


History and Historiography in Early Christian Ireland - Muirchú's 'Vita Patricii' and Tírechán's 'Collectanea'

História e Historiografia na Early Christian Ireland – a “Vita Patricii”, de Muirchú, e a “Collectanea”, de Tírechán

Dominique Santos^a

E-mail: dvcsantos@furb.br

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0265-2921> 

^a Universidade de Blumenau, Departamento de História e Geografia, Blumenau, SC, Brasil

ABSTRACT

Despite modern writers noticing the importance of Premodern historiographical phenomena for a deeper comprehension of both Theory of History and History of Historiography, the Irish contribution to the subject is often left aside. Topics such as the *Seanchas* Tradition and Medieval Irish Classicism are not well integrated into such historiographical narrative. The *Seanchaidh*, the Irish *Artifex* of the Past, for example, is broadly mentioned as not a historian, but a chronicler, antiquary, genealogist, hagiographer or pedigree systematizer. This article addresses these issues and, more specifically, we focus on two Irish narratives produced in 7th century by Muirchú and Tírechán. Since they belong to the world of orality and bilingual literacy of Early Christian Ireland, perhaps their works could be understood as bounded by the *Seanchas* Tradition and Medieval Irish Classicism, hence, both could be considered as great examples of the producers of History and Historiography at the time.

KEYWORDS

Historiography; Medieval; Ireland

RESUMO

Apesar de alguns escritores modernos terem notado a importância dos fenômenos historiográficos pré-modernos para uma maior compreensão tanto da Teoria da História quanto da História da Historiografia, a contribuição irlandesa para o tema nem sempre é apontada. Tópicos como a tradição *Seanchas* e o Classicismo Medieval irlandês não estão integrados a esse tipo de narrativa historiográfica. O *Seanchaidh*, o *Artifex* irlandês do passado, por exemplo, é frequentemente mencionado como não sendo um historiador, mas, ao invés disso, um cronista, antiquário, genealogista, hagiógrafo ou sistematizador de pedigrees. Neste artigo, tais questões são endereçadas e, de forma mais específica, nos focamos em duas narrativas irlandesas do século VII produzidas por Muirchú e Tírechán. Uma vez que os autores pertencem ao mundo da oralidade e do letramento bilíngue da *Early Christian Ireland*, talvez suas obras possam ser compreendidas como vinculadas à tradição *Seanchas* e ao Classicismo Medieval irlandês, podendo, então, serem consideradas como grandes exemplos das produções de História e Historiografia daquele tempo.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Writing of History; Event; Historical Time.

Introduction

On several occasions, Medieval historiography has received a similar treatment to that reserved for Ancient historiography, that is, its diverse experiences are brought together and classified under generalizing concepts. If Roman historiography has been synthesized as '*Historia Magistra Vitae*' and the Greek as one that produced a temporal narrative based on 'cycles', for example, the Middle Ages would have had a historiography, above all, ecclesiastical (SANTOS 2015, p. 7-18). In such explanations, one commonly finds syntheses that bring together names like Herodotus, Thucydides, and Polybius for the Greek context; Tacitus and Dion Cassius for the Roman one; while Augustine, Eusebius, and Gregory of Tours would be the medieval representatives. After that, the books of Theory of History and History of Historiography mention Vico, an author from the 17th and 18th centuries. This is mainly because a large portion of scholars who teach the theoretical subjects of History courses have focused on themes linked to more recent temporalities, mainly from the 19th century to the present. Furthermore, they consider that what happened before Ranke, Droysen or Gervinus, would not be professional historiography; that is, premodern historiographies are evaluated with modern eyes, including the Medieval ones (DELIYANNIS 2003, p. 1-16; MOMIGLIANO 2004; MARINCOLA 2007).

Regardless of the historical shapes used to refer to the temporalities involving the texts produced in Ireland between the 5th century and the year 1169, 'Ancient Ireland', 'Late Antique Ireland', 'Medieval Ireland', 'Early Christian Ireland', among similar epithets, specificities are disregarded. When mentioned among Medieval texts, they are classified as not being sufficiently 'historiographic', and are not included in History of Historiography manuals. Even in specific works of Medieval Historiography, Irish texts do not usually appear; Irish authors are often referred to as 'chroniclers', 'antiquarians', 'genealogists', 'hagiographers', or even 'pedigree systematizers'. Thus, the Irish contribution to both Theory of History and

the History of Historiography is lost (SANTOS 2015, p. 7-18; SANTOS 2018). The very rich production developed between the *Seanchas* tradition and Irish Medieval Classicism is no longer integrated into historiographical narratives and the task performed by *Seanchaidh*, the Irish *Artifex* of the past, is ignored.

To contribute to this debate, the following works of two of these Medieval Irish historians are approached: *Vita Sanctii Patricii*, by Muirchú, and *Collectanea*, by Tirechán. From them, we can see that old tales and stories, poetry, fiction, genealogy, hagiography, law and traditional laws, and history and historiography are hard to be considered apart, especially if we observe the classification system of the time. Both Muirchú and Tirechán, despite their differences, wrote their works in a world that connected oral and bilingual literacy, dialoguing with Latin, Greek, and Hebrew traditions in an Ireland that lived between Christianity and Paganism (MILES 2011, p. 34). These authors are great examples of History and Historiography producers and their works allow us to elucidate issues that can enrich our view of Early Christian Ireland.

Muirchú and Tirechán: life and work

As his name indicates, Muirchú Moccu Machteni was probably a 7th century resident of Mochtaine, one of the Irish *Tuatha* in the region of Mag Macha, plain of Armagh. We know he was someone of relative importance, as he attended, together with Bishop Áed, the Synod of Birr; a King-supported meeting convened by Adomnán, abbot of Iona in the year 697, held in the locality that would correspond to the modern county of Offally. At the time, abbots, sages, teachers, poets, and kings discussed important themes for that society; it was in Birr, for example, that the *Cáin Adomnáin*, or *Lex Innocentium* (Law of the Innocents, as it was also known) was enacted, a law that defended women and children in vulnerable situations, especially in times of war.

Áed was responsible for incorporating Armagh into a web of ecclesiastical relations called *Paruchia Patricii*, i.e., those churches that had or maintained some kind of relationship with [Saint] Patrick and placed themselves under the tradition of his name, invoking links with the one who, at that time, was already considered important for Irish Christianity.

Then, Armagh was trying to establish itself as the center of Irish religious connections and Patrick was at the center of this propaganda based on a combination of three models of authority, the abbot, the bishop and the *comarbae*. *Paruchia Patricii* would be a model of jurisdiction, bringing together several churches, as if in one family; the *Familia Patricii*, around Armagh (ETCHINGHAM 1999). Muirchú was one of the writers responsible for spreading these ideas in *Early Christian Ireland* and this also helped him to project his name not only during his own time, but beyond it. He is also related to the beginnings of Irish hagiographic production and wrote a document entitled *Vita Sancti Patricii* (Life of Saint Patrick), one of the first and most mentioned hagiographic accounts of [Saint] Patrick, considered the patron of Ireland.

Tírechán also lived in the 7th century and was a disciple of Bishop Ultán moccu Conchobair. According to Terry O'Hagan, if we consider information from the 'Martyrology of Tallaght' (a list of related saints and festivities) Ultán would come from the Ardraccan monastery, located in a territory corresponding to the current county of Meath, in the province of Leinster (O'HAGAN 2011). Tírechán would have studied there under the care of Ultán, around the year 650, and was probably responsible for continuing the work of his master after his death. Tírechán, however, did not come from the region, but belonged to a family from northern Connacht, another province in Ireland. He is related to the Uí Amonngid dynasty, which inhabited the region of Killala Bay, County Mayo. Among all the locations explored in his work, this is the most detailed and receives the most attention from the author, as pointed by O'Hagan (2011). This means that Tírechán stood out among

others and received the necessary investment to leave the north of Mayo, and spend several years acquiring the skills a scribe of that time would have. He received his education in Ultán, in Ardraccon, County Meath, then, on the other side of Ireland, which indicates that he was a member of a family with conditions, that is, a high elite of the time (O'HAGAN 2011).

Both Muirchú and Tírechán produced important texts for our knowledge about Ireland in the 7th century, but also about the history of Christianity in that place. While the former wrote *Vita Sancti Patricii*, the most well-known and cited work on the life of [Saint] Patrick, the latter produced a work whose title we do not know, but which became known as '*Collectanea de Vita S. Patricii*'. It is a collection of memories also related to Patrick and his activities in Ireland. Both works were written in Latin and in the same period. In both cases, there is a link with the thesis that the foundation of Armagh should be the monastic house to obtain primacy over others in Ireland, rivaling, for example, with potential Irish rivals such as Kildare, and even from other locations, like Iona. However, it seems that Muirchú directly defended this idea, while Tírechán was more concerned with an apology in favor of the very notion of *Paruchia Patricii*. Mentioning Patrick meant establishing a connection with an ecclesiastical authority, who was probably already popular in the 7th century and considered one of the pioneers of Irish Christianity (SANTOS 2013a).

Both works appear in a document written in Latin called *Liber Ardmachanus* (L.A.), or Book of Armagh, in English. It was developed in the locality from which it was named, around the year 807 of the Common Era. The oldest part of the manuscript was produced by Ferdomnach of Armagh, who died in 845 or 846, and his scribes.

The work is catalogued as manuscript number 52 (Ms. 52) from the Library of Trinity College Dublin (BOARD OF TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN 2011). It is a *Vellum*, which originally had 222 leaves, however, of these, five are missing (the opening *folio*: *fol.* 1; two *bifolia* from the second quire of the Gospel of

Matthew: *fol.* 42-45). Currently, then, the Book of Armagh has 217 *fol.* The text was written in double columns with insular minuscule letters, the Irish minuscule, and has around 34-40 lines per *folio*; the quires are numbered. Its dimensions are approximately 195x145 mm. The manuscript can be divided into three parts: one that contains texts relating to Patrick (*fol.* 2-24); another that presents us the only Irish copy to survive from the time of the New Testament (*fol.* 25-191); and a last one that contains the Life of St. Martin of Tours (*fol.* 192-222) by Sulpicius Severus. The first part (*fol.* 2-24), then, contains *Vita Sancti Patricii*, by Muirchú maccu Machteni, which is located, more specifically, between the *fol.* 2ra-8vb, and *Collectanea de Vita S. Patricii*, by Tírechán, covering the *fol.* 9ra-15vb (BOARD OF TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN 2011; GROENEWEGEN 2015).

If we look at both Muirchú's and Tírechán's works with a modern perspective, ignoring the context and specificities of the time, we will find in them a synthesis of various elements that today, undoubtedly, we would classify as literature, fiction, poetry, theology, geography, hagiography, history, jurisdiction, among others. It is not by chance that the two works were significantly depreciated, especially between 1961, due to the interpretation of Daniel Binchy, author of the main synthesis about Patrick back then (elaborated when many people in Ireland believed to be celebrating 1,500 years of Patrick's death) (BINCHY 1962); and only recovered in much more recent times, when new ideas were pointed out, mainly by David Howllet (1994; 2006).

From this modern perspective, both Muirchú's *Vita* and Tírechán's *Collectanea* were seen as carrying generalizations, simplifications and anachronisms. Thus, they would not only have little historiographical value, but they would also be responsible for the mistaken image that we would have of Patrick, a character more legendary than historical. The recommendation was, at least between 1961 and 2006, that, to be able to understand the 'historical Patrick' and

not the 'legendary Patrick', both works should be left aside, abandoned. They would make references to the 7th century itself and could say nothing about the 5th century, when Patrick probably lived. Thus, it would be better if Muirchú and Tírechán were understood, at most, as producers of hagiographies (SANTOS 2013a).

Edward Arthur Thompson went even further on the issue. He has interpreted the works of Muirchú and Tírechán as deeply hagiographic, which we should read from a historical and dialectical materialistic bias, ignoring the praise found in this type of material (THOMPSON 1986). In other words, Thompson practically developed an anti-hagiographic "antidote" (JONES 1987).

In general, then, texts produced in Ireland in those times would not be seen as historiographies. The so-called 'hagiographic works' of Muirchú and Tírechán, much less, as they would be full of fictionalities. Hagiography would have a pejorative character (HOWLETT 1994).

Tírechán's *Collectanea* seems to be more pragmatic than Muirchú's *Vita*. While the former prefers to focus on portraying the daily tasks and activities carried out by Patrick, especially the places he visited in Ireland, the latter represents several actions that were interpreted as miraculous. However, the two authors were associated and classified as fiction producers. Thus, if an image was created of a 'fictional' Patrick, as opposed to a 'real' and/or 'historical' one, this type of text would be to blame, since this would have occurred as the works left by these two authors were the most widely read (HOWLETT 1994; 2006).

Peter Brown showed that the cult of the saints emerged in what he called Latin Christianity and functioned as an agglutinating and structuring element, allowing people of that time to build guidance and meaning for themselves and their communities. In other words, this promoted social interaction around sanctified figures and their respective cults

and traditions, a theme recently explored also by the 'the Cult of Saints' project, led by Bryan Ward-Perkins at the Oxford University (BROWN 1981; WARD-PERKINS, *Cult of Saints*, 2014-2019).

The works of Muirchú and Tírechán produced this support of the necessary symbols for interaction and social life in Ireland back then, and it is important to keep in mind that the authors were successful only because, to insert Armagh into a Patrician tradition, they needed to know and master the methods used in such a context to represent the past. The central characteristics of 7th century Irish historiography, then, were brought together, organized and systematized as plausible narratives, for the audience to which the two works were destined.

'*Saí seanchasa*' or '*Seanchaidhe*' was perhaps the term used in that time for the individual who had the responsibility to organize, produce and present the narratives about the past, which, in turn, were part of *Seanchas*. During the long chronological arc in which this tradition was in force, this Medieval historian appears in the manuscripts performing the most distinct tasks from the point of view of the narrative. In some documents, he may appear as guardian of tradition, a witness who is an expert in interpreting ancestral customs, a genealogist; also as an interpreter of the law, an arbitrator to resolve issues involving disputes that require knowledge of the past, a mnemonic guardian of notary records; or even the holder of knowledge about territorial divisions and borders, someone who prepares the king's speech, a master of eloquence and one who writes or tells the story of a certain fact, circumstance, king or people, whenever requested (SIMMS 1987; 1998). According to Fergus Kelly, he was the one who should provide evidence about the past whenever he was asked to solve any type of dispute or controversy related to genealogical issues, properties etc. (KELLY 1986, p. 93). The *Seanchas* has, then, several developments and so that is how it must be thought (SANTOS 2018).

Even if we decide that Muircú, and Tírechán, because he lived in the 7th century, still cannot be called a 'Saí seanchasa' or a 'Seanchaidhe', we must not forget that they were part of this tradition and had full knowledge of it. After all, *Seanchas* can be defined as 'the memory and narrative of Irish history as preserved and written from the early medieval period to the writing of histories of Ireland in the 17th century' (BHREATHNACH 2007, p. 19). *Seanchas* must be taken, then, as a narrative system that brought together history, myth and tradition (Ó CRÓINÍN 2005; JOHNSTON 2013). Thus, the *Seanchas* are keys to History in Medieval Ireland (BHREATHNACH 2013) and 'encompassed the collective consciousness of the Irish as expressed by their historians' (BHREATHNACH 2014, p. 2). In this way, we propose to think of Muirchú, and Tírechán, as an *Artifex* of the past, probably a *Seanchaidhe*, responsible for the Irish *Seanchas*, or, at the very least, someone inserted in such a tradition, even if it were perhaps still in formation. Let us then proceed to the analysis of the two works and their historiographic characteristics, considering the notions of historiography of the period.

Historiographical notes on *Vita Sanctii Patricii*, by Muirchú Moccu Machteni, and *Collectanea de S. Patricii*, by Tírechán

In the prologue to his work, Muirchú states that his objective is to narrate 'these few of the numerous deeds of holy Patrick' (*Vita Sancti Patricii, Prologus*, 1). In addition, he also states that he writes 'with little knowledge', 'on uncertain authority', 'from an unreliable memory', as well as 'feebly and in poor style' (*Vita Sancti Patricii, Prologus*, 3).

The first evidence of writing in Ireland that we have are found in the *Ogham Stones*. After these monuments, we have the two letters that Patrick himself wrote, *Confessio* and *Epistola*, which are traditionally dated from the 5th century. Only in the 6th century, perhaps in 597, it is believed that Dallán Forgail, a poet friend of Colm Cille, wrote a text called

Amra Choluimb Chille, on the occasion of the Saint's death (BREATNACH 2005, p. 400; O'LOUGHLIN 2006, p. 468; CLANCY 2006, p. 557). Since that moment, we have in Ireland a tradition that developed between literacy (in Latin and Irish, but with a profound influence also from Greek and Hebrew) and orality. Probably, Muirchú was referring to *Seanchas*, although these were still in formation in the 7th century. When he comments, for example, about writing 'feebly and in poor style', he wants to show his readers that he knows Patrick's literary style, who also writes in his *Confessio* that he is a '*peccator rusticissimus et minimus omnium fidelium*'/'I am a sinner, a simple country person, and the least of all believers' (Patrick, *Confessio*, 1). In other words, it is a rhetorical strategy; when writing a life of Patrick, Muirchú shows the audience that he knows the texts that preceded him. According to David Howlett, Muirchú must have taken at least 100 of the 130 words he uses in his prologue from Patrick's *Confessio* (HOWLETT 2006, p. 30-34).

Narrating, for Muirchú, was something difficult and complex that should be done carefully. For this reason, he uses the Latin term '*acutissimos carubdes*' (*Vita Sancti Patricii, Prologus*, 1) to express this difficulty. In order to favor the reception of his work and to be able to situate himself in those versions, which should have existed at the time of Patrick's life, nothing better than being based on the writings of the character represented. There is a process of *mimesis* directly attached to Patrician work, which Howlett understood very well, and which we can see by comparing the following two passages, put in parallel. The first, by Patrick: '(1) *Intermisi* (2) *hominem* (3) *cum* (4) *quo* (5) *fuera* (6) *sex annis*' (Patrick, *Confessio*: 17). The second, by Muirchú: '*Etiam in sexto decimo* (1) *anno* (2) *aetatis* (3) *captus* (4) *et* (5) *sex* (6) *annis seruiuit*' (Muirchú, *Vita Sancti Patricii*, II, 15.2). This comparison, firstly suggested by the Oxford professor, shows that in the Patrician text, the sixth word in the line is 'sex', six. Its last letter is the sixth before the end of the line. In Muirchú, 'sex' is the sixth word after 'sixth'. It would be possible to think of 'coincidence', if these two were the only fragments in which this occurs; however,

quite the contrary is true. As Howlett has pointed out, there are hundreds of parallels, resignifications, and conscious uses that Muirchú makes of Patrick's text (HOWLETT 2006). Historiography has accepted these are the criteria of veracity and 'source quotation' used by the hagiographer, which is related to the historiographic perceptions of the time (SANTOS 2013a; 2013b).

The battle between the 'druids' of King Lóegaire and Patrick, in the province of Tara, cannot be left out either, since the passage is one of the most quoted in Patriciology as a negative example, i.e., that it would be no historiography and to emphasize that Muirchú's text is only fiction. After all, in this fragment, in addition to the various magical conflicts, Muirchú says that one of the Druids took flight like a bird and went to meet Patrick. The problem is that only the modern audience presents this interpretation. Readers at the time, familiar with the *Seanchas* tradition, knew how to separate what was fun, poetry, literature, fiction, from what was history, politics, moral lessons and so on.

Muirchú writes, for example, that there was an attempt to poison Patrick when '*Caenatibus autem omnibus (...)*' while they were all eating' (Muirchú, *Vita Sancti Patricii*, I. 20.1). According to O'Loughlin (2003), the passage is based on Matthew 26:26: '*Cenantibus autem eis accepit Iesus panem et benedixit*', which can be translated as 'And as they were eating, Jesus took the bread, and blessed it'. In addition, we note that there are no references by Muirchú to the 'druids', a kind of Celtic priests, but to the magicians, the Persian equivalent, that did not exist in Ireland. When the fear of the king is mentioned, we have the following: '*Et timuit rex uehementer et commotum est cor eius et omnis ciuitas cum eo*' And the king was in great fear, his heart was trembling, and so was his entire city' (Muirchú, *Vita Sancti Patricii*, I. 20.15). Again, another parallel, says O'Loughlin, as the passage is related to Mark 1:27, which reads, in Latin: '*Et mirat sunt omnes ita ut conquirerent inter se dicents quidam est hoc quae doctrina haec noua*' and can

be translated as: 'And they were all amazed, insomuch that they questioned among themselves, saying, what thing is this? What new doctrine is this?' (O'LOUGHLIN 2003; SANTOS 2014).

O'Loughlin (2003) has also pointed out that Muirchú was based on the biblical Book of Daniel (3.1) too, in which we have the figure of King Nebuchadnezzar (*Nabuchodonosor Rex*). In the work of Muirchú (*Vita Sancti Patricii*, I. 10.1), the equivalent is King Lóegaire (*Lóegaire Rex*), in addition to Nebuchadnezzar himself being mentioned (Muirchú, *Vita Sancti Patricii*, I. 15.2). If in the Book of Daniel events happen in the countryside of a Babylonian province (*In campo Duram provuiciae Babylonis*), in Muirchú that is true as well, but in the great plain of Brega (*In campo Breg maximo*) (Muirchú, *Vita Sancti Patricii*, I. 13.2). The most interesting thing, says O'Loughlin (2003), is that if in the Book of Daniel (3.3) there are satraps, in Muirchú's work too: '*congregates etiam regibus, satrapis, ducibus, principibus*'/there assembled the kings, satraps, leaders princes' (Muirchú, *Vita Sancti Patricii*, I. 15.2). Just as there were no 'magicians', literally speaking, in Ireland, but druids instead (and for this reason it is common for the translators of Muirchú and Tírechán to translate '*magus*' into '*druid*'), there were also no satraps. The Book of Daniel (3.8) ends by saluting the 'king who lives forever', and Muirchú does the same, in Latin: '*rex, in aeternum uiue*' (Muirchú, *Vita Sancti Patricii*, I. 15.5), evident parallels to the Old Testament narrative (O'LOUGHLIN 2003; SANTOS 2013a; SANTOS 2014).

Historiography has already pointed out that Muirchú used several texts available to seventh-century Irish scribes: *Audite Omnes Amantes*, by Sechnall (Saint Secundinus); *Commonitorium*, by Vicente de Lérins; *Etymologiae*, by Isidoro de Sevilha; the apocryphal *Actus Petri cum Simone*; *Passio apostolorum Petri et Pauli*; *Historia Apostolica* or *Uirtutes Apostolorum*, by Pseudo-Abadias; *Libri Miraculorum*; by Gregory de Tours; *Dialogi*, by Gregório Magno; *Passio Iohannis Apostoli*, by Pseudo-Mellitus; The Book of Ultán; *De Locis Sanctis*, by Adomnán; possibly, *Vita Sanctae Brigidae*, by

Cogitosus; in addition to other books (BIELER 1949, p. 115; O'LEARY 1996, p. 2; O'LOUGHLIN 2006, p. 121, p. 159) and, of course, *Confessio* and *Epistola ad Milites Corotici*, by the very own [Saint] Patrick, as we have already suggested.

When dialoguing with these texts, Muirchú, as we have insisted, showed that he knew the *Seanchas*, and that he was a writer 'per cola et commata' (by sentences and phrases), a system used by Saint Jerome (HOWLETT 2006). The author of *Vita Patricii* was a perpetuator of classical (and vernacular) letters in Ireland. Thus, he can be understood as taking part in what we call 'Irish classicism', a program or movement of writers who copied, translated and interpreted classic works, also creating their own versions (MILES 2011; SANTOS 2016, p. 93-110). All of these were criteria that Muirchú knew and appropriated, in dialogue with his peers, who knew how to ascertain such forms of composition, recognizing historicity and veracity in Muirchú's narrative even if accompanied by fiction and digression; in the period, it did not pose any problem. We shall proceed to see how Tírechán also dialogued with the same tradition.

The text contained in *fol.* 9ra-15vb, a section of the first part (*fol.* 2-24) of the Book of Armagh, is a copy, produced in the *scriptorium* of Ferdomnach, with the assistance of his assistant scribes, at the beginning of the 9th century, of the work of Tírechán, who lived in the 7th century. It was written in Latin although it did contain numerous names and places in Old Irish (much more than what we see in Muirchú). 'Tírechán, writing Latin, wrote and thought like an Irishman', according to James Carney (1961, p. 136). His work is unfinished and does not have a defined title, but as it brought together a series of memoirs about Patrick available at the time of its compilation, it received the name *Collectanea de Vita S. Patricii*, probably an attribution from Ferdomnach.

The work describes the countless trips Patrick would have made in Ireland, in his initial missions of attempting to Christianize the Irish and subsequent missionary activities,

listing names, ecclesiastical communities related to him, his disciples, dynasties, places, relics, festivities and more. Tírechán visited Armagh and several places in Connacht. He studied with Ultán moccu Conchobair in Ardraccon, around 650, and traveled to various places in Ireland, despite the actions mentioned taking place in Meath and Connacht. Tírechán's work can be understood, if not as belonging, at least in relation to the *dindschenchas* branch of the *Seanchas* Tradition, as its emphasis is undoubtedly geographic. Such dimension is one of the most important factors of *Collectanea* (BYRNE 1974).

From the list of bishops, priests, deacons, exorcists; the knowledge that Tírechán had about the stories related to the Loegaire, as well as about his daughters, including how the author quantifies the years of this king; the fact that he saw Tara with his own eyes; of having addressed the text 'to the men of Meath', regardless of who these people were; of belonging to *Paruchia Patricii*; but, above all, because of his relationship to *dindschenchas*, the literature of the field has interpreted that *Collectanea* did not derive its geographical, onomastic and genealogical knowledge of texts from the Annals tradition, such as those of *Ulster*, *Inisfallen*, and *Cambriae*, despite similar structures. According to J. B. Bury, if Tírechán had accessed known textual sources, he would have mentioned them, as this would have represented a guarantee of authenticity (BURY 1902).

Thus, on the contrary, the author believes that the only source that Tírechán may have had before him when writing his work was the book of his master Ultán, which was also a collection of *acta* based on Patrick's *Confessio*, in addition to the patrician work itself, that he may have handled or had second-hand knowledge. Versions of biblical texts must also have been consulted by him. Bury believes, however, that Tírechán did not transcribe Patrick's journey from old documents, but visited the places founded by the evangelizer and wrote what he heard from the elders of these communities. In other words, *Collectanea's* main source would be a gathering of memories

from information collected locally by Tírechán himself (BURY 1902, p. 259-260). We believe we can say that *Collectanea* was composed from the crossing between information received mostly orally, as Bury pointed out, but also some textual sources, although difficult to identify.

According to Catherine Swift, Tírechán wrote his work recognizing the importance of Armagh, but not as a propagandist of his preeminence (like Muirchú); instead, his objective was to defend *Paruchia Patricii* from possible rivals in the second half of the 7th century, which is why there are so many references to the places that Patrick and his followers had visited (SWIFT 1994). It is possible to interpret, then, that Tírechán elaborated a narrative exploring his knowledge of *dindschenchas* to justify *Paruchia Patricii* from one of the traditions in force in that time.

In addition to identifying, systematizing and presenting these memories and achievements of Patrick, which Tírechán collected from the places he visited, there are some mentions in his work that also give it veracity, considering the requirements of the context. Early on, we find a short introduction to *Collectanea*, written by, perhaps, Ferdornach or one of his two assistant scribes. On it, we can read '*Tirechan episcopus haec scripsit ex ore uel libro Ultani episcopi, cuius ipse alumpnus uel discipulus fuit*', i.e., 'Bishop Tírechán has written this, based on the words and the book of bishop Ultán, whose fosterling and pupil he was' (*Liber Ardmachanus*, 9rb I ff, III.I). Here, '*alumpnus uel discipulus*' has a double meaning. While it indicates that Ultán was a mentor of Tírechán and took care of his spiritual and religious life, he was also his teacher, since he taught him the arts of writing in Ardraccan. On the other hand, to relate his work with Ultán means to say that, just as he had an *autorictas* narrative, Tírechán, as his disciple, would also have it (O'LEARY 1996).

For this reason, he says, for example, that '*Inueni quattuor nomina in libro scripta Patricio apud Ultanum episcopum*'/'I have found four names for Patrick written in a book in the hands

of Ultán' (Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 1 (I)). Tírechán was based not only on the book written by Ultán. Just as he inquired of the people he passed by, in the sense pointed out by Bieler, he also learned from the words and teachings of his master, which can be confirmed later, when he writes that '*mihi testante Ultano episcopo*'/'as bishop Ultán testified to me' (Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 1 (6)). Furthermore, Tírechán also states, at the end of this part, that '*omnia autem quase euenierunt inuenietis in plana illius historia scripta*'/'You will find all that happened to him written in the straightforward story of his life'. (Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 1 (7)). According to Ludwig Bieler (2004, p. 39), it is possible that this '*plana historia*' is some kind of Patrick's primitive 'Life', probably based on his *Confessio*, that is now lost.

Another important reference is the counting of time, which, regardless of whether it is correct or not, made sense to the community that received the work. Tírechán himself believed in the description made, which was probably drawn from what was heard from his interviewees. According to him, 433 years passed between the 'Passion of Christ' to the 'Death of Patrick'. Loiguire would have reigned two or five years after Patrick's death and the duration of his kingdom must have been around 36 years (Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 2). Tírechán makes use of his knowledge of Christian chronology to give it an Irish interpretation, linking events known elsewhere with events allegedly taking place in Ireland.

The author also does this with important themes in Christian narratives, explaining them from their Irish language equivalents. That's what happens in: '*In nomine Domini Dei Patris et Filii atque Spiritus Sancti. +Iesu Christi benigni+ Hoc autem dicitur in Scotica lingua Ochen*'/'In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit'. +the benevolent Jesus Christ+ who is called in the Irish language *Ochen Ísu Crist*'. (Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 4). According to Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, the *duo* between Latin and Irish was very important in Medieval Ireland, so readers were prepared for texts elaborated from

this conception (NÍ MHAONAIGH 2008). After all, as Brent Miles (2011) explains, from the beginning, Irish literacy and textual tradition developed at the same time in Latin and Vernacular.

Another similar example occurs in the twelfth section of *Collectanea*, when Tírechán says that the *'gentiles in sepulcris armati'*/'the pagans armed in their graves' would have their weapons prepared *'usque ad diem erdathe'*/'until the day of the *erdathe'* (Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 12 (2)). Here, the Latin passage contains the Irish word *'erdathe'*, which Ludwig Bieler (2004 p. 132) preferred to italicize in his translation of the Tírechán text in English. *Collectanea's* own author explains what the word means. According to him, *'apud magos, id est iudicii diem Domini* (according to the magicians [druids], that is, the day of the Lord's Judgment) (Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 12 (2)).

Tírechán also explains that when Patrick was baptizing a man named Erc, they went *'ad fontem Loigles in Scotica, nobiscum 'Vitulus Ciuitatum''*/'to the well of *Loigles* in Irish, and in our language *'Calf of the cities''* (Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 13 (3)).

A last example is the use of the Irish word *'Ferta'* as equivalent to the Latin *'Relic'*, meaning a tomb containing the remains, but which, in Ireland of the time, was related to ancestry and territorial demarcation. The excerpt reports that the so-called pagans made tombs in the form of *'fertae, quia sic faciebant Scotici homines et gentiles, nobiscum autem relic uocatur'*/'*fertae*, because this is what the Irish pagans used to do, we nevertheless call *relic'* (Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 26 (20-1)). Tírechán knew very well what his audience expected and often made this transition between Latin and Old Irish in his work.

Tírechán finishes the fifth part of his work mentioning *'Benignus episcopus, sucessor Patricii in aeclessia Machae'* (Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 6). In English: *'Bishop Benignus, Patrick's successor in the church of Armagh'*. Thus, Tírechán

shows that Armagh, an important location for *Paruchia Patricii*, was established by Patrick himself and that we can locate his successors until the present work. In sections six and seven he elaborates, in the part called '*De episcopis*'/'Concerning bishops' a list with many bishops. Some names are repeated, such as Olcanus, Bernicius and Hernicius, which, according to Ludwig Bieler (2004), may be an indication that Tírechán copied this list as he found it, but that it may have been the result of a compilation, by someone or some group that tried to systematize several lists into one. Tírechán's intention is to defend *Paruchia Patricii* by giving it ancestry in some form, dating it to the 5th century (the time of Patrick himself), and linking it to the Armagh of his own time.

The fifteenth section of Tírechán's work contains a reference to a treaty between Patrick and the sons of Amolngid, with their vassals and bishops. The guarantee that the treaty would be fulfilled is Loíguire, son of Níall, something common according to the traditions of the time. What draws the most attention in the passage, however, is that, according to Tírechán, this information was taken from Patrick's own work: '*ut in scriptione sua adfirmat*'/'as he states in his own writings' (Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 15 (4)). It is a theme that appears in other moments of Tírechán's work, mentioning the known fragments of Patrick's *Confessio*, such as, for example, the revelation of Victor the Angel, showing how Patrick would escape from captivity (Patrick, *Confessio*, 17; Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 1 (4-5); also present in *Vita Sanctii Patricii*, by Muirchú, I, i.4) and the mention to '*silua Fochloth*'/'Wood of Fochloth' (Patrick, *Confessio*, 23; Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 14 (I-6); Muirchú, *Vita Sanctii Patricii*, I, 7).

In the eighteenth excerpt of his work, Tírechán dialogues with the possible readers of the narrative. At this point, we can also observe both the conscious use of these veracity criteria and the author's methodological intentions. First, he says that everything he narrated took place '*in uestris regionibus*'/'in your own regions' (Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 18 (I)) that is, the region

of possible readers of the work. When there was an exception, that is, the facts narrated occurred elsewhere, Tírechán justifies, stating that he used this resource because it was relevant to his work: *'in utilitatem laboris mei'* (Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 18 (I)). In addition, all of these passages were learned from *'senioribus multis'*/'many elders' (Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 18 (I)), probably related to *Paruchia Patricii* and interrogated by him and also by Bishop Ultán Moccu Conchubair himself, who instructed him. Again, Tírechán uses his master's *autorictas* as a guarantor that his narrative is trustworthy. He ends the passage saying that *'Omnia autem quae scripsi ab initio libri huius simplicia sunt; omne autem quod restat strictius erit'*/'All the things that I have written from the beginning of this work are unspecified; all that remains will be more specific'. (Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 18 (5)). That way, Tírechán's audience can follow him, knowing exactly what to expect from his work.

The author continues to address similar aspects in the following excerpts. At twenty-eight, he claims that between the death of Patrick and the baptism of Cíarán, 140 years have passed. As a guarantee of reliability, Tírechán says that people can believe him because *'ut peritissimi numerorum aestimant'*/'those most expert [in chronology] estimate' (Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 28 (3)). Another similar excerpt, of conversation between Tírechán and his possible audience, is in what he states that *'Nomina quoque uirorum nolo dicere nissi duo principes Bernicius et Hernicius episcopi, et sororis nomen Nitria'*/'I do not intend to give the names of the men, except the two most important ones, the bishops Bernicius and Ernicus, and the name of their sister, Nitria' (Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 29 (1)). Again, the audience has tools to follow Tírechán's speech, as he himself provides them.

In the next section, Tírechán says that Patrick went to Selc together with several bishops and rested on the spot among the stones. According to the author, these are the stones *'in quibus scripsit manus sua literas, quas hodie conspeximus oculis nostris'*/'on which his hand wrote

letters, which (even) today we may see with our eyes' (Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 30 (I-2)). He was referring, probably to something that could be ascertained by the audience to which the narrative was intended. Tírechán ends the section with a new list of people who accompanied Patrick.

We shall investigate a final example of these references. This is the fragment number thirty-eight. On it, Patrick would have gone to Mount Egli to fast for '*quadraginta diebus et quadraginta noctibus, Mosaicam tenens disciplinam et Heliacam et Christianam*'/'for forty days and forty nights, following the example of Moses, Elijah and Christ' (Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 38 (1)). In other words, Tírechán invokes known biblical examples to the construction of the representation of the character object of his narrative.

In '*Notas suppletoriae ad Tirechanum*'/'Supplementary notes to Tírechán', the narrative form follows the same line of reasoning as the rest of Tírechán's work, which had also already been adopted by Muirchú, presenting Patrick's death in a similar way to that of Moses (Ferdornach, *Liber Ardmachanus, Notae*, fol. 15vb/16ra, [III 3] 53). According to the text, Patrick would have four things similar to Moses: 1) received a message from an angel burning in a bush; 2) fasted 40 days and 40 nights; 3) lived 120 years; 4) nobody knows where his body is (Ferdornach, *Liber Ardmachanus, Notae*, fol. 15vb/16ra, [III 4] 54). He has gathered characteristics that made sense to the audience receiving the work. There is no evidence that Tírechán wrote these *Notae*, since the *Collectanea* text ends with Patrick arriving in Cashel (Tírechán, *Collectanea*, 51 (4)). However, we also have no reason to doubt it, since the language adopted is similar. According to Bieler (2004, p. 45), Tírechán would be the author of the passage. From philological evidence, he concluded that the author of *Collectanea* would also be the one who wrote *Notae*, [III 2] and [III 4], but not [III 7], which may have been added by Ferdornach himself or one of his two scribes. In any case, it is possible that the relationship between Moses and Patrick was something common in the tradition of

the period, so Muirchú and Tírechán adopted it and Ferdomnach did not see any incongruence in that, despite the fictional age, closer to the mythical narratives.

As we have already said, shortly after the *Ogham Stones* were written, the first texts written in Ireland were the two works by Patrick, *Confessio* and *Epistola ad Milites Corotici*, in the 5th century, in Latin, and, in Irish, *Amra Choluimb Chille*, in the final years of the 6th century. From that moment, several narratives were developed in Ireland; according to Brent Miles, 'there was an Irish fascination with the *tres linguae sacrae*' [Hebrew, Greek, and Latin] (MILES 2011, p. 34). Numerous works related to themes of the so-called classical world have been reframed in Late Ancient and Medieval Ireland: about Alexander the Great; one adaptation of Aeneid, by Virgil; one based on *Bellum Civile*, by Lucano; another on *Historia adversum paganos*, by Orosius; one based on *Metamorphoses*, by Ovid; to name just a few examples (O'CONNOR 2014, p. 1-24; MILES 2011; SANTOS 2016, p. 93-110). According to Elva Johnston, Ireland was 'an island of tradition and of innovation; its culture was a creative synthesis of the old and new' (JOHNSTON 2013, p. 28). Irish literature would have flourished from a learning system that had an oral culture as its basis. Thus, in Ireland, orality and literacy were in continuous interaction (JOHNSTON 2013, p. 157; SANTOS 2016, p. 93-110). The works of Muirchú and Tírechán dialogued with this same tradition, which, as we have seen, does not make a very clear distinction between Literature and History.

Vita Sancti Patricii, by Muirchú, has a more explanatory prologue than that of Tírechán's *Collectanea*, in relation to the historiographic procedures adopted. It is also possible to state that Tírechán's work is not a '*Vita*', in the biographical or hagiographic sense, as is the text by Muirchú. In hagiographic terms, Muirchú's work would be closer than expected to the genre, with more emphasis on miracles and similar actions. Tírechán's, however, would be different not only from *Vita Sancti*

Patricii, but from other medieval hagiographies, as it would be more 'pragmatic'. According to O'Hagan (2011, section 3), the main objective of the work would be concentrated on 'bringing Patrick into contact with named people and places rather than on illustrating miracles'.

In Muirchú, there is a concern to emphasize Armagh's preeminence over other rival communities, while in Tírechán, it is more to defend *Paruchia Patricii* from those who question it as a legitimate tradition. Tírechán's work, as we have pointed out, is more geographic, genealogical, onomastic. Muirchú emphasizes Patrick and his actions; in Tírechán, however, Patrick gains meaning in association with the places he visited. The *Collectanea* text is close to the *dindschenchas* branch of the *Seanchas* Tradition, and at times it recalls that of the great Irish epic, written later, *Táin Bó Cuainlge*, in which this concern with a systematization of places also appears. Despite the differences, however, both writers mobilized the historiographic elements available at the time for the elaboration of their works.

Final considerations

From the Greek-Latin-Hebrew triangulation, without disregarding the development of writing in the Irish language since the last years of the 6th century (especially the *duo* formed between Latin and Irish, a characteristic that was already present in the bilingual and bilateral Ogham Stones from Wales, Cornwall and the Isle of Man) writers with different skills produced many narratives in *Early Christian Ireland*, mainly in the 7th century, like Muirchú and Tírechán. The great historiography manuals, even those that offer some space for premodern historiographies, have ignored this Irish contribution (DELIYANNIS 2003, p. 1-16; MOMIGLIANO 2004; MARINCOLA 2007). Even among the patriciologists and historians of Medieval Ireland, Muirchú and Tírechán were classified as 'fiction producers', as it was believed that they would not collaborate in the investigation and construction

of the image of a 'Historic Patrick', something that began to be revised only in 1994, but certainly from 2006, due to the contributions of David Howllet.

Thus, such works were seen as examples of a smaller genre, or as having no historiographical value, since, for a modern perspective, perhaps an empiricist historicist, texts like these would be examples of an antiquarianism characteristic of premodern writings, at most close to *Historia Magistra Vitae*, a generic name used to refer to Ancient and, sometimes, Medieval historiography, disregarding the thematic multiplicity of what was produced in this specific chronological arc. This way, Tírechán and Muirchú would not contribute much to historical knowledge.

If it is true that Ireland never produced a Bede or a Gregory of Tours, it had Muirchú and Tírechán (BYRNE 1974). Both *Vita Sancti Patricii* and *Collectanea* are examples of the historiography produced there. If modern writers have a problem separating literary genres and subgenres within a text, if there are nuisances generated by the presence of fictional elements in historiographical texts, this concerns modernity itself and has never been a problem for the writing tradition in which Muirchú and Tírechán were inserted. The historiographical production in Ireland took place in relation to it. There was no separation between poetry and history; not even the dichotomy between 'fact' and 'fiction' was relevant. As Erich Poppe once said, if for the modern audience these texts from *Early Christian Ireland* may be 'literary', 'medieval Irish writers considered then to be history' (POPPE 2014, p. 139).-

The rules followed by Irish historiography of the time were different from ours. If we have difficulties with fiction within the historiographical discourse, with poetry along with the facts, with the description of emotions, with digressions for the purpose of entertainment, with the need for genealogies, onomastic indices, specific rhetorical and aesthetic patterns, related to the needs of the audiences of that context, this was never a problem there. As Joan Rander pointed out, 'what we

today might see as contradictory modes of thought and belief [...]`, did not necessarily seem contradictory to the scholars of Medieval Ireland' (RANDER 1999, p. 325). This is how we must understand both Muirchú's and Tírechán's work, after all, they were responsible for the historiographical production of the time and, as Francis Byrne (1974, p. 138) once said about Ireland: 'The muse of history here never escaped from the swaddling bands of *senchas*'.

The Irish case, once it has been considered and respected for its specificity, can serve as an example, or at least an inspiration, for helping us to rethink and reevaluate other Late Ancient, Medieval and Late Medieval historiographies, both in Europe and elsewhere. The study of these conflicts, limits, challenges and approaches based on the relationship between *facto* and *fictio*, tradition and modernity, history and poetry, can change the way we view pre-modern historiographies.

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AUTHOR NOTE

Dominique Santos

dvcsantos@furb.br
Universidade de Blumenau
Blumenau
Santa Catarina
Brasil

CORRESPONDENCE ADDRESS

Dominique Santos
Fundação Universidade Regional de Blumenau, Departamento de História e Geografia.
Rua Antônio da Veiga, 140 - Centro de Ciências Humanas e da Comunicação
CCHC- Campus 1, Sala R-111
Victor Konder
89012900
Blumenau, SC - Brasil

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

No potential competing interest was reported by the authors.

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