The *Brú*: A Hiberno-Roman Cult Site at Newgrange?

Michael Gibbons[1] and Myles Gibbons[2]

Abstract

Michael O'Kelly argued in 1982 that Newgrange had been left largely unaltered from the Neolithic onwards. However, recent scholarship and a re-assessment of the archaeological remains, as well as the early antiquarian sources and available aerial photography, suggest that, in addition to the long-recognized deposition of Roman material at the front of the entrance, the tomb was altered and perhaps entered as part of continuing ritual activities and deposition over several centuries in the Iron Age. Iron Age activities may have included deposition within the interior of the tomb itself, the construction of an enclosure or barrow on the summit and alterations to the profile of the mound itself. The ritual importance of Newgrange in the Late Iron Age is reflected in the Early Christian and medieval literature and the mythological and literary sources suggest strong links between Newgrange and Romano-British religious and ritual practices at Lydney near the NW coast of the Severn Estuary. There is now sufficient evidence of possible Iron Age activity at Newgrange to justify further testing of the remains from O'Kelly's excavations between 1962 and 1975 to clarify the extent and duration of these practices.

Establishing the nature and extent of later prehistoric activity at Newgrange has been identified as a research objective under the "Brú na Bóinne World Heritage Site Research Framework" (Smyth 2009, 92). One area that remains a comparative blank is the Late Iron Age (roughly between the first and fifth centuries AD). In his definitive 1982 book on the excavations, Michael O'Kelly argued that the passage tomb at Newgrange, unlike its counterparts at Knowth and Dowth, had been left largely inviolate since its construction in the Neolithic. He interpreted Newgrange as having been built in separate sections with the outer part of the passage constructed as a "free-standing entity independent of the main cairn" and the inner part of the passage integrated with the chamber which was surrounded by "its own supportive mini-cairn". The conservation of Newgrange was claimed to have made the "restored part of the monument … as close as possible to what is was when it was built *c.* 2,500 BC". The completed Neolithic monument was argued to have been "drum-like" rather than "dome-shaped" with the pre-conservation "bogus hemispherical shape" being the result of a subsequent series of slippages and collapses and the "misconceptions of earlier days" (O'Kelly 1982, 72–73). In spite of the discovery of Iron Age and Roman remains at Newgrange, it was claimed that there had been no Bronze Age, Iron Age, Early-Christian or Anglo-Norman interference with the mound itself. O'Kelly suggested that the mound might have been consciously left untouched due to its continuing significance as a "House of the Dead". He acknowledged that offerings had clearly been deposited outside the tomb over an extended period; including the fourth-century Roman offerings left, he proposed, by visiting Romans from Britain who "had been told of the powerful gods who lived there" (O'Kelly 1982, 126–127). O'Kelly did intend to produce a volume on the later pre-history of the site but this was never completed (although he did discuss the activities of supposed Bronze Age "squatters" outside the mound in another publication; O'Kelly *et al.* 1983) and his view of the development of the site has remained extremely influential. However, recent re-analysis of O'Kelly's proposed stratigraphy has substantially modified the older view. A closer analysis of the early antiquarian accounts and illustrations, along with historic aerial photography, suggests phases of alteration and re-use in the Iron Age or Early Christian period, similar to those found at other large tombs such as Knowth, Dowth, Rathcroghan and at Tara.

The Profile of the Mound

In recent years, O'Kelly's interpretation of the mound at Newgrange, as remaining largely in its Neolithic form with some intervening collapse, has been challenged. His view of the relationship between the various phases began to be questioned when "Sweetman shattered … [O'Kelly's] interpretation when he looked from his rows of pits and posts up the hill to the rows of cement posts left behind to mark the pits discovered by O'Kelly in the 1960s." David Sweetman subsequently established that these were all part of a single pit circle (partially identified during O'Kelly's excavations but left unexplained and not properly represented on published site plans) predating the great stone circle (Stout 2007, xvi). Charles Mount argues that the Late Neolithic faunal assemblage should be seen as primarily the result of deliberate ceremonial patterns of consumption and deposition associated with a complex of monuments constructed around the mound including: a timber circle or *wood-henge* to the south east and a smaller, possibly roofed, timber circle to the west as well as an enclosing bank constructed along the southern and western sides and a free-standing circle of great stones encircling the monument (Stout 1994, 433, 443). Palle Eriksen (2008) argued for multiple phases of alterations over several periods and that the large

[1] Michael Gibbons is former Co-Director of the National Sites and Monuments Record Office of Public Works. He has served on the Archaeology Committee of the Heritage Council, is currently a member of the Folklore Council of Ireland and works as an independent archaeologist and archaeological and heritage tourism provider.

[2] Myles Gibbons holds an MA in Medieval Studies from NUIG.

present mound was a conscious attempt to seal the passage tomb, similar to the development of Silbury Hill in southern England.

In the most recent discussion of the mound's development, Niels Andersen (supporting Eriksen) proposes that a smaller inner barrow was subsequently expanded out to the outer kerb with the erection of a larger mound, hundreds of years after the erection of the original monument (Andersen 2013, 522–523). John Ó Néill has recently suggested a slightly different scenario. Humic acid from a turf sample behind stone K-96 of the outer kerb, immediately to the East of the Entrance, produced a radiocarbon date of AD 259–536 (300±45: ad UB-360) in the Late Iron Age. Although it came from a context several metres deep and beneath layers of both stone and turves, this date was previously dismissed as "anomalous". Quentin Dresser, who analysed the Newgrange samples, described it as being "too young" and argued that it may have been due to the loose stone structure of the mound being "ineffective in preventing penetration by younger materials" although he did accept the date of a lower sample from the same area (2585±1055 bc: UB-361) which agreed with the dates of earlier samples (O'Kelly 1982, 240–231). Ó Néill proposes that the date of the sample may instead indicate a significant Late Iron Age phase of alteration to the profile of the monument. Iron Age additions to the southern side of the mound, coupled with the Iron Age capping of loose cairns with sods (also seen at Navan Fort) would also help to explain both the sheer mass of the cairn of loose stones at Newgrange and the intermediate layers of turf within the mound. These would represent the addition of stabilising deposits (as O'Kelly had originally proposed) rather than being a consequence of 'slippage' (Ó Néill 2013, 260–261).

The deliberate heightening of an existing mound is a feature of Iron Age and Early Christian treatment of older monuments. Examples can be seen at Kiltierney, Co. Fermanagh, where a Neolithic circular cairn was substantially remodelled by the excavation of a ditch around the cairn and the use of the resulting material to both heighten the mound and to construct nineteen small satellite mounds around its perimeter (Raftery 1997, 192) and at Deerpark Farms where a seventh-century ring-ditched enclosure was progressively raised, ultimately becoming a flat-topped mound into which souterrains were built (O'Sullivan *et al.* 2013, 73–74).

A Possible Enclosure

The idea of Newgrange being a multi-phase monument that acquired its final form in the Late Iron Age is an old one. James Ferguson (2010, 210) proposed as early as the late 1870s that the mound was likely to have been a two-phase monument and argued (on the basis of the coins, torcs and rings) that it was likely completed *c.* AD 400. An Iron Age phase of construction at Newgrange might also help to explain an interesting feature which has gone previously unnoticed in the literature. A roughly circular enclosure can be seen on the summit in historic aerial photography (e.g. Coffey 1977, 25; O'Kelly *et al.* 1983, 19) and appears on several antiquarian drawings. During the conservation programme the "flat top" was "made good by the filling in of the numerous holes made there in the past" but traces of the enclosure are still slightly visible on the ground (O'Kelly 1982, 23). Parts of the enclosure appear in a number of sectional elevations of portions of the tomb in O'Kelly's 1982 book (i.e. see fig. 13 and monochrome plates 1 [vertical aerial photograph] and 15 where traces are visible), although the lack of a full cross-section in the publication makes it difficult to establish the degree to which it was apparent in the 1960s and 1970s. The vertical photograph shows the enclosure clearly visible from the east to the north quadrants and the same portion is visible in the ground-shot from the north-east, while oblique aerial photographs taken by Leo Swan show the complete enclosure running from NE to SW.

The cross-section in the "Catalogue of Roman Coins" (Carson and O'Kelly 1977, 44), running SW-NE, confirms the presence of two banks, showing a bank with a slight ditch on its inner face on each side of the mound with a slightly mounded interior, giving the summit of the mound a "barrow-like" appearance. The NW-SE profile in Coffey (1977, 13) also shows traces of the feature. The banks appear in Charles Vallancey's 1776 survey (Stout 2002, 41, fig. 6) as well as on Edward Ledwich (1804, 42, pl. 1) and Richard Molloy's (1813) illustrations of the mound (although Molloy appears to be copying Ledwich quite closely, his illustration shows a seemingly flatter topped mound with slightly more prominent banks). When measured from O'Kelly's plan of the mound, it measures some 40m in diameter (Waddell 2000, 60, fig. 29), agreeing roughly with Ferguson's (2010, 202) 120 ft. for the diameter of platform on the top. Although no trace is visible in Gabriel Beranger's 1775 view of Newgrange, the illustration in Ledwich's 1790 *Antiquities of Ireland* appears to show that the banks were stone-capped in the late eighteenth century.[3] O'Reilly's description, written in the 1820s, does not refer directly to the enclosure but describes the summit as "flat or rather a sort of hollow like a dish, and in most places the stones of which it is formed appear, the soil, if ever they were covered with any, having been washed away by the successive rains of some thousands [several hundreds above the line] of ages" (Candon and O'Kelly 1984, 25). A double-ring appears on the Ordnance Survey "Fair Plan" of 1836 showing the tumulus at Dowth; O'Kelly and O'Kelly (1983, 139–141) interpreted this as possibly indicating the level platform or berm near the top of the mound but it may have represented an enclosure similar to that at Newgrange. Stout and Stout (2008, 15) drew attention to the possible use of the large level area at the top of the Newgrange mound for ritual activities, giving its diameter as 45 m.

The Standing Stone

Edward Lhwyd, (who, along with O'Flaherty, originally rediscovered the connection between Newgrange and *Brú na Bóinne*; Gibbons 2014, 30–32) writing in 1697, described a standing stone on the summit as being visible from the area around the monument. It was apparently smaller than those found in the "great circle" around the mound: "having a number of huge stones pitched on end about it, and a single one

[3] See *NthtA*.

on the top" (McGuinness 1996, 63). Thomas Molyneaux, writing in 1725, did not mention the stone (Boate and Molyneux 1725), nor does it appear on Vallancey's or in Beranger's watercolour of the mound[4] but it was shown by John Antis in his early copy of a drawing by Lhwyd (Smyth 2009, 11). Confusingly, it does appear in a July 1844 sketch by W.P. Newenham, the excavator of the Knocklea Passage Grave, near Rush in Co. Dublin. The sketch is captioned: "The Mound or Cave of New Grange near Drogheda under which is a Druidical Temple about 20 feet high". A note beside the sketch reads: "This stone was undermined and thrown down the mound by men seeking for hidden money. Gold ornaments &c were found at the base".

Louisa C. Beaufort had also mentioned that two gold coins were found beneath the pillar stone (see below). Newenham had seen the Newgrange monuments *c.* 1837 and may have been drawing from memory. The artefacts referred to may be the Roman ornaments found in 1842 by Lord Albert Conyngham, though Conyngham's description does not mention a standing stone, stating only that the artefacts were found at a depth of about two feet without any covering or protection.[5] William Wakeman (1891, 95) wrote that "In the Mausoleum of Newgrange we are informed that upon the summit of it an obelisk or huge pillarstone formerly stood". O'Kelly queried whether the stone in question had in fact been a "pillar-stone" or "even if it was, whether it was an original feature of the monument or not" (O'Kelly 1982, 26–27). During O'Kelly's excavations, the opportunity was not taken to investigate the presence or absence of a standing stone or the enclosing element on the summit and its current whereabouts remain a mystery. In a parallel to Newgrange, Wakeman's 1878 illustration of Heapstown Cairn passage tomb in Co. Sligo, shows a standing stone on the summit.[6] The stone itself is no longer extant and no evidence is available that might indicate its date of erection, but accounts from the 1937/38 Schools' Manuscript Collection (NFCS 182, 371–374) appear to describe its removal, re-erection and subsequent destruction (Hensey and Robin 2011, 112).

The arrangement of a possible ring-barrow (in this case, without the common central mound; Corlett 2005, 63) and standing stone at Newgrange also parallels similar arrangements at Rathcroghan (where a squat stone slab, possibly the base of a standing stone, survives at the southernmost edge of Rathcroghan Mound with a second smaller example diametrically opposite on the far side of the summit; Waddell *et al.* 2009, 156–157). At Tara, the *Lia Fáil* once stood on the Mound of the Hostages (Waddell 2000, 330) and at Kiltullagh Hill, a standing stone was found in association with an Iron Age ring-barrow and cremation pits above a fifth/sixth-century inhumation burial (Bhreatnach 2010, 25). The Rathcroghan complex also includes a series of circular enclosures comparable to that on top of the mound at Newgrange (*c.* 30m in diameter) as well as the 'Daithí's mound' ring-barrow at the complex's southern edge, which is of similar size with a large standing stone on top. When excavated by John Waddell (1988) the monument produced radiocarbon dates ranging from the late first millennium BC or the early first millennium AD.

Pre-Historic Monuments and Early-Medieval Assembly Sites

The date of both the summit enclosure and the standing stone are unknown but the combination of standing stone and enclosure strongly suggests an Iron Age/Late Iron Age date. During the Iron Age, numerous earlier monuments were modified and adapted to new ritual practices. From at least the Early-Medieval period onwards, these were incorporated into the folklore and origin legends of the ruling dynasties. Modern scholarship has noted the re-use of prehistoric monuments in the Iron Age in association with the cult of kingship and so-called "royal sites". Herity's (1993) discussion of historically identified royal sites noted the frequent presence of ring-barrows, usually associated with hillforts and linear earthwork avenues but also, albeit less frequently, with standing stones and cairns. In several cases, the top of an established burial mound appears to have been deliberately flattened to facilitate inaugurations or other royal rituals (Fitzpatrick 2005). While many of the known examples are comparatively late,[7] the use of natural or man-made mounds for assemblies, legal judgement and ecclesiastical functions is well attested in the written record from as early as the seventh century (Swift 1996, 13–20). The precise details of Iron Age and early-medieval inauguration rites remain unclear and doubtless changed over time. *Dé Shíl Conairi Móir* (possibly eighth-century), *Baile in Scáil* (ninth-century) and *Betha Colmáin maic Lúacháin* (twelfth-century) all describe royal inauguration rituals at Tara but none are contemporary accounts. The use of stone inauguration chairs by the Uí Néill is attested in the Late Medieval period (Fitzpatrick 2004, 2–4) but the role of the *Lia Fáil/Ferp Cluche* in inaugurations at Tara (Carey 1999) is attested as early as the eighth-century *Dé Shíl Chonairi Móir* and it seems likely that the standing stones at Royal Sites did play a role in the inauguration of kings in the Iron Age.

The Passage Tomb: Passage and Chamber

O'Kelly suggested that, after his proposed first collapse of the perimeter, the tomb's entrance remained undetected until 1699 when it was rediscovered and re-opened (O'Kelly 1982, 26). This is now open to serious question. There is some evidence that the inner chamber of the tomb itself may have been entered during the Iron Age. Molyneux mentioned the discovery of two skeletons at Newgrange and the remains of two others were identified during O'Kelly's excavations (Fraher 1982, 220). Stout and Stout (2008, 55) noted that the presence of two unburnt skeletons within the tomb itself is highly unusual for a Neolithic burial and suggested that it might represent the later use of the tomb for burial. Two granite objects, interpreted as lamps, have been identified from Newgrange. One is an old find from the centre of the main chamber under the

[4] See *NthtA*.

[5] Herity 1967, 1, 6, 137. Sketch visible at http://www.voicesfromthedawn.com/wp-content/gallery/newgrange2/newingham.jpg.

[6] *The great Cairn of Heapstown, Co. Sligo.* Drawn on the spot for Colonel Cooper on October 26th 1878 by William F. Wakeman. Copyright Sligo County Library.

[7] Eg. see Fitzpatrick 2004, 67–75 for the Medieval creation of traditional links between inauguration sites and the Uí Fíachrach original legend.

basin stone (which had formerly been found in the east recess and subsequently moved to the centre). Another (E56.959) was discovered outside the tomb, 9m south of kerbstone K92 at the base of O'Kelly's Late Neolithic/Beaker horizon. A third, similar, example was found in the surface soil south of Newgrange near the bank of the Boyne (O'Kelly 1982, 196). Another is known from Dowth North and another was described by Sir William Wilde as coming from a "Kistvaen" at Knowth, although O'Kelly argued that this was not an apt comparison. O'Kelly compared the finds, noting that such lamps were usually taken to be Iron Age/Early Christian, but argued that one of the Newgrange examples had to be Late Neolithic/Beaker Age due to its position in the stratigraphy (O'Kelly *et al.* 1983, 179–180). Given the breakdown of O'Kelly's stratigraphic system, the lamps may in fact be Iron Age/Early Christian artefacts. This would indicate that, as at Knowth and Dowth, the tomb had been entered during the Late Prehistoric/Early Christian period.

The remains of stags' or elks' horns were described as being found within the tomb when the passage was first opened in 1699 but they were subsequently removed. These descriptions are usually now taken to refer to bone and antler pins which are a common feature of passage tomb assemblages[8] but this does not match Lhwyd's account which described the discovery of "several bones in the cave, and part of a stag's (or else elk's) head" (McGuinness 1996, 63). Similarly, a memorandum in the Molyneaux papers (Herity 1967, 131) describes "Staggs horns and Elk or rather Mose horn that were found here" (within the tomb). In addition, the remains of at least three individual deer and at least one shed antler were identified in the "Beaker Period" remains outside the tomb (van Wijngaarden-Bakker 1974, 353). Other animal remains, including rabbits, hares, bats, frogs and dogs were discovered during the 1967 excavations (van Wijngaarden-Bakker 1982). The animal bones are undated. Schulting *et al.*'s study dating bones from other tombs (eight court tombs and two other monuments) unexpectedly produced mid-thirteenth century and later dates for all of the animal bones that could be dated (Schulting *et al.* 2012, 17), but it is possible that the Newgrange examples date from the Iron Age.

The remains of the three dogs, one each from the east and west chambers and one from just outside the end chamber at Newgrange were interpreted as likely being of recent origin due to their state of preservation and their large size as compared to Neolithic dogs (van Wijngaarden-Bakker 1982, 215). In her more detailed discussion of the animal remains Louise van Wijngaarden-Bakker (1982) notes that "whether the skeletons belong to stray dogs that were unable to get out of the tomb or to dogs that were deliberately buried remains speculative" but later states that "the bodies of the three dogs may have been brought into the tomb," which leaves open the possibility of a deliberate deposition. The bones were found as part of a mixed assemblage of material and may be of modern origin. However, given the uncertainty concerning the various phases at Newgrange, it is possible that they were deposited during the Iron Age.

Consumption of dog-flesh may have played a magical role in Late Iron Age Ireland. The tenth-century Cormac's Glossary (Ó hÓgáin 1999, 79) describes the consumption of dog flesh by a *file*:

> *The poet chews a piece of the flesh of a red pig, or of a dog or cat, and places it afterwards on the flagstone behind the door, and sings an incantation on it and offers it to the idol-gods and afterwards calls his idols to him … and what he seeks is then revealed to him.*

The archaeological evidence indicates that this may not have been an entirely literary creation. Ó Ríordáin describes the discovery of the remains of two dogs (or wolves) at the Rath of the Synods at Tara (Grogan 2009, 121). The remains of dogs made up some 9.6% of the assemblage from the ditch of Ráith na Ríg in the immediate vicinity of the Mound of the Hostages at Tara (McCormick 2009). The largest dog skull from any prehistoric site in Britain and Ireland, similar in size to a small wolf and dating to *c.* 1200 BC, was found at Haughey's Fort (Mallory 1989: 006) and dog comprised 31% of the total fragments from the Late Bronze Age ritual pool at the King's Stables near Navan Fort (Lynn *et al.* 1977, 54, 58; McCormick 2009). At least one dog from Tara showed evidence of being butchered for food, which Bhreathnach (2002, 118–119) has interpreted as a reflection of ceremonial activity although literary sources also refer to dogs as a source of food. The list of Cú Chulainn's taboos in the Book of Leinster notes that "*Geiss dó dano cárna chmanma do ithi*" "it was taboo for him to eat the flesh of that which had the same name" (i.e. a dog), suggesting that in other circumstances dogs might be eaten (Grieve 2012, 199–200). However, *Chronicum Scotorum* (Hennessy 1866, 319) refers to a great famine in the spring of AD 1116, where people had to sell their children for food, and even eat each other and dogs, suggesting that by the early twelfth century the eating of dog meat was an extreme measure.

James Ferguson (2010, 210) claims that a gold ring was found "in the cell" in the early 1840s and that it was in the possession of Mrs. Caldwell, the proprietor's wife, in 1872. O'Kelly (1982, 34–35) mistakenly referred to this as a coin and dismissed it along with a report by Beaufort that two gold coins were found beneath the pillar stone (presumably the same incident referred to by Newenham), claiming that "no warranty for any of these statements can be traced." Ferguson was writing within living memory of the discovery, however, and claimed to know the owner of the artefact so there seems to be no reason to reject his report. Lhwyd referred briefly to the discovery of "pieces of glass and some kinde of beads" at Newgrange when the tomb was opened. O'Kelly (1982, 24) suggested that Lhwyd was in fact referring to polished marbles and pottery beads similar to those found in passage-graves elsewhere and at Newgrange in 1967 but they may indicate the presence of a later burial. The glass might have come from glass vessels, beads, or bracelets. Four Roman glass cinerary urns are known from Ireland: two unprovenanced examples, one from a Roman burial with several other Roman artefacts at Stoneyford, Co. Kilkenny, and one from beneath "an exceeding large mound" at Dunadry Co. Antrim (Cahill Wilson *et al.* 2014, 129–130). Eleven of the fourteen Iron Age burials at Knowth were accompanied by collections of glass beads of varying

[8] Pers. Comm. Robert Hensey.

numbers and sizes although, without a clearer description of the artefacts seen by Lhwyd, it is impossible to make a detailed comparison (Raftery 2012).

Find No. E56.563, a dumb-bell shaped artefact from the Inner Chamber at Newgrange, was cut from a single piece of white chalk and resembled two chalk marbles stuck together (O'Kelly 1982, 194). A green glass dumb-bell shaped unperforated bead is also said to have been found "in the field adjoining Newgrange during an excavation conducted by Deane at either Site K or L" (O'Kelly and O'Kelly 1983, 180). Both closely resemble similar artefacts from Iron Age contexts elsewhere. Michael Herity identified a pair of glass dumb-bell beads among the artefacts from Cairn H in the Loughcrew Passage tomb complex, Co. Meath, as dating to the Early Iron Age (Swift 1997, 18). The Iron Age ring-ditch at Ballyboy 2 (in use between the first century BC and the first century AD) also contained a glass toggle-bead of dumb-bell shape (E37 18:23:2), and an antler/bone gaming piece similar to the one from Newgrange was included in a cremation deposit at nearby Ballyboy 1, bone from which returned a 2 Sigma calibrated date of 90 BC–AD 47 (2026±19: UBA 13026) (Delaney 2012, 98–100; McNamara 2010b, 17; McNamara 2010a). An antler/bone dice was discovered at Listoghil at Carrowmore (Burenhult 1998), where a recent discovery has identified what may be an Iron Age carving similar to those found on orthostats C3, C8 and C9 at Cloverhill (Co Sligo), on stone M20 at Millin Bay (Co Down) and on the two decorated stones at Malinmore court cairn (Co Donegal) Cloverhill (Hensey and Robin 2011, 123). A dumb-bell bead accompanied burial 20 at Knowth, as well as burials at Granagh, Co. Galway, and Kiltierney, Co. Fermanagh, and a bone example is known from one of the burials in Tumulus 8 at Carrowjames. Later glass examples have also been noted in later contexts such as Lagore, Co. Meath, Ballinderry II crannóg, Co. Offaly, and the hilltop settlement at Clogher, Co. Tipperary (Raftery 2012).

In addition, several of the bone artefacts discovered outside the tomb at the base of the earth-stone layer during O'Kelly's excavations (one of which was described as an apple-scoop; O'Kelly *et al.* 1983, 48–52) closely resemble the socketed long-bone points (also sometimes identified as spearheads) from Lagore and elsewhere. In an Irish context these tend to date to the Late Iron Age or to the second half of the first millennium AD rather than the Neolithic, although some of the British collections may date back to the first half of the first millennium BC (Mullins 2007, 46–49, 54–55). At Knowth, five similar artefacts were recovered, one antler example from an Iron Age female child's burial and the other four from early Christian and later contexts (Fitzgerald *et al.* 2012). Further finds from within the tomb may also be significant. E56.566b, a burnt fragment of the spatulated head of a bone pin (not illustrated) was found "with burnt human bone under the north-east edge of the basin in the west recess" (O'Kelly 1982, 195). During the Knowth excavations, a lozenge-headed pin (Spatulate Type D) was found (Knowth Find 5007) in the upper fills of the outer ditch, dated to the eleventh/twelfth century. The pin is one of a group found at Knowth and ranging in date from the Early Christian period to the eleventh-twelfth centuries (Barton-Murray and Johnson 2012, 330–331) and was described as an almost exact parallel to an earlier bronze pin, which Armstrong recorded as having been "found at New Grange Co. Meath" in 1923, although no specific find-spot was given (Armstrong 1923, pl. xiii, fig. 4). Pins of this type are more consistent with an Early-Christian or Medieval date than with a Neolithic origin.

Roman Material

Newgrange was clearly a focus for religious/ritual deposition in the Late Iron Age, including the repeated deposition of high-value material from the Roman world (Carson and O'Kelly 1977). Lhwyd described the discovery of a coin dating to the reign of Valentinian (AD 364–75) on the summit in 1697 and Molyneaux described the discovery of two more (one of Valentinian and one of Theodosius (AD 379–395)) during the removal of stones from the base of the mound (Carson and O'Kelly 1977). Two gold torcs, a brooch and a gold ring, as well as a denarius of Geta (AD 198-212), were discovered during digging in the area around the entrance in 1842 (Fergusson 2010, 210). Overall twenty-five Roman coins have been discovered at Newgrange. The earliest dates to the reign of Domitian (AD 81–96) and was issued at the mint of Rome c.AD 81 and the latest is either a solidus of Arcadius issued at Trier between AD 383 and 387 or a clipped siliqua issued between AD 364 and 395. In addition, a number of finger-rings, brooches, glass beads, earrings and torc fragments have also been identified. The majority came from two specific locations; the area in front of the tomb entrance and the ground around the three tall stones of the Great Stone Circle. In addition, a gold bracelet was discovered in an adjoining field, a bronze pin was discovered in the rampart of another monument in the *Brú na Bóinne* complex and additional Roman gold was discovered in satellite tomb Z (Carson and O'Kelly 1977, 35, 40-41). Three gold uniface pendants from Newgrange date from the reigns of Constantine I and II and were produced at official mints; probably at Trier (see below; Cahill Wilson 2014, 35). In addition, a previously enigmatic inscription on the hook end of a Middle Bronze Age gold torc from Newgrange: SCBONS.MB, has recently been interpreted as either *Sacrum Bonis Manibus* (an offering to the benevolent spirits) or *S-C-B-O-N Sacrum Manibus* (an offering to the spirits by S-C-BON—perhaps a name or an abbreviation for a name such as Scribonius). Patrick's Confession refers to the placing of jewellery on altars by the pagan Irish and the use of an Irish gold torc suggests a native depositor (Ó Néill 2013, 259). Assuming the torc was deposited within the same time-frame as the rest of the Roman material, the inscription suggests the presence of a native group familiar with the Latin language and with Roman depositional inscription practices and abbreviations at some point between the second half of the first and the late fourth centuries AD.

Horse remains from the area may also have had Roman connections. Two sample horse-teeth from O'Kelly's Late Neolithic/Beaker Horizon have recently been dated to CalAD 67–220 (95.4% probability), and 40 CalBC–AD 80 (91.5%) or CalAD 104–121 (3.9%) respectively, i.e. to the Irish Iron Age, and not the Beaker period (Bendrey *et al.* 2013, 93). The horse remains from Newgrange have produced dates (OxA-19887: 40 CalBC-AD 121; OxA-19886: CalAD 67–220) which place them "firmly within the time-frame of the earliest deposition of Roman material". The wear evident on one of the horses' teeth is consistent with a Roman cavalry bit (although also with the un-

even use of an Irish snaffle-bit; Cahill Wilson 2014, 37). The closest direct parallel would appear to be with the deposition of horse remains from the Ráith na Ríg enclosure at Tara, particularly given the links with Roman Britain visible in the remains from the Rath of the Synods and the close proximity to a Neolithic passage tomb (Bendrey *et al.* 2013, 99). Horses, particularly white mares, are closely associated with Irish kingship (Newman 2011, 24). McCormick (2002, 60) has discussed the connection between horse bones and kingship rituals as described by Giraldus Cambrensis and this may be related to later semi-mythological accounts of the burial of pre-Christian kings of Tara at *Brú na Bóinne*. The Dagda's alternative title of Eochaidh (horseman) may also suggest an association with royalty (Ó hÓgáin 1999, 60).

The Roman material from Knowth includes samian ware sherds, Roman glass, a *ligula* (a long-handled cosmetic spoon) and a stylus, all consistent with a domestic habitation. The Newgrange material, by contrast, appears to represent the result of the cumulative structured deposition of precious jewellery, rings, chains, necklaces and gold coins ranging across the entire Roman period (Cahill Wilson 2014, 39). Various explanations have been proposed for the presence of Roman material at Newgrange; ranging from deposition by Roman pilgrims to looting by Irish raiders, contacts with Romano-British tribes or direct trade with Roman *mercatores*. Another possibility might be a system of subsidies distributed by Roman diplomats or (in a more sinister vein) *speculatores* or *arcani*/*areani* attempting to acquire intelligence or influence Irish political affairs (Janiszewski 2011, 60–62). Swift (1997, 18) argued for the Iron Age deposits from the southern chamber of Cairn H at Lough Crew, and the gold coin of late Roman date at Giant's Ring, Co. Antrim, as parallels for the depositions at Newgrange, as well as discussing the parallels from Roman Britain in more depth in a later article (2003).

Coins and jewellery were deposited outside shrines as well as Neolithic monuments throughout Roman Britain; six Roman coins, five ranging between the middle and end of the fourth century, were found at the West Kennet long barrow in Wiltshire. A combination of coins and Roman burials are known from the 'Julliberrie's Grave' long barrow in Kent; a scatter of eight coins dating to the late fourth century were found at the southern end, along with a pot of early fourth-century coins in the line of the ditch as well as two inhumations and two cremations, accompanied by pottery and a single bronze brooch. Seven scattered coins were discovered in association with Romano-British pottery in the surface mould from the ditch at Wor Barrow Neolithic long barrow in Dorset. A small hoard of coins from the reign of Constantine I is known from a round barrow at Tarrant Hinton (also in Dorset). Six of the Cotswold/Severn long barrows may have been opened in the Roman period and four of these (Foxcote, Windmill Tump, Woodchester I and Hetty Pegler's Tump) produced coins. In addition, Hetty Pegler's Tump produced a skeleton and three fourth-century coins from the highest pan of the mound. The site is adjacent to West Hill, Uley, a multi-phase ritual complex which was extensively remodelled during the Roman period and rebuilt in the fourth century. The site has produced some 87 lead tablets dedicated to Mercury, Mars, Silvanus and to a Celtic god who may have been comparable to the Dagda. Roman burials and fourth-century coins were also discovered in a round barrow at Ivy Lodge, in King's Stanley, and Roman altars and coins have been discovered at Bisley (possibly a Bronze Age round barrow) and Tidenham (possibly a barrow) in Gloucestershire. Eight altars were found at Bisley, three dedicated to Mars, one to Minerva and one without a written inscription but inscribed with a carved serpent and a ram's horns. An altar and single coin were also discovered at Tidenham. However, doubt has been cast on both of the latter sites with Bisley described as "very doubtful" and Tidenham identified as a "gazebo or folly built around 1700. (Swift 2003, 59–60).

The Newgrange collection should also be seen in the context of the broader concentration of Roman material on the islands off the coast of Dublin and in east-central Ireland. The Dublin sites have produced evidence for continuing trade from the beginnings of the Late Iron Age to Late Antiquity, e.g. early and later Roman material from Dalkey Island, fourth-century Roman coins on Ireland's Eye and a small, possibly Roman-type, lamp from Skerries as well as finds from Howth Head (Dowling 2014, 27). Perhaps most significantly, a series of burials were discovered on Lambay Island in 1927 along with an array of Romano-British material including a coin of Trajan (AD 98–117) or Hadrian (AD 117–38), an iron sword, a bronze shield boss, three dolphin-fibulae, a plain bronze scabbard mount, an iron mirror, two decorated bronze scabbard mounts, a rosette-type fibula, a Langton-Down type fibula, various rings (some of which may be scabbard fittings), a finger ring, a decorated repoussé disc, a triangular bronze plaque, a beaded bronze torc and a decorated bronze bracelet or armlet. Which of the finds were directly associated with burials remains unclear (Cahill Wilson *et al.* 2014, 92–93).

On the mainland, in addition to the Newgrange assemblage, there is a collection of Roman material from Tara ranging between the second and the fourth century as well as a collection of finds from the huge promontory fort at Drumanagh in North County Dublin (Armit 2013, 288). Drumanagh has been compared to the similarly sited port of trade at Hengistbury Head in Dorset, which handled a huge quantity of trade with the continent (including Gaul, Italy and the Mediterranean) during the first century BC (Cunliffe,, 1978) The Drumanagh collection contains a range of personal artefacts including finger rings, dolphin fibulae, trumpet fibulae and umbonate enamelled plate brooches, all dating to the later first and early second centuries AD, as well as decorated horse bits and pendants, bronze cinerary vessels and a wide range of metalwork along with sixteen coins ranging from the reigns of Emperor Vespasian (AD 69–79) or Titus (AD 79–81) to Hadrian (AD 117–38) (Cahill Wilson 2014, 25–29). As well as the finds from within the fort, a number of Iron Age finds have been made in the area around Drumanagh, including two second-century AD Roman coins and a sherd of Severn Valley Ware from the field adjoining the promontory fort (Cahill Wilson 2014, 62).

The east coast of Ireland, including such prominent features as Drumanagh and the mouth of the Boyne, were clearly familiar to the officers and sailors of the Roman navy based in Britain. Naval bases were established on the east coast of the Irish Sea over the course of the Roman occupation and remained in use until the end of the Roman period. These included Caer Gybi at Holyhead on Anglesey (Mona) and another with an

accompanying *vicus* (civilian settlement) at Segontium at Caernarfon on the Menai Strait. The bases appear to have been accompanied by a signalling system with the erection of signal stations on the heights above them, potentially to deal with Irish piracy or raiding or to regulate trade (Casey 2010, 64). Distribution points for Roman material culture such as Drumanagh appear to have played a major role in Roman commerce and diplomacy beyond the frontiers of the Empire, with Roman prestige goods penetrating into elite culture beyond the Rhine and Danube as well as north of Hadrian's Wall. In any case, the pattern of deposition at Newgrange clearly suggests a continuing practice, extending across almost the entire period of the Roman occupation of Britain, of depositing high prestige Roman-derived artefacts in an area to the south of the mound (and perhaps within). This indicates a continuing political and cultic importance over several centuries, which would suggest that, as Swift (1996, 1) argued, those responsible were members of the "native and aristocratic warrior class" already subject to Romano-British influence who were making regular votive offerings and practising a continuing tradition, rather than visiting Roman pilgrims as O'Kelly originally proposed. In particular, the gold medallions/pendants dating to the reigns of Constantine I and II and issued between *c.* AD 318 and 337 are of a type more usually found outside the frontiers of the Empire. It has been proposed that these may have been distributed as subsidies to the barbarians or as payment to the commanders of the *laeti* (barbarians who served with the Roman armies; Bland 2012, 219–222).

Pagan Newgrange, Leinster and Medieval Tradition

The likely recipients of these payments or subsidies were the leadership of the Leinster dynasties. The older Leinster genealogical poems, now generally dated to the early seventh century rather than the fifth (Ó Corráin 1992), indicate that the kingship of Leinster was held at times by the Laigin, Gáilióin and Domnainn, ruling from both Dún Áilinne and Tara (claims to the kingship of Tara were later tactfully removed from Uí Néill-oriented material; Ó Cróinín 2005, 187). There are indications of cultural contacts between the Leinster leadership and Roman Britain as well as of Romano-British connections with the Boyne valley specifically. The earlier Patrician documents portray parts of the Boyne valley as having been ruled by Irish kings with British mothers (Swift 2003, 61) and titles and terminology associated with early Leinster figures (notably *trebun* (tribune) and *legion*) may reflect a pre-Christian phase of borrowing from Latin and a familiarity with the Roman army (Carney 1971, 69–70).

This cult may have had an intimate connection with Newgrange. Irish medieval written sources tend to identify royal sites as the burial places of the ancestors of the ruling dynasty. This aspect is present at Newgrange, but the tumulus is associated with three distinct but connected strands of mythical personages: the *Túatha Dé Danann*, Cú Chulainn and the *Ulaidh*, and the pagan forebears of the kings of Ireland. Most famously, in the eighth/ninth-century text *Tocmarc Étaíne,* the Dagda, also named as Eochaid Ollathair, fathered Óengus on the goddess Bóand/Eithne within Brú na Bóinne itself, having successfully deceived her husband, Elcmar of the Brú, into staying away for nine months under the impression that only a single day had passed. Óengus subsequently returned to seize the Brú from Elcmar during the feast of *Samain* when Elcmar is described as standing unarmed on the hill of *Síd in Broga*, (ie. Newgrange) wearing a double cloak with a gold brooch and holding a forked white stick of hazel in his hand in what may have be a reference to royal attire (Bergin and Best 1938). Elcmar (the 'Jealous One' – likely an epithet rather than a name) appears in the Metrical Dindshenchas as the *breithem* of the Dagda and is also described as the brother of Bóand (Swift 2003, 55–56).

An alternative account in *Dé Gabáil in t-Sída* in the Book of Leinster, has Óengus trick the Dagda into handing over the *Síd* for a day and a night and then claiming it for ever on the grounds that; "the whole world is day and night and that is what is granted to me" (Koch and Carey 2000, 145). In the eighth-century *Aislinge Óenguso,* Óengus is described as returning to the Brú with his lover, Caer Ibormeith, from Síd Uamain in Connacht (Bhreathnach 2014, 9). This connection appears still later in *Toraigheacht Díarmada agus Ghráinne* when Óengus (Díarmaid's foster father) brings the hero's body back to the Brú for burial (Breatnach 1968, 141). Other sources make the Brú the burial place of the Dagda himself (Ó hÓgáin 1999, 109) and the first recension of the *Lebor Gabála Érenn* claims that he died in the Bruig after the battle of Mag Tuired (Koch and Carey 2000, 262). The Metrical Dindshenchas indicates that the Dagda built the mound and also that he lay there with his consort (likely the Morrigan: two hillocks west of the mound are known as *dá Chích na Morrígna—the two breasts of the Morrigan*) giving it the alternative name *imdai nDagdai Dearg*—the bed of the red Dagda (Ó hÓgáin 1999).

Nuadu, the great-great grandson of Alduí was identified as the king under whom the Túatha Dé Danann came to Ireland. He ruled before Lug and lost an arm in the first battle of Moytura replacing it with a silver replica hence his epithet *Airgetlám* (Silver-hand). T.F. O'Rahilly proposed that his name might mean 'cloud-maker' and suggested that he was a synonym of Elcmar, husband of Bóand in *Tochmarc Étaíne* (Swift 2003, 60–61). His cult would thus be associated with Newgrange via his wife Bóinn and his original possession of the mound itself. Ó h'Ógáin (1999,136-137) has proposed that population movements out of Roman Britain in the first two centuries AD, perhaps as a result of the Roman Conquest, may have introduced Nuadu (also known as Nechtan/Nuadhu Necht) to the Irish pantheon as a parallel to the British god Nodens/Nudens/Nodons (spellings vary in the inscriptions) whose name is an earlier cognate form (Tolkien 1932, 132-7). The temple at Lydney across the Severn Estuary from Uley was built within what appears to be a prehistoric enclosure and has produced votive offerings of coins and jewellery as well as inscriptions dedicated to the god Mars Nodens. The temple remained in use during the Roman period and was rebuilt in the fourth century when it possessed a mosaic floor with a frieze of sea monsters and fish as well as bronze artefacts illustrated with sailors holding anchors, fishermen holding tridents and conch shells (Swift 2003, 60–61).

In a possible parallel to the salmon of knowledge associated with the Boyne, Lydney has produced coins showing a salmon being caught (Ó hÓgáin 1999, 144), and in Culhwch and Olwen, Llyn Llyw, where the heroes find a knowledgeable ancient sal-

mon who reveals the location of the imprisoned Mabon ap Madron, appears to have been a widening of the Severn Estuary before it enters the Bristol Channel (Bromwich and Simon Evans 1992, 144). A copper arm (potentially the source of the silver-arm of Nuadu and of his Welsh equivalent *Nudd/Lludd Llaw Eraint*) was also discovered at Lydney. Nodons is identified with Mars in several inscriptions but Sir John Rhys argued for his role as a God of the waters, similar to Neptune, based on the aquatic connotations of many of the decorations at Lydney (Rhys, 1892, 125-127) and Ross drew attention to an inscription from Chesterholm (*Vindolanda*) reading *Deo No Neptu* (Ross, 1974, 231-232). Ó hÓgáin suggests that this may be the source of Nuadu's alternative name Nechtan, with the cult becoming established in Ireland in the second and third centuries AD after the Latin name had become established. Óengus' ungrammatical title (*Mac and Ócc*) may similarly have been derived from the Gaulish and British deity Maponos/Maponus (1999, 136-137). The name Maponus appears in conjunction with that of Apollo in several inscriptions on altars found in the area around Hadrian's Wall as well as in France on an altar at Bourbonne les Bains, in the *departement* of the Haute Marne, at Rouen and at Savigny (Swift 2003, 56). Nuadu is associated with the Laigin; in the Leinster Genealogies he appears as an ancestor of Find mac Cumhaill and Find File. His cult may have been adopted by the Laigin while they held the Boyne Valley and the Tara Kingship (Ó hÓgáin 1999, 137). Prior to the sixth century, the Laigin appear to have held territory in Britain, giving their name to the Lleyn peninsula in Wales, and it has been proposed that the term *Laigin* itself is related to the Latin *legiones* (although the precise derivation is unclear) (Bhreathnach 2014, 45). Their adoption of a British cult during the Roman Period would provide a context for the deposition of Roman material at Newgrange.

Newgrange's other mythological associations may reflect different historical links. In the eighth-century *Compert Con Culainn,* the god Lugh seduces Deichtine, daughter of Conchobar, king of the Ulaidh, in a series of supernatural events in or near the Brú; resulting in the birth of Cú Chulainn (Deane 2011, 2–3). The eleventh/twelfth-century Metrical Dindshenchas also made the Brú the burial place of the daughter of Pharaoh (presumably Scota, the wife/mother of Goidel Glas the creator of the Irish Language and ancestor of the Gaels; Macalister 1941) and of the pagan kings of Tara until Cormac Mac Airt refused to be buried with idolaters and was ultimately buried at Ros na Righ (Gwynn 1906). The earliest attested reference to Cormac's refusal appears in a poem attributed to Cinaed Ua hArtacáin (d. 974) and dedicated to Congalach mac Máelmithig, king of Cnogba/Knowth and Tara (d. 956). Another member of the dynasty, Flann mac Maelfhinnia, is identified in 931 as Flann of the Brú, while an earlier figure, Cinaed mac Irgalaig (d. 728) is described as having built a monumental grave for his horse at the Brug (Swift 2003, 54). The capture of both the Boyne Valley and Tara itself by the Uí Néill might be reflected in both the loss of the mound by Elcmar/Nuadhu and the claim in the Metrical Dindshenchas that decidedly anti-Leinster Connachta ancestor figures such as Túathal Techtmar and Conn of the hundred battles are buried at the Brú (Gwynn 1906).

Iron Age Burial at Newgrange?

The tradition of royal burials may not have been entirely without foundation. Iron Age burials have been discovered at the base of the mound at Knowth. These were accompanied by an extensive and unique collection of glass beads and the collection of similar finds from this area at Newgrange is suggestive. Over twenty glass pinheads, "similar to beads but without a through penetration", were discovered beyond the kerb in the same uppermost layers as the Roman material (O'Kelly 1982, 74). The pair of rectangular bone dice found at in the same area (Carson and O'Kelly 1977, 51, pl viia) parallels the three dice (two antler, one cattle bone) from the Iron Age burial 9 at Knowth. The Knowth examples date to the period between the late first century BC and the mid second century AD and show Roman influence (Riddler 2012). Ten fragments of human skull-vault as well as four loose teeth have also been discovered in two separate locations in front of kerbstone 2 at Newgrange in the area in front of the entrance. The skull fragments found directly in front of kerbstone 2 present the same degree of corrosion as the prehistoric animal bones and bear no traces of cremation. Elsewhere, five human teeth were found in a prehistoric pit between the entrance stone and stone 1 of the great circle (van Wijngaarden-Bakker 1974, 333).

In view of the prevalence of glass grave goods at Knowth and the obvious ritual component of the deposits in this area at Newgrange, these may represent the remains of subsequently disturbed un-cremated Late Iron Age burials in the area south-east of the mound. The area appears to have been extensively disturbed. In spite of O'Kelly's statement to the contrary (1982, 23), there is evidence in both the antiquarian accounts and his own excavation report, for alterations to Newgrange in this area caused by quarrying,[9] as well as nineteenth-century efforts to penetrate the mound in the area around the roof-box. This may have disturbed Iron Age deposits. A triangular stone is described within the great-circle around the mound and in front of the entrance. It was illustrated in this position by Vallancey. It may have been a second standing stone, distinct from the Great Circle, and its socket may have been exposed during excavations around the tomb entrance, although this is far from clear (Stout 1993). A similar arrangement of a standing stone on the summit of the mound and another before the entrance is also found at Kercado near the stone alignments in Carnac, Brittany, which would suggest that this feature may have been substantially older than the Irish Iron Age (Stout and Stout 2008, 15). A mound of stones and/or soil is also visible in front of the entrance on Beranger's illustration. While possibly the result of quarrying, it may also have been the remains of a now-destroyed Iron Age monument. An alternative explanation for the distribution of the material from the front of the mound might be the remains of a large spoil-heap or clearance cairn created during quarrying into the mound and from the clearance of the chamber and passage. This would imply that much of the material from directly in front of the entrance came from the mound itself or the interior of the tomb (perhaps originally the result of a deliberate closing of the passage) although this is unlikely to explain all of the material.

[9] Referred to by Pownall, with the effects visible in Beranger – see Herity 1967, 133–134.

Assemblies and Insight from the Otherworld?

The twelfth-century *Aided Muirchertaig Meic Erca*, hints at a continued memory of an assembly area associated with Newgrange. According to the text, the traditional threefold death of Muirchertach (d. AD 536 according to the Annals) followed swiftly on his agreement to dig a trench as part of a project to mark out a church at *Brú na Bóinne*. This is said to have been "the first time that the green of the Brug was injured" (*do cét-milled faichthi in Broga*) (Ní Bhrolcháin 2008, 55). The *faithche/faichthe* of Cashel is described in the early sources as being used for inauguration rites and fairs (Fitzpatrick 2004, 179) and Newgrange may have been perceived in later years as having been an appropriate venue for such events. The mound may also have been used for the pursuit of esoteric knowledge into the medieval period. In 1084, according to the Annals of Tigernach, Óengus Óc supposedly related the supernatural cause of a plague to one Gilla Lugan who "used to haunt the fairy mound every year on Halloween (*ro tathaigedh an sith gach bliadan aidchi samna*)". The *síd* closely associated with Óengus is Newgrange and Waddell proposes that it may have been the fairy mound in question (Waddell 2011, 203–204). The practice may have been of long standing. A tradition of seeking guidance at burial mounds is attested as early as the second century BC among the Continental Celts when it was reported by Nicander of Collophon in a now lost text referred to by Tertullian in *Dé Anima* (Koch and Carey 2000, 10). In one account (found in various versions in the Book of Leinster, Egerton MS 1782 and RIA MS Stowe D. IV 2, f.49) either Senchán Torpéist or his sons are described as having restored the text of the *Táin Bó Cúailnge* by seeking guidance at the burial mound of Fearghus mac Róich. In the version found in the Stowe Manuscript, answer was found only after first fasting on the graves of Saint Brendan of Clonfert and St Cíarán of Clonmacnoise (Williams and Ford 1992, 89). Similarly, in the Mabinogion, Pwyll prince of Dyfed sits on the mound Gorsedd Arberth to see a marvel, shortly after which his future bride Rhiannon (possibly a sovereignty goddess) comes into view. Rhiannon's second consort Manawydan sees Dyfed reduced to a wasteland after he sits on the same *gorsedd*, while, in Branwen, Matholwch is sitting on top of another *gorsedd* when he sees supernatural beings emerging from the lake of the cauldron (Sims-Williams 2011, 60). The *mirabilia* section of the ninth-century *Historia Brittonum* describes a *sepulcrum* on top of Crug Mawr mountain in Southern Powys, which changes its size to match anyone who lies next to it and grants lifelong freedom from weariness to anyone who kneels three times before it. Giraldus Cambrensis adds that weapons left beside it overnight will be found broken to pieces in the morning, again suggesting a night spent at the mound. A late seventh-century charter in the twelfth-century Book of Llandaff recounts that Morgan, king of Glywysing (*c.* 670–710), contributed land to the church while lying on the tomb of his grandfather, Meurig ["*super sepulchrum mourici regis iacentis landauie aui sui*"] (Jones 1997). The tradition was not confined to Celtic literature, however: Sulpicius Severus records that Martin of Tours (d. *c.* 397) discovered the identity of a buried brigand by praying on his tomb and the tradition of lying on tombs for the purpose of contacting their occupants or receiving mystical or poetical revelations is also attested in Norse literature. The practice may have ultimately been derived from the cult of Aesculapius whose so-called "incubation temple" at Epidaurus in Greece (*c.* 421 BC) played host to devotees awaiting supernatural cures and revelations at the tombs of the dead. In a possible further link with Lydney (see above), a series of cubicles at Nodens' temple seem to indicate the same practice in Late-Roman Britain, from whence it may have spread to Ireland. (Chadwick 1968). At Lydney, visiting pilgrims are now believed to have slept in the cubicles within the *nemeton* (perhaps having been drugged), after which a dream interpreter, referred to in an inscription on the mosaic floor of the temple, would interpret their dreams (Soffe, G. pers. comm.).

Conclusion

While the evidence is inconclusive, there is some reason to believe that, rather than being treated differently from the other two passage tombs at *Brú na Bóinne*, Newgrange was similarly altered by Iron Age people and incorporated into their mythology. The enclosure on the summit is likely to have been either a large Iron Age barrow (perhaps, along with the alterations to the profile of the mound, symbolically converting the entire mound into a single large barrow), or else a settlement enclosure paralleling that at Knowth, although the presence of the standing stone makes a ritual function more likely. While not decisive, there is strong circumstantial evidence and a number of finds pointing to Iron Age activities and possible burials within the tomb itself. The deposition of high value foreign material in a broad arc running from the SE to SW in front of the entrance and the possible presence of undetected elite burials at the base illustrates that the importance attributed to *Brú na Bóinne* in the immediate pre-Christian period had had several centuries to develop. This helps to explain the importance attached to the *Brú* in the later tradition, which associates the mound with the Dagda, Óengus, Bóann/Bóand and Elcmar/Nuadu. The lack of any confirmed settlement evidence might indicate a sepulchral role for Newgrange, unlike the more traditional royal habitation sites at Knowth and Lagore. The combination of high status burials at a prominent prehistoric site, the deposition of high value Roman artefacts (with extensive Romano-British parallels for the practice), the remains of both dogs and horses similar to those found at Tara and the pseudo-historic tradition of royal burial at Brú na Bóinne, all combine to suggest that Newgrange acted as a royal cultic centre in the centuries immediately before the introduction of Christianity. It may also have played a role in royal inaugurations although this is less certain as several of the features found at other sites are not present. In order to clarify the sequence of events and achieve the goals laid out in the "*Brú na Bóinne* World Heritage Site Research Framework", a detailed investigation of the summit of the mound, along with a programme of dating of the bone remains (both human and animal) from the original excavations, should be a priority for future research at Newgrange.

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