

## The Swineherd in Celtic Lands

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Early Irish prose narratives and legal sources often mention a professional, not particularly privileged, but who was somehow endowed with a specific rank and honour in traditional society. I refer to the swineherd. As often occurs when confronted with early Irish (or insular Celtic) phenomena it will be rather difficult to distil rare historical facts from the background of the idealised or mythological reality where all our swineherds and their pigs may be discovered. Pigs are very different from other domestic animals, and a swineherd (Old Irish *muc-caid*, Middle Welsh *meichiad*) differs a lot from other herdsmen. Pig-keeping was one of the pillars of early Irish and Welsh agriculture: no feast described in the literature would be suitable without some pork being served. It is therefore also notable that at Navan Fort, the site of Emain Macha of the Ulster cycle, the majority of Early Iron Age faunal remains belonged to the pig.<sup>1</sup> The pig bones from the excavation came from the phase preceding the well-known Forty Metre structure. Phase 3, dated to c. 600-400 BC, occupied by a high status population. They might contain evidence of princely feasts held on the settlement.<sup>2</sup> Pigs were kept especially because of their tasty and nutritious meat, which was eaten fresh or preserved by salting and smoking. It is worth noting that bacon was exported to Rome from Gaul, and also Gaulish ham was particularly famous in Rome. Early Irish farming exploited pigs' hides and bones for domestic purposes.<sup>3</sup>

One should bear in mind that the pigs mentioned in the early Irish narrative texts were not completely domesticated and were tended by swineherds in the

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<sup>1</sup> *Aspects of the Táin*, ed. J. P. Mallory (Belfast, 1992), 120.

<sup>2</sup> F. McCormick, "Faunal Remains from Navan and Other Late Prehistoric Sites in Ireland," in *Ulidia. Proceedings of the First International Conference on the Ulster Cycle of Tales*, ed. J. P. Mallory and G. Stockman (Belfast, 1994), 183.

<sup>3</sup> N. Edwards, *The Archaeology of Early Medieval Ireland* (London, 1996), 58; F. Kelly, *Early Irish Farming* (Dublin, 1997), 84-6.

woods. Those early Irish pigs would have been small, long-legged, and hairy.<sup>4</sup> Swineherds were often left to themselves. They had the right to wander in the oak forests for long periods of time disregarding any existing borders between *túaths* (small tribal kingdoms). In practice, they were marginal members of early insular Celtic societies.

It is also important that the pig had a certain religious meaning among the pagan Celts. Whole carcasses or large chunks of pork were placed into the graves of the Celtic aristocracy. Pre-Roman or early Gallo-Roman and British sculpture reflects traces of a ‘pig cult’ (for instance, the statue of the deity from the environs of Euffigneix (Fig. 1), representing the British God Vetiris with an ornament of pigs).



Fig. 1: The statue of the deity from the environs of Euffigneix (Haute-Marne), 1<sup>st</sup> c. BC.  
Musée d'archéologie nationale, Saint-Germain-en-Laye

It is significant that a hero's portion (*curad-mír*) according to early Irish literature presented a large portion of a cooked pig.<sup>5</sup> Such importance has to be reconciled with the fact that the pigs in Indo-European culture are often associated with death, putrefaction, burials and the lower world in general. In early

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<sup>4</sup> N. Edwards, “The Archaeology of Early Medieval Ireland, c. 400-1169: Settlement and Economy,” in *A New History of Ireland I. Prehistoric and Early Ireland*, ed. D. Ó Cróinín (Oxford, 2008), 266.

<sup>5</sup> B. Meier, *Dictionary of Celtic Religion and Culture* (Woodbridge, 1997), 224.

medieval insular Celtic literature the pig often plays the role of a death messenger. This chthonic character owes much to the very nature and habits of the animal. Pigs lie in the dirt; they dig soil and damage roots in search of food. Moreover, although the pig is not a beast of prey, it feeds on flesh: it devours snakes (without suffering from the snake poison), it eats carrion or motionless, helpless victims. Pigs can be trained and kept as pets (this used to happen in early Ireland), but to herd them was difficult. These ambiguous qualities of the animal were definitely considered unnatural if not supernatural.<sup>6</sup> It has been argued also that the special importance of the pig in Celtic traditions as well as in ancient Greek Eleusinian mysteries went back to a North or Central European pre-Indo-European substratum.<sup>7</sup> Pigs were fed on acorns from oaks sacred in many Celtic traditions, and swineherds associated with pigs were often portrayed equal in wisdom with druids or *filid* in early Irish and Welsh literatures.

In early medieval Ireland, according to laws, an ordinary farmer (*ocaire*) was allowed to have seven pigs, whereas a rich farmer (*bó-aire*) was entitled to ten. A rich landowner (*mruigfher*) was entitled to two sows in farrow.<sup>8</sup> Wild sows in farrow look for any kind of shelter in a shadowy place and dig a large den, the bottom of which they cover with branches and its slopes – with grass and leaves. In early medieval Ireland domesticated pigs were kept in covered pigsties, but sows in farrow followed their instincts and would dig dens which they covered with different materials. Sows farrowed in spring and usually gave birth to up to nine piglets. The importance of the pig in early Irish society is symbolically reflected in ‘The Triads of Ireland’ (*Trecheng Breth Féni*),<sup>9</sup> where the uterus of a sow (*brú birite*) is named as one of the three renovators of the world.<sup>10</sup> In attempt to save all the piglets, the farmer’s wife could take a piglet from a sow and hand-rear it on cow’s milk.<sup>11</sup> The piglet might be reared as a pet. As it could become troublesome when it matured, its owners were responsible for its trespasses.<sup>12</sup> It should be stressed that owners usually did not herd their pigs. This task was performed by their servants or even slaves.

Sows, together with their piglets, stayed in the vicinity of the farm until the beginning of August when the piglets were fit enough to feed on their own in the

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<sup>6</sup> *Encyclopaedia of Indo-European Culture*, ed. J. P. Mallory and D. Q. Adams (London and Chicago, 1997), 426.

<sup>7</sup> E. Hamp, ‘The Pig in Ancient Northern Europe,’ in *Proto-Indo-European: The Archaeology of a Linguistic Problem. Studies in Honor of Marija Gimbutas* (Washington, 1987), 186-7. The following Celtic terms for ‘pig’ lack Indo-European cognates: \**mokku*-> Irish *mucc* f., Welsh *moch* (collective; sg. *mochyn*), Breton *moc'h* (collective; sg. *penmoc'h*); cf. the Gaulish theonym *Moccus*.

<sup>8</sup> *Críth Gablach*, ed. D. Binchy (Dublin, 1979), 8.196 (early 8<sup>th</sup> c., see L. Breatnach, *A Companion to the Corpus Iuris Hibernici* (Dublin, 2005), 244).

<sup>9</sup> Probably 9<sup>th</sup> c. (F. Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law* (Dublin, 1988), 284).

<sup>10</sup> *The Triads of Ireland*, ed. K. Meyer (Dublin, 1906), § 148, v. 1.

<sup>11</sup> R. Thurneysen, ‘Cáin Lánamna,’ in *Studies in Early Irish Law*, ed. R. Thurneysen, N. Power, M. Dillon et al. (Dublin and London, 1936), 33.

<sup>12</sup> Kelly, *Early Irish Farming*, 81.

woods. According to the archaeozoological evidence pigs were slaughtered when at a rather young age (18-36 months old).<sup>13</sup> Pigs from different owners within the same *túath* were mixed together in a single herd under the care of a swineherd. If pigs were staying in the woods nearby, they could go back to their sties at night. As we are informed by *Hisperica Famina* (a collection of obscure Latin poems likely to have been written in Ireland in the seventh century), at sunrise ‘the bristly crowd of swine leave [their] huts,/ the swine dig sandy soil with their snouts, / they eat the solid bracken roots/ and taste the grassy juice’. In the evening, ‘the bristly swine go back to their familiar sties’.<sup>14</sup> Still, quite often, pigs were herded in the woods far from human settlements. This was reflected in the opening pages of *Táin Bó Cúailnge* when Ailill and Medb summon ‘their great herds of swine from woods and sloping glens and remote places’.<sup>15</sup> Swineherds were supposed to follow a herd and stay in the wilderness for long periods of time. Swineherds could also hunt in the woods in order to survive and also to bring food to their lords. The *dindshenchas* (a collection of Old and Middle Irish place-lore) mention a certain Odba, the royal swineherd of a legendary high-king of Ireland, Conn Cétchathach, who was also a distinguished hunter of deer and birds. He had never lived in a house but always in the woods and sloping glens, hunting and herding swine. His main seat was on a particular hill which he had chosen as his burial ground and which was, according to the place-lore, named after him.<sup>16</sup> According to the *Metrical Dindshenchas* he used to return to his abode on the hill ‘with his foreign horses [under] gentle yoke’ (*ria gall-echaib rognais, cuing tlais*) (it means that he was entitled to have a chariot – a hero’s privilege). It is remarkable that Odba who ‘loved wisdom’, is called ‘a strong oak’ and ‘a swineherd of shrewd judgement’ (the word play was intended: 1 *mess* ‘judgement’, or 2 *mess* ‘mast’).<sup>17</sup>

Odba, the swineherd of Conn Cétchathach, is mentioned in the *dindshenchas* as the counterpart of Matha, the swineherd of another legendary high-king of Ireland, Catháir Mór. Matha competed against Conn’s swineherd. Once, his swine became attracted by the odour of the oakwood on the plain of Macha. They all rushed towards this wood and Matha followed them until he fell and fractured his forehead. He then fell into the stream and was drowned and the stream was called Sruthar Matha after him.<sup>18</sup> This swineherd pair corresponds exactly to another pair of contending magic swineherds whose story (*De cho-phur in dá muccida*) is set as the introductory tale to the *Táin*. Matha’s tragic

<sup>13</sup> Ibidem, 81-2; Edwards, *The Archaeology of Early Medieval Ireland*, 58.

<sup>14</sup> *Gesperiyiskie recheniya. Hisperica Famina*, ed. D. Shabelnikov and D. Torshilov (Saint Pe, 2000), 194, 202.

<sup>15</sup> *Táin Bó Cúailnge from the Book of Leinster*, ed. C. O’Rahilly (Dublin, 1967), 2.66-67. (This is the 12<sup>th</sup>-c. Middle Irish recension).

<sup>16</sup> W. Stokes (ed.), “The Prose Tales from the Rennes *Dindshenchas*,” *Revue Celtique* XVI (1895): 55.

<sup>17</sup> *The Metrical Dindshenchas*, ed. E. Gwynn, vol. 4 (Dublin, 1924), 174, 176.

<sup>18</sup> Ibidem, 172-4; W. Stokes (ed.), “The Prose Tales from the Rennes *Dindshenchas*,” 54-5.

death and a glorious description of Odba signifies on the political level Conn's victory over Catháir Mór and the consequent success of Conn's descendants, the Uí Néill, as the dominant power in Ireland.

According to early Irish hagiography, young slaves often performed swineherds' duties for their owners; they had to guard pigs against brigands and wolves. Even St. Patrick himself, as we are informed by Muirchú, his late seventh-century biographer, used to herd swine for his lord on the slopes of Sleemish during his Irish captivity.<sup>19</sup> Probably due to this occupation, St. Patrick later acquired his British nickname *Succet* – 'swineherd'.<sup>20</sup> Saint Brigit of Ireland was a daughter of a rich farmer, Dubthach, from a female slave, and when she came back to her father from her fosterer (a druid), she had to herd her father's swine. Robbers stole two boars from her but Dubthach returned them and became angry with Brigit. Then she asked her father to count the herd again and it appeared that there were no boars actually missing. In this way Dubthach got two more boars in his herd.<sup>21</sup> Many monastic communities in Ireland used to keep herds of swine. Some early Irish saints, before taking their monastic vows, also worked as swineherds.<sup>22</sup>

In early Breton hagiography the swineherd (Lat. *subulcus*, *pastor*, *porarius*, *porcenarius*) is also always described as a representative of the lowest castes: he is a 'pauper' (*pauperculum*), a 'slave' (*seruus*), a 'miserable man' (*homunculus*). In Brittany, local landlords' pigs were often herded on monastic meadows and monks were not happy about these activities. Nevertheless, Breton saints also are attributed with miracles connected with pigs and swineherds. Saint Malo during his mission in Brittany once met a sad weeping swineherd who had killed a pig from his lord's herd with stones because the pig was trespassing and destroying the harvest on the fields. Her eight piglets gathered around the poor dead sow trying to find some milk in her dead teats. Saint Malo touched the sow with his staff, and she immediately came back to life and gave milk to her piglets. The pig's owner in response to this marvel granted Malo the whole farm.<sup>23</sup> The Irish name of the landlord (Domnech) implies an Irish influence in the fragment discussed.

According to *Buile Shuibhne* (an early modern, c. thirteenth-century Irish tale based on an earlier one of the first millennium AD), in Tech Moling, the monastery founded by St. Moling, there was one Mongan the swineherd who lived there together with his wife, a cook in the monastery's kitchen. This swineherd killed mad Suibhne, who was granted refuge by St. Moling. The swineherd became jealous when his wife was feeding Suibhne with milk in the

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<sup>19</sup> L. Bieler (ed.), *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh* (Dublin, 1979), 82.

<sup>20</sup> P. Ní Chatháin, "Swineherds, Seers, and Druids," *Studia Celtica* XIV/XV (1979-80): 200.

<sup>21</sup> *Bethu Brigitte*, ed. D. Ó hAodha (Dublin, 1978), 2.

<sup>22</sup> Ní Chatháin, "Swineherds:" 200.

<sup>23</sup> *Vie de Saint-Malo évêque d'Alet*, ed. G. Le Duc (Rennes, 1979), 112-5; see also B. Merdrignac, "Truies et verrats, cochons et sangliers, porcs et porchers dans les *vitae* de saints bretons du Moyen Age," in *Mythologies du porc*, ed. Ph. Walter (Grenoble, 1999), 135-7.

morning. Mongan pierced Suibhne's back with his broad spear that he kept at home and used to handle semi-wild swine with.<sup>24</sup>

A professional swineherd was often shown as a gloomy and sinister character. For example, in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* ('The destruction of Da Derga's hostel', henceforth *TBDD*) we are told about three swineherds of Conaire, the king of Tara, who followed their lord into the hostel. They all had black sheared hair, green upper cloaks, and black lower cloaks. They hanged their forked poles on the wall above them in Da Derga's house, and their black greaves – a defence against the pigs' bites – on the pillar in the hostel. The three royal swineherds from the tale were given appropriate names – Dub ('black'), Donn ('brown') and Dorchae ('dark').<sup>25</sup> Another swineherd was mentioned among Da Derga's guests in his hostel: it is Nár Túathchaech ('Blind-in-the-Left-Eye?'), the swineherd of Bodb, the king of the *áes síde* from Síð ar Femen. He is obviously of the *áes síde* himself and his only eye had a sinister magic power. He is described in his room holding 'a pig's head on the fire, which is squealing' (*cend mucce lais for tenid os-sí oc sírégim*). It is said that 'blood has been spilt at each feast where he was present' (*Nach fled oc a rubi riam dodórted fuil occe*).<sup>26</sup> In *TBDD* he has the same malevolent qualities as Fer Caille, 'a man of the wood', with a pig on his back. This is how Fer Caille appeared before Conaire on the road to Da Derga's hostel:

There overtook them a man with short black hair and one eye, one hand and one foot. His short hair was rough. If a sackful of wild apples were thrown on top of his head, not an apple would fall to the ground, but each apple would stick to his hair. If his snout were thrown against a branch, they would stick together. As long and thick as an outer yoke was each of his shins; the size of a rounded hard cheese on a withe each of his buttocks. A forked iron pole was in his hand; a singed pig with short, black bristles on his back, and it squealed constantly.<sup>27</sup>

Thus, a man from the wood, a hermit belonging to both worlds, also played the important role of a swineherd. Here it is relevant that any royal feast in the king's house or on the threshold between worlds could not be imagined without pork as a main dish.

Early Welsh literature also contains references to mighty and liminal swineherds: the 'Triads of the Island of Britain' (written down in the thirteenth

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<sup>24</sup> *Buile Shuibhne*, ed. J. G. O'Keeffe (Dublin, 1975), 75-7.

<sup>25</sup> *Togail Bruidne Dá Derga*, ed. W. Stokes (Paris, 1902), 109 (I am using here Recension II, a composite Old Irish version of the tale).

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*, 133 § 140; *Togail bruidne Da Derga*, ed. E. Knott (Dublin, 1975), 42. It means that a severed pig's head still has some vital force left in it. The same phenomenon is observed in insular Celtic literatures in case of severed human heads, as Conaire's head in *Togail bruidne Da Derga*.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*, 11.

century) mention ‘three powerful swineherds of Britain’. The first of them is Pryderi, son of Pwyll and Lord of Annwfn (Otherworld), who guarded the swine of Pendaran Dyfed, his foster-father. Pwyll brought the seven pigs from Annwfn and gave them to Pendaran Dyfed. Pryderi kept them in Glyn Cuch in Emlyn, and no one was able to take swine from him either by deceit or by force.<sup>28</sup> It was a hero’s intimate relation with otherworldly animals and his role of their guardian that gave him the status of ‘powerful swineherd’ (*gwrdueichyat*).

Another variant of the story of Pryderi and his swine is found in ‘Math son of Mathonwy’ (*Math uab Mathonwy*), the fourth branch of the *Mabinogi* (going back to the eleventh/twelfth centuries). Here we encounter an aetiological legend on the introduction of pigs into Britain. Arawn, king of Annwfn, sent the first pigs in Britain to Pryderi. Gwydion, son of Dôn, a magician and trickster, set forth to obtain the pigs by trickery for his lord, Math, the ruler of Gwynedd in North Wales. Gwydion came to entertain Pryderi telling him stories the whole night and then asked for the pigs of Annwfn as a reward. Pryderi replied that he would be happy to give the pigs but he had an agreement with his people that they should not go from him until they bred double their number in the land. Then Gwydion made by magic twelve stallions with golden saddles and bridles, and twelve greyhounds with golden collars and leashes, and moreover twelve golden shields that he had shaped by magic out of mushrooms. Pryderi summoned a council where it was decided to give them pigs for stallions and greyhounds. Gwydion and his men quickly gathered the swine and brought them up to the Northern mountains where they built a sty for them. Meanwhile, when on the next day Gwydion’s magic had disappeared together with all its stallions and greyhounds, Pryderi’s host began pursuing the pigs and met the army of Math, son of Mathonwy. Pryderi was killed by magic in combat with Gwydion, and his army had to withdraw.<sup>29</sup> Thus, the mighty swineherd was defeated by a mighty magician.

One often encounters cattle-raids as a plot-creating engine in early Irish literature. The most famous of them, ‘The Cattle-raid of Cuailnge’, caused a major war between the provinces of Ireland. In Wales, on the contrary, we witness the war between two halves of Wales caused by the theft of a different kind of sacred animal, namely the swine. The swineherd’s craft is shown akin to other powerful magic abilities.

The second most powerful swineherd of Britain according to the ‘Triads’ was Drystan, son of Tallwch, who guarded the swine of March, son of Meirchiawn, while the swineherd went to ask Essyllt tryst with him. The whole of King Arthur’s court – Arthur himself, March, Cei and Bedwyr – could not get as much as one piglet from Drystan – ‘neither by force, nor by deception, nor by stealth’.<sup>30</sup> The protagonist here plays the swineherd’s role only temporarily, as if

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<sup>28</sup> *Trioedd Ynys Prydein*, ed. R. Bromwich (Cardiff, 2006), 50-1.

<sup>29</sup> *Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi*, ed. I. Williams (Caerdydd, 1930), p. 68-73.

<sup>30</sup> *Trioedd Ynys Prydein*, loc. cit.

putting on a swineherd's mask. According to Welsh tradition, Drystan was March's nephew and, as a relative, was supposed to serve his uncle. In view of the fact that hunting and pig-keeping were closely connected in Celtic lands and wild pigs often interbred with domesticated ones, it is understandable that according to the Old French Arthurian cycle Tristan once was wounded while hunting a boar in the wood.<sup>31</sup>

A mysterious story is connected with the third most powerful swineherd of Britain – Coll, son of Collvrewy, who guarded the swine of Dallwyr Dallben in Cornwall. There was a sow in farrow among them; Henwen ('Old White') was her name. It was prophesied that the Island of Britain would suffer from her womb-burden. Arthur summoned an army to destroy her, and Coll went in pursuit of her when she was about to farrow. He crossed the Bristol bay. When the sow landed in Wales she gave birth to a grain of wheat, a grain of barley, a bee, a wolf-cub, a kitten and a young eagle. And whereas the grains and the bee caused prosperity in the lands where they were left, the newly born creatures appeared as sheer disasters for Britain.<sup>32</sup>

Another evidence of the swineherd's role at the Welsh ruler's court is found in the opening paragraph of 'Culhwch and Olwen' (c. 1100). Culhwch's mother, the wife of a Welsh ruler, lost her mind during pregnancy and wandered all alone through the countryside. She regained consciousness, when she was about to give birth – in a pig-sty. She found herself among pigs, was frightened and gave birth out of fear. The swineherd collected the new born child (Culhwch) and brought him to his father's court. The name Culhwch derives from Welsh *hwch* 'boar', and the swineherd becomes the 'godfather' of the noble hero.<sup>33</sup>

This kind of combination of everyday life with magic is also common in early Irish texts devoted to swineherds. An Old Irish tale, *De chophur in dá muccida* ('About *cophur* of the two swineherds'), a *remscél* to the *Táin*, is dated by Thurneysen to approximately the ninth century.<sup>34</sup> The story tells about two swineherds from the *side* (fairy mounds, originally 'seats of the gods'<sup>35</sup>).<sup>36</sup> It is interesting to focus on some features of their daily life as reflected in the tale. One of them was Friuch ('Boar's bristles?'), the swineherd of Bodb, king of the *side* of Munster, and another was Rucht ('Grunt'), the swineherd of Ochall

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<sup>31</sup> Walter, "Tristan porcher," in *Mythologies du porc*, 208.

<sup>32</sup> *Trioedd Ynys Prydein*, loc. cit.

<sup>33</sup> P. Ford, *The Mabinogi and Other Medieval Welsh Tales* (Cardiff, 1978), 121.

<sup>34</sup> R. Thurneysen, *Die irische Helden- und Königssage* (Halle, 1921), 278. Although, as advised by J. Carey, *na* as a form of the dual article attested in *De chophur in dá muccida* (as in *cardess na dá muccaid-se* from the fragment discussed below) is Middle Irish.

<sup>35</sup> See M. West, *Indo-European Poetry and Myth* (Oxford, 2007), 123.

<sup>36</sup> According to the *Dindshenchas* they were both sons of Smuchail son of Bacdub and are mentioned as champions from Munster and Connacht consequently under the protection (*for foesam*) of Bodb and Ochall. In their combat they display their "swineherd's craft" (*a ceird muccada*) which is probably the equivalent of their "pagan wisdom" (*suíthe ngentleхта*) mentioned in *De chophur in dá muccida* ("The Prose Tales in the Rennes Dindshenchas," ed. Whitley Stokes, *Revue Celtique* XV (1894): 452-3).

Ochne, king of the *síde* of Connacht. ‘Each of them had pagan wisdom and they used to transform themselves into every form...’ (*Suīthe ngentlechta la cechtarde, ocus nos-delbtais in cech richt*).<sup>37</sup> Such was the agreement between the two swineherds: when there was mast in Munster the swineherd from the north used to come south with his thin pigs. When there was mast in the north the southern swineherd used to come north. It should be mentioned that the acorn crop in Ireland comes in September and October and served to fatten up the young pigs. These fat pigs were either immediately killed or left to survive the hungry winter.<sup>38</sup> Law-texts distinguish pigs feeding on acorns (*muca for mesruth*) from another category fattening on other food (*mucca denma*) (the latter could be fed on grain and milk).<sup>39</sup>

These two swineherds began to quarrel. The men of Connacht said that their swineherd’s magic power was stronger, but the men of Munster said the same about their swineherd. That year there was a rich mast in Munster, and the northern swineherd came to the south to feed his pigs in the woods. Friuch and Rucht greeted each other and started their dialogue:

‘They are trying to cause trouble between us,’ said [Friuch], ‘These men say that your power is greater than mine.’

‘It is no less indeed’, Ochall’s swineherd said.

‘That will be something that we can find out,’ Bodb’s swineherd said, ‘I will hinder your pigs, so that they won’t fatten even though they eat this mast, and my pigs will fatten’.<sup>40</sup>

It happened as Friuch had proclaimed, and Rucht returned home with his thin pigs. They could hardly return to their sty because they were so weak. People laughed at Rucht when he came back to his own country. Everyone said that his counterpart’s power was greater. Then Rucht decided that he would do the same to Friuch when there was a good mast in Connacht. So, when the next year they had a great acorn crop in Connacht, Bodb’s swineherd came northward with his lean swine. Ochall’s pig-keeper performed the same trick on the southern pigs so that they withered. Then everyone said that their powers were equal. Friuch came back south with his lean pigs, and his lord Bodb deprived him of his swineherd’s duties. The same happened to the northern swineherd. After both of them had failed to resolve their quarrel in their professional field they started transforming themselves into different creatures and fighting each other.

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<sup>37</sup> *De chophur in dá muccida*, ed. U. Roider (Innsbruck, 1979), 26. It is possible that Friuch and Rucht go back to certain prototypes known in pagan Ireland, who were perceived as swineherds of gods (Bodb and Ochall) and were considered gods themselves (J. A. MacCulloch, *The Religion of Ancient Celts* (1911), 394).

<sup>38</sup> F. Kelly, *Early Irish Farming*, 83.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibidem*, 84; Edwards, *The Archaeology of Early Medieval Ireland*, 58.

<sup>40</sup> *De chophur in dá muccida*, 28.

One of the most famous early Irish hermits and swineherds was the legendary Marban, brother of Guaire, king of Connacht. A ninth-century poem 'King and Hermit' was devoted to him. It tells how sad Guaire, having lost a battle, visits his brother in his humble hut and is almost turned into a hermit when looking at his brother's idyllic life. Marban in the poem describes his small hut in the wood where acorns and nuts fall to the ground and feed fat pigs. Both wild and domesticated pigs live close by together with other animals.<sup>41</sup> It is important that Marban is perceived here as a hermit and monk leading a righteous life, and in the later texts he is described as a wise man whose knowledge supersedes that of the *filid*. In one of these texts, 'The tiresome Guaire's guests' (*Tromdámh Guaire*, c. thirteenth century), Marban helped his royal brother to escape from the *filid* when he was allowed to slaughter his favourite white boar whose fat was given to the wife of Senchán Torpéist, the king's poet (*rígfili*).

In certain circumstances the owner of the pigs could guard them himself, but only rarely do our sources mention such cases. The tale of the exile of Conall Corc (dated to the ninth/tenth centuries), the future king of Munster, tells about his stay in the Highlands of Scotland. Conall became lost in the mountains and was caught by a snowstorm so that he almost froze to death stuck in the snow up to his belt. He was saved by Gruibne Éices, the royal *fili*, who was seeking his pigs together with twelve horsemen helping him.<sup>42</sup> Gruibne welcomed Conall in his house and introduced him to Feradach, King of Scotland. Another swineherd helped Conall in Ireland, when the future king turned up in Munster close to his future residence in Cashel. The story about a swineherd helping a king is repeated once more. Conall Corc and his men were lost in a snowstorm in the northern part of Mag Femen. On that day, the swineherd of Aed, the King of Muscraige, was tending his pigs. The swineherd had a mysterious vision in which he saw a yew-tree, a small chapel and a stone close by on the rock of Cashel. The king's druid explained this vision: the first person who kindled a fire beneath the yew tree, would become King of Munster whose residence would be founded on the rock of Cashel. Conall Corc was first to kindle the fire and was made King of Munster. Then the swineherd received noble status from Conall for himself and for his descendants as well as the garment of the king.<sup>43</sup> In this way the swineherd became a guardian of royal power, and even if he cannot be associated directly with a royal inauguration, his role in Munster is very significant.

A later story about the 'finding' of Cashel involves two visionary swineherds, who helped Conall Corc to find his royal residence. Duidriu, the swineherd of the King of Éile, and Cuirirán, the swineherd of the King of Muscraige, were tending their herds of pigs by the rock of Cashel. The local woods were all yellow (the month was likely October) and there was a rich acorn crop on the

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<sup>41</sup> Murphy, *Early Irish Lyrics* (Oxford, 1956), 10.

<sup>42</sup> V. Hull, "The Exile of Conall Corc," in *Proceedings of the Modern Languages Association of America* 56 (1941): 940.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibidem*.

ground. The swineherd found a place rich in acorns and the pigs started feeding, but soon both swineherds and their swine fell asleep and they slept mysteriously for three days and three nights. In their dream the two swineherds saw Corc blessed by angels receiving royal power over Munster.<sup>44</sup> The two visionary swineherds from the story may have been borrowed from the Ulster cycle tale concerning the quarrel of the two swineherds.

The Rees brothers noticed some analogies between the status and role of swineherds in the southern part of Wales, Dyfed, and the southern fifth of Ireland, Munster. Pryderi, the ruler of Dyfed, is mentioned as a swineherd, and Conall Corc, the King of Munster, was raised to royal power with the help of the swineherds. This is more surprising because, according to early Irish laws, a lord (*flaith*) did not have right to have pigs on his farm.<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, one can hardly agree with the Rees brothers that pigs always played a role as otherworldly animals. The pig as a priestly, brahmanic or druidic marker, noted in literature by Guénon<sup>46</sup>, is mostly absent in the insular Celtic literatures and realities lying behind them. We notice rather that the swineherd, with his low and marginal status, often paradoxically is ascribed a high and important (social) position.

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<sup>44</sup> M. Dillon, "The Story of the Finding of Cashel," *Ériu* 16 (1952): 64.

<sup>45</sup> A. and B. Rees, *Celtic Heritage* (New York, 1994), 178.

<sup>46</sup> R. Guénon, *Autorité spirituelle et pouvoir temporel* (Paris, 1929), 2.

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VON GERHARD JARITZ

GEDRUCKT MIT UNTERSTÜTZUNG DER KULTURABTEILUNG  
DES AMTES DER NIEDERÖSTERREICHISCHEN LANDESREGIERUNG

**niederösterreich kultur**

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## Vorwort

Das vorliegende Heft von *Medium Aevum Quotidianum* widmet sich erneut vorrangig einem Themenbereich, welcher bereits in früheren Bänden unserer Reihe als besonders wichtig für eine Alltagsgeschichte des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit erkannt wurde: der Rolle von Tieren und verschiedenen Varianten der Mensch–Tier-Beziehung (vgl. vor allem Sonderband XVI: *Animal Diversities*, 2005, den Beitrag von Helmut Hundsbichler in *MÆQ* 51, 2005, sowie den Artikel von Gertrud Blaschitz in *MÆQ* 53, 2006). Grigory Bondarenko beschäftigt sich mit dem Schweinehirten im keltischen Irland und Irina Metzler untersucht die Bedeutung und symbolische Funktion der Katze in religiösen Diskursen. Schweine und Katzen repräsentieren zwei Säugetierfamilien, welchen augenblicklich auch besonderes Interesse im internationalen „Medieval Animal Data Network (MAD)“ entgegen gebracht wird, welches letzteres vor einigen Jahren am Department of Medieval Studies der Central European University (Budapest) ins Leben gerufen wurde und das von Alice Choyke kurz vorgestellt wird.

Von den gebotenen Buchbesprechungen ist im Besonderen die sehr ausführliche Auseinandersetzung von Rainer Welle mit der neuen Lieferung des Katalogs der deutschsprachigen illustrierten Handschriften des Mittelalters zur Quellengruppe der „Fecht- und Ringbücher“ hervorzuheben.

Gerhard Jaritz