

ВСЕОБЩАЯ ИСТОРИЯ

S. E. Fyodorov

THE EIRCS AND THE FOUNDATION LEGEND OF SCOTTISH DÁL RIATA

The article examines one of the surviving variants of the foundation legend of Scottish Dál Riata, emphasising the version described in “Senchus Fer n-Alban” (The History of Men of Scotland). Identifying the extent to which Irish historical sagas (“The seed of Conaire” and “About the sons of Conaire”), “The Life of Saint Féichín”, as well as fragments of Yellow Book of Lecan influenced the genealogical introduction to “Senchus”, the author shows how this lore was adapted to the version of the legend presented there. The adapted version excluded any personification connected with both the sons of Eirc and with Fergus Mór himself. It is exclusively centered round the idea of exodus of part of Dál Riata from Ireland and round the proof of the ethnic and political homogeneity of both parts of the kingdom. The notion of the links between Dál Riata and the Eircs cannot have originated before the Alpinid dynasty took interest in their Irish descent. It was only within this context that Fergus himself and his brothers were invested with the features necessary for their functionally essential role as the first Irish colonists who had set foot on Scottish lands. Thus, the monarchy with which the Alpinid kingdom was directly associated turned out to be Irish. Therefore, the key figures who determined the links of Kenneth MacAlpin’s descendants with territorial political groups of Ireland were: firstly, Conaire Mór and the whole tradition originating from him; secondly, Fiachu Fer Mara, a legendary ancestor of the royal dynasty of Dál Fiatach, the rulers of Ulaid; thirdly, Oengus Tuirmech, one of the most prominent ancestors of the royal family of Ui Néill; fourth, Ugainne Már, one of the common ancestors for all of the most influential Irish royal lineages; and finally Míl Espáine, one of the legendary characters of Irish epics. Refs 33.

Keywords: Early mediaeval Scotland and Ireland, Dál Riata, the foundation legends of Dál Riata, Gaelic kindreds.

For citation: Fyodorov S. E. The Eircs and the foundation legend of Scottish Dál Riata. *Vestnik of Saint Petersburg University. History*, 2017, vol. 62, issue 1, pp. 57–68. DOI: 10.21638/11701/spbu02.2017.105

Fyodorov Sergey Egorovich — Doctor in History, Professor, Institute of History, St. Petersburg State University, 7–9, Universitetskaya nab., St. Petersburg, 199034, Russian Federation; s.fedorov@spbu.ru

Федоров Сергей Егорович — доктор исторических наук, профессор, Институт истории, Санкт-Петербургский государственный университет, Российская Федерация, 199034, Санкт-Петербург, Университетская наб., 7–9; s.fedorov@spbu.ru

This article has been written with support from the Russian National Fund for the Humanities (RGHF) (grant N 16-01-00108a).

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ЭРКИ И ЛЕГЕНДА ОБ ОСНОВАНИИ ШОТЛАНДСКОЙ ДАЛ РИАТЫ

Статья рассматривает один из сохранившихся вариантов легенды об основании шотландской Дал Риаты, обращая особое внимание на изложенную в «Истории народа скоттов» версию. Определяя пути влияния ирландских саг («О семени Конайре» и «О сыновьях Конайре»), жития св. Фехина, а также содержащихся в Желтой книге Лекана фрагментов на генеалогическое введение к «Истории», автор показывает, каким образом эти предания были адаптированы в разработанной в ней версии легенды. Адаптированный вариант легенды исключал какую-либо персонализацию, связанную как с сыновьями Эрка, так и самим Фергусом Мором. Он концентрировался исключительно на идее исхода определенной части Дал Риаты из Ирландии и на доказательстве этнической и политической однородности обеих частей королевства. Представление о том, что исход Дал Риаты был связан с Эрками, не могло возникнуть ранее, чем Алпиниды стали проявлять заметный интерес к своему ирландскому прошлому. Только в таком контексте сам Фергус и его братья наделялись необходимыми чертами, обеспечивавшими им функционально значимую роль как первых ирландских колонистов, вступивших когда-либо на шотландскую землю. Монархия, с которой королевство Алпинидов ассоциировалось напрямую, оказывалась таким образом ирландской. В этом смысле ключевыми фигурами, определившими связь потомков Кеннета Мак Алпина с территориальными политическими союзами Ирландии были, во-первых, Конайре Великий (Conaire Mór) и вся восходящая к нему традиция, во-вторых, Фиаху Фер Мара (Fiachu Fer Mara) — легендарный предок королевского рода Дал Фиатах, правителей Улада, в-третьих, Энгус Туйрмех (Oengus Tuirmech), один из наиболее значительных предков королевского рода Уи Нейллов, в-четвертых, Угаине Великий (Ugaine Mór), один из общих предков всех наиболее значительных ирландских королевских родов, и, наконец, Мил Испанский (Míl Espáine), один из легендарных персонажей ирландского эпоса. Библиогр. 33 назв.

Ключевые слова: раннесредневековая Шотландия и Ирландия, Дал Риата, легенды об основании Дал Риаты, гэльские кланы.

As it was reported by Gildas, northern Britain was peopled almost at the same time by Pictish and Gaelic invaders, who settled beyond the areas controlled by the Romans and Britons. Two centuries later Bede came up with a different version, according to which first Irish settlers (Scots) came to a land already been populated by the Picts and Britons. Bede wrote: "...the Picts, making sail for Britain, began to dwell along the northern part of the island, for the Britons had occupied the southern...but in the course of time Britain received, after the Picts and Britons, a third nation, the Scots in the part occupied by the Picts, who, with Reuda for their leader, having set out from Ireland, obtained for themselves, whether by friendship or by the sword, those settlements among them which up to present day hold; from which leader, in truth, they are even unto this day called Dalreudini: for dál, in their tongue, signifies 'a part' ” (Bede. Hist.I.I).

As Gildas, Bede confirms the fact of migration, but in his version of the migratory legend the Picts turn out to be the earliest colonists in Northern Britain known to him. Bede's statement about the antecedence of the Picts makes Argyll their primordial land. Some remarks in his text imply that the Picts may have had conflicts with the Scots (Gael) and even fought against them and bore arms (Bede. Hist.I.I). The scholars, who have repeatedly commented on Bede's assertion, point out that the information in it was undoubtedly of Pictish origin whereas the Gaels themselves may have interpreted their own migration differently [Fyodorov, Palamarchuk 2014].

In fact, long before Bede completed his work Gaelic chroniclers had been familiar with Reuda. Generally, they combined cenél nGabráin and cenél Comgaill under the

name of Corcu Réti¹, considering them to be the descendants of Domangart Réti [Mac Airt S. 1951, 503.1]. J. Fraser believes that it was this version of the origin of two main kindreds of Dál Riata that formed the basis for Bede's narrative [Fraser 2009, p. 145].

It's known that cenél nGabráin was one of the three ruling kindreds in Dal Riata and had retained its territorial sovereignty in Southern Argyll over the whole period of the existence of Scottish Dal Riata. Cenél Loairn controlled the central part, while the adjoining islands belonged to the cenél nOengussa. Cenél nGabráin, most probably, was of possession of some lands in Antrim (in the north-east of Ireland). It is thought that Bede knew the genealogy of these two kindreds, therefore, his description of the way the Scotts settled to the north of Clyde may have pointed, though implicitly, to the outline of Kintyre peninsula, which makes the northern periphery of the Firth of Clyde ('a very great gulf of the see that...separated the nation of Britons from the Picts, which on the west for a long space makes an inroad upon the land...to the northern part of which gulf then the Scots... came and made it for themselves a place of settlement') and was part of Gabráin's ancestral lands together with the stronghold of Daventry.

The legend about the kingdom of Corcu Réti or Gabráin's kingdom was not the only one describing the peopling of Dál Riata. There are at least two more semi-legendary narratives about the Gaelic migration to Scotland. The latest legend, as far as its final version is concerned, is considered to be the one from the famous text of "The History of the Men of Scotland" (Senchus Fer n-Alban) whereas the earliest one was the story from the tractate "The four chief kindreds of Dál Riata" (Cetri príomchenéla Dál Riata). The text became largely known, as it was there that the fourth kin – the cenél Comgaill – appeared. D. Dumville maintains that it formed part of the territorial alliance headed by Loairn's kindred [Dumville 2000, pp. 175–183].

The territorial coalition of Loairn (Loairn's and Comgaill's kindreds), the kingdom of Corcu Réti (Cenél nGabráin) as well as cenél nOengussa, a kind of the federation of the adjoining to Kintyre peninsula, made up what is usually referred to as Scottish Dál Riata. [Anderson 1982, pp. 106–132; Nieke, Duncan 1988, pp. 6–21; Sharpe 2000, pp. 47–61; Dumville 2000, pp. 170–191; Dumville 2002, pp. 185–212; Dumville 2011, pp.41–52].

In the tractate each segment of the alliance was deemed to have equal rights [Dumville 2000, pp. 170–173]. D. Dumville believes that the described form of the polity of Gaels in Argyll is a reflection of the widespread contemporary formulae 'scoti Britanniae', which, in particular, was frequently used in the "Life of Columba" by Adomnán. J. Fraser, specifying a semantic list of possible additions, points out the notion of 'Dalreudini' by Bede [Dumville 2000, p. 173; Fraser 2009, p.146].

With regards to the origin myth of the Gaels of Dál Riata, of most significance is the legend in "The History of the men of Scotland" (Senchus Fer n-Alban). Its initial version dates back almost to the same time when the work on the treaty "The four chief kindreds of Dál Riata" had been completed. However, the subsequent editing, which had lasted over the period of nearly three centuries, turned it into unique evidence for establishing the political claims to the territorial sovereignty in the area concerned, according to J. Bannerman².

¹ See the etymology of this eponym [O' Rahilly 1957, pp. 6–7] and different versions the eponym's use in the genealogical tradition [Anderson 1973, pp. 237–240; Broun 1999, pp. 61–62; 69–72; Dumville 2002, pp.186–187].

² Text **H** (Trinity College (Dublin), H.2.7. (1298); Senchus is in the first of the six volumes of the collection) with the differences in comparison with text **B** (Royal Irish Academy, 23, p. 12. (536): The Book

Comparing different copies of “Senchus”, it is possible to question the stability, let alone the initial nature of the scheme, which determined the content of the legend about the Gaels inhabiting western coasts of Scotland that had been disseminated in other chronicles. It concerns not only a generally accepted view, which, nonetheless, has its origin in the text of this chronicle, that the “migration” of Gaels to Scotland was organized by three brothers Eirc — Fergus, Loairn and Oengus, but also two more plots affecting the later processes of constructing the legend and its reproduction. These ideas, for the first time connected together, remained crucial for the later tradition: that it was the Eircs, not Corcu Réti, who led Irish kindreds to Argyll and the polity they formed came into being as part of ethnically homogenous (Gaelic) confederation, recognizing the supremacy of an Irish king from the sept of Corcu Duibne.

Bannerman [Bannerman 1956; Bannerman 1974] believes that the Latin protograph dates back to the middle of the 7th century and that the work on the final version of the chronicle had been finished in the middle of the 10th century at the earliest [Bannerman 1956, p. 152], thus supposing that even in its incomplete version the chronicle contained the earliest variant of the so called “Gaelic” evidence about Dál Riata.

Reconstructing the initial variant of the manuscript, he determines the text of the protograph, regarding it as a kind of genealogy of the royal dynasty of Gabráin, which, most probably, had been finished before the first representative of the cenél Loairn, Ferchar II (676–696), ascended the throne³. He also maintains that the later interpolations were due to the changing configuration of the rulers of Dál Riata, and that the manuscript must have been completed during the reign of Alpín mac Echdach (839–842) or his son Cinaed mac Alpín (841–858)⁴.

Bannerman perceives the text’s dynamic nature to result from the stages of editing or copying when a new environment brought about changes in the initial text of the manuscript. This transformed the legend into a version which was more general and, most probably, neutral to the ruling kindred of Dál Riata while still preserving its narrative similarity with the earlier version of the exodus of the “sons of Conaire”.

Being edited, the initial version of the legend, recording a plot about the exodus of the descendants of the aging ruler, underwent both informative and structural changes and

of Ballymote (c.1384–1406); the text of Senchus: p. 148, col. b — col. c 1.41.) and L (Royal Irish Academy. 23, p.2 (535): The Book of Lecan (1418); the text of Senchus: fol. 109, col. d. 1.8. — fol. 109v. col. b. 1.33), as well as text McF (University College (Dublin), MacFirbis’s Book of Genealogies (1650); the text of Senchus: p. 400–403. col. b. 1.6.) published: [Bannerman 1956, pp. 154–157, 157–159]. The text reconstructed by Dumville, based on the same copies, was published: [Dumville 2002, pp. 201–203].

³ D. Dumville, opposing the justification of the reconstruction of the text, supposes that “Senchus” was the incomplete result of the work of Irish scribes from the monastery of Clonmacnoise, who combined several chronicles (which might have come from Scotland) and differ in origin and genre. The work on the text, which was a kind of a commentary (míniugud) to the genealogies of Gaelic kindreds of Scotland rather than kindreds of Dal Riata, was interrupted not earlier than at the end of the 10th century (hence his suggestion for a title Míniugud Senchasa Fher nAlban). However, he does not rule out that the texts (Cethri Primchenéla Dáil Riata as well as different versions of royal genealogies known under the name of Genealogia Albanensium), might have been compiled in the 7th and 8th centuries [Dumville 2002, pp. 197–200]. Richard Sharpe also challenges Bannerman’s idea of the date [Sharpe 2000, p. 56], believing that the most plausible period for appearing of the protograph of Senchus was the turn of the 8th century.

⁴ Bannerman maintains that the phrase ‘gabsat Albain’ (literally ‘to gain possession of Alba’) cannot have appeared earlier than the middle of the 9th century, as before that Alba had been synonymous with Britain and it was only during the first kings of the Alpinid dynasty that the name acquired a more specific meaning referring to the Gaelic-Pictish lands of the Alpinid monarchy [Bannerman 1974, pp. 118–119].

transformations. Despite the fact that the work on “Senchus” followed logic to a certain extent, the editor’s efforts were not always sufficient to balance or harmonize the contradictions arising as a result of interpolations, and the text reflected traces of such narrative layers.

The first striking feature in the texts published by Bannerman is a large number of paired or similar names with regard to spelling and pronunciation. At first the overview mentions 12 sons of Erc mac Echdach for the following visualization, but later the list is almost mirrored in the description of those leaving for Britain and those staying in Ireland (6+6), which reflects the concept known to the compiler only rather than a widespread genealogical structure [Bannerman 1956, p. 154–156].

The tendency to such personification did not mean an attempt at historicizing the plot about migration, but reflected the process of its gradual embodiment. On the one hand, it was obvious that the editor was inclined to enliven the information behind the figures 12 and 6, which was of sacred character. The list of names was limited to the repertoire of anthroponyms most common for Gaels of Dál Riata and neighboring Picts, according to combinations with the patronymic Oengus, mentioned in the text. It is due to this fact that the presence of paired names in the Irish and Scottish cohorts of sons of Eirc can be explained, as well as the appearance of unidentified interchangeable names of Fergus in text H.

Alternatively, the editor might have tried to double Irish toponyms known to him in the names of Gaels of Dál Riata. Thus, it is possible to account for the most unusual situation with the Pictish anthroponym Oengus, which was supposed to have an Ulster toponym Telach Ceniul Oengossa [Bannerman 1974, p. 120].

The personification of the list most probably reflected the earliest stage of editing the text of “Senchus” and chronologically might have coincided with the dominance of the cenél nGabrain in Scottish Dál Riata. Such editing did not suppose an exact identification of the kindreds’ connections with the personified list, yet, it adapted an independently circulating Irish version of the legend (about the exodus of “the sons of Conaire”) to the ethno cultural context characteristic of Dál Riata. The blood relation between Fergus mac Eirc and Domangart I and his two sons, recorded in the text, was, alike other correlations, a prerequisite, according to Bannerman, necessary for legitimacy of the ruling kindred of Gabráin during one of the period of their undoubted dominance, but, nonetheless, remained an interpolation added by a scribe or an editor⁵.

The emphasizing of eponyms, or the next group of interpolations, naturally reflected the rise of the cenél (kindred lineage) Loairn. The traces of yet another editing could be put down to this. It was then that the lists were altered and, besides new names, some references to a certain connection between Loairn Mór and his kindred, bearing his eponym, was pointed out [Bannerman 1956, p. 155]. The later corrections in the manuscript only increase the number of eponyms and clearly show the correlation between the Gaels arriving in Dál Riata and its territorial structure, symbolizing a certain unity⁶.

⁵ The latest variants of such genealogies present Fergus mac Eirc as the tenth (Genelaig Albanensium), in another version the fifteenth descendant of Coirpre Riata, founder of the sept of Dál Riata (the corresponding text Genelaig in Rawlinson B. 502). In all the other texts, apart from McF, such correlation is not recorded [Bannerman 1956, p. 157].

⁶ For more details about it refer to: [Bannerman 1974, pp. 62–64, 108–111].

If the above-mentioned groups of interpolations were really dependent on the dynamics of social and political changes in western Scotland from the 7th to the 9th centuries, then the scheme of ruling kindreds of Dál Riata, retaining the initial relationships between the three Eircs presented in “Senchus”, had to reflect changing priorities. The nature of the details added to such alterations by a chronicler/editor was not only determined by the available variant of the legend, which incorporated and legitimized new territorial acquisitions (a campaign of the royal heir to the “neighboring” lands or abroad), but also by the accessible genealogical information to illustrate such relationships.

If an heir during his military campaign conquered or, as chroniclers put it, took possession of a new land, he as victor concluded an alliance with those of the conquered or returned territories, first symbolically and then really adding them to the domain of his still living predecessor. As a rule, chronicles gave an eponym of the heir to the tribes inhabiting such lands, thus, the conquered people joined the kinship of the heir. When the heir was accompanied by his brothers, more complex combinations were involved.

In contrast to the fact that cenél Loarin and cenél nOengussa are mentioned in all texts of “Senchus”, there is no reference to either the paternal kindred of Fergus (Coirpre Riata)⁷ or to the polity, which originated due to his arrival in Argyll and bore his eponym (Cenél Fergusa Móir). Contrary to all expectations, his name is directly connected with the kindred of Gabráin even in the earliest variants of the text.

Bannerman looked upon this as a considerable contradiction disrupting the entire narrative of the “Senchus” and put it down to inevitable discrepancies not only between different interpolations, but also between the historical and legendary layers. However he perceived Fergus as a real figure — the founder of the oldest ruling dynasty in Dál Riata. Bannerman took no note of the absence of the exact information about Fergus’s genealogy and the vagueness of the chronicler/editor with regard to presenting him among lineages of other rulers of Dál Riata — factors which he considered to be of significance as far as dating of the text is concerned⁸.

Certain layers of legendary and historical aspects in “Senchus” were determined by the genealogical tradition reproduced in the text, which combined mythical and historical figures, thus enabling to actualize the described reality. It was this tradition that formed the “conceptual” part of “Senchus”, uniting a legend about the exodus of people of Dál Riata and the structures of kindreds of Argyll.

The earliest layer of the legend, according to the remaining by the end of the 8th century variants,⁹ ended at the moment when people of Dál Riata were leaving for the coasts of Britain, but neither the date of their exodus, nor the events taking place there were elaborated on. In this way the beginning of the legend described how Irish septs of Muscraige, Corcu Duibne, Corcu Baiscind, as well as Dál Riata, whose origin could be traced back to the three sons of Conaire Mór¹⁰ (Coirpre Musc, Coirpre Baiscind and

⁷ In Bannerman’s (lines 61–62) as well as in Dumville’s transcriptions (line 49) there is a reference to “the people of Coirpre”, which has not survived due to later editing.

⁸ Refer to: [Dumville 2002, pp. 204–206].

⁹ It concerns a fragment of the legend about “the sons of Conaire” or in another variant — “the seed of Conaire” The main version, existent in the period in question, was published: [Gwynn 1912 (De Moccailb Conaire), pp. 144–152; Gwynn 1912 (De SíL Chonairi Mór), pp. 130–142; Bernard 1898, no. 33]; the texts of Lives of Saint Féichín are also of interest (died. 660): [Strokes 1891, pp. 318–353; Follet 2006].

¹⁰ The paternity of Conaire Mór was not indisputable: in one version of the legend the sons of Conaire Cóem, a grandson of Coirpre Firmaora, one of the sons of Conaire Mór, are called founders of these septs.

Coirpre Riata)¹¹ settled in Munster and most probably it was there that they, together with the Iverni, possessed large areas of lands [Gwynn 1912 (De SíL Chonairi Mór), p. 147, 150; Gwynn 1912 (De Moccaib Conaire), p. 149, 152]. Later, an additional plot was interpolated into the initial variant of the legend, which clarified that when after a while Dál Riata left Munster (the reason for their returning to the north of Ireland again remained uncertain) and headed for the North so as to settle in Britain (the details about the events happening on the other side of the Irish sea were not given again), their lands in Munster were inherited by the sept of Corcu Duibne.

The comments to “Elegy to Coluim Cille” contain details, which continue the story¹². It turns out that being driven by a famine in Munster, Coirpre Riata lead his people (Dál Riata) back to Ulster, afterwards (shortly afterwards, according to one of the variants) a certain part of the sept decided to leave Ireland, moving to Alba rather than to Britain, judging by scanty elaboration [Strokes 1899, pp. 423–426].

This is where all the versions of the legend extant at the end of the 8th century end, leaving much scope for later interpolations [Bannerman 1974, p. 44]. As none of the surviving variants of the legend particularizes the list of colonists and clarifies the date of the exodus (apart from one) [Strokes 1899, p. 43], the possibility of its further reproduction so as to legitimize domineering royal kin groups in Scottish Dál Riata was quite strong.

If the opening lines of “Senchus” (1–10) could be regarded as such evidence, then its version of the legend is represented in the following way. Any direct connection with the tale of Coirpre Riata¹³ is eliminated (but the chronological first and foremost). A natural reference to the line of Gabrain’s predecessors is excluded. There is no hint, even implicitly, at Conaire Mór in the continuity constructed there. As all the previous versions of the legend had not mentioned Fergus and consequently perhaps his brothers from his inner circle, what remained crucial was the central storyline, which determined the continuity not only with the Iverni¹⁴, but also with Irish Dál Riata. It is also essential that the accomplished exodus was presented without chronological or spatial details [Bannerman 1974, pp. 44, 122–124].

Bannerman was sure that even for the chronicler, not the editor, Fergus not only personified the idea of “passage”, but also clarified chronological framework. Referring to different evidence dating to Patrician texts [Malchrone 1939, p. 97; Gwynn 1913, p. 36

Conaire Cóem is known as “the father of three Coirpri” (Na Trí Coirpri). Both variants of the legend retain legitimacy character.

¹¹ There have survived variants of the legend where each son is identified by name Oengus Músc, Ailill Baschain, Eochaid Rigfhota [Gwynn 1912 (De SíL Chonairi Mór), p. 137, 141]. Dumville points out that such clarifications are repeated in genealogies of Muscraige in The Book of Leinster [Dumville 2002, p. 187; O’Brien, Kelleher 1976, p. 372].

¹² Different versions of the elegy date to the beginning of the 7–8I cc. [Atkinson 1896. (fragment I and II (col.1–2, pp. 436–437; и col. 125–128, pp. 434–435); Stokes 1899, pp. 31–55, 132–183, 248–289, 400–437; Vernam 1961, pp. 242–51; Fergus 1973, pp. 1–34].

¹³ The only exception is the last paragraph in “Senchus” where Coirpre («one’s of this text passing phantoms» [Dumville 2002, p. 208]) is mentioned among those who left behind in Ireland. (Tri caogad f[h]er an longas do ladar lá mocaibh Erc as é an tres caoga **coirbre** gona muintir [Bannerman 1966, line 72–73; Bannerman 1974, p. 62, 124]). At the same time, it’s important to remember that the links between genealogical and the following (general) parts of “Senchus” remain unproven.

¹⁴ Through mentioning the figure of Eochaid Munremar, whose ancestors stem from a legendary High King of Ireland Oengus Turbech Temrach, and through him — from High Kings of SíL Cinn (descendants of Conn Cétchathach) and, indirectly, from Uí Néill [Bannerman 1974, pp. 65–66; O’Brien, Kelleher 1976, p. 129; Dumville 2002, p. 204].

(facs. E. 18vb — 19rb)] as well as to a terse report about the death of the character in *The Annals of Tigernach* [Strokes 1895, p. 374–420], he attempts at proving that the tradition behind “*Senchus*” looked upon Fergus as a real figure, obviously dismissing the fact that the evidence mentioned there dated from the end of the 9th century and can not have been known to the chronicler.

Different versions of “*Senchus*” published by Bannerman were not characterized by such personification. The unstable nature of the main elements in the genealogical scheme of “*Senchus*” demonstrate that both the chronicler and even the editor, changing its text, had difficulty distinguishing Fergus from other colonists, let alone making him a chief figure in the exodus [Dumville 2002, p. 186]. The final version of the text mentions not only two brothers bearing the patronymic Mac Nisse (Mac Nisse Becc and Mac Nisse Mór), but also two Ferguses (Fergus Mór and Fergus Becc) [Bannerman 1956, p. 154]¹⁵. It was also possible that Mac Nisse Mór and Fergus Mór were one and the same person [Bannerman 1956, p. 154]¹⁶.

Neglecting the exact details of the names in both lists of cohorts of the Eirc, the compilers, nonetheless, consistently kept the symmetry characteristic of both groups. Such symmetry may not only have symbolized certain harmony between two parts of Dál Riata, but also clarified the exodus in terms of space and chronology, enabling both the chronicler and his editor to keep their version of the “passage” within its legendary context. Thus, the personification of Fergus¹⁷ was needless since the legend itself deliberately referred to kin groups (the Eirc), most suitable for the perceptions of the entirety and a group of compatriots split away from it.

* * *

It was only later that the interest in personification of Fergus grew, primarily, in Scottish royal genealogies, which served the purpose of recording every stage in patrilineal kinship of the monarch [Dumville 1997, pp. 47–102], although even they retained certain vagueness [Broun 1999, pp. 69–72]. Yet, real historical names and semi-legendary figures

¹⁵ In Bannerman’s transcription (lines 4–5); in Damville’s transcription (§1. 3): [Dumville 2002, p. 201].

¹⁶ In Bannerman’s transcription (line 11); in Damville’s transcription (§1. 6): [Dumville 2002, p. 201].

¹⁷ There might have been other justifications for the absence of such personification. If we consider the scheme about the correlation between “*Senchus*” and “*Cetri prímhchenéla Dál Riata*” suggested by Dumville [Dumville 2000, p. 170–191], then in the source material available to the chronicler and his editor the position of Fergus Mac Nisse was determined exclusively in connection with the cenél Comgaill (B: Royal Irish Academy (Dublin), MS. 23, p. 12 (536). *The Book of Ballymote*, published: [Atkinson 1887, 149b4–c8.]; F: University College (Dublin), MS. Add. Ir. 14, published: [Ó Muraíle 2004–2005, vol. I, p. 143 (§404.4–405.6)] and H: Trinity College (Dublin), MS. 1298 (H. 2.7), printed: [Bannerman 1974, p. 66]; L: Royal Irish Academy (Dublin), MS. 23, p. 2 (535) and Trinity College (Dublin), MS. 1319 (H. 2.17); *The Great Book of Lecan*, vol. 2, fols. 63–71). Further “clarifications” basing on that correlation [Dumville 2000, p. 181] reproduced it, using the formulae ‘ainm aile do’ [Bannerman 1966, line 11], taking account of fraternal ties between Comgaill and Gabráin [Bannerman 1966, line 13]. At the same time a perspective «Fergus Mór» (*Senchus*) turned out to be a later interpolation compared to the text of “*Cetri prímhchenéla Dál Riata*” and did not leave any scope for exact personification. Genealogical layers pointed out by Broun [Broun 1999, pp. 69–72], where the figure of Fergus Mór, most probably, was mistakenly identified with Fergus m. Ferchad (Ferchar), might have played a certain role as well: preference for the version of “*Cetri prímhchenéla Dál Riata*” was obvious, yet it was of little help for either the chronicler of the editor as far as concrete details of one of the Eircs were concerned.

listed in genealogies symbolized the legitimacy of power itself rather than the indisputable right of a particular ruler to such power.

Each genealogy included several key figures of predecessors, for instance, an inaugurated king, whose functional silhouette stood out from other figures within genealogical space. As a rule, names of such ancestors were venerated and praises were bestowed upon them in literature circulated in the inner circle of the monarch.

It is known that in the part of Ireland neighboring Scotland, they resorted to distinctions, specially marked for the founder of the dynasty from whom other kings derived their origin, to determine the nature of genealogical succession, as well as to the figure of the ruler, whose name symbolized the establishing of the territorial realm. In this sense, the royal genealogy centred round a personality of the monarch, mostly — an eponymic figure, whose name legitimized the beginning of the dynasty. Only later, in retrospect, did there arise the figure of some kind of an installer of the monarchy, by reference to whom a legitimate dynasty monopolized supreme power. For example, a similar role of the founder of the dynasty of Irish Uí Néill in their genealogy belonged to Niall of the Nine Hostages (Niall Noigiallach). At the same time, Conn Cétchathach or Conn of the Hundred Battles was considered to be the founder of the Irish dynasty.

The basis for the development and further usage of such genealogical scheme was formed during the editing of “Senchus”, but it finally took shape in the genealogies of the Alpinid dynasty. According to the scheme, Alba was regarded as a successor of the lands, which had been managed by Fergus himself and his relatives — younger brothers. The sons of Eirc might have been perceived as founders of the territorial monarchy of the Gaels, whose legitimacy at another step of its evolution was connected with Kenneth MacAlpin, as with the installer of the dynasty. By that time Fergus could have become quite a recognizable person. [Bannerman 1974, pp. 119–121; Broun 1999, pp. 69–72].

M. Anderson believed that the position of the elder Eircs as predecessors of the Alpinid dynasty became stronger after a certain plot, uniting burial places of the sons of Eirc and Kenneth I, had been incorporated in the genealogical practice. Referring to the protograph of group X, she believes that island of Iona might have been such a place as since the 12th century it had been regarded as an ancestral burial place of the Alpinid dynasty as well as their predecessors from Dál Riata¹⁸. Moreover, in text F from the same group of manuscripts it is said that all the monarchs “between Kenneth and Lulach” (1057–1058) were also buried on that Island¹⁹.

Referring to the sons of Eirc as to organizers of genealogical space not only turned the idea of a monarchy that they had established in this way into a “technically” and “technologically” available instrumental method, but also facilitated the task of its double legitimacy. The genealogy of the Eirc brothers, even at the level of two generations preceding them, provided further genealogical links and space for the possibility of introducing the Alpinid dynasty.

It was only within this context that Fergus himself and his brothers were invested with the features necessary for their functionally essential role as the first Irish colonists,

¹⁸ About further development of this genealogical concept: [Cowan 1981, p. 7].

¹⁹ Despite the inaccuracy in the way the name of Oengus is spelt, the phrase sounds very convincing: ‘sepultus in Yona insula, ubi tres filii Erc, scilicet Fergus, Loarn et Eneugus sepulti fuerat’. Given the fact that it is repeated almost literally in texts F, D, G and I, its functionality is undoubted [Anderson 1973, pp. 64 (G), 59–60, 62–63 (I), 279–285 (D, F)].

who set foot on the Scottish land. Thus, the monarchy with which the Alpinid kingdom was directly associated, turned out to be Irish. Therefore, the key figures who determined the links of Kenneth MacAlpin's descendants with territorial political groups of Ireland were: firstly, Conaire Mór²⁰ and the whole tradition originating from him; secondly, Fiachu Fer Mara, a legendary ancestor of the royal dynasty of Dál Fiatach, the rulers of Ulaid; thirdly, Oengus Tuirmech, one of the most prominent ancestors of the royal family of Ui Néill; fourth, Ugaine Már, one of the common ancestors for all of the most influential Irish royal lineages; and finally Míl Espáine, one of the legendary characters of the Irish epics [Broun 1999, p. 189].

* * *

The question of what Loairn's and Oengus's place was in the adapted version of the legend remains an enigma²¹. It is possible to assume that they, together with polities connected with them, dwelt in Argyll like the cenél nGabráin. In this case a chronicler using real facts combined them with the "vacant" storylines in the legend. Filled lacunae, though, do not give any clue to the ethnic origin of the "settlers" behind Loairn and Oengus. As for kindreds bearing their eponyms, it is hard to say whether they were of Gaelic origin or not.

The answer, to some extent shedding light on the ethnic compositions of kindreds of Dál Riata, lies in the corrections in text L. It is known that the name of Oengus had been included in both lists of Fergus's brothers until one of the editors eliminated it from the Irish version, adding an unequivocal comment: 'cuius tamen semen in Albania est'²². Due to the use of the toponym "Alba", the correction cannot be dated earlier than the beginning of the 9th century, thus, the situation with defining ethnic composition of inhabitants of Dál Riata remained unsolved until the disappearance of the kingdom²³.

If Bede experienced difficulty describing the ethnic composition of the population of Argyll, then the existence and interaction of people with varied origin may seem quite plausible. The northern border of Dál Riata went through the Ardnamurchan peninsula, beyond which, in the North-East, there were lands belonging to the Picts. In the South-East they bordered with the British kingdom of Alclud, whereas all along the eastern periphery there stretched a frontier between them and the Southern Picts.

It is hard to imagine the impenetrability or isolation of Gaelic area outlined in such a way. Bede wrote about the willingness of the Gaels to give "wives" to the Picts upon their departure on condition that 'when the matter became a subject of doubt, they should choose their king rather from the female than the male line of royalty», clarifying further

²⁰ In Irish genealogies he is sometimes called Conaire mac Moga Lama. It is this same version that is reproduced in the genealogy of William the Lion in the collection of Poppleton manuscripts. Published: [Anderson 1973, pp. 235–240]. Conaire is listed as N 38 in the line originating from William I.

²¹ Of interest is the position in genealogies of Irish kings (Fiche bliadhna o cath Ocha go n[d]ecadar clanna Eirc i nAlbain i. vi mic Eirce mic Ethach Muinramair, dá Aengus dá Loarn dá [Fergus]), retaining uncertainty not only as far as Fergus is concerned, but also with regard to Loarn and Oengus. [Boyle 1971, p. 173].

²² For this refer to Bannerman's remark: [Bannerman 1974, p. 119].

²³ Scottish historiography retained certain vagueness until the XV century, which, as D. Broun pointed out, intricately combined ideas of the three waves of Gaels' migrations to Dál Riata. In this context, it remained unclear how and, chiefly, when the Gaels might have mixed with autochthonous people of Western Scotland [Broun 1999, pp. 69–72].

that, «which custom even to the present time is...observed among the Picts» (Bede. Hist. I.I). It should be noted that the structure of the sentence does not enable to ascertain whether what was meant is a custom of “taking Gaelic wives” or a practice of succession to the throne: it is probable that Bede implied both conditions connected with Gaelic-Pictish “treaty”.

If before the supposed arrival of Fergus the population of Argyll had been of varied ethnic origin²⁴ or had been mixed (people of Reuda and the Picts), then the character of the polity of Dál Riata based on kinship groups does not seem to be so obvious. It is possible that due to such circumstances Scottish Dál Riata did not so much resemble a part of its legendary diphyletic prototype as connected with Irish possessions, but was a kind of composite ethnic unity combining in its core Gaelic population and, apparently, Pictish or Gaelic-Pictish inhabitants, who had lived in Argyll before the exodus of the people of Coirpre Riata (Reuda).

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²⁴ K. Mayer, for example, supposed that before Gaels arrived, the territory of the Kintyre peninsula had been inhabited by Britons: [Mayer 1912, pp. 445–446 (§ 41)].

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Received: 02 October 2016

Accepted: 26 January 2017