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# Towards a Relative Chronology of the Milesian Genealogical Scheme



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## Abstract

As a result of Christianization, the Irish of the early historical period found a need to locate the history of their own people within that of the Bible. The result of their efforts is a body of what is termed 'pseudohistorical' doctrine. An integral aspect of this project was the creation of a genealogical framework meant to explain the origins and genetic relationships between the various peoples of Ireland. According to this framework, the free peoples of Ireland descended from a set of legendary ancestors collectively known as 'the sons of Míl' (meic Míled). The complex web of relationships by which the various peoples of Ireland were held to be connected to one another can be termed the Milesian genealogical scheme, and it underwent significant changes and reformulations. The genealogical relationships described by the scheme should not be understood as expressing actual genetic relationships, but rather as descriptions of political relationships at the time they were written coded by the familial and social relationships of legendary ancestors. Since legitimacy to rule was overtly based upon one's putative ancestry, a small industry of genealogists and propagandists fabricated the appropriate pedigrees and origin legends for their patrons.

This study attempts to discern the broad trends of the changes under which the scheme went and finds that the critical period for the scheme's development was c. 650, when Isidorian texts were transmitted to Ireland, to c. 750, by which point we have evidence of the early compilation of the genealogical corpus. Traces of the pre-Isidorian organization of the scheme are also identified.

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