



# The Archaeological Journal

## Book Reviews



**LUG'S FORGOTTEN DONEGAL KINGDOM: THE ARCHAEOLOGY, HISTORY AND FOLKLORE OF THE SÍL LUGDACH OF CLOGHANEELY.** By Brian Lacey. Pp. x and 141, Illus 49. Four Courts Press, 2012. Price: €26.95. ISBN 978 184682 343 5.

Brian Lacey's most recent work on the early medieval and Gaelic kingships of Co. Donegal deals with the Síil Lugdach/Cenél Lugdach, a túath (tribal kingdom) based in the extreme north-west of Ireland. In previous discussions on the inhabitants of early medieval Donegal, the 'children of Lugaid' have often been overlooked in favour of their neighbours, the Cenél Conaill (the tribe of Conall) and the Cenél nÉoghain (the tribe of Éoghan). Indeed, as the author points out, there are only eleven definite references to this tribal group in the Annals of Ulster before AD 1110, and most of these can only be identified because of knowledge gleaned from external sources, such as genealogies. In this sense the Síil Lugdach are very much an example of a 'forgotten' kingdom. The importance of the Síil Lugdach in later Gaelic Ireland, however, is greatly increased. This is due to the fact that two major Donegal families both claimed membership of this polity: the O'Doherty's, who came to dominate the Inishowen peninsula, and the O'Donnells, who would become Lords and Earls of Tyrconnell (i.e. Donegal).

The book consists of nine chapters, and has the general feel of a collection of papers rather than a continuous narrative piece. This is largely due to the lack of substantial data on the Síil Lugdach. The chapters may be lumped into three broad subject areas: the god Lug; the later Gaelic genealogies/histories; and the archaeological data. One chapter details the mythologies relating to Lugh/Lug and ties him into a wider 'Celtic' pantheon (Chapter 2), and another highlights potential survivals of pre-Christian ritual behaviour in the area of the Síil Lugdach (seemingly largely consisting of picking bilberries/blaeberrys in early August; Chapter 6). The archaeological section largely draws upon the author's earlier work, the *Archaeological Survey of Co. Donegal* (1983). The remoteness of this area means that it has not been subject to the same degree of development-led archaeology which has driven research in other regions of Ireland. Various historical written sources were used to identify individuals of the Síil Lugdach, and also to delineate the territories of this people as they changed over time. The relative lack of contemporary writings, however, means that most of the information for the earlier part of the history of the Síil Lugdach, up to c. AD 1100, is largely based upon later works.

The Síil Lugdach have historically and traditionally been seen as ultimately descended from the fourth-century leader Niall Noígiallach (Niall of the Nine Hostages), the founder of the Uí Néill hegemony, which included the neighbouring Cenél Conaill and Cenél nÉoghain. Lacey argues, however, that the Síil Lugdach were a unconnected kingdom that

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only adopted the guise of the Uí Néills at a later date in an attempt to legitimize the growing dominance of the O'Dohertys and the O'Donnells (pp. 10–11). DNA tests undertaken by Dan Bradley and published in 2006 on individuals from families that trace their lineage to the Síl Lugdach, Cenél Conaill and Cenél nÉoghain, have shown a shared genetic marker which is only transmitted down the male line, and derived from a single ancestor who lived 1730 years ago (A Y-Chromosome Signature of Hegemony in Gaelic Ireland, *Amer. J. Human Genetics*, **78** (2), 334–38). These scientific findings appear to support the traditional Uí Néill connection and cause a major problem for the underlying claim promoted in this work that the early medieval Síl Lugdach did not share consanguinity with their neighbours. This issue notwithstanding, *Lug's Forgotten Donegal Kingdom* is a useful repository of information on early Irish kingship and should be seen as a worthy companion piece to Lacey's 2006 work: *Cenél Conaill and the Donegal kingdoms, AD500–800*.

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