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Carnal love and priestly ordination on sixth-century Tíree

Aed the Black was a king of the Ulstermen—the Ulaid—during the last quarter of the sixth century. From entries in the *Annals of Ulster*,¹ Aed's reign has been calculated to have run from the year 581 until his death in 588. Aed's fame in Irish tradition stemmed not from any of his actions as king of the Ulaid. His notoriety rested on a deed committed a decade and a half before he ascended to the kingship.

Aed the Black murdered the most important political leader of sixth-century Ireland, Diarmait mac Cerbaill. For two decades Diarmait reigned as the high-king of the Uí Néill kindred. The Uí Néill high-king held the ceremonial site of Tara, and with it a primacy of prestige over the kings of the four traditional 'Fifths' of Ireland: Leinster, Ulster, Munster and Connacht.² During Diarmait's long reign (dated from 544 to 565 based on information in *AU*), Ireland truly emerged into the historical record. Important monasteries were founded, contacts with Europe were strengthened, and the ancient gathering called the Feast of Tara was celebrated for the final reported time.³

Only one event is known concerning Aed the Black between his murder of Diarmait mac Cerbaill and his elevation as king of the

¹ Subsequent references to medieval Irish annals will use the following abbreviations:

AU: *The Annals of Ulster (to A.D. 1131)*, ed. S. Mac Airt and G. Mac Niocaill (Dublin 1983).

ATig: 'The Annals of Tigernach, third fragment', ed. W. Stokes, *Revue Celtique* 17 (1896) 119-263.

AI: *The Annals of Inisfallen*, ed. S. Mac Airt (Dublin 1951).

CS: *Chronicum Scotorum*, ed. W.M. Hennessy (Rolls Series, London 1866)

Numbers following the above abbreviations refer to the years under which events are recorded. Daniel P. McCarthy, 'The chronology of the Irish annals', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* C 98 (1998) 203-55; *idem*, 'The status of the pre-Patrician Irish annals', *Peritia* 12 (1998) 98-152, in discovering the source of the kalends-and-ferial dating system used in some of the Irish annals, has proposed that annals were contemporary records in Ireland as early as the mid fifth century and that these contemporary records are most faithfully reproduced by *ATig* and other annals connected to the medieval monastery at Clonmacnoise. McCarthy's conclusions are unwarranted, and the previous scholarly consensus that the earliest contemporary annals were written on Iona in the late seventh century and are best represented by *AU* remains valid. On the composition of *AU*, see M. Meckler, 'The Annals of Ulster and the date of the meeting at Druim Cett', *Peritia* 11 (1997) 44-52.

² F.J. Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-kings* (London 1973) 46-47.

³ The traditional foundation dates of Clonmacnoise, Bangor, Clonfert and Iona occur in Diarmait's reign, and increasing trade and travel brought to Ireland the plague that was ravaging the reconquered Mediterranean empire of Justinian; see also Byrne, *Kings*, 87-105; D.A. Binchy, 'Fair of Tailtiu and the Feast of Tara', *Ériu* 18 (1958) 113-38.

Ulaid. The event is reported by Adomnán in his *Life of St Columba*, written roughly a century after Aed's death.⁴

alio in tempore supra memoratus prespiter Findchanus, Christi miles, Aidum cognomento Nigrum, regio genere ortum, Cruthinicum gente, de Scotia ad Britanniam sub clericatus habitu secum adduxit, ut in suo apud se monasterio per aliquot perigrinaretur annos. qui scilicet Aidus Niger ualde sanguinarius homo et multorum fuerat trucidator. qui et Diormitium filium Cerbulis totius Scotiae regnatorem deo auctore ordinatum interfecerat.

hic itaque idem Aidus post aliquantum in perigrinatione transactum tempus accito episcopo quamuis non recte apud supradictum Findchanum prespiter ordinatus est. episcopus tamen non est ausus super caput eius manum inponere, nisi prius idem Findchanus Aidum carnaliter amans suam capiti eius pro confirmatione inponeret dexteram.

quae talis ordinatio cum postea sancto intimaretur uiro egre tulit. tum proinde hanc de illo Findchano et de Aido ordinato formidabilem profatur sententiam, inquiens: 'illa manus dextera, quam Findchanus contra fas et ius ecclesiasticum super caput filii perditionis inpossuit, mox computrescet et post magnos dolorum cruciatus ipsum in terram sepelienda praecedet. et ipse post suam humatam manum per multos superstes uicturus est annos. ordinatus uero indebete Aidus sicuti canis ad uomitum reuertetur suum. et ipse rursus sanguilentus trucidator existet, et ad ultimum lancea iugulatus, de ligno in aquam cadens, submersus morietur. talem multo prius terminum promeruit uitae, qui totius regem trucidauit Scotiae.'

quae beati uiri profetia de utroque adimpleta est. nam prespiteri Findchani dexter prae pugnus putrefactus in terram eum praecessit, in illa sepultus insula quae Ommon nuncupatur. ipse uero iuxta uerbum sancti Columbae per

⁴ Latin text is taken from A.O. Anderson and M.O. Anderson, *Adomnán's Life of Columba* (2nd edition, Oxford 1991); English translations, except where noted, are those of R. Sharpe, *Adomnán of Iona, Life of St Columba* (Harmondsworth 1995). The composition date is generally reckoned to be in the 690s; see M.O. Anderson in Anderson and Anderson, p.xlii; Sharpe, p.55; J.-M. Picard, 'The purpose of Adomnán's *Vita Columbae*', *Peritia* 1 (1982) 160-77. References to Adomnán's text will use the abbreviation *VC* (for the Latin *Vita Columbae*), followed by the book and chapter numbers, separated by a period, as indicated in the Andersons' edition (e.g., *VC* i.36 refers to book 1, chapter 36). Other Latin texts will also be referenced according to this book-and-chapter scheme. For texts not divided into books, only the chapter number will be given.

multos post uixit annos. Aidus uero Niger, solummodo nomine prespiter, ad sua priora reuersus scelera dolo lancea transfixus, de prora ratis in aquam lapsus stagneam disperiiit. (VC i.36)

Once, this priest called Findchán, a soldier of Christ, brought with him from Ireland to Britain a man of the race of Ulster and of royal stock yet wearing a cleric's habit. His name was Aed Dub,⁵ and it was intended that he should remain for a number of years as a pilgrim in Findchán's monastery. This Aed Dub had been a very bloody man and had killed many people, among them Diarmait mac Cerbaill, ordained by God's will as king of all Ireland.

This same Aed, having spent some time in pilgrimage, was ordained priest in Findchán's monastery, but the ordination was invalid even though a bishop had been brought. This was because the bishop had not dared to place his hand on Aed's head until Findchán (who had a carnal love for Aed) had first laid his right hand on his head in confirmation.

When this ordination was later made known to the saint, he took it ill, pronouncing thereupon this fearful judgement on Findchán and Aed, now ordained, saying: 'That right hand which Findchán, against the law of God and of the Church, laid on the head of the son of perdition will soon grow rotten. It will give him great pain, and be dead and buried before him though he will live many years after his hand is buried. Aed, however, who was ordained unfittingly, will return as a dog to its vomit; he will again be a bloody murderer and in the end, killed by a spear, he will fall from wood into water and die drowning. He deserved such an end to life long ago for having killed the king of all Ireland.'

The blessed man's prophecy concerning both of them was fulfilled. First, the right fist of the priest Findchán became rotten and preceded him into the earth, being buried on the island called Ommon.⁶ The man himself, in accordance with St Columba's words, lived on for many years. Aed Dub, a priest in name only, returned to his old wickedness and, being pierced by a treacherous spear, he fell from the prow of a ship into the waters of a lake and perished. (tr. Sharpe, *Adomnán*, pp.138-39)

⁵ Irish *dub* = Latin *niger* = English 'black'; Aed is called Aed Dub in an Irish interlinear note at *AU* 564.

⁶ This site has not been identified; see W.J. Watson, *A History of the Celtic Place-Names of Scotland* (Edinburgh 1926) 91.

This episode has not escaped attention from both literary scholars and historians. Literary scholars have sharpened their focus upon Aed's threefold death—by slaying, by falling and by drowning (*lancea iugulatus, de ligno in aquam cadens, submersus*). The motif of the threefold death was widespread in medieval Irish literature.⁷ Tradition also gave Aed's victim, Diarmait mac Cerbaill, his own even more elaborate threefold demise in the various versions of Diarmait's *aided*, or 'death tale', appearing in both Latin and Irish manuscripts.⁸

Historians examining this episode have concentrated upon the development of the concept of high-kingship in medieval Ireland. Diarmait is described by Adomnán, and in Columba's own words as relayed by Adomnán, as the 'king of all Ireland' (*totius Scotiae regnatorem; totius regem ... Scotiae*). Moreover, Diarmait is described as having been a ruler 'ordained by God's will' (*deo auctore ordinatum*). These phrases show that even by the end of the seventh century, when Adomnán was writing, the concept of the high-kingship was already in bloom.⁹

Another question to be asked is whether Aed's stay on Tiree was connected with Diarmait's murder. Richard Sharpe, in his translation of Adomnán, assumes not, relating the pilgrimage to internal disputes among the Ulaid.¹⁰ The wording of the passage, while identifying Aed as Diarmait's murderer, does not specifically call the visit a result of the assassination, even though the assassination seems to be one cause of Columba's hostility towards Aed.

The Ulaid had an unusual political structure. There were two distinct ethnic groups—the Cruthin and the Érainn—and kingship over this 'Fifth' of Ireland switched between the two, with kings from the

⁷ J.N. Radner, 'The significance of the threefold death in Celtic tradition', in Patrick K. Ford, ed., *Celtic Folklore and Christianity* (Santa Barbara 1983) 180-99; Brian Ó Cuív, 'The motif of the three-fold death', *Éigse* 15 (1973) 145-50; K.H. Jackson, 'The motive of the threefold death in the story of Suibhne Geilt', in John Ryan, ed., *Féil-sgríbhinn Eóin Mhic Néill* (Dublin 1940) 535-50.

⁸ Parts of the story appear in both the Irish and Latin lives of saint Ruadán of Lorrha as well as in the Irish life of Brendan of Clonfert; Irish versions are also found in the *Book of Fermoy*, the *Book of Lismore*, the *Book of Uí Maine*, the *Yellow Book of Lecan*, and in British Library MS Egerton 1782; see J. Corthals, *Manuscript sources to Old and Middle Irish tales (MS-OMIT)* website:

<<http://titus.uni-frankfurt.de/texte/msomit/omittabx.htm>>.

The versions in the *Book of Lismore* and BL Egerton 1782 were edited and translated by Standish H. O'Grady, *Silva Gadelica* (London 1892), vol.1, 66-82 (edition); vol.2, 70-88 (translation). The *Yellow Book of Lecan* version was described, with passages transcribed and translated, by Radner, 'Significance', 191-95. The *Book of Uí Maine* version has recently been edited by Daniel M. Wiley, *An edition of the Aided Diarmata meic Cerbaill from the Book of Uí Maine* (Ph.D. Diss. Harvard, 2000).

⁹ Byrne, *Kings*, 96-97; Sharpe, *Adomnán*, 296-97.

¹⁰ Sharpe, *Adomnán*, 297-98.

dominant Dál Fiatach kindred from the Érainn alternating with Cruthin kings, usually from the Dál nAraidi kindred. Aed the Black was a prince of the Dál nAraidi.¹¹

Entries in the Irish annals indicate that when Diarmait was killed, Demmán mac Cairill of the Dál Fiatach was the Ulster king. Demmán became king by defeating and killing the previous king, a distant kinsman, at a battle dated to 557 (*ATig*, *CS* 557; cf. *AU* 556). Demmán would himself be killed by shepherds roughly a decade later at a location identified as being near the modern town of Dromara in Co. Down (*ATig*, *CS* 568; cf. *AU* 571).¹² This area would have been populated by Cruthin, but not those of the Dál nAraidi kindred but rather from the seemingly unrelated Uí Echach Cobo kindred.¹³

Demmán was succeeded by his brother Baetán. Baetán seems to have been an ambitious and energetic leader who attempted to extend his authority to the Isle of Man and possibly to Galloway.¹⁴ Pressure was certainly felt by the Dál Riata of Argyll, a kindred of Ulidian origin who still had ties to the Irish mainland. Aedán mac Gabráin, the Dál Riata king, is reported in the sources to have been engaged in conflict with and submission to Baetán.¹⁵ Aed the Black would certainly have been seen as a potential rival for the Ulster kingship, and he in fact succeeded Baetán after Baetán died a natural death, probably in 581 (*AU* 580). For the Dál Riata, the possibility of causing dissention among the Ulaid by having a potential king nearby may have seemed advantageous, though it should be kept in mind that Aed was being sheltered at a monastery on Tiree and not at the court of the Dál Riata king. Even if Aed's presence on Tiree was encouraged or merely tolerated by the Dál Riata for their own political purposes, Aed may well have despaired of returning to Ulster by the time he joined the priesthood. The ordination occurred some time, perhaps several years, after his arrival on the island (*post aliquantum in perigrinatione transactum tempus*).

Little is known both of the monastery at which Aed resided, and of the monastery's founder, Findchán. The monastery's name, Artchain, is a compound of *ard*, 'promontory', and *caín*, 'beautiful',

¹¹ On the Ulaid in this period, see D. Ó Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland, 400-1200* (London 1995) 48-52.

¹² E. Hogan, *Onomasticon Goedelicum* (Dublin 1910; repr. Blackrock, Co. Dublin 1993) 118, s.v. *boirenn*.

¹³ Byrne, *Kings*, 109.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 109-11; Ó Cróinín, *Ireland*, 50-51.

¹⁵ M. Meckler, 'Colum Cille's ordination of Aedán mac Gabráin', *IR* 41 (1990) 139-50; the famous meeting at Druim Cett involving Aedán was not, however, connected to Baetán's activities, see Sharpe, *Adomnán*, 313; cf. B. Jaski, 'Druim Cett revisited', *Peritia* 12 (1998) 340-50.

and should therefore describe a picturesque location on an elevated site.¹⁶ The remains of only one early Christian monastery on Tiree are recognisable today, those surrounding the ruins of St Patrick's Chapel on the southwest corner of the island.¹⁷ These remains happen to be on an elevated site, but there is no other reason to identify them as Findchán's monastery. Tiree seems to have been swarming with monks in the second half of the sixth century.¹⁸ Adomnán's *VC* mentions not only Artchain but, more prominently, a monastery founded by Columba's cousin and successor Baíthéne in a place called *Campus Lunge* ('Ship Field') as well as other, unidentified monasteries.¹⁹ Cainnech, who appears several times in *VC* and founded his own monastery at Aghaboe, is said in his own hagiographic biography to have spent time on Tiree.²⁰ Latin lives of Brendan of Clonfert state that Brendan founded his own monastery on Tiree in a place called *Bledua*.²¹ A Latin Life of Comgall claims that he, too, founded a monastery on Tiree in the seventh year after the establishment of Bangor, but that Comgall decided to abandon the project after the place was robbed by a band of Pictish pirates.²² Comgall, like Aed the Black, was an Ulsterman belonging to the Cruthin and also of the Dál nAraidi. Adomnán explicitly tells us Comgall's ethnicity and kindred, and the information is confirmed in the later and rather dubious genealogies of Irish saints.²³

Nothing is known about this particular priest Findchán outside of this episode in Adomnán's *VC*. Attempts have been made to connect this Findchán with the *Findcain aircisiremh* commemorated on 11 March in the *Martyrology of Tallaght*.²⁴ A marginal note in Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale ms. 5100-4, explains the otherwise unknown Irish

¹⁶ A.O. Anderson and M.O. Anderson, *Adomnan's Life of Columba*, 1st ed. (Edinburgh 1961) 150.

¹⁷ Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, *Argyll: An Inventory of the Ancient Monuments*, vol. 3 (Edinburgh 1980) no.325, pp.165-66.

¹⁸ A.P. Smyth, *Warlords and Holy Men: Scotland AD 80-1000* (London 1984) 100-1.

¹⁹ *VC* iii.8 mentions a plague that affected multiple monasteries on Tiree.

²⁰ *Vita sancti Cainnechi* 26 in W.W. Heist, ed., *Vitae sanctorum Hiberniae* (Brussels 1965) 188, text from the *Codex Salmanticensis*; cf. Chapter 21 of the version in Dublin, Marsh's Library MS Z3. 1. 5 (formerly known as the *Codex Kilkenniensis* or the *Codex Ardmachanus*), edited by Charles Plummer, *Vitae sanctorum Hiberniae* (2 vols, Oxford 1910) i, 159-60. On the Latin manuscripts of medieval collections of Irish saints' lives, see R. Sharpe, *Medieval Irish Saints' Lives* (Oxford 1991).

²¹ *Vita altera sancti Brendani* 15 in Heist, *Vitae*, 330; cf. *Vita prima sancti Brendani* 87 in Plummer, *Vitae*, i, 143.

²² *Vita sancti Comgalli* 22 in Plummer, *Vitae*, ii, 11.

²³ *VC* iii.17; P. Ó Riain, ed., *Corpus Genealogiarum Sanctorum Hiberniae* (Dublin 1985) §97, p.16, *inter alia*.

²⁴ W. Reeves, ed., *Adamnan, Life of Saint Columba* (Historians of Scotland 6: Edinburgh 1874) 259.

epithet *aircisiremh* with the Latin phrase *.i. Finchani qui fuit in cruciatibus diuturnis*, ‘that is, of the Findchán who was in long-lasting tortures’.²⁵ Under the same commemoration day (11 March) in the *Martyrology of Gorman*, Findchán is described as *geloc gradnech*, translated by Whitley Stokes as ‘fair-young, loveable(?)’.²⁶ An alternative translation renders the epithets as ‘pure’ and ‘ordained’, indicative of Findchán’s virtuous and religious way of life.²⁷ The descriptions of the two martyrologies require some effort to reconcile with each other, let alone with the Findchán of *VC*. Even less evidence is available to connect the Findchán of *VC* to either of the two other Findcháns commemorated in the *Martyrology of Gorman*—one on 4 June²⁸ and the other on 29 October²⁹—about both of whom only the name survives.

A more prevalent connection in the scholarly literature appears between the priest Findchán of *VC* and the parish name of Kilfinichen on the Ross of Mull.³⁰ The proximity of this parish to Iona must have encouraged this connection, but what paltry evidence exists concerning local knowledge of the dedicatee of the parish church points instead to a female saint.³¹

Although Adomnán’s *VC* is our only source about this particular priest named Findchán, the text provides an important piece of evidence about Findchán’s background. This evidence, however, has been seriously misinterpreted.

Adomnán remarks that Findchán arranged for Aed’s priestly ordination with the phrase *Findchanus Aidum carnaliter amans*. Richard Sharpe translates that Findchán ‘had carnal love for Aed’. Sharpe is not alone in discussing carnal love. The translation created in Victorian times under the supervision of Alexander Penrose Forbes, the Episcopal Bishop of Brechin, states that Findchán ‘was greatly attached to Aid, in a carnal way’.³² These translations seem to interpret the phrase as a reference to a homosexual relationship between Findchán and Aed, or at least to homosexual desire on Findchán’s part.

²⁵ R.I. Best and H.J. Lawlor, *The Martyrology of Tallaght* (London 1931) 22.

²⁶ Whitley Stokes, ed., *The Martyrology of Gorman* (London 1895) 52-53.

²⁷ Thomas Clancy has suggested to the author this alternative understanding of these epithets.

²⁸ Stokes, *Gorman*, 110-11; Best and Lawlor, *Tallaght*, 48.

²⁹ Stokes, *Gorman*, 206-7; Best and Lawlor, *Tallaght*, 85.

³⁰ Reeves, *Adamnan*, 259; Watson, *Place-names*, 304; J.M. MacKinlay, *Ancient Church Dedications in Scotland: Non-Scriptural* (Edinburgh 1914) 70.

³¹ *Argyll* 3, no.296, pp.145-46; cf. *Origines Parochiales Scotiae: The Antiquities Ecclesiastical and Territorial of the Parishes of Scotland*, vol. 2, pt.1 (Edinburgh 1854) 314, which suggests the dedicatee was the virgin saint Fincana of Abernethy.

³² Reeves, *Adamnan*, p.26.

Not all modern readers have seen homosexuality in the episode. J.T. Fowler, in his edition of William Reeves' Latin text of *VC*, glossed the word *carnaliter* as '[w]ith mere human affection'.³³ Alan and Marjorie Anderson translated the clause somewhat ambiguously by explaining that Findchán's 'love for Áid was earthly'.³⁴ In the eighteenth century, Fr Thomas Innes, the eponym of this very journal, provided two translations of *carnaliter amans* in his *Civil and Ecclesiastical History of Scotland*. In his initial translation, Innes wrote that Findchán 'had a vehement affection for [Aed]'.³⁵ In the subsequent detailed explanation of the passage, Innes remarked that Aed 'was a particular friend of Findchan, whom he passionately loved, *carnaliter amans*, says Adamnan'.³⁶ For Innes, Findchán's deep friendship for Aed had no physical component and was manifest only as a concern to 'engage [Aed] into a penitential course of life'.³⁷

The traditional division between the physical and the spiritual certainly seems inherent to the meaning of *carnaliter amans*. Comparison might well be made to an episode in the so-called *Earlier Life of St Munnu of Taghmon* in the *Codex Salmanticensis*.³⁸ Munnu founded his monastery (the site today is not far from Wexford) in the middle of the seventh century. The text of this saint's life most likely dates from the twelfth century but relied on an earlier source. Near the end of the text, the author writes that if Munnu ever spoke harshly to a visitor at his monastery, the saint would never take a meal until he had apologised to his guest. Munnu would say to him, 'Earlier I behaved as the earthly son of Telchán [the name of Munnu's father], but now I am the spiritual son of God': *ego preterita hora carnaliter filius Tulchani, nunc uero spiritualiter filius Dei sum*.³⁹

Adomnán, however, seems to be using the word *carnaliter* in a specific sense that precludes any association with sexual desire. Here the adverb *carnaliter* indicates when an action was carried out because

³³J.T. Fowler, *Adamnani Vita S. Columbae* (Oxford 1894) 47.

³⁴Anderson and Anderson, *Columba*, 2nd ed., p.67.

³⁵T. Innes, *The Civil and Ecclesiastical History of Scotland* (Aberdeen 1853).

³⁶*Ibid.*, 180.

³⁷*Ibid.*; today's scholars may have good reasons to quibble with Innes' historical understanding of the episode, for Innes located Artchain in Shetland, believed the monastery to have been under Iona's authority, and chronologically placed the ordination of Aed *after* his reign as king of the Ulaid.

³⁸The references here to the *Life of St Munnu* and to Gerald of Wales were kindly provided by Anthony Harvey via electronic transmission from the pre-publication extracts of the Royal Irish Academy's forthcoming *Non-Classical Lexicon of Celtic Latinity*, by A. Harvey and J. Power. An online Celtic-Latin Word-List may be found at the website of the Academy's Dictionary of Medieval Latin from Celtic Sources project, <<http://journals.eecs.qub.ac.uk/DMLCS/wordlist/wordlist.html>>. The author wishes to thank Dr Harvey for his generous assistance.

³⁹*Vita prior sancti Fintani seu Munnu*, in Heist, *Vitae*, 209.

of a bond of kinship or ethnicity. This is a meaning also used five centuries later by Gerald of Wales. In *Invectiones* i.7, Gerald complains about the attempts of Hubert Walter, archbishop of Canterbury, to prevent Gerald—then archdeacon of Brecon—from becoming bishop of St David's. Some of the clerics of St David's informed Hubert Walter that support could be found for the election of Peter, abbot of Whitland, because many of Peter's relatives served as canons of St David's. As Gerald reports, Hubert Walter was told that if the archbishop promoted Peter's candidacy, 'all of them would be of assistance, either for him [the archbishop] in his struggle against the archdeacon [Gerald], or because of the family connection': *illi omnes ei contra archidiaconum uel carnaliter assisterent*.⁴⁰

This meaning of *carnaliter* is paralleled by the use of the noun *caro* in another episode in VC, where Adomnán relates a prediction made by the saint to Comgall of Bangor. Columba foretells that a well that has brought them both water will one day be fouled with human blood.

nam mei cognitionales amici, et tui secundum carnem cognati (hoc est Nellis nepote, et Cruithini populi), in hac uicina munitione Cethirni belligerantes committent bellum.
VC i.49

For my near kindred and your kinsmen according to the flesh (that is the Uí Néill and the Cruithin) will make war on one another, fighting a battle at this fort of Dún Cethirn near here.

tr. Sharpe, *Adomnán*, 151.

The use here of *caro* in the phrase *tui secundum carnem cognati* indicates an ethnic bond, a genetic link.⁴¹ Findchán's 'love' for Aed the Black was the support extended to members of one's own kindred. The phrase *Findchanus Aidum carnaliter amans* should be translated 'Findchán loved Aed as a member of his family'.

Columba disapproved of Aed's ordination, an opinion shared by Adomnán. To what degree the validity of the ordination was questioned depends upon interpretation of the passage. Richard Sharpe has Adomnán flatly reject the ceremony in translating the phrase *accito episcopo quamuis non recte...prespiter ordinatus est* as 'the ordination was invalid even though a bishop had been present'. In Sharpe's interpretation, the ceremony was procedurally flawed because

⁴⁰ *Invectiones* i.7, ed. W. S. Davies, 'The Book of Invectives of Giraldus Cambrensis', *Y Cymmrodor* 30 (1920) 107.

⁴¹ T.M. Charles-Edward, *Early Irish and Welsh Kinship* (Oxford 1993) 144-45.

Findchán, who was not a bishop, participated in the ceremony by laying his hand on Aed's head before the bishop did.

Earlier translators have had other views. The Andersons believed Adomnán to have accepted the validity of the ordination ceremony. They translate that Aed 'was ordained as priest, although not rightly'.⁴² In other words, although Aed was an unsuitable candidate for the priesthood and the ceremony may have contained unusual elements, the ceremony itself was acceptable. The nineteenth-century translation supervised by Forbes questions the validity of the ordination, but places the action of ordination solely upon the bishop: '[Aed] was irregularly ordained priest by a bishop invited for the purpose'.⁴³

The phrase *non recte...ordinatus* must be reconciled with Columba's later description of Aed as *ordinatus...indebete* in the saint's subsequent prophecy. The Andersons, pointing to flaws in Aed's character, translated *ordinatus...indebete* as 'unworthily ordained'. Sharpe translates 'ordained unfittingly'. The Forbes translation is the most stringent, giving 'irregularly ordained'. Despite the variety of translations, the description *ordinatus...indebete* (along with the later phrase *solummodo nomine prespiter*) seems to indicate that Columba indeed accepted the validity of the ceremony, for although Aed was *indebete ordinatus*, this murderer of Diarmait mac Cerbaill was, nevertheless, *ordinatus*.

The questioning by Sharpe and Forbes of the ceremony's validity is in accord with the views of Fr Innes, but only in vehemence, not in rationale. Innes translated *ordinatus...indebete* as 'unlawfully ordained', and *accito episcopo quamuis non recte...prespiter ordinatus est* as '[Aed was] ordained priest, against the canons, by a bishop sent for on purpose'.⁴⁴ Innes discussed this episode from *VC* in detail in his *Civil and Ecclesiastical History of Scotland* because of two events mentioned therein: that Findchán summoned a bishop for Aed's ordination; and that Columba did not include the bishop in the saint's subsequent curse. Innes used these details to refute Presbyterian claims that the early abbots of Iona held authority over bishops, and that in early Scotland, bishops were not necessary for the ordination of priests.⁴⁵

In his arguments against Presbyterianism, Innes might well have been expected to view as an irregularity that Findchán laid his

⁴² Anderson and Anderson, *Columba*, 2nd ed., 67.

⁴³ Reeves, *Adamnan*, 26; the Forbes translation seems to have interpreted the ablative absolute *accito episcopo* as an ablative of agent.

⁴⁴ Innes, *History*, 179-80.

⁴⁵ On the role of bishops in Irish monastic settlements in this period, see G. Márkus, 'Iona: monks, pastors and missionaries', in *Spes Scotorum, Hope of Scots: St Columba, Iona and Scotland*, edd. D. Broun and T.O. Clancy (Edinburgh 1999) 115-38.

right hand on Aed's head before the bishop did. Innes, however, defended the practice with reference to the third canon of the so-called Fourth Council of Carthage.⁴⁶ The historicity of this council is not accepted, and the canons that purport to have been established thereat seem to have been composed in southern Gaul in the late fifth century. The canons represent the practices of the Gallic Church and may not be applicable outside the region. The text containing these canons has come to be known as the *Statuta ecclesiae antiqua*. Sometime thereafter, the statutes in this document were rearranged and fashioned into a new text that purported to be the canons of a synod of African bishops held in Carthage in the year 436. This new text was incorporated into a seventh-century Spanish collection of the canons of early councils, and thence the 'Canons of the Fourth Council of Carthage' found their way throughout western Christendom.⁴⁷

Adomnán may well have had a canon collection that contained the *Statuta ecclesiae antiqua*. A younger Irish contemporary used the *Statuta* in creating the compilation known as the *Collectio canonum Hibernensis*.⁴⁸ The canon in question, however, merely calls for priests present at an ordination ceremony to place their hands next to the elevated hand of the ordaining bishop, and not, as in the case of Findchán and Aed, directly on the ordinand's head before the bishop placed his own hand.⁴⁹ Recourse to modern practice is not relevant,⁵⁰ and in any case Adomnán's language makes it clear that Findchán's participation in Aed's ordination was unusual. That the ceremony was unusual did not, however, make it invalid.

Innes's insistence that Aed's ordination was 'against the canons' was primarily based upon Aed's unsuitable background and

⁴⁶ Innes, *History*, 182.

⁴⁷ Charles Munier, *Concilia Africae A.345 - A.525 (Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina [henceforth CCSL] 259; Turnhout 1974) 323-25, 342; the text of the third canon of the 'Fourth Council of Carthage' is on p.344; idem, Les Statuta ecclesiae antiqua (Paris, 1960) 229-36, with text of this canon forming chapter 91 of the Statuta, pp.95-96; idem, Concilia Galliae A.314 - A.506 (CCSL 148; Turnout 1963) 163 (introduction), 181 (text of chapter 91); Friedrich Maassen, *Geschichte der Quellen und Literatur des kanonischen Rechts* (Graz 1870; repr. 1956) 382-94. For complete bibliography on the numerous early-medieval collections of Church law, see Lotte Kéry, *Canonical collections of the early middle ages (ca.400-1140)* (Washington 1999).*

⁴⁸ H. Wasserschleben, *Die irische Kanonensammlung* (2nd ed., Leipzig 1885) pp.xvi-xvii; L.M. Davies, 'Isidorian texts and the *Hibernensis*', *Peritia* 12 (1997) 207-49. The author of this article was unable to consult Davies' D.Phil. thesis, *The Collectio canonum Hibernensis and its sources* (Oxford 1995).

⁴⁹ *Presbyter cum ordinatur, episcopo eum benedicente et manum super eius caput tenente, etiam omnes presbyteri qui praesentes sunt manus suas iuxta manum episcopi super caput illius teneant*; Munier, *Concilia Africae*, 344.

⁵⁰ Cf. Fowler, *Adamnan*, 47.

character. Although Canon Law today expressly forbids those who have committed wilful homicide from receiving Holy Orders,⁵¹ such a ban did not have absolute acceptance in the early Church. The twenty-second canon of the Council of Ancyra held in the year 314 (known in Ireland from the collection made in Rome by Dionysius Exiguus in the early sixth century)⁵² requires Christians who commit wilful homicide to submit to a life of penance, allowing them to return to communion at the end of their lives. Such penance would effectively bar wilful murderers from the priesthood. The time of penance for wilful murder was, however, generally of a fixed duration, and that duration varied from region to region. Even the early penitentials written by Irishmen disagree on the length of penance for wilful killing by lay Christians (the category in which Aed's murder of Diarmait would have been classified). The Penitential of St Columbanus prescribes three years penance for murder.⁵³ The Penitential of Cummean distinguishes between premeditated murder (presumably the killing of Diarmait was premeditated) and murder committed in the heat of passion. Those who commit premeditated murder face lifelong penance. Those who kill as a result of sudden anger have a three-year penance.⁵⁴ The second and third sections of the penitential text named by Ludwig Bieler as *Canones Hibernenses I* require seven years penance for homicide, but the text provides the alternative view of *Monochoma* (the name, presumably, of an Irish cleric) that a penance of ten years is appropriate.⁵⁵

Aed's stay on Tiree seems to have been penitential in origin (*in perigrinatione*), whether for the killing of Diarmait mac Cerbaill or for other sins. Columba may not have been satisfied with the penance imposed or how that penance was completed, but in Adomnán's *VC* the saint may also be displaying concern over Aed's future career. For a priest to accept a position of secular political and military authority—this, after all, is the role of a king—was in direct violation of Church doctrine. The seventh canon of the Council of Chalcedon in

⁵¹ Canon 1041 §4.

⁵² This very canon is quoted explicitly from Dionysius' collection in the *Collectio canonum Hibernensis* 28.10; Wasserschleben, *Kanonensammlung*, 96. In Dionysius's collection, this canon is numbered 21, because canons 4 and 5 of the Greek text from the Council of Ancyra together comprise canon 4 in Dionysius' translation.

⁵³ L. Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials* (Dublin 1975) 102-3.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 118-21.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 160-61; recent bibliography on medieval penitentials may be found in the introductions to the edition of Spanish penitentials by F. Bezler, *Paenitentia Hispaniae* (CCSL 156a; Turnhout 1998) xi-xiv.

451 expressly forbids the clergy from military or secular office. The punishment is excommunication.⁵⁶

The arrangements of Aed's ordination would have raised suspicions that he had not entirely removed himself from Ulidian politics. His pilgrimage was to a monastery run by a kinsman who then made the arrangements for Aed's ordination to the priesthood. The network of family relations governing early Irish society was active in Aed's promotion, just as Aed's murder of Diarmait mac Cerbaill was connected, in the later *aided* tradition, to avenging Aed's father. Strong was the temptation for Aed to employ or serve family interests in the future. 'As a dog to its vomit', Columba remarks in *VC*, alluding to the famous line in Proverbs 26.11 about a fool who repeats his folly. Columba's speech more likely recalls the sharper condemnation of false teachers—false priests—in 2 Peter 2.20-22:

For if, flying from the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they be again entangled in them and overcome, their latter state is become unto them worse than the former. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of justice, than after they have known it, to turn back from that holy commandment which was delivered to them. For, that of the true proverb has happened to them: the dog is returned to his vomit; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.

Scholars may find hypocrisy in Columba's criticism of using the Church to promote family interests. Columba has himself been portrayed, in both medieval hagiography and modern scholarly literature, as an active promoter of the interests of his own Uí Néill kindred. The saint's disgust at Aed's priestly ordination has been interpreted in connection with Aed's murder of an Uí Néill high-king.⁵⁷ Columba's successor as abbot of Iona was his first-cousin Baíthéne, whose own successor was Laisrén, the son of another first-cousin. Adomnán, abbot of Iona in the final decades of the seventh century, was also an Uí Néill kinsman.⁵⁸

Adomnán, however, presents in *VC* a Columba who does not actively promote his kinsmen of the flesh, the Uí Néill. In the prophecy of the polluted well of Dún Cethirn, Columba does not mention the victory of the Uí Néill over the Ulaid in the battle to take place four decades thence. Instead, Columba reveals a troubling image, that the

⁵⁶ Cf. Peter L'Huillier, *The Church of the Ancient Councils* (Crestwood, New York 1996) 225-27.

⁵⁷ Smyth, *Warlords*, 98-9; cf. The comments of Sharpe, *Adomnán*, 14-15.

⁵⁸ Máire Herbert, *Iona, Kells and Derry: The History and Hagiography of the Monastic Familia of Columba* (Oxford 1988) 9-56.

well will be polluted by the corpse of an Uí Néill kinsman.⁵⁹ Even more telling is an episode Adomnán omits from *VC*. A prophecy of Columba from a text written by Cumméne the White, one of Adomnán's predecessors as abbot of Iona, was added to the text of *VC* in the oldest surviving manuscript by the scribe Dorbbéne.⁶⁰ The prophecy is a blunt warning by Columba to Aedan mac Gabráin, king of the Dál Riata, against trying to harm the saint's kinsmen, the Uí Néill. Adomnán must have known this text. In his concern, however, over the preoccupation of clerics with the secular affairs of their kinsmen, Adomnán chose not to include this prophecy in *VC*.

For Adomnán, the influence of a cleric's natural family must always be second to that of his spiritual kindred. The priestly ordination of the murderer Aed the Black, bound as it was in the kinship ties of the Dál nAraidi, demonstrated misplaced priorities on the part of the priest Findchán. Aed's punishment and Findchán's penance would, in Adomnán's narration, demand and receive divine imposition.

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⁵⁹ *VC* i.49.

⁶⁰ The fragment is appended to *VC* iii.5; on the manuscripts of *VC*, see Anderson and Anderson, 2nd ed., liv-lxii.