

# **The *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* at a Glance: an Overview of the 11th Century Irish *Book of Invasions***

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This document is intended as an orientation for students of the *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* (LGE), a refresher for those who have read it in the past, and a rapid reference in relation to the genealogy of persons mentioned in the LGE.

## **Nature and Origin of the *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* narratives**

The LGE is one of the primary sources of information about the earliest period of Irish mythology, the so-called Mythological Cycle. All of the information in this guide has been abstracted from the *Lebor Gabála Éirenn - The Book of the Taking of Ireland* Parts I-V, R.A.S. Macalister, D.Litt., Irish Texts Society, 1938-1956, reprinted 1993-1995. In general, Macalister provides three redactions of the text (essentially, R<sup>1</sup> is from the *Book of Leinster*, R<sup>2</sup> from the Stowe D Collection, and R<sup>3</sup> from the *Book of Ballymote*) and this document provides a composite overview where greater weight has been given to the 'orthodox' or dominant versions. Alternative accounts or variant details are included only when they are deemed interesting or important to the larger context.

In the LGE, the details for figures in Macalister's Section I (*From the Creation to the Dispersal of the Nations*) have their origins in the Old Testament book *Genesis*. LGE Section II (*The Early History of the Gaedil*) is a pseudohistory of the Gaels that seems to have been based on the wanderings of the Israelites in the Old Testament book *Exodus*. A version of the pseudohistory (in Latin) is found in Nennius's 9th century *Historia Brittanorum*, and it features in the 9th century poem *Can a mbunadas na nGaedel*. This pseudohistory traces the lineage of the Gaels from Egypt to Scythia (and, in R<sup>2</sup>, back to Egypt), whence they travel to the Caspian, the Maeiotic Marshes, Spain, and finally to Ireland. R<sup>2</sup> has Mil leading the expedition from the second departure of the Gaels from Egypt onwards. Irrespective of redactions, it is their final migration - from Spain to Ireland, under Mil - that forms the basis for LGE Section VIII (*The Sons of Mil*). The combined story (equivalent to LGE Sections II & VIII) was in circulation in late 11th century as the *Liber Occupationis*.

The 9th century *Historia Brittanorum* not only includes the pseudohistory of the Gael but also an early account in Gaelic of the invasions by Partholon, Nemed and Mil (waves II, III, & VI in Table 1). Early accounts of the Fir Bolg and Tuatha De Danann invasions (waves IV

and V in Table 1) can be found in 9th century poems by Tuán mac Cairell. By the 11th century, the story of Cessair (wave I in Table 1) had also been incorporated into poems describing the invasions. Macalister infers the existence of a late 11th century MS, which he calls the *Liber Originum*, that would have served to bring these poems together. Macalister divides the *Liber Originum* into two components: the *Pericope Antediluvianorum*, containing descriptions of the invasions of Ireland before the Flood (equivalent to LGE Section III), and the *Liber Praecursorum*, containing descriptions of the invasions after the Flood (equivalent to LGE Sections IV-VII).

The LGE developed its current structure late in the 11th century, when the genuinely traditional sagas of the *Liber Originum* were embedded in a prose narrative that explained and expanded upon their details, and the result was integrated with the pseudohistory of the Gaels contained in the *Liber Occupationis*. It is worth remarking that the *Annals of the Four Masters* relies heavily upon the LGE, and that the *Cath Maige Tuireadh* saga also contains information that was borrowed from the LGE.

### Contents of the *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* narratives

The remainder of this document consists of a Table and a Figure. The Table (Table 1, below) summarizes the successive Invasions of Ireland as described in the LGE, with explanatory footnotes on selected topics of interest. The Figure (Figure 1) is a genealogical tree for key persons mentioned in the LGE. The legend for this Figure is included in the body of this document, but for technical reasons the Figure itself has been provided as a separate file.

**Table 1. Key events in the Invasions of Ireland, as described in the *Lebor Gabála Éirenn*.**

Each major wave of invasion is identified by a Roman numeral (I-VI). The duration of each settlement is indicated, as well as any intervening periods when the country was unoccupied (d = days, y = years; figures separated by commas indicate alternative values supplied by different redactions). Variant accounts are identified by *italics*.

<i>Settler</i>	<i>Settled for</i>	<i>Events</i>	<i>Empty for</i>
Banba	40y	Arrived with 150 maidens & 3 men (inc. Lada) from unspecified origin Died of disease. (Banba story attributed to <i>Quire of Druim Snechta</i> )	200y

<b>I. Cessair<sup>a</sup></b>	6d, 40d	Came from Egypt with 50 maidens & 3 men (her father Bith, Ladra the pilot, Fintan) Landed at Dun na mBarc (in Corkaguiney, northern Kerry) All (except Fintan) died before the Flood, Cessair from heartbreak at her father's death	
<i>Capa, Luasad &amp; Laigne</i>	<i>0d</i>	<i>Spanish fishermen &amp; their wives; drowned at Tuad Inbir (Bann estuary) by the Flood</i>	300-312y, 1002y
<hr/>			
<b>II. Partholon</b>	300y, 550y	Came from Sicily or Graecia Parva with his 4 sons, after killing his parents Beat Cichol Clapperleg and his Fomoire (whose '7-Taking' may have preceded P. by 200y, accompanied by 300 Fomoire from Emor and Mt. Caucas in the east) Lake-bursts occurred; he had plains cleared Originator of cattle husbandry, cooking, drinking, duelling, etc. P. cuckolded by his servant Topa, whom he then killed P. died of his old wounds many years after the Fomorian battle Killed by plague (except Tuan MacCairell) on Old Plain of Elta of Edar (Howth) <i>or driven out by dog-headed apes</i>	30y
<hr/>			
<b>III. Nemed</b>	400y, 630y, 720-730y	Came from Greece with his 4 sons; many drowned capturing a tower of gold in the sea Lake-bursts occurred; he had plains cleared, and royal forts dug Beat Fomoire in 3-4 battles N. died of a plague that killed 2000 Tax of two-thirds of all produce & progeny levied by Fomoire each Samain Beat Fomoire (under Conand mac Febar) at his Tower in Toirinis Ceitne (Tory Is.; or Dernish Is., Co. Sligo) Conand avenged by Fomoire (under Morc mac Dela) at Toirinis Ceitne; many drowned by tide 30 survivors fled Ireland - Semeon to Greece (Fir Bolg), Bethach line to Scandinavia (TDD)	200y, 230y
<hr/>			
<b>IV. Fir Bolg<sup>b</sup></b>	30y, 36-37y	Came from Greece, where they had been slaves Three groups arr. in same week: Gaileoin (warrior-chiefs), Fir Domnann (diggers) & Fir Bolg (carriers) Their five chiefs divided Ireland into the traditional 'fifths' First mention of a Brug in LGE Last FB king (Eochu mac Erc) moved royal centre to Tara (Mound of 3 Men, Carn of One Man erected) <sup>c</sup> Fled to island strongholds after defeat by TDD at 1st Battle of Mag Tuired (see below)	

Descendants (=Sons of Umor) regained Irish territory (e.g. they built Dun Oenghus) during Ulster cycle

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**V. Tuatha De Danann** 196-197y

Came from north of world, where they had become experts in magic, possibly via Greece and then Scotland<sup>d</sup>  
Nuadu king (4-)7y before arrival  
Arrived in dark clouds without ships, *or in ships which they burnt on alighting*  
Brought 4 enchanted objects: Lia Fail, Lug's spear, Nuadu's sword, and Dagda's cauldron  
Beat Fir Bolg at 1st Battle of Mag Tuired (Moytura, Cong, Co. Galway) but with heavy losses, inc. Ermmas, Tuirill Biccreeo, Fiachra, Ectach, Etargal, and Nuadu's arm  
Kingship to Bress (7y); then to healed Nuadu (20y), who fell defeating Fomoiré at 2nd Battle of Mag Tuired (nr. Sligo), 27y after TDD arrived. Macha, Ogma, Bress, Bruidne, Casmael also fell.  
Lughnasa instigated at Tailltiu (Telltown, Co. Meath) in memory of Tailltiu, foster-mother of Lug, who died there  
Kingship to Lug (40y); then Dagda (80y) over whom was made Brug na Boinne (Newgrange). Brigid had some magic animals, who produced demonic voices (whistling, outcry & groaning) after plunder. Lug demands wergild of 7 enchanted items from Brian, Iuchar & Iucharba for killing his father Cian in the Brug.  
Kingship to Delbaeth (10y); Fiachna (10y)  
Kingship to MacCuill+MacCecht+MacGreine (29y)

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**VI. Sons of Mil** to historical times

Ith saw Ireland from top of his father Breogan's Tower in Spain, and travelled there  
Ith helped MacC,-C,-G settle a dispute, and praised Ireland, but they killed him as a spy  
Milesians voyaged to Ireland to avenge Ith; Mil, Oige, Uige, Erannan, Scene & Ir died in transit  
The land was disguised as a hog's back; on landing, the lake-burst of Loch Luigdech  
Fought TDD (& poss. Fomoiré) at Battle of Sliabh Mis, then Battle of Lifé  
Colloquy with Banba, Fotla & Eiriu regarding the name of the land  
In Teamair (Tara), MacC,-C,-G gain 3 days reprieve; Milesians sail, battling druidic storms, Eber Donn drowns  
MacC,-C,-G & wives killed by Milesians at Battle of Tailltiu (by Eber, Erimon & Amorgen, resp.)  
Eber Finn took kingship of the south (+5 chieftains), while Erimon took the north (+6 chieftains)  
A poet went with Eber, a harper with Erimon. Many raths and dúnns constructed. TDD settle around Tailtiu.

*Alternative sequence: Landing, colloquy, departure & druidic winds, Battle of Sliabh Mis, Loch Luigdech burst, Battle of Tailtiu*

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**Milesian kings** (early ones only)

After a year, Erimon fought and slew Eber, becoming sole king  
The Cruithne (Picts) came to Ireland but were banished to Scotland by Erimon; he gave them widows from the ship of Donn for wives, provided that Cruithne women could inherit & rule  
Lake-bursts, building of Rathes, etc. continued in these times; also battles against Fomoiré

Kingship alternates (by battle) between the lineage of Erimon & Eber, up to Tigrernmas (gt-gt-grandson of Erimon). Under Tigrernmas were battles v. Fir Bolg; also smelting of gold, coloured garments (tartan), worship of Crom Cruach. Tigrernmas died with 75% of the men of Ireland in a Samain ritual to CC.

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**Footnotes to Table 1:**

*a.* The Cessair story was originally a cosmogenic flood myth that existed independently of the Biblical Flood, but later the two floods came to be regarded as a single event. In the original Cessair myth, she and her people would have survived their flood, and Ladrá/Adna would have united with all of the women and re-peopled the earth. The Cessair story has also become compounded with the Banba story and *vice versa*, so that the identities of Banba and Cessair are now interlinked. The fact that Cessair, rather than one of the men, is the key figure in this invasion reflects the primal myth of Ireland first being discovered by a woman.

*b.* Macalister considered that the name Fir Bolg meant 'Men of Breeches', i.e. serving classes. He also considered them to have a close association with pigs. The Fir Bolg and the Fomoiré are closely identified with one another, as follows. The Fir Bolg were dispersed into island strongholds after the Tuatha de Danann arrived, outposts typically associated with the Fomoiré. Indeed, in *Cath Maige Tuireadh* the Fir Bolg returned from these outposts in alliance with the Fomoiré to battle the Tuatha de Danann at Second Battle of Mag Tuired. Descendants of the Fir Bolg were later known as 'Sons of Umor', and the earliest Fomorians were also descended from one of this name. However, the Fir Bolg Umor seems to have been born later in time, since he appeared when the exiled Fir Bolg tried to regain territory in Ireland during the Ulster Cycle of Irish mythology. The sons of this Umor were: Oenghus (who built Dun Oenghus, and whose son Conall was slain by Cu Chulann), Cime-four heads (who was slain by Conall Cernach), Taman, Mod, Mil, Concraide, Cutra, Bera, Dalach, Bairnech, Adar the poet, Cing, Mend the poet, Uar, Aenach, Assal, and Irgus. The relics of the Fir Bolg in Ireland in historical times (when the *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* was being written) were: the Gabraide of the Suc in Connaught, the Uí Tarsaig, and the Gaileoin in Leinster.

*c.* The various names of Tara through the ages are listed in Macalister's ¶444 (Vol V, p.83)

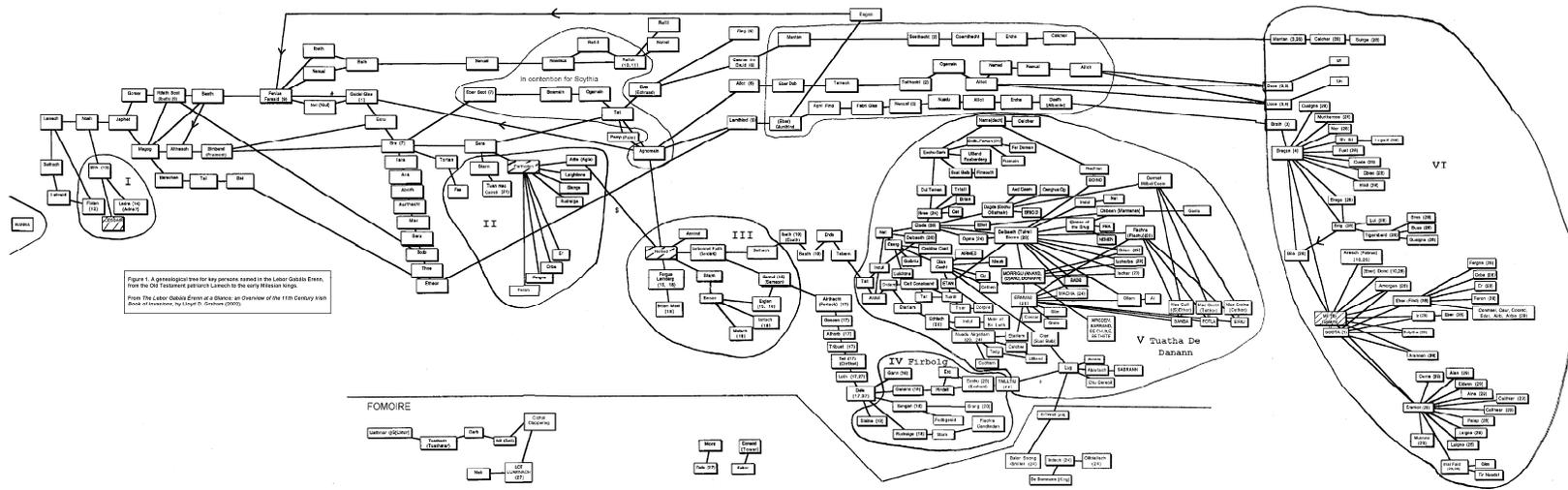
*d.* Several different accounts exist for the origins of the Tuatha De Danann. A harmonized account, which reconciles the major variants into a single narrative, might read as follows:

After the defeat of the Nemedians at Conaing's Tower, the seed of Bethach s. Iarboneil the Soothsayer s. Nemed fled from Ireland into the north of the world (to wit, the northeast of Scandinavia) where they learned magic and wizardry. There were four cities where they acquired this knowledge, to wit Failias, Goirias, Findias, & Muirias. Thereafter they went to Greece for further training and to seek "the maiden", whom they captured. During their time there they were accounted poets of the Greeks, and they had a special power of sailing together on the seas without the need for ships. After their training in Greece was complete, they travelled to Dobar and Iardobar (poss. River Dour, Aberdeenshire) in north Scotland, where Nuada was their king for 4-7 years. Then they came in dark clouds to Ireland, and alighted on the mountain of Conmaicne Rein (identified as being in southern Leitrim); or alternatively, they came to Ireland in ships, which they burnt on landing, and proceeded under cover of the dark clouds of steam and smoke to Sliabh an Iarinn (a mountain in Co. Leitrim, which still bears this name).

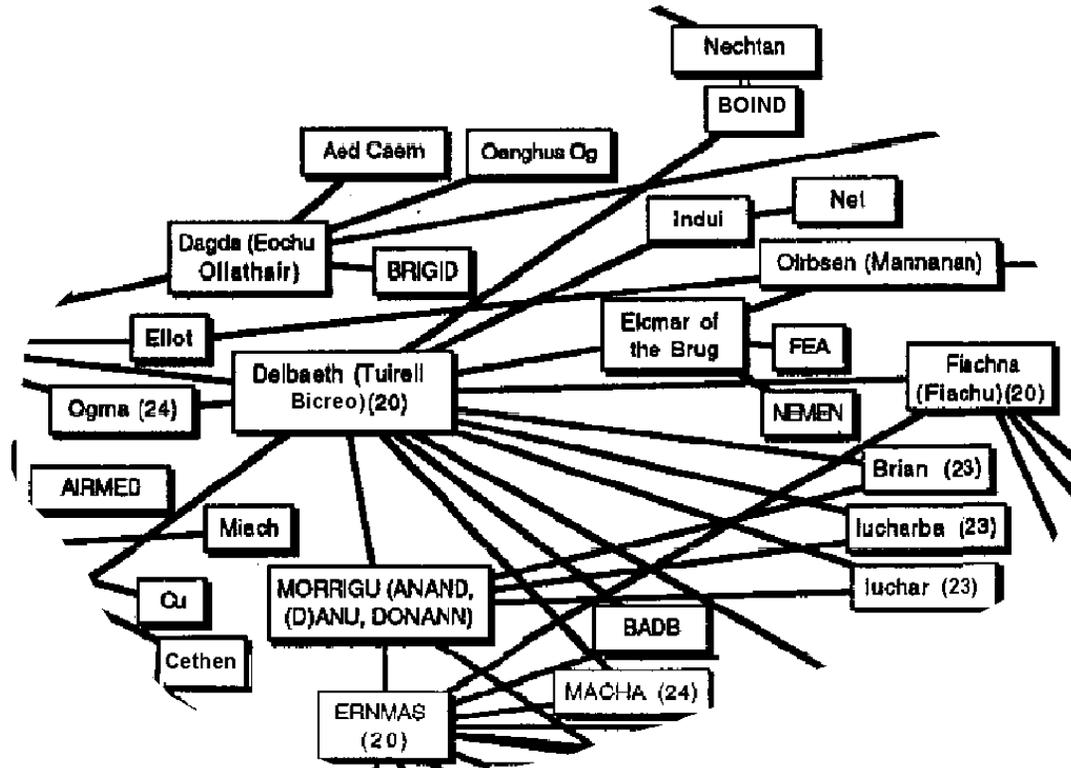
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**Figure 1. A genealogical tree for key persons named in the Lebor Gabála Érenn, from the Old Testament patriarch Lamech to the early Milesian kings.**

The figure is provided in full at the end of this document. This is how the Figure is structured...



and the following is a close-up from the Tuatha De Danann part of the Figure...



*Conventions & symbols in the Figure:*

Line linking boxes means left person begat right person

-<- (reverse arrow) means reverse of the usual convention (i.e. rightmost begat leftmost)

Multiple lines - if different redactions provide different lineages, then all versions are shown whenever practical (especially if this merely requires placement of additional links between persons already included in the Figure). Note that only R<sup>1</sup> has been followed for persons in the LGE section entitled *The Early History of the Gaedil*.

(Name) denotes an alternative name for a person

(number) directs reader to a numerical footnote (see below)

Curving lines enclose each of the different Invasions, and the Roman numeral (I-V) in each enclosure corresponds to the Invasion number in Table 1. Two other enclosures are also present; these group people with a common activity that is specified by the caption within the box. Lastly, a zig-zag line partitions the Fomoiré into a strip along the bottom of the Figure.

/// cross-hatching of a box shows that this is the person for whom the Invasion is named. If the Invasion is not named for a person, then the name of the Invasion is printed next to the Roman numeral for the Invasion.

Female names are in CAPITALS

= or || linking boxes indicates persons were husband and wife

\$ means unspecified number of generations (more than one)

# means fosterage

[ ] notes some significant attribute of the person

#### *Numerical footnotes to the Figure:*

1. Scota = dau. of Pharaoh. In her first appearance (Macalister ¶18) she is dau. of Manetho's Khenkheres (Dyn 18); this Scota is the wife of Nel and mother of Gaidel Glas. In her second appearance (Macalister ¶410) – the only one shown in Fig. 1 – she is dau. of Nectanebo II (Dyn 30); this Scota is the wife of Mil.
2. shared joint rule
3. came to Spain
4. built tower in Spain, at Brigantia
5. saw Ireland from top of Spanish tower, first to visit Ireland, killed there by the Tuatha De Danann
6. chiefs during Caspian Sea voyage
7. together led the flight from Egypt
8. contemporary battle-heroes in 'Mil in Egypt' variation
9. at tower of Babel
10. Aireach & Dond were born of Seng d. Refloir, the first wife to Mil
11. killed by Mil in 'Mil in Egypt' variation
12. born of Bochra (= 'Ocean', female), Fintan survives Flood and lives until Milesians
13. 'Life'
14. Adna signifies 'Ancient'
15. champions against Fomoiré after death of Nemed; attacked Conand's tower and survived (with 27 others) to flee into exile
16. these names appeared previously as leaders of Fomoiré vs. Nemed
17. fled to the North of the world
18. Fir Domnain component of Fir Bolg
19. Gaileoin component of the Fir Bolg
20. present at 1st Battle of Mag Tuired
21. survived successive invasions; knew about Cessair, so possibly identified with Fintan (see note 12)

22. daughter of Mag Mor, king of Spain
23. the Three Gods of the Tuatha De Danann
24. present at 2nd Battle of Mag Tuired
25. in some versions, the Ethliu/Ethlend is father (rather than mother) to Lug
26. identified as Fomorian kings in manuscript *Cath Maige Tuireadh*
27. names shared by Fomorian & Fir Bolg identities
28. leaders of the 'Sons of Mil' who arrived in Ireland to avenge Ith
29. born in Ireland
30. identified by one source with Nuadu Airgetlam
31. full name, 'Bodb of the Mound over Femen', has been abbreviated to fit into the Figure

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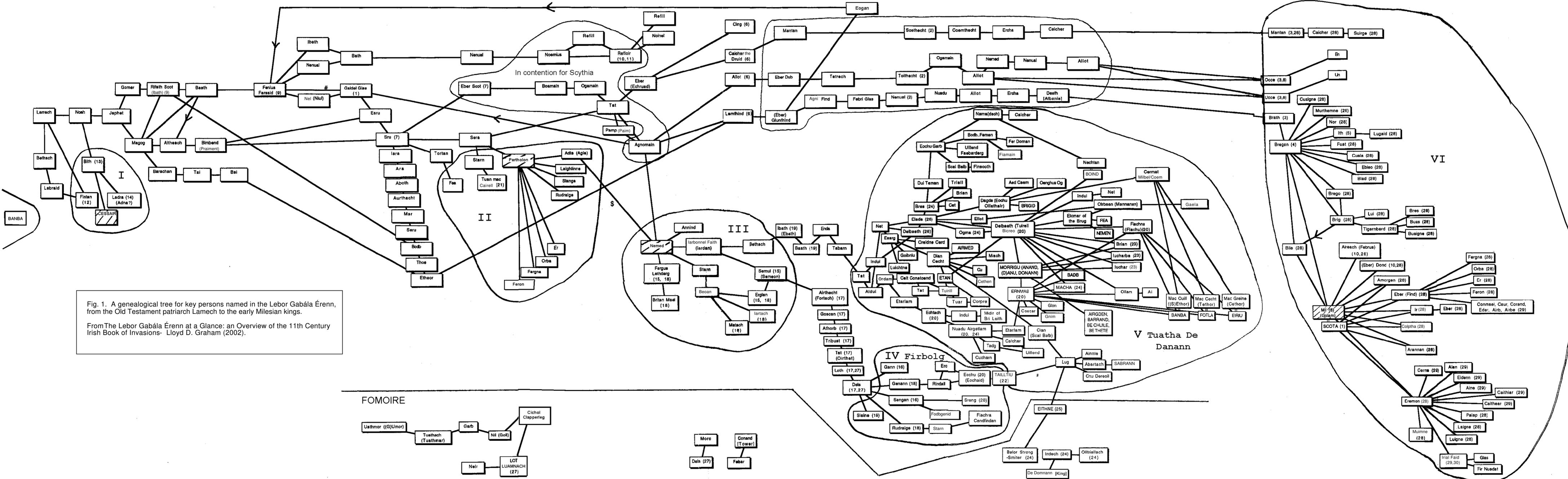


Fig. 1. A genealogical tree for key persons named in the Lebor Gabála Érenn, from the Old Testament patriarch Lamech to the early Milesian kings.  
 From The Lebor Gabála Érenn at a Glance: an Overview of the 11th Century Irish Book of Invasions- Lloyd D. Graham (2002).