

## Conn na mBocht

by Ailbhe Mac Shamhráin

Conn na mBocht ('of the poor') (d. 1060), almoner and hospitaller of Clonmacnoise, belonged to the hereditary ecclesiastical line of Muintir Gormáin, descended from Gormán (d. 758), abbot of Louth. Sometimes associated with Uí Chellaig Breg, a branch of the royal dynasty of Mide, Conn's line is traced with more credibility to the kindred of Mugdorna Maigen. His father, Joseph, died (1022) as *anamchara* (spiritual adviser) of the community. For his own part, Conn was an anchorite for a time, but subsequently married and was the father of at least six sons. He later gained great distinction at Clonmacnoise as head of the *Céli Dé*; this term originally indicated a community of stricter observance, but by the eleventh century it had extended in meaning and was applied (it has been suggested) to 'poor lay monks'. It seems more reasonable, however, that the term in fact described a lay community that dedicated itself to the poor.

There are indications that in Conn's time headship of the *Céli Dé* was identical with an office of *cennas bocht* (stewardship of the poor) – designating a specific category of dwellers at ecclesiastical settlements. Such an office existed at other ecclesiastical settlements by the eleventh century. Conn himself was not without resources: in 1031 he founded a hospital at Ísel Chiaráin which, according to tradition, was the location of the first settlement of St Ciarán (qv) (d. 545) at Clonmacnoise. He endowed it with twenty cows, the basis of a herd for the succour of the poor. He died in 1060, at an advanced age, and was acclaimed as the 'glory and dignity of Clonmacnoise'.

Through his sons he became the ancestor of an ecclesiastical family known as Meic Cuinn na mBocht, which continued to hold high office at Clonmacnoise at least till the end of the twelfth century. His sons included Abbot Máel-Findén the abbot, who predeceased him in 1057; Abbot Máel-Ciaráin, who constructed a causeway at Clonmacnoise and died in 1079; and vice-abbot Cormac, who lived till 1103. Other sons included Gilla-Críst (d. 1085), Máel-Ísu (d. 1103), and the bishop Célechair 'of the Mugdorna' who died in 1067. The latter's son in turn, Máel-Muire (qv) (slain by raiders in 1106), was the principal scribe of Lebor na hUidre. It is quite possible that Conn's family maintained the annals at Clonmacnoise, which may explain the detailed and often flattering entries relating to them.

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AU; AFM; Chron. Scot.; Ann. Clon.; O' Curry, *Manuscript materials*; DNB; J. V. Kelleher, 'The Táin and the Annals', *Ériu*, xxii (1971), 125–6, table II; B. Ó Cuív,

'Boicht Chorcaige', *Celtica*, xviii (1986), 107–9; Kehnel, *Clonmacnois*, 133–7, 286, 287; *ODNB*

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