[74] Feuds and the compensation required to settle them were both referred to as *galanas*, while *sarhaed*, injury, refers to an additional payment and the insult that caused it. As R.R. Davies has demonstrated, the system of *galanas* was central enough to Welsh law that it persisted through the fifteenth century,[75] although the degree of kinship which qualified for either the payment or receipt of *galanas* appears to have been reduced over time.[76] As in early medieval Ireland and Anglo-Saxon England, Welsh laws allowing for the settlement of feuds were inextricably linked to societal understanding of kinship groups, who both received *galanas* for a slain kinsman and would be responsible for paying it out in the case that one of their kinsmen was the slayer.

Surviving Welsh legal evidence on kin-slaying therefore appears to underscore its exceptional nature. We read that

> p6bynhac aladho y ura6t am na ran tref tat ac ef y llofrud honno ny dyly kenedyl talu galanas gyt ac ef; namyn ef adyly talu galanas eu kar udunt h6y abit colle byth o tref y dat.
>
> (whosoever shall kill his brother, because that he will not share patrimony with him; with such a homicide a kindred is not to pay *galanas*, but he is to pay the *galanas* to the relatives: and let him forfeit for ever the patrimony.)[77]

Although *galanas* is still paid to the rest of the kin by the slayer, the law recognises that the wider kin-group cannot be responsible for *galanas* in a case of kin-slaying, and the slayer is also expelled from the legal community through forfeiture of his patrimony. (It is interesting to note that one's patrimony is also forfeited in cases of treason against one's lord, but in such cases patrimony can be restored with a letter of absolution from the pope.)[78] 'Neu [dyn] aladho y tat [neu y vam]' (a murderer of his father or mother) is also listed as one of the categories of persons whose testimony is invalid.[79]

The severity of kin-slaying in a legal context would also appear to be underscored by its treatment in the Welsh legal triads (*Trioedd Cyfraith*),

[74] See Charles-Edwards, *Early Irish and Welsh Kinship*, 181–215.
[75] R.R. Davies, 'The Survival of the Bloodfeud in Medieval Wales', *History* 54 (1969): 338–57 at 344; on the survival of feuding in late medieval Wales, see further Llinos Beverley Smith, 'A Contribution to the History of *Galanas* in Late-Medieval Wales', *Studia Celtica* 43 (2009): 87–94.
[76] Davies, 'Survival of the Bloodfeud', 345.
[77] Owen, *Ancient Laws and Institutes*, GC II.xxxvii.2.
[78] Owen, *Ancient Laws and Institutes*, DC II.xxiii.25.
[79] Owen, *Ancient Laws and Institutes*, DC III.ii.12.

an important accompaniment to Welsh law itself. As Morfydd E. Owen writes in her survey of this genre, 'extensive series of triads' – groups of threes – 'can be found in most fields of medieval Welsh learning', and 'the professional classes of Wales were therefore using the form of the triad to record and memorise the learning of their crafts'.[80] The legal triads are extant in thirteenth-century manuscripts onwards, and Owen has suggested that 'the fact that legal triads written in Welsh are recorded in the thirteenth-century Latin texts of the laws would seem to support' a theory of 'oral vernacular origins'.[81] Within the legal triads, kin-slaying is depicted as a shameful and serious offence. One of the legal triads notes

teir kyfulauan, os gwana dyn yn y wlad, y dyly y vap yntev colli tref y dat gan gyfureith – o llad y arglwyd, nev y penkenedyl, nev y teispantyle – rac trymed y kyfulyuanev hynny.

(three offences for which, if a man commits them in his own country, his son should lose his patrimony by law – killing his lord, or his head of kindred, or his representative – because of the seriousness of these offences.)[82]

Another highlights 'teir kyfurinach yssyd gwell ev hadev noc eu kelv: vn ohonunt colledeu y brenhin, a chynllwyn, a llad o dyn y tad' (three secrets that are better confessed than concealed: one of them the losses of the king, and a secret killing, and a person killing his father).[83] We perhaps find sentiments surrounding kin-slaying stated most strongly in the triad which reads,

tri dyn kas kenedyl: lleidyr, a thvyllvr, kany ellir ymdiret udunt; a dyn a latho dyn o'e genedyl ehunan, kany dylyir llad y kar byv yr y kar marv. Kas vyd ynteu gan pavb.

(three hated men of a kindred: a thief, and a deceiver, for they cannot be trusted; and a man who kills a man from his own kindred, for the living kin should not be killed for the dead kin. He will be hated by everybody.)[84]

Yet here too, legal theory and historical practice differed. Historical examples of kin-slaying were widespread in medieval Wales.[85] Gildas's *De Excidio* charges British ruler Maglocunus with the murder of his uncle in order to gain the kingship. A charter which is appended to the Life of St Cadog and also appears in the Book of Llandaff notes the slaying of Merchion by his brother Guidnerth on

[80] Morfydd E. Owen, 'Welsh Triads: An Overview', *Celtica* 25 (2007): 225–50 at 225 and 227.
[81] Owen, 'Welsh Triads', 227.
[82] Sara Elin Roberts, *The Legal Triads of Medieval Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007), 52–3.
[83] Roberts, *Legal Triads*, 76–77. [84] Roberts, *Legal Triads*, 86–7.
[85] See Maund, *Ireland, Wales and England in the Eleventh Century*, 139.

account of struggle for the kingship.[86] David E. Thornton's excellent study of the dynastic conflict in Gwynedd during the late eighth and early ninth centuries examines the role played by fratricide in written records of events (if not necessarily historical reality).[87] An 814 entry in the *Brut y Tywysogyon* records the death of Griffri ap Cyngen through the treachery of Elise, his brother.[88] Again in Gwynedd, after the death of Hywel ab Ieuaf in 985, Hywel's brother (Cadwallon ab Ieuaf) slew his cousin (Ionafol ap Meurig) in the subsequent struggle for power.[89] Thus, in early medieval Wales as well, kin-slaying was recognised as an exceptional crime in the legal material, yet the historical reality was that acts of violence between members of the same kin-group were a familiar part of dynastic struggles.

In the early medieval insular world, then, kin-slaying was a notable occurrence, yet the rhetoric demarcating it as an exceptional act did not match the reality that it was committed quite frequently. Acts of kin-slaying broke emotional, social and legal taboos, and as such were recognised as something singular in legal and literary texts.[90] This singularity had a long history, as the above discussion of Cain and Romulus has

[86] Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, 258.

[87] David E. Thornton, *Kings, Chronologies, and Genealogies: Studies in the Political History of Early Medieval Ireland and Wales* (Oxford: Prosopographica et Genealogica, 2003), 75ff.

[88] Peniarth MS 20 version. The *Brut y Tywysogyon* exists in three versions: the MS Peniarth 20 version, for which see Thomas Jones (ed.), *Brut y Tywysogyon, Peniarth MS 20* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1941) and Thomas Jones (trans.), *Brut y Tywysogyon, or, The Chronicle of the Princes: Peniarth MS 20 Version*, Board of Celtic Studies, University of Wales, History and Law Series 11 (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1952); the Red Book of Hergest version, for which see Thomas Jones (ed. and trans.), *Brut y Tywysogyon or The Chronicle of the Princes, Red Book of Hergest Version* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1955); and Brenhinedd y Saeson, for which see Thomas Jones (ed. and trans.), *Brenhinedd y Saeson or The Kings of the Saxons* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1971). These chronicles are 'three authentic versions of the *Brut* representing three independent Welsh translations of three slightly different texts of a Latin chronicle compiled towards the end of the thirteenth century by an anonymous historiographer who probably worked in the Cistercian abbey of Strata Florida', Jones, *Red Book Version*, xii. The *Brut y Tywysogyon* is related to other Welsh chronicle traditions: 'although the original Latin compilation does not appear to have survived, certain sections of it are still to be found embedded in the three texts of the *Annales Cambriae* and in the *Cronica de Wallia*', Jones, *Red Book Version*, xii. For a discussion of textual issues, see Jones, *Peniarth 20 Version*, xi–lxxv. Peniarth 20 is believed to be the earlier version – see Jones, *Peniarth 20 Version*, lx.

[89] Jones, *Brut y Tywysogyon, Peniarth MS 20*.

[90] There is a vast body of scholarly literature on the anthropology of kin-slaying. See e.g. May Edel and Abraham Edel, *Anthropology and Ethics: The Quest for Moral Understanding* (Cleveland, OH: The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1968), 53–67; Thomas V. Pollet and Ashley D. Hoben, 'An Evolutionary Perspective on Siblings: Rivals and Resources', in Catherine A. Salmon and Todd K. Shackelford (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Evolutionary Family Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011),

underscored, and was not unique to the insular region.[91] However, the legal consequences of feuding in the insular world shared important similarities because these legal systems centred around feud and kin-slaying created a paradox that could not be resolved through settlement or retribution. Avenging a kinsman who had been slain by another kinsman would result in a new case of kin-slaying. To avoid perpetuating an endless cycle of violence, kin-slaying became linked to sentences of exile. Yet the reality of kin-slaying in the early insular world was that it was legally quite serious yet historically very common among the political elite. While each kingdom had its differences, on the whole, it was a shared reality across the early insular region that a vacant kingship could potentially be filled from a broad pool of eligible successors.[92] These candidates belonged to competing dynasties that were usually related to one another to some degree: two half-brothers with the same father, two cousins with a shared ancestor, etc. Thus the potential for violence against one's kin was quite high, but as we have seen in the historical record, so too was the payoff. Those who committed kin-slaying in the early insular world were more likely to gain a throne than suffer a sentence of exile. As we shall see below, the legal link between kin-slaying and exile made it an increasingly common feature of insular origin legends at the same time as the historical reality that acts of kin-slaying led to successful reigns made it an acceptable crime for a foundational ancestor to have committed.

Part III: Kin-Slaying in Insular Origin Narratives

Once the motif of a foundational ancestor's exile made its way into the corpus of insular origin legends, medieval authors naturally sought to explain why a given figure had been exiled in the first place. Kin-slaying emerged as a significant *ex post facto* reason. The final section of this chapter examines kin-slaying throughout the insular origin corpus, beginning with the *Historia Brittonum*, an influential text whose contents would

128–48; and texts collected in Daniel Lord Smail and Kelly Gibson (eds.), *Vengeance in Medieval Europe: A Reader* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009).

[91] Calvert Watkins, *How to Kill a Dragon: Aspects of Indo-European Poetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 419, has demonstrated that even the vocabulary used to discuss kin-slaying was exceptional, as Indo-European linguistic commonalities are shared by 'more than ordinary killings', 'found characteristically in narration of killing of or by a dragon or other monster (bidirectionality), of fratricide or other kin-slaying, of awesome exploits of the hero, or of awesome victims. The context is not indifferent.'

[92] See Charles-Edwards, *Early Irish and Welsh Kinship*, 215ff. and Frederick M. Biggs, 'The Politics of Succession in *Beowulf* and Anglo-Saxon England', *Speculum* 80 (2005): 709–41.

go on to shape much later material. Kin-slaying enters the *Historia Brittonum* via the legend of eponymous British ancestor Brutus, which was introduced in Chapter One above. Brutus's fate is prophesied by a mage before his birth: 'quia dixit Ascanio quod masculum haberet in utero mulier et filius mortis erit, quia occidet patrem suum et matrem suam et erit exosus omnibus hominibus' (he told Ascanius that the woman had a male in her womb, who would be the child of death, for he would kill his father and his mother, and be hateful to all men).[93] The prophecy comes true, but as the skilfully crafted narrative reveals, events do not unfold in the manner we might expect. Brutus does not wilfully slaughter his parents, but rather, 'in nativitate illius mulier mortua est' (his mother died in his birth) and 'ictu sagittae occidit patrem suum, non de industria, sed casu' (he killed his father with an arrow shot, not on purpose, but by accident).[94] The plot of Brutus's curse is quite obviously a close parallel to the apocryphal stories of Lamech's slaying of Cain discussed above.

In the *Historia Brittonum*, kin-slaying is a crucial feature of the legend of Brutus, founder of the Britons. Its prophecy manifests before his birth, and it defines his destiny during life. Significantly, Brutus's kin-slaying is the cause of his exile, as after his father's death, 'expulsus est ab Italia' (he was driven from Italy).[95] The fact that Brutus's identity as a kin-slayer and an exile leads to his role as the foundational ancestor of Britain sets an important narrative pattern for insular origin legends. Exile is a good way to explain the movement of a foundational ancestor from their original homeland, and kin-slaying is a compelling reason to explain that sentence of exile itself. Moreover, a foundational ancestor who has committed an act of kin-slaying paves the way for unique narrative opportunities. As Joseph Lennon has noted, the consequence of the Brutus legend is that 'this image of patricide establishes an independence for the Britons'.[96] The ancestral figure of Brutus gives the Britons historical and genealogical ties to the classical world, yet his act of kin-slaying is also an act of political severance: having separated himself from his family, no one other than Brutus's descendants, the legend implies, has any claim to the island of Britain. Brutus, therefore, is presented as a complex ancestral figure by the *Historia Brittonum*. He is a kin-slayer, but an accidental one. His past gives the island of Britain and its inhabitants ties to broader world history through the figure of an ancestor who is cursed yet blameless, allowing for the creation of a new dynasty. The dynamic potential of this narrative

[93] Morris, *Nennius*, 60 and 19.
[94] Morris, *Nennius*, 60 and 19.
[95] Morris, *Nennius*, 60 and 19.
[96] Lennon, *Irish Orientalism*, 37.

pattern is carried forward elsewhere in the corpus of insular origin legends thanks to the influence of the Brutus story.

The narrative potential of a kin-slaying ancestor like Brutus can perhaps best be understood through a brief study of his opposite, found later in the *Historia Brittonum*. The narrative pattern of Brutus's parricide is reversed in the 'Wonders of Britain' section which follows the *Historia Brittonum*'s historical chronicle. In an episode widely recognised as folkloric, the text describes Arthur's slaying of his son Amr:

> Est aliud miraculum in regione quae vocatur Ercing. Habetur sepulcrum juxta fontem, qui cognominatur Licat Amr, et viri nomen: qui sepultus est in tumulo, sic vocabatur Amr; filius Arthuri militis erat, et ipse occidit eum ibidem et sepelivit. Et veniunt homines ad mensurandum tumulum in longitudine aliquando sex pedes, aliquando novem, aliquando duodecim, aliquando quindecim. In qua mensura metieris eum in ista vice, iterum non invenies eum in una mensura, et ego solus probavi.
>
> (There is another wonder in the country called Ergyng. There is a tomb there by a spring, called Llygad Amr; the name of the man who is buried in the tomb was Amr. He was a son of the warrior Arthur, and he killed him there and buried him. Men come to measure the tomb, and it is sometimes six feet long, sometimes nine, sometimes twelve, sometimes fifteen. At whatever measure you measure it on one occasion, you never find it again of the same measure, and I have tried it myself.)[97]

O.J. Padel notes that 'in these wonders the text recounts local legends, linked with place-names', and 'of Arthur's killing of his own son, presumably without recognizing him as in stories from other cultures, nothing more is known'.[98] A full narrative version of the type of story Padel mentions is found in the Old Irish tale *Aided Óenfhir Aífe* ('The Death of Aífe's Only Son'), in which Irish hero Cú Chulainn slays his son Connla, who has not identified himself. The deaths of Connla and Amr reverse the narrative pattern of the Brutus legend. By slaying his father, Brutus establishes a new historical dynasty of his own. Figures such as Cú Chulainn and Arthur, who have slain their sons, are anti-origin legends: they die tragically as mythological heroes, severed from any historical descendants or legacy.

From the *Historia Brittonum*, I turn next to the *Lebor Bretnach*, its eleventh-century Irish translation, and the slightly later *Labor Gabála Érenn*. I argue that the narrative pattern of the Brutus legend influenced these works, which both feature multiple instances of a foundational ancestor who committed an act of kin-slaying. The repetition of kin-slaying

[97] Morris, *Nennius*, 83 and 42.
[98] O.J. Padel, *Arthur in Medieval Welsh Literature* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000; repr. 2013), 7.

ancestors throughout these texts is one more instance of a well-studied phenomenon in the *Lebor Bretnach* and *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, namely, that of narrative doubling. Narrative doubling is a well-documented literary device in which a plot or character occurring in one part of a given work is duplicated later on in that same work under a slightly different guise. It would have been well known to medieval authors from biblical and classical contexts.[99] In early medieval Irish literature, this process has been well documented both externally (moments where part of a source text is duplicated) and internally (a narrative motif or pattern is duplicated elsewhere in the same text). Repeated occurrences of kin-slaying ancestral figures throughout these texts makes it easy to see how the narrative doubling of this motif spread: first from the *Historia Brittonum* to the *Lebor Bretnach* as the Brutus episode was translated into Irish; then throughout the *Lebor Bretnach* itself as the motif was duplicated through internal influence; and finally, carried forward into the *Lebor Gabála Érenn*. These narrative shifts in the *Lebor Bretnach* and *Lebor Gabála* show the translators, authors and compilers of these texts placing them in dialogue with other insular origin material as the pattern of a kin-slaying foundational ancestor grew and spread throughout the corpus.

Scholarship on early Irish pseudohistorical texts has made clear the importance that patterns of narrative doubling have to the structure of these works. Such doubling was modelled on both internal and external sources. When it comes to external influences for narrative doubling, for instance, John Carey has demonstrated how this process took place in the case of the Milesians: 'the name *Míl Espáne* is neither more nor less than a direct borrowing into Irish of the Latin phrase *miles Hispaniae* which we find in the *Historia [Brittonum]*',[100] with the consequence that 'the sons of Míl themselves seem much likelier to be the creations of medieval scholars than the heroes of a primordial tradition'.[101] The reason why the conceit of the *miles Hispaniae* likely arose in the first place, as van Hamel originally suggested, can in turn be traced back to late antique intellectual tradition, where Isidore of Seville's depiction of Spain as the 'mother of races'[102] suggests a plausible explanation for the purported Spanish ancestry of the Irish. Carey has built on these conclusions to demonstrate the influence of Orosius's *History against the Pagans* as a source for the geographical connections drawn between Ireland and Spain and the

[99] See e.g. Joshua A. Berman, *Narrative Analogy in the Hebrew Bible: Battle Stories and Their Equivalent Non-Battle Narratives* (Leiden: Brill, 2004) and Susan Lindgren Wofford, *The Choice of Achilles: The Ideology of Figure in the Epic* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992).

[100] Carey, *The Irish National Origin-Legend*, 8.

[101] Carey, 'Did the Irish Come from Spain?'.

[102] van Hamel, 'On *Lebor Gabála*', 173.

tower of Bregon episode (the purported Iberian tower from which Ireland is first glimpsed) in the *Lebor Gabála*, and he also finds Isidorian influence behind the idea that the Irish came from Spain in the fact that Isidore derives the Latin name of Ireland, (H)ibernia, from that of Spain, (H)iberia.[103] In other words, among the waves of founding ancestors who feature at points throughout the Irish origin legend, 'Partholón and Míl Espáne look like scholarly constructs, the figments of men steeped in Jerome and Isidore',[104] thanks to patterns of narrative doubling in these texts formed due to the influence of external sources.

(It should be noted that the Milesians also appear in the grammatical text *Auraicept na n-éces*, portions of which are quite early. However, the Milesian material is not present in the early core of *Auraicept*, that is, what its most recent editor Anders Ahlqvist has dubbed the 'canonical' portion of the text. The Milesian material reads:

Is e seo a thosach in Uraiceapta [i]ar nAmairgein nGlungeal. Locc don libur-sa Tochur Inbhir Moir i crich hUa nEnechglais Cualand. Et aimser do aimsear mac Miled. Perso do Amairgein Glungeal mac Miled. Tucaid a denma mic Miled dia tothlugud fair amal ata 'nar ndiaidh.

[This is the beginning of the Primer according to Amairgen Whiteknee. Place of this book, Tochur Inbir Moir in the territory of Hy Enechglais Cualann. And its period the period of the sons of Milesius: the person of it Amairgen White-Knee, son of Milesius. The reason for making it that the sons of Milesius demanded it of him as is after us.][105]

There is no doubt these traditions are deeply entwined, as it is clear that a now-lost written version of the Irish origin legend was extant before its inclusion in the *Historia Brittonum*, and portions of this [centred on ancestral figure Fénius Farrsaid] are present in the early core of the *Auraicept* itself.)

At the same time, internal influence was also significant in forming patterns of narrative doubling, as studies by Liam Ó Buachalla and R. Mark Scowcroft have demonstrated.[106] Scowcroft notes that 'the invasion-style myth stimulates the spread of features from one personage or group to its typological equivalent',[107] concluding,

[103] Carey, 'Did the Irish Come from Spain?'.
[104] Carey, *The Irish National Origin-Legend*, 9.
[105] See Anders Ahlqvist, *The Early Irish Linguist: An Edition of the Canonical Part of the Auraicept na n-Éces, with Introduction, Commentary and Indices* (Helsinki: Societas Scientiarum Fennica, 1983); text and translation from George Calder, *Auraicept na n-éces: The Scholars' Primer* (Edinburgh: John Grant, 1917), 78–9.
[106] Ó Buachalla, 'The *Lebar Gabála* or Book of Invasions of Ireland' and Scowcroft, '*Leabhar Gabhála* Part I' and 'Part II'.
[107] Scowcroft, '*Leabhar Gabhála* Part II', 59.

these clues to the Milesian origins of Partholón and Nemed differ in kind from the typological parallelism that unites them with the other invaders, but may have inspired it. By the time Nennius summarized the invasions of Ireland, these three had achieved recognition as distinct events, but would have brought to the canon enough duplication to foster its growth as a cycle of narratives governed by common patterns and themes. In repetition its authors would see convention.[108]

The same patterns of 'repetition and convention' explain the duplication of kin-slaying ancestral figures found throughout the *Lebor Bretnach* and the *Lebor Gabála*, which drew initially on the Brutus legend in the *Historia Brittonum* before spreading via internal instances of narrative doubling. This process shows how individual origin legends were shaped to match others in the insular region.

To begin, the legend of Brutus is copied nearly verbatim from the *Historia Brittonum* to the *Lebor Bretnach*. All the details are present: the druid's prophecy before Brutus's birth that he would kill his father and mother and be hateful to all men, his mother's death in childbirth, his accidental killing of his father with a hunting arrow, and his subsequent exile from Italy and founding of Britain. I argue that these details are transferred to the biography of Ireland's legendary foundational ancestor, Partholón, in order to give him a more 'complete' narrative matching that of Brutus. Partholón is the Irish form of the Christian name Bartholomew. As Meyer first argued, this name was likely given to the first man to settle in Ireland after the flood because it was interpreted by the early church fathers as meaning 'the son of the one who holds up the waters'.[109] Partholón and his followers first appear in the *Historia Brittonum*, where they are the first of three waves of invaders to colonise Ireland: Partholón, Nemed, and the sons of Míl Espáne. These invading figures are what we might call 'canonical' to the Irish origin legend in that they are all found in the same order in the texts that contains this material, though with slight variations – for instance, by the time of the *Lebor Gabála* the tradition has grown to include the antediluvian female invaders of Banba and Cessair before Partholón arrives after the flood.

In Partholón's first appearance in the *Historia Brittonum*, his death, and that of his followers, remains unexplained. The narrative relates that,

> Novissime autem Scotti venerunt a partibus Hispaniae ad Hiberniam. Primus autem venit Partolomus cum mille hominibus, de viris et mulieribus, et creverunt usque ad quattuor milia hominum, et venit martalitas super eos, et in una septimana omnes perierunt et non remansit ex illis etiam unus.

[108] Scowcroft, '*Leabhar Gabhála* Part II', 63.
[109] Meyer, 'Partholón mac Sera' and Carey, *The Irish National Origin-Legend*, 8.

(But later the Irish came from Spain to Ireland more recently. Partholon came first with a thousand, men and women, and they grew until they were four thousand, and a plague came upon them, and in one week they all died, and there remained not a one of them.)[110]

The *Historia Brittonum*'s version of the Irish origin legend provides no explanation for either Partholon's arrival or the plague that killed him and this initial wave of settlers.

Yet as the legend of Ireland's first settler grew and developed over time, more details were added to fill in the narrative gaps. Most manuscripts of the *Lebor Bretnach* agree with the *Historia Brittonum*'s reading of the Partholón legend, relating that, 'ceid-fhear dogab Eirind .i. Parrtalon cum mile homnaibis .i. mile itir firu ⁊ mna, ⁊ roforbrithea a n-Eiri na n-il-milib corasmarb a n-aen-tseachtmain do tam'[111] (the first man to take Ireland was Partholón with a thousand men, that is, a thousand between men and women, and they multiplied in Ireland into many thousands, until they died of a plague in one week).[112] Yet one version of the *Lebor Bretnach* (van Hamel's 'L2', one of the two recensions preserved in the Great Book of Lecan in its extant form) alters the Partholón narrative to more closely parallel the story of Brutus. The L2 version of the *Lebor Bretnach* reads,

ceid-fhear dogab Eirind .i. Parrtalon cum mile homnaibis .i. mile itir firu ⁊ mna, ⁊ roforbrithea a n-Eiri na n-il-milib corasmarb do tham hen-sechtmain huile a ndigail na fingaili doroindi fora athair ⁊ fora mathair.[113]

(the first man to take Ireland was Partholón with a thousand men, that is, a thousand between men and women, and they multiplied in Ireland into many thousands, until they died of a plague in one week as judgment for the kin-slaying that he carried out on his father and on his mother.)[114]

Because the *Lebor Bretnach* is a translation of the *Historia Brittonum*, we can see precisely how the additional detail that Partholón slew his parents could have been doubled onto his biography from that of Brutus. The Brutus material comes just a few sections before Partholón, and the language of the two sections is very closely parallel: it is prophesied of Brutus that 'co mairfead a athair ⁊ a mathair'[115] (he would kill his father and his mother).[116] It seems quite plausible that a redactor of the *Lebor Bretnach*, searching for a reason why the plague that killed Partholón's people occurred, remembered the dual parricide of another exiled ancestral figure that he had just transcribed and duplicated it, creating one of

[110] Morris, *Nennius*, 61 and 20.
[111] van Hamel, *Lebor Bretnach*, 21.
[112] Todd, *Leabhar Breathnach*, 43.
[113] van Hamel, *Lebor Bretnach*, 21.
[114] Todd, *Leabhar Breathnach*, 43.
[115] van Hamel, *Lebor Bretnach*, 16.
[116] Todd, *Leabhar Breathnach*, 35.

the patterns of narrative doubling so common in this early Irish origin material.

Another instance in which Brutus's biography influenced an additional portion of the *Lebor Bretnach* can be seen in a section entitled *Do feartaib Cairnich*, 'On the miracles of Cairnech', which is attested only as an interpolation in the Book of Ballymote version of the *Lebor Bretnach*.[117] In the course of relating the saintly Cairnech's biography, *Do feartaib Cairnich* notes that

> Muirceartach mac Erca in tan sin i uail rig Breatan ig foglaim gaiscidh, iar na dichur a h-Erind ar na Crossana do marbadh, ⁊ iar na dichor iartain a h-Albain ar marbadh a sean-athar .i. Loairnd rig Alban.
>
> (At that time, Muircheartach Mac Erca happened to be with the king of Britain learning military skills after he was exiled from Ireland for having killed the Crossans and subsequently exiled from Scotland for having killed his grandfather, Loarn, king of Scotland.)[118]

Muircheartach Mac Erca's biography follows the same pattern as those of Partholón and Brutus, in which an act of kin-slaying leads to exile. Moreover, while *Do feartaib Cairnich* is ostensibly focused on the saint, his miracles are rather militaristic and vindictive, and a great deal of this brief narrative is in actuality devoted to the political and military victories of Muircheartach Mac Erca. Thus, *Do feartaib Cairnich* also duplicates the pattern of an origin story in which a kin-slaying ancestor is the founder of a great dynasty.

Much of the narrative momentum of the story is driven by St Cairnech's troubles on account of his brother. We read that 'Luirig, imorro, ro gab iar sin, go n-erecht a neart for Saxana, ⁊ con n-era catair foirechneach i uail mainistrech Cairnich .i. a brathair' (Luirig then succeeded to the throne, and he extended his power over the Saxons, and he forcibly built a fort within the precincts of the monastery of Cairnech his brother).[119] In order to rid himself of this nuisance, St Cairnech tells Muircheartach Mac Erca that, 'bod rig Erenn ⁊ Bretan tu chaidhchi, ⁊ do gebha neamh iardain acht co n-dichuirea Luirig do neart ata for in n-eclais' (you will be king of Ireland and Britain forever, and you will go to heaven afterwards, if you can stop Luirig from exercising his power

[117] Todd, *Leabhar Breathnach*, 178 and van Hamel, *Lebor Bretnach*, 40–1. This text has been little-studied; see Patrick Wadden, '*Do feartaib Cairnich*, Ireland and Scotland in the Twelfth Century', *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium* 33 (2013): 189–213 for a good contextualisation of its contemporary political resonances. In the Book of Ballymote version of the *Lebor Bretnach*, *Do feartaib Cairnich* is inserted between Todd's sections xiv and xv (after the subjugation of the Britons to the Romans).

[118] Todd, *Leabhar Breathnach*, 180–3.

[119] Todd, *Leabhar Breathnach*, 180–1.

against the church).[120] Muircheartach Mac Erca cheerfully slays Luirig on Cairnech's behalf, and is duly rewarded with the promised sovereignty for himself and his descendants: '⁊ gor marbad coigedhaigh na h-Erend iartain, ⁊ go ro gaib a righi do dhiles co brath do féin ⁊ dá chloind' (and he killed the provincial kings of Ireland afterwards, and took their sovereignty by right forever, for himself and his descendants).[121] The text of *Do feartaib Cairnich* therefore appears to reflect another instance of narrative doubling in the *Lebor Bretnach*, in which the pattern set by the Brutus legend of an ancestral figure who commits kin-slaying, is exiled, and founds a new dynasty is repeated yet again.

Several instances of ancestral kin-slaying, which I argue are shaped by the Brutus legend in the *Historia Brittonum*, are also found in the *Lebor Gabála*. Firstly, the *Lebor Gabála* is modelled on a biblical framework, meaning that it begins by including the kin-slayings of ancestral figures Cain and his descendant Lamech discussed above. Cain's kin-slaying is highlighted as the source of all later kin-murders in the world:

> Ro immarbáigestar cland Adaim íarom .i. sinser mac (n)Adaim, .i. Cáin miscadach, ro marb a derbráthair Aibél [. . . tria formud (?)] ⁊ tria saint, lasin (?) cnáim chamaill, mar adberat eólaig . . . tinnscnadar (?) fingail in domain.
>
> (Adam's descendants sinned after that, namely, the eldest of his sons, Cain the cursed, who slew his brother Abel . . . [through his jealousy?] and through his greed, with the bone of a camel, as learned men say. [In this manner?] began the kin-murders of the world.)[122]

Later in the *Lebor Gabála*, Cain's slaying of Abel is also cited as the reason for the flood. God's messenger tells Noah:

> Déna airc dhuit – do crandaib edroma, ar doragha diliu ⁊ dileaghbaid gach mbeo, triasin fingail moir doroindi Cain mac Adhaim ar a og-brathair; ⁊ ni thernoba gan tuitim sa tubaisti sin do sil Adhaimh.
>
> (Make an ark of light timbers, for a flood will come and submerge every living thing, because of the great kin-murder which Cain s. Adam wrought upon his younger brother: and none of the descendants of Adam shall escape without falling in that catastrophe.)[123]

In the case of Lamech, a poetic reference makes it clear that the tradition in which he was a kin-slayer of his ancestor was known to at least one redactor of the *Lebor Gabála*: 'Laimíach dígamus cen gái / is é cét-fer thuc dá mnái: / leis dorochair Cáin crom / dia tarlaic fair in uboll' (Lamech the two-spoused, without falsehood, / he is the first man who took two wives: / by

[120] Todd, *Leabhar Breathnach*, 182–3. [121] Todd, *Leabhar Breathnach*, 192–3.
[122] Macalister, *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, vol. I, 18–19.
[123] Macalister, *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, vol. II, 198–9.

him did crooked Cain fall, / after he cast the apple upon him.)[124] The *Lebor Gabála*, then, is framed with important incidents of ancestral kin-slaying.

More interesting to the arguments of this book are the *Lebor Gabála*'s inclusion of several legendary ancestral figures whose biographies have expanded to include instances of kin-slaying. Michael Murphy's extensive index of Macalister's edition of the *Lebor Gabála Érenn* includes a heading for kin-murder whose entries alone run to four pages,[125] and I do not have space to discuss all of these episodes here. Murphy's impressive detective work means that he includes many slayings which the *Lebor Gabála* does not explicitly identify as *fingal*, but he has reconstructed as such through genealogical tables. As he writes:

> The LGÉ text is not very clear that kin-murder is a crime. Not all killings that would seem to be 'kin-murder' are so described. Not all killings clearly identify the relationship of the individuals involved and it is often necessary to construct a genealogical chart to see the relationships. The following listing might be expanded with a clearer definition of 'kin'.[126]

My focus is on legendary ancestral figures – meaning I will largely leave aside the quasi-historical kings found in volume five of Macalister's edition – and episodes which the text of the *Lebor Gabála* itself calls attention to as instances of kin-slaying. Thus, the discussion that follows is largely focused on the legendary ancestral figures of Míl and Partholón, whom we have already met in the *Historia Brittonum*. My interest here is the way that their stories have been expanded to include episodes of kin-slaying and exile. Finally, I will explore some points in which Míl and Partholón's expanded narratives have themselves influenced later episodes in the *Lebor Gabála*.

After its opening biblical framework, the *Lebor Gabála* shifts to a section on the early history of the Gaedil. In this section, ancestral figure Míl is remembered as having slain his kinsman Refloir, leading to the Gaedil's second exile from Scythia: 'his aire dono ro hindarbtha Gáidil asin Scithía, i cinaidh marbtha Refloir meic Rephill meic Noemi meic Noenuail meic Baaith meic Ibaith meic Foeniusa Farrsaid' (this is why the Gaedil were driven forth from Scythia, for the crime of slaying Refloir s. Refill s. Noemius s. Nenuail s. Baath s. Ibath s. Foenius Farrsaid).[127] The story is expanded elsewhere. The descendants of Nel are exiled from Egypt. They sail to Scythia, and

[124] Macalister, *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, vol. I, 182–3.
[125] Michael Murphy, *Lebor Gabála Érenn, The Book of the Taking of Ireland, Part VI: Index, G–K* (2008), entry for 'kin-murder'.
[126] Murphy, *Index, G–K*, entry for 'kin-murder'.
[127] Macalister, *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, vol. II, 22–3.

Clanda Niúil ⁊ Noenuail, dá mac Feiniusa Farsaid, ónd aimsir sin co haimsir Refelair meic Nema ⁊ Míled meic Bile, .i. Galum a ainm. Mór do cathaib ⁊ do chongalaib ⁊ do choicthib ⁊ do fingalaib ro imirset etorru frissin ré sin, co ro gon Míled mac Bile Refelair mac Nema. Dá bliadain décc ar nóe cétaib ro búi in cosnum sin. Doluid Miled for longais íarsain.

(The descendants of Nel and of Nenual, the two sons of Feinius Farsaid, contended in the matter of the princedom of Scythia, from that time till the time of Refloir son of Noemius and of Mil son of Bile [whose name was Galam]. They waged many battles and conflicts and wars and kin-murders between themselves during that time, until Mil son of Bile inflicted a mortal wound upon Refloir son of Noemius. That strife lasted for nine hundred and twelve years, after which Mil came into exile.)[128]

At numerous points, it is clear that the *Lebor Gabála* understands Refloir's death to be an explicit case of kin-slaying:

Tuirrthechta ⁊ imthechta fine Gáeidil, ó Magoc mac Iathfét, ⁊ ó Srú mac Easrú: amail ro imthigsed a tír Éigept, ⁊ Scithía, ⁊ Easpáin, no co torachtadar co Hérind: a catha imorro, ⁊ a congala, isin Sceithía, ⁊ fingal cloindi Nenuail ⁊ Niúil: amail ro scindsed im flaithius na Sceithía, .i. fri ré dá bliadain déc ⁊ nói cét: úair is ead sin ro bas isin chocad mór sin.

(The narratives and adventures of the kindred of Gaedel from Magog son of Iapheth and from Sru son of Esru: how they departed out of the land of Egypt, and Scythia, and Spain, till they reached Ireland: their battles moreover, and their conflicts, in Scythia, and the kin-murder of the progeny of Nenual and of Nel: how these broke out in the matter of the princedom of Scythia, for a space of nine hundred and twelve years: for that is the [length] which that great war had.)[129]

A fuller explanation of events makes clear how the killing qualifies as a kin-slaying:

Gabas Beoaman ríghi a nirt cosnamha atón Sceithía Thúaiscertaig gu tracht Mara Caisp, gundorchair i ceilg catha la Ninias mac Neanuail. Gabas Nenias in flaitus íarsin, condorchair la Hogamman mac mBeoamain a ndígail a athar. Gabas Ogamman íarsin in ríghe conerbailt indte, .i. isin ríge. Bái cosnom imon flaithus fri a ré, cethra mbliadna íar sin, idir Refleoir mac Refill ⁊ Mílidh mac mBile. Ocus

[128] Macalister, *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, vol. II, 38–9; also 64–5: 'Is i slígi dolodar, for Muir Rúaid d'Inis Tibrad Fáine, timcheall Sléibhi Rifi botúaidh co rángadar in Sceithía, ⁊ con-snighsead im flaithus na Scithía .i. clanna Niúil ⁊ Neanuail, dá mac Feiniassa Farrsaigh. Ón aimsir sin go haimsir Reifloir meic Nemain ⁊ Mílidh meic Bile, mór do cathaibh ⁊ do chonghalaibh ⁊ do choctaibh ⁊ do fingalaibh ro imirsead eatorru frisin ré sin, gur goin Míli mac Bile Reifloir mac Nema' (The route which they followed was on the Red Sea to the island of Taprobane, around the Rhipaean Mountain northward till they reached Scythia, and contested in the matter of the princedom of Scythia – that is, the progeny of Nel and Nenual, the two sons of Feinius Farsaid. From that time till the time of Refloir son of Noemius and of Mil son of Bile, many battles and combats and wars and kin-murders were transacted between them during that space, till Mil son of Bile inflicted a mortal wound upon Refloir son of Noemius).

[129] Macalister, *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, vol. II, 44–5.

is andsin bái ingean gnáitheach ag Refleoir diar bho comainm Seang ingean Refleoir, ⁊ ro furáil Refleoir air Mílidh mac mBile in ingen soin, ⁊ dosfuigh Mílid mac Bile, ⁊ bái aige go grádhach, go rug días chloindi dhó, .i. Aireach Fabhruadh ⁊ Donn a n-anmanda. Is andsin ro cograd Refulair a clíamain do marbad, air ba heagail lais a thiachtain fris fa ríghi: ⁊ ráinig a fis sin do mac Bile, .i. a chogar da clíamain. Ocus dochuaidh féin i cenn cogaidh íar sin, ⁊ ro comraig ⁊ Rofeallair, ⁊ ro gonsun Refallair gu garb ⁊ gu hamnas tria na sliasaid, ⁊ ba guin dígla ⁊ bháis. Ro theasbaigh mór ag slúaghaibh na Sceithía im lot ⁊ im guin a tigerna do mac mBile, ⁊ ro hindarbadh asin Sceithia hé, ⁊ dochuaidh Milidh íarsin ⁊ rug a claind leis.

(Boamain took the kingship in combat from Northern Scythia to the shore of the Caspian sea, until he fell in a battle-ambush at the hands of Noemius son of Nenual. Noemius took the princedom thereafter, until he fell at the hands of Ogamain son of Beoamain in vengeance for his father. Ogamain took the kingship thereafter till he died in it [that is, in the kingship]. There was contention in the matter of the princedom during his time, four years after that, between Refloir s. Refill and Mil s. Bile. Now Refloir had a beautiful daughter, whose name was Seng d. Refloir: and Refloir offered her to Mil s. Bile. Mil s. Bile took her, and she was with him until she bore him two children; Airech Februad and Donn were their names. It was then that Refloir plotted to slay his kinsman, because he feared that he would come against him for the kingship. The son of Bile heard about this [that is to say, about his kinsman's plotting]. Thus he himself went to battle, and he and Refloir fought, and he wounded Refloir severely and painfully through his thigh – a wound of vindictiveness and of death. The hosts of Scythia felt it a great loss that their lord should be hurt and mortally wounded by the son of Bile, and he was expelled out of Scythia: so Mil went thereafter, and took his children with him.)[130]

Míl, then, is another prominent ancestral figure who is exiled as the consequence of a kin-slaying and subsequently founds a dynasty important to the origins of early Ireland. The legendary origins of this dynasty are significantly expanded from their earliest appearance in the *Historia Brittonum*, where the Milesians are noted as one of three waves of settlers to colonise Ireland, but no explanation is given for their initial movements. The story of the Milesians, like that of Partholón we have already seen in the *Lebor Bretnach*, expands to include an element of exile and kin-slaying.

Míl is the most prominent kin-slaying ancestor in the portion of the *Lebor Gabála* focused on the early history of the Gaedil, yet he is not alone: a poetic reference makes clear that there was also a tradition of kin-slaying between Nel and Nenual, the two sons of ancestral figure Feinius Farsaid. The poem reads:

> Dá mac ac Féinius, fír dam,
> Nél ár n-athair is Noenal,

[130] Macalister, *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, vol. II, 66–7.

ruead Nél ocon Túr tair,
Noenal con Scithía scíath-glain.

Tar éis Feiniusa in láich lir
imtnúth itir na bráithrib:
do marb Nél Nenual nar mín;
do hindarbad in t-ard ríg.

(Feinius had two sons – I speak truth –
Nel our father and Nenual.
Nel was born at the Tower in the east,
Nenual in Scythia, bright as a shield.

After Feinius, the hero of ocean,
there was great envy between the brethren:
Nel slew Nenual, who was not gentle;
the High King was expelled.)[131]

This fraternal kin-slaying obviously mirrors that of Cain and Abel, but at the same time, Nel becomes yet another foundational ancestor in the *Lebor Gabála* to commit a kin-slaying, become exiled, and found an Irish dynasty. In the *Lebor Gabála*, the narrative motif of an ancestral kin-slaying becomes duplicated to fit several founding figures in the Irish origin legend.

We have already seen that one redaction of the *Lebor Bretnach* alters the story of ancestral figure Partholón to include an episode of kin-slaying, which I have argued is a narrative doubling from the Brutus legend in the *Historia Brittonum* and, subsequently, the *Lebor Bretnach*. In the *Lebor Gabála*, the kin-slaying remains attached to Partholón whilst a new detail is introduced to Partholón's narrative which changes the shape of the legend yet again:

Mad áil a ḟis cid ara tánic Partholón assa thír, ninsa. Partholón ro marb a máthair ⁊ a athair, ic iarraid ríge dia bráthair: co táinic co Hérind ar teched a ḟinghaile. Conid íarom luid táimlechta fair ina finghail. Nói mile fri háen sechtmain adbath do cinaidh a fingaile.

(if you want to know why Partholon came from his land, that's not difficult. Partholon killed his mother and his father, seeking kingship for his brother: so he came to Ireland fleeing from his kin-slaying. And afterwards, plagues came upon him for his kin-slaying. Nine thousand in one week died for the guilt of his [presumption and his] kin-slaying.)[132]

By the time the strands of the *Lebor Gabála* had accreted, Partholón had clearly become a figure associated with the act of kin-slaying, as a poetic reference also links him to the rather enigmatic 'Caraid na Finghaile'

[131] Macalister, *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, vol. II, 90–1.
[132] Macalister, *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, vol. III, 8–9.

(Weir of the Kin-Murder).[133] Another prose recension of the Partholón legend expands the details of his kin-slaying further:[134]

Mad ail a fis cid ara tainic Parrtalón as a tír féin, ní. Parrtalón do marb [a] athair ⁊ a mathair .i. Sru mac Praimint meic Athachta meic Mághoicc meic Iafet, ac iarraid righi da derbrathair .i. Becsomus a ainm-side; ⁊ fa sine é na Parrtalon. Ro indarb Srú Parrtalon ⁊ gur loit he, cur ben a suil cle as ⁊ co roibe .uii. mbliadna for indarbad. Co tanic isin Bigin Grec, lucht luinge, cur loisc tech for a athair ⁊ for a mathair, gur loisg iat a ndis, ⁊ do rat rigi da brathair. Ocus tanic fein co Heirinn ar teichim na finghaile sin. Ocus is inand Sera isin berla Grecda "fingalach" isin berla teibide. Is aire aderar Parrtalon mac Sera fris. Ocus for indarbad rucadh dis do clann Parrtaloin .i. Rudraige ⁊ Slainghe, conid aire sin tainic taimlecht forra ina fingail. Ba he tinne in taimlichta: in cruth ina mbid gach fer dib ina suide no na sesam no na luige a ec, ⁊rl.

(If you want to know why Partholon came out of his own land, that's not difficult. Partholon slew his father and his mother, namely Sru s. Prament s. Athacht s. Magog s. Iafeth, seeking kingship for his brother, whose name was Becsomus, and he was his elder brother. Sru drove out Partholon and wounded him, and cut his left eye out from him: and he was in exile for seven years. Then he came into Bigin of the Greeks [with] a ship's crew, and burnt a house over his father and his mother, and burnt them together, and gave the kingship to his brother. He himself came to Ireland, fleeing that kin-slaying. Now *Sera* means in the Greek language what *fingalach* means in the chosen language [Gaelic]. That is why he is called Partholon son of Sera. Two of the children of Partholon were born in exile, Rudraige and Slanga. Because of this, a plague came upon him for the guilt of the blood of his kin; such was the heaviness of that plague that however any man was, sitting, or standing, or lying down, he died, etc.)[135]

Clearly, then, the Partholón narrative had expanded by the time of the *Lebor Gabála* such that Partholón's kin-slaying had become a definitive part of his biography, while this text has also added the detail that Partholón slew his parents in order to procure the kingship for his brother.

As Scowcroft has noted, among the details added to the Partholón narrative as it expanded, 'the most interesting is the claim that Partholón fled his home because he had slain his parents, hoping thus to secure the kingship for his brother'.[136] To explain this detail, Rudolf Thurneysen long ago pointed to the glosses on the poem 'Apraid a éolchu Elga' by Eochaid ua Cérín, where a gloss on Partholón gives an etymology

[133] Macalister, *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, vol. III, 70–1.
[134] As Macalister, *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, vol. II, 264, notes, this is a 'brief text, contained in a fragment bound into the MS. H. 4 22 (p. 37, col. 2) in the Library of Trinity College Dublin (there is another, slightly variant, copy in the same library, in H. 3. 18, part I, p. 46)'.
[135] Macalister, *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, vol. II, 264–5.
[136] Scowcroft, '*Leabhar Gabhála* Part I', 106.

of *mac Sera* as *mac fingalach* (kin-slayer),[137] while Scowcroft has more recently studied the Partholón expansion as another example of narrative doubling in the *Lebor Gabála* in which Partholón and Nemed become two Scythian sons of Agnoman who parallel Míl, the leader of the Gaedil expelled from Scythia after a kin-slaying, as discussed above.[138] To add to these observations, I suggest that Partholón's slaying of his parents also shows evidence of being a narrative doubling of the Brutus legend. As discussed above, both the Brutus legend and the added detail of Partholón's parental kin-slaying are present in at least one recension of the *Lebor Bretnach*, and the language of the two episodes is closely parallel. Moreover, the Brutus legend was known to the author(s) of the *Lebor Gabála*, as it is referenced in the section on Nemed:

> Fergus Lethderg mac Nemidh ⁊ a mac .i. Britan Máel mac Fergusa, i m-Móind Chonain: ⁊ ro lín in tír sin dia claind. Síl Britais meic Isicóin ro línsat in innsi uile acht sein. Batar tra clanna Britain meic Fergusa i m-Móinn Chonain, ⁊ clanna Brituis meic Issicoin isin n-innsi, conus tanic Hors ⁊ Eighis, da mac Bechthgeilsi, rig Allsaxan, lucht da barcc.
>
> (Fergus Redside s. Nemed and his son, Britain Mael s. Fergus [settled] in Moin Conain, and filled that country with their children. The descendants of Brutus s. Ascanius filled the whole island except that part. So the progeny of Britan s. Fergus were in Moin Conain, and the progeny of Brutus s. Ascanius were in the island, until the coming of Horsa and Hengist, the two sons of Guictglis, king of the Old Saxons, with the crew of two ships.)[139]

There is thus good narrative evidence that the expansion of Partholón's origin story to include the dual kin-slaying of his mother and father could be a narrative doubling from the Brutus legend.

Manuscript evidence also supports this theory, as all versions of the *Lebor Bretnach* and the *Lebor Gabála* that mention Partholón's killing of his parents are found in the Great Book of Lecan (Royal Irish Academy, MS 23 P 2). The sole version of the *Lebor Bretnach* to preserve this detail (van Hamel's L2) occurs in the Great Book of Lecan, where it forms a composite version alongside van Hamel's L1 recension: the two together begin on folio 139. Also preserved in the Great Book of Lecan are three out of the four main recensions of the *Lebor Gabála*, including the two which include the detail of Partholón's

[137] Rudolf Thurneysen, 'Partholón', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 20 (1936): 375–81 at 378: '.i. Parttolón ro-marb a athair & a máthair ac íarair ríghe dia bráthair (conid aire at-berar Parrtolón mac Sera friss .i. mac fingalach. cera .i. fingal), co-tánicc co h-Érinn ar teched a finghaile, conid íarum luid taimlechta ina fingail .i. .ix. m. do éc fri oínsechtmain díb'.

[138] Scowcroft, '*Leabhar Gabhála* Part II', 58.

[139] Macalister, *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, vol. III, 148–9.

dual parricide.[140] The medieval *Lebor Gabála* tradition falls into four main recensions, which in Scowcroft's stemma are known as *a*, *b*, *c*, and *m*. Recension *b* (Macalister's R2 / second recension) is the one which adds the detail of Partholón's parricide to the common narrative of his settlement. Recension *c* (Macalister's R3 / third recension), which draws on and expands recension *b*, also incorporates this detail. These two recensions of the *Lebor Gabála* are preserved in the Great Book of Lecan alongside Scowcroft's recension *m*, which does not include Partholón's killing of his parents. As Macalister noted in his edition, the parental killing 'reads like the end of an independent narrative: its material is quite foreign to [the first recension / Scowcroft's *a* version]'.[141] The Irish origin material in the Great Book of Lecan, then, in both recensions L2 of the *Lebor Bretnach* and *b* and *c* of the *Lebor Gabála*, shows a propensity to include the version of the Partholón legend in which he kills his parents, underscoring the accretion of this legend over time and its interest to the compiler of this particular manuscript. Thus, there is good evidence that, drawing on the Brutus legend in the *Historia Brittonum*, the authors of the *Lebor Bretnach* and *Lebor Gabála* saw a legend of an ancestral figure who founded Britain in exile after killing both his parents and duplicated it in the case of Ireland's first settler, Partholón, and other important figures in the corpus of legendary history.

While this chapter does not have space to fully explore every instance of kin-slaying in the *Lebor Gabála*, a brief coda illustrates how this motif was carried forward from founding ancestors to other important figures who appear later in the text. In the section on the supernatural Tuatha de Danann, the *Lebor Gabála* records that

> íar marbad trá Nuadat ⁊ na fer so sin chath sain, do ratsat Túatha Dé Danann rígi do Lug, ⁊ do rochair lais a senathair .i. Balar co cloich assa thabaill.
>
> (after the slaying of Nuadu and of those men in that battle, the Tuatha De Danann gave the kingship to Lug, and his grandfather [Balar] fell at his hands with a stone from his sling.)[142]

Later still, in the section on early Ireland's 'historical' kings, Fiachu Finscothach appears as one of many rulers who also share this

[140] For more details on the manuscript context, see Tomás Ó Concheanainn, '*Lebor Gabála* in the Book of Lecan', in Toby Barnard, Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, and Katharine Simms (eds.), *'A Miracle of Learning': Studies in Manuscripts and Irish Learning: Essays in Honour of William O'Sullivan* (Farnham: Ashgate, 1998), 68–90.

[141] Macalister, *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, vol. II, 255.

[142] Macalister, *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, vol. IV, 118–19.

pattern: 'gabais Fíacha Fínscothach mac Sétna Airt meic Airt meic Ébir meic Ir meic Míledh ríge nhÉrenn íar marbad do a athar féin' (Fíachu Fínscothach s. Sétna Airt s. Art s. Éber s. Ír s. Míl took the kingship of Ireland after the slaying of his own father by him).[143] In the *Lebor Gabála*, then, the narrative in which an important ancestral figure committed an act of kin-slaying became an attractive one. This motif underwent numerous examples of narrative doubling as individual origin legends were expanded and developed as the text of the *Lebor Gabála* was put together.

Conclusions

The earliest versions of origin legends in the insular corpus provided no explanation for the wanderings of the foundational ancestors they depicted. As time passed and origin narratives grew in detail and complexity, exile became a popular explanation for why a founding figure was said to first arrive in Britain or Ireland. The authors of texts containing insular origin legends sought to explain the reason why ancestral figures had been exiled, and an act of kin-slaying took on increasing importance as an explanation from the ninth-century *Historia Brittonum* onward. The precedent of a foundational ancestor who had committed an act of kin-slaying had a long life in biblical and classical history via the figures of Cain and Romulus, and in the early medieval insular region, the gripping narrative of Brutus's accidental killing of his mother and father proved a popular model for subsequent texts. Historically, kin-slaying was both a crime whose legal penalty was often a form of exile as well as an act that created a compelling narrative for a foundational ancestor. As we have seen, when an act of kin-slaying occurs by a foundational ancestor, genealogical and historical ties to the original homeland are retained, yet contemporary opportunities for political claims are neatly curtailed.

Kin-slaying provided an explanation for how and why a people's foundational ancestor arrived in a new location. The following chapter will turn to the ways in which insular origin narratives depicted the aftermath of a people's arrival, by focusing on origin narratives which include moments of intermarriage and incest. Once a group of (usually) male founding figures arrived in the insular region, origin stories depicted them as seeking societal stability through the establishment of families and dynasties. Practically, in a narrative context, the formation of these dynasties could go one of two ways: intermarriage with already established residents of a given region, or incest within the arriving group. Both

[143] Macalister, *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, vol. V, 230–1.

such scenarios offered rich narrative potential to the tales that encompassed them. Chapter Four provides a selective examination of intermarriage and incest within insular origin legends. It explores the politics of intermarriage within the texts containing origin motifs, examining how marriage relationships were constructed to discuss power dynamics between the different peoples represented in these texts. At the same time, intermarriage clearly was seen to bring risks. Incest kept a culture self-contained; but as we shall see, it was used within insular origin narratives to point out moments of societal failure. Both intermarriage and incest were used by early insular authors to underscore the challenges inherent in origin narratives of the transition between arriving in a new place and turning it into a permanent home.

4 Intermarriage and Incest

Chapters Two and Three explored some ways in which origin stories in the early insular region grew over time. As we have seen, these narratives expanded from their earliest, unembellished versions to longer tales that began to seek explanations for events. As early medieval authors wondered from where and for what reason their ancestors had emigrated from their original homelands, exile became an important part of insular origin legends. Relatedly, kin-slaying emerged as one significant explanation for ancestral exile, as well as a motif which offered unique narrative potential for a given people's historical relationship to the broader world. In this chapter, I turn to some ways in which origin legends expanded further to envision what might have happened after a foundational ancestor arrived in the insular region. This chapter examines the decisions that medieval authors made about how a people might have grown from one ancestor, or group of ancestors, into many, as well as the narrative implications of expanding a given people in a particular way.

Insular authors were aware that the logistics of a people's expansion required explanation, and they addressed the questions raised by this problem directly. For example, we have already seen that even the earliest version of the Partholón legend in the *Historia Brittonum* takes great pains to explain how the earliest Irish settlers would have expanded their population:

> Primus autem venit Partolomus cum mille hominibus, de viris et mulieribus, et creverunt usque ad quattuor milia hominum, et venit martalitas super eos, et in una septimana omnes perierunt et non remansit ex illis etiam unus.
>
> (Partholon came first with a thousand, men and women, and they grew until they were four thousand, and a plague came upon them, and in one week they all died, and there remained not a one of them.)[1]

This narrative is careful to explicitly establish that the original settlers in Partholón's party included both men and women, so that the population

[1] Morris, *Nennius*, 61 and 20.

could expand naturally, and many other origin legends followed suit. Yet not all adhered to this pattern, as we shall see. Many described male ancestral figures who emigrated alone or with a small band of followers. In such cases, authors were well aware that women were necessary in order to preserve the population, and there were really only two solutions to the problem: intermarriage or incest. This chapter examines each of these motifs in turn, studying how they were introduced into insular origin legends and expanded to create different narrative possibilities as the corpus grew.

As was also the case with exile and kin-slaying, intermarriage and incest were very familiar concepts to those living in the insular region via both biblical precedent and contemporary legal material. Both intermarriage (or some form of exogamous relationships) and incest are as old as human society, and an exhaustive study is beyond the scope of this book. At the same time, as we have seen elsewhere, biblical precedent was enormously influential in the medieval world. Intermarriage in the Bible was presented in an overtly political light (as it would come to be understood in insular origin legends as well). As for incest, the Old Testament provided a useful model for medieval peoples to understand the 'necessity' of a practice that was contemporarily taboo amongst their founding ancestors, as it was not condemned in a postlapsarian or postdiluvian context. Secondly, as in previous chapters, an examination of legal practices and historical examples surrounding intermarriage and incest will prove useful in understanding the resonances of these topics in early insular society.

Finally, I shall explore occurrences of intermarriage and incest in the origin legends themselves. Intermarriage offered both benefits and risks: the potential of strengthening a people through political alliances was weighed against the danger of obligation to a people that was not one's own (or the risk of treachery from them). These narrative possibilities were fruitfully explored by the insular origin legends which featured intermarriage. Often, marriage between different peoples inserted into prehistory was used as a commentary on contemporary political issues and relationships. Yet despite its political overtones, intermarriage was fundamentally a moment of connection. Insular peoples, like the texts under study in this book, acknowledged the threads which joined them together to build a collective past. Incest, a near-universal moral taboo, obviously looked inward rather than outward and consequently was used within origin narratives to point to moments of societal failure. Both intermarriage and incest became increasingly incorporated into insular origin narratives as they expanded over time, again underscoring the connectedness of the corpus as a whole.

Part I: Intermarriage and Incest in Biblical Tradition

Intermarriage is common throughout the Old Testament, as are prohibitions against it, and medieval peoples would have been very familiar with both. It is beyond the scope of this study to survey every biblical reference to exogamous relationships, and moreover, such studies have already been conducted.[2] The biblical precedent for intermarriage was, unsurprisingly, complicated: relationships outside a cultural, religious, or kin group could bring genealogical, material, and political benefits; yet at the same time, exogamy was often portrayed as a harbinger of cultural loss or dilution. As Mary Anna Bader notes, 'the issue of intermarriage is complex because the HB [Hebrew Bible] is ... comprised of traditions that hailed from different sources and various times', and so 'many opinions are voiced' and 'in some instances, the ideas do not agree with one another'.[3] Historically speaking, 'according to nearly all sources on Jewish marriage in antiquity, Jewish communities, to lesser or greater extents, valued endogamous marriages (marriages to "insiders") and abhorred exogamy (marriage to "outsiders")'.[4] Yet as we would expect from a text composed of discrete sections originating from a wide range of locations and time periods, the Bible itself presented a much less straightforward picture. For example, Ezra 9:1–2 reads:

Postquam autem haec conpleta sunt accesserunt ad me principes dicentes; non est separatus populus Israhel et sacerdotes et Levitae a populis terrarum et de abominationibus eorum; Chananei videlicet et Hetthei et Ferezei et Iebusei et Ammanitarum et Moabitarum et Aegyptiorum et Amorreorum. Tulerunt enim de filiabus eorum sibi et filiis suis et commiscuerunt semen sanctum cum populis terrarum manus etiam principum et magistratuum fuit in transgressione hac prima.

(And after these things were accomplished, the princes came to me, saying: The people of Israel, and the priests and Levites have not separated themselves from the people of the lands, and from their abominations: namely, of the Chanaanites, and the Hethites, and the Pherezites, and the Jebusites, and the Ammonites, and the Moabites, and the Egyptians, and the Amorrhites. For they have taken of their daughters for themselves and for their sons; and they have mingled the holy seed with the people of the lands. And the hand of the princes and magistrates hath been first in this transgression.)[5]

[2] See e.g. the essays in Christian Frevel (ed.), *Mixed Marriages: Intermarriage and Group Identity in the Second Temple Period* (London: T&T Clark International, 2011).
[3] Mary Anna Bader, *Sexual Violation in the Hebrew Bible: A Multi-Methodological Study of Genesis 34 and 2 Samuel 13* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 61.
[4] Michael L. Satlow, *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 133.
[5] Ezra 9:1–2.

This passage, and others like it, condemns exogamous marriage at the same time as it clearly indicates the prevalence of these unions in the first place.[6] As Gary N. Knoppers notes, these intermarriages have important political repercussions: 'The issue is not simply a class issue, but also an issue within the repatriated elite. Some within the in-group are adamantly opposed to exogamy, while others within the in-group have actually been practicing exogamy.'[7]

Likewise, while many biblical passages can be found which condemn or prohibit exogamous marriages, a closer look reveals that these prohibitions often only apply to marriages with certain peoples. A prohibition against exogamous marriages has often been inferred from moments like Deuteronomy 7:3, which reads: 'neque sociabis cum eis coniugia filiam tuam non dabis filio eius nec filiam illius accipies filio tuo' (Neither shalt thou make marriages with them. Thou shalt not give thy daughter to his son, nor take his daughter for thy son).[8] Yet in actuality, the full passage is speaking specifically only of the seven Canaanite nations:

> Cum introduxerit te Dominus Deus tuus in terram quam possessurus ingredieris; et deleverit gentes multas coram te, Hettheum et Gergeseum et Amorreum Chananeum et Ferezeum et Eveum et Iebuseum: septem gentes multo maioris numeri quam tu, es et robustiores te. Tradideritque eas Dominus Deus tuus tibi, percuties eas usque ad internicionem; non inibis cum eis foedus, nec misereberis earum; neque sociabis cum eis coniugia filiam tuam non dabis filio eius nec filiam illius accipies filio tuo; quia seducet filium tuum ne sequatur me et ut magis serviat diis alienis irasceturque furor Domini et delebit te cito.
>
> (When the Lord thy God shall have brought thee into the land, which thou art going in to possess, and shall have destroyed many nations before thee, the Hethite, and the Gergezite, and the Amorrhite, and the Chanaanite, and the Pherezite, and the Hevite, and the Jebusite, seven nations much more numerous than thou art, and stronger than thou: And the Lord thy God shall have delivered them to thee, thou shalt utterly destroy them. Thou shalt make no league with them, nor shew mercy to them: Neither shalt thou make marriages with them. Thou shalt not give thy daughter to his son, nor take his daughter for thy son: For she will turn away thy son from following me, that he may rather serve strange gods, and the wrath of the Lord will be kindled, and will quickly destroy thee.)[9]

Exogamous marriages with the Canaanites are prohibited specifically because of fears that religious and cultural contamination would follow.

[6] See similarly Nehemiah 13:23–31.
[7] Gary N. Knoppers '"Married into Moab": The Exogamy Practiced by Judah and His Descendants in the Judahite Lineages', in Frevel (ed.), *Mixed Marriages*, 170–91 at 171.
[8] Deuteronomy 7:3; see similarly Exodus 34:15. The negative consequences of exogamous marriages are depicted in e.g. Numbers 25 and 31; Deuteronomy 23; Joshua 23; Judges 3.
[9] Deuteronomy 7:1–4.

As Christine E. Hayes notes: 'the very fact that certain groups are singled out for exclusion from the congregation of the Lord implies that other groups are permitted. The passage is therefore as much a source for the *permission* to intermarry as it is a source for the prohibition of intermarriage. The rationales provided are sociopolitical, reflecting interethnic enmity.'[10]

Other points in the Old Testament would appear to look more favourably upon exogamous relationships via their inclusion of stories featuring non-Israeli women whose cleverness, bravery, or piety were pivotal in preserving the Israelites at crucial moments: Tamar (Genesis 38), Zipporah (the wife of Moses), Rahab (Joshua), and Ruth are some of the most well known. Thus, as Karen S. Winslow writes, 'a canonical/theological approach suggests that, taking all the texts together, we have support for a certain pro-Israel sort of exogamy, whereas women who serve as conduits for Israel's submission to other gods threaten Israel's survival and must be avoided'.[11] While the issue is thus a complicated one, it is clear that there was scope for intermarriage as a societally acceptable phenomenon in early biblical history: 'the clear implication of this rationale is that only those exogamous unions that result in the moral or religious alienation of the Israelite partner are prohibited. . . . the women of foreign nations are considered to be ultimately assimilable, whereas those of the seven Canaanite nations are not'.[12] In sum, then, intermarriage in the Bible was a multifaceted issue, at times presented both positively and negatively. Although eventually prohibited for the Israelites, earlier texts make clear that exogamy was viewed as a benefit in certain circumstances. Medieval readers would of course not have believed themselves beholden to Old Testament laws governing the Israelites. Nevertheless, they would have drawn some fairly obvious conclusions from the Bible about intermarriage: it was a risk that offered the potential for significant gains or losses, depending on the circumstances. On the whole, biblical history provided many examples of intermarriages with significant political resonance, providing a rich store of narrative patterns on which later medieval authors could draw when crafting their own origin stories.

On the flip side of the coin, biblical history was also rife with incest. As Regina M. Schwartz writes, 'like Goldilocks, ancient Israel

[10] Christine E. Hayes, *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities: Intermarriage and Conversion from the Bible to the Talmud* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 26.
[11] Karen S. Winslow, 'Mixed Marriage in Torah Narratives', in Frevel (ed.), *Mixed Marriages*, 132–49 at 149.
[12] Hayes, *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities*, 25.

generally finds incest too hot, exogamy too cold, and something in-between – a relative but a distant relative – just right'.[13] Notwithstanding idealised social customs, the normative outliers of incest and exogamy appeared in biblical narratives with relative frequency. There is a near-universal societal taboo against incest, to which the medieval world was no exception: 'anthropological literature widely asserts that incest taboos are a particularly widespread human phenomenon ... there is no compelling evidence for the existence of human societies that have no sexual restrictions at all'.[14] Yet in the Christian west, biblical incest was rationalised as a logistical necessity during the postlapsarian and postdiluvian periods. Thus, it provided a narrative model for how a small group of related ancestors might populate an empty place. For medieval Christians, the New Testament superseded the Old Testament as a model for contemporary beliefs and practices; yet at the same time, the Old Testament provided a useful model for how their own ancestors might be placed within the framework of biblical history.

Episodes of biblical incest are very frequent, as Johanna Stiebert discusses in her exhaustive study on *First-Degree Incest and the Hebrew Bible*.[15] As she notes, biblical incest itself had a long precedent: 'first-degree incest and first-degree sex motifs, as is already becoming clear, are – for all the talk of universal taboo and natural aversion – recurrent in ancient literature, as well as beyond'.[16] As we have already seen with kin-slaying, proscribed real-world behaviours often made for compelling literary and historical narratives. Incest was theoretically forbidden by the Bible, with prohibited consanguineous relationships listed most explicitly in Leviticus 18:6–18 and 20:11–21. These prohibited relationships include unions that might not always be considered incest in modern terms (though they would certainly be viewed as morally dubious at best): not only relationships with blood relatives, but also those between two parties related through marriage, are prohibited, such as sexual relations with one's stepmother, uncle's wife, daughter-in-law, or wife's sister.

[13] Regina M. Schwartz, *The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 83.
[14] Johanna Stiebert, *First-Degree Incest and the Hebrew Bible: Sex in the Family* (London: T&T Clark, 2016; repr. paperback 2018), 1–2.
[15] See also Seth Daniel Kunin, *The Logic of Incest: A Structuralist Analysis of Hebrew Mythology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995); Calum M. Carmichael, *Law, Legend, and Incest in the Bible: Leviticus 18–20* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997); and Ilona N. Rashkow, *Taboo or Not Taboo: Sexuality and Family in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000).
[16] Stiebert, *First-Degree Incest and the Hebrew Bible*, 4.

Yet despite these taboos, narrative episodes of biblical incest are not only frequent but quite often morally ambivalent. As Stiebert argues, incest in the Bible is 'somewhat analogous to rape marriage, which is depicted as a less desirable but not illegal alternative to arranged marriage'.[17] Instances of biblical incest were sometimes condemned outright, but often treated with the uneasy approval of perceived necessity. Medieval audiences took their cues from the Bible, understanding these episodes as belonging to a different place and time, one in which they could locate their own ancestors, who likely, or perhaps ideally, would have behaved similarly when founding a dynasty from a small kin group. At the same time, where biblical incest is overtly condemned, it is instructive to examine the political affiliations of the participants before drawing broader conclusions. Perhaps the best-known episode of biblical incest is the story of Lot and his daughters (Genesis 19:30–38), in which Lot and his family flee Sodom before its destruction but his wife is turned into a pillar of salt. His daughters – who according to medieval Christian tradition believed they and their father were the only surviving people in the world – take turns getting their father drunk and sleeping with him to impregnate themselves. Yet Teresa J. Hornsby has memorably argued that 'the point of this story is that the Ammonites and Moabites, foreigners and sometimes enemies of the Israelites, are incestuous bastards'.[18] Even the aforementioned list of prohibited consanguineous relationships in Leviticus 18 is introduced by the assertion that

> Iuxta consuetudinem terrae Aegypti in qua habitastis non facietis et iuxta morem regionis Chanaan ad quam ego introducturus sum vos non agetis nec in legitimis eorum ambulabitis.
>
> (You shall not do according to the custom of the land of Egypt, in which you dwelt: neither shall you act according to the manner of the country of Chanaan, into which I will bring you. Nor shall you walk in their ordinances.)[19]

As Stiebert argues, 'incest is ascribed here to deviant foreigners from whom it is important to keep oneself separate'.[20]

Accusations of incest could thus be marshalled to cast aspersions on another people. At the same time, doing so created an obvious paradox – avoiding 'deviant foreigners', of course, results in a shift towards endogamous marriage practices which run the danger of reduplicating the same incestuous behaviours that a given group was attempting to avoid in the first place. As we shall see, these tensions between incest as an accusation

[17] Stiebert, *First-Degree Incest and the Hebrew Bible*, 17.
[18] Teresa J. Hornsby, *Sex Texts from the Bible: Selections Annotated & Explained* (Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2007), 154.
[19] Leviticus 18:3. [20] Stiebert, *First-Degree Incest and the Hebrew Bible*, 4.

levelled at one's political rivals and as a potential behaviour of one's own ancestors were in play during the medieval period as well. In sum, then, biblical incest was technically prohibited yet narratively frequent – sometimes condemned outright, other times treated as an unavoidable price to pay for founding a dynasty. Medieval authors, taking their cues from the Bible, understood incest as a taboo that was frequently broken in narratives of prehistory.

Thus, as Elizabeth Archibald notes in her excellent study on *Incest and the Medieval Imagination*, 'Christians in the Middle Ages inherited a complicated and often contradictory series of attitudes to incest from Jewish and biblical tradition.'[21] As we have seen, biblical incest was sometimes overt – in this case, the most influential episodes were Lot and his daughters, Reuben and Bilha, Tamar and Judah, Abraham and Sarah, and Amnon's rape of Tamar. At other times, it was implied, as early biblical commentators and their medieval counterparts discussed the conflict between the consanguinity prohibitions of Leviticus and the biblical necessity of populating the world from the single family of Adam and Eve in a postlapsarian world and Noah's descendants in a postdiluvian one. As was also the case with kin-slaying (as we have seen in the stories that sprung up around Lamech), some of the most influential incest narratives in medieval tradition were not always overtly characterised as such in their earliest biblical appearances. For example, Ham's curse as a result of mocking his father Noah's drunken nakedness instead of covering it like his brothers (Genesis 9:20–27) was explained by some later commentators as an act of incest. A common interpretive tradition concluded from these events that Ham 'penetrated Noah sexually in an attempt to dominate his father',[22] and 'one interpretation even stated that "to see your father's nakedness" meant committing incest with one's mother, so that Canaan was the result of incest between Ham and his mother, Noah's wife, and was punished for it'.[23]

The moral ambiguity inherent in these biblical incest narratives was not unnoticed by medieval authors. As Archibald writes, 'narratives involving incest in the first section of the Old Testament presented serious problems for early Christian theologians'.[24] Some cases of incest were clearly condemned: Absalom has Amnon killed for his rape of their sister Tamar

[21] Elizabeth Archibald, *Incest and the Medieval Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 21.

[22] K. Renato Lings, *Love Lost in Translation: Homosexuality and the Bible* (Bloomington, IN: Trafford Publishing, 2013), 124; see further Stephen Gero, 'The Legend of the Fourth Son of Noah', *The Harvard Theological Review* 73 (1980): 321–30.

[23] Abraham Melamed, *The Image of the Black in Jewish Culture: A History of the Other*, trans. Betty Sigler Rozen (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 247 n. 43.

[24] Archibald, *Incest and the Medieval Imagination*, 23.

(2 Samuel 13), and Jacob curses his son Reuben for sleeping with his concubine Bilhah (Genesis 49:3–4). But others appeared to have been relatively unproblematic. No moral judgement is passed on the incest of Lot's daughters (Genesis 19:30–8), Tamar and Judah (Genesis 38), or Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 20:11–12). Unsurprisingly, early Christian thinkers and their medieval counterparts sought to rationalise these moments of contradiction by drawing distinctions between biblical history and the present day. In Archibald's words, 'medieval theologians were well aware of the problem of incest among the patriarchs, and dealt with it ingeniously'.[25] St Augustine's approach to the problem would prove particularly influential. In *De civitate Dei*, 15.16, he writes:

> Cum igitur genus humanum post primam copulam viri facti ex pulvere et coniugis eius ex viri latere marium feminarumque coniunctione opus haberet ut gignedo multiplicaretur, nec essent ulli homines nisi qui ex illis duobus nati fuissent, viri sorores suas coniuges acceperunt. Quod profecto quanto est antiquis conpellente necessitate, tanto postea factum est damnabilius religione prohibente.
>
> (Now, after the first union between a man, created from dust, and his spouse, fashioned from the man's side, the human race required the mating of males and females to reproduce and multiply, and the only other human beings who then existed had been born from those first two parents. Since this was the case, men took their sisters as wives. This practice, of course, respectable as it may have been when it was dictated by necessity, later became no less reprehensible when it was forbidden by religion.)[26]

Augustine's justification for biblical incest was that necessity compelled practices which religion later prohibited, in order that social ties might be spread across as great a community of people of possible. His explanation was logical, straightforward, and 'immensely influential' from the late antique period onward.[27] As we shall see, this logic allowed the authors of insular origin stories to comfortably apply the same rules to their own foundational ancestors that they saw attached to biblical patriarchs. Incest was a contemporary taboo, yet this ultimate transgression was deemed acceptable when compelled by the necessity of founding a dynasty.

Part II: Intermarriage and Incest in Their Insular Legal and Historical Contexts

Intermarriage was quite common in the early medieval insular region. Legal provisions for a partner entering a given society from the outside

[25] Archibald, *Incest and the Medieval Imagination*, 24.
[26] Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, 15.16; trans. Levine, 500–3.
[27] Archibald, *Incest and the Medieval Imagination*, 25.

make this clear, as do numerous historical examples of high-profile exogamous marriages. In the medieval world – as we have seen in the Bible – intermarriage held both positive and negative connotations. On the one hand, it could bolster a kin-group with advantageous financial resources or political connections. Yet on the other, 'outsiders' could be viewed with suspicion and subject to curtailed legal rights. 'There is agreement that exogamous marriage relations were common' in the insular region before the arrival of the Romans.[28] In the late antique period, a number of high-profile exogamous marriages between Romans and 'barbarians', such as that of the Roman Galla Placidia to Visigothic king Ataulf in the fifth century, set the precedent that such unions could be used advantageously to forge or cement political relationships between peoples and kingdoms.[29] Similarly, while the historicity of this figure is fraught, Gildas's reference in *De Excidio* 25 to the Roman parentage of Ambrosius Aurelianus – depicted as a British military leader – suggests that there was at least the perception of exogamous marriages in the insular world during the Roman period.

As time passed and legal texts began to clarify societal norms, references to exogamous marriages make clear that such unions were an expected part of everyday life. It is difficult to draw a clear and consistent definition of all those marriages which would have been considered exogamous from a wide range of disparate source material, but our sources seem relatively consistent that exogamous marriages in the insular region would have been defined not only as unions that bridged two distinct *gentes* (such as an Anglo-Saxon king and a Frankish princess, an Irish woman and a Viking, etc.) but also those which drew together partners from two Irish *túatha* or from different Anglo-Saxon or British kingdoms. As was also the case with exile and kin-slaying in the insular region, our surviving legal and historical sources paint rather different pictures of exogamous marriage in the early medieval world. These unions were depicted fairly negatively in the legal material, but historical records reveal a relatively consistent pattern of high-profile exogamous marriages used to cement political alliances across the insular region in which neither partner appears to have suffered negative consequences.[30]

[28] J.D. Hill, 'How Did British Middle and Late Pre-Roman Iron Age Societies Work (If They Did)?', in Tom Moore and Xosé-Lois Armada (eds.), *Atlantic Europe in the First Millennium BC: Crossing the Divide* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 242–63 at 252.

[29] See R.C. Blockley, 'Roman-Barbarian Marriages in the Late Empire', *Florilegium* 4 (1982): 63–79, who lists thirty-two examples from the third to sixth centuries.

[30] On the aftermaths of some of these marriages, see Pauline Stafford, 'Sons and Mothers: Family Politics in the Early Middle Ages', in Derek Baker (ed.), *Medieval Women* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978), 79–100.

Old Irish legal texts distinguish between the status of an outsider (*deorad*) and someone who is in legal standing within the bounds of a *túath* (*aurrad*).[31] It seems clear that a *deorad* is anyone outside his own *túath*, where he would not expect to have legal rights:

Is iat na deoraid: na cóicidh da ceile. acht chena, cidh aoncóicedh no cidh aontir nó cidhat braithre comfoicsi na daine beit ar deoradacht a cóiceth aile. cia foghlaige nech dib fri araile, is sith deoraid uad. ⁊ cid [i]na tir fein donet dlighe, is fo aigne in tire i ndernad in fogail, nó in cunnradh, tét in dliged.

(These are the outsiders: the [people of the five] provinces [of Ireland] vis-à-vis each other. What is more, even if the people who are abroad in another province are [of] the same province or the same land or they are close kinsmen, if any [one] of them should do harm to another [of them], the atonement of an outsider is [paid] by him. And even if it is in their own land that they make [settlement in accordance with] law, it is in accordance with the land in which the harmful act is done, or the contract made, that the law is determined.)[32]

As Kelly notes, 'the law-texts refer to various types of outsider, and the distinctions between them are not always clear'.[33] What is clear is that the legal rights of someone marrying outside his own *túath* were limited, yet such provisions nonetheless indicate that such situations were widespread. Part of the difficulty in understanding legal references to exogamous marriages in the Irish (and Welsh, discussed below) sources is that the terminology used to describe them often overlaps with that used in reference to exiles from another *túath* or kingdom. It is clear that legal rights, generally speaking, were curtailed outside one's own *túath*. At the same time, at least part of the thinking appears to have been that someone would only enter into a different *túath* because he had been exiled from his own, and thus legal references to outsiders – including exogamous marriages – treat the 'external' partner as a risky bet and takes steps to limit his legal rights and responsibilities. (He would also be a risky bet because as a *deorad*, it could not be assumed that his kin were available to cover his liabilities were he to commit a crime.)[34] Thus, for instance, the *cú glas* ('grey dog') is glossed as a *deorad loingsigh*, that is, an exile from overseas.[35] If he marries into a *túath*, he cannot enter into legal contracts without the permission of his wife, who must pay any debts

[31] *CIH* 307.12. See further Christophe Archan and Olivier Viron, 'Insularité – altérité. La place de l'étranger dans l'Irlande du haut Moyen Âge', *Droit et Cultures* 76 (2018): 183–228.
[32] Neil McLeod, 'Di Ércib Fola', *Ériu* 52 (2002): 123–216 at 164–5, §1.11.
[33] Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, 5; see further 4–6 and 14–15.
[34] See Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, 12–14.
[35] *CIH* 917.18. Presumably distinguished from a *murchoirthe* – 'one thrown up by the sea'; see *CIH* 17.17–18, 1913.10, 1915.26–27, and 382.18.

that he owes.[36] Practical and legal responsibility for any children that result from the marriage are also designated solely to his wife and her kin-group.[37] These laws about marrying outside one's own *túath* provide the 'outsider' with restricted rights, yet fewer legal responsibilities, than he would possess in a marriage to someone in the same *túath*.

Yet we can see from the existence of such provisions that intermarriage was an expected part of early medieval Irish life, and the historical record indeed bears this out.[38] Some of the most high-profile examples come from the Viking period, when marriages to the daughters of Irish kings proved to be an effective means of consolidating power. Tenth-century Viking ruler of Dublin Amlaíb Cuaráin (also known as Amlaíb mac Sitric / Óláfr Sigtryggsson / Olaf Cuaran) was first married to Dúnflaith, an Irish princess from the northern Uí Néill kingdom of Cenél nEógain, before his marriage to Gormlaith, daughter of Muchad mac Find, Ua Fáeláin king of Leinster. After her marriage to Amlaíb, Gormlaith was herself then married first to Uí Néill high-king Máel Sechnaill before finally marrying Brian Boru. Three daughters of Cerball mac Dúnlainge, ninth-century king of Ossory – Gormflaith, Frithgerth, and Rafarta – were likewise married to Norsemen.[39] Exogamous marriages – particularly political ones – were thus extremely common in early Ireland.[40] As we shall see, depictions of exogamous marriages in early insular origin narratives encompass both the political benefits of such unions that we find in the historical records and the scepticism about the dangers of outsiders that is evident in the legal material.

Exogamous marriage does not stand out as exceptional in the Old English legal material, and it appears to have been generally encouraged in Anglo-Saxon England. For example, VI Æthelred reads,

> ⁊ æfre ne geweorðe, þæt Christen man gewifige in VI manna sibfæce on his agenum cynne, þæt is binnan þam feorþan cneowe, ne on þæs lafe, þe swa neah wære on woroldcundre sibbe, ne on þæs wifes nydmagan, þe he ær hæfde.
>
> (and it must never occur that a Christian man marries within six degrees of his own kin, that is, within the fourth generation, nor the widow of a man who was as close kin as this, nor a close kin of his first wife's.)[41]

[36] *CIH* 427.4–18. [37] *CIH* 22.8, 442.13, and 31.8.

[38] On marriage in early Ireland more broadly, see Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'Marriage in Early Ireland', and Art Cosgrove, 'Marriage in Medieval Ireland', in Art Cosgrove (ed.), *Marriage in Ireland* (Dublin: College Press, 1985), 5–24 and 35–50.

[39] See Margaret E. Dobbs, 'The Ban-shenchus' (Parts 1, 2, and 3), *Revue Celtique* 47 (1930): 283–339; 48 (1931): 163–234; and 49 (1932): 437–89.

[40] As they were in later medieval Ireland as well: see Sparky Booker, 'Intermarriage in Fifteenth-Century Ireland: The English and Irish in the "Four Obedient Shires"', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy: Section C, Archaeology, Celtic Studies, History, Linguistics, Literature* 113 (2013): 219–50.

[41] VI Æthelred 12.

Such prohibitions – discussed further below – are obviously primarily intended to prevent incestuous unions, but nonetheless have the side-effect of promoting exogamous marriages. The text known as 'Be wifmannes beweddung' (On a woman's betrothal) points to the same conclusion from another perspective. In listing the agreements which must be properly made during a betrothal, this text records that

> Gif hy man ðonne ut of lande lædan wille on oðres þegnes land, ðonne bið hire ræd, ðæt frynd ða forword habban, ðæt fire man nan woh to ne do, ⁊ gif heo gylt gewyrce, ðæt hy moton beon bote nyhst, gif heo næfð, of hwam heo bete.
>
> (If the man wishes to lead her out of the land into another thane's land, then there shall be advice for her that her friends have an agreement that no harm will be done to her, and if she commits a crime, that they will be first liable for *bot* if she has nothing from which she can pay *bot*.)[42]

The text is concerned for the woman's wellbeing and legal obligations if she marries out of her own land, but again, the existence of provisions like this suggests the commonplace nature of exogamous unions.

The historical record bears this out, as intermarriage for political gain was common in Anglo-Saxon England. In the early period, 'the adoption of British name-elements by the West Saxon royal house may indicate that intermarriage and alliances with important British families helped West Saxon assimilation of British territory'.[43] Marriage alliances between the royal families of Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, or between Anglo-Saxon and British, Irish, or Pictish dynasties, were also extremely common.[44] As we have already seen in Chapter Three, sixth/seventh-century Northumbrian king Edwin formed a politically savvy marriage with Æthelburh, the daughter of King Æthelberht of Kent. This was his second marriage, his first having been to Cwenburh, daughter of Ceorl, king of the Mercians, and mother of Edwin's two sons Osfrith and Eadfrith, who were born in Mercia while Edwin was in exile there. Eanfrith of Bernicia, discussed in Chapter Two, married a Pictish princess during his exile who gave birth to their son Talorgan, who became king of the Picts from 653–7. Oswiu of Bernicia was married to an Irish princess named Fín or Fína and a British princess, Rhiennmelt of Rheged, before his union with the Anglo-Saxon Eanflæd.[45] Fín was the mother of

[42] Be wifmannes beweddung, 7.
[43] Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms of Early Anglo-Saxon England*, 155.
[44] See Craig Cessford, 'Exogamous Marriages between Anglo-Saxons and Britons in Seventh Century Northern Britain', *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History* 9 (1996): 49–52 and Lorraine Lancaster, 'Kinship in Anglo-Saxon Society', *British Journal of Sociology* 9 (1958): 230–49.
[45] Martin Grimmer, 'The Exogamous Marriages of Oswiu of Northumbria', *The Heroic Age* 9 (2006), unpaginated online journal.

Aldfrith, later king of Northumbria, about whom a rich historical tradition existed in early Irish sources, including the attribution of a collection of Old Irish proverbs known as *Bríathra Flainn Fhína maic Ossu*.[46] At the highest political level, many prominent Anglo-Saxon kings married the daughters of royal families on the continent, with an eye to forming advantageous political connections. Some of the most famous such pairings include Bertha and Æthelbert (sixth century), Judith and Æthelwulf (ninth century), and Emma with first Æthelred 'the unready' and then Cnut (early eleventh century), as well as Mercian king Offa's failed attempt to marry his son Ecgfrith to Charlemagne's daughter Bertha (eighth century). In Anglo-Saxon England, intermarriage was an important political tool, and one which was frequently deployed.

The same holds true for medieval Wales, where, like Ireland, evidence from legal texts makes clear that intermarriage was common and expected at the same time as it evinces diminished rights for those who married into a community from the outside.[47] For example,

oderuyt roy Camaraes yalldut abot plant meybyon vthunt eplant adele trefat ouamuys eythir na deleant ran or tetyn breynyaul hyd etredet dyn eythyr mab alldut o pennaet.

(if a Welsh female be given to an *alltud*, and they have male children, the children are entitled to inheritance by maternity; but they are not to have a share of the privileged farm, until the third generation; excepting the son of an *alltud* chieftain.)[48]

Similarly,

teyr graget adele eu meybyon vamuys [herwẏd keureẏth] mab Camraes arodher ealldut amab grueyc agusteller eglaut aghefyet okefyf vecyckochy ay gustellau hyteu oy kenedel ay argluyt agreyc edecko alldut treys [e] arney.

(three women whose sons are to have the privilege of maternity according to law: the son of a Welsh female given to an *alltud*; the son of a woman given as an hostage to a foreign country, if she become pregnant, being given as an hostage by her kindred and her lord; and of a woman upon whom an *alltud* shall have committed a rape.)[49]

[46] Colin Ireland, 'Aldfrith of Northumbria and the Irish Genealogies', *Celtica* 22 (1991): 64–88 and *Old Irish Wisdom Attributed to Aldfrith of Northumbria: An Edition of Bríathra Flainn Fhína maic Ossu* (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 1999).

[47] Thomas Glyn Watkin, *The Legal History of Wales: Second Edition* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007), 53.

[48] Owen, *Ancient Laws and Institutes*, VC II.i.59.

[49] Owen, *Ancient Laws and Institutes*, VC II.i.61.

Like the Irish legal texts, Welsh laws limited the legal rights and responsibilities of an *alltud* marrying into another community, at the same time as the existence of these provisions in the first place serve as a testament to the commonplace nature of such unions.

The widespread nature of intermarriage in early medieval Wales suggested by the laws is supported by the medieval Welsh legal triads, several of which mention intermarriage. For example, one triad reads,

Teir gwraged ny dyliir datlev ac eu hetiued am tref eu mam: y wreic a rodes yngwystyl dros tir a chaffael mab o honno tra vo yngwystyl; a gwreic a roder o rod kenedyl y alltud; a mab gwreic a dialho gwr o genedyl y mam, a cholli tref y dat o achaws y gyfulauan honno, ac wrth hynny y keiff tref y mam.

(Three women with whose heirs there should not be pleadings concerning the inheritance of their mother: a woman who is given as a hostage on behalf of a territory and she has a son while she is a hostage; and a woman who is given by gift of kin to an alien; and the son of a woman who avenges a man from his mother's kindred, and he loses his patrimony because of that offence, and because of that he receives the inheritance of his mother.)[50]

Two cases in this triad underscore the frequency of intermarriage, as one encompasses a woman taken away from her people and another a woman amongst her own people who has been given an alien as a spouse. Another triad reminds us that, despite the legal difficulties intermarriage could pose, it could nonetheless result in a welcome political union between two peoples:

Tri chyfredin kenedyl ynt: pennkenedyl, a theispandyle, a mab g6reic a roder o rod kenedyl y'6 gelyn; y mab h6nn6 a dyly vot yn gyffredin r6g y d6y genedyl.

(These are the three things common to a kindred: a head of kindred, a representative, and a son of a woman given by gift of a kin to its enemy; that son should be common to the two kindreds.)[51]

A son who belongs to both kindreds draws them into a familial (and thus political and legal) relationship with one another, cementing alliances between what had clearly been former enemies.

Historically, exogamous marriages in early medieval Wales were indeed used to cement political alliances between kingdoms, as we have already seen in the cases of the mixed Anglo-Saxon / British marriages discussed above. There is also strong evidence that exogamous marriages to princesses from a different kingdom were used to facilitate – or at the very least, provide an *ex post facto* explanation for – the takeover of that kingdom by an external dynasty. A good example is the much-discussed lineage of Merfyn Frych, ninth-century king of Gwynedd, who seems to have derived his claim to

[50] Roberts, *Legal Triads*, 54–5. [51] Roberts, *Legal Triads*, 168–9.

Gwynedd's royal dynasty through his mother, Esyllt ferch Cynan Dindaethwy, rather than his otherwise-unknown father, Gwriad ap Elidyr. In the next generation, Rhodri Mawr, the son of Merfyn Frych, is frequently supposed to have taken over the kingdom of Ceredigion through his marriage to Angharad ferch Meurig after the death of her brother Gwgon ap Meurig.[52] Thus, exogamous marriages themselves were not only politically useful at the time at which they were formed, but there is also good evidence from later genealogical traditions that the appearance of such marriages (whether or not they actually took place as depicted) was being used as a justification for shifting power bases within early medieval Welsh kingdoms.

Intermarriage became even more common in the insular region after the Norman invasions of Britain and Ireland. After the Norman Conquest of England, 'intermarriage further mixed the peoples, and within a hundred years of the Conquest it had become difficult to separate Norman and English influences in the new culture. Writers still referred to Normans and English; but the terms no longer meant the same as in the immediate aftermath of 1066.'[53] The same held true in the March of Wales, where 'intermarriage was common; within a generation or two English families might become Welsh and such names as Puleston, Hanmer, Havard and Stradling bear witness to this'.[54] Intermarriage between Gaelic Irish families and those sent to colonise them was so commonplace that the Statutes of Kilkenny, famously, sought to prevent it in 1366 (with little success):

> interethnic familial links between the colonists and Irish people from within the colony and from without were a constant feature of life ... marriage between settlers and the Irish occurred in the colony from its inception ... politically, militarily, and economically strategic intermarriages among elites persisted but intermarriage also spread down the social scale as colonization progressed, reflecting the extensive interaction between English and Irish.[55]

Finally, this state of affairs was also evident in Scotland, where 'there is both enough evidence for intermarriage to blur ethnicity in many cases, and also insufficient evidence to ascertain it in many others'.[56]

[52] See P.C. Bartrum, *Early Welsh Genealogical Tracts* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1966); Thornton, *Kings, Chronologies, and Genealogies*, 88ff.; Ben Guy, *Medieval Welsh Genealogy: An Introduction and Textual Study* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2020); and generally J. Beverley Smith, 'Dynastic Succession in Medieval Wales', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* 33 (1986): 199–232.

[53] Marjorie Chibnall, *The Normans* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2000; repr. paperback 2006), 62.

[54] A.D. Carr, *Medieval Wales* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 95.

[55] Sparky Booker, *Cultural Exchange and Identity in Late Medieval Ireland: The English and Irish of the Four Obedient Shires* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 143.

[56] Alexander Grant, 'At the Northern Edge: Alba and Its Normans', in Keith J. Stringer and Andrew Jotischky (eds.), *Norman Expansion: Connections, Continuities and Contrasts*

Intermarriage was thus historically and legally commonplace in the insular region throughout the medieval period. Law texts reflect its prevalence, but also sometimes indicate an unease with accepting outsiders into a community and consequently take steps to curtail the legal rights of such outsiders. Historically, exogamous marriages offered the chance to cement high-profile political alliances. Intermarriages could be very advantageous, but also held the potential to create disastrous fallout when they failed. These conflicting nuances of exogamous marriages created rich narrative possibilities within the corpus of early insular origin material.

Edicts either prohibiting incest or prescribing the appropriate punishment when it occurred demonstrate that this was also a practice which weighed on the societal consciousness of those living in the early medieval insular region. The prohibition of incest might at first seem straightforward: as discussed above, it is a universal human taboo. Yet in reality, medieval societies, like their modern counterparts, differed in their interpretations of what relationships constituted incestuous behaviour.[57] As Stiebert notes, after a fairly universal taboo against relationships between those related 'vertically' by blood (parents, children, siblings, grandparents, etc.) the definition of incest is surprisingly muddied.[58] As a modern example, marriages between first cousins are currently prohibited in roughly half of US states, but not in the UK or Ireland. Confusion and/or disagreement as to the definition of incest were also widespread in the medieval period. For example, in some early medieval societies, marriages to relatives with whom there was no blood tie – such as marrying one's stepmother or sister-in-law upon the death of one's father or brother – were not only permitted but encouraged as a means of consolidating assets within a kin-group. However, such marriages came to be defined as incest from a medieval Christian perspective. Thus, prohibitions against incest and punishments for committing it featured in medieval legal and ecclesiastical texts. Moreover, as we shall see, accusations of incest could also be levelled against an individual or group for political gain.

(Ashgate: 2013; repr. London: Routledge, 2016), 49–86 at 63–4, citing Robert Bartlett, *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization and Cultural Change, 950–1350* (London: Allen Lane, 1993), chapter 11, and Matthew H. Hammond, *A Prosopographical Analysis of Society in East Central Scotland, circa 1100 to 1260, with Special Reference to Ethnicity* (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Glasgow University, 2005), at 66–73.

[57] See James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1987; repr. paperback 1990); Kar Ubl, *Inzestverbot und Gesetzgebung: Die Konstruktion eines Verbrechens (300–1100)* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008); and D.L. d'Avray, *Papacy, Monarchy and Marriage, 860–1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

[58] Stiebert, *First-Degree Incest and the Hebrew Bible*, 2–3.

The definition of incest was a complex and fluid one throughout the medieval period. It varied by time period, culture, and precisely who was doing the defining. One constant is that it was a topic in which the church held a vested interest.[59] Pre-conversion marriages, comparatively speaking, were less restrictive in terms of prohibited consanguineous relationships.[60] It would be problematic to suggest a linear progression from pre-Christian 'laxity' to post-conversion 'strictness' in the case of marriages which were defined as incestuous. However, in the early medieval period, post-conversion discussions around incest appear to have increased in their specificity, and steps were taken to prohibit relationships between parties linked together by blood, marriage ties, or baptismal sponsorships. As James A. Brundage writes, 'the ostensible purpose of these regulations was to prevent incest, but the rules that came into currency during the seventh and eighth centuries forbade marriages where the relationship between the parties was so remote that incest seems unlikely to have been the central issue'.[61] Textual evidence is of course not equivalent to lived experience, and it is important to note the distinction that 'the medieval forbidden degrees are not incest taboos ... for most of the relations they banned were not considered evil in themselves or in all cases'.[62] Nonetheless, institutional discussions concerning legitimate or verboten degrees of kinship in marriage were frequently couched in the language of incest in the early medieval period.

The church's investment in defining and prohibiting incestuous relationships is reflected in the nature of our sources. Incest actually features relatively rarely in secular legal texts from the early medieval period. The sole reference to incest in the Old Irish legal material is suggestive for the arguments of this book, as it draws a link between incest and exile. The text – which survives in a fragmentary commentary on *Córus Fine*, the law of kindred – reads,

> Mad mac scrine .i. mac so dorinne re coibdelaig ina richt bodein; ⁊ is ed dlegar a cur i scrin lethair ar muir in eret bus leir gelsciath ar muir; acht masin ferann-sin fein dorala aris é, is fognum fuidhre uadha do macaib na primmna, ⁊ a beth amal gac mac indligthec isin fine.
>
> (If it is the son of a shrine, that is, a son who is gotten on a kinswoman in her own form, it is required that he be put into a leather shrine on the sea as far as the distance that a white shield is visible on the sea; but if he comes back again into the same territory,

[59] See Ubl, *Inzestverbot und Gesetzgebung* and d'Avray, *Papacy, Monarchy and Marriage*.
[60] Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society*, 130–1.
[61] Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society*, 140.
[62] D'Avray, *Papacy, Monarchy and Marriage*, 104.

he will serve as a *fuidir* to the sons of the chief wife, and he will be like every son according to the rights of the kindred.)[63]

As with exiling a kin-slayer, setting the child of incest adrift prevented blood on the hands of those who carried out the sentence. An intriguing feature of this passage is the gloss that the 'son of a shrine' is a child who is begotten on a kinswoman 'ina richt bodein', that is, in her own guise or form. A tempting interpretation of this phrasing is that incest was only understood to have taken place if the parties were aware of their relationship to one another, but this must remain speculative. Also interesting for our purposes is that the judgement of incest is left up to God, emphasised by the child's placement in a literal *scrín* (shrine). If he survived, he was welcomed back into the kindred with his rights relatively intact, echoing the literary narratives in which children of incest can remain blameless, which will be discussed further below.[64] The link between incest and exile in a legal context prefigures their connection in origin stories from the insular region.

Anglo-Saxon law codes also make references to incest. For example, as we have already seen, VI Æthelred instructs that

⁊ æfre ne geweorðe, þæt Christen man gewifige in VI manna sibfæce on his agenum cynne, þæt is binnan þam feorþan cneowe, ne on þæs lafe, þe swa neah wære on woroldcundre sibbe, ne on þæs wifes nydmagan, þe he ær hæfde.

(and it must never occur that a Christian man marries within six degrees of his own kin, that is, within the fourth generation, nor the widow of a man who was as close kin as this, nor a close kin of his first wife's.)[65]

Edward and Guthrum enumerates the procedures surrounding penalties for incestuous relationships, remarking specifically on incest through marriage:

⁊ æt syblegerum þa witan geræddan, þæt cyng ah þone uferan ⁊ bisceop þone nyþeran, butan hit man gebete for Gode ⁊ for worulde, be þam þe seo dæde sy, swa bisceop getæce. Gif twegen gebroðra oððe twegen genyhe magas wið an wif forlicgan, beten swyþe georne, swa swa man geþafige, swa be wite swa be lahslitte, be þam þe seo dæde sy.

(And when it comes to incest, the witan has decided that the king will have the greatest and the bishop the lesser, unless the man makes *bot* before God and the

[63] *CIH* 744.28–31.

[64] O'Neill, 'Old Irish *Muirchrech*', has argued that the term refers not to a fixed distance from land but rather to the distance from which a 'white shield' (which she argues are marked standing stones) on land is visible when one is at sea. If this interpretation is correct, it may be another point in favour of the theory that such 'exile' may not be as harsh a punishment as it first appears, as the minimal distance at which painted stones would be visible to the naked human eye implies that exiles would not be put out into open water.

[65] VI Æthelred 12.

world according to his deed, as the bishop teaches. If two brothers or two near kinsmen lie with one woman, they must make reparations swiftly, such as it is permitted by *wite* or by *lahslitte* according to the deed.)[66]

One of Cnut's law codes also notes that the severity of the penalty for incest varies according to the degree of kinship, reading

Gif hwa sibleger gewyrce, gebete þæt be sibbe mæðe, swa be were swa be wite swa be ealre æhte. Ne byð na gelic, þæt man wið swustor gehæme ⁊ hit wære feorr sibb.

(If anyone commits incest, he must pay *bot* according to the degree of kinship, whether *wer*, *wite*, or with all his goods. It is not the same if a man lies with his sister as it is with a distant kinswoman.)[67]

Old English legal texts, then, saw incest as problematic and sought to legislate against it at the same as they acknowledged that incestuous relationships ought to be penalised more severely the closer the degree of kinship between the parties involved.

Additional evidence about incest in the insular region is found in early medieval penitentials.[68] The Irish *Penitential of Cummean* (*c.*650) states that 'moechator matris suae ann(is) .iii. cum peregrinatione perenni peniteat' (he who defiles his mother shall do penance for three years, with perpetual exile).[69] The penitential evidence is echoed by an episode from Adomnán's *Life of Columba*, 'de infelici quodam qui cum sua dormivit genitrice' (concerning an unhappy man who slept with his mother). We learn that 'hic homo fratricidum in modum perpetravit Caín, et cum sua matre mechatus est' (this man has perpetrated fratricide, in the manner of Cain, and incest with his mother). Columba dictates the man's penance – 'si xii. annís inter Brittones cum fletu et lacrimís penetentiam egeris, nec ad Scotiam usque ad mortem reversus fueris, forsan deus peccato ignoscat tuo' (if you do penance among the Britons with wailing and weeping for twelve years, and do not return to Ireland until your death, perhaps God will condone your sin). However, the man is

[66] Edward and Guthrum 4–4,1. [67] II Cnut 51–51,1.

[68] On penitentials, see Frantzen, *The Literature of Penance in Anglo-Saxon England*; Mayke de Jong, *The Penitential State: Authority and Atonement in the Age of Louis the Pious, 814–840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Sarah Hamilton, *The Practice of Penance, 900–1050* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2001); Julie Ann Smith, *Ordering Women's Lives: Penitentials and Nunnery Rules in the Early Medieval West* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2001); Rob Meens, *Penance in Medieval Europe, 600–1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Jurasinski, *The Old English Penitentials and Anglo-Saxon Law*; and Erin V. Abraham, *Anticipating Sin in Medieval Society: Childhood, Sexuality, and Violence in the Early Penitentials* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017).

[69] Ludwig Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials*, with appendix by D.A. Binchy, Scriptores Latini Hiberniae 5 (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1963), 114–15.

unwilling to undertake penance, returns to Ireland, and is killed as Columba has prophesied.[70] Similarly, the Anglo-Saxon *Penitential of Theodore* (*c.*690) prescribes either fifteen years' penance or seven years' penance and perpetual exile for incest with a mother, either twelve or fifteen years' penance for incest with a sister, and fifteen years' penance during which meat cannot be eaten for incest with a brother. It can be reasonably inferred that the man was understood to be the aggressor/instigator in these scenarios due to a final penance of eating no meat for three years and fasting one day a week for a mother who commits incest with her small son.[71]

In the insular region, 'by the eleventh century the prohibitions on marriage between kin had reached their most extended range', and 'no one might marry any relative by blood or marriage within seven degrees of kinship, or any spiritual relative within four degrees of kinship'.[72] Yet as Archibald notes, 'this extraordinarily restrictive taboo was not established without resistance, and was honoured as much in the breach as in the observance. The correspondence of medieval ecclesiastics is full of queries about the prohibitions on marriage with kin.'[73] In the early insular world, incest was universally recognised as a taboo when it came to relationships between close blood relatives. Yet in the case of those bound by spiritual ties, related by marriage, or separated by slightly fewer degrees of kinship than the church would have preferred, the situation was not quite so clear-cut. While the church pushed for increasing strictness in its definition of incest, the practicalities of daily life meant that for many medieval people – particularly those of lower social classes living in small or remote rural areas – prohibiting marriage within seven degrees of kinship was simply not feasible. Thus while incest, particularly in the case of first-degree blood relatives, remained a strong taboo throughout the medieval period, it nonetheless 'occurred' with relative frequency in the sense that not all church prohibitions present at a given moment were possible or practical to follow.

Awareness of incest in the early medieval period is also evident from the frequency with which it was levelled as an accusation against political or cultural enemies. Unsurprisingly, societies whose marriage customs did not fully align with church guidelines came in for particular scorn by those who sought to portray them as shameless barbarians, and a given country's supposedly incestuous customs were frequently used as a political

[70] Anderson and Anderson (eds.), *Adomnan's Life of Columba*, 252–7.
[71] Printed in Benjamin Thorpe, *Ancient Laws and Institutes of England* (Commissioners on the Public Records of the Kingdom, 1840), 286–7, xx.
[72] Archibald, *Incest and the Medieval Imagination*, 34.
[73] Archibald, *Incest and the Medieval Imagination*, 34.

justification for military conquest and colonisation. During the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons, Bede was particularly scathing on the subject of men who sought or entered into marriages with their stepmothers after the deaths of their fathers. Augustine's fifth question to Gregory, included in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, famously asked, 'vsque ad quotam generationem fideles debeant cum propinquis sibi coniugio copulari; et nouercis et cognatis si liceat copulari coniugio' (within what degree may the faithful marry their kindred; and is it lawful to marry a stepmother or a sister-in-law).[74] The answer was a resounding 'no', and throughout the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Bede castigates those who follow such older Germanic marriage practices. One good example is Æthelbert's son Eadbald, who married his stepmother upon his father's death. Bede writes,

> At uero post mortem Aedilbercti, cum filius eius Eadbald regni gubernacula suscepisset, magno tenellis ibi adhuc ecclesiae crementis detrimento fuit. Siquidem non solum fidem Christi recipere noluerat, sed et fornicatione pollutus est tali, qualem nec inter gentes auditam apostolus testatur, ita ut uxorem patris haberet.
>
> (But after the death of Æthelberht, when his son Eadbald had taken over the helm of state, there followed a severe setback to the tender growth of the Church. Not only had he refused to receive the faith of Christ but he was polluted with such fornication as the apostle declares to have been not so much as named among the Gentiles, in that he took his father's wife.)[75]

For Bede, Eadbald's marriage to his stepmother is a sign of his wholehearted opposition to the church itself.

In Ireland, 'reform-minded clerics of the eleventh and twelfth centuries were outraged by the marital arrangements of the Irish, and frequently expressed their outrage in writing'.[76] Lanfranc, the archbishop of Canterbury, wrote to Irish king Toirdelbach ua Briain in 1074 with complaints about divorce and incest in Ireland. Pope Alexander III wrote with praise to Henry II after the Anglo-Norman invasion of Ireland in the twelfth century, mentioning specifically the chance to reform Ireland's incestuous marriage customs. (He was speaking of 'incest through marriage', such as unions with stepmothers and sisters-in-law.) Good examples of this type of rhetoric can be found in the writings of Giraldus Cambrensis / Gerald of Wales, who levels

[74] Colgrave and Mynors, *Bede*, i.27, 84–5. [75] Colgrave and Mynors, *Bede*, ii.5, 150–1.
[76] Conor McCarthy, *Marriage in Medieval England: Law, Literature and Practice* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2004), 14. See also Bart Jaski, 'Marriage Laws in Ireland and on the Continent in the Early Middle Ages', in Christine Meek and Katharine Simms (eds.), *'The Fragility of Her Sex'? Medieval Irishwomen in Their European Context* (Dublin: Four Courts, 1996), 16–42.

accusations of incest against both the Irish and the Welsh.[77] On the Irish, he writes,

Gens enim hæc gens spurcissima, gens vitiis involutissima, gens omnium gentium in fidei rudimentis incultissima. Nondum enim decimas vel primitias solvunt; nondum matrimonia contrahunt; non incestus vitant; non ecclesiam Dei cum debita reverentia frequentant. Quinimmo, quod detestabile valde est, et non tantum fidei sed et cuilibet honestati valde contrarium, fratres, pluribus per Hiberniam locis, fratrum defunctorum uxores non dico ducunt, sed traducunt; immo verius seducunt, dum turpiter eas et tam incestuose cognoscunt; veteris in hoc testamenti non medullæ sed cortici adhærentes, veteresque libentius in vitiis quam virtutibus imitari volentes.[78]

(This is a filthy people, wallowing in vice. Of all peoples it is the least instructed in the rudiments of the Faith. They do not yet pay tithes or first fruits or contract marriages. They do not avoid incest. They do not attend God's church with due reverence. Moreover, and this is surely a detestable thing, and contrary not only to the Faith but to any feeling of honour – men in many places in Ireland, I shall not say marry, but rather debauch, the wives of their dead brothers. They abuse them in having such evil and incestuous relations with them. In this [wishing to imitate the ancients more eagerly in vice than in virtue] they follow the apparent teaching, and not the true doctrine, of the Old Testament.)[79]

Gerald of Wales also raised accusations of incest against the Welsh, for similar political purposes, writing,

Crimen autem incestus adeo apud omnes, tam minores in populo quam etiam majores, enormiter invaluit, quod in quarto gradu et quinto passim, in tertio quoque plerumque, quia non est timor Dei ante oculos eorum, consanguineas ducere nec verecundantur nec verentur. Ad sedandas quippe inimicitias, quas inter se toties, quia veloces pedes eorum ad effundendum sanguinem, hostiliter incurrunt, hujuscemodi per se dispensationibus passim abutuntur. Ob generositatis etiam amorem, quam tantopere cupiunt et affectant, suæ genti se jungentes, aliensis omnibus, tanquam sanguine et origine, juxta innatæ præsumptionis arrogantiam, longe disparibus, modis omnibus copulari recusant.[80]

(Incest is extremely common among the Welsh, both in the lower classes and the better educated people. 'There is no fear of God before their eyes', and they have no hesitation or shame in marrying women related to them in the fourth or fifth degree, and sometimes even third cousins. Their usual excuse

[77] *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera*, 8 vols., Rerum Britannicarum Medii Ævi Scriptores (London, 1861–91).

[78] James F. Dimock (ed.), *Topographia Hibernica*, Distinctio III, cap. xix; *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera*, vol. V (1867), 164–5.

[79] Gerald of Wales, *The History and Topography of Ireland*, Part III, ¶98; John J. O'Meara (trans.), *Gerald of Wales: The History and Topography of Ireland* (Dundalgan Press, 1951; repr. London: Penguin Books, 1982), 106.

[80] James F. Dimock (ed.), *Descriptio Kambriæ*, Liber II, cap. vi; *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera*, vol. vi (1868), 213.

for abusing the ordinances of the church in this way is their wish to put an end to some family quarrel or other. These are common among them and they pursue them with tremendous bitterness, for 'their feet are swift to shed blood'. Another reason given for their marrying women of their own family is their great respect for noble descent, which means so much to them. They are most unwilling to marry anyone of another family, who, in their arrogance, they think may be their inferior in descent and blood.)[81]

The charge of incest was also one which was frequently levelled by religious figures against any society which they judged in need of reform, including their own. Anglo-Saxon homilist Wulfstan, archbishop of York, in his famous eleventh-century *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* accused the Anglo-Saxon people of having become corrupt through, among a great many other sins, 'þurh mægræssas ⁊ þurh manslyhtas ... þurh siblegeru ⁊ þurh mistlice forligru' (through kin-slaying and through manslaughter ... through incest and through manifold fornications).[82] Accusations of incest were less based in factual reality than they were a general rhetorical signal that reform was needed.

Intermarriage and incest were thus both acknowledged realities of life during the medieval period, though they obviously fell on opposite sides of the interpersonal spectrum. Inherited literary and historical traditions about both were influential from the Bible onwards, and contemporary attitudes towards both intermarriage and incest were reflected in medieval legal and ecclesiastical documents. Intermarriage was often positioned as disadvantageous in extant law texts, yet historically, it was clear that exogamous unions could bring about significant political advantages. Incest was a universally recognised taboo, yet a given society's definition of incest was not always in perfect alignment with that of the church, meaning that accusations of incest were frequently levelled against particular individuals or cultures as a political weapon. As we shall see, intermarriage and incest both formed important parts of insular origin narratives. The origin legends with intermarriage or incest at their core were used to illustrate the perceived power dynamics of political relationships between peoples.

Part III: Intermarriage in Insular Origin Narratives

In insular origin narratives, the consequences of intermarriage were used for rhetorical effect to illustrate the perceived power dynamics between various peoples in the region. Sometimes, intermarriage was used to

[81] Gerald of Wales, *The Description of Wales*, book II, chapter 6; Lewis Thorpe (trans.), *Gerald of Wales, The Journey through Wales / The Description of Wales* (London: Penguin Books, 1978), 262–3.

[82] Dorothy Whitelock (ed.), *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* (London: Methuen, 1963; first publ. 1939), 61.

inject a genealogy perceived as illustrious into a given dynasty, as we shall see in the case of Emrys Wledig / Ambrosius Aurelianus and his purported Roman father. The bulk of this discussion forms an extended case study of the origin legends of the Picts (who intermarried with the Irish) and the Anglo-Saxons (who intermarried with the British). In these origin narratives, being given wives by another people is depicted as conceding political power to that people, and these intermarriages are used to justify the contemporary political positions of the Irish and the Anglo-Saxons. Over time, origin legends grew to include details like these that formed a commentary on contemporary political power dynamics. At the same time, representations of intermarriage in insular origin legends demonstrate the very real interpersonal and political connections between peoples living in the insular region that medieval authors understood as foundational in having shaped their collective pasts.

The Pictish origin legend, as discussed above in Chapter One, was first preserved in Bede's eighth-century *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, derived from an Irish source which itself no longer survives. This narrative underscores the importance of intermarriage in insular origin stories. The Pictish legend illustrates the ways in which intermarriage could be used as a commentary on contemporary political power dynamics. It also reveals the perceived historical connections between those in the early medieval insular region, as well as the narrative connections between their origin legends themselves. Of the Picts, Bede writes:

Et cum plurimam insulae partem incipientes ab austro possedissent, contigit gentem Pictorum de Scythia, ut perhibent, longis nauibus non multis Oceanum ingressam, circumagente flatu uentorum, extra fines omnes Brittaniae Hiberniam peruenisse, eiusque septentrionales oras intrasse atque, inuenta ibi gente Scottorum, sibi quoque in partibus illius sedes petisse, nec inpetrare potuisse . . . Ad hanc ergo usque peruenientes nauigio Picti, ut diximus, petierunt in ea sibi quoque sedes et habitationem donari. Respondebant Scotti quia non ambos eos caperet insula, 'sed possumus' inquiunt 'salubre uobis dare consilium, quid agere ualeatis. Nouimus insulam esse aliam non procul a nostra contra ortum solis, quam saepe lucidioribus diebus de longe aspicere solemus. Hanc adire si uultis, habitabilem uobis facere ualetis; uel, si qui restiterit, nobis auxiliariis utimini.' Itaque petentes Brittaniam Picti habitare per septentrionales insulae partes coeperunt; nam austrina Brettones occupauerant. Cumque uxores Pictti non habentes peterent a Scottis, ea solum condicione dare consenserunt, ut ubi res ueniret in dubium, magis de feminea regum prosapia quam de masculina regem sibi eligerent; quod usque hodie apud Pictos constat esse seruatum.

(After they [the Britons] had got possession of the greater part of the island, beginning from the south, it is related that the Pictish race from Scythia sailed out into the ocean in a few warships and were carried by the wind beyond the furthest bounds of Britain, reaching Ireland and landing on its northern shores.

There they found the Irish race and asked permission to settle among them but their request was refused . . . The Picts then came to this island, as we have said, by sea and asked for the grant of a place to settle in. The Irish answered that the island would not hold them both; 'but', said they, 'we can give you some good advice as to what to do. We know of another island not far from our own, in an easterly direction, which we often see in the distance on clear days. If you will go there, you can make a settlement for yourselves; but if any one resists you, make use of our help.' And so the Picts went to Britain and proceeded to occupy the northern parts of the island, because the Britons had seized the southern regions. As the Picts had no wives, they asked the Irish for some; the latter consented to give them women, only on condition that, in all cases of doubt, they should elect their kings from the female royal line rather than the male; and it is well known that the custom has been observed among the Picts to this day.)[83]

Several features of this striking legend demonstrate important facets of the portrayal of intermarriage in early insular origin legends. First of all, exogamous marriage is recognised as a societal necessity: the Picts arrive to the insular region without any women, whose existence is clearly crucial to the foundation of a new society. Secondly, the Pictish origin legend raises the important point that early moments of contact between different peoples are rarely portrayed as scenes of violence or conflict within insular origin texts. Rather, as the Pictish narrative demonstrates, they are more likely to be depicted as moments of negotiation and mutual benefit. Whatever the circumstances of political or military conflict between these peoples in later centuries, their moments of first contact were remembered not as aggressive ones but rather as a time of cooperation and mutual gain. Thirdly, origin legends involving intermarriage preserved memories of ties between different peoples that lasted for centuries. The Pictish origin legend implies the existence of a centuries-long political alliance between the Pictish and Irish royal families – at the expense of the British, as the Irish cannily 'give' the Picts land in the north of Britain that they themselves have no claim over. Yet by building an alliance with the Picts rather than fighting with them, the Irish in this origin legend create a political relationship with strong ties for the future. Knowing they have successfully secured their own island, the Irish have also cultivated new allies in Britain in case of conflict with the Britons themselves.

As a side note, this origin legend works as a neat piece of backstory to explain the Anglo-Saxon origin story, first preserved in Gildas's *De Excidio et Conquestu Britannie*, that the arrival of the mercenary Anglo-Saxons in Britain was prompted by the joint attacks of the Irish and the Picts on the Britons. Gildas reports that after the departure of the

[83] Colgrave and Mynors, *Bede*, i.1, 16–19.

Romans, 'omnis belli usus ignara penitus, duabus primum gentibus transmarinis vehementer saevis, Scotorum a circione, Pictorum ab aquilone calcabilis, multos stupet gemitque annos' (quite ignorant of the ways of war, she [Britain] groaned aghast for many years, trodden under foot first by two exceedingly savage overseas nations, the Scots from the northwest and the Picts from the north).[84] The Britons plead for rescue and the Romans return, but after another departure,

itaque illis ad sua remeantibus emergunt certatim de curucis, quibus sunt trans Tithicam vallem evecti, quasi in alto Titane incalescenteque caumate de artissimis foraminum caverniculis fusci vermiculorum cunei, tetri Scottorum Pictorumque greges.

(as the Romans went back home, there eagerly emerged from the coracles that had carried them across the sea-valleys the foul hordes of Scots and Picts, like dark throngs of worms who wriggle out of narrow fissures in the rock when the sun is high and the weather grows warm.)[85]

Thus, in the earliest text containing insular origin material, the Picts and the Irish are depicted as fighting in alignment against the British. The Pictish origin legend preserved in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* and later texts could have very plausibly been invented as an explanation for this alliance.

These ties of alliance between the Irish and the Picts within this origin narrative are only further strengthened through the text's explanation of the conditions of the pact between these two peoples. In providing the Picts with Irish women for wives, the Irish in this legend are forming a lasting kin relationship between the Picts and themselves. The conditions of this relationship are most obviously placed on the Picts, as I shall discuss further below. Yet in creating this alliance through marriage, the Irish are nonetheless placing ties of obligation on themselves. Acknowledging the Picts as their kin means that the Irish in this narrative would also place themselves under an obligation to come to the aid of the Picts if required – not an insignificant promise.

However, the most significant facet of the relationship between the Irish and the Picts in this narrative, by far, is the obligations imposed around Pictish kingship. As discussed in Chapter One above, scholarly interpretations of the legend of Pictish matriliny, and its relationship (or lack thereof) to historical reality have been numerous and varied, with most scholars now following the consensus that 'all indications are that the spectre of matrilineal inheritance among the Picts, rendering them unique in Britain and Ireland, can no longer be conjured up to support or

[84] Winterbottom, *Gildas*, 93 and 21. [85] Winterbottom, *Gildas*, 94–5 and 23.

undermine cultural or linguistic hypotheses'.[86] Of particular interest is Fraser's argument, discussed above, that the Pictish origin legend as preserved in Bede can be interpreted in light of contemporary Pictish politics as casting a favourable light on the dynasty and kingship claims of Bridei, who became king of the Picts in 696 or 697 and claimed the kingship through the patrimony of his (Pictish) mother, and Alex Woolf's argument that similar patterns of succession are also evident in early Anglo-Saxon, British, and Irish kingdoms, yet this does not a 'matriliny' make.[87] Yet what I want to examine here are the power dynamics between the Irish and the Picts in the narrative of this legend as it is preserved in insular origin texts. Bede's version of the Pictish origin story subordinates the Picts to the Irish, in several ways. The Picts request permission to live in Ireland, but their request is refused by the Irish, a situation which portrays the two peoples in a power imbalance in which the Irish have the upper hand. Moreover, the Irish offer that 'if any one resists you, make use of our help' implies that the Picts are militarily weaker than the Irish. The *Historia Ecclesiastica*'s narrative depicts the Picts as unable to find wives on their own. There are no women in Scotland when they arrive, and they are unwilling to take British or Irish wives by force (or at least, this is not presented as an option within the narrative). Thus, the fact that the Picts are given wives by the Irish seems to reflect an implied power dynamic between the two peoples in which the Picts are depicted as subordinate to the Irish.

This power differential is also suggested by the Picts' adherence to conditions placed upon them by the Irish which would affect their own political arrangements in the future. As many scholars have pointed out, Bede's version of the Pictish origin legend has too often been stretched wildly out of context to imply that the Picts were a fully matrilineal society. What Bede actually says is that '*in all cases of doubt*, they should elect their kings from the female royal line rather than the male' (emphasis mine), a much less stringent set of conditions than has often been assumed.[88] Nonetheless, the Pictish origin legend in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* depicts an

[86] Fraser, *From Caledonia to Pictland*, 53.

[87] Alex Woolf, 'Pictish Matriliny Reconsidered', *The Innes Review* 49 (1998): 147–67. See also Nicholas Evans, 'Royal Succession and Kingship among the Picts', *The Innes Review* 59 (2008): 1–48 and the essays in Stephen T. Driscoll, Jane Geddes, and Mark A. Hall (eds.), *Pictish Progress: New Studies on Northern Britain in the Middle Ages*, The Northern World 50 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), particularly Barbara E. Crawford, 'F.T. Wainwright and the Problem of the Picts' (1–12); James E. Fraser, 'From Ancient Scythia to the Problem of the Picts: Thoughts on the Quest for Pictish Origins' (13–43); and Nicholas Evans, 'Ideology, Literacy And Matriliny: Approaches To Medieval Texts on the Pictish Past' (45–65).

[88] On which see Woolf, 'Pictish Matriliny Reconsidered'.

externally imposed set of conditions agreed to by the Picts which makes Irish matriliny the deciding factor in cases of contested kingship – not an insignificant proposition. In this narrative, therefore, the Irish appear to be depicted as having gained the political upper hand in these negotiations. They are able to both banish the Picts from their island and ensure that Irish ancestry is the deciding factor in contested decisions about kingship. In this legend, then, taking wives from another people seems to place political power into the hands of those who provided them – a narrative strategy which will be more fully explored in the case of the *Lebor Bretnach* below. Yet regardless of the political implications of this origin story, at its heart, it is a narrative of intermarriage. The Pictish legend underscores the connections between peoples depicted within the corpus of early insular origin texts.

The *Historia Brittonum* contains two important tales of intermarriage embedded within its origin narratives, with two very different messages to the reader. One, the tale of Emrys Wledig and his Roman father, features Emrys as a heroic character and illustrates the benefits that intermarriage can bring. The other – the story of British king Vortigern's ill-fated marriage to Anglo-Saxon leader Hengest's daughter, which facilitates the Anglo-Saxon conquest of Britain – suggests its pitfalls. The narrative of Vortigern's marriage echoes the Pictish origin story in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* in that taking wives from another people in both cases is shown to place power in the hands of those who provided them. Finally, the *Lebor Bretnach* places the Anglo-Saxon and Pictish origin stories in dialogue, creating a commentary on the current state of political affairs in Britain and Ireland that depicts the Anglo-Saxons and the Irish as the rightful rulers of their respective islands.

The tale of Emrys Wledig offers an example – albeit a confused one – of an intermarriage that brings about a positive outcome. Emrys (who would later be merged by Geoffrey of Monmouth with native Welsh prophetic figure Myrddin Gwyllt into the infamous Merlin of later Arthurian legend) is introduced into the *Historia Brittonum* as a prophetic, druidic figure. Vortigern is besieged on the one hand by the attacks of the Anglo-Saxons he has invited to Britain and on the other by St Germanus, who has brought to light Vortigern's incestuous relationship with his daughter (discussed in greater detail below). Upon asking his councillors for advice, he is urged to flee to the most remote corner of his kingdom – Snowdonia – and build a fortress. Yet it collapses nightly, and his advisors insist he must find a child without a father, kill him, and sprinkle the foundation with his blood. Such a child is found, thanks to a playground taunt, and brought before Vortigern. Yet his killing is halted when the boy proves able to answer questions that Vortigern's druids cannot: namely,

that the cause of the fortress's collapse is a duel between two dragons in a lake under the foundation, prophetic symbols of the Britons and Anglo-Saxons. Emrys advises Vortigern that he will never be able to build in his chosen location and should found a stronghold elsewhere. At the end of this interlude, Vortigern asks the boy's background:

Et rex ad adolescentem dixit: 'Quo nomine vocaris?' Ille respondit: 'Ambrosius vocor', id est Embreis Guletic ipse videbatur. Et rex dixit: 'De qua progenie ortus es?' Et ille: 'Unus est pater meus de consulibus romanicae gentis.' Et arcem dedit rex illi cum omnibus regnis occidentalis plagae Brittanniae, et ipse cum magis suis ad sinistralem plagam pervenit et usque ad regionem quae vocatur Guunnessi affuit, et urbem ibi, quae vocatur suo nomine Cair Guorthigirn, aedificavit.

(Then the king asked the lad 'What is your name?' He replied 'I am called Ambrosius', that is, he was shown to be Emrys the Overlord. The king asked 'What family do you come from?' and he answered 'My father is one of the consuls of the Roman people.' So the king gave him the fortress, with all the kingdoms of the western part of Britain, and he himself went with his wizards to the northern part, and came to the region called 'Gwynessi', and there he built a city, that is called by his name, Caer Gwrtheyrn.)[89]

Thus while this story clearly represents the merging of two traditions, one a folkloric hero of a boy without a father and the other following Gildas's version of Ambrosius Aurelianus and his Roman parents, the tale of Emrys nonetheless concludes by suggesting that he is the product of intermarriage between a British wife and a Roman husband, a marriage which clearly led to an exceptional offspring. The tale of Emrys thus illustrates a way in which intermarriage can be modelled as a positive – here, it has clearly brought about benefits to the British through the wise counsel of Emrys.

The *Historia Brittonum* also introduces the marriage between British king Vortigern and the daughter of Anglo-Saxon leader Hengest, which is cast in a far more negative light. Like the Pictish origin legend in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, it suggests that taking wives from another people gives them the upper hand in political negotiations. Yet the Anglo-Saxon origin legend, like that of the Picts, also underscores the reality that intermarriage was remembered as a necessary part of 'dark ages' insular history, a tool that was used to cement alliances in a new land. The Anglo-Saxon origin legend also exhibits the same pattern of development over time, in which an initially sparse narrative depicts only the arrival of foundational male ancestors, and women are introduced into the story as time passes and it becomes more fully fleshed out. Here, however, the

[89] Morris, *Nennius*, 72 and 31.

pattern is flipped from the Pictish origin legend in that the Anglo-Saxons do not come to Britain seeking wives, but rather bring women with them.

The Anglo-Saxon origin legend in the *Historia Brittonum* is presented as follows:

Factum est autem, postquam metati sunt Saxones in supra dicta insula Tanet, promisit rex supradictus dari illis victum et vestimentum absque defectione; et placuit illis, et ipsi promiserunt expugnare inimicos ejus fortiter. At illi barbari cum multiplicati essent numero, non potuerunt Brittones cibare illos. Cum postularent cibum et vestimentum, sicut promissum erat illis, dixerunt Brittones: 'Non possumus dare vobis cibum et vestimentum, quia numerus vester multiplicatus est, sed recedite a nobis, quia auxilio vestro non indigemus.' Et ipsi consilium fecerunt cum majoribus suis, ut pacem disrumperent.

Hencgistus autem, cum esset vir doctus atque astutus et callidus, cum explorasset super regem inertem et super gentem illius, quae sine armis utebatur, inito consilio, dixit ad regem Brittannicum: 'Pauci sumus; si vis, mittemus ad patriam nostram ac invitemus milites de militibus nostrae regionis, ut amplior sit numerus ad certandum pro te et pro gente tua.' Et ille imperavit ut facerent, et miserunt, et legati transfretaverunt trans Tithicam vallem, et reversi sunt cum ciulis sedecim, et milites electi venerunt in illis, et in una ciula ex eis venit puella pulchra facie atque decorosa valde, filia Hencgisti. Postquam autem venissent ciulae, fecit Hencgistus convivium Guorthigirno et militibus suis et interpreti suo, qui vocabatur Ceretic, et puellam jussit ministrare illis vinum et siceram, et inebriati sunt et saturati sunt nimis. Illis autem bibentibus, intravit Satanas in corde Guorthigirni, ut amaret puellam, et postulavit eam a patre suo per interpretem suum et dixit: 'Omne quod postulas a me impetrabis, licet dimidium regni mei.' Et Hencgistus, inito consilio cum suis senioribus, qui venerunt secum de insula Oghgul, quid peterent regi pro puella, unum consilium cum illis omnibus fuit ut peterent regionem quae in lingua eorum vocatur Canturguoralen, in nostra autem Chent. Et dedit illis, Guoyrancgono regnante in Cantia, et inscius erat quia regnum ipsius tradebatur paganis et ipse solus in potestatem illorum clam dari, et sic data est puella illi in conjugium, et dormivit cum ea, et amavit eam valde.

Et dixit Hencgistus ad Guorthigirnum: 'Ego sum pater tuus et consiliator tui ero, et nolit praeterire consilium meum umquam, quia non timebis te superari ab ullo homine neque ab ulla gente, quia gens mea valida est. Invitabo filium meum cum fratrueli suo, bellatores enim viri sunt, ut dimicent contra Scottos, et da illis regiones quae sunt in aquilone, juxta murum, qui vocatur Guaul.' Et jussit ut invitaret eos, et invitavit Octha et Ebissa cum quadraginta ciulis. At ipsi cum navigarent circa Pictos, vastaverunt Orcades insulas, et venerunt, et occupaverunt regiones plurimas ultra mare Frenessicum, usque ad confinium Pictorum. Et Hencgistus semper ciulas ad se paulatim invitavit, ita ut insulas ad quas venerant absque habitore reliquerent, et dum gens illius crevisset et in virtute et in multitudine, venerunt ad supradictum civitatem Cantorum.

(And so it came to pass, after the English were encamped in the aforesaid island of Thanet, the aforesaid king promised to supply them with food and clothing without fail; and they agreed, and promised to fight bravely against his enemies. But the barbarians multiplied their numbers, and the British could not feed them.

When they demanded the promised food and clothing, the British said 'We cannot give you food and clothing, for your numbers are grown. Go away, for we do not need your help.' So they took counsel with their elders, to break the peace.

But Hengest was an experienced man, shrewd and skilful. Sizing up the king's impotence, and the military weakness of his people, he held a council, and said to the British king 'We are few; if you wish, we can send home and invite warriors from the fighting men of our country, that the number who fight for you and your people may be larger.' The king ordered it to be done, and envoys were sent across the sea, and came back with sixteen keels, with picked warriors in them. In one of the keels came Hengest's daughter, a beautiful and very handsome girl. When the keels had arrived, Hengest held a banquet for Vortigern, and his men and his interpreter, whose name was Ceretic, and he told the girl to serve their wine and spirits. They all got exceedingly drunk. When they were drinking, Satan entered into Vortigern's heart, and made him love the girl. Through his interpreter he asked her father for her hand, saying 'Ask of me what you will, even to the half of my kingdom.'

Hengest took counsel with the elders of Angeln, to decide what they should ask of the king for the girl, and they all agreed to ask for the country that in their language is called Canturguoralen, in ours Kent. So he granted it to them, although Gwyrangon was ruling in Kent, and did not know that his kingdom was being handed over to the heathens, and that he was himself given secretly into their power on his own. So the girl was given in marriage to Vortigern, and he slept with her, and loved her deeply.

Hengest said to Vortigern 'I am your father, and will be your adviser. Never ignore my advice, and you will never fear conquest by any man or people, for my people are strong. I will invite my son and his cousin to fight against the Irish, for they are fine warriors. Give them lands in the north about the Wall that is called Guaul.' So he told him to invite them, and he invited Octha and Ebissa, with forty keels. They sailed round the Picts and wasted the Orkney Islands, and came and occupied many districts beyond the Frenessican sea, as far as the borders of the Picts. So Hengest gradually brought over more and more keels, until they left the islands whence they came uninhabited; and as his people grew in strength and numbers, they came to the aforesaid city of the Kentishmen.)[90]

Key features of this narrative underscore the important role of intermarriage in insular origin stories. Whereas the Pictish legend saw them arriving to the region without any women, the Anglo-Saxon narrative flips the structure such that it is the Anglo-Saxons who bring women and the British (or at least, one politically rather significant Briton) who desire them. This text is notable in its emphasis that the Anglo-Saxons' decision to bring women from their home country for the express purpose of intermarriage with the Britons was a tactical one, a crucial part of Hengest's military campaign. The narrative makes clear that Hengest's

[90] Morris, *Nennius*, 68–9 and 28–9.

daughter is one of many weapons in the Anglo-Saxons' arsenal in their conquest of Britain.

When it comes to the marriage itself, the narrative clearly emphasises two important political facets: the union of two peoples in kinship, and the exchange of desirable wives for land. The Anglo-Saxon origin legend underscores the fact that such political considerations in intermarriage were remembered as a crucial part of the prehistory of the insular region. While a small detail in this story, the presence of an interpreter is nonetheless significant for the same reasons.[91] The Anglo-Saxon origin narrative became remembered as one of swift invasion, yet the presence of an interpreter at a feast held shortly after their arrival belies a relationship of such brevity between the Anglo-Saxons and the Britons. A relationship between these two peoples of long enough duration for an interpreter to hone his skills raises intriguing questions. Where, when, and how would such an interpreter have trained? Would he consider himself to be British, Anglo-Saxon, or something else? (His name, Ceredig, is a very common British one and suggests the former.) How did the opportunity for meaningful contact with both languages come about: was he an interpreter by design, a merchant or trader, a hostage or prisoner of war? The presence of an interpreter in this tale suggests that its author wished to convey the impression of a much more substantial period of contact between the Britons and the Anglo-Saxons than has usually been assumed by those studying the so-called '*adventus Saxonum*'. This, alongside the political reality of intermarriage depicted in this narrative, constructs a milieu in which the perceived relationship amongst peoples in the early medieval Irish Sea region involved many more points of contact than has been popularly understood.

It is also of great narrative interest that the first time the *Historia Brittonum*'s interpreter appears is during these marriage negotiations, rather than the prior military negotiations we have already witnessed. Within the structure of the *Historia Brittonum*, by the time of Vortigern's marriage, the Anglo-Saxons and the British have already met, bargained with one another, arranged to fight together, and conducted multiple negotiations and conversations. Why, now, the need for interpreters? Narratively speaking, it suggests that warfare has a 'common' language, yet intermarriage places emphasis on the drawing together of two distinct

[91] On interpreters in the early period, see Frederick C. Suppe, 'Who Was Rhys Sais? Some Comments on Anglo-Welsh Relations before 1066', *Haskins Society Journal* 7 (1995): 63–73 and 'Interpreter Families and Anglo-Welsh Relations in the Shropshire-Powys Marches in the Twelfth Century', *Anglo-Norman Studies* 30 (2007): 196–212, and Julia Crick, '"The English" and "The Irish" from Cnut to John: Speculations on a Linguistic Interface', in Tyler (ed.), *Conceptualizing Multilingualism in England*, 217–37.

cultures. In the *Historia Brittonum*, a marriage between two peoples flags the recognition of cultural and linguistic differences (and hence, the need for an interpreter).[92] Nonetheless, Vortigern's marriage reminds us that the author (and audience) of the *Historia Brittonum* saw intermarriage between disparate cultures as a political reality of pre-history in the insular region.

Yet it is in the marriage negotiations themselves, and Hengest's actions afterwards, that we see the full political repercussions of this union. Vortigern is the leader of the Britons and should inhabit the role of senior military commander. Yet the Anglo-Saxon origin legend is written in such a way as to continually emphasise the military and political upper hand of the newcomers. The Anglo-Saxons are depicted as militarily stronger from the beginning, as the Britons must seek their help in fending off the attacks of the Irish and the Picts. Moreover, Vortigern is portrayed as a poor leader for the high price that his bride commands, telling Hengest, 'ask of me what you will, even to the half of my kingdom'. Crucially, Vortigern becomes obviously subordinate to Hengest after his marriage to his daughter takes place. Hengest is able to successfully negotiate for the kingdom of Kent as a bride-price for his daughter. After the marriage, he tells Vortigern, 'I am your father, and will be your adviser. Never ignore my advice, and you will never fear conquest by any man or people, for my people are strong'. In doing so, Hengest – like the Irish in the Pictish origin legend – has placed the Anglo-Saxons in a position of dominance over the subordinate Britons. We witness the immediate consequences of this power imbalance as Hengest is easily able to secure additional lands for his son and nephew after his marriage. In this narrative, Vortigern seeks guidance from Hengest, and it is clear that he does so to the detriment of himself and his people. The Anglo-Saxon origin story in the *Historia Brittonum* leaves us with the message that those who take wives from another people cede political power to them.

The motif within insular origin legends that intermarrying into another people by taking wives from them gave those who provided the women the political upper hand is even more pronounced in the *Lebor Bretnach*, thanks to its inclusion of origin legends for all four of the Irish, Picts, Britons, and Anglo-Saxons. In doing so, the *Lebor Bretnach* creates a narrative of insular history in which a pattern of settlement and invasion emerges. Britain and Ireland are initially constructed as parallel islands, settled by the Britons and the Irish, with Anglo-Saxon and Pictish sibling groups arriving by boat and hired as mercenaries upon landing. Yet the

[92] A parallel historical figure is Bishop Liudhard, who accompanied Bertha to Kent upon her marriage to Æthelberht.

Britons and Picts both take wives from another people and then become subordinate to them, and the Irish are able to successfully remove the Picts from Ireland while the Britons are conquered by the Anglo-Saxons. Taken together, the material in the *Lebor Bretnach* constructs a narrative of early insular history which draws the Anglo-Saxons and Irish closer together as the rightful possessors of Britain and Ireland.

In the *Lebor Bretnach*, the Britons and the Irish are the original settlers of their respective islands, and the Anglo-Saxons and the Picts are later, itinerant mercenaries. As in the *Historia Brittonum*, the Britons in the *Lebor Bretnach* are descended from Brutus:

> . . . tanic iartain a n-Inis Breatan. Corogob a rigi ⁊ coroainmniged in inis uad ⁊ coruslin dia claind ⁊ conad he sin tosach a atrebe . . .[93]
>
> (. . . he came afterwards into the island of Britain, where he took possession of the kingdom, and the island was named for him, and became full of his children and his descendants, and thus was it first settled . . .).[94]

As we have seen, the Irish origin legend involves several waves of successive settlers before the island is successfully populated:

> Ceid-fhear dogab Eirind .i. Parrtalon cum mile homnaibis .i. mile itir firu ⁊ mna, ⁊ roforbrithea a n-Eiri na n-il-milib corasmarb a n-aen-tseachtmain do tam.[95]
>
> (The first man that took Ireland was Parrtalon, with a thousand men, that is a thousand between men and women; and they multiplied in Ireland into many thousands, until they died of a plague in one week.)[96]

Eventually, it is the descendants of Nemed who will come to populate the island. Both Britain and Ireland, then, are constructed as empty islands which are initially settled by the descendants of one ancestor.

In contrast to the Britons and the Irish, the Picts and the Anglo-Saxons are both depicted as itinerant groups of siblings who land in Ireland and Britain and are initially hired as mercenaries by the islands' native inhabitants. The conquest of the Anglo-Saxons is introduced in the *Lebor Bretnach* as it is in the *Historia Brittonum*. Three keels of Saxons land, driven into exile from Germany, led by the brothers Horsa and Hengest: 'tancadar tri ciuile asin Germain .i. tri barca for indarba hi rabadar na da brathair .i. Ors ⁊ Heigist o fuilit Saxain'[97] (there came three keels out of Germany, that is, three barks, into exile, in which were the two brothers, Horsa and Hengest, from whom are the Saxons).[98] They are initially

[93] van Hamel, *Lebor Bretnach*, 18.
[94] Todd, *Leabhar Breathnach*, 39.
[95] van Hamel, *Lebor Bretnach*, 21.
[96] Todd, *Leabhar Breathnach*, 43.
[97] van Hamel, *Lebor Bretnach*, 42.
[98] Todd, *Leabhar Breathnach*, 77.

welcomed by the Britons as mercenaries to fend off the Picts, but quickly overstay their welcome:

> Saxain imorro in n-Inis Teineth ⁊ Gortigern co mbiathad ⁊ co n-edid Saxan con cathaigsetar dar a cenn re Cruithentuaith. O roimdaigidar Saxain, foreimidseat Breatain a mbiathad na a n-eidid acht rofogairseat Breatnaig doib dul as uile.[99]

> (Now, the Saxons remained in the island of Thanet, and Gortigern was feeding and clothing the Saxons, so that they might fight for him against Pictland. But when the Saxons had multiplied, the Britons not only refused to feed or clothe them, but the Britons warned them all to go away.)[100]

The Saxons quickly turn on the Britons and claim the island as their own.

In the *Lebor Bretnach*, the Anglo-Saxon and Pictish origin legends share the same narrative backbone: siblings in a ship arrive to a new island and are invited to stay as mercenaries. The Picts come from Thrace in a boat with six brothers and one sister, with whom the kings of first Thrace and then France wish to marry without a dowry, causing the brothers to flee in successive escapes from Thrace to France and then from France to Ireland. The eldest brother and the sister die between France and Ireland, where the Picts are welcomed by the king of Leinster, conditional upon their expulsion of the Tuatha Fidhbha: 'atbert friu Cremthand Sciathbel rig Laigen doberad failti doib ar ndichur thuaithi Fidhbha'[101] (Cremhthann Sgiathbhel, King of Leinster, said that he would give them welcome on the expulsion of the Tuatha Fidhbha).[102] Thus the Picts, like the Anglo-Saxons, are introduced in the *Lebor Bretnach* as a set of brothers at sea, who arrive to an island and are welcomed on the condition that they fight off an enemy whom the original inhabitants cannot.

Also like the Anglo-Saxons, the Picts successfully defeat their opponents and quickly become more powerful than the original inhabitants of their new home would prefer. Yet in contrast to the Anglo-Saxons, who easily overwhelm the Britons – who are said to be 'co fann gan milid gan arma'[103] (feeble, without soldiers, without arms)[104] – the Picts are expelled from Ireland to Britain by the Irish: 'gabais Gib ⁊ a mac .i. Catluan nert mor i n-Erinn corusindarbsad Heremon'[105] (but Gub, and his son Cathluan, acquired great power in Ireland, until Herimon drove them out).[106] Thus, the Anglo-Saxons and the Picts in the *Lebor Bretnach* are two groups of peoples who stem from sets of siblings, are hired as mercenaries, and become more powerful than their hosts would like. Yet the Anglo-Saxons conquer the Britons, becoming the new possessors of

[99] van Hamel, *Lebor Bretnach*, 48.
[100] Todd, *Leabhar Breathnach*, 85.
[101] van Hamel, *Lebor Bretnach*, 8.
[102] Todd, *Leabhar Breathnach*, 123.
[103] van Hamel, *Lebor Bretnach*, 48.
[104] Todd, *Leabhar Breathnach*, 85.
[105] van Hamel, *Lebor Bretnach*, 9.
[106] Todd, *Leabhar Breathnach*, 125.

that island, while the Irish successfully extricate the Picts from Ireland and send them to the north of Britain where they make their permanent home.

In the *Lebor Bretnach*, a separate narrative commonality shared by the Britons and the Picts has significance in the way that these events are characterised: because the Britons and the Picts both take wives from another people, the Anglo-Saxons and the Irish, they ultimately become subordinate to them. When read together in the *Lebor Bretnach*, these two origin stories create a narrative of early insular history which draws the Anglo-Saxons and the Irish closer together as the 'rightful' rulers of their respective islands, in part because the Britons and Picts have indicated subservience by marrying Anglo-Saxon and Irish women.

This aspect of the Anglo-Saxon conquest is, again, present in both the *Historia Brittonum* and the *Lebor Bretnach*. The Anglo-Saxons arrive in Britain and take on the role of mercenaries, fighting successfully against the Picts on behalf of the Britons. Yet when the Britons cease feeding and clothing them, the Anglo-Saxons note their military weakness and turn on their hosts. Hengest summons more shiploads of his people from Germany, including his beautiful daughter. As she serves alcohol at a feast Hengest has organised, Vortigern, leader of the Britons, is inflamed with lust and promises Hengest anything he wishes as a dowry as long as he can have her in marriage. Hengest of course requests more land, and the Anglo-Saxon conquest continues as the invaders gain control of a greater portion of Britain and fill the land with their people. As the *Lebor Bretnach* notes, 'atraracht nert Saxan iarsin, ar ba cara doib Gorthigern a los a mna'[107] (after this the power of the Saxons increased, for Vortigern was their friend on account of his wife).[108] As the *Historia Brittonum* and *Lebor Bretnach* make clear, Vortigern's lust for the pagan Anglo-Saxon daughter of Hengest sways him into making poor political decisions and plays a key role in the downfall of the Britons.

What the *Lebor Bretnach* adds to this legend is the corresponding Pictish origin narrative that matrilineal succession was imposed on account of the Picts' Irish wives, which further indicates that the taking of women from another people places power in the hands of those who provided them. In the Pictish origin legend, after the Picts have defeated the Tuatha Fidhbha at the behest of the king of Leinster, 'gabais Gib ⁊ a mac .i. Catluan nert mor i n-Erinn corusindarbsad Heremon ⁊ cotard mna doib na fer robaitea imailli fri Donn'[109] (Gub and his son Cathlusan acquired great power in Ireland, until Herimon drove them out, and gave them the

[107] van Hamel, *Lebor Bretnach*, 63. [108] Todd, *Leabhar Breathnach*, 101.
[109] van Hamel, *Lebor Bretnach*, 9.

wives of the men who had been drowned along with Donn).[110] The legend explains further that the Picts decide to remain in the north of Britain,

> acht ni badar mna leo ar bebas bandtrocht Alban. Doluid iarum Cruithnechan for culu docum mac Miled ⁊ rogab nem ⁊ talam ⁊ grian ⁊ esca ⁊ drucht ⁊ daithi, muir ⁊ tir ba do maith riu flaith forro co brath. ⁊ dobert da mnai dec forcraidi badar oc macaib Miled a robatea a fir isin fairrge tiar araen re Donn. Conad do feraib Herind flaith for Cruithnib osin dogres.[111]

> (but they had no women, because the women of Scotland had died. And Cruithnechan went back to the sons of Mileadh, and he swore by heaven and earth, and the sun and the moon, by the dew and elements, by the sea and the land, that the regal succession among them for ever should be on the mother's side; and he took away with him twelve women that were superabundant with the sons of Mileadh, for their husbands had been drowned in the western sea along with Donn, so that the chiefs of the Picts have been from the men of Ireland from that time ever since.)[112]

As in the Anglo-Saxon conquest of Britain, becoming dependent on another people for wives places political power into the hands of those who provided them.

Both the legend of the Anglo-Saxon invasion and the Pictish origin narrative use the conceit of taking wives from another people to indicate political and military subservience to that people. Such marriages are understood as exchanges of power, in which political control is ceded to one's father-in-law upon the taking of a wife. As Hengest says to Vortigern after his marriage to his daughter, 'bid misi t'athair ⁊ do comarleid. ⁊ dia nernda mo comarle, ni caemsat na cineadaig eile ni duit'[113] (I will be your father and your counsellor, and if you take my advice, the other peoples will not be able to harm you in any way).[114] Likewise, as we have just seen, the Picts marrying Irish women means that 'regal succession among them for ever should be on the mother's side' and thus 'the chiefs of the Picts have been from the men of Ireland from that time ever since'. In the *Lebor Bretnach*, the broader narrative pattern of settlement and conquest is more complex than a simple series of military victories, because those who are defeated are presented as having symbolically ceded their political power to the victors.

In the *Lebor Bretnach*, the taking of women from another people places power in the hands of those who provided them. These marriages are understood as symbolic exchanges of power, in which political control is ceded to one's father-in-law upon the taking of a wife. In the *Lebor Bretnach*,

[110] Todd, *Leabhar Breathnach*, 125.
[111] van Hamel, *Lebor Bretnach*, 9.
[112] Todd, *Leabhar Breathnach*, 127.
[113] van Hamel, *Lebor Bretnach*, 50.
[114] Todd, *Leabhar Breathnach*, 89.

the broader narrative pattern of settlement and conquest is more complex than a simple series of military victories, because those who are defeated are presented as having symbolically ceded their political power to the victors. This pattern is used within the overall historical narrative in order to demonstrate that those who control their respective islands – the Irish and the Anglo-Saxons – are the rightful possessors, because the Picts and Britons were unworthy of political and military power, having so willingly conceded it.

It is worth remembering that the *Historia Brittonum* is – while understood by modern scholarship not as a guileless 'heap' of information, as claimed by its Nennian preface, but as something more artfully crafted – nonetheless a narrative in which the Anglo-Saxons' conquest of Britain and their subsequent impact on the island forms a significant historical strand. In removing much of the Anglo-Saxon material while expanding the history of the Irish and adding new material on the origins of the Picts, the *Lebor Bretnach* shifts that narrative to something different. The *Historia Brittonum* details the Britons' loss of their own island to the Anglo-Saxons. In including more of the origins of the Irish and the Picts, the *Lebor Bretnach* expands the focus of its historical arc to encompass all of the insular world, constructing a narrative of two conquests in parallel. The Britons and Picts, both of whom cede power to the Anglo-Saxons and the Irish, are constructed as unworthy inheritors, while the Anglo-Saxons and the Irish remain as the 'rightful' possessors of Britain and Ireland.

On the whole, then, the narrative of the *Lebor Bretnach* draws initial parallels between the Irish and the Britons as the first inhabitants of their respective islands, positions the Picts and Anglo-Saxons as incoming tribes of mercenaries, yet ultimately draws the Irish and the Anglo-Saxons parallel to one another as the rightful possessors of Ireland and Britain. This narrative equation even appears to be made directly at one point when the *Lebor Bretnach*, in a passage on the *sex aetates mundi*, adds a further sentence of detail not present in the *Historia Brittonum*:

insin sesed amsir imorro tancadar Dal Riatai, corgabsad hirind na Cruithneach ⁊ isan aimsir sin rogabsad Saxain iraind na Breatan.[115]

(but it was in the sixth age that the Dalriada came, and took the district of the Picts, and it was at that time also that the Saxons took their portion of the island from the Britons.)[116]

[115] van Hamel, *Lebor Bretnach*, 28.

[116] Todd, *Leabhar Breathnach*, 59. On the legendary history of the Dál Riata, see further *Senchus Fer n-Alban* / *Míniugud Senchusa Fher n-Alban*, in Bannerman, *Studies in the History of Dalriada*. *Senchus Fer n-Alban* is a brief genealogical treatise, but relevant to the arguments of this book is the fact that it includes a kin-slaying: 'Fergus bec dano mac eirc gegnai a brathair' (Fergus Bec, moreover, son of Erc; his brother killed him);

Dating the Irish conquest of the Picts to the same age as the Anglo-Saxon conquest of the Britons places their respective conquests in direct parallel to one another.

Insular origin narratives involving intermarriage demonstrate several important things. As we have already seen when it comes to motifs of exile and kin-slaying, intermarriage was added to the corpus of origin stories over time, as narratives grew from bare-bones to something more elaborate. Stories of intermarriage set during prehistory were often used to reflect contemporary political dynamics between insular peoples. Moreover, early medieval authors remembered intermarriage itself as a crucial part of insular prehistory – one that was quite often used as a deliberate political strategy. In doing so, insular peoples crafted origin legends that depicted their pasts as intricately linked. The history of the region was written in acknowledgement of a shared history.

Part IV: Incest in Insular Origin Narratives

In contrast to origin legends of intermarriage were those involving incest, which addressed the question of how foundational ancestors arriving to a completely empty island would have populated it. Like kin-slaying, the fact that incest is a feature of some insular origin narratives is initially surprising in that it builds a serious crime into the heart of a people's foundation story, yet it too eventually came to signify their singularity. Incest first entered the corpus of insular origin texts via Gildas's vituperative *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae*. As we have seen, Gildas blames the Anglo-Saxon conquest of Britain on the Britons' perceived sinfulness after the departure of the Romans. Sexual licentiousness forms a significant proportion of Gildas's accusations. He castigates his people for their behaviour during a respite from Irish and Pictish attacks:

Quiescente autem vastitate tantis abundantiarum copiis insula affluebat ut nulla habere tales retro aetas meminisset, cum quibus omnimodis et luxuria crescit. Crevit etenim germine praepollenti, ita ut competenter eodem tempore diceretur: 'omnino talis auditur fornicatio qualis nec inter gentes.'

(In the respite from devastation, the island was so flooded with abundance of goods that no previous age had known the like of it. Alongside there grew luxury. It grew with a vigorous growth, so that to that time were fitly applied the words: 'There are actually reports of such fornication as is not known even among the Gentiles'.)[117]

Bannerman, *Studies in the History of the Dalriada*, 42 and 48. This text is discussed further in the Conclusion below.

[117] Winterbottom, *Gildas*, 96 and 24.

Gildas's enormously influential text thus places sexual sin at the heart of the story of the Anglo-Saxon invasion of Britain.

Gildas goes on to make specific accusations against Britain's five kings – whom he deems tyrants – some of which include incest. He writes:

Demetarum tyranne Vortipori, stupide riges? quid te tam violenti peccatorum gurgites, quos ut vinum optimum sorbes, immo tu ab eis voraris, appropinquante sensim vitae limite non satiant? quid quasi culminis malorum omnium stupro, propria tua amota coniuge eiusdemque honesta morte, impudentis filiae quodam ineluctabili pondere miseram animam oneras?

(Vortipor, tyrant of the Demetae. The end of your life is gradually drawing near; why can you not be satisfied by such violent surges of sin, which you suck down like vintage wine – or rather allow yourself to be engulfed by them? Why, to crown your crimes, do you weigh down your wretched soul with a burden you cannot shrug off, the rape of a shameless daughter after the removal and honourable death of your own wife?)[118]

Gildas accuses Vortipor of incest with a first-degree blood relative – his daughter – but several other British kings are also named for sexual improprieties due to their relationships with relatives by marriage (viewed as incest by the church, as discussed above).

To Cuneglasus, Gildas asks rhetorically,

Quid praeter innumerabiles casus propria uxore pulsa furciferam germanam eius, perpetuam deo viduitatis castimoniam promittentem, ut poeta ait, summam ceu teneritudinem caelicolarum, tota animi veneratione vel potius hebetudine (nympharum) contra interdictum apostoli denegantis posse adulteros regni caelestis esse municipes suspicis?

(Why, aside from countless other lapses, have you rejected your own wife and now, against the ban of the apostle, who says that adulterers cannot be citizens of the kingdom of heaven, do you cast your eyes, with all the reverence (or rather dullness) of your mind, on her villainous sister, although she has promised to God perpetually chaste widowhood, like, as the poet says, the supreme tenderness of the dwellers in heaven?)[119]

While Gildas's primary complaints seem to be Cuneglasus's adultery and his wife's sister's abandonment of her vows, he nonetheless flags the marriage of a sister-in-law, one of the categories of relationships that the church viewed as incest. The same holds true for Maglocunus, whom Gildas accuses:

Spernuntur namque primae post monachi votum inritum inlicitae licet, tamen propriae coniugis praesumptivae nuptiae, aliae expetuntur non cuiuslibet relictae, sed viri viventis, non externi, sed fratris filii adamatae.

[118] Winterbottom, *Gildas*, 101 and 31. [119] Winterbottom, *Gildas*, 101 and 32.

(Your presumptive first marriage, after your vow to be a monk had come to nothing, was illegal – but at least it was to your own wife. You spurned it, and sought another, not with some widow, but with the beloved wife of a living man, no stranger either, but your brother's son.)[120]

While Gildas's accusations focus on a range of sins and incest is not particularly high amongst them, the *De Excidio* nonetheless set a precedent within the corpus of texts containing insular origin narratives by linking sexual licentiousness to insular prehistory. Incest, as one of the Britons' many sins, provides a justification for their eventual conquest by the Anglo-Saxons.

This pattern is extended in the *Historia Brittonum*. The text incorporates an incest narrative into the foundation story of the Anglo-Saxons through the figure of British king Vortigern, who as we have seen, already comes under sharp criticism in the narrative for his marriage to the daughter of Anglo-Saxon leader Hengest. Vortigern compounds his errors by entering into a sexual relationship with his own daughter. The *Historia Brittonum* narrates:

Nam, super omnia mala adjiciens, Guorthigirnus accepit filiam sui uxorem sibi, et peperit ei filium. Et hoc cum compertum esset a sancto Germano, eum corripere venit cum omni clero Brittonum. Et dum conventa esset magna synodus clericorum ac laicorum in uno concilio, ipse rex praemonuit filiam suam ut exiret ad conventum et ut daret filium suum in sinum Germani et ut diceret quod ipse erat pater filii; et mulier fecit sicut erat edocta. Germanus autem eum benigne accepit et dicere coepit: 'Pater tibi ero nec te dimittam, nisi mihi novacula cum forcipe pectineque detur et ad patrem tuum carnalem tibi dare licetur.' Et obaudivit puer, et usque ad avum suum patrem carnalem Guorthigirnum perrexit, et puer illi dixit: 'Pater meus es, caput meum tonde et comam capitis mei.' Et ille siluit, et tacuit, et puero respondere noluit, sed surrexit et iratus est valde, ut a facie sancti Germani fugeret, et maledictus est, et damnatus a sancto Germano et omni Brittonum concilio.

(Then, on top of all his misdeeds, Vortigern took his daughter to wife, and begot a daughter upon her. When this was made known to saint Germanus, he came with all the clergy of Britain to accuse him. When the great Synod of the clergy and laity met together in a single council, the king told his daughter beforehand to come to the meeting, and put her son in the lap of Germanus, and say that he was the child's father. The woman did as she was told, but Germanus took the child kindly, and addressed him 'I will be your father, and will not send you away, unless a razor and scissors and comb are given me, and you are permitted to give them to your father after the flesh.' The boy heard him, and turned to his grandfather Vortigern, his father after the flesh, and said to him 'You are my father. Crop my head, and the hair of my head.' But he was silent, and said nothing, and refused to answer the boy. He got up in great anger, and fled from the face of saint Germanus, and

[120] Winterbottom, *Gildas*, 103 and 34.

was accursed, and was condemned by saint Germanus and the whole council of the British.)[121]

This episode in the *Historia Brittonum* attaches incest firmly to a British king. Like Gildas's *De Excidio*, though focused on the crimes of one king instead of many, the *Historia Brittonum* nonetheless blames the Anglo-Saxon conquest on the sinfulness of the Britons. As many scholars have discussed, the *Historia Brittonum* displays a strong regional bias in its decision to cast Vortigern as the villain responsible for the downfall of all of Britain.[122] Yet he is still depicted as the leader of Britain in this narrative, and his act of incest is remembered as part of British history.

It is noteworthy that – as is the case with many medieval incest narratives – the child born of Vortigern's incestuous union is not condemned for his origins, but in fact grows up to become a respected religious figure. The *Historia Brittonum* reports,

Quartus fuit Faustus, qui a filia sua genitus est illi, et sanctus Germanus baptizavit illum, et nutrivit, et docuit, et condidit locum magnum super ripam fluminis quod vocatur Renis, et manet usque hodie. Et unam filiam habuit, quae fuit mater Fausti sancti.

(A fourth son was Faustus, who was born to him by his daughter. Saint Germanus baptised him, and brought him up, and taught him, and he founded a great monastery on the banks of a river, called Riez, that stands to this day. He also had one daughter, who was the mother of saint Faustus.)[123]

Blaming the perpetrators of incest but not the children born of such unions is an important feature of insular origin legends. While St Faustus becomes a religious figure and founds a monastery, other instances of incest in origin narratives begin dynasties that populated the insular region. Like exile and kin-slaying, attributing incest to a people's foundational ancestor in early insular origin narratives conveyed the idea that a singular crime set that ancestor apart yet did not entirely come to define his descendants.

The Pictish origin legend in the *Lebor Bretnach* hints at an incest narrative which has never been fully explored. These undertones are not present in Bede's version of the narrative, which as we have just seen, depicts Pictish men alone voyaging to the insular region, where they then obtain wives from Ireland. Yet the extended version of the

[121] Morris, *Nennius*, 70 and 29.
[122] See e.g. Jankulak, *Geoffrey of Monmouth*, 27; Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, 346–59.
[123] Morris, *Nennius*, 74 and 33.

Pictish origin legend present in the *Lebor Bretnach* provides a more complicated backstory: the Picts are said to have come from Thrace in a boat with six brothers and one sister, whom the kings of first Thrace and then France wished to marry without a dowry, causing the brothers to flee in successive escapes:

Seser taisech tancadar .i. Solen, Ulfa, Nechtan, Drostan, Aengus, Leithenn. Fath a tiachtana: Policornius ri Traicia dorad grad dia siair corothriall a breth cen tochra. Lodar iarsin tar Romanchu co Frangcu. ⁊ cumdaigsed cathair ann .i. Pictauis a Pictis .i. o n-armthib ⁊ dorad rig Frangc grad dia siair. Lotar for muir iar n-eg in tshinnsir brathar .i. Leitind. I cind da laa iar ndul tar muir adbath a siur.[124]

(Six brothers of them came at first, that is, Solen, Ulfa, Nechtan, Drostan, Aengus, Leithenn. The cause of their coming was this, namely, Policornus, king of Thrace, fell in love with their sister, and proposed to take her without giving a dowry. They after this passed across the Roman territory into France and built a city there, that is, Pictavis, called à pictis, that is from their arms. And the king of France fell in love with their sister. They put to sea after the death of the sixth brother, that is Leithinn; and in two days after going on the sea their sister died.)[125]

No incest is overtly depicted in this narrative. However, the Pictish origin legend has suggestive parallels to other well-known stories – such as the tales of Constance, Emaré, and Apollonius of Tyre – which were popular in the medieval west.[126] In these stories, a (sympathetic) female character either flees or is exiled across the sea in a boat when her father either attempts or succeeds at her incestuous rape. The Pictish origin legend in the *Lebor Bretnach* hints at a similar narrative in the odd details that it preserves. Six brothers and one sister take to sea in a boat, moving on every time a marriage proposal is put to the sister. Lack of dowry for the first proposal is given as an explanation for their initial departure, yet the narrative makes clear that any time an outsider proposes to initiate a sexual relationship with their sister, the siblings take flight. The brothers' refusal to let their sister marry is a common plot feature in medieval incest narratives, seen perhaps most famously in the widely popular story of Apollonius of Tyre.[127] Another insinuation of an underlying incest

[124] van Hamel, *Lebor Bretnach*, 8. [125] Todd, *Leabhar Breathnach*, 120–3.

[126] See Archibald, *Incest and the Medieval Imagination*, chapter 4, 'Fathers and Daughters', 145–91 and Corinne Saunders, *Rape and Ravishment in the Literature of Medieval England* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2001).

[127] Apollonius is the hero of this tale, which follows his adventures after he reveals that King Antiochus raped his own daughter. The king begins assaulting her after the death of his wife (the later 'donkeyskin' folklore motif), and when she reaches marriageable age, he seeks to prevent her relationship with any other man by setting a supposedly 'impossible' riddle as the price for her hand. Apollonius solves the riddle, whose solution is the king's incestuous abuse of his child. See Elizabeth Archibald, *Apollonius of Tyre: Medieval and*

narrative potentially stems from their collective exile. Leviticus 20 lists punishments for incest and other sexual crimes. Most cases of incest are punishable by death, but in Leviticus 20:17, incest between a brother and sister results in the exile of both parties from their people. Finally, the death of the eldest brother and the sister between France and Ireland are also suggestive of an incest narrative, as these frequently include the tragic deaths of the 'tainted' characters. The Pictish origin legend thus strongly hints at the possibility of an incest narrative – yet it is ultimately rejected in favour of the arrival of brothers alone to the insular region and their eventual marriages to Irish wives, as we have previously seen. The Pictish narrative suggests the possibility that a serious sin lay behind their initial exile, yet in this narrative, that sin was not carried on into the Picts' new homeland.

The Anglo-Saxon origin legend as developed from the *Historia Brittonum* onward is also worth reexamining in this light. As we have seen, both Gildas and Bede depict the *adventus Saxonum* as a strictly military affair, while the *Historia Brittonum* expands the narrative to introduce themes of intermarriage through the figure of Hengest's daughter, as discussed above. This narrative hints at incest in the way Hengest sexually manipulates his daughter for the gain of the Anglo-Saxon people. He tells Vortigern that he will bring more warriors from his homeland, yet also plans to retrieve his daughter, who is described as beautiful and appealing. Hengest holds a joint feast between the Britons and the Anglo-Saxons for the express purpose of manipulating Vortigern so that his lust for his daughter overcomes his common sense and the Anglo-Saxons will gain the political upper hand. Hengest's manipulation of his daughter's sexuality in this way creates dark undertones in the Anglo-Saxon origin legend. As in the Pictish narrative, we see – if not overt incest – stories in which the control of a woman's sexuality by a male relative becomes crucially important in the origin legend of a people.

As we have seen, the *Lebor Gabála Érenn* is a sprawling account that situates a narrative of Ireland within the framework of broader world and biblical history. Incestuous narratives feature at each stage of history within the *Lebor Gabála*, though they are most prevalent within the Irish origin period, which will therefore form the bulk of my discussion. As with kin-slaying, incest in the *Lebor Gabála* begins in its biblical framework via the families of Adam and Noah. Of Adam's progeny, the text relates, 'Trí meic d'Adam ca mbái cland – / Seth, Sile, Cáin cláen-cam: / a teora mná, búadach bríg! / Olla, Pip, ⁊ Pithíp' (Adam had three sons who had progeny – / Seth, Sile, Cain perverse and

Renaissance Themes and Variations Including the Text of the Historia Apollonii Regis Tyri with an English Translation (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1991).

crooked: / their three wives, victorious strength! / were Olla, Pip, and Pithip).[128] The same obvious incest is also attributed to Noah's family:

> . . . conid desin tuc Día díliu dar in domain imaille, connach térna beó díb acht Nóe cona mnái, .i. a siur fodesin ⁊ cona thríb macaib, ⁊ bátar iat-sidhe fir a trí n-ingen, ⁊ cona thríb ingenaib, ⁊ bádar iat-side mná na trí mac.
>
> (. . . so it was on that account that God brought a flood over the world altogether, so that no one of them escaped alive except Noah and his wife, [his own sister], and his three sons, [who were the husbands of his three daughters], and his three daughters, [who were the wives of the three sons].)[129]

Biblical incest, then, sets the precedent for an unpleasant but unavoidable taboo broken in the case of founding ancestors. Throughout the *Lebor Gabála*, we see the same situation carried out with many of Ireland's other founding ancestral families.

As is well-known, the *Lebor Gabála* constructs its own Noah-esque figure in the form of Cessair, one of Ireland's waves of invaders. With a company of fifty women and three men in three ships, Cessair sails to Ireland and escapes the flood. The women are then divided amongst the men in an (eventually futile) attempt to repopulate the island. The three men in question, however, are Bith (son of Noah), Fintan (son of Lamech, brother of Noah), and Ladra (son of Bith). Cessair is Bith's daughter, Ladra's sister, and Fintan's cousin, constructing this settlement attempt as an extended family endeavour.[130] Cessair's taking of Ireland eventually fails when everyone dies. Incest is here positioned as a sin – a necessary evil for populating Ireland from a small family group, but one which is doomed to ultimate failure. We shall see this pattern carried out further in the additional waves of invaders who follow Cessair to Ireland, the first of which are the children of Partholon.[131] Partholon is said to travel to Ireland with a number of his sons, one of whom is Laiglinde, and a number of daughters, one of whom is Laiglinde's wife Aife. As the text states explicitly, 'airmit eolaigh corb ingen do Partholon fein Aifi' (learned men reckon that Aife was daughter to Partholon himself).[132] In Partholon's followers, we see the pattern repeated in which incest is included as part of the island's initial settlement – which ultimately is seen to fail.

The same holds true in the families of two more settlement groups following foundational ancestors Míl. Among Míl's progeny are two sons,

[128] Macalister, *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, vol. I, 186–7.
[129] Macalister, *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, vol. I, 30–31.
[130] Macalister, *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, vol. II.
[131] Macalister, *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, vol. III, 4–7.
[132] Macalister, *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, vol. III, 6–9.

Donn and Érimón, who marry Míl's daughters / their sisters, Díl and Odba. The *Lebor Gabála* calls attention to these relationships, noting of the first, 'ocus is ann ro báidedh Díl ben Duinn . . . ingen-side Míled' (and it is there that Díl wife of Donn was drowned . . . she was a daughter of Míl).[133] Likewise, Odba is also noted as 'Odba ingen Míled, imorro, máthair trí mac nÉrimóin' (Odba d. Míl, mother of the three sons of Érimón).[134] Finally, Míl's son Érimón is involved in another case of incest after Míl's death, when Érimón marries Míl's widow Scota:

Conabbath dana Scota ingen Foraind ríg Égept isin cath sin, ben Éremóin meic Míled. Ar Míl mac Bíle luid i nÉgept for loingís, lucht .iiii. long, ⁊ dorat Scota di mnái, ⁊ dorat Éremón dia éis.

(Scota d. Pharao king of Egypt, also died in that battle – the wife of Érimón s. Míl. For Míl s. Bile went voyaging into Egypt, four ships' companies strong, and he took Scota to wife, and Érimón took her after him.)[135]

These moments of incest within Ireland's origin legends, as we have already seen in the case of kin-slaying, inject some kind of original sin into the island's foundational waves of settlers. Here, that sin appears to be more harshly punished, as most of the foundational families involved in incest (apart from Míl's) ultimately die out and do not successfully populate Ireland. In the *Lebor Gabála*, incest functions as a means for a small family group to populate an empty island, but the failure of these dynasties to permanently succeed places Ireland in the timeline of broader world history while leaving the way open for the island's eventual successful settlement.

After the settlement period in the *Lebor Gabála*, many instances of incest are also present amongst the 'historical' kings, underscoring the spread of this textual motif. I will briefly discuss one as an illustration of how the incest motif was used narratively after prehistory in a quasi-historical setting. The story concerns quasi-historical king Óengus Tuirmech and his son Fíacha, born of an incestuous union:

Óengus Tuirmech doringi fri a ingin tria mesca in Fíacha, co ro laad in nóid oen-seched for muir é, ó Dún Aignech, co slonnud meic ríg, .i. bratt corcra co cuaich óir. Conosfuaratar iascaireda i Tráig Brenaind fó na fiachaib, conid dé sin ro len-som Fíacha Fer-Mara. Ocus gabsat a chland ríge hÉrenn ⁊ Alban . . .

(Óengus Tuirmech begat that Fíacha upon his own daughter in drunkenness, and put him in a boat of one hide upon the sea, out from Dún Aignech, with the trappings of a king's son – a purple robe with a golden fringe. Fisher-folk found

[133] Macalister, *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, vol. V, 56–7.
[134] Macalister, *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, vol. V, 38–9.
[135] Macalister, *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, vol. V, 32–3.

him in Tráig Brenainn amid his treasures, and thence had he his name, Fíacha Fer-Mara: and his children took the kingship of Ireland and of Scotland . . .)[136]

While set in a later historical period, this story nonetheless positions a dynasty as having been created through an initial act of incest. The story of Fíacha Fer-Mara also demonstrates the link between incest and exile, as we have seen above. Yet – as was also the case with St Faustus, the product of incest between British king Vortigern and his daughter – the child who is the product of this incestuous union is not blamed by the narrative for the sins of his father. Cast adrift with the symbols of royalty, he goes on to found a dynasty of kings. Incest can become part of a foundational family's story without detracting from the honour of the descendants of that line. In such a way, incest was used within the origin stories contained in the *Lebor Gabála* to produce descendants from a single family line without casting a stain on future generations.

Conclusions

In insular origin stories, once a foundational ancestor arrived in the region, a given island had to be populated in order for a people to continue. Origin narratives depicted two ways in which this could happen: incest amongst a small family group on an empty island, or intermarriage when the land was already occupied. This chapter has explored the role of both motifs in insular origin tales, discovering that early medieval authors saw the potential gains and losses inherent in both processes and used them cannily within their narratives to emphasise the power balances of different political relationships. We have also seen the ways in which stories of intermarriage and incest spread throughout the corpus of insular origin material as narratives developed from their initially sparse details to gain in complexity as time went on. The narrative use of such motifs was not limited to origin legends, of course. Stories of intermarriage and incest made for compelling drama across a wide range of early insular texts, exemplified by, for example, the Old Irish *Fingal Rónáin* ('The Kin-Slaying of Rónán'), which combines motifs of kin-slaying and incest into a powerful narrative of tragedy.[137] In conclusion

[136] Macalister, *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, vol. V, 284–5.

[137] Greene (ed.), *Fingal Rónáin and Other Stories*, and Ralph O'Connor, '"Stepmother Sagas": An Irish Analogue for *Hjálmpérs saga ok Ölvérs*', *Scandinavian Studies* 72 (2000): 1–48. An incestuous origin is a common motif for heroes in Old Irish literature; see e.g. Doris Edel, 'The Theme of Incest in the Older Literature of Ireland', in Stefan Zimmer (ed.), *Kelten am Rhein. Akten des dreizehnten Internationalen Keltologiekongresses, 23. bis 27. Juli 2007 in Bonn*, 2 vols., Beihefte der Bonner Jahrbücher 58 (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 2009), vol. 2, 45–61 and

to this chapter, I will briefly demonstrate some ways in which these ideas spread to other texts through a brief examination of intermarriage and incest in the Second Branch of the Welsh Four Branches of the *Mabinogi*, *Branwen uerch Lyr*, which dates to roughly the twelfth century.[138]

Branwen is about a failed intermarriage, famously depicting (like many Icelandic sagas) how diplomatic relations entered into with the best will in the world can irrevocably break down through the sabotage of one person. The Second Branch also concludes with an episode of incest as a mini origin story, here cast in a rather unsavoury light. The story of intermarriage in *Branwen* is one whose political and diplomatic motivations are made explicitly clear from the beginning. Matholwch, king of Ireland, comes to Britain to marry Branwen, the daughter of Llyr, with the express purpose of allying the two kings together in kinship through marriage, thus binding Britain and Ireland together and strengthening both. Matholwch's marriage proposal outlines everything that could hope to be gained from a diplomatic marriage, yet these efforts are quickly imploded through the actions of one person, Branwen's nefarious brother Efnisien. The chaos he causes during Branwen's wedding causes Matholwch to mistreat her after their marriage, culminating in a war between Britain and Ireland in which almost everyone – including Branwen's young son – is killed. Branwen dies heartbroken from grief at her impossible position, caught between her kin on one side and husband and son on the other. The Second Branch ends in total disaster, with only a handful of people from both Britain and Ireland left alive. Any 'victory' the British have achieved is in reality the ruination of two peoples. *Branwen* paints a highly pessimistic picture of intermarriage and, consequently, insular diplomatic relationships.

At the same time, the Second Branch also depicts the Irish in a negative light due to an incestuous mini origin story after the chaos of the main tale is over.[139] After the war between Britain and Ireland, the British survivors return home. In Ireland, we are told, there are no survivors except for five pregnant women in a cave in the wilderness. They eventually give birth to five sons, and when the sons are grown, each sleeps with one another's mothers to repopulate the island. While not technically incest, it is clear that subsequent generations would had to have been born from some

Kicki Ingridsdotter, 'Motivation for Incest: Clothru and the Battle of *Druim Criaich*', *Studia Celtica Fennica* 10 (2013): 45–63.

[138] Derick S. Thomson (ed.), *Branwen Uerch Lyr: The Second of the Four Branches of the Mabinogi, Edited from the White Book of Rhydderch, with Variants from the Red Book of Hergest and from Peniarth 6*, Mediaeval and Modern Welsh Series 2 (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1961) and trans. Sioned Davies, *The Mabinogion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[139] See Sims-Williams, *Irish Influence on Medieval Welsh Literature*, 202–7.

form of incestuous union, and this episode has been understood as unflattering to the Irish for its incestuous overtones.[140] Yet ultimately, the narrative is not very different from many of the other Irish settlement tales we have already seen. Insular origin narratives depict a cycle in which Ireland is settled, populated, and emptied before being settled yet again. *Branwen* depicts another episode in this cycle of invasions. The Second Branch illustrates how themes of intermarriage and incest during the prehistorical period spread outward from origin narratives to other genres of medieval literature. In Chapter Five, we shall jump forward in time to examine how early modern antiquarians made use of these same origin materials in a very different context.

[140] Andrew Welsh, 'Doubling and Incest in the Mabinogi', *Speculum* 65 (1990): 344–62.

5 Early Medieval Origin Legends in Early Modern Histories

The authors of insular historical works written during the early modern period had access to – and eagerly made use of – earlier medieval source material, including origin legends. The narratives of these stories remained fundamentally unaltered in later historical texts, but both the framing that surrounded origin legends and the rhetorical uses to which they were put underwent a substantial shift. These differences are linked to the rise of nationalism.[1] The authors of early modern historical works did not give equal credence to each of their sources in the same way as we have seen earlier medieval texts do, nor did they treat origin stories as historical facts to be taken at face value. Instead, these later texts constructed narratives of history containing strong nationalistic biases: works which sought to paint a picture of the past proving the superiority and antiquity of an author's own people, nation, and history, often at the expense of their insular neighbours'.

The present chapter focuses on four key facets of this nationalism as expressed in four key works of insular historical writing from the late medieval and early modern periods, one each roughly focusing on England, Ireland, Scotland, and Britain. In these texts, nationalism is reflected in an increased awareness of the distinct identity of each country and the value judgements which are drawn between them. Four main subsets of nationalism in early modern historical writing will be explored here, occurring in pairs which are reverse sides of the same coin. The first doublet is that these early modern histories evince their authors' pride in their own nation or people at the same time as other nations and peoples are disparaged. The second pair is that doubt is cast on the truthfulness and antiquity of others' sources and historical narratives at the same time as authors are quick to defend the validity of their own. Within early modern historical works, the same origin legends that arose during the early medieval period are put to use in a much more rhetorically contentious manner. Origin stories which come across as overly fantastical must

[1] See Introduction, 'The Anachronism of Nationalism', 4–13.

be explained away within the narrative of one's own history, while the outsized legends of other nations can be used as ammunition to prove their histories false. In the early modern period, origin legends underwent a significant shift from a more straightforward part of history to something frequently accompanied by defensiveness or weaponisation. Early modern insular histories evince the same intellectual connectedness as medieval works. Yet in the later period, an awareness of alternative sources and narratives was as often used to cast doubt on a competing vision of history as it was as a source of information for one's own. In the early modern period, origin legends which had previously grown and developed together were put to use in individual, nationalistic narratives of history.

Part I: Geoffrey of Monmouth and the Growth of Origin Legends in the 'Long Twelfth Century'

This study breaks at a moment of transition from 'early' to 'high medieval' origin legends which took place in roughly the twelfth century, before jumping forward in time to examine the uses of early medieval origin material in historical chronicles from the early modern period. This moment of transition during 'the long twelfth century' was one of significant change, and these changes have consequently been well studied. One was historical: the arrival of the Normans in Britain altered the focus of historical writing, opening up the potential for even more extended continental influence than had existed previously as well as bringing contemporary concerns of the Conquest to the forefront.[2] One was intellectual, as the so-called 'twelfth-century renaissance' saw an increased interest in the inheritance of the classical world, which led to innovations in education and cultural production.[3] Yet the most significant factor which impacted the writing of insular origin legends during the high medieval period was a literary one, namely the publication of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *De gestis Britonum* in the 1130s.[4] It would be difficult to

[2] See Antonia Gransden, *Historical Writing in England I: c. 550 to c. 1307* (London: Routledge, 1974) and *Historical Writing in England II: c. 1307 to the Early Sixteenth Century* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982); Elisabeth van Houts, 'Historical Writing', in Christopher Harper-Bill and Elisabeth van Houts (eds.), *A Companion to the Anglo-Norman World* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2002), 103–22; John Spence, *Reimagining History in Anglo-Norman Prose Chronicles* (York: York Medieval Press, 2013); and Emily A. Winkler, *Royal Responsibility in Anglo-Norman Historical Writing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

[3] On the so-called 'twelfth century renaissance', see bibliography in Introduction, n. 91 above.

[4] Also known as the *Historia regum Britanniae*. Michael D. Reeve (ed.) and Neil Wright (trans.), *Geoffrey of Monmouth: The History of the Kings of Britain* (Woodbridge: The

overstate the importance of this text, which shifted the genre of insular origin narratives in some fundamental and important ways.

De gestis Britonum was immediately and wildly popular in the medieval period, with over 200 known surviving manuscripts. It was a polarising text that found a wide and enthusiastic audience at the same time as many of Geoffrey's contemporaries despaired at his framing of overtly fictitious legends under the guise of history.[5] Consequently, Geoffrey's work has been well served by modern scholars. Important foundational studies were undertaken by Neil Wright and Julia Crick, and Joshua Byron Smith and Georgia Henley have recently edited *A Companion to Geoffrey of Monmouth* with updated studies on his sources, contemporary resonances, and global reception, as well as surveys of scholarly approaches to his work.[6] *De gestis Britonum* had a significant and immediate impact on the genre of origin legends in the insular region and beyond. As we have seen, the origin stories of the early medieval period were often conveyed in terse and confusing narratives. These episodes were brief and sometimes presented contradictory versions of events or left significant gaps in the narrative that later authors sought to fill. In contrast, Geoffrey's *De gestis Britonum* offered smooth, narrative prose that – as his detractors often noted in frustration – created a seamless narrative which flitted lightly across the framework of known history, aligning only occasionally with reality.[7]

Geoffrey's impact on the insular imagination as a whole was significant, but for the purposes of this study, there were three particularly noteworthy ways in which *De gestis Britonum* altered the genre of insular origin

Boydell Press, 2007), and most recent bibliography and studies in Smith and Henley (eds.), *A Companion to Geoffrey of Monmouth*.

[5] For Geoffrey of Monmouth's impact, see Hugh A. MacDougall, *Racial Myth in English History: Trojans, Teutons, and Anglo-Saxons* (Montreal and Hanover: Harvest House and the University Press of New England, 1982), 7–27.

[6] Neil Wright, *The Historia Regum Britanniae of Geoffrey of Monmouth I: Bern, Burgerbibliothek, MS. 568* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1985); *The Historia Regum Britanniae of Geoffrey of Monmouth II: The First Variant Version: A Critical Edition* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1988); Julia C. Crick, *The Historia Regum Britanniae of Geoffrey of Monmouth III: A Summary Catalogue of the Manuscripts* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1989); *The Historia Regum Britanniae of Geoffrey of Monmouth IV: Dissemination and Reception in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1991); Neil Wright, *The Historia Regum Britanniae of Geoffrey of Monmouth V: Gesta Regum Britannie* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1991); and Smith and Henley (eds.), *A Companion to Geoffrey of Monmouth*.

[7] See Simon Meecham-Jones, 'Early Reactions to Geoffrey's Work', 181–208; Siân Echard, 'The Latin Reception of the *De gestis Britonum*', 209–34; Owain Wyn Jones, 'The Most Excellent Princes: Geoffrey of Monmouth and Medieval Welsh Historical Writing', 257–90; and Georgia Henley, 'Geoffrey of Monmouth and the Conventions of History Writing in Early 12th-Century England', 291–314, in Smith and Henley (eds.), *A Companion to Geoffrey of Monmouth*.

legends. First, Geoffrey's work shifted the genre towards the inclusion of more overtly fictional elements. While the origin stories under consideration in this book are, as we have seen, firmly in the realm of the legendary rather than the historical, they nonetheless represent genuine attempts on the part of early medieval authors to depict the known or believed events of the past in a way that aligned with the understood metaphysical realities of the historical present. *De gestis Britonum*, on the other hand, introduced giants, magic, and obscure prophecies into the fabric of 'historical' foundation legends.[8] In tone and style, there was a marked shift from the chronicles we have seen in the early medieval period to *De gestis Britonum*, which was something more akin to a chivalric romance.[9] Even ostensibly historical episodes, such as Arthur's Roman campaign, were invented out of whole cloth (and could be easily verified as fictional by comparison to extant, widely circulated sources). Geoffrey's critics found him to be patently unbelievable for precisely these reasons, yet for those who eagerly read and circulated his work, the *De gestis Britonum* would alter the shape of insular origin narratives to include more content which would be considered overtly fictional from both medieval and modern perspectives.

Second, the narrative focus of the *De gestis Britonum* also marks a shift in interest within origin stories from the deeds of ancestors to the deeds of their descendants. The early medieval works which have formed the focus of this study thus far presented origin legends as part of the distant past. These works then jump forward to 'known' historical time (usually Roman Britain) before transitioning into contemporary history. The narratives are discrete, with ancestral founding legends positioned as important to the past, but distinct from the present. *De gestis Britonum*, in contrast, offers an unbroken lineage of rich prehistory in which each generation of Brutus's descendants features as prominently as he does within the overall narrative. Not only did this mean that part of Geoffrey's legacy in the high medieval period was lengthier texts – Wace's *Roman de Brut* clocks in at around 15,000 lines; Laȝamon's *Brut* is 16,000 – but also that in shifting the focus off a single ancestral figure, later medieval authors writing under Geoffrey's influence had more freedom to expand the narratives of other pseudohistorical figures (as can be seen most memorably in the enduring legacy of Geoffrey's

[8] On giants, see Tina Marie Boyer, *The Giant Hero in Medieval Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 2016); on magic, see Corrine Saunders, *Magic and the Supernatural in Medieval English Romance* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2010); and on prophecy, see Victoria Flood, *Prophecy, Politics and Place in Medieval England: From Geoffrey of Monmouth to Thomas of Erceldoune* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2016).

[9] See Helen Cooper, *The English Romance in Time: Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

Arthurian mythologising).[10] The impact of *De gestis Britonum* meant that on the whole, origin narrative from the high medieval period tended to take the form of more linear narratives that encompassed a greater range of pseudohistorical figures.

Third, the focus of *De gestis Britonum* was firmly on the history of Britain and the Britons. While the Anglo-Saxons make an appearance at the end of the narrative, its focus is clearly an extended study in British prehistory, evident from the outset in Geoffrey's famous claim to have used 'Britannici sermonis librum uetutissimum' (a very old book in the British tongue) as the source for his own work.[11] While modern scholars have debated the extent to which Geoffrey's narrative was actually 'pro-British', 'pro-Norman', or something else altogether, there is no doubting the subject of its focus.[12] Geoffrey's work stood at the forefront of a gradual shift which saw later medieval authors most often focusing on extended treatments of the origins of a single people rather than introducing every insular origin narrative at the outset.[13] On the whole, then, the publication of *De gestis Britonum* marked a moment of significant departure between early and later medieval origin narratives. After the influence of Geoffrey's work, origin legends from the high medieval period tended to include more overtly fictional elements, be formed of lengthier and more linear narratives focusing on multiple figures rather than a single ancestor, and focus on the origins of a single people rather than the entire insular region.

The influence of Geoffrey's *De gestis Britonum* made origin narratives quite popular during the high medieval period, and their impact was not limited to the realm of history and literature. As Hugh A. MacDougall has discussed, *De gestis Britonum* had an outsized influence on the real-world

[10] See e.g. Norris J. Lacy (ed.), *A History of Arthurian Scholarship* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2006); Jankulak, *Geoffrey of Monmouth*, 67–77; and Siân Echard (ed.), *The Arthur of Medieval Latin Literature: The Development and Dissemination of the Arthurian Legend in Medieval Latin* (Cardiff: The University of Wales Press, 2011).

[11] Reeve (ed.) and Wright (trans.), *Geoffrey of Monmouth*, 4; for discussion of which see most recently Ben Guy, 'Geoffrey of Monmouth's Welsh Sources', in Smith and Henley (eds.), *A Companion to Geoffrey of Monmouth*, 31–66.

[12] For recent discussion, see Michael A. Faletra, *Wales and the Medieval Colonial Imagination: The Matters of Britain in the Twelfth Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) and 'Colonial Preoccupations in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *De gestis Britonum*', in Smith and Henley (eds.), *A Companion to Geoffrey of Monmouth*, 317–40.

[13] This is not, of course, to say that such works did not exist during the later medieval period – see e.g. Michele Campopiano and Henry Bainton (eds.), *Universal Chronicles in the High Middle Ages* (York: York Medieval Press, 2017). On burgeoning nationalism in the later medieval period, see e.g. David McRoberts, 'The Scottish Church and Nationalism in the Fifteenth Century', *The Innes Review* 19 (1968): 3–14; Andrea Ruddick, *English Identity and Political Culture in the Fourteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Caspar Hirschi, *The Origins of Nationalism: An Alternative History from Ancient Rome to Early Modern Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 78–103; and Bradshaw, *'And so began the Irish Nation'*.

politics of high medieval England and Wales, as individual monarchs sought to align themselves with the genealogies and prophecies popularised by Geoffrey's work.[14] Within the literary and historical spheres, *De gestis Britonum* spurred widespread interest in the story of Brutus and Britain's supposed Trojan origins.[15] The Troy legend was widespread for a range of peoples throughout medieval Europe,[16] and *De gestis Britonum* gave it particular resonance in the insular region, where it was prevalent throughout England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales in the later medieval period.[17] The interest in individual origins that *De gestis Britonum* had spurred carried forward during this period as well. For the British, as Owain Wyn Jones has demonstrated, *De gestis Britonum* played a 'central role' 'not only in vernacular historical writing, but also in the way the Welsh conceived of their past and explained their present' during the later medieval period when Geoffrey's 'work had become accepted as the foundational narrative of Welsh history'.[18] In England, the immediacy of the Norman impact brought about a flurry of historical writing which looked to the Anglo-Saxon past, often through rose-coloured lenses.[19] Looking north, Scottish narratives of origin were a subject of increasing interest as Scottish historical writing gained momentum over the high medieval period,[20] while in Ireland, the *Lebor Gabála* continued to be

[14] MacDougall, *Racial Myth in English History*, 7–27.

[15] On Brutus, see Summerfield, 'Filling the Gap'.

[16] For the Trojan legend and the Franks, see Ghosh, *Writing the Barbarian Past*, 101–10; for the Normans, see Francis Ingledew, 'The Book of Troy and the Genealogical Construction of History: The Case of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae*', *Speculum* 69 (1994): 665–704; and on Europe more broadly, see František Graus, 'Troja und trojanische Herkunftssage im Mittelalter', in Willi Erzgräber (ed.), *Kontinuität und Transformation der Antike im Mittelalter. Veröffentlichung der Kongressakten zum Freiburger Symposion des Mediävistenverbandes* (Sigmaringen: Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 1989), 25–43; Alan Shepard and Stephen D. Powell (eds.), *Fantasies of Troy: Classical Tales and the Social Imaginary in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2004); Federico, *New Troy*; and Wolfram A. Keller, *Selves & Nations: The Troy Story from Sicily to England in the Middle Ages* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2008).

[17] See Tyler, 'Trojans in Anglo-Saxon England'; Fulton, 'History and *Historia*'; Wingfield, *The Trojan Legend in Medieval Scottish Literature*; and Benson, *The History of Troy in Middle English Literature*.

[18] Jones, 'The Most Excellent Princes', 257 and 258; see further his *Historical Writing in Medieval Wales*.

[19] See e.g. Robert Allen Rouse, *The Idea of Anglo-Saxon England in Middle English Romance* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2005); Martin Brett and David A. Woodman (eds.), *The Long Twelfth-Century View of the Anglo-Saxon Past* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015); and Jay Paul Gates and Brian O'Camb (eds.), *Remembering the Medieval Past: Generative Uses of England's Pre-Conquest Past, 10th to 15th Centuries* (Leiden: Brill, 2019).

[20] Broun, *The Irish Identity of the Kingdom of the Scots*; E.J. Cowan, 'Myth and Identity in Early Medieval Scotland', *Scottish History Review* 63 (1984): 111–35; Roger Mason, 'Scotching the Brut: Politics, History, and National Myth in Sixteenth-Century Britain', in Roger Mason (ed.), *Scotland and England 1286–1815* (Edinburgh: John

copied and circulated while an interest in the classical world increasingly made itself felt in vernacular literature as a whole.[21]

In sum, then, the period after the 'long twelfth century' saw a significant shift in how origin stories were written in the insular region. This was spurred by many factors, but the most significant to the writing of insular pseudohistory was the publication of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *De gestis Britonum* in the first half of the twelfth century. Due to the influence of this widely popular work, subsequent origin legends gained a more linear quality in their narratives, took on more overtly 'fictional' elements, and tended to focus on the deeds of one nation at length. There is not space here to conduct an exhaustive survey of every insular origin legend from the high Middle Ages, and indeed, numerous excellent studies have already been published on the individual texts themselves. However, it is important to understand how the early modern texts which form the focus of this chapter arose from the intellectual milieu that they did. Thus, before turning to these works themselves, I will briefly digress to explore the intellectual strands that came together in the late medieval period to form a corpus of historical writing on which our early modern sources eventually drew.

Part II: Origin Legends in the High Middle Ages

As this book has demonstrated, insular historical writing did not take place in isolation. Authors drew on earlier works and were drawn on in turn by later writers. Geoffrey of Monmouth was an innovative author whose *De gestis Britonum* had an outsized impact on insular origin narratives from the twelfth century onward precisely because this process of influence was a continuous one. This chapter focuses on four key texts from the late medieval and early modern periods, introduced in more detail below: John of Fordun's *Chronica gentis Scotorum* (1385), continued by Walter Bower as the *Scotichronicon* (1447); Holinshed's *Chronicles* (first edition 1577; second edition 1587); William Camden's *Britannia* (first edition 1586); and Seathrún Céitinn / Geoffrey Keating's *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn* (completed 1634). Before discussing these texts in their early modern milieu, it will be helpful to briefly trace the process of textual influence from Geoffrey of Monmouth onwards that shaped their sources and antecedents over the course of the later medieval period.

Donald, 1987), 60–84; Goldstein, *The Matter of Scotland*; and Wingfield, *The Trojan Legend in Medieval Scottish Literature*.

[21] Lennon, *Irish Orientalism*, 5–57; O'Connor (ed.), *Classical Literature and Learning in Medieval Irish Narrative*; and Miles, *Heroic Saga and Classical Epic in Medieval Ireland*.

For Scotland, the work on which this chapter focuses is Walter Bower's *Scotichronicon*, which dates to the late fifteenth century. The *Scotichronicon* has long been known to be an extension and continuation of John of Fordun's *Chronica gentis Scotorum* (1385). Thanks to the meticulous detective work of Dauvit Broun, we now know that John of Fordun drew heavily on an earlier series of medieval Scottish historical chronicles which survive intact only in fragments or in their absorption into these later works.[22] The process out of which John of Fordun's chronicle emerged involved several stages of composition and compilation across the high and later medieval periods.[23] First, in the thirteenth century, a historian known as 'Veremundus' composed 'Scotland's first continuous narrative', which began with Scottish origin material and continued up until the accession of Mael Coluim III in the eleventh century.[24] 'Veremundus' has long been identified as Richard Vairement, and the case for his authorship and a probable composition date of the 1260s has recently been confirmed by Broun. Vairement's history 'was based chiefly on Geoffrey of Monmouth' and also incorporated a small handful of earlier texts: legendary narratives of the origins of the Scots and the Stone of Scone as well as a brief king-list.[25] As Broun has argued, 'Vairement produced his narrative by repackaging material from Geoffrey of Monmouth to create a vision of immemorial Scottish freedom, a theme he extended into his retelling of Scottish origins.'[26] The influence of Geoffrey's work on insular origin texts was immediate, as the *De gestis Britonum* inspired subsequent authors to craft cohesive narratives of their own past modelled on Geoffrey's sweeping vision of British history.

Subsequently, a synthesist whom Broun has dubbed 'proto-Fordun' 'seems to have set himself the task of consolidating Vairement's narrative by making it a more complete record of the Scottish past'.[27] He incorporated alternative accounts of Scotland's legendary past into the narrative, synthesised its timeline, and extended it up to the present day (1285). Additional documentary material was added over the course of the fourteenth century, until the narrative was synthesised again by John of Fordun in 1384x7. As Broun has argued, this means that in the thirteenth century, 'Richard Vairement was the creator of Scotland's first "national"

[22] Broun, *The Irish Identity of the Kingdom of the Scots* and *Scottish Independence and the Idea of Britain*.
[23] Broun, *Scottish Independence and the Idea of Britain*, 215–68, helpfully summarised at 258ff.
[24] Broun, *Scottish Independence and the Idea of Britain*, 258.
[25] Broun, *Scottish Independence and the Idea of Britain*, 258.
[26] Broun, *Scottish Independence and the Idea of Britain*, 259.
[27] Broun, *Scottish Independence and the Idea of Britain*, 260.

history, providing the Scots with an account of their origins and a narrative of their freedom under their kings from ancient times.'[28] Yet as he notes, 'the core idea, however, was also fundamentally different from that of a modern nation'; 'the doctrine was that sovereign kingdoms constituted peoples, not that ethnic communities should be politically independent'.[29] The writing of Scottish history over the course of the high and later medieval periods laid the foundation for the increasingly nationalist ends to which origin stories were put in the early modern period.

The roots of Holinshed's *Chronicles*, first published in 1577, were also deeply embedded in what Alexandra Gillespie and Oliver Harris have called the 'native chronicle tradition', that is, 'an existing tradition of chronicle writing in England' that extends forward from the *Historia Brittonum* and 'continues without any striking change of form or technique until after the 1580s'.[30] The compilers of Holinshed's *Chronicles* drew on a vast swath of source material that ranged from manuscripts of early medieval texts to printed copies of contemporary works.[31] Prefatory material names 182 sources for the *History of England* alone. Of relevance here are those items which make clear the indebtedness of the Holinshed compilers to an ongoing tradition of historical writing in Britain in which individual works were aware of and drew upon previous texts. Holinshed's *Chronicles* incorporated material from Gildas's *De Excidio*, Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, and 'Nennius''s *Historia Brittonum*, as well as a series of important post-Conquest works whose authors built on one another's narratives: William of Malmesbury, Henry of Huntingdon, and Geoffrey of Monmouth (twelfth century); Gerald of Wales (twelfth to thirteenth centuries); Matthew Paris's *Chronica Majora* (thirteenth century); the anonymous prose *Brut* (a thirteenth-century Anglo-Norman translation of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *De gestis Britonum* and Wace's *Roman de Brut*, later translated into Latin and English, then printed by Caxton); Ranulf Higden's Latin *Polychronicon* and its translation into English by John Trevisa (fourteenth century); Polydore Vergil (sixteenth century); and the works of John Bale and John Leland after the dissolution of the monasteries (sixteenth century).

Yet at the same time as the writers of Holinshed's *Chronicles* were indebted to an earlier tradition of chronicle writing that provided the raw material upon which they drew, the *Chronicles* were also influenced

[28] Broun, *Scottish Independence and the Idea of Britain*, 262.
[29] Broun, *Scottish Independence and the Idea of Britain*, 263.
[30] Alexandra Gillespie and Oliver Harris, 'Holinshed and the Native Chronicle Tradition', in Paulina Kewes, Ian W. Archer, and Felicity Heal (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Holinshed's Chronicles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 135–51 at 135 and 136.
[31] Henry Summerson, 'Sources: 1577', in Kewes, Archer, and Heal (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Holinshed's Chronicles*, 61–76.

by new traditions of vernacular historical writing and the growth of the commercial book trade in the later medieval period.[32] As I argue below, while the *Chronicles* drew on a continuous tradition of historical writing that extended back into the early Middle Ages, these familiar narratives were put to new purposes during the later period. The same holds true for the use of earlier sources in William Camden's *Britannia*, whose first edition was published in 1586. Camden also drew upon a rich body of earlier source material dating back to the classical, late antique, and earlier medieval periods. As William Rockett describes, 'in each of *Britannia*'s three divisions, Camden collated documentary materials, chiefly the works of Caesar, Tacitus, Strabo, and Isidore of Seville among historians of the Romans and, among British histories, Gildas, Nennius, Bede, Gerald of Wales, Henry of Huntington, William of Malmesbury, Humphrey Llwyd, John Major, Hector Boece, and George Buchanan'.[33] Like Holinshed's *Chronicles*, Camden's *Britannia* was a work of synthesis, as 'he epitomized texts and sought, as had others before him, to rectify the documentary record'.[34] Yet as will be discussed further below, the testimony of these earlier works was not accepted unquestioningly: 'secondary as well as primary materials (e.g., chronicles, charters, deeds, wills, and heraldic materials) were treated as evidence and witnesses, rather than as authorities, in order to determine the authenticity of records containing differing versions of the same phenomena', wherein 'the aim was to arrive at a corrected version of the historical narrative'.[35] As we shall see, this 'corrected' version of the historical narrative reflects an attitude of burgeoning scepticism towards previously acceptable origin stories in the early modern period.

Finally, the same process in which a continuous chain of historical narratives was extended directly from the medieval to early modern periods is also evident in the case of Geoffrey Keating's *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn*, which was completed in 1634.[36] Keating drew directly on a large

[32] Gillespie and Harris, 'Holinshed and the Native Chronicle Tradition'.
[33] William Rockett, 'The Structural Plan of Camden's *Britannia*', *Sixteenth Century Journal* 26 (1995): 829–41 at 832.
[34] Rockett, 'The Structural Plan of Camden's *Britannia*', 832.
[35] Rockett, 'The Structural Plan of Camden's *Britannia*', 833.
[36] See Aine Ni Chroinin (= Anne Cronin), 'The Sources and Literary Influence of Keating's Foras Feasa', *The Irish Monthly* 63 (1935): 389–94; Anne Cronin, 'The Sources of Keating's *Forus feasa ar Éirinn* [1. The Printed Sources]', *Éigse* 4 (1943–44): 235–79 and 'The Sources of Keating's *Forus feasa ar Éirinn* [2. Manuscript Sources]', *Éigse* 5 (1945–47): 122–35; Bernadette Cunningham, 'Seventeenth-Century Interpretations of the Past: The Case of Geoffrey Keating', *Irish Historical Studies* 25 (1986): 116–28; and Sarah Connell, 'The Poetics and Politics of Legend: Geoffrey Keating's *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn* and the Invention of Irish History', *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 14 (2014): 83–106.

corpus of medieval works including the *Lebor Gabála*, the *dindshenchas* (Irish place-name lore), the *Acallam na Senórach*, and numerous medieval prose tales, genealogies, and sets of annals which had been extended and recopied throughout the high and later medieval periods.[37] Like his contemporaries, Keating frequently mentioned prior historical narratives in his work, though it was – as discussed below – more often than not to refute them. Keating was familiar with Bede, Gerald of Wales, Higden's *Polychronicon*, Edmund Spenser, Richard Stanihurst, Meredith Hamner, William Camden, Fynes Morrison, John Davies, John Barkely, and Edmund Campion, among others. His *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn* carefully synthesises certain narratives of the past while rebutting others in order to construct an account of Irish history that Keating understood to be authoritative.

Early modern authors were thus part of a continuous process of historical writing that extended directly back to the medieval period. They drew on a broad range of texts containing origin material to construct their narratives. While there might seem to be no immediate connection between early medieval and early modern historical writing, as we have seen, the sources on which early modern authors drew as they wrote their own histories were not solely filtered through later medieval texts. On the contrary, these later writers read and incorporated the works of Gildas, Bede, and other early medieval authors directly into their own work. Such a direct comparison offers valuable insights. While early modern historical writing has been very often studied in the context of its late medieval inheritance, it is rarely examined side-by-side with the earlier medieval material on which these later authors also directly drew. Studying early modern historical writing alongside the conclusions already drawn from the early medieval period has much to tell us about the ways in which attitudes towards insular origin material transformed over time.

Part III: The Early Modern Sources

The field of historical writing grew exponentially in the early modern period. The humanist renaissance which had begun in Italy in the fourteenth century fuelled antiquarian interest in the past,[38] while the

[37] On Keating's use of oral and folkloric sources, see Kelly Ann Fitzgerald, *Céitinn, Leabhar an tSeanchais: Literary and Oral Interaction in Irish Folklore* (Unpublished PhD thesis, University College Dublin, 2007).

[38] See Stuart Piggott, *Ancient Britons and the Antiquarian Imagination: Ideas from the Renaissance to the Regency* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1989) and Angus Vine, *In*

invention of the printing press in the fifteenth century made the publication of historical works more affordable and accessible.[39] Early modern historical works are both numerous and voluminous, and this chapter will not attempt a comprehensive survey.[40] Instead, I have selected four representative samples of historical writing covering England, Ireland, Scotland, and Britain, focusing on some of the most widely circulated, cited, and popular texts which attempted to survey each region. From Scotland, I examine John of Fordun's late medieval *Chronica gentis Scotorum* (1385), later continued by Walter Bower as the *Scotichronicon* (1447). From England, I turn to Holinshed's *Chronicles* (first edition 1577; second edition 1587), and for Britain more widely, including Wales, William Camden's *Britannia* (first edition 1586). Finally, from Ireland, I explore Seathrún Céitinn / Geoffrey Keating's *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn* (completed 1634). I will briefly introduce each of these texts in turn before turning to a survey of some ways in which origin stories were used for nationalistic ends in early modern historical writing as a whole.

In the late fourteenth century, the secular cleric known as John of Fordun began compiling the *Chronica gentis Scotorum*, which was intended to be a fully comprehensive narrative of Scottish history. As we have seen, the *Chronica* was a synthesis of several earlier chronicles derived ultimately from a rewriting of Geoffrey of Monmouth from a Scottish perspective. When John of Fordun died (*c.*1385), the *Chronica gentis Scotorum* covered the period from the earliest origins of the Scots up to the death of David I (Dauíd mac Maíl Choluim) in 1153. In the mid-fifteenth century, the *Chronica gentis Scotorum* was continued by Walter Bower, abbot of Inchcolm. Bower's work, known as the *Scotichronicon*, added new material that extended Scotland's history from 1153 up to the death of James I in 1437 whilst also expanding upon John of Fordun's earlier text, such that the prior five books were

Defiance of Time: Antiquarian Writing in Early Modern England (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

[39] See Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early-Modern Europe*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Roger Chartier, *The Cultural Uses of Print in Early Modern Europe*, trans. Lydia B. Cochrane (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989); and Sandra L. Hindman (ed.), *Printing the Written Word: The Social History of Books* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991).

[40] See Donald R. Kelley and David Harris Sacks (eds.), *The Historical Imagination in Early Modern Britain: History, Rhetoric, and Fiction, 1500–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); D.R. Woolf, *Reading History in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Paulina Kewes (ed.), *The Uses of History in Early Modern England* (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 2006); David Matthews and Gordon McMullen (eds.), *Reading the Medieval in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); and Judith Pollmann, *Memory in Early Modern Europe, 1500–1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

increased to sixteen.[41] While much of Fordun's material was ahistorical, concerned with the legendary origins of Scottish prehistory, Bower has nonetheless been judged 'smug and self-serving'[42] and 'a much less competent person than his predecessor' by modern scholars, who have written that Bower 'makes every important occurrence an excuse for a long winded moral discourse'.[43] The discussions in this chapter focus on material from John of Fordun's *Chronica gentis Scotorum*, which contains the narrative of Scotland's legendary origins. This narrative was highly influential on the histories to follow, and became remembered as 'the standard version of Scotland's ancient history'.[44]

Roughly a century later, the London printer Reyner/Reginald Wolfe wished to compile a universal history which would be printed in English. This ambitious project quickly became too overwhelming for one man, and the end result, some decades later, purported to be a comprehensive history of the peoples of Britain and Ireland and was produced by a team which included Raphael Holinshed, William Harrison, Richard Stanihurst, Edmund Campion, Abraham Fleming, John Stow, Francis Thynne, and John Hooker. The final product – which has become known as Holinshed's *Chronicles* – was published in a first edition in 1577 (two volumes) and a second edition in 1587 (three volumes).[45] Holinshed's *Chronicles* consisted of a description and history of England, a description and history of Scotland, and a description and history of Ireland,[46] followed by a separate volume of English history after the

[41] Walter Bower, *Scotichronicon*, ed. and trans. in D.E.R. Watt (gen. ed.), *Walter Bower, Scotichronicon*, 9 vols. (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1987–98). Citations will be from William F. Skene (ed.) and Felix J.H. Skene (trans.), *John of Fordun's Chronicle of the Scottish Nation*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1972).

[42] Roger A. Mason, 'National Identity', in Michael Lynch (ed.), *Oxford Companion to Scottish History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001; repr. 2007), 439.

[43] P. Giles, 'The Earliest Scottish Literature', in A.W. Ward and A.R. Waller (eds.), *The Cambridge History of English Literature, Vol. II: The End of the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1908; repr. 1980), 100–32 at 129. D.E.R. Watt's entry on Bower in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* refers more kindly to Bower's 'didactic aims'.

[44] Colin Kidd, *Subverting Scotland's Past: Scottish Whig Historians and the Creation of an Anglo-British Identity, 1689–c. 1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993; repr. paperback 2003), 18.

[45] Holinshed's *Chronicles* has a complex printing history. In addition to its two editions, passages initially excised by the Privy Council were published in 1723, and a complete reprint of the 1587 edition was published in 1807: *Holinshed's Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland in six volumes* (London, 1807). For more information, see Tim Smith-Laing, 'Note on References to the *Chronicles*', in Kewes, Archer, and Heal (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Holinshed's Chronicles*, xix–xxi. Citations will be taken from the online edition published by the Holinshed Project (http://english.nsms.ox.ac.uk/holinshed/), with references given to the original edition, volume, book, and chapter.

[46] Published as vol. 1 in 1577 and vols 1 and 2 in 1587.

Norman Conquest of 1066.[47] The 'authorship' of individual sections of Holinshed's *Chronicles* is notoriously complex.[48] Nonetheless, the text takes pains to inform readers of its sources. In addition to the medieval and early modern source texts for English history discussed above, the Scottish material in Holinshed's *Chronicles* traced back to Hector Boece's *Scotorum historiae* (1527, which itself relied heavily on the *Chronica gentis Scotorum* and the *Scotichronicon*). In 1536, John Bellenden translated Boece's work from Latin into Scots as the *History and Croniklis of Scotland*, and the Scottish portion of Holinshed's *Chronicles* drew on both Boece's Latin text and Bellenden's Scots translation for its English version of Scottish history. The Irish material stemmed from a much briefer set of notes by Edmund Campion, which were greatly expanded by Richard Stanihurst (the description of Ireland and its history under Henry VIII) and Holinshed (the remaining history). Holinshed's *Chronicles* thus sought to be a comprehensive source for the history of Britain and Ireland. Nonetheless, as we shall see, it was by no means an unbiased one, and nationalistic commentary shaped the narrative of history that this work presented.

Around the same time, William Camden was compiling his own masterpiece, *Britannia*.[49] Initially published in Latin in 1586, the work enjoyed great popularity: subsequent editions (each containing more material than the last) were published in 1587, 1590, 1594, 1600, and 1607, and the work was translated into English by Philemon Holland in 1610.[50] Where the primary focus of Holinshed's *Chronicles* was historical narrative, Camden's *Britannia* was a comprehensive antiquarian achievement.[51] It was a work of chorography, encompassing history, geography, archaeology, and philology while providing a complete overview of the landscape of early modern Britain. Praised for its 'thorough and deeply learned antiquarian approach',[52] Camden's methodology

[47] Published as vol. 2 in 1577 and vol. 3 in 1587.

[48] See Felicity Heal and Henry Summerson, 'The Genesis of the Two Editions', in Kewes, Archer, and Heal (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Holinshed's Chronicles*, 3–20.

[49] For Camden's background, see F.J. Levy, 'The Making of Camden's *Britannia*', *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 26 (1964): 70–97.

[50] Citations are from William Camden, *Britannia (1607)*, The Philological Museum, English translation by Philemon Holland (1610): A hypertext critical edition by Dana F. Sutton, The University of California, Irvine, Posted June 14, 2004, www.philological.bham.ac.uk/cambrit/.

[51] Graham Parry, *The Trophies of Time: English Antiquarians of the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995; repr. 2004, paperback 2007).

[52] John M. Adrian, 'Itineraries, Perambulations, and Surveys: The Intersections of Chorography and Cartography in the Sixteenth Century', in Yvonne Bruce (ed.), *Images of Matter: Essays on British Literature of the Middle Ages and Renaissance* (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2005), 29–46 at 29.

combined the careful compilation of documentary sources with his own firsthand knowledge of ancient artefacts and archaeological sites.[53] *Britannia* has become remembered as a keystone text for early modern antiquarianism, chorography, and philology, one which even at the time of its publication 'had become and would long remain the most respected and influential source for the history of those islands'.[54] Camden's approach was noteworthy not only for its comprehensive nature, but also for his careful evaluation of the quality of his sources. The *Britannia* sheds great light on how earlier historical material was put to use during the early modern period.

Finally, in early seventeenth-century Ireland, the Old English Catholic priest Geoffrey Keating / Seathrún Céitinn wrote his *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn* ('A Foundation of Knowledge about Ireland').[55] Keating completed his *magnum opus* sometime *c.*1634. *Foras Feasa* was immediately popular and was circulated widely in manuscript form, in its original Irish as well as in English and Latin translations, of which some abridged versions were also printed.[56] However, due to the Protestant government's prohibition against Catholic printing, the complete Irish text of *Foras Feasa* was not published in print until the scholarly edition produced by the Irish Text Society in the early twentieth century.[57] *Foras Feasa* was written at the same time as the *Annals of the Four Masters* (*Annála ríoghachta Éireann*, 'Annals of the kingdom of Ireland'), a compilation of earlier annalistic sources up to 1616 produced by a team led by Mícheál Ó Cléirigh and including Cú Choigcríche Ó Cléirigh, Fearfeasa Ó Maol Chonaire, and Cú

[53] On Camden's methodology, see W.H. Herendeen, 'William Camden: Historian, Herald, and Antiquary', *Studies in Philology* 85 (1988): 192–210; William Rockett, 'Historical Topography and British History in Camden's *Britannia*', *Renaissance and Reformation* 14 (1990): 71–80; and Angus Vine, 'Copiousness, Conjecture and Collaboration in William Camden's "Britannia"', *Renaissance Studies* 28 (2014): 225–41.

[54] Blair Worden, 'Ben Jonson among the Historians', in Kevin Sharpe and Peter Lake (eds.), *Culture and Politics in Early Stuart England* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 67–90 at 67.

[55] For more on Keating's life and process of authorship, see Breandán Ó Buachalla, '*Annála ríoghachta Éireann* is *Foras feasa ar Éirinn*: an comhthéacs comhaimseartha', *Studia Hibernica* 22–3 (1982–3): 59–105 and Bernadette Cunningham, *The World of Geoffrey Keating: History, Myth and Religion in Seventeenth-Century Ireland* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000: repr. paperback 2004).

[56] See Marc Caball and Benjamin Hazard, 'Dynamism and Decline: Translating Keating's *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn* in the Seventeenth Century', *Studia Hibernica* 39 (2013): 49–69.

[57] David Comyn and P.S. Dinneen (ed. and trans.), *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn: The History of Ireland by Geoffrey Keating*, 4 vols. (London: Irish Text Society, 1902–14). The text here is cited from the online version of this edition published by CELT: https://celt.ucc.ie//published/G100054/index.html (text) and https://celt.ucc.ie/published/T100054.html (translation), with references given to the pagination of the ITS edition.

Choigríche Ó Duibhgeannáin.[58] Like *Foras Feasa*, the *Annals of the Four Masters* did not appear in print until their modern scholarly edition was published by the Royal Irish Academy in the mid-nineteenth century.[59] While both works underwent a circuitous route to publication in comparison to their counterparts in Britain, Keating's work enjoyed far greater popularity between compilation and publication than the *Annals of the Four Masters*, knowledge of which was largely restricted to antiquarian, scholastic circles.[60] At least four separate English translations of *Foras Feasa* were made in the century after it was written, beginning with Michael Kearney's in 1635, and English translations were printed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the first an expensive folio edition but the second a more affordable pocket version.[61] For these reasons, I have chosen to focus on *Foras Feasa* as a representative example of Irish historical writing which was both written and circulated in the early modern period.

Some general differences are evident between historical writing from the early medieval and early modern periods. One will be immediately apparent to anyone who casts an eye over the respective amounts of space filled by the editions of Gildas and Holinshed on their bookshelf. While medieval authors were perfectly capable of producing voluminous works, it is not a spurious rule of thumb to note that the printing press led to greater ease of reproduction and, consequently, a trend towards longer texts. The printing press also allowed early modern historians to be more deliberately and consistently encyclopaedic in the presentation of their works. As we have seen, medieval authors did not hesitate to cite their sources either. Yet early modern printed histories saw an increased tendency towards visually highlighting the names of sources and quoted material by printing them in a different font (bolded, italicised, enlarged or shrunk, etc.). Such techniques, of course, stemmed ultimately from the design of medieval manuscripts, but the new medium of print enhanced

[58] See Bernadette Cunningham, *The Annals of the Four Masters: Irish History, Kingship and Society in the Early Seventeenth Century* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2010).

[59] John O'Donovan (ed. and trans.), *Annala rioghachta Eireann: Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland, by the Four Masters, from the Earliest Period to the Year 1616*, 7 vols., 2nd edn. (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1856).

[60] Bernadette Cunningham, 'John O'Donovan's Edition of the *Annals of the Four Masters*: An Irish Classic?', in Dirk Van Hulle and Joep Leerssen (eds.), *Editing the Nation's Memory: Textual Scholarship and Nation-Building in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008), 129–50.

[61] Bernadette Cunningham, 'Transmission and Translation of Medieval Irish Sources in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries', in R.J.W. Evans and Guy P. Marchal (eds.), *The Uses of the Middle Ages in Modern European States: History, Nationhood, and the Search for Origins* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 7–17.

the ease with which such apparatuses – such as indices of manuscripts consulted or authors cited – could be included.

As we have seen, late medieval and early modern historians had access to a wide range of source material from which to compile their narratives. Their sources included classical, late antique, early medieval, and late medieval texts, and the works which have formed the primary focus of this study were well represented in the bibliographies of later authors. The *Chronica gentis Scotorum* drew on the works of Gildas, Bede, the *Historia Brittonum*, and some version of the *Lebor Gabála*, in addition to Geoffrey of Monmouth and numerous later chronicles, many of which now only survive via their incorporation into the *Chronica* itself.[62] As noted earlier, Holinshed's *Chronicles* was prefaced by a 182-item-long list containing 'The names of the Authours from whome this Historie of England is collected', among whom were Gildas, Bede, Nennius, and Geoffrey of Monmouth.[63] Early material was also frequently consulted secondhand when an author did not have access to the source itself, as when 'Holinshed's account of the country's [Ireland's] "First Inhabitants", for example, is based upon Cambrensis's somewhat garbled redaction of the eleventh-century *Lebor Gabála Érenn*'.[64] Camden was very familiar indeed with the works of Gildas, Bede, 'Nennius', and Geoffrey of Monmouth, among innumerable others, quoting them at length and engaging thoughtfully with their narratives of the past. His care in compiling and evaluating as extensive a body of source material as possible has been commented upon often, and it can be nicely illustrated by the growth of his section on Ireland. Initially fairly sparse, it was substantially revised and expanded over the course of the *Britannia*'s publication history, increasing in both length and accuracy with each new edition.[65] Finally, Keating was likewise both familiar and engaged with the works of Gildas, Bede, 'Nennius', and Geoffrey of Monmouth, as well as, of course, the *Lebor Gabála*. Late medieval and early modern authors had a rich body of source material to consult, and in general they were eager to demonstrate their expertise by indicating that they were familiar with as much of it as they could.

[62] See Watt (gen. ed.), *Scotichronicon*; Skene and Skene (trans.), *John of Fordun's Chronicle of the Scottish Nation*; Goldstein, *The Matter of Scotland*; and Broun, *Scottish Independence and the Idea of Britain*.

[63] Holinshed's *Chronicles* (1577), vol. 1, 'The names of the Authours from whome this Historie of England is collected'.

[64] Richard A. McCabe, 'Making History: Holinshed's Irish Chronicles, 1577 and 1587', in Kewes, Archer, and Heal (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Holinshed's Chronicles*, 51–67 at 53.

[65] Rudolf B. Gottfried, 'The Early Development of the Section on Ireland in Camden's *Britannia*', *ELH* 10 (1943): 117–30.

Yet early modern historians were not hesitant to make their opinions of the works they consulted known to their audiences. Early modern historical writing was characterised by an awareness of the 'modernity' of contemporary times and their perceived enlightenment compared to what had come before. As Jennifer Summit writes (speaking of Camden in particular, but applicable to others), 'the authority of Camden's historiography comes not from the primary source but from the distance he erects between that source and the historian who frames it'.[66] When it came to the past, early modern historians walked a fine line between homage and superiority. They respected the past, and narratives of it, as they sought to extend the pedigrees of their modern nations as far back as possible in order to enhance their legitimacy and glory. Yet at the same time, as we shall see, these authors also sought to demonstrate the superiority of the present moment through a rigorous evaluation of their sources, with harsh judgement cast upon those found lacking. Early modern histories – like medieval ones – shed more light on their own age than they do upon the past which they seek to present. In this later period, we can see the past put to increasingly nationalistic purposes. Early modern historical works evince two sides of the same coin, nationalism and xenophobia, as they sought to promote pride in one's own country, often at the expense of others.

Part IV: Nationalism and Xenophobia

It has long been recognised that the writing of historical works in the early modern period was strongly tied to the rise of nationalism. The authors who wrote these texts turned to the past in order to promote the glory of their own nations in the present moment. As Brendan Bradshaw writes, Geoffrey Keating 'designed his history to provide the emerging Irish nation with that essential credential of nationhood to the seventeenth-century way of thinking, an origin legend that located the nation's beginnings venerably far back in antiquity'.[67] John of Fordun's *Chronica gentis Scotorum* is the first surviving text in a line of Scottish histories which 'were, as many historians of medieval Scotland argue, an attempt to consolidate an already existing Scottish self-consciousness with the Scottish claim for independence after the

[66] Jennifer Summit, *Memory's Library: Medieval Books in Early Modern England* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 182.

[67] Bradshaw, *'And so began the Irish Nation'*, 79. See also Peter McQuillan, '"Nation" as Word and Concept in Seventeenth-Century Irish', *Eolas: The Journal of the American Society of Irish Medieval Studies* 8 (2015): 71–88.

Wars of Independence'.[68] Richard Helgerson has characterised Camden's *Britannia* as the starting point of 'the nationalist impulse with which the whole chorographic enterprise began',[69] and it is recognised that 'with each new edition the *Britannia* further develops its patriotic function as a text promoting national identity'.[70] Likewise, it has been understood that Holinshed's *Chronicles* 'give voice to the new nationalist discourse of the land'.[71] The authors of these and other early modern historical works, then, participated in a widespread discourse of heightened national awareness. In their works, this rhetoric was primarily expressed in two ways: pride in one's own nation and people and racist and xenophobic denigration of others.

Camden's preface to his *Britannia* presents a classic example of such inward-looking nationalism. His pride in his country is not only expressed profusely, but also characterised as the rationale behind the production of the *Britannia* itself. Camden describes how, when initially confronted with the enormity of his task, 'a proposito tamen, quantum rei difficultas me deterruit, tantum ad id ipsum aggrediendum charissimae patriae gloria excitavit' (neverthelesse how much the difficultie discouraged me from it, so much the glory of my country encouraged me to undertake it).[72] He speaks further of 'patriae charitas, quae omnes omnium charitates complectitur, Britannici nominis gloria' (the love of my Country which compriseth all love in it, and hath endeared me to unto it, the glory of the British name) and of 'fide syncere antiqua ad patriam illustrandam elaboratum est' (sincere antique faithfulnesse to the glory of God and my countrie).[73] Camden invokes his and his readers' 'patriae communis charitas, et Britannici nominis dignitas' (common love of our common mother our native Country, the ancient honour of the British name).[74] It is clear from the outset that national pride is presented as a significant part of the story of how Camden's *Britannia* came into existence.

Similar strains of national pride are also evident in the works of other authors. The preface to Holinshed's *Chronicles* reminds readers 'not to forget their natiue coũtreis praiſe (vvhich is theyr dutie) the encourage|

[68] Atsuko Ichijo, *Scottish Nationalism and the Idea of Europe* (London: Routledge, 2004), 30.
[69] Richard Helgerson, *Forms of Nationhood: The Elizabethan Writing of England* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992; repr. paperback 1994), 138.
[70] Claus Uhlig, 'National Historiography and Cultural Identity: The Example of the English Renaissance', in Herbert Grabes (ed.), *Writing the Early Modern English Nation: The Transformation of National Identity in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century England* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001), 89–108 at 101.
[71] Samantha Frénée-Hutchins, *Boudica's Odyssey in Early Modern England* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014; repr. Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 31.
[72] Camden, *Britannia* (1607), trans. Holland (1610), 'Preface'.
[73] Camden, *Britannia* (1607), trans. Holland (1610), 'Preface'.
[74] Camden, *Britannia* (1607), trans. Holland (1610), 'Preface'.

ment of theyr vvorthie coun|trie men'.[75] Within the *Chronicles*, readers are told, 'herevvith the vvorthie exploytes of our countrey men ſo many'.[76] Likewise, in the preface to *Foras Feasa*, Keating praises the character of the Irish people at length, concluding, 'ionnus nach féadtar go fírinneach a rádh go raibhe lucht a s ruighthe i bhféile nó i n-eineach 'san Eoraip riamh do réir a gcumais féin i gcomhaimsir dhóibh' (insomuch that it cannot truthfully be said that there ever existed in Europe folk who surpassed them, in their own time, in generosity or in hospitality according to their ability).[77] In these texts, then, we can see the writers of early modern historical works drawing connections between national history and national honour. The deeds of past countrymen – and the character of a people – are viewed as a source of pride in the present moment. This love of country is also invoked as a motivating factor behind the creation of a text to its audience.

Of course, nationalistic pride has always carried with it a very dark side. Racism and xenophobia are rampant within early modern historical works, whose authors also sought to promote the reputation of their own nations and peoples through the denigration of others. As Igor Djordjevic writes, 'throughout the early modern period xenophobia and oppositional self-definition remained staples of nationalism', wherein 'insularity and a fierce loyalty to Crown and Country were also vital components of early modern English nationalism, but xenophobic "othering" was probably its most prominent trait'.[78] The expression of such attitudes in early modern histories was depressingly commonplace. Holinshed's *Chronicles* are rife with examples. Speaking of the conversion to Christianity of Scottish tribes, the *Chronicles* records:

> Certes this prosperous attempt passed all mens expe|ctation, for that these nations were in those daies re|puted wild, sauage, and more vnfaithfull and craftie than well-minded people (as the wild Irish are in my time) and such were they (to saie the truth) in déed, as nei|ther the sugred courtesie, nor sharpe swords of the Ro|mans could mollifie or restraine from their naturall furie, or bring to anie good order. For this cause also in the end, the Romane emperours did vtterlie cast them off as an vnprofitable, brutish, & vntameable nation, and by an huge wall herafter to be described, separated that rude companie from the more mild and ciuill portion.[79]

This passage manages to disparage both the ancient Scottish and the modern Irish peoples in its characterisation of the Scottish 'tribes'

[75] Holinshed's *Chronicles* (1577), vol. 1, 'The Preface to the Reader'.
[76] Holinshed's *Chronicles* (1577), vol. 1, 'The Preface to the Reader'.
[77] Keating, *Foras Feasa*, vol. I, 4–7.
[78] Igor Djordjevic, *Holinshed's Nation: Ideals, Memory, and Practical Policy in the Chronicles* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010; repr. Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 140.
[79] Holinshed's *Chronicles* (1587), vol. 1, bk. 1, ch. 9.

(speaking particularly of the Picts) as wild barbarians, whom the Irish of the author's time still resemble. Conversely, Rome is portrayed as the height of civilised society, which must be protected from the 'barbarians' to the north by the erection of a wall. Such attitudes are only reaffirmed in the histories and descriptions of Scotland and Ireland within Holinshed's *Chronicles*. In the history of Scotland, that nation is described as the place 'where the Scottes be|ing a rude Nation, wilde and ſauage, inhabi|ted a barraine Countrey, full of roughe and fruitleſſe mountaynes, delyting therto in nothing but in the ſlaughter of men and beaſtes'.[80] The *Chronicles* here equate the land and people: lowland Britain (and its inhabitants) are peaceful, fertile, and pleasant, unlike the rough and barbarous land and people of the Scottish highlands.

Similarly racist prejudice against the Irish is to be found in the 'Treatiſe contayning a playne and perfect Deſcription of Irelande' authored by Richard Stanihurst, which is notorious for its prejudice against those who lived beyond the Pale (the portion of Ireland directly governed by England) – particularly in a chapter entitled 'the diſpoſition and maners of the meere Iriſh, commonly called the wyld Iriſhe'. Stanihurst is careful to distinguish between (civilized, English, Protestant) inhabitants of the Pale and the (barbarous, Irish, Catholic) Gaelic-speakers outside of it, warning his readers:

> Before I attempt the vnfoldyng of the ma|ners of the méere Iriſh, I thinke it expedi|ent, to forewarne thée reader, not to impute a|ny barbarous cuſtome that ſhall be here layde downe, to the citizens, towneſmen, and the in|habitants of the engliſh pale, in that they differ little or nothyng from the auncient cuſtomes and diſpoſitions of their progenitors, the En|gliſh and Walſhmen, beyng therfore as mor|tally behated of ye Iriſh, as thoſe that are borne in England.[81]

Stanihurst carries on to attribute a number of unflattering characteristics to the 'wyld Iriſhe' which are intended to portray them as unevolved barbarians, distinct from civilized society: 'the lewder sorte, both clearkes and lay men are sensuall & ouer loose and liuyng', 'they follow the dead corpes to the graue wt howlyng and barbarous', 'gréedy of prayſe they be, and fearefull of diſ|honor', 'water creſſes, which they terme ſhamrocks, rootes and other herbes they féede vpon, ote|meale and butter they cramme together, they drinke whey, mylke, and biefe brothe', and 'fleſhe they deuour without bread, and that halfe raw'.[82] Nor is such prejudice limited to the Irish, as elsewhere in the history of Ireland, the

[80] Holinshed's *Chronicles* (1577), vol. 2, bk. 2, 'The Historie of Scotland'.
[81] Holinshed's *Chronicles* (1577), vol. 3, bk. 1, ch. 8.
[82] Holinshed's *Chronicles* (1577), vol. 3, bk. 1, ch. 8.

Scots are characterised as 'a liuely, cruell, vnquiet, an|cient and victorious people'.[83]

John of Fordun's *Chronica gentis Scotorum* displays the same prejudices in its famous distinction between highland and lowland Scots.[84] He writes:

Mores autem Scotorum secundum diversitatem linguarum variantur; duabus enim utuntur linguis, Scotia, videlicet, et Theuthonica, cujus linguae gens maritimas possidet et planas regiones, Scoticae vero linguae montanas inhabitat et insulas ulteriores. Maritima quoque domestica gens est et culta, fida, patiens et urbana, vestitu siquidem honesta, civilis atque pacifica, circa cultum divinum devota, sed et obviandis hostium injuriis semper prona. Insulana vero sive montana, ferina gens est et indomita, rudis, et immorigerata, raptu capax, otium diligens, ingenio docilis et callida, forma spectabilis, sed amictu deformis, populo quidem Anglorum et linguae, sed et propriae nationi, propter linguarum diversitatem, infesta, jugiter et crudelis. Regi tamen et regno fidelis et obediens, necnon faciliter legibus subdita, si regatur.

(The manners and customs of the Scots vary with the diversity of their speech. For two languages are spoken amongst them, the Scottish and the Teutonic; the latter of which is the language of those who occupy the seaboard and plains, while the race of Scottish speech inhabits the highlands and outlying islands. The people of the coast are of domestic and civilized habits, trusty, patient, and urbane, decent in their attire, affable, and peaceful, devout in Divine worship, yet always prone to resist a wrong at the hands of their enemies. The highlanders and people of the islands, on the other hand, are a savage and untamed nation, rude and independent, given to rapine, ease-loving, of a docile and warm disposition, comely in person, but unsightly in dress, hostile to the English people and language, and, owing to diversity of speech, even to their own nation, and exceedingly cruel. They are, however, faithful and obedient to their king and country, and easily made to submit to law, if properly governed.)[85]

Even a Scottish history, at the forefront of incipient Scottish nationalism, draws distinctions between the 'barbarous' and 'civilised' inhabitants of its own nation. As was also the case with Stanihurst, the English language is here too used as a marker of civilisation and modernity in contrast to the 'savageness' of Gaelic. As Colin Kidd writes, 'Fordun represents an emerging and undefined Lowland consciousness which included a strong antipathy to the Highlands, yet was nevertheless too vague and

[83] Holinshed's *Chronicles* (1577), vol. 3, bk. 2, 'The Historie of Irelande'.

[84] For discussion and contextualisation of this passage, see Martin MacGregor, 'Gaelic Barbarity and Scottish Identity in the Later Middle Ages'; Dauvit Broun, 'Attitudes of *Gall* to *Gaedhel* in Scotland before John of Fordun'; and Stephen Boardman, 'The Gaelic World and the Early Stewart Court', in Dauvit Broun and Martin MacGregor (eds.), *Mìorun Mòr nan Gall, 'The Great Ill-Will of the Lowlander'? Lowland Perceptions of the Highlands, Medieval and Modern* (Glasgow: Centre for Scottish and Celtic Studies, University of Glasgow, 2007), 7–48, 49–82, and 83–109, respectively.

[85] John of Fordun, *Chronica gentis Scotorum*, vol. I, bk. II, ch. IX.

tentative to displace the national myth of the Scots as the heirs of Dalriada.'[86]

The same prejudiced distinctions between so-called 'barbarous' and 'civilised' peoples were to be found in Camden's *Britannia* as well. In the introduction to his description of Ireland, Camden writes:

> Quod vero male nonnunquam audit, ab incolis est, qui alicubi sunt incultiores, qui mira naturae diversitate et inertiam amant et quietem oderunt, quique in praeproperam Venerum sunt effusiores.
>
> (Now in that otherwhiles there goeth of it an ill name, it is for that the inhabitants are in some places wilde and very uncivill, who, in a mervailous contrariety of nature, both love idlenesse and withall hate quietnes; who also are immoderately given to fleshly lust, and that over-soone.)[87]

Moreover, as Daniel Huws remarks, the *Britannia* was also 'a work read by generations of Welsh scholars with a mixture of admiration and an irritation which arose from a perceived anti-Welsh prejudice'.[88]

Early modern histories, then, were written with a strong undercurrent of nationalism. Authors displayed pride in their nation and its people, quite often at the expense of others. Such nationalistic motivations extended beyond the present day. In early modern histories, the past became a tool which could be weaponised for present-day concerns. Authors were eager to stress the antiquity and validity of their own historical traditions at the same time as they sought to cast doubt on others'. In early modern histories, we can see origin legends – and the earlier source texts which contained them – being put to use in the present day. Chroniclers sought to defend the antiquity of their own traditions whilst questioning the validity of others. In the early modern period, origin legends were simultaneously a source of national pride and evidence that could be used to question the historical veracity of a neighbouring nation's traditions.

Part V: Defending the Validity of a Nation's Own Past

In early modern historical works, we can see origin legends becoming a source of nationalistic pride. One way in which modern nations could be both defined and defended was through their antiquity and continuity. As early modern historians sought to prove that the history of their nation had continued unbroken for thousands of years, origin legends became

[86] Colin Kidd, *British Identities before Nationalism: Ethnicity and Nationhood in the Atlantic World, 1600–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999; repr. 2004), 124.
[87] Camden, *Britannia* (1607), trans. Holland (1610), 'Ireland'.
[88] Daniel Huws, *Medieval Welsh Manuscripts* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), 291.

valuable evidence. As Claus Uhlig notes, speaking here of England, modern political positions were often supported by mustering the evidence of the past:

> Not only did Tudor rule, which was still relatively recent, have to be supported, but the Anglican state church also had to be defended against the Catholic powers on the Continent. In both cases it was a question of legitimising their existence by the time-honoured method of claiming venerable descent – not only that of the monarchy but also that of the English church acting as warden of Christianity in opposition to the usurpation of Christendom by the presumptuous 'bishop of Rome'.[89]

Yet in the early modern period, which was proud of its burgeoning rational, scientific awareness,[90] there existed a simultaneous unease that led to some origin legends being vociferously defended – both against the factual inaccuracies (as their authors understood them) heaped upon them by rivals and against obvious charges of falsehood which might be occasioned by the inclusion of some of their more fantastical elements. Sometimes, such defences seemed urgent enough that they formed the overwhelming rationale for the composition of a work. For example, as Bradshaw writes, 'as announced in his Introduction, Céitinn proposed to defend the reputation of the Gaeil against the calumnies circulating in Europe about them since medieval times and to which the colonial community had clung tenaciously to justify the conquest of Ireland by their forebears'.[91] Other authors defensively upheld their sources at moments of perceived weakness, such as references to giants or other manifestly fantastical elements, obvious anachronisms or confusion in dating, or contradictory information across multiple sources. In early modern historical works, origin legends were part of a process in which the antiquity of a nation's past became evidence for its identity and value in the present. At the same time as early modern texts clearly valued the pedigree of the medieval sources they relied upon, they evince a frequent sense of defensiveness about the quality of those sources. Origin legends were viewed as both a point of pride and a potential liability.

Early modern historical works present the antiquity and continuity of a nation's past as valuable commodities in the present day. In the preface

[89] Uhlig, 'National Historiography and Cultural Identity', 100–1.
[90] See Mary Baine Campbell, *Wonder & Science: Imagining Worlds in Early Modern Europe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999); Juliet Cummins and David Burchell (eds.), *Science, Literature and Rhetoric in Early Modern England* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2007, repr. Abingdon: Routledge, 2016); and Giulia Giannini and Mordechai Feingold (eds.), *The Institutionalization of Science in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2020).
[91] Bradshaw, *'And so began the Irish Nation'*, 80.

to his *Britannia*, Camden famously records the motivation behind the production of his work: 'ut Britanniae antiquitatem et suae antiquitati Britanniam restituerem' (that I would restore antiquity to Britaine, and Britaine to his antiquity).[92] Britain's past, in other words, becomes a defining feature of its present identity. John of Fordun's *Chronica gentis Scotorum* likewise begins by noting the antiquity of both the Scottish nation and the sources that demonstrate it:

Ex variis quippe veterum scriptis chronographorum colligitur, quod gentis antiquissimae natio Scotorum a Graecis et Egyptiorum reliquiis, ceteris mari rubro cum rege submersis, primum ceperat exordium.

(We gather from various writings of old chroniclers that the nation of the Scots, one of the most ancient descent, sprang from the Greeks, and from the Egyptians who survived the overthrow of their fellow-countrymen and king in the Red Sea.)[93]

He is also eager to emphasise the antiquity of the ties between the Scots and their land, writing:

Borealis itaque pars ab antiquo Scotis inculta dicebatur Scocia, quae nunc etiam Deo protegente suum est regnum principale. Habent etiam Scoti multas insulas numero centum vel eo amplius, per eos ab antiquis temporibus possessas . . .

(Its northern portion, in like manner, being inhabited by Scots from an early period, was called Scotia; and it is now, by the help of God, the chief kingdom of the island. The Scots possess numerous islands, a hundred or more, which have belonged to them from ancient times . . .)[94]

Here, we see the identity of the modern Scottish nation tied to the antiquity of their collective history and presence on the landscape. The longevity of Scottish history is cast as a source of national honour – as has been remarked, the *Chronica gentis Scotorum* also displays 'pride in an early conversion of the Scots to Christianity'.[95]

In its care to emphasise that the ultimate origins of the Scots stem from ancient Greece and Egypt, the *Chronica gentis Scotorum* also exhibits a concern for the antiquity of Scottish origins which occurs throughout these early modern historical works. As we have seen in the early medieval origin material discussed above, insular origin stories came to include genealogical and historical ties to the rest of the known world as an important component. The early modern period also valued these connections. Camden's *Britannia* emphasised Britain's

[92] Camden, *Britannia* (1607), trans. Holland (1610), 'Preface'.
[93] John of Fordun, *Chronica gentis Scotorum*, vol. I, bk. I, ch. I.
[94] John of Fordun, *Chronica gentis Scotorum*, vol. I, bk. I, ch. VI.
[95] Kidd, *Subverting Scotland's Past*, 18.

identity as part of the Roman empire as a justification for its people's 'Roman' origins:

Haec dum ego commenter de Romanum in Britannia imperio quod ad quadringentisimum septuagesimum sextum plus minus annum, ut modo dixi, pertigit, commentor, et subinde mecum repeto quot tanto tempore Romanorum coloniae huc deductae, quot milites huc Roma in praesidia continuo transmissi, quot ad res suas vel imperii agendas hunc submissi, qui cum Britannis connubiis coniuncti hic et sedes fixerunt, et sobolem susceperunt, *ubicunque*, inquit Seneca, *vicit Romanus, habitat*, saepenumermo animum subiit quod Britanni per hos Romanos qui a Troianis proculdubio prognati se in stirpem Troianam verius inferant quam vel Averni qui *sanguine ab Iliaco* Romanorum se fratres dixere, vel Mamertini, Hedui, et caeteri qui fabulosa origine se Troianis imputavere. Communis illa mater enim, ut inquit ille, Roma, cives vocavit, *Quos domuit nexuque pio longinqua revinxit*. Et par est credamus Britannos et Romanos tot seculis in unam gentem quasi laeta insitione coaluisse, cum Ubii in Germania anno vicesimo octavo post Coloniam deductam de Romanis colonis responderint, *Deductis olim et nobiscum per connubium sociatis, quique mox provenere, haec patria est. Nec vos adeo iniquos existemus, ut interfici a nobis parentes, frateres, liberos nostros velitis*. Si Ubii et Romani tantillo tempore inter se parentes, fratres et liberi fuerunt, quid censeamus de Britannis et Romanis tot annis inter se consociatis? Quid etiam de Burgundis dicamus, qui quod sanguinem cum Romanis miscuissent dum Romanorum provincias paulisper insedissent, se sobolem Romanam appellarunt, ut non denuo repetam quod supra dixi, insulam hanc Romaniam, et Insulam Romanam fuisse appellatam?

(In writing of these matters concerning the Romanes government in Britaine, which continued (as I said) CCCCLXXVI yeeres, or much thereabout, whiles I consider and thinke otherwise [sometimes] with my selfe, how many Colonies of Romans were in so long a time brought hither, how many souldiers continually transported over hither from Rome to lie in garrison, how many sent hither to negotiate either their own busines, or the affaires of the Empire, who joyning in mariage with Britans, both planted themselves, and also begat children here (for *wheresoever the Romans winneth*, saith Seneca, *there he woneth, and inhabiteth*), I enter of times into this cogitation, that Britans may more truley ingresse [engraft] themselves into the Trojanes stocke by these Romanes, who are descended from Trojans, than either the Averni, who drawing their descent from Ilian bloud, have named themselves the Romans brethren; or the Marmertines, Hedui, and the rest, who grounding upon a fabulous originall, have fathered themselves upon the Trojans. For, Rome, that common Mother (as he saith), called those her Citizens, *Whom she subdued, and by a gratious knot / United people farre dissite [distant] and remote.* And meet it is we should beleeve, that the Britans and Romans in so many ages, by a blessed and joyfull mutuall ingraffing, as it were, have growen into one stocke and nation: seeing that the Ubii in Germanie within 28 yeeres after that a Colonie was planted, where now Colein is, made answere as touching the Roman Inhabitants there, in this wise: *this is the naturall Countrey, as well to those that being conveied hither in times past, are conjoyned with us by mariages, as to their off-spring. Neither can we thinke you so unreasonable, as to wish us for to kill our parents, brethren, and children*. If the Ubii and Romans in so small a time

became parents, brethren, and children one to another, what should we judge of Britans and Romans linked and conjoyned for many yeeres together? What also may we say of the Burgundians, who for that they mingled their bloud with the Romans, whiles they held for a small time the Romans Provinces, called themselves a Roman off-spring, not to rehearse againe what I have said before, that this Island hath beene named Romania and *Insula Romana*, that is, The Roman Isle?)[96]

Camden here points to intermarriage between Britons and Romans – which, as we have seen, is so important in the development of insular origin legends – as grounds for considering Britain to be 'Roman' in origin, thanks to its status as part of the Roman empire. This passage is also an interesting meditation on what makes a people a people: Britons can claim Roman descent through intermarriage, while Romans can become British by living in Britain.

Interestingly, Camden's emphasis on Roman (and other classical) origins leads to his very dismissive rejection of any suggestion that the Britons may have been indigenous inhabitants of the island. He speaks scornfully of those earlier writers 'hominesque blitterarum et fungorum instar e terra in principio germinasse suspicati sunt' (who also imagined that men in the beginning sprang out of the earth, like unto mushromes and todstooles).[97] Rather, he writes, the Bible makes perfectly clear that the sons of Noah repopulated the earth after the flood, and: 'Ad nostam etiam insulam, disseminatis paulatim familiis, ex eorum posteris quosdam pervenisse cum ipsa ratio, tum Theophili Antiocheni autoritas comprobat' (That some of their posteritie came to this Ile after the families were by little and little spred and dispersed abroad, both reason it selfe, and also the authority of Theophilus Antiochenus, doe jointly proove).[98] Sources that Camden disagrees with can be dismissively rejected as unscientific. An alternative, acceptable origin story to the (clearly ludicrous, to Camden's mind) suggestion that 'men in the beginning sprang out of the earth, like unto mushromes and todstooles' is found in biblical genealogy, which creates a satisfactory defence for the origin story of his choosing. In his evaluation of his sources, we can see the process through which Camden has selected one version of British origins while rejecting others to create the narrative he wishes to present, namely, that Britain's identity as a nation is by definition entwined with its ancient Roman past.

At other times, however, an author's desire to rely upon sources including details which clearly ventured into the realm of the fantastic resulted in some rather blatant special pleading. In a chapter questioning 'whether

[96] Camden, *Britannia* (1607), trans. Holland (1610), 'Romans in Britain'.
[97] Camden, *Britannia* (1607), trans. Holland (1610), 'Britaine'.
[98] Camden, *Britannia* (1607), trans. Holland (1610), 'Britaine'.

it be likely that there were euer any Gyaunts inhabiting in this Iſle or not', Holinshed's *Chronicles* argues:

> Beſides theſe aforeſayde nations, which haue crept as you haue hearde into our Iſlande, we reade of ſundry Gyaunts that ſhoulde inhabite here, which report as it is not altogither incredible, ſith the poſterities of diuers princes were called by ye name: ſo vnto ſome mens eares it ſéemeth ſo ſtraunge a rehearſall, that for the ſame onely they ſu|ſpect the credite of our whole hyſtorie and reiect it as a fable, vnwoorthy to be read.[99]

The *Chronicles* argues against dismissing an entire history on account of its occasional fantastic elements, stating: 'For this cauſe therefore I haue nowe taken vpon me to make thys briefe diſcourſe inſuing, therby to prooue, that the opiniõ of Gyaunts is not altogether grounded vpon vayne & fa|bulous narrations, inuented only to delite the eates of the hearer ... with the report of mar|veilous things.'[100] Holinshed defends the use of sources mentioning giants with several points: princes used to be called giants, as did men 'giant' in deed; there is biblical discussion of the existence of giants in previous times; and numerous giant bones and skeletons have been discovered in the present day. Here, then, we can witness the methodology used to defend the inclusion of a questionable narrative of one's own past.

(It must, however, be said that the overwhelming impression left by this passage is of a man who knows better but sheepishly doubles down on a favoured source anyway. Laura Ashe has pointed out that 'all readers of Holinshed's *Chronicles*' own account of early history will recognize the pattern visible here, the critical dismissal of *fabulae* immediately followed by a patently implausible tall story'.[101] And as Henry Summerson has noted,

> Geoffrey of Monmouth ended his 'History' in 689 with the death in Rome of the British King Cadwallader. He had sowed chronological confusion to the last, and it must have been with relief that Holinshed now began to rely on those 'autentike writers' with whom Geoffrey had so often been at variance, and from whom he could henceforward construct a single narrative rather than two imperfectly interlocking ones.[102])

Elsewhere, Holinshed turns to nationalism when defending his reliance upon dubious sources – that is, he argues that the nationalistic loyalties of foreign historians have caused them to ignore the 'truth' of a given

[99] Holinshed's *Chronicles* (1577), vol. 1, bk. 1, ch. 4.
[100] Holinshed's *Chronicles* (1577), vol. 1, bk. 1, ch. 4.
[101] Laura Ashe, 'Holinshed and Mythical History', in Kewes, Archer, and Heal (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Holinshed's Chronicles*, 153–69 at 155.
[102] Summerson, 'Sources: 1577', 65.

narrative and instead skew the story in their own favour. Addressing the debate over whether or not Brutus was indeed the historical founder of Britain, he writes,

but now wheras by reaſon of the vncertayn | tie in the Roman authors themſelues, touching the lyne of Aeneas, ſome forein writers haue ei | ther with ſlender argumente, or elſe verie arro | gantly without any grounded reſon ſhewed, ta | ken vpon them to denye that there was any ſuch Italyan Brutus, lineally cõming from Aeneas the Troian, of whom the race of the Britiſh na | tion that poſſeſſed this Iſle ſhould proceede.[103]

In other words, denying that Brutus was the founder of Britain is an act only undertaken by 'arrogant' foreign writers. In defending his own position, Holinshed turns here to the justification of the majority vote: more sources include Brutus than not, therefore the Brutus story must be true. John of Fordun uses the same technique when deciding between competing versions of history, in which the weight of numbers is marshalled as evidence to defend a chosen narrative. Discussing Bartholomaeus Anglicus's *De proprietatibus rerum*, which depicts the Picts and Scots as having arrived in Scotland together, John of Fordun writes, 'huic vero nulla favet quam legebam historia' (no history that I have read, however, favours this view).[104] Likewise, discussing Ireland, he notes: 'Januensis autem ponit Hyberniam ab hyeme dirivatam eo quod ibi praecipue fit hyemps dura. Aliter tamen scripserunt omnes historici, qui mentionem faciunt hujus insulae' (Januensis, it is true, lays it down that Hibernia is derived from Hiems, because the winter is there particularly severe. All the historians, however, who make mention of this island, have written otherwise).[105] Authors of early modern histories were aware of contradictions in their sources, but had a variety of techniques at hand with which to defend the validity of their chosen narratives.

Perhaps nowhere is this more true than Keating's *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn*. As Keating explains in the introductory preface to his text, its entire raison d'être is a defence of Irish history against (as he sees it) the falsehoods written by outsiders. *Foras Feasa* begins by protesting,

Óir ní fhuil stáraidhe ó shoin i leith d'á scríobhann uirre nach ag iarraidh lochta agus toibhéime do thabhairt do Shean-Ghallaibh agus do Ghaedealaibh bhíd.

(For there is no historian of all those who have written on Ireland from that epoch that has not continuously sought to cast reproach and blame both on the old foreign settlers and on the native Irish.)[106]

[103] Holinshed's *Chronicles* (1577), vol. 1, bk. 4 (Historie of Englande), ch. 9 (Brvte).
[104] John of Fordun, *Chronica gentis Scotorum*, vol. I, bk. I, ch. XXXV.
[105] John of Fordun, *Chronica gentis Scotorum*, vol. I, bk. I, ch. XVIII.
[106] Keating, *Foras Feasa*, vol. I, 2–3.

Keating positions his text as the sole truthful narrative of Ireland's past. Like Holinshed, Keating blames the 'unfairness' of foreign authors for constructing what are, in his view, false narratives of history. He writes,

má atá, iomorro, go moltar an fonn leis gach stáraidhe d'á scríobhann ar Éirinn, díommoltar an fhoireann leis gach Nua-Ghall-stáraidhe d'á scríobhann uirre, agus is leis sin do gríosadh mise do chum na stáire seo do scríobhadh ar Éireannchaibh, ar mhéid na truaighe do ghabh mé fa'n eugcóir fhollusaigh do-ghníthear orra leó.

(if, indeed it be that the soil is commended by every historian who writes on Ireland, the race is dispraised by every new foreign historian who writes about it, and it is by that I was incited to write this history concerning the Irish, owing to the extent of the pity I felt at the manifest injustice which is done to them by those writers.)[107]

In defence of Ireland's history, Keating references a proper methodology necessary to access the 'truth' of history and – like other authors we have seen – reminds his audience of the antiquity of Ireland's history, inhabited by the native Irish for 3000 years and the old foreigners for 400. Keating also reminds his audience that gaps in the histories of these 'foreign authors' when it comes to information about their own nations' pasts should make them doubly suspect in relating truthful information about Ireland:

Óir atá Samuel Daniel, Gildas, Rider, agus Nennius, agus mórán d'úghdaraibh eile do scríobh stáir na Breatan Móire, ag a admháil gurab neamh-chruinn an seanchus atá aca féin ar dhálaibh seanda na Breatan, do bhrígh go rugadar Rómhánaigh agus Sacsanaigh a seanchus agus a sein-scríbhne uatha; ionnus nach bí aca acht amus nó baramhail do thabhairt do dh laibh seanda na Breatan rés na Sacsanaibh agus rés na Rómhánchaibh: agus, uime sin, adeir Camden foghlamtha féin nach feas dó créad ó'n abharthar Britannia re Breatain, acht a bharamhail do thabhairt mar gach fear. Adeir fós nach feas dó ca ham tángadar na Picti d'áitiughadh na taoibhe tuaithe do'n Bhreatain Mhóir; agus mar go rabhadar mórán do dhálaibh seanda na Breatan Móire i n-a bhfoilcheas air, níor bh'iongnadh a mbeith nídh budh mhó 'na bhfoilcheas ar Hanmer, agus foilcheas budh ro-mhó ioná sin do bheith air i sean-dálaibh Éireann: agus, d'á réir sin, ní baránta inchreidthe é fá rígh Lochlann do bheith 'na rígh Éireann re linn beirthe Chríost.

(For Samuel Daniel, Gildas, Rider, and Nennius, and many other authors who have written the history of Great Britain, acknowledge that the old account they have themselves on the ancient condition of Britain was inexact, because the Romans and Saxons deprived them of their records and their ancient texts; insomuch that they had but a conjecture or an opinion to offer concerning the ancient affairs of Britain before the Saxons and the Romans: and, therefore, the learned Camden himself says that he knew not whence it was that Britain was

[107] Keating, *Foras Feasa*, vol. I, 76–7.

called Britannia, but to give his opinion like any man. He says also that he did not know when the Picts came to inhabit the northern part of Great Britain; and since there were many of the ancient transactions of Great Britain obscure to him, it was no wonder their being still more obscure to Hanmer, and that there should be greater obscurity than that in his case concerning the ancient affairs of Ireland: and, accordingly, he is not a trustworthy warrant as regards the king of Scandinavia having been king of Ireland at the time of the birth of Christ.)[108]

Keating questions both the biases and the lack of information inherent within history written by outsiders, defending his own narrative – Irish history as written by an Irish author – as the truthful record of Ireland's past.

Keating also defends what he sees as Ireland's true history by mustering other authors whom he feels that those he criticises have ignored. He notes that 'le croinicibh Nua-Ghall na haimsire seo' (the works of the present-day foreigners) have omitted from their narratives any number of noble deeds in Irish history, mentioning first those deeds themselves and then cataloguing the historical works in which they are recorded.[109] Irish history is thus defended by the evidence of previous historians whom (in Keating's view) have been unfairly omitted from the narratives of those he criticizes as 'mhórán do shean-úghdaraibh eile coigcríche do scríobh go meardhána mítheasta ar Éirinn, ar bhréig-sgeulaibh ainteastach d'á ná'r chóir creideamhain 'na shamhail so do nídh' (many other ancient foreign authors who wrote rashly without evidence concerning Ireland, on the lying statements of false witnesses, whom it would not be right to trust in such a matter).[110] In the same way, Keating is quick to use the evidence of other historians against those he would repute, as when he quotes William of Newburgh's, Gerald of Wales's, and Camden's statements that Ireland had never been invaded or controlled by a foreign power to dispute the idea that anyone (not King Arthur, not the Britons, and not the Romans) had invaded Ireland before the Normans.[111]

In defence of his narrative of Irish history, Keating is also carefully attuned to the importance of historical documents. Again rebutting the suggestion that Ireland owed tribute to King Arthur, he writes that this cannot be true as it was supposed to have taken place under one Irish king Gillamar, and:

Gidheadh tar cheann go luaidheann Policronicon agus Monomotensis agus drong eile do Nua-Ghallaibh an Giolla Már so do bheith 'na rígh Éireann a shlán fá aon d'á lorgairidhibh go bhfuil laoidh nó litir a seanchus Éireann i n-a bhfuil luadh nó iomrádh ar Ghiolla Már do bheith 'na rígh Éireann riamh: acht munab do

[108] Keating, *Foras Feasa*, vol. I, 46–7.
[109] Keating, *Foras Feasa*, vol. I, 6–7.
[110] Keating, *Foras Feasa*, vol. I, 10–11.
[111] Keating, *Foras Feasa*, vol. I, 16–19.

Mhuircheartach mór mac Earca fá rí Éireann agus fá fear comhaimsire do rígh Artúr ghairmid é; agus níor bh'fhéidir Muircheartach do bheith fá chíoscháin ag an rígh Artúr, do bhrígh go raibhe sé féin treun i n-Éirinn agus i n- Albain, agus gurab é do chuir a sheisear dearbhráthar i n- Albain, agus gur fear dhíobh fá céid-rí do Chineadh Scoit ar Albain, mar atá Fearghus Mór mac Earca, agus fós gurab le Scotaibh agus le Pictibh do thuit Rí Artúr féin.

(Howbeit, notwithstanding that (the author of) Polychronicon, and (Geoffrey of) Monmouth, and others of the new foreigners assert this Gillamar to have been king of Ireland, I defy any of their followers (to show) that there is a lay or a letter from the ancient record of Ireland in which there is mention or account of Gillamar having ever been king of Ireland: unless it be to Muircheartach the Great, son of Earc, they call it, who was king of Ireland, and was a contemporary of King Arthur; and Muircheartach could not have been tributary to King Arthur, because, that he himself was mighty in Ireland and in Scotland, and that it was he who sent his six brothers into Scotland, and that it was one of them became the first king of the Scotic race in Scotland, namely, Feargus the Great, son of Earc; and moreover, that it was by the Scots and the Picts King Arthur himself was slain.)[112]

Keating here emphasises the importance of primary documents in writing history, using their lack to criticise other narratives of the past as mere fictions.[113] True history, he asserts, must be backed up by documentary evidence, which *Foras Feasa* possesses but other histories do not. Keating reiterates the importance of such 'hard evidence' at various points throughout his text, writing elsewhere (in rebuttal to Gerald of Wales) that 'mo fhreagradh air ann so, nach fuil laoidh ná litir, seanchuis náid sein-scríbhne iris náid annálaigh ag teacht leis ar an mbréig seo' (my answer to him here [is], that there is not a lay nor a letter, of old record or of ancient text, chronicle or annals, supporting him in this lie).[114] He is just as quick to underscore the importance of contemporary historical evidence as he is to turn to ancient documents, as when he rebuts Stanihurst's claim that there was no intermarriage across the Pale with a list of precisely such alliances within recent memory.[115]

Early modern historians, then, made use of historical sources and origin legends from the medieval period. They sought to define and strengthen the identities of modern-day nations by demonstrating the continuity of their past histories. However, these authors were also aware that several competing versions of any given historical narrative existed and that much of this earlier material was not exactly up to contemporary scientific standards. Early modern historians were thus quick to defend the validity of

[112] Keating, *Foras Feasa*, vol. I, 12–15.
[113] On this episode, see *Senchus Fer n-Alban*, in Bannerman, *Studies in the History of Dalriada*.
[114] Keating, *Foras Feasa*, vol. I, 18–19. [115] Keating, *Foras Feasa*, vol. I, 32–5.

their favoured historical sources and narratives from potential attack by critics. We have seen a wide range of such defensive techniques: preemptively attacking other authors' political stances or deficiencies in knowledge, tallying the numbers of sources agreeing with a particular position to defend it by majority vote, introducing previously neglected evidence to a debate, or simply mustering rhetorical skill to rebut a disputed position point-by-point. Additionally, these historians were quite capable of going on the offensive. Questioning the veracity of other peoples' historical narratives, as we shall see, was an effective method of casting doubt on the validity of their modern claims to nationhood.

Part VI: Questioning the Origins of Others

At the same time as early modern authors sought to defend the antiquity and veracity of their own historical narratives against would-be detractors, they were eager to cast doubt upon the accuracy of their contemporaries' writings. As Ashe has noted, this process involved an impressive amount of hypocrisy, and the end result was a situation in which 'sixteenth-century historians capable of clear-sightedness in the assessment of other peoples' origin legends can appear to have lost all powers of analysis when it came to their own'.[116] Questioning the origin legends of others led to their use as a rhetorical weapon, which undermined claims of present-day nationhood.

One strategy, which we have already seen some of, was to undermine a competing historical narrative by casting doubt on its author's competence and motivations. Keating was a master of such techniques. Criticising Stanihurst's text, he writes, 'tuig, a léaghthóir, go rabhadar trí heasbadha ar Stanihurst re scríobhadh stáire na h-Éireann as ná'r chóir cion stáraidhe do thabhairt air' (understand, reader, that Stanihurst was under three deficiencies for writing the history of Ireland, on account of which it is not fit to regard him as an historian).[117] Keating denounces Stanihurst's youth and lack of knowledge, political motivations for writing, and the fact that

> do bhí sé dall aineolach i dteangaidh na tíre i n-a raibhe seanchus agus seandála na críche, agus gach foirne d'ár áitigh innte; agus mar sin, níor bh'fhéidir dó a bhfios do bheith aige.
>
> (he was blindly ignorant in the language of the country in which were the ancient records and transactions of the territory, and of every people who had inhabited it; and, therefore, he could not know these things.)[118]

[116] Ashe, 'Holinshed and Mythical History', 158.
[117] Keating, *Foras Feasa*, vol. I, 40–3. [118] Keating, *Foras Feasa*, vol. I, 40–3.

By highlighting these flaws, he seeks to undermine Stanihurst's text on every level. In calling attention to his ignorance of the Irish language – and consequent omission of important sources for Irish history – Keating alerts his readers to the factual deficiencies in Stanihurst's narrative. Questioning his political motivations calls attention to the underlying bias of the work as a whole. Elsewhere, Keating writes,

measaim ar olcas an teastais do-bheir Stanihurst ar Éireannchaibh, gurab ionchuir ó theist é, do bhrígh gurab d'aon-toisg ar fhuráileamh droinge do bhí fuathmhar d'Éireannchaibh do scríobh go maslaightheach orra; agus saoilim gurab é fuath na n-Éireannach ceud-bhallán do tharraing iar ndul i Sacsaibh ar dtús do dhéanamh léighinn dó, agus go raibhe 'na thoirrcheas bronn aige nó gur sgeith le n-a scríbhinn é, ar dtoidheacht i n-Éirinn dó.

(from the worthlessness of the testimony Stanihurst gives concerning the Irish, I consider that he should be rejected as a witness, because it was purposely at the instigation of a party who were hostile to the Irish that he wrote contemptuously of them; and, I think, that hatred of the Irish must have been the first dug he drew after his first going into England to study, and that it lay as a weight on his stomach till, having returned to Ireland, he ejected it by his writing.)[119]

When nationalistic bias lies behind the creation of a work, Keating notes, the entirety of its contents should fall under suspicion from discerning readers.

Keating also discredits rival narratives for incorrectly interpreting the evidence of the past. Rebutting classical authors, he writes, 'atáid cuid do na sean-úghdaraibh chuireas neithe breugacha i leith na n-Éireannach; mar adeir Strabo, 'san g-ceathramhadh leabhar, gurab lucht feola daoine d'ithe na h-Éireannaigh' (there are some ancient authors who lay lying charges against the Irish; such as Strabo, who says in his fourth book that the Irish are a man-eating people).[120] Keating counters the charge that all Irish were cannibals by admitting his knowledge of one exceptional instance of cannibalism in the sources. Rival histories could thus be discredited by attacking both the facts of a narrative and a historian's motivations for writing it.

Our authors were well aware that contradictory narratives of the past competed for dominance. John of Fordun's *Chronica gentis Scotorum* contains a thoughtful passage on the difficulties of interpreting historical sources which opposed one another:

Haec autem et alia siquidem innumera scriptis eorundem reperta, Scociam astruunt a principio separatam a Britannia, licet e contrario quibusdam eorum scriptis omnis Albion vocari Britannia dinoscatur … Nuncquid haec omnino differe videntur a praecedentibus? ymmo differunt: sed neque super hiis vel illis

[119] Keating, *Foras Feasa*, vol. I, 34–5. [120] Keating, *Foras Feasa*, vol. I, 8–11.

fixum historiae sermonem retinent; quoniam et eisdem varia variis contraria saepius intermiscentur etiam, ut eodem quandoque capitulo quaedam inseruntur finibus clausulae dissonantes. Et licet hujusmodi sane crebra discrepatio reperta sit chronicis, ipsarum peritis, ymmo sanctis, nullatenus est auctoribus imputanda, qui caute suis originalibus immobili stilo consonas quippe veritati scripserunt historias. Sed scribis porius aemulae nationis, quorum invidia quaedam omnino chronicae, ne regnorum confinium vigeat autoritas, evertuntur, pejorantur, violantur, ac indiscrete saepius adeo mutantur, ut unius videatur assertio capituli sensum alterius adnullare.

(But, although these and numberless other passages, found in the works of these writers, refer to Scotia as separated from Britannia, from the beginning, it may be acknowledged, on the other hand, that, in some of their writings, the whole of Albion is called Britannia … Now, do not these passages seem to differ entirely from the preceding? Verily, they do differ. But histories do not hold consistent language, either one way or the other; for, frequently, in the very same work, various passages are intermingled with others of contrary import, so that clauses incompatible with each other are sometimes inserted even in the same chapter. Although, however, discrepancies of this sort are very often found in chronicles, they should by no means be imputed to their skilful, nay, holy, authors, who have taken care to write their histories in strict conformity with truth, and with an unswerving regard for their original authorities; but, rather, to transcribers of a rival nation, by whose envy, lest the power of adjoining kingdoms should be strengthened, certain chronicles are entirely perverted, corrupted, violated, and, very often, indiscreetly so changed that the assertion of one chapter seems to annul the purport of the next.)[121]

John of Fordun here raises some very real problems with his sources. His solution to these difficulties underscores the political conversations in which early modern histories participated. Fordun does not blame earlier authors for the contradictions evident in their works, but rather, bad actors who twist the information they contain: 'transcribers of a rival nation' who manipulate historical narratives because of their 'envy' that 'the power of adjoining kingdoms should be strengthened'. The *Chronica gentis Scotorum* rather neatly lays out the political issues with which contemporary critiques of origin legends were engaged. The topic of discussion may have been the past, but at stake were contemporary issues of nationhood.

At the same time, however, John of Fordun was just as capable of critiquing rival histories as any of his contemporaries. At one point, he dismissively describes 'ex quo popularis inepta loquacitas, de tali forte consilio sublimia glorians, asserere voluit, Hiberniam eis de sui regis dono fuisse datam' (whence the foolish babbling of the British people, glorying highly, perhaps, in this advice, would assert that Ireland had been given

[121] John of Fordun, *Chronica gentis Scotorum*, vol. I, bk. II, ch. IV.

by their own king as a gift to this people [the Scots]).[122] The British origin legend came under a great deal of scrutiny in the early modern period due to its entanglement with the highly implausible narrative written by Geoffrey of Monmouth. While scepticism of *De gestis Britonum* was not limited to the early modern period – as Daniel Woolf notes, 'it is worth remembering that Geoffrey of Monmouth had inspired doubt as early as the thirteenth century'[123] – the Brutus legend nonetheless came in for particular criticism during this time. As Ashe writes, 'there is inherent risk in the teleological act of identifying modernity in historical writing, but whilst that is widely acknowledged, there is general agreement that "the early modern era was characterized by a deepening and more fully articulated conception of time and history"'.[124]

We witness precisely such questioning of the Brutus origin story in Camden's *Britannia*. Camden casts doubt on Geoffrey of Monmouth's narrative of history due to its misalignment with numerous other historical narratives, writing,

> Gildas Sapiens et ipse Britannus qui ante mille annos vixit de Bruto isto ne verbum quidem … Nenius etiam … His etiam adiungunt Bedam, Guilielmum Malmesburiensem, et quotquot ante annum MCLX scripserunt, qui Bruti nomen ne fando audivisse videantur, adeo altum de eo in ipsorum scriptis silentium.
>
> (Gildas, being himselfe a wise and learned Britaine, who lived a thousand yeeres since, hath not one word of this Brutus … Ninus also … To this they adjoyne Beda, William of Malmesburie, and as many as wrote eleven hundred and threescore yeeres since, who seeme not once to have heard of Brutus his name, so silent are they of him in all their owne writings.)[125]

Camden's tactics are familiar ones, only this time we see him using the weight of historical evidence to deny rather than confirm a particular narrative of the past. Further evidence against the Brutus legend stems from (in Camden's view) its deliberate fictionality. He places the Brutus legend in the same category as other 'fictitious' origin legends for which there is no ancient evidence, indicating that the Brutus story was deliberately written in order to construct an ancestor in imitation of the French:

> Hinc colligunt cum nostri Francos vicinos a Troianis genus ducere accepissent, deforme existimarunt ab iis origine superari quos virtute aequarent.

[122] John of Fordun, *Chronica gentis Scotorum*, vol. I, bk. I, ch. XXIV.
[123] Daniel Woolf, 'From Hystories to the Historical: Five Transitions in Thinking about the Past, 1500-1700', in Kewes (ed.), *The Uses of History in Early Modern England*, 31–68 at 64.
[124] Ashe, 'Holinshed and Mythical History', 154, citing Paulina Kewes, 'History and Its Uses: Introduction', in Kewes (ed.), *Uses of History*, 1–30 at 2.
[125] Camden, *Britannia* (1607), trans. Holland (1610), 'Britaine'.

(Hence they collect that when our country-men heard once how the French-men their neighbours drew their line from the Trojans, they thought it a foule dishonour that those should out-goe them in nobilitie of Stocke, whom they matched every way in manhood and proesse.)[126]

Camden accuses the Britons of having constructed Brutus out of whole cloth due to their desire for an ancestral figure in imitation of the French. In doing so, he casts doubt on the validity of both historical traditions.

Camden goes on to discuss a lengthy catalogue of fictional ancestors, in which etymologically derived figures come under particular suspicion:

Addunt praeterea sub id quoque tempus Scoticos scriptores Scotam Pharonis Aegyptii filiam suae nationis conditricem ementitos fuisse. Tunc etiam quosdam ingenio et otio abutentes vimque veritati afferentes Hibernis suum Hiberum, Danis suum Danum, Brabantiis suum Brabonem, Gothis suum Gothum, Saxonibus suum Saxonem quasi gentium authories affinxisse. Cum autem nostra aetate quae a fatalibus illis ignorantiae tenebris emersit Franci suo Francioni tanquam ementito patri renunciarent ... Cumque Scoti sanioris iudicii suam Scotam reiecerunt, Hiberum etiam, Danum, Brabonem et eius farinae caeteros umbratiles heroas veritas ipsa fugaverit, cur Britanni suo Bruto ut insulae denominatori et Troianae origini tantopere adhaerescant demirantur, quasi ante Troianum excidium quod anno a diluvio plus minus millesimo accidit, Britanni hic non fuissent, et ante Agamemnona multa fortes non vixissent.

(They add this much moreover, that about the same time the Scotish writers falsly devised Scota the Aegyptian Pharaoes daughter to be the Foundresse of their nation. Then also it was that some, misspending their wit and time, yea and offring violent abuse unto the truth, forged out of their owne braines for the Irish, their Hiberus; for the Danes, their Danus; for the Brabanders, their Braho; for the Gothes, their Gothus; and for the Saxons, their Saxo, as it were the Stock-fathers of the said nations. But seeing that in this our age, which hath escaped out of those darke mists of fatall ignorance, the French have renounced their Francio as a counterfet Progenitor ... And that for the Scots, such as be of the wiser sort have cast off their Scota, and truth it selfe hath chased away Hiberus, Danus, Brabo, and the rest of these counterfet Demi-gods and Worthies of the same stampe. Why the Britans should so much sticke unto their Brutus as the name-giver of their Iland, and to the Trojane originall, they greatly wonder: as who would say, before the destruction of Troie (which hapned in the thousand yeere or thereabout after Noahs floud), there had been no Britans heere, and as if there had not lived many valorous men before Agamemnon?)[127]

Here Camden not only criticises ancestral figures whom he interprets as fictitious, he also offers a double critique of contemporary nations who have not foresworn these types of fictional figures in the enlightened modern era. In this way, Brutus comes in for an extra heaping of scorn.

[126] Camden, *Britannia* (1607), trans. Holland (1610), 'Britaine'.
[127] Camden, *Britannia* (1607), trans. Holland (1610), 'Britaine'.

As many scholars have demonstrated, Camden's *Britannia* displays a complicated relationship towards the Brutus narrative. As Ashe writes, 'over the *Britannia*'s several editions from 1586 to 1607, Camden markedly expands his discussion of Brutus's foundation of Britain, paradoxically adding both to the source evidence against it, and to his seemingly disingenuous willingness to allow for belief . . . as the years progressed, the myth of Brutus apparently continued to trouble him'.[128] Camden's repeated interrogations of the Brutus legend are part of the 'perceived anti-Welsh prejudice' which so frustrated contemporary Welsh readers of the *Britannia*.[129]

Other authors were more overt in their attacks on the validity of other nations' narratives of the past. Holinshed's *Chronicles* displays particular antipathy towards competing narratives of Scottish and Irish history. Throughout the *Chronicles*, accounts of Scottish and Irish origins and their antiquity in Britain and Ireland are repeatedly questioned in a way that is intended to subordinate their historical narratives – and thus, their modern-day claims to nationhood – to the primacy of English history. At times, Holinshed questions the truthfulness of Scottish narratives of history, bluntly accusing them of composing falsehoods that depict them in a better light. He writes:

> Thus we see how England hath six times beene subiect to the reproch of conquest. And wheras the Scots séeme to challenge manie famous victories also ouer vs, be|side gréeuous impositions, tributs, & dishonorable com|positions: it shall suffice for answer, that they deale in this as in the most part of their historie, which is to seeke great honor by lieng, & great renowme by prating and craking. Indeed they haue doone great mischéefe in this Iland, & with extreme crueltie; but as for any conquest the first is yet to heare of.[130]

Rhetorically, Holinshed emphasises his point that the English were never conquered by the Scots by admitting that England has been conquered multiple times – just not by them!

Not just the facts, but also the antiquity of Scottish history are questioned. At one point, Holinshed writes: 'But when first the Picts, & then the Scots should come ouer into our. I|land, as they were obscure people, so the time of their arriuall is as far to me vnknowne. Wherefore the reso|lution of this point must still remaine In tenebris.'[131] The implication is that Scottish history rests on dubious sources which cannot be trusted, leaving the antiquity of this people open to question. Holinshed's

[128] Ashe, 'Holinshed and Mythical History', 156.
[129] Huws, *Medieval Welsh Manuscripts*, 291.
[130] Holinshed's *Chronicles* (1587), vol. 1, bk. 1, ch. 4.
[131] Holinshed's *Chronicles* (1587), vol. 1, bk. 1, ch. 4.

language reveals what is at stake here – in portraying the Scots as late arrivals to Britain, they become cast as an 'obscure' people who came at a late date 'into *our* island'. This is reiterated at various points throughout the *Chronicles*. Elsewhere, Holinshed again emphasises the 'uncertainty' of Scottish accounts of history, writing:

> How and when the Scots, a people mixed of the Scithian and Spanish blood, should arriue here out of Ireland, & when the Picts should come vnto vs out of Sarmatia, or from further toward the north & the Scithi | an Hyperboreans, as yet it is vncerteine. For though the Scotish histories doo carrie great countenance of their antiquitie in this Iland: yet (to saie fréelie what I thinke) I iudge them rather to haue stolne in hither within the space of 100. yeares before Christ, than to haue continued here so long as they themselues pre | tend, if my coniecture be any thing.[132]

Again, Holinshed depicts the Scots and Picts as a 'foreign' people with an uncertain history, who have 'stolen' into an island that is not theirs. Narratives of the past are very much caught up in contemporary political debates, as Holinshed's *Chronicles* carefully creates a hierarchy of histories. Only the nation with the longest history in Britain, this narrative implies, has the right to its 'ownership' – latecomers (like the Scots) are mere interlopers.

Nor do the Irish fare much better. While Irish origin legends are included in Ireland's history, Holinshed's *Chronicles* retains a high degree of scepticism when discussing them. After having introduced the legend of Cessair (said to have escaped the flood by sailing to Ireland), the text states:

> But where this tale bewrayeth it ſelfe too mani | feſtly to be a mere vntruth, if the time & other cir | cũſtances be throughly examined, I wil not ſtãd longer about the proofe or diſproufe therof, ſauing that it is ſufficient (as I thinke) to bring it oute of credite, to conſider, how that the Arte of ſay | ling was vnknowne to the world before the vni | uerſall floud, and no parte inhabited excepte the continent of Syria, and thereaboutes.[133]

Logic and external historical evidence are used to cast doubt on an origin story which the text's author deems suspect. At other points, Holinshed's *Chronicles* outwardly accuses Irish historians of concocting fictitious fantasies:

> But ſuche fooliſhe tales and vayne nar | rations may warne the aduiſed reader how to be | ware of yelding credite vnto the lyke idle fanta | ſies & forged tales, when they hap to lyght vpon ſuche blynde Legendes. For where ſome of the Poets vſed for

[132] Holinshed's *Chronicles* (1587), vol. 1, bk. 1, ch. 4.
[133] Holinshed's *Chronicles* (1577), vol. 3, bk. 1 ('Historie of Irelande'), ch. 1.

inuention ſake to fayne ſuch drea|ming Fables, for exerciſe of their ſtiles and wits, afterwarde thorough errour and lacke of know|ledge, they haue ben taken with the ignorant for verie true and moſte aſſured hiſtories.[134]

A 'discerning' reader, the text suggests, is able to sift historical truth from fictional narratives – and Holinshed's *Chronicles* of course places itself firmly in the former category.

Conclusions

In the late medieval and early modern periods, the rising tide of nationalism impacted many facets of life beyond the political sphere, not least the writing of history. Nationalistic sentiments are evident in works whose authors displayed simultaneous pride towards their own country and people and xenophobia and racism towards others. These authors sought to construct a record of their nation's history which would validate its identity in the present moment. To do so, they turned to the past to demonstrate the antiquity and continuity of their national identity. Origin legends, as we have seen, were an important part of that narrative of the past. Yet at the same time, they did not always align with contemporary understanding of historical reality. For that reason, they often stood out in later medieval and early modern historical narratives as a source of unease. The origin stories of one's own nation very often had to be defended, while the origin legends of others, as we have seen, could be used as a weapon to discredit their own narratives of history. Such unease about the historicity of origin legends marked the beginning of their end in one sense, but it was a slow decline: the Anglo-Saxon origin legend of Hengest and Horsa, for instance, can often still be found presented as a historical fact in textbooks of English history.[135] Origin narratives remained popular in spite of their potential pitfalls for the same reasons explored in this book. People throughout the ages shared a desire to know who their ancestors were, where they might have come from, and how they arrived in the places they eventually made their home.

[134] Holinshed's *Chronicles* (1577), vol. 3, bk. 1 ('Historie of Irelande'), ch. 1.
[135] See e.g. Matthew Howorth, *Teaching Primary History: Everything a Non-Specialist Needs to Teach Primary History*, Bloomsbury Curriculum Basics (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), chapter 7.

Conclusion: Origin Legends and Local History

This book has explored origin legends embedded within historical works from early medieval Britain and Ireland, arguing that these legendary narratives grew and developed together as authors sought to construct comprehensive histories of the insular region. Chapter One surveyed textual circulation and influence within this corpus of works, compiling the 'hard evidence' necessary to understand how these texts developed together and shaped one another as they did so. The bulk of this study has focused on analysis of three important motifs within insular origin legends: exile (Chapter Two), kin-slaying (Chapter Three), and intermarriage and incest (Chapter Four). We have seen how these key themes built on and developed from one another over time, becoming increasingly important throughout the corpus of insular origin stories as a whole. Chapter Five then shifted forward in time to explore the breakdown of this insular intellectual connectivity during the late medieval and early modern periods, as a sense of burgeoning nationalism gained a stronger hold. While early modern historians still relied on medieval origin legends as evidence for the antiquity – and, thus, contemporary identity – of their nations, origin stories were increasingly treated as a liability rather than an asset. The legendary features of these tales became something to be explained away in one's own history as well as a potential weapon to cast doubt on the antiquity and identity of another people.

This study has examined the origin legends of individual *gentes* embedded within broader historical narratives of the insular region, that is, the origin stories of the Anglo-Saxon, Irish, Pictish, and British peoples. Yet it should be noted that origin legends were an important component of a wide range of texts throughout the medieval period. Monastic foundation legends were a widespread genre that, much like the origin legends we have seen, attempted to imbue a given monastery with authority through ostensible antiquity, as well as to bolster its reputation with evidence of its founders'

piety.[1] Origin narratives were created as explanations for placenames and landscape features in genres such as the Irish *dindshenchas*.[2] The impact of the Viking Age and subsequent Scandinavian settlement in Britain and Ireland brought about the creation of new legends.[3] As time passed, individual dynasties often began to acquire their own origin tales as well.[4] Sometimes these mirrored the origin legends of the larger *gens*, as in the excellent examples embedded within the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* of small sibling groups whose arrival to Britain parallels that of Hengest and Horsa.[5] Other times they were even more fantastic and inventive, as in the 'sovereignty' narrative found within tales such as *Echtra mac nEchach Muigmedóin*, written to lend support to the Uí Néill dynasty,[6] who as John V. Kelleher memorably wrote, 'emerge into history like a school of cuttlefish from a large ink-cloud of their own manufacture; and clouds and ink continue to be manufactured by them or for them throughout their long career'.[7] Origin legends gained importance as individual rulers throughout the medieval period grasped the power of propaganda and sought to lend authenticity to their present reign by crafting stories of a glorious lineage.

[1] See Amy G. Remensnyder, *Remembering Kings Past: Monastic Foundation Legends in Medieval Southern France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995); Tim Pestell, *Landscapes of Monastic Foundation: The Establishment of Religious Houses in East Anglia c.650–1200* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2004); Karine Ugé, *Creating the Monastic Past in Medieval Flanders* (York: York Medieval Press, 2005); Susan Boynton, *Shaping a Monastic Identity: Liturgy & History at the Imperial Abbey of Farfa, 1000–1125* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006); Ellen F. Arnold, *Negotiating the Landscape: Environment and Monastic Identity in the Medieval Ardennes* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013); and Lindy Brady, 'Crowland Abbey as Anglo-Saxon Sanctuary in the Pseudo-Ingulf Chronicle', *Traditio* 73 (2018): 1–24.

[2] See Amy C. Mulligan (= Amy Eichhorn-Mulligan), *A Landscape of Words: Ireland, Britain and the Poetics of Space, 700–1250* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019).

[3] See Gro Steinsland, 'Origin Myths and Rulership from the Viking Age Ruler to the Ruler of Medieval Historiography: Continuity, Transformations and Innovations', in Gro Steinsland, Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, Jan Erik Rekdal, and Ian Beuermann (eds.), *Ideology and Power in the Viking and Middle Ages: Scandinavia, Iceland, Ireland, Orkney and the Faeroes* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 15–68 and Clare Downham, 'Coastal Communities and Diaspora Identities in Viking Age Ireland', in James H. Barrett and Sarah Jane Gibbon (eds.), *Maritime Societies of the Viking and Medieval World* (Leeds: Maney/Society for Medieval Archaeology, 2015), 369–83.

[4] For a recent in-depth study of this process in medieval Wales, see Guy, *Medieval Welsh Genealogy*.

[5] See Yorke, 'Political and Ethnic Identity'.

[6] See Amy Eichhorn-Mulligan (= Amy C. Mulligan), 'The Anatomy of Power and the Miracle of Kingship: The Female Body of Sovereignty in a Medieval Irish Kingship Tale', *Speculum* 81 (2006): 1014–54.

[7] John V. Kelleher, 'Irish History and Pseudo-History', *Studia Hibernica* 3 (1964): 113–27 at 115.

The growth of origin narratives throughout a wide swath of literary and historical genres demonstrates their important role in constructing a particular vision of the present by linking it to a carefully constructed narrative of the past during the medieval period. It also underscores the intellectual connections that this book has argued were widespread in the early medieval insular region. Such textual connections were not limited to the more comprehensive historical works which have formed the focus of this study. Local origin stories also drew on the same narrative patterns and motifs. By way of conclusion, I will examine four brief dynastic origin legends that incorporate some of the themes explored in this book, namely, a sense of movement evinced by an ancestral figure who arrives to a new homeland from afar. For the Picts, I will explore the brief genealogical treatise of the Dál Riata known as *Senchus Fer n-Alban* / *Míniugud Senchusa Fher n-Alban*.[8] From Ireland, I will introduce the legendary piece of Uí Néill dynastic propaganda known as *Echtra mac nEchach Muigmedóin*.[9] For the British, I will consider the legend of ancestral figure Cunedda and his sons expelling the Irish from Gwynedd, which is embedded in the *Historia Brittonum*,[10] and from Anglo-Saxon England, the story of legendary Danish ancestor Scyld Scefing from the opening lines of *Beowulf*.[11] These narratives underscore the importance of movement within the corpus of insular origin material, even on a local level.

Senchus Fer n-Alban is a genealogical tract primarily focused on the men of the Dál Riata.[12] It is brief and non-narrative in nature, but nonetheless incorporates some of the motifs which have been of interest in this study. The genealogies in *Senchus Fer n-Alban* demonstrate transmarine movement and connections through their linkages of the ancestries of the Dál Riata, Scotland, Islay, and Kintyre to Ireland. The text begins:

Incipit míniugud senchasa fher n-alban. Dá mac echdach munremair .i. erc ⁊ olchú. Dá mac deac immorra la erc .i. a sé díb gabsat albain . . . A sé ali i n-hérind.

(A statement of the history of the men of Scotland begins. Two sons of Eochaid Munremar .i. Erc and Olchú. Erc, moreover, had twelve sons .i. six of them took possession of Scotland . . . Six others in Ireland.)[13]

[8] Bannerman, *Studies in the History of Dalriada*.
[9] Whitley Stokes (ed. and trans.), 'The Death of Crimthann Son of Fidach, and the Adventures of the Sons of Eochaid Muigmedón', *Revue Celtique* 24 (1903): 172–207 and John Carey (trans.), '*Echtra Mac nEchach*: The Adventures of the Sons of Eochaid Mugmedón', in John T. Koch and John Carey (ed. and trans.), *The Celtic Heroic Age: Literary Sources for Ancient Celtic Europe and Early Ireland and Wales*, 4th edn. (Aberystwyth: Celtic Studies Publications, 2003), 203–8.
[10] Morris, *Nennius*, 79 and 37.
[11] *Beowulf*, ll. 4–52; Fulk, Bjork, and Niles (eds.), *Klaeber's Beowulf*, 3–4.
[12] For studies of this text, see bibliography in Chapter Two, n. 43 above.
[13] Bannerman, *Studies in the History of Dalriada*, 41 and 47.

The text continues in this vein, as the genealogies of the men of the Dál Riata and Islay are also ultimately traced back to Ireland. *Senchus Fer n-Alban* thus not only participates in the narrative pattern in which a foundational ancestral figure arrives from afar, it also echoes the Pictish origin legend in the close genealogical ties drawn between Ireland and northern Britain. Significantly, one of these genealogies involves an act of kin-slaying: 'Fergus bec dano mac eirc gegnai a bráthair óen mac leis .i. sétna a quo cenél conchride i n-híle' (Fergus Bec, moreover, son of Erc; his brother killed him. He had one son .i. Sétna, from whom are the Cenél Conchride in Islay).[14] Even in this brief text, many of the patterns which have emerged throughout this study are repeated. The micro origin stories in *Senchus Fer n-Alban* further underscore the narrative power of these tales, the connectedness of the intellectual milieu that produced them, and the importance of peoples' movements in origin legends from the insular region.

Echtra mac nEchach Muigmedóin is well known for its personification of Irish sovereignty via the figure of a 'loathly lady' with whom legendary ancestral figure Niall Noígíallach ('Niall of the Nine Hostages') must join in sexual union in order to gain the kingship of Ireland for himself and his descendants. The text is a piece of propaganda written to bolster the position of the Uí Néill at the time of its composition in the eleventh century, and its sovereignty figure has been much discussed.[15] Niall's mother, Cairenn Casdub, has been a less frequent object of study but is relevant to our purposes here because she represents an origin story of intermarriage.[16] Niall is not only the son of Irish king Eochaid Mugmedón and the daughter of a Saxon king; he also gains the sovereignty of Ireland over his four wholly Irish half-brothers. *Echtra mac nEchach Muigmedóin* begins:

Bui ri amra airegda for Erinn .i. Eochaid Muigmedón. Badar coic maic aicci, Brian, Ailill, Fiachra, Fergus, Niall. Moingfind ingen Fidaig máthair Briain ⁊ Fiachrach ⁊ Fergusa ⁊ Ailella. Caireand Casdub, ingen Sgail Bailb, ri Saxan, máthair Neill. Ba miscais lasin righain inti Niall, ar is dara ceand dorinde in rí fri Cairind he.[17]

(There was a wondrous noble king over Ireland, Eochaid Mugmedón. He had five sons: Brian, Ailill, Fiachra, Fergus, Niall. Mongfhind daughter of Fidach was the mother of Brian and Fiachra and Fergus and Ailill. Cairenn Casdub, daughter of Saxall Balb king of the Saxons, was the mother of Niall. The queen had a hatred of

[14] Bannerman, *Studies in the History of the Dalriada*, 42 and 48.
[15] Eichhorn-Mulligan, 'The Anatomy of Power and the Miracle of Kingship'.
[16] See further Lindy Brady, 'An Irish Sovereignty Motif in *Laxdœla saga*', *Scandinavian Studies* 88 (2016): 60–76.
[17] Stokes (ed. and trans.), 'The Death of Crimthann Son of Fidach, and the Adventures of the Sons of Eochaid Muigmedón', 190.

Niall, for it was in infidelity to her that the king had begotten him upon Cairenn; and so the queen put great hardship upon Cairenn.)[18]

The tale proper involves a series of tests through which Niall proves his superiority (and that of his descendants) for the kingship of Ireland in perpetuity over that of his half-brothers. Yet interestingly, the four unfit brothers are given an Irish lineage while Niall is half Saxon. *Echtra mac nEchach Muigmedóin* also appears to call attention to Niall's heritage by emphasising a sense of visible ethnic difference between the two women: 'Casdub' means 'dark, curly hair'; 'Mongfind' means 'fair hair'. A tale which depicts a Saxon woman as the mother of foundational Uí Néill ancestor Niall might seem unusual were it not for the origin legends explored in this book. We have seen how common it is for insular origin stories to depict an ancestral figure who came to Britain or Ireland from 'elsewhere', as well as the frequency with which origin legends feature exogamous intermarriages. In depicting Niall Noígíallach as the son of a Saxon woman, the Uí Néill propagandist who composed *Echtra mac nEchach Muigmedóin* both emphasised his singularity in comparison to his half-brothers and endowed him with an origin legend which matched those of other ancestral figures in the insular corpus.

The legend in which British ancestral figure Cunedda and his sons gained the kingdom of Gwynedd by expelling the Irish is another example in which a foundational ancestor arrives from 'elsewhere'. Although embedded in the *Historia Brittonum*, it has not been understood as Merfynion (texts associated with the dynasty of Merfyn Frych) as it is likely to have been written earlier, though it should not be taken as historical.[19] As is the case with other origin narratives we have seen, the story of Cunedda and his sons depicts a legendary foundational ancestor who has traveled to his new homeland from another place:

Mailcunus magnus rex apud Brittones regnabat, id est in regione Guenedotae, quia atavus illius, id est Cunedag, cum filiis suis, quorum numerus octo erat, venerat prius de parte sinistrali, id est de regione quae vocatur Manau Guotodin, CXLVI annis antequam Mailcun regnaret, et Scottos cum ingentissima clade expulerunt ab istis regionibus, et nusquem reversi sunt iterum ad habitandum.

(King Maelgwn the Great was reigning among the British, in Gwynedd, for his ancestors, Cunedda, with his sons, to the number of eight, had come from the north, from the country called Manaw Gododdin, 146 years before Maelgwn reigned, and expelled the Irish from these countries, with immense slaughter, so that they never again returned to inhabit them.)[20]

[18] Carey (trans.), '*Echtra Mac nEchach*', 203.
[19] Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, 180–1, 190, and 359–64.
[20] Morris, *Nennius*, 79 and 37.

As Charles-Edwards notes, this legend is ahistorical: 'it is much more likely, as contemporary inscriptions indicate, that Gwynedd was founded by the Irish, or at least in a very close alliance with them' and that their supposed 'expulsion' was a later piece of dynastic British propaganda.[21] In this brief legend of Cunedda we again find an ancestral figure who arrives from afar with a suspiciously large and easily divisible number of sons. A legend of external origins is used to signal dynastic unity amongst his contemporary 'descendants'.

Finally, from Anglo-Saxon England, the opening lines of *Beowulf* and the legendary origin story of Danish ancestral figure Scyld Scefing illustrate another variation on the same pattern. Scyld Scefing's name, composed as it is of two elements meaning 'shield' and 'sheaf' (of grain), signal his mythic origins.[22] The poem opens by introducing the legendary Danish king as a foundling: 'Oft Scyld Scefing sceaþena þreatum, / monegum mægþum meodosetla ofteah, / egsode eorlas, syððan ærest wearð / feasceaft funden'[23] (Scyld Scefing often deprived many troops of enemy hosts of their mead-benches, terrified the warriors, from the time that he was first found forsaken). Later details make clear that he too came from 'elsewhere'. After a good life as king of the Danish people, a ship funeral is prepared upon his death. The poem relates that 'Nalæs hi hine læssan lacum teodan, / þeodgestreonum, þonne þa dydon / þe hine æt frumsceafte forð onsendon / ænne ofer yðe umborwesende'[24] (They did not bestow any less of the nation's treasure upon him than did those who had first sent him forth alone over the waves as a child). Scyld's origins remain mythic: when his funeral ship is pushed out to sea, the *Beowulf*-poet narrates that 'Men ne cunnon / secgan to soðe, selerædende, / hæleð under heofenum, hwa þæm hlæste onfeng'[25] (Men cannot truthfully say – not hall-counsellors, not heroes under heaven – who received that cargo). In giving the Danish kingdom a legendary founding figure, *Beowulf* also participates in the narrative pattern of origin stories in which ancestral arrival from afar is used to set a people apart.

In discussing these brief dynastic narratives, I am by no means suggesting that the texts containing them were all aware of one another or of the broader corpus of works containing insular origin stories on which this book has focused. However, such micro legends underscore the spread of

[21] Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, 190.
[22] Scyld Scefing has been well studied: see Alexander M. Bruce, *Scyld and Scef: Expanding the Analogues*, with a foreword by Paul E. Szarmach (New York: Routledge, 2002), but cf. review by Roberta Frank, *Speculum* 79 (2004): 1045–7.
[23] *Beowulf*, ll. 4–7a; Fulk, Bjork, and Niles (eds.), *Klaeber's Beowulf*, 3.
[24] *Beowulf*, ll. 43–46; Fulk, Bjork, and Niles (eds.), *Klaeber's Beowulf*, 4.
[25] *Beowulf*, ll. 50b–52; Fulk, Bjork, and Niles (eds.), *Klaeber's Beowulf*, 4.

origin material and of the themes discussed in this book across a wide range of texts from the early medieval period. As this study has attempted to emphasise, insular origin legends embraced motifs of connection. Studies of dynastic legends have often looked inward, examining how these stories worked to construct and define group identities across the medieval period. Yet as we have seen, these origin stories were not composed, recorded, or transmitted in isolation, nor do they depict it in their narratives.

Just as these micro origin legends share some important narrative patterns, so too can they be placed in a shared framework when it comes to the construction of identities in the early medieval period. These mini origin stories, like the ones examined in detail in this book, demonstrate an awareness of the origins of other *gentes* than those that form the focus of their narratives. The identities they seek to define are also local and dynastic in nature, lending further weight to the anachronism of nationalistic interpretations of origin material in the early medieval period.

Each of these micro origin stories, despite their brevity, displays an awareness of other *gentes* in the region than those that form the focus of their narratives. *Senchus Fer n-Alban* enumerates the genealogies of the men of Scotland, Ireland, Islay, Kintyre, and the Dál Riata, linking them together when appropriate through purported shared ancestral figures. As noted above, *Echtra mac nEchach Muigmedóin* introduces legendary Uí Néill progenitor Niall Noígíallach as singular precisely on account of his joint Irish and Saxon ancestry. The story of legendary British king Cunedda of Gwynedd and his sons involves movement from Manaw Gododdin and the purported expulsion of the Irish from Gwynedd. *Beowulf* is set in Scandinavia rather than Anglo-Saxon England, but while it begins with a mythical Danish origin story, the poem as a whole encompasses a great deal of information about the histories and genealogies of the Geats, Swedes, and numerous other peoples as well. Even these abbreviated episodes of origin material display an awareness of other *gentes*, reflecting the reality that the authors of these narratives did not position individual peoples in isolation.

These brief origin stories also lend further support to the anachronism of nationalism in the early medieval period, as the identities they construct are local and dynastic in nature. *Senchus Fer n-Alban* draws the islands of Britain and Ireland closer together, with shared genealogies of the men of Scotland, Ireland, Islay, Kintyre, and the Dál Riata through their descent from common ancestral figures. The genealogies themselves are arranged by families and kingdoms such that the text is structured around local dynasties tied together by shared ancestry across the Irish

Sea. *Echtra mac nEchach Muigmedóin* provides an excellent illustration of the anachronism of nationalism in that the central figure and progenitor of the Uí Néill dynasty for whom this propaganda was written is depicted as the sole son with non-Irish lineage. Here too, the tale's construction of identity is at the level of an individual dynasty rather than Ireland-wide. The legend of Cunedda and his sons celebrates the expulsion of the Irish from Britain, but celebrates the ruling dynasty of Gwynedd rather than constructing any sense of pan-British identity. Identities in *Beowulf* are defined dynastically, to the extent that the poem concludes tragically with the ending of Beowulf's own failed dynasty.[26] While the brief origin narratives discussed in this conclusion are but a handful of examples chosen from among many, they are nonetheless illustrative of broader patterns within this corpus of material. Origin legends in the early medieval insular region underscore the construction of identities that took place on a local and dynastic level, as these stories attempted to understand the place of individual *gentes* within broader world history.

The origin legends at the heart of this study have involved movement. They contain scenes of exile, flight to a different region of the world, and the initiation of new relationships that would shape the course of history in the centuries to come. Moreover, as we have seen, these stories themselves were not static. Early medieval insular origin legends were fluid creations, and this book has explored the numerous ways that they changed and developed over time. It has argued that early insular origin legends developed as they did because they were part of a conversation within the broader region. The intellectual connections which formed such a crucial part of life in this region meant that its history was written comprehensively, with individual origin narratives embedded within broader histories growing and changing as they were shaped in response to one another. In the early medieval period, the history of the insular region was written as a whole. Any study of the region must appreciate these connections: intellectual, physical, political, and personal. The insular region saw its history as entwined, and we must appreciate the evidence that early medieval authors have left us when studying how medieval peoples understood and shaped their own pasts.

[26] See Biggs, 'Politics of Succession'.

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