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Adomnán's *Vita Columbae* and the early churches of Tiree

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The most striking thing about Adomnán's references to Tiree in his *Vita Columbae* [VC] is, it seems to me, the allusion in VC III.8 to *fratrum monasteria*, '(the) monasteries of brothers', and *cetera eiusdem insulae monasteria*, 'the other monasteries of the same island', in addition to the Columban foundation of *Campus Lunge*. In VC I.36, indeed, he names one of them: *Artcháin*, 'Fair Height', founded by the priest Findchán. Tiree, then, by no means a large island, supported in Adomnán's day more than two monasteries: a notable enough phenomenon. So it seemed worthwhile, after first reviewing what Adomnán himself has to say about the early churches of Tiree, to try to find out what other evidence (documentary chiefly, but also archaeological and toponymic) might exist to shed further possible light on his passing – and tantalizing – notice in VC III.8. I have not thought it necessary, for this exercise, to undertake personally fieldwork on the island, deeming existing surveys, especially the work of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (see below), to be quite sufficient for the purpose.

The island of Tiree

The island was, at a much later date at least, well-known for its fertility, upon which many old accounts comment. 'The island of Tiree, where there is ... great plenty of barley', says the fourteenth-century chronicler John of Fordun.¹

... Thiridh ane main laich fertile fruitfull cuntrie ... Na cuntrie may be mair fertile of corn, and very gude for wild fowls and for fische ...²

Tierhie ... is commodious and fertile of corns and store of gudes ... It was callit in all tymes McConnells girnell [i.e., MacDonald's granary or storehouse]; for it is all teillit land, and na girs [grass] but ley land, quhilk

1 *Insula Tyrec, qua ... est ... ordei magna copia*, Fordun *Chronica* (ed. Skene, i, p. 43, ii, p. 40); cf. Bower, *Scotichronicon* II.10, lines 55–6 (ed. MacQueen and MacQueen, pp 188–9, 343–4, 348, nn). 2 So Dean Monro in 1549: Munro, *Western Isles*, p. 65.

is maist nurischand girs of ony other, quhairthrow the ky [cows] of this Ille abundis sa of milk that thai are milkit four times in the day [etc.].³

'The Isle of Tiree ... has been always valued for its extraordinary fruitfulness in corn ... the natives for the most part live on barley-bread, butter, milk, cheese, fish ...', says Martin Martin c.1695.⁴ 'The Ille of Tery ... is goudid for cattell, productive of corne and grasse abundantly. It is commodious for fowling and fishing ...' according to a (late seventeenth-century?) writer in Macfarlane's *Geographical Collections*.⁵ If these or similar conditions prevailed in the sixth and seventh centuries (and *Campus Lunge* is able, in VC I.41, to send 'a fat beast and six measures of grain' to a pauper in Coll: see below), then the fact that the island could have supported at this time several, doubtless fairly small, monastic communities is perhaps less surprising. Such apparently intensive (if localized) monastic settlement, however, would also seem to presuppose an existing lay population so disposed that such ecclesiastical colonization could be more or less readily accommodated, socially and economically; and so no over-riding prior interest in the island on the part of one or more powerful secular kindreds there or nearby. As usual (as, indeed, in the case of Iona itself), we know nothing whatever of the local circumstances governing the foundation of individual churches.

The place-name 'Tiree'

In VC, Adomnán calls the island *Ethica terra* (I.19, 36, II.39, III.8), *Ethetica* and *Aethica terra* (II.15), *Ethica insula* (I.19, twice); compare *Aethicum pilagus* (I.19): 'land' or 'island of Eth'. 'Adomnán's (*A*)ethic(a) is a fanciful Latin adjective ... The quasi-Greek *Etheticam* is even more fanciful'.⁶ In the Latin lives of the saints, it is *Heth* (*terra, regio*).⁷ It occurs in early Irish as *Tír-iath*.⁸ With the traditional reputation of Tiree for fertility in mind, Reeves derived the generic element of the name from Old Irish *ith*, gen. sg. *etho(a)*, 'corn, grain' (*DIL*, s.v.), understanding the name to be *Tír Etho* (*Tír Itha*), 'land of corn'.⁹ Watson,

³ *Description of the Isles of Scotland*, in Skene, *Celtic Scotland*, iii, pp 428–40, at 437. Skene dated this piece between 1577 and 1595. ⁴ Martin, *Description* (ed. Macleod, pp 294–6). ⁵ Macfarlane, *Geographical collections* (ed. Mitchell, ii, pp 217–18). ⁶ Anderson and Anderson, *Adomnán's Life* (1991), p. lxxv. ⁷ But *terra Ethica* in the *Vita Altera S. Brendani* 15; *Ethica insula* in the *Vita S. Columbae Hiensis* 26 (ed. Heist, *VSH*, pp 330, 372). The second example, however, occurs in a context derived directly from VC III.8. ⁸ Watson, *Celtic place-names*, pp 60 and n.; 62, n. 2; 85–6. ⁹ Reeves (ed.), *Life of St Columba* (1857), p. 48, n. 'b'; (1874), 308–9.

however, in his discussion of the name,¹⁰ drew attention to the fact that, as Kuno Meyer had already pointed out, the early Irish *Tír-iath* showed, by the diphthongization of Adomnán's *e(th)* to *ia(th)*, that the *e* of *eth* was long (from an older *ei*) – a fatal objection to Reeves' etymology, where *etho* has short *e*. Watson concluded that 'the various forms (that is, of the name Tiree), ancient and modern, cannot be reconciled with each other, and their diversity indicates that the second part is not Gaelic, possibly not even Celtic'.¹¹ The fact, on the other hand, that we are dealing with essentially the same name from early medieval to modern times (whatever its origins; and discontinuous documentation notwithstanding) probably serves to emphasize the importance of the island in the ecclesiastical domain from Adomnán's day and earlier to the Reformation and later (for *Hith*, etc., see Appendix).

Campus Lunge

Much of the documentary material for the early churches of Tiree is provided by VC, the bulk of it having to do with the monastery that Adomnán calls *Campus Lunge*, 'ship field',¹² or 'plain of the ship', over which presided, apparently for a significant period, Baithéne, Columba's second-in-command and eventual successor.

Campus Lunge occurs, explicitly or implicitly, six times. (1) In I.19, a whale (*cetus, bilua*) appears between Iona and Tiree. One Berach, sailing to Tiree in the morning, gives no heed to Columba's warning about it and, in consequence, has a bad fright. Baithéne, likewise sailing from Iona to Tiree that morning, listens to the saint in a receptive frame of mind, meets the whale and blesses it, whereupon the animal disappears. The moral of the story seems to lie in the likely consequences of monastic obedience and disobedience essentially and, as Anderson points out,¹³ the whale is assimilated to Jonah's sea-monster (it is both *monstruosum prodigium*, 'a prodigious monster', and *cetus mirae et immensae magnitudinis*, 'a whale of marvellous and enormous size'). Baithéne is presumably bound for *Campus Lunge*: Berach is probably so also. (2) In I.30, a penitent (a clerical (?) scholar – he is called *sapiens uir*, 'a wise man')¹⁴ comes from Ireland to Columba in Iona; and after a few days there he is sent to Baithéne, who is described as *praepositus*, 'prior', of *Campus Lunge*. Here we see the

¹⁰ Watson, *Celtic place-names*, pp 85–6. ¹¹ Medieval record forms of the name may be found conveniently in Innes, *Origines Parochiales Scotiae* ii.1, pp 327–31. Watson, *Celtic place-names*, p. 86, reviews the modern Scots Gaelic forms of the name, noninal and adjectival. ¹² Anderson and Anderson, *Adomnán's Life*, p. 58, n. ¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 44, n. ¹⁴ Reeves, *Life of St Columba* (1857), p. 59 n. 'd'; Sharpe, *Adomnán*, p. 292 n. 139.

monastery in the role of penitential station, as again in II 39 (below). (3) In I.41, Columba orders Baithéne as *praepositus* of *Campus Lunge* to send 'a fat beast and six measures of grain' (*quoddam pingue pecus et vi. modios*) to the indigent thief Erc mocu Druidi in Coll. It need not be inferred from this that Tiree could afford a charitable gift of agricultural produce that Iona could not.¹⁵ Tiree is close to Coll and the mother-house had previously, in fact, given Erc some sheep.¹⁶ (4) In II.15, Baithéne sails from Iona to Tiree; Colmán Elo from Iona to Ireland. Both obtain a favourable wind from Columba's prayers, one after the other. Baithéne's landfall is the harbour of *Campus Lunge* – *portus campi Lunge*: this does not necessarily mean, of course, that the monastery is at its harbour, or indeed right on the sea – it could just as easily be some way inland. (5) The long story, doubtless a well-known tradition of the Columban community, of Librán of the reed-plot, is the subject of II.39. Librán comes to Columba in Iona from Connacht as a lay penitent. Having confessed his sins to the saint, he is sent to *Campus Lunge* to work out his penance there for seven years. After formal reconciliation in Iona at the end of this period and a visit home, he returns to Iona and, becoming a monk of Columba, is sent back to *Campus Lunge*, where he remains. Eventually and apparently long after Columba's death, he dies an old man and is buried at Durrow, while on official business there. 'This Librán is called "of the reed-plot" (*Libranus harundineti*)', Adomnán explains, 'because for many years he worked in a reed-plot, gathering reeds.' The plot was presumably in Tiree, the property immediately of *Campus Lunge*, whose community (and that of Iona?) used the reeds for thatching their timber buildings and probably for other purposes also.¹⁷ We see again here, as in I.30 (above), the monastery of *Campus Lunge* in the role of penitential station. Clearly this role involved more than merely temporary retreats. That penance could involve physical mortification, at least deprivation of food, is indicated by the episode in I.21 concerning a false penitent at the monastery on the island of *Hinba*. (6) In III.8, Columba repulses from Iona, with angelic assistance, disease-inflicting demons, which then attack Tiree. The monasteries of Tiree (the *fratrum monasteria, cetera eiusdem insulae monasteria*, to which I referred at the outset) suffer severely from this visitation, except Baithéne's community of *Campus Lunge*, where only one man dies.

Tiree and/or *Campus Lunge* thus appear, as I have said, six times in *VC*. The monastery on the island of *Hinba* appears seven times. Both monasteries are penitential stations; both are ruled by *praepositi* who are close to Columba, physically and spiritually. Baithéne was Columba's first cousin.¹⁸ If we could

¹⁵ As implied by Reeves, *Life of St Columba* (1857), pp 78–9 n. 'k'; 'Tiree', p. 309. ¹⁶ Cf. Sharpe, *Adomnán*, p. 303, n. 182. ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 340, n. 319. ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp 256–7 n. 55. Ernán in

identify *Hinba* with any certainty, other points of comparison might emerge. Columba, however, is never said by Adomnán to visit Tiree; whereas five episodes in *VC* have him staying in *Hinba*.¹⁹

Adomnán's hybrid Latin-Irish *Campus Lunge* translates fully into Irish as *Mag Luinge*: in *monasterio quod Campus Navis, id est Mag Lunga, vocatur, quodque per sanctum Columbam in terra Heth fundatum est*, 'in the monastery which is called the Plain of the Ship – that is *Mag Luinge* – and which was founded by Saint Columba in Tiree'.²⁰ The annals record the burning of *Mag Lunge* in 673,²¹ and the death of Conall of *Mag Luinge* in 775.²² It seems likely that this *Mag Luinge* and *Campus Lunge* are identical, though the place-name *Mag Luinge* occurs in Ireland also: Hogan²³ lists three instances. On the other hand, AU 673.2,4,5 and possibly much of 3 as well – out of six entries for 673 – are Scottish,²⁴ and all but the first entry (four out of five) for the corresponding year in AT are then Scottish too. There is less certainty in the case of Conall, but AU 775.1 starts with the obit of Cinadu, king of the Picts,²⁵ and it seems likely that the Four Masters, or their source, regarded Conall as abbot of the monastery of *Mag Luinge* – *Campus Lunge* in Tiree.²⁶

Both Reeves²⁷ and Watson²⁸ suggested that Kilbride on Cornaig Mór might be represented in Irish tradition by *Brigit Maigi Luinge*.²⁹ Sharpe dismisses the suggestion, basically on the grounds that *Mag Luinge* is also an Irish place-name (as noted above).³⁰ Both the saint's name and the place-name are, in fact, somewhat doubtful: *Brig[it] Maige Chungu* or *Luinge*;³¹ *Bríg Maige Chungu*, LL 368 g 53.³² I would not, however, reject the identification out of hand. *Brigit Maigi Luinge* is an attested reading:³³ as we have seen, *Mag Luinge* in Tiree was probably known to Irish annalists (at least for the pre-Viking period and presumably *via* Iona) and Tiree was known to Irish hagiographers, whether from Adomnán (directly or indirectly) or independently. It is possible, therefore, that the existence (if no more) of this church of Kilbride – *Cill Bhríghde* – was known in Ireland, as part of the ecclesiastical topography of the island generally, or of that associated with the monastery of *Campus Lunge* specifically (Cornaigmore and Cornaigbeg lie on the north side of the island, a short distance south-west of

Hinba was his uncle (*VC* I.45). ¹⁹ *VC* I.21, II.24, III.5, 17, 18. ²⁰ *Vita S. Baithini* 9 (ed. Heist, *Vitae*), p. 381, my translation. ²¹ *Combustio Maige Lunge* – AU 673.1; similarly AT 202; also AFM 671, where O'Donovan notes that this is *Campus Lunge* in Scotland: 'Moyle long was burnt' – AC 669. ²² *Conall Maighe Luinge* – AU 775.1; *Conall abb Maighe Luinge* – AFM 770. ²³ Hogan, *Onomasticon*, p. 525. ²⁴ Anderson, *Early sources*, i, pp 182–3. ²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp 247–8. ²⁶ Though cf. Reeves, 'Tiree', p. 313. ²⁷ Reeves, 'Tiree', p. 313. ²⁸ Watson, *Celtic place-names*, p. 92. ²⁹ Reeves actually asserts the identification much more confidently in *The Life of St Columba* (1857), p. 59 n. 'f'. ³⁰ Sharpe, *Adomnán*, p. 303 n. 182. ³¹ Ó Riain, *Corpus*, p. 154: 708.13. ³² Ed. O'Sullivan, *The Book of Leinster*, vi, p. 1673. ³³ That of Rawl. B 502, 94 d 45, according to Watson, *Celtic place-names*, p. 92.

Balephetrish Bay. My argument partly depends, of course, on the assumption that this area formed part of *Campus Lunge* – *Mag Luinge* as the district within which Columba's monastery also lay).

Artcháin

As was noted at the outset, in *VC* III.8, Adomnán refers to *fratrum monasteria* and *cetera eiusdem insulae monasteria*, in addition to *Campus Lunge*. In I.36, he names one of them – *Artcháin*, 'Fair Height', founded by the priest Findchán. Findchán brings to his monastery a sanguinary man and unworthy pilgrim and subsequently has him irregularly ordained priest, 'a bishop being summoned for the purpose' (*accito episcopo*: this hesitant and probably reluctant individual is not necessarily, I think, a monk of Findchán's in episcopal orders)³⁴ and Findchán himself effectively participating in the ordination. As a consequence, and in accordance with the indignant Columba's pronouncement, given when this transaction is made known to him, Findchán's participating right hand decays and is buried in the island of *Ommon* (unidentified: near Tiree?), though he himself lives for many years more; while Aid, the unworthy pilgrim and false priest, returns to his former life to meet the violent end that Adomnán regards as his due.

There is no unambiguous indication, to my mind, that *Artcháin* was a Columban monastery;³⁵ nor is it clear whether or not it survived until Adomnán's day. Findchán is called by Adomnán 'soldier of Christ' (*Christi miles*): nevertheless he does not emerge well from this episode. If, therefore, he enjoyed some cult as a saint and is, in fact, commemorated in Kilfinichen (*Cill Fhionncháin*) in Mull,³⁶ he scarcely derived his reputation for sanctity from Adomnán's narrative alone. If he is the saint of Kilfinichen, this suggests to me a separate tradition stemming originally from a church that was not only inde-

³⁴ *Pace* Reeves, *Life of St Columba* (1857), p. 69, n. 'n'. and 'Tiree', p. 304; cf. Sharpe, *Adomnán*, p. 298, n. 158. ³⁵ Again, *pace* Reeves (*Life of St Columba*, 1857, p. 69 n. 'n'; 'Tiree', p. 304): Adomnán's distinction, in *VC* III.8, between *Campus Lunge* and the *cetera monasteria* of Tiree implies that it was not. The fact that Columba pronounces a *sententia* on Findchán and Aid cannot, I think, be taken to imply that he had formal authority over them. In two other cases in *VC* known to me (there may be others), where Columba pronounces a *sententia* on wrongdoers – II.20 (the inhospitable Vigenus, B text only) and II.25 (a girl's murderer) – his authority is moral (and, as in I.36, prophetic), but not formal. On the other hand, if *Artcháin* is not a Columban church, it is the only non-Columban foundation in Scotland named explicitly by Adomnán. ³⁶ As suggested by Reeves, *Life of St Columba* (1857), p. 66, n. 'c'; Watson, *Celtic place-names*, p. 304; RCAHMS, *Argyll* 3, no. 296; see also Sharpe, *Adomnán*, p. 296, n. 156.

pendent of Iona, but which, as such, perhaps also had strained relations (permanently or periodically) with *Campus Lunge*: these strained relations being reflected in Adomnán's rather negative portrayal of Findchán. It would suggest, too, that *Artcháin* (or possibly a dependency or dependencies, in Tiree or elsewhere) survived long enough to disseminate, to some extent at least, the cult of its founder and patron. It is, therefore, worth noting the following calendar entries, though they are by no means conclusive in the present context: *Findchadan na hArda*, 23 Feb. (*Martyrology of Tallaght*, similarly *Gorman* and *Donegal*); *Fintan Airde Cain*, 8 Sept. (*Martyrology of Tallaght*, similarly *Gorman* and *Donegal*).³⁷

There is nothing in Adomnán's narrative to indicate the possible location within Tiree of *Artcháin*, save the very little that may be inferred (and that in only the most general terms) from the generic element of the place-name.

The foundation of monasteries or at least their sojourn in Tiree is attributed by their later lives to Cainnech of Aghaboe, Brendan of Clonfert and Comgall of Bangor. All of these saints are associated by Adomnán with Columba: in *VC* III.17, especially, they are three (out of four) of Columba's distinguished visitors in *Hinba*.

Kilkenneth

The Latin Life of Cainnech (21) in the Dublin MS,³⁸ and that in the Salmanticensis collection (26),³⁹ have a layman, Tulchán, going from Ireland to St Columba in Iona to become a monk, taking with him his young son, Munnu. Later, Baithéne, urging that Tulchán loves his son more than he loves God, advises Columba to order his father to throw Munnu from a high rock into the sea. Cainnech, divinely apprised of this transaction while voyaging, or about to voyage, from Scotland to Ireland, goes out of his way to rescue the boy from the waves; and, arriving in Iona, angrily upbraids Columba for his cruelty. The episode is clearly modelled closely on the account given by John Cassian of Abba Patermutus and his young son.⁴⁰ To test the sincerity of the father's monastic vocation (after their joint reception), the two of them are separated and the small boy is deliberately neglected and even maltreated. Finally, Patermutus is ordered to throw his son into the river, which he does. Monks

³⁷ Two other entries for Sept. 8 may possibly indicate Pictish associations: *meic Talarag* (*Martyrology of Tallaght*: *meic Thalaire(c)*, *Martyrology of Gorman*, *Martyrology of Donegal*), 'the sons of Talarag, Talarc'; and *Fergus cruthnech* (*Martyrology of Tallaght*: similarly *Gorman*, *Donegal*), 'Fergus the Pict(?)'. ³⁸ Ed. Plummer, *Vitae*, i, pp 159–60. ³⁹ Ed. Heist, *Vitae*, p. 188. ⁴⁰ Cassian, *Institutes* IV.27, 28 (ed. Ramsey) pp 92–3; (ed. Guy), pp 158–62.

have, however, been stationed beforehand on the riverbank, to make sure that his obedience does not end in tragedy – a precaution that Columba and Baithéne have neglected to take at Iona. Cassian draws explicit attention to the parallel between Paternus' deed and that of Abraham (with Isaac, Gen 22:1–18). The Irish lives, on the other hand, have largely lost sight of the fact that the test is meant to be ultimately constructive in the monastic context (the methods adopted are certainly repugnant to modern western sensibilities: Cassian's story, at least, is no doubt starkly dramatized in order to reinforce its essentially exemplary character).

The Salmanticensis version of the Tulchán episode gives a detail of some significance in the present context, namely that Cainnech had been living in Tiree: 'dwelling in the district of Tiree and hastening to sail to Ireland' (*in regione Hethi habitans atque ad Hyberniam navigare properans*). In view of the fact that the Salmanticensis Life of Cainnech is one of Richard Sharpe's 'O'Donohue group' of Irish saints' lives, for which he proposes an eighth-century origin,⁴¹ the implications of this piece of information for the earlier history of the church of Kilkenneth – *Cill Chainnich (Choinnich)* – in Tiree could be considerable. Excavation of the site might cast further light on its origins and early development.

Bledach, Bledua, Bleit (St Brendan)

The Oxford *Vita Prima S. Brendani* has St Brendan of Clonfert visit Britain twice. In chapter 86, he founds a church (*ecclesia*) in the island of *Auerech* (or *Ailech*); in chapter 87, he sets out again for Britain and founds a church there 'called Bledach, in the district that is named Heth' – *fundavit ibi ecclesiam, nomine Bledach* [Beldach, one MS] *in regione cui nomen Heth*.⁴² In the Salmanticensis *Vita Altera S. Brendani* (15), Brendan apparently founds both churches on the same visit: 'he founded two monasteries, one in the island of Ailech, the other in Tiree, in the place called Bledua' (*duo monasteria, unum in insula Ailech, alterum in terra Ethica, in loco nomine Bledua, fundavit*).⁴³ The Irish Life of Brendan (57), has yet another variation on the tradition: 'Brendan afterwards went into the land of the Britons again and built a monastery named Bleit in the district of Letha' (*Luidh iarsin Brenainn hi ccrich Bretan doridhisi, 7 cumdaigter lais in chathair dianid ainm Bleit i ccrich Letha*).⁴⁴ The vision Brendan has here is basically the same as he has at Bledach in the Oxford *Vita Prima* (87). Plummer, however, equates *Letha* with *Armorica* or *Brittany*.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Sharpe, *Saints' lives*, pp 297–339. ⁴² Ed. Plummer, *Vitae*, i, p. 143. ⁴³ Ed. Heist, *Vitae*, p. 330. ⁴⁴ Ed. Plummer, *Bethada*, i, pp 86–7 (text), ii, p. 84 (translation). ⁴⁵ Plummer,

Clearly, there are problems with this tradition of Brendan, not least with regard to the place-names. Given the (eventual) literary reputation of St Brendan the Navigator, furthermore, the fact that the most readily comprehensible (to me at least) place-name variant – *Bledach* – may mean 'abounding in monsters, beasts, whales' (DIL, *bledach*; *bled*, 'whale, sea-monster. Used also of various wild or fabulous animals'),⁴⁶ arouses some suspicion. One wonders, indeed, whether the variant *Bledua* might not be modelled on Latin *belua*, 'beast distinguished for size or ferocity, a monster (as an elephant, lion, wild boar, whale etc.), brute' (Lewis and Short, *Dictionary*, s.v.) – perhaps influenced by the episode in *VC* (I.19) and Adomnán's use of *bilua* there (see above). (*Marina*) *belua* is in fact used twice in the Oxford *Vita Prima S. Brendani* (86), as an alternative to *bestia*, in the context of the fight between two sea-beasts witnessed by Brendan while he is in *Auerech-Ailech*;⁴⁷ (and see further below).⁴⁸ With *Ailech*, on the other hand, we seem to be on much firmer historical ground. It is most probably, as Watson argued cogently,⁴⁹ *na h-Eileacha Naomha* in the Garvelloch Islands, at the southern end of the Firth of Lorn, where there are the remains of an early ecclesiastical settlement.⁵⁰ Between the islands of *na h-Eileacha Naomha-Eileach an Naoinh* and *Garbh Eileach* to the north is the small island of *A'Chuli*, earlier *Culbrandon*, for *Cúil Bhrianainn*, 'Brendan's Retreat'.⁵¹ If, then, the hagiographical tradition seems to have had access to at least this much genuine historical-topographical information about one Brendanic foundation in the Hebrides, one has to consider the possibility that *Bledach* in Tiree was equally historical at one time. *Bledach* could have been named as a coastal site where whales were frequently seen and, perhaps of more practical importance, where they were more or less frequently stranded. This did happen in later times. 'Some years ago', says Martin Martin in his account of Tiree, 'about one hundred and sixty little whales, the biggest not exceeding twenty feet long, run themselves ashore in this isle, very seasonably, in time of scarcity, for the natives did eat them all, and told me that the sea-pork, that is, the whale, is both wholesome and very nourishing meat'.⁵² The seventeenth-century people of Tiree were clearly familiar with and appreciated whale-meat. 'There is no evidence that the early Irish hunted whales. However, stranded

Bethada, ii, p. 375: Index of places, tribes and families. ⁴⁶ Cf. Plummer, *Vitae*, i, pp xxxvi–vii n. 5. ⁴⁷ Ed. Plummer, *Vitae*, i, p. 143. ⁴⁸ *Bestia* and *belua* are both used in the account of the fight between two sea-beasts in the *Navigatio Sancti Brendani Abbatis* 16 (ed. Selmer) pp 45–8 – if necessary of the same animal. ⁴⁹ Watson, *Celtic place-names*, pp 81–2. ⁵⁰ For which see RCAHMS, *Argyll* 5, no. 354 – *Eileach an Naoinh*. ⁵¹ The name of the highest summit on the ecclesiastical island itself is said to be *Dún Bhrennain*. No relevant archaeological site seems to have been recorded on *A'Chuli*, in the Inventory or more recently: consultation with the National Monuments Record of Scotland on 27 June 2000. ⁵² Martin, *Description* (ed. Macleod), pp 294–6.

whales were viewed with enthusiasm by those who lived near the coast'.⁵³ There is clearly a superficial resemblance, furthermore, between the written forms *Bled(-ach, -ua)* of the Latin lives and *Bleit* of the Irish Life; and likewise between *Heth* and *Letha*. ('Perhaps there is some confusion between Tír Etha, Tiree, and Tír Letha, Armorica').⁵⁴ The question, however, whether these apparent similarities are merely coincidental, or indicate an ultimately original identity in a common (Latin?) source involves possibly complex problems of transmission of text and tradition that I do not feel qualified to discuss.

If, however, the historical reality of Brendan's church in Tiree depends largely upon a possibly fanciful place-name, its actual existence must, it seems to me, be debatable. The further consideration that that place-name may not in fact belong originally to Tiree only serves to cast further doubt on a Brendanic foundation there. In the *Vita Prima* (86) and in the Irish Life (56), St Brendan witnesses, from a high rock near the sea on *Ailech*, a fight between two sea-beasts.⁵⁵ One beast, being defeated, asks for quarter from the victor in the name of St Brigit, and receives it. Brendan thereupon returns to Ireland to ask Brigit why she, though absent, was thus invoked; while he, though present, was passed over. It seems likely enough that, in the tradition of *dindsenchus*, this episode was created to explain the place-name *Bledach*, (*Bledua*), (*Bleit?*); or, perhaps more plausibly, that the place-name was created to commemorate the story – but referring in either case to *Ailech*, not Tiree.⁵⁶

St Comgall of Bangor and Tiree (?Kilmaluag)

In the Life of Comgall of Bangor (22),⁵⁷ Comgall sails to Britain, in the seventh year after the foundation of Bangor, to visit certain saints and to stay there for a time. 'And he founded a monastery there, in a certain village in the district of Heth' – *Et constituit ibi monasterium in quadam villa in regione Heth* – where he remained for a while. During this time, he and his foundation are raided by 'many heathen robbers of the Picts' – *gentiles latrunculi multi de Pictoribus* – out for plunder. Comgall is working alone in a field, with his chrismal over his

⁵³ Kelly, *Farming*, pp 284–5, discussing the significance of the whale for early Irish society and economy, mainly on the basis of the early law tracts. ⁵⁴ Plummer, *Vitae*, i, xxxvi–vii n. 5. ⁵⁵ Plummer, *Vitae*, i, p. 143; Plummer, *Bethada*, i, pp 85–6; ii, 83. ⁵⁶ In the Oxford *Vita Prima*, 87–8 (ed. Plummer, *Vitae*, i, p. 143) and in the Irish Life, 57–8 (Plummer, *Bethada*, i, pp 86–7, ii, p. 84), Brendan has an apparently quite different vision at *Bledach-Bleit*, which induces him to return to Ireland again. This vision may be alluded to in the *Salmanticensis Vita Altera* 15 (ed. Heist, p. 330). ⁵⁷ Ed. Plummer, *Vitae*, ii, p. 11; see also Anderson, *Early sources*, i, pp 50 n. 1, 52–4.

robe: this is taken by the pirates for his personal god, so in fear they avoid him, but carry off everyone and everything else. But Comgall comes to the rescue, with divine help; and the Pictish invaders are allowed to depart, suitably chastened and justly empty-handed. 'Afterwards, Saint Comgall was conducted back to Ireland by many holy men' (*Postea sanctus Comgallus a multis viris sanctis reductus est ad Hiberniam*).

It is, once again, difficult to know what to make of this. The foundation of the monastery, which is unnamed, forms little more than an incidental, if necessary, preliminary to the central motif – the attack by the Pictish pirates and their discomfiture – to which it is the background. The last sentence of the chapter, moreover, suggests a formal, almost liturgical withdrawal or recession; and nothing more is said about the monastery. The mention of Pictish raiders, on the other hand, may well strike a note of authenticity. Not only is there nothing historically improbable about the likelihood of such raiding in the Argyll Hebrides during the sixth century; but it also seems to me doubtful that a writer of, say, the later ninth century (or subsequently) would have thought first of Picts in this context. For the form of the name, compare, for example, *Pictones* 7 *Brit(t)ones* (AU 750.4, AT 251), *Pictones* (AT 253 = 752);⁵⁸ also *Pictores* (AU 669.2, AT 201; AU 676.3 and 728.4) – all from early contexts. It may be pertinent to mention here too the story of the killing of Donnán of Eigg and his community in 617.⁵⁹ In his own Life (51), though not in the similar passage in Adomnán (*VC* II.35), Comgall accompanies Columba and Cainnech of Aghaboe on a visit to the pagan Pictish King Brude.⁶⁰ Anderson suggests a possible connection between this episode in the Life of Comgall and that in which Adomnán describes the visit to Columba in *Hinba* of Comgall, Cainnech and Brendan (*VC* III.17).⁶¹ In any case, it seems to provide another hagiographical link between Comgall and the Picts (though the writer of Comgall's Life does not actually call Brude a Pict here).⁶²

If there is a kernel of historical truth embedded in the tradition of Comgall's visit to Tiree, it seems likely that there was some knowledge at one time of a church there that was dedicated to him, or was in some other way believed to be associated with Bangor or one of its dependencies. Richard Sharpe has drawn attention to a reference in Jocelin's *Vita S. Patricii* (98), in the context of a short account of St Comgall and the monastery of Bangor, to one *ex filiis Benchoensis cenobii Luanus nomine centum monasteriorum solus fundator* – 'of the sons of the monastery of Bangor, Luanus by name, the founder alone of a

⁵⁸ Anderson, *Early sources*, i, 240–1. ⁵⁹ AU – for which see most conveniently Anderson, *Early sources*, i, pp 142–5. ⁶⁰ Plummer, *Vitae*, ii, p. 18. ⁶¹ Anderson and Anderson, *Adomnán's Life*, p. 207, n. ⁶² See further Anderson and Anderson, *Adomnán's Life* (1961), pp 22–3.

hundred monasteries' (my translation) – which he thinks 'suggests an account of St Moluag founder of Lismore in the Firth of Lorn'.⁶³ Jocelin seems to have derived this reference from St Bernard's Life of St Malachy.⁶⁴ There is no other evidence, to my knowledge, that Bangor and Lismore had any kind of formal relationship as mother and daughter. But it appears from this that a tradition existed according to which Bangor claimed such a relationship at one time, whether or not it was ever recognized by Lismore. Certainly, Comgall (d. AU 602.1) and Moluag (d. AU 592.1) belonged to the same kindred – the Dál nAraide of north-east Ulster.⁶⁵ One of the medieval church sites of Tiree was Kilmaluag (see further below) – *Cill Mo-Luáig*, 'Moluag's church'. If this were an early church – and the place-name could certainly be early – then knowledge of its existence, if only by hearsay, might have led the hagiographical tradition of Bangor to attribute its original foundation to St Comgall, against a background in which Bangor claimed at least nominal suzerainty over Lismore and its dependent churches. The earliest documentary evidence for this church, however, appears to be mid-seventeenth century.⁶⁶

The physical background

As sites on the ground, *Campus Lunge*, *Artcháin* and (if historical and in Tiree) *Bledach* remain unidentified. There are, however, a large number of church, chapel or burial-ground sites in Tiree, all of which are presumably at least of

63 Sharpe, *Saints' lives*, p. 33, n. 122; full text in Colgan, *Trias Thaumaturga*, p. 88. 64 *Locus* (i.e. Bangor) *vere sanctus secundusque sanctorum, copiosissime fructificans Deo, ita ut unus ex filiis sanctae illius congregationis, nomine Luanus, centum solus monasteriorum fundator exstitisse feratur ... Denique ita Hiberniam Scotiamque repleverunt genimina eius ...*, St Bernard's Life of St Malachy VI.12 (text ed. Jean Leclercq in *Obras Completas de San Bernardo*, ii.2, p. 340; trans. Lawlor, *Life of St Malachy*, 12(7), and see n. 3 there, where Lawlor also identifies Luanus as probably Molua(g) of Lismore in Scotland); and by Meyer (*St Malachy*, p. 30, and see p. 133, n. 44, where the same identification is made). Cf. also Annals of St Mary's Abbey Dublin, s.a. 1139 (ed. Gilbert *Chartularies*, ii, p. 259) – again borrowing largely from St Bernard. Dedications to St Moluag, doubtless of various ages, are common enough in Scotland: see Watson, *Celtic place-names*, pp 292–3 (esp.), 194 (518). It seems unlikely, however, that dedications of churches or chapels represent the sole basis of the tradition recorded in the Life of Malachy, even when due allowance is made for lost instances. 65 Ó Riain, *Corpus*, pp 16:97 (Comgall); 20:121 (Moluóc). Another important early Scottish church, Applecross in Wester Ross, was founded from Bangor; and seems to have maintained a formal relationship with the mother-house at least until 802, when Macc-oigi of Applecross died as abbot of Bangor. See most conveniently Anderson, *Early sources*, i, pp 183, 219–20, 258. St Maelrubai, its founder, was of the Dál nAraide on his mother's side: in fact, she is represented as being sister of St Comgall of Bangor – Ó Riain, *Corpus*, p. 178: 722.86. 66 *Origines Parochiales Scotiae*, ed. Innes, ii.1, p. 330: Kilmolowaig.

later medieval date; and some of which have produced evidence of early medieval occupation, whether as churches or burial-grounds or both. The RCAHMS (1980) gives ten church and/or burial-ground sites. Reeves (1874) mentions two additional sites, both anonymous; and a place-name, 'Kilwillin', but without further information. Beveridge (1903) adds a further two chapel sites near Scarinish; and suggests an unconvincing third in the vicinity of Balaphuil (for all these, see below). The ten sites of the RCAHMS include those of the two medieval parish churches, at Soroby and Kirkapoll. To begin a search for the 'lost' churches, therefore, there is a fairly generous choice of candidates to question.

On surface indications alone, on the other hand, two sites only seem to show characteristics which might be interpreted as reflecting, probably or possibly, early medieval communal (or perhaps strictly monastic) status. St Patrick's, Ceann a'Mhara, with its chapel, enclosure, probable hut-platforms and possible burial structure to the east of the chapel, may be the remains of the settlement of a small ascetic and perhaps individualist community.⁶⁷ Kirkapoll has one of the two medieval parish churches, dedicated to St Columba, within a small enclosed burial-ground; a chapel about 77m to north occupying an unenclosed site on the summit of a rocky knoll; and a larger walled cemetery – *Cladh Odhráin* or *Cladh Mór* (*cladh*: 'burial-ground') – about 44m to south-east of the church, in which the foundations of a building are said to have been revealed at about the turn of the twentieth century.⁶⁸ Though both surviving buildings are possibly of the second half of the fourteenth century and the enclosure walls of the burial-grounds are of comparatively recent origin; and though the history and dedication of the chapel (which stands directly on the natural rock surface) are unknown – nevertheless we have here two, possibly three churches and two cemeteries. Both St Patrick's and Kirkapoll, furthermore, have produced early crosses (below).

Of the other sites, there are no visible remains of *Cill Fhinnein*, Balephetrish;⁶⁹ of the chapel and burial-ground at *Crois a' Chaolais*,⁷⁰ though nearby are the place-names *An Annaid*,⁷¹ and *Pairc a'Chlaidh*; of *Cladh Beag*, Hynish,⁷² though three cross-slabs probably came from here (below); of the chapel and burial-ground of Kilbride, Cornaig Mór;⁷³ or of the chapel and burial-ground of Kilmoluag,⁷⁴ which was probably near the farm of Crois. The stones of the old chapel were employed to build the walls of cabins, and the

67 RCAHMS, *Argyll* 3, no. 325 and fig. 195. 68 Ibid., no. 310. 69 Ibid., no. 259. 70 Ibid., no. 264. 71 For which term see Watson, *Celtic place-names*, pp 250–4. 72 RCAHMS, *Argyll* 3, no. 276. 73 Ibid., no. 278 and see above: the walls of the chapel were removed to help in building some adjacent cabins – Reeves, 'Tiree', p. 313. 74 RCAHMS, *Argyll* 3, no. 304: see above.

space where the cemetery is shown to have been is now in tillage'.⁷⁵ At Kenovay, Kilfinnian is probably represented by an irregular pentagonal enclosure, within which are the remains of a small, oblong and orientated building. 'Here still-born children have been occasionally buried'.⁷⁶ At Kilkenneth are the fairly well-preserved ruins of a small chapel, possibly of later medieval date, associated with traces of an enclosure.⁷⁷ There is a cross-slab from here (below).⁷⁸ At Soroby stood the other medieval parish church.⁷⁹ Nothing is now visible of this church, which was also dedicated to St Columba and the last traces of which are said to have disappeared some time before 1852, inside the now walled burial-ground. There are, however, two early crosses from the site (below). It has been suggested that Soroby is *Campus Lunge*, though on no very compelling grounds.⁸⁰

In addition, Reeves noticed a chapel and burial-ground site, anonymous, at 'Knock-a-chlaodh' (presumably for *Cnoc a'Chlaidh*) on the farm of Barrapoll; and a chapel site at 'Templefield', likewise anonymous, on the farm of Helipoll, near Crossapoll.⁸¹ Beveridge adds to Reeves' list: 1) A chapel site – *Caibeal Thomais* – with its burial-ground, on the north-west outskirts of Scarinish: the ruins of which had been used for modern building. 2) A field in the manse glebe, about half a mile north of Scarinish, was then still known as *Tir a'Chaibel*: 'about its centre are the foundations of the east and west walls of some building, which appears to have measured about fifty by eighteen feet, perhaps including an annexe'.⁸² Beveridge's suggested third addition to Reeves,

⁷⁵ Reeves, 'Tiree', p. 315. ⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 314. RCAHMS, *Argyll* 3, no. 290 and fig. 171. ⁷⁷ RCAHMS, *Argyll* 3, no. 298 and fig. 175: see above. ⁷⁸ 'Lord Archibald Campbell mentioned, as now in the possession of his family, a small bronze bell of only about two inches diameter, which was found some years ago at Kilkenneth' – Beveridge, *Coll and Tiree*, p. 152 n. 2. This bell does not appear to be noticed by Anderson, *Scotland*; or by the RCAHMS, *Argyll* 3; or by Bourke, 'Hand-bells'. Its date, of course, is unknown. ⁷⁹ RCAHMS, *Argyll* 3, no. 327. ⁸⁰ For example Reeves, *Life of St Columba* (1857), p. 59 n. 'f'; 'Tiree', pp 310–13; RCAHMS, *Argyll* 3, p. 167 and n. 4. Cf. Sharpe, *Adomnán*, 303, n. 182. Reeves' chief reasons for identifying *Campus Lunge* with Soroby seem to be: 1. That Adomnán's 'portus Campi Lunge', mentioned as lying opposite to Iona (VC II.15) is 'probably the little creek called *Port-na-Lung*, which is close to the old burying-ground of Soroby on the south-east side of the island' (*The Life*, p. 59, n. 'f'), 'lying over against Iona' (Reeves, 'Tiree', p. 311); 2. That the parsonage of Soroby 'pertained to the Abbot of Ecolmkill' [at the Reformation], thus continuing the old relationship of *Campus Lunge* with the abbacy of Iona ('Tiree', pp 310–11). Reeves assumed that the harbour and monastery of *Campus Lunge* were contiguous ('Tiree', p. 303). With reference to *Brigit Maigi Luinge*, furthermore, he opined that, if this were indeed Kilbride on Corraig Mór, 'then Magh Lung must be understood to comprehend the western half of the island, about equivalent to the parish of Soroby' ('Tiree', p. 313). Reeves ('Tiree', p. 304 and n. 7, p. 310) says of Soroby 'all traces of its ancient church have of late disappeared': his visit to Tiree, with W.F. Skene, was made in the summer of 1852. ⁸¹ Reeves, 'Tiree', pp 315–16. ⁸² Beveridge, *Coll and Tiree*, pp 156–7.

a site on Cnoc Grianal on Ben Hynish, half a mile east of Balaphuil, seems to me too vague and uncertain to be included here.

There were also one or more wells called *Tobar an Dómhnaich* at Balemeanoch.⁸³ 'The water of the well called Toubir in Donich is by the natives drunk as a catholicon for diseases', says Martin.⁸⁴ It is likely that this is also the spring referred to by the writer in Macfarlane as 'remarkable to be gould for persons in consumptions and that hes weak stoamocks'.⁸⁵ There does not, however, seem to be any associated church site.

Five of the ten sites listed by the RCAHMS have or had certain or probable early medieval crosses. There are or were linear crosses at *Cladh Beag*, Hynish, at Kirkapoll and at Soroby: these have been dated to probably the late sixth to ninth centuries. The sunken crosses from *Cladh Beag*, Hynish, from St Patrick's, Ceann a'Mhara and from Kilkenneth⁸⁶ may belong towards the end of the same period. Sunken crosses also occur at Iona.⁸⁷ The large cruciform slab at Soroby may be as late as the eleventh century.⁸⁸ According to this dating, therefore, most of these crosses would appear to reflect some kind(s) of Christian activity at the sites in question during broadly the same period as that highlighted by the documentary sources, historical and traditional.⁸⁹

The dedication evidence in relation to native saints may be briefly summarized: Columba (twice – Kirkapoll and Soroby), Patrick (Ceann a'Mhara), Brigid (Kilbride), Finnén (twice – Balephetrish and Kenovay), Cainnech (Kilkenneth), Moluag (Kilmoluag), Odhrán (Kirkapoll: cf. Reilig Odhráin, Iona),⁹⁰ ?Faelán-Faolán ('... the ecclesiastical or historical features of the island retained the older names of ... Kilwillin ...').⁹¹ The actual historical value of such evidence is, of course, largely unquantifiable in the present state of knowledge.

Conclusion

Comgall of Bangor, Cainnech of Aghaboe and Brendan of Clonfert are three of the 'four holy founders of monasteries' – *iiii ... monasteriorum sancti fundatores* –

⁸³ RCAHMS, *Argyll* 3, no. 328. ⁸⁴ Martin, *Description* (ed. Macleod), pp 294–6.

⁸⁵ Macfarlane, *Geographical collections* (ed. Mitchell), ii, pp 217–18. ⁸⁶ RCAHMS, *Argyll* 3 (see no. 298 and fig. 176). ⁸⁷ RCAHMS, *Argyll* 4, p. 16 and no. 6 (nos 18–21 and 44).

⁸⁸ RCAHMS, *Argyll* 3, p. 168, no. 2. For general discussion, see RCAHMS, *Argyll* 3, p. 29.

⁸⁹ A cross-marked stone, found in no significant context at Caolas, came to the attention of the Royal Commission's staff in 1998. Not closely datable, its discovery does not affect materially what has been said here on the basis of the Inventory. I am grateful to Ian Fisher, then RCAHMS, for this information: pers. comm., 28 June 2000. ⁹⁰ RCAHMS, *Argyll* 4, no. 12. ⁹¹ Reeves, 'Tiree', p. 310.

who foregather with Columba in the island of *Hinba* in *VC* III.17.⁹² The Columban presence in Tiree is sufficiently vouched for by *VC* and probably corroborated to some extent by the annals. We have seen that there are some grounds for accepting that the traditional associations of Cainnech and Comgall with the island may have originally historical bases. Where Brendan is concerned, however, while a genuine association at some level with *Ailech* need not be doubted, his association with Tiree seems questionable. In his case, it could be that *VC* III.17 has influenced the attribution of a church here to him (by 'cloning' *Ailech*?), at some point in the evolution of written traditions about him, in order to put him on an equal footing in this respect with Comgall and Cainnech.

The nature of the relationship between small Hebridean churches such as those discussed here and the major centres of saints' cultus where particular written traditions presumably evolved (usually in Ireland) is another matter. The early relationship between *Campus Lunge* and Iona is reasonably clear from *VC*. I have suggested that Comgall's claim to a foundation in Tiree may have been made for him in the broader context of a claim by Bangor at some time to general superiority (acknowledged or not) over Scottish Lismore and its dependent churches.⁹³ The existence of a possibly early dedication to Cainnech in Tiree, implying probably the presence of relics of some kind there, together with the reference to Cainnech in Tiree himself in the *Salmanticensis* Life of

⁹² The presence of the fourth, Cormac Ua Liatháin, seems problematic. Elsewhere in *VC* he is Adomnán's voyager saint *par excellence* (I.6, II.42). Apart from the bare mention of him, he really plays no active part here; and Brendan recounts his vision only to Comgall and Cainnech. Cormac does not seem otherwise to be associated explicitly with the foundation of a monastery: Anderson and Anderson, *Adomnán's Life*, p. 29 n. 30; Sharpe, *Adomnán*, pp 341–2, n. 323, 368, n. 386 (where Sharpe suggests, with reference to Cormac, that some element in the tale told in *VC* III.17 may have been lost). Nevertheless, Cormac is clearly a figure of traditional importance, within the Columban community if not more widely – cf. *Martyrology of Tallaght*, *Féilire Óengusso* (and nn), *Martyrology of Gorman*, *Martyrology of Donegal*, under 21 June – to the extent that his genealogy was preserved and transmitted: see Ó Riain, *Corpus*, p. 38: 227. Is it possible that Adomnán introduces him here basically to bring him into direct contact with St Brendan? ⁹³ Documentation for early medieval Lismore is sparse. Its traditional founder, Lugaid (hypocoristic form Mo-Luóc, Moluag), died AU 592.1. It seems to disappear from the Irish annals in 635 (AU 635.7. Irish Lismore was traditionally founded in 636: Gwynn and Hadcock, *Religious houses*, p. 91). There appears, notwithstanding, to have been a (possibly hereditary and probably lay) abbot in the first half of the twelfth century; the church became, probably from the outset, the cathedral of the new diocese of Argyll, 1183–9; and a thirteenth-century(?) source gives *céli dé* (culdees) under the bishopric of Argyll (Anderson *Early sources*, i, pp 159–60, ii, pp 697–700; Cowan and Easson, *Religious houses*, pp 210–11; MacDonald, 'Lios', pp 52–3). It was known, furthermore, to the compiler of *Féilire Óengusso*, in the ninth century, that St MoLuóc was of Lismore in Scotland (ed. Stokes, p. 142 = 25 June).

him, indicate in all likelihood a similar claim of superiority on the part of one of Cainnech's larger churches in Ireland, though not necessarily one as far south as Aghaboe (Co. Laois).⁹⁴

Adomnán's *VC* is the only contemporary witness we have to a plurality of churches in Tiree in the sixth to seventh centuries. Later tradition, especially as preserved in the relevant saints' lives, may add a few names by way of detail to his at least partially anonymous framework. It may be, too, that *VC* III.17 was the primary inspiration for the attribution of a church in the island to St Brendan of Clonfert. It would be unwise, however, to infer from such considerations that *VC* must underlie all later written tradition. Adomnán is sparing of detail, which has to be supplied, with due qualification, from elsewhere. Rather, both *VC* and the later written sources probably reflect aspects of the same underlying tradition, which stems in turn from the existence, in Tiree, of course, but also in the Argyll Hebrides generally and doubtless more widely still, of churches of varying size and importance, claiming affiliation or claimed as owing more or less direct allegiance to the ecclesiastical confederations that had evolved variously from the acknowledged principal foundations of certain traditional sixth- (and seventh-) century saints. *VC*, at any rate, indicates that, at least as regards Tiree, a concrete historical situation formed the actual physical background of an early stage in the development of that tradition; and that elements, possibly all, of that tradition existed essentially by Adomnán's day.

Appendix: Hith etc.

In the Life of St Cainnech published by Plummer (21), a layman named Tulchán goes from Ireland to St Columba in *insula Hithie* to become a monk; and the *monasterium Hith(e)* is mentioned there and in chapter 22.⁹⁵ Similarly, in the Life of St Ite (24), one Columbanus (Colmán) goes to St Columba in *insula Yth*, where he receives episcopal orders.⁹⁶ Again, in the Life of St Munnu (7), that saint goes *ad insulam Hyth* to become a monk with Columba.⁹⁷ Reeves'

⁹⁴ Cainnech's family actually belonged to the Ciannachta, whose name survives in the barony of Keenaght in Co. Derry: Sharpe, *Adomnán*, p. 262 n. 68; for his genealogy, see Ó Riain, *Corpus*, p. 20: 123.1. At a later date, *comarba Cainnigh i Cian(n)acht* – 'successor of Cainnech in Cian(n)acht' – occurs in AU 1056.1 and 1090.1. The coarbial church was identified by Reeves: *Down, Connor and Dromore*, p. 374, n. 'q' and O'Donovan (AFM, s.aa. 1056, n. 'l', 1090, n. 'n'; 1206, nn. 'c', 'd') as Drunachose or Termonkenney in the barony of Keenaght, Co. Derry. See also Gwynn and Hadcock, *Religious houses*, p. 34. On the west coast of Scotland, besides Tiree, there were churches dedicated to Cainnech in Mull, Kintyre, Coll and S. Uist: Watson, *Celtic place-names*, p. 276. ⁹⁵ Ed. Plummer, *Vitae*, i, pp 159, 160. ⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, *Vitae*, ii, p. 124. ⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp 228–9.

etymology of the name Tiree must have led him to assume that *Hith* etc. were all variants of *Heth*.⁹⁸ In the other versions of these lives, however, as Plummer noted, the name is that of Iona. Thus *Hithe* of the Life of Cainnech (21, 22) is otherwise *Ie* and *I*; in the Life of Ite (24), *ad insulam Yth* is otherwise *ad Yam insulam*; and in the Life of Munnu (7 – which is, in any case, basically an abbreviated version of *VC* I.2), *Hyth* is otherwise *Ie*, *Hii* or *I*. The *-th*, then, has apparently to be explained with reference to Iona rather than Tiree – whatever the explanation may be. But the problem is a minor one: these ‘*Hith* episodes’ contribute nothing of value concerning Iona (or Tiree).

98 Reeves, *Life of St Columba* (1857), p. 48, n. ‘b’; (1874), pp 255, 305–6.