A Fitzpatrick Clan Crest on the National Harp: How recognizing a dynastic emblem reveals a tradition of heraldry on early Gaelic harps and may solve the mystery shrouding the origins of Ireland's national icon.

By Eóghan Rian Mac Giolla Phádraig

The 15th century Trinity College harp, earliest surviving medieval Irish cláirseach and archetypical icon of Gaelic identity, shows the heraldic crest of the Mac Giolla Phádraig (Fitzpatrick) clan of Upper Ossory carved into the wood adorning the harp's forepillar. Is this merely a decorative coincidence, or is there a connection between this famous artifact and the lords of Upper Ossory? This paper examines heraldry upon four early harps, offers insights into their medieval social context and evolution, and posits an origin for Ireland's national icon.

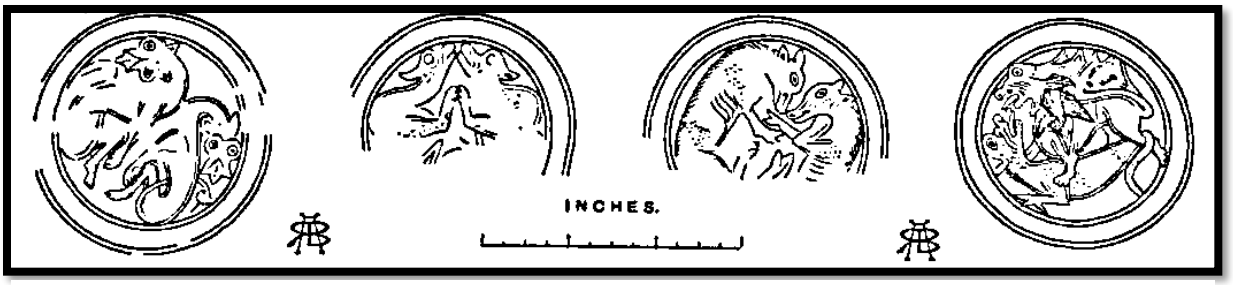
The Trinity College harp, also known as the Brian Boru harp or the O'Neill harp, is second only to the shamrock as the most famous Irish national icon, being donated to that school by William Burton Conyningham in 1782. Since then, this instrument, termed a *cláirseach* in Irish (*pl. cláirseacha)*, has become the quintessential symbol of Gaelic identity. Musicologist Mary O'Donnell stated: "For centuries, the Irish harp, the revered instrument of early Gaelic society with over a thousand years of history, has been the ultimate signifier of Ireland and Irishness."[1] The Trinity College harp saw its rise to predominance as a modern civic symbol after its adoption as the prototype for the official emblem of the Irish Free State in 1922. This aristocratic instrument is on a short list of important material objects whose likeness has become an internationally recognized image, alongside the British crown and the American Liberty Bell. Richly decorated with Gaelic knotwork, animal motifs, foliage, crosses and other Christian inscriptions, this distinctive Irish cláirseach looks markedly different from modern European orchestral harps, harkening to an age when Ireland's elites prized its sublime metallic sound as the height of music. In heraldry, a harp has represented Ireland long before its modern independence; yet it was usually non-native harp styles depicted upon arms which did not necessarily reflect the construction of an actual cláirseach. Other heraldic harps bearing the shaggy heads of lions, or winged angels import a sense of foreign ascendency, not reflecting the true construction of the Irish cláirseach. Such subtle indicators of outside control were anathema to the mindset of a newly autonomous Irish government seeking to reassert ancient Gaelic independence. Thus, the founding fathers of the Irish Free State rejected other heraldic styles of harps and specifically chose the Trinity College harp as their model to emphasize a strong Gaelic identity. While O'Donnell elsewhere points out how the Trinity College harp is now losing its iconographic power in a progressive, Eurocentric Ireland, it remains ubiquitous as Ireland's official government insignia: on the national arms, the Presidential flag, Irish passports, Euro coins, etc. - and has long served as the corporate logo for one of Ireland's most famous exports, Guinness.[2] The world recognizes the image of this historic harp as synonymous with Irish identity, and therefore it should come as a surprise that the decorative carvings upon the harp have not received greater analysis. The harp is depicted upon modern heraldry, but I propose that there is an ancient type of

[1] O'Donnell, "Harping to a different tune in the 21st century".

[2] Beginning in the Celtic Tiger years, some government representations of the Irish harp have deviated from the Trinity harp's standard representation into all manner of whimsically abstract, often garishly cartoony variations at great taxpayer expense; and this signals a new state-initiated weakening of nationalist Irish Gaelic identity in the context of a progressivist Ireland, ideologically subservient to EU multiculturalism. See: O'Donnell, "Death of An Icon: Deconstructing The Irish Harp Emblem In The Celtic Tiger Years", 21-39.

native Irish heraldry (*suaithentas*) depicted upon the harp that indicates its original owners; something which has remained unrecognized until now. The Trinity College harp bears four prominent roundels with unique animal motifs carved into the wood in a native Irish style, which modern scholars believe to be original to its construction.[3] One of these symbols can be positively identified as belonging to the Mac Giolla Phádraig clan prior to their formal submission to king Henry VIII in 1539. I bring attention to a longstanding tradition of heraldic representation on Irish and Scottish harps, and posit that all the symbols on the Trinity College harp, as well as the Queen Mary harp belong properly to an under-studied classification of pre-Norman, native Gaelic heraldry; the remnants of which were gradually assimilated into the more Continental heraldic system of post-Norman Ireland.[4] Increasing our understanding of the Trinity College harp's carvings may help us better understand the origins of this iconic instrument, as well as the evolution of the hereditary symbols which are so distinct within Irish heraldry.

Trinity's Zoomorphic Roundels



The four zoomorphic carvings on the forepillar of the Trinity College Harp, as illustrated by Armstrong (1905).

Above is Robert Bruce Armstrong's illustration of the four carved zoomorphic roundels which decorate the Trinity College harp's forepillar; that is, the bowed wood in the front of the harp which is held together with the harmonic curve and sound box by tension from the strings. Facing the forepillar and moving clockwise from the upper left: first, a pair of seated mirrored beasts whose heads turn away from each other. Armstrong suggested these are wolfhounds— entirely possible, given their deep chests and long legs. Their peculiar three-pronged muzzle may be an attempt to depict two floppy or bearded jowls and a lolling tongue; their long tails ending with a tuft. Second, the lower left shows two mirrored canids, either wolves or foxes as indicated by their bushy tails, facing each other, paw to paw. Armstrong's illustration points out the bushing of a tail despite the lower half of this roundel being worn away – an important detail which indicates these two are furred and are not dragons. Third, the lower right of the forepillar shows two mirrored boars, clearly identifiable by their snouts, shoulder bristles, and cloven hooves. Fourth, in the prominent location of the forepillar's *upper right* are the only two animals who are not a matching pair: a bushy-maned lion surmounting a dragon. The dexter (right) paw of the lion is reaching out to the dragon's head; the dragon is regardant, facing back to strike his attacker. These two embattled creatures have a dexter orientation (meaning, facing to the bearer's right/viewer's left), even as they face each other. Are these carvings merely decoration, or are they symbols indicating the harp's original owners? Until now, none of these roundels have been recognized as belonging to the heraldic repertoire of any Irish clan, and therefore were not seen as indicative of the harp's origins. Because harps were high-status items, the images carved into them reasonably stand to be hereditary clan symbols, expressing the lordly Gaelic environments which produced them.

Harps & the Gaelic Aristocracy

Harps hold an inseparable historic connection with the Irish and Scottish nobility, both ecclesiastical and secular. This is often reflected by images of king David, the archetypical God-fearing king and psalmist in the Scriptures who is universally depicted in Irish stone carving and metalwork holding his famous harp. The

[3] Chadwick, "Early Gaelic Harp Info: An Anthology of Source Texts".
[4] O'Shea, "Proto-Heraldry in Early Christian Ireland: The Battle Standards of Gaelic Irish Chieftains".

two earliest surviving Gaelic harps, the Trinity College harp and the Queen Mary harp, bear elaborate ornamentation and intricate carving, exemplifying a rich beauty befitting their elevated station. Numerous sources indicate the close relationship that harpists held with the elites in both Ireland and Scotland, even after the collapse of the Gaelic order.[5] It is well-attested that cláirseacha and the high artistic culture which produced them were entirely dependent on the patronage of the wealthy medieval Irish aristocracy. Prior to the fall of the Irish chiefs in the 17th century, these majestic instruments originated and survived through the hands of the Irish and Scottish upper classes because no one else could afford to build them and hire skilled musicians. Joan Rimmer states:

Plate 3 from John Derrick's "The Image of Ireland" showing an Irish harpist playing for a Mac Sweyne chief; decorated sides of forepillar highlighted.

> "Although in Ireland and Wales in later centuries the harp became associated to a great extent with what is loosely called 'folk-music', this was the result of particular political and social circumstances. The harp has generally been an aristocratic, high art instrument, and nowhere more so than in Ireland in medieval times. It was a valuable object, produced by an expert instrument maker and often exquisitely decorated. A harpist was a skilled specialist musician, and no poor man could have maintained or hired one, any more than he could maintain a racehorse today. The patrons of men of learning, or poets, reciters and harpists, were the Gaelic Irish aristocracy, the Norman-Irish who eventually became indistinguishable in English government eyes from the native lords and, later, the powerful Anglo-Irish families like the Butlers who were Earls of Ormond, and the Fitzgeralds – descendants of Giraldus de Barri's Welsh-Norman uncle, Maurice who were Earls of Kildare."[6]

The harpist's purpose was not merely entertainment, but rather to extoll their lord's genealogy and status. William Tytler summed it well regarding Scottish harpestry: "In the family of every chief, or head of a clan, the Bard was a very considerable person: His office, upon solemn feasts, was to sing or rehearse the splendid actions of the heroes, ancestors of the family, which he accompanied with the harp."[7] Given this emphasis within the Gaelic culture common to Ireland and Scotland prior to the 17th century, it is understood that the chiefs of the greater clans supported harpists, each for their own courtly augmentation, to proclaim their ancestral rights and military prowess. Quality harps and skilled players must have been worth their expense, as it was an opportunity to peacefully display largesse and lordship within medieval Irish society. The role of the court harpist (*cláirseoir*) played directly into this, using his skill to enhance the status of his lord through music. A harp's delicate metallic music echoing through a banqueting hall epitomized the way a clan chief could manifest peacetime expressions of status, courtly refinement, recitation of deeds, and most importantly, of genealogical descent; together with the masterful praise poems of the *filí* and *seanchaí*. While it was the nobility who sustained the patronage of harpists, it was also they who had a vested interest in promoting and protecting their own family or clan symbols – visual tokens of their identity and authority: their clan brand. It is therefore predictable that some early harps might bear symbols and heraldic images associated with the nobles and chiefly families who commissioned the carving of these instruments and patronized the harpists. Even after the fall of the Gaelic order in Ireland which turned elite harpists into itinerant wanderers, the Brian Boru harp of Trinity College Dublin, and the Queen Mary harp in Scotland still have the names of popular monarchs now attached to them, reflecting the lost courtly environments from which these instruments were believed to descend, however legendary the connections to those monarchs may be.

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[5] For a succinct compilation, see: Chadwick, "Early Gaelic Harp Info: an anthology of source texts".
[6] Rimmer, "The Irish Harp", p. 37.
[7] Tytler, "Dissertation on the Scottish Music".

O'Brien or O'Neill harp?

The largest obstacle to understanding the origins of the Trinity College harp has been its doubtful 11th century provenance and pre-modern chain of custody. Though it came into light in Limerick, the actual historical origins of the Trinity College harp have faded into the mists of time. Despite the harp bearing the names the "*Brian Boru harp*" and the "*O'Neill harp*", any association with the O'Brien and O'Neill clans rests on tenuous evidence. The harp's more popular name, *the Brian Boru harp*, references the written accounts which state the instrument was handed down through a succession of medieval owners, beginning with high king Brian Bóruma mac Cennétig (d.1014). To support this, we have only an apocryphal provenance pointing to west-central Ireland prior to its college years, in two versions: first from a 1783 letter by Ralph Ousley after arriving at Trinity College, and in a slightly different second account by Charles Vallancey in his 1786 *Collecteana Rebus Hibernicis*.[8] The story goes that high king Brian Boru's son Donnchad gifted it to the Vatican on pilgrimage in 1064 as an act of penance, where it remained until being re-gifted centuries later, either by Leo X to Henry VIII as *Fidei Defensor,* or by Innocent XI to Charles II. The harp was then supposedly sent to the 1st Earl of Clanricarde, passing then through a lady of the de Burghs to the MacMahons of Clenagh, Co. Clare. About 1756, Henry MacMahon of Clenagh, purportedly gifted the harp (and a letter of its provenance) to Counsellor Matthew MacNamara of Limerick, who then gave it to Ralph Ousley of Limerick. The antiquarian Chevalier Tomás O'Gorman then delivered it to Colonel William Burton Conyningham, who donated it to Trinity College, Dublin in 1782 where it has since remained.[9] Aside from the English kings and Roman Popes, the Irish personas and families in this winding narrative are decidedly from the Irish West coast, with connections to Limerick, Galway and especially strong ties to County Clare. The MacMahons of Clenagh possessed a castle and lands of the east bank of the Fergus River estuary, part of the barony of Bunratty Lower, whose easternmost portion borders Limerick city. O'Gorman and Coyningham both had family ties in Ibrickan and the Burren, Co. Clare, opposite the Aran Islands. Chevalier O'Gorman himself was the descendant of the MacGorman chiefs of Ibrickan, but his grandfather's estates in Drumelihy and Cahermurphy had been confiscated in 1691 for high treason as a result of his Jacobite support in the Williamite wars.[10] In a twist of fate, O'Gorman received financial backing to search out the harp from William Burton Conyningham, whose own family was awarded some of O'Gorman's lost patrimony.[11] However, most authors on the subject dismiss this received tradition as a romantic fabrication of O'Gorman's forging, or reckon it as an honest recitation, only partially true towards its more recent portions. Historian William Grattan-Flood was incredulous to the narrative prior to the harp's custody by Henry MacMahon of Clenagh, stating: "The latter account looks very circumstantial, but the only part that can be accepted without hesitation is the history of the instrument from about the year 1720, when it came into the possession of Henry MacMahon."[12] Famed harpist and harp-maker Paul Dooley writes:

> "The Trinity College harp, assumed to be from the fifteenth century, is the oldest surviving harp in Ireland, and quite possibly the oldest surviving triangular-framed harp in Europe. … The history of this particular harp is obscure, and nothing is known of its makers. It is known to this day as the 'Brian Boru Harp' but its association with the famous high king appears to be nothing more than a romantic fabrication. The date of its construction is generally agreed to be sometime between 1400 and 1500."[13]

Historians do not accept that the famous 11th century king Brian Boru had any connection with this harp, which is believed to be constructed three to four centuries after his floruit. The famous antiquarian, George Petrie, tore down this narrative in Edward Bunting's *The Ancient Music of Ireland*; dismissing it in part based on the lack of any O'Brien heraldic imagery on the instrument combined with the presence of a small silver

[8] Chadwick, "Early Gaelic Harp Info: Trinity College Harp: Damage".
[9] Hayes, "A Forgotten Irish Antiquary: Chevalier Thomas O'Gorman 1732-1809", p 1.
[10] Ibid.
[11] O'Halloran, "Antiquaries: Wine, genealogy and cross-dressing."
[12] Flood, "The Story of the Harp", p 42. "
[13] Dooley, "Reconstructing the Irish Harp", p 107-108.

plaque which he regarded as an O'Neill escutcheon, which is now lost.[14] Eugene O'Curry agreed in part, explaining away the O'Neill's Red Hand escutcheon as an O'Brien symbol, and raising the possibility of the harp originating with the 13th century Donnchadh Cairbreach Ó Briain instead of the 11th century Donnchadh mac Briain.[15] That Petrie and O'Curry expected such a royal item to bear recognizable symbols pertaining to Brian Boru or the O'Brien clan should not be understated: they assumed that the existence of any such symbol would be strong proof of the harp's original owners. In that presumption, the presence of an O'Neill badge was heavier evidence in Petrie's mind of the harp's origins, when weighed against its emergence from Limerick with improbable romantic associations with Brian Boru. For O'Curry, it was necessary to harmonize the O'Neill's Red Hand badge to maintain belief that it was an O'Brien harp.

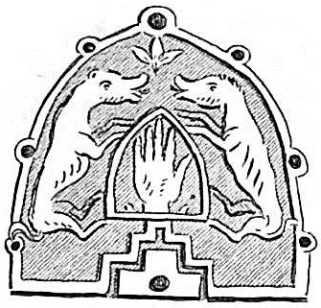

Illustration of the lost silver plaque, presumably an O'Neill heraldic device, once affixed to the Trinity harp.

The lost silver plaque bore what is probably the famous Red Hand of Ulster, an ancient symbol widely used by many clans, but best connected with the O'Neill dynasts.[16] Petrie naturally supposed this heraldic badge to indicate the harp's original owner, and this gave rise to its other name, "*the O'Neill harp*". Because the harp also has the Christogram "IHS" carved into the left side of the neck, combined with its smaller frame size, he thought this indicated an ecclesiastical purpose, and thus attributed its manufacture to one of several bishops with the O'Neill surname rather than with any prince or chief.[17] However, later authors, such as Armstrong, regarded the heraldic plaque badge to be a decorative addition affixed to the forepillar long after the harp's construction. Therefore, while perhaps an indication of a former owner, the plaque is not a reliable indication of the harp's original provenance.[18] No narrative of O'Neill ownership exists; however, one of the last musicians to ever play it was the famed blind harpist Arthur O'Neill (d. 1816), who himself attributed its original ownership to Brian Boru. Ralph Ousley's 1783 letter states that the Trinity College harp once held "more ornaments of plate than are now to be seen" which have since been pilfered; these lost plaques may have also borne other arms as well. It's quite possible that what Petrie and others presume to be an O'Neill clan badge, could merely be a heraldic badge representing Ulster, and that the other missing augmentative plaques may have also borne badges for Ireland's other provinces of Leinster, Munster, and Connacht, which would accord with the absence of an O'Neill provenance. Modern authors follow Armstrong in that the silver heraldic plaque is likely a later decorative enhancement, almost certainly not original to the harp's manufacture, which was nonetheless separated from the forepillar in the 19th century. Due to the harp's artistic and structural similarity to the Scottish Queen Mary and Lude harps, Dooley noted speculations that it was perhaps crafted in western Scotland and brought to the O'Neills in Ulster. Harp expert Simon Chadwick states:

> "The usual dates suggested for the harp ranges from the 14th to the 16th century. Some scholars have compared it with the Queen Mary harp, the Keills cross slab and other West Highland artwork, and have suggested that it may have been made in South Argyll in the 15th century. However, the method used for such judgements is comparative study of the artwork and decoration, and the decoration of this harp is very under-studied."[19]

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[14] Petrie, "Memoir of Ancient Irish Harp Preserved in Trinity College", pp. 40 - 41. Petrie's opinion was that the presence of heraldry on the harp reduced the case for a pre-Norman origin.

[15] O'Curry, "On the Manners and Customs of the Ancient Irish" p 271-278.

[16] The hand on the escutcheon is not explicitly red, nor exclusively O'Neill, but this is the most likely assumption despite the large numbers of Irish arms that bear hands as charges. The famous Red Hand, while of Irish origin, is not exclusively an O'Neill emblem; being also widely dispersed among the arms and crests of numerous clans on both sides of the North Channel.

[17] IHS can be interpreted as meaning "ΙΗΣΟΥΣ ΗΜΕΤΕΡΟΣ ΣΩΤΗΡ" (*Iēsous Hēmeteros Sōtēr:* "Jesus our Saviour"), or in Latin as "In Hoc Signo [Vinces]" ("In this Sign, [Conquer]"); the carving can be alternatively seen as "IHC".

[18] Armstrong, "Musical instruments, Part 1: The Irish and Highland Harps*",* p 58-61.

[19] Chadwick, "Early Gaelic Harp Info: Trinity College Harp: History".

Just as no obvious O'Brien or Dalcassian symbols from Clare appear, none of the carved decorations or zoomorphic symbols on the Trinity College harp reveal a recognizable connection with the O'Neills or any of the West Highland clans. Thus, neither of the harp's names, invoking king Brian Boru nor the O'Neills, satisfactorily indicates the harp's creators with any certainty. Yet Petrie and others clearly expected that there would be some hereditary clan symbol which signaled the harp's original owners.

A Tradition of Heraldry Upon Early Gaelic Harps

Petrie's expectation of heraldic symbols was by no means amiss because we can see this same tradition on the forepillars of two 17th century Irish harps which bear heraldic devices and inscriptions from the powerful Geraldines, thus leaving the ownership of those harps in no doubt. The forepillar of the Fitzgerald-Kildare harp bears the well-known red saltire of the Fitzgerald arms, with a crescent cadency mark and their distinctive ape crest atop a helm. These arms are decoratively outlined in red, bearing an inscription "*RFG*" above, and "*fecit anno 1215*" below.[20] The remaining forepillar of the 1621 Dalway harp bears the arms of Sir John MacEdmond Fitzgerald of Cloyne, Co. Cork, marshalled alongside the arms of his wife, lady Ellen Barry, as well as the full armorial achievement of King James I. This harp also bears a battle cry in Latin: "*Bravery flourishes by wounds*", and "*Press forward*". The carved upper body of a queen holding a scepter atop the forepillar appears to be the royal embodiment of this harp, connecting it with the elaborate inscription which boldly declares: "*I am the queen of harps. I sound, I conquer. I rule…[animals] men.*"[21] In addition to the Latin inscription which states the initials of those who commissioned the instrument is a longer inscription in Irish, enumerating many important household staff, retainers, craftsmen, and artisans in Fitzgerald's court of Cloyne - including the harp's maker, Donnchadh fitz Teig, and musician, Giolla Phádraig Mac Críodán. This clearly demonstrates that these harps were high-status objects, finely crafted to reflect their own specific courtly environments. Their heraldic decoration displays their social context. They bear the marks of high social status, giving specific reference to their noble owners primarily through armorial displays on the forepillar, and in the Dalway's case, even the naming the ranks of individuals who served as their clients. The Gaelic harp is thus a vehicle for displaying courtly relations within an Irish lordship: an expensive, revered instrument decorated with clan symbols denoting ownership, authority, with the potential to indicate marriage alliances and named relationships with various supporting families and clientele. Such performances must have been incredibly potent upon an audience: not only would beautiful music and words invisibly pierce the audience, but the body of the harp itself was a feast for the eyes, decorated with symbols that carried meaning, potentially relating to the songs.

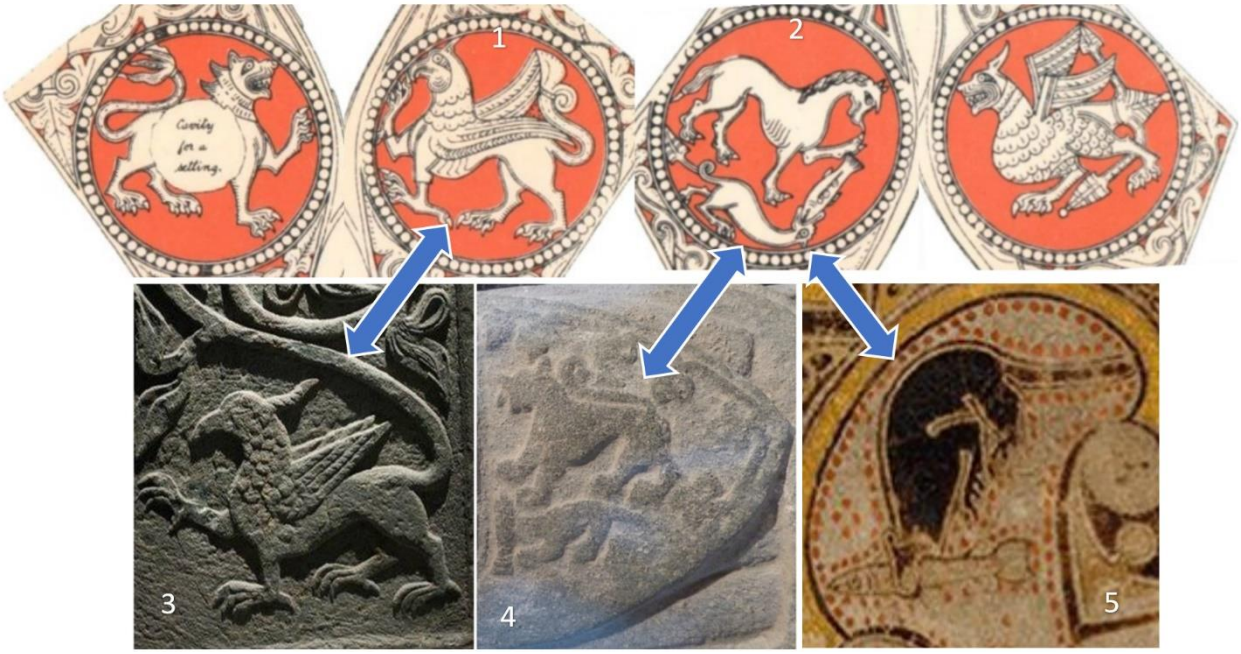
Heraldic achievements on the fragments of the Dalway harp. Image from "Irish and Highland Harps" by R.B.

Arms on the Fitzgerald-Kildare harp. Image from "Irish and Highland Harps" by R.B. Armstrong.

Like the two Fitzgerald harps, we can also perceive the same tradition of adorning forepillars with identifiable heraldic symbols from an even earlier period on the Trinity College and Queen Mary harps. The Queen Mary harp is closest to the Trinity College harp in period, construction, and decoration, and is reputed to have once held the arms of Scotland in gold atop the forepillar, in addition to an image of the face of Mary Queen of Scots. This image of Queen Mary, described in a letter as a "portrait", has been determined to most likely have been a gold coin, later affixed to the wood long after the harp's construction and along with the Scottish arms, was ripped off by despoiling soldiers in

[20] Rimmer states the inscription date to be 1275. Chadwick paid close attention to this detail, helpfully providing his own colorized rendition carving on his Early Gaelic Harp Info archived website.

[21] Rimmer, "The Irish Harp", p 75-76.



Comparison of gryphon (1 & 3), and unicorn over an otter biting a salmon (2 & 4) between Bruce Armstrong's 1905 illustration of the Queen Mary roundels above, and two MacKinnon gravestone carvings from Iona below. Gillebrìde MacKinnon's shield (4; image courtesy of Karen Loomis) has been cropped and oriented 90 degrees to the left to set unicorn and otter on their feet. In situ, this shield is point-down, unicorn and otter under a lymphad. Details in wood and paint are obviously easier to achieve than in stone. Simon Chadwick was the first to make this connection. Image of an otter biting a salmon from the Book of Kells (5; bottom of folio 34r), believed to have been produced on Iona. Note even the dotted outline border of the Queen Mary roundels, as in Book of Kells illustrations.

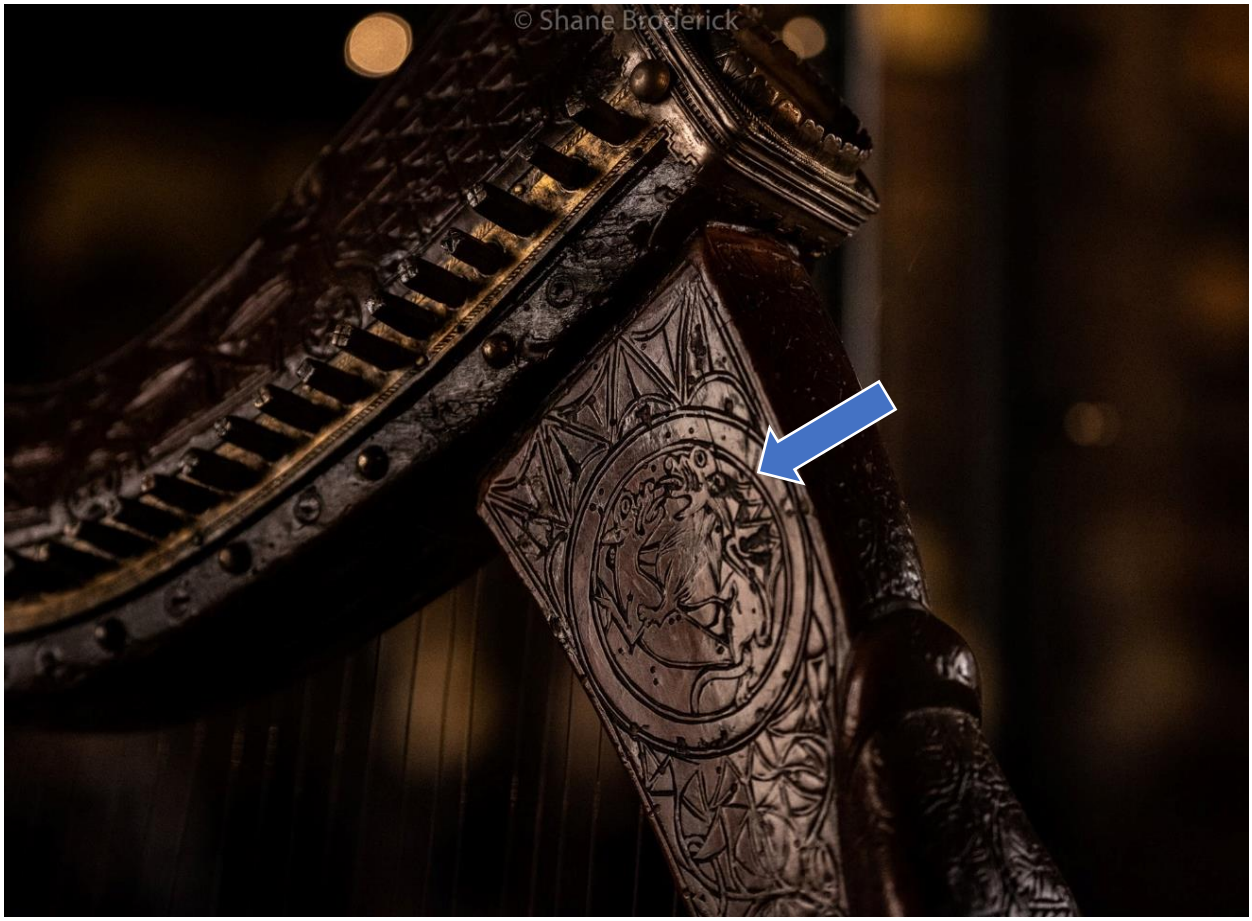
1745.[22] While any association of this Scottish harp with the historical Queen Mary is most likely just as fictious a the Trinity College harp's connections to Brian Boru, these later heraldic additions confirm the practice of displaying arms upon forepillars. Yet the Queen Mary also has four roundels like the Trinity, likewise each hosting its own unique beasts: upper right is a lion passant, upper left is a griffin passant, lower left is a wyvern, and bottom right is an enigmatic scene of a unicorn standing above an otter swallowing a fish. The appearance of a fish in the mouth of the otter is a solid confirmation that the creature truly is an otter and not a serpent, despite missing its forelegs, which appears to be merely a stylistic subtraction.[23] Lions, gryphons, and unicorns are admittedly ubiquitous in Scottish heraldry, and this may explain why no roundel seemed at first to present any obvious or definitive modern clan associations. However, Simon Chadwick positively identified the lower right roundel bearing the unicorn and the otter as being carved into the lower half of the shield of Gillebrìde MacKinnon, one of several MacKinnon grave slabs located within the church of Relig Odhráin on Iona, pictured above.[24] The stone carving shows the pair oriented to viewer's left and turned sideways. Perhaps in the 15th century, the rules governing West Highland heraldry were less set in stone (pun intended), as the mason appears to have simply made adjustments to fit the unicorn/otter pair within the narrowing confines of a typical kite shield by turning it sideways; the orientation apparently being less meaningful than the symbols themselves. The viewer would be expected to recognize a unicorn standing over an otter. This is essentially a stone snapshot of a Gaelic emblem being squeezed into the borders of a Norman escutcheon. Chadwick also noted the cross of Lachlan MacKinnon within Relig

[22] Sanger, "WireStrungHarp.com: The Queen Mary Harp".
[23] In heraldry, otters are often identified by the presence of a fish in their mouths. Like the heraldic tyger holding a mirror, or the heraldic ostrich biting a horseshoe, the fish in the otter's mouth seems to be a purposeful and well-known device used to distinguish that charge as a species, widely occurring in pan-European heraldry.
[24] Chadwick, "West Highland Heraldry". See also: Chadwick, "Early Gaelic Harp Info: Queen Mary Harp: Decoration: Forepillar".

Odhráin on Iona displaying a gryphon quite like the one on the Queen Mary harp, further connecting the relationship of the Queen Mary to the MacKinnons, shown above left. While the modern MacKinnon arms and crest today bear none of the heraldic beasts found on the Queen Mary, it is significant that the MacKinnon chiefs and abbots buried on Iona from the late 14th to the late 15th century around the time of the Queen Mary's construction did. The rarity of the combined unicorn/otter motif is compelling evidence from Chadwick that further cements the origins of the Queen Mary harp to the 15th century West Highlands. We may be seeing the clan totems of several important MacKinnon men or branches displayed on the Queen Mary together; or the heraldic symbols of important clients within a MacKinnon court (similar to the listing of names of Fitzgerald's court at Cloyne), or various Gaelic aristocratic families close to the MacKinnons who would have also patronized such a harpist, such as Clan Donald. The MacKinnons were one such important client lineage, serving under the MacDonald lordship of the Isles until the close of the 15th century; however, no obvious MacDonald emblems appear on the Queen Mary. I explain below how the placement of each roundel may be suggestive of a spatial hierarchy on the harp, which may reflect social relationships between clans.

The Trinity's Lion & Dragon

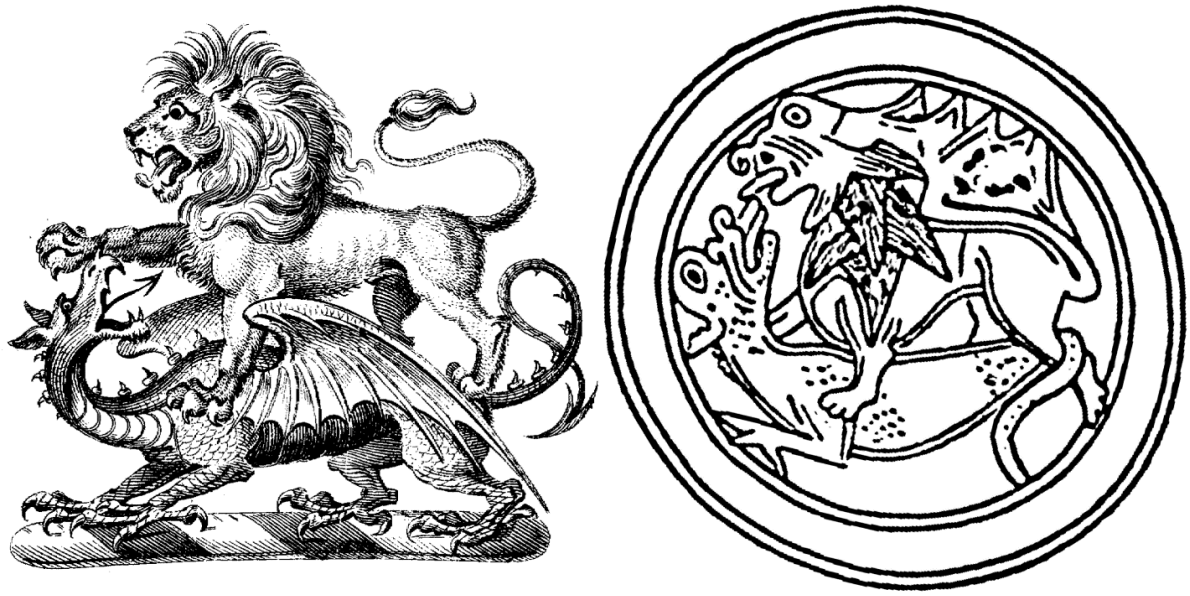
Following the pattern of heraldry on the Queen Mary, Kildare, and Dalway harps, while keeping Petrie's and O'Curry's expectation of aristocratic symbols denoting ownership in mind, we can return to the Trinity College harp to further detect the pattern of clan crests carved upon the forepillar. Like the MacKinnon's unicorn/otter combination, there is indeed a known clan crest carved into the wood of the Trinity College harp which is exclusively borne by a single Irish dynasty. This was first brought to my attention through the



Lion and dragon motiff in the upper right roundel of the Trinity College harp. Photo courtesy of Shane Broderick.

excellently clear photography of Shane Broderick in November 2019.[25]

When I first saw a detailed high-resolution image of this carving, I knew there was no mistaking it: this is clearly a Fitzpatrick (Mac Giolla Phádraig) heraldic crest carved upon the national harp. This lion and dragon symbol was used by the Fitzpatrick chiefs of Upper Ossory in present-day County Laois and other armigerous clan members down to today. It is a very distinctive crest, unique to this clan alone; a totem denoting exclusive association with the Upper Ossory dynasts. No other clan or family anywhere to my knowledge employs these two same creatures battling together in this exact position, either as a heraldic charge, crest, or badge, striking as it is. Lions are ubiquitous across Irish heraldry, but dragons are surprisingly rare. There are ironically far more Irish crests and arms bearing snakes than there are dragons; very few Irish arms display the dragon as a heraldic beast at all. Aside from the Fitzpatricks, no others show a dragon locked in combat with a lion with such high specificity of form as depicted on the Trinity College harp, and this emblem appears with remarkable consistency within that lineage in surviving heraldic illustrations and gravestone carvings at least from the mid-17th century onwards.[26] To confirm my suspicion that this emblem is indeed unique to the Fitzpatricks alone, I reached out to experts in Irish heraldry. Herald of Arms Micheál Ó Comáin for the Office of the Chief Herald of Ireland stated: "I have certainly never encountered the distinctive Fitzpatrick crest used by anyone but a Fitzpatrick."[27] Digital heraldic artist Eddie Geoghagen stated: "As far as I am aware that crest is unique to Fitzpatrick, not just in terms of Irish clans but also it is unique among all crests in Ireland and Britain."[28] Fairbairn's massive compilation of heraldic crests also confirms the Fitzpatrick clan's singular usage of the lion surmounting the dragon.[29] Below is a comparison between a modern illustration of the Fitzpatrick heraldic crest from *Fairbairn's Crests* (at left), and the image of the lion and dragon carving on the Trinity College harp, taken from Armstrong's 1904 illustration in *Irish and Highland Harps:*



Modern engraving of the Fitzpatrick crest (left) compared with 15th c. carving on the Trinity College harp (right).

[25] Many thanks to photographer Shane Broderick for capturing these images and allowing me to use them in this paper. Shane's photographic skill is on display at: https://www.facebook.com/Irishfolklore/ and https://irishfolklore.wordpress.com/.

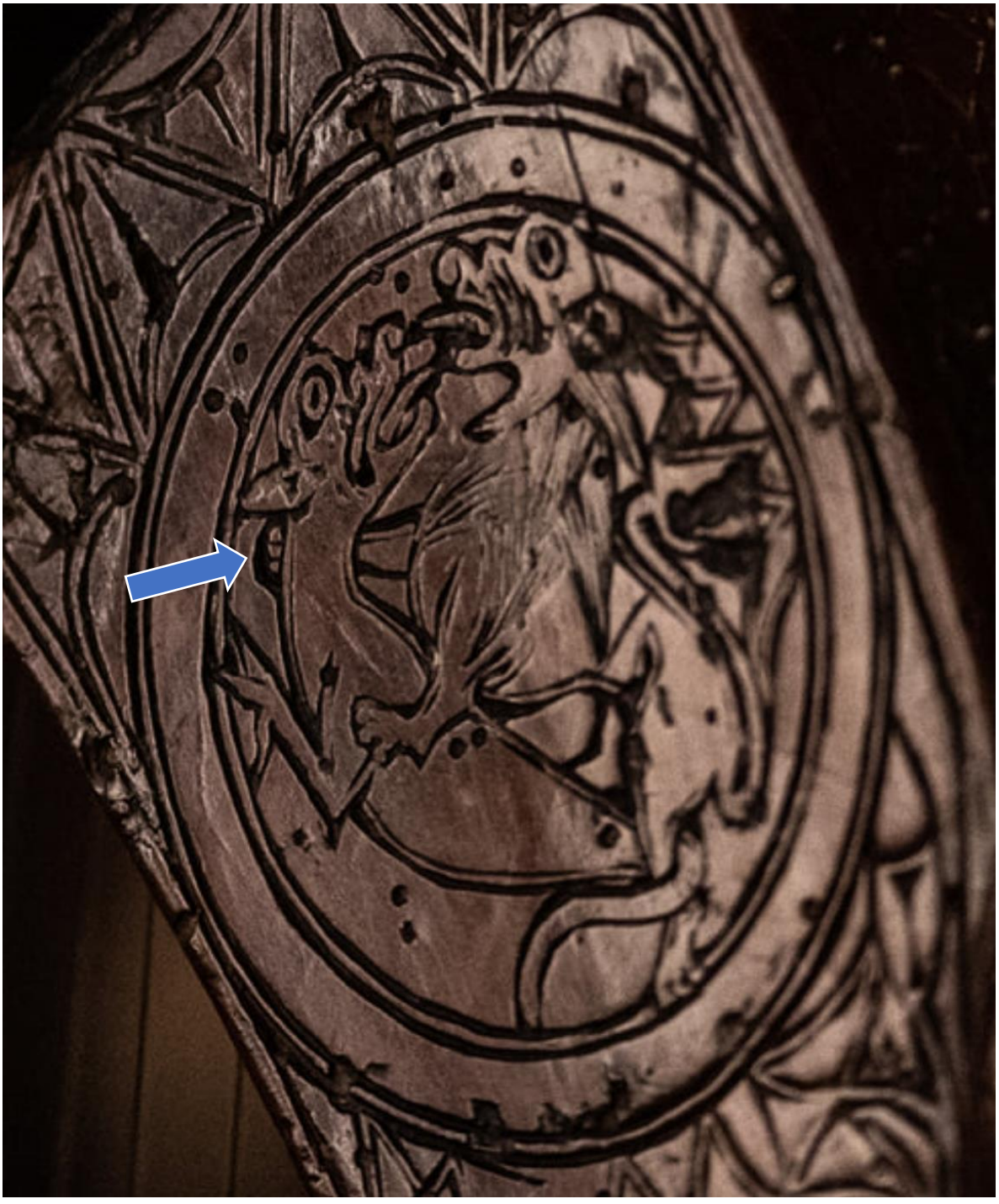
[26] For a list of Fitzpatrick heraldic illustrations, see: Fitzpatrick and Zalewski, "Fitzpatrick Arms, Crests, Mottos and Supporters", in The Fitzpatrick-Mac Giolla Phádraig Clan Society; Heraldry & Tartan

[27] Private email correspondence with the author, 8 September 2020.

[28] Private email correspondence with the author, 25 August 2020. Since 1999, Geoghagen has created thousands of digital images of Irish and European arms for clients worldwide.

[29] Fairbairn, "Fairbairn's Book of Crests of The Families of Great Britain and Ireland. Vol. 2", Plate 73, Figure 8.

The images of the modern Fitzpatrick crest and the lion and dragon carving on the harp are essentially identical. Both emblems remain consistent on the following points: the lion attacking the dragon from a mounted position; the dragon rearing its head in reverse to bite back, while simultaneously supporting the lion; both mouths yawning agape with tongues displayed; the lion's dexter paw, a symbol of its regal authority as king of beasts reaching out towards the dragon's head; and both standing with a dexter orientation. The degree of specificity required in the creatures' heraldic attitude to resemble the Fitzpatrick



A more detailed close-up, noting the lion's right paw reaching towards the dragon's head, its dexter paw visible wrapping behind the dragon's neck below the ear; no small detail, one that is distinctly Fitzpatrick.

crest is very high, and the Trinity College harp carving is a match. While the carving on the harp is done in an Irish style, none of the of the four zoomorphic roundels on the Trinity College harp bear any complex Celtic knotwork or interlacing of appendages which one sees elsewhere in typical Irish decoration from the period. Notice that all four zoomorphic beasts possess all the hallmarks of formal heraldic illustration: tongues lashing out, the lion's tail arcing over its back, with limbs and heads in positions consistent with standardized heraldry across western Europe. The positions of the carved animals in all four roundels on the Trinity harp so closely resemble formal heraldry, that their attitude can even be perfectly described in blazon, minus the tinctures. For the lion and dragon: "a dragon regardant, surmounted by a lion passant." For the seated pair of beasts/dogs: "two wolfhounds sejant regardant." For the pairs of boars and canines, their heraldic attitude could be described as "rampant combatant" or "salient combatant." The same of course can be said of the Queen Mary's menagerie. These decorative carvings then ought not to be assumed to be mere frivolous fancies of the carver's imagination; these beasts were very likely well-known hereditary symbols who were connected to families within the context of their creation. This lion and dragon symbol as it appears on the harp is therefore certainly not generic decoration and was unlikely to be confused with any other lineage or individual either in Ireland or Scotland. The realization then that this emblem is a known hereditary clan symbol carved into the wood is tantamount to finding a brand trademark or a signature of ownership on the harp.

How and when the Mac Giolla Phádraig princes first adopted this symbol is unknown.[30] All extant heraldic illustrations of this crest used by the Upper Ossory dynasts and their cadet branches post-date the submission of their famous chief Brian Mac Giolla Phádraig, who renounced his personal claim over his ancestral Gaelic titles in favor of being restyled by Henry VIII as Barnaby Fitz-Patrick, 1st Baron Upper Ossory in 1541.[31] Carved into the 15th century Trinity College harp we see the apparent crest of the Mac Giolla Phádraig chiefs pre-dating their adoption of the anglicized surname Fitzpatrick, and pre-dating the use of English heraldry. Presumably because the Meic Giolla Phádraig were not yet using Norman-style heraldry in the 15th century, this might explain why the lion and dragon appears within a roundel with no torse of twisted silk under the dragon's feet, as seen in later heraldic illustrations. We have no evidence yet that the distinctive Fitzpatrick arms bearing a white saltire on a black field was employed by the Gaelic lords of Upper Ossory prior to Brian's surrender-and-regrant to Henry VIII; thus making the recognition of this clan symbol on the Trinity College the earliest known depiction of the Fitzpatrick crest (if the word "crest" can even be applied here, as being of the 15th century, there was no helm beneath it yet). It appears then, that the lion and dragon emblem was the Mac Giolla Phádraig's unique native identifying totem from at least the early 1400's, which was later retained as the crest after adopting arms in the following century. It is known that many Irish nobles did this very thing, whereby their ancient Gaelic dynastic emblems translated quite well into the refashioned arms and crests of the Irish chiefs as they adopted Tudor titles over the course of the 16th century; sometimes appearing on the arms, other times becoming the crest.

It is shocking that a known Irish crest from a significant clan has hitherto gone unrecognized on such a famous artifact of national importance, despite being seen by hundreds of thousands of tourists each year on display at Trinity College since arriving there in 1782. This could be due to its exclusive use by the Fitzpatrick chiefs: had it been a more famous crest used widely by numerous other clans, such as the Red Hand of Ulster or the Dalcassian's upraised sword, perhaps it would have been more obvious. But because the lion and dragon crest of Clann Giolla Phádraig is not as well-known, being unique to just that one lineage alone, countless eyes passed over this carved decoration without understanding that it probably signals to us the harp's original owners, just as Petrie and O'Curry anticipated.

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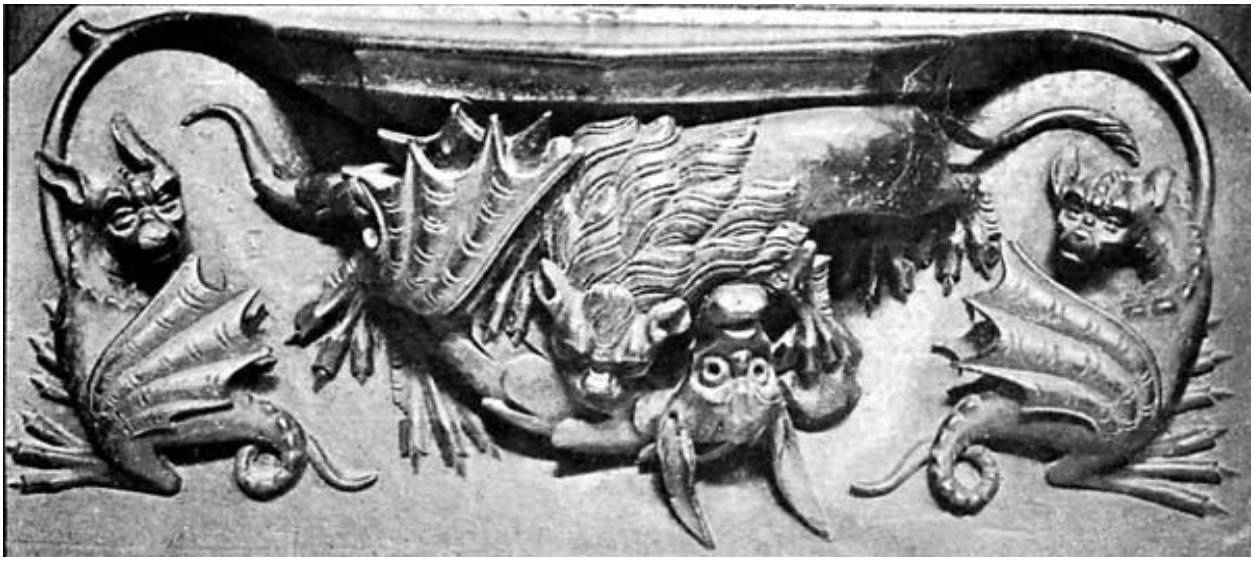
[30] Like St. George slaying the dragon, the motif likely has a symbolic Christian interpretation, with Christ the Lion of Judah overcoming Satan the great serpent. However, as the Mac Giolla Phádraig dynasty had split prior to the Norman arrival in Osraige and reconsolidated upon their expulsion from Kilkenny into western Laois, it might allude to one branch of the dynasty gaining supremacy through reunification with another; not unlike the symbolism contained in the Tudor Rose.

[31] Zalewski and Fitzpatrick, "Descendants of Bryan Fitzpatrick, Lord & First Baron of Upper Ossory, 2nd ed.".



Above: A lion wrestles with a dragon on a 15th century misericord in Carlisle cathedral. Such an image in an ecclesiastical context invokes the battle of good versus evil, of Christ over the devil. Misericords such as this occur across Ireland, Britain, and Europe, but the battling beasts never take the more rigid heraldic postures required to match the Fitzpatrick crest. Photo courtesy of David Badke.

Below: Leonardo da Vinci's 1517 sketch "Dragon Striking Down a Lion." Interestingly, within a century of the construction of the Trinity College harp, Leonardo da Vinci expressed the inverse of the Fitzpatrick crest in his notebooks. Image courtesy of leonardodavinci.net.

To demonstrate that this is not merely a decorative happenstance, it is important to acknowledge here that lions have been fighting dragons in the minds of artists across the world for centuries. The brute pair are not uncommon in art. Many examples of lions locked in mortal combat with dragons do exist outside of this Irish artifact, most often seen in misericords, church architecture, and manuscript illustration throughout Western Europe; other examples in stone carving, mosaics and metalwork can be seen even as far as Iran, India, China, and Japan.[32] Given that lions and dragons are the two apex predators in medieval bestiaries, it is easy to see why such a fearsome contest would ignite the imagination. Most examples in Western Europe have ecclesiastical contexts where the battle alludes to the God-man Jesus Christ, the Lion of Judah overcoming Satan, the great serpent who deceived mankind in Eden. It may also hearken to Psalm 91 (MT)/90 (LXX), verse 13: "Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet."[33] However, other depictions of lions fighting dragons are simply for the sheer delight of the ferocious combat. The contemporary genius Leonardo Da Vinci illustrated the inverse of the Fitzpatrick crest with a huge wyvern surmounting a regardant lion in 1517, likely within a century after the Trinity College harp's construction. Battles between these two heraldic heavyweights clearly captivated many minds. Yet in all the examples in historic art I have seen where lions get medieval with dragons, they appear in many other different positions, never taking the distinctly rigid heraldic postures (*attitude*) shown in both the Fitzpatrick crest and the Trinity College harp, and therefore hold no intentional heraldic meaning. Not just any lion-on-dragon royal rumble will indicate association with the lords of Upper Ossory; both beasts must achieve the correct posture. When these two heavyweights are found in an Irish Gaelic context showing the lion with right paw extended surmounting the regardant dragon, -the pair having a dexter orientation- only then does the criteria for imitating the Fitzpatrick crest narrow to a match. This said, there are enough Fitzpatrick heraldic achievements extant to show several examples of slight variations from the standard positions in their own right, all else remaining the same. Wings and legs were sometimes optional for dragons unless otherwise stated. Blazons for individual arms sometimes specify minor differences, such as the lion's tail being extended straight out, or in the case of the Lords Castletown who overcame technical illegitimacy resulting from Catholic marriage: "the whole debruised by a bendlet wavy."[34] Such instances are modern heraldic variations on a traditional archetype. With the original archetype for the Fitzpatrick crest remaining unchanged, these few outlying examples can be recognized as deviations from the norm and may reflect artistic errors, flair by the illustrator, or occasionally revealing the socio-political position of the individual armiger.

Various examples of Fitzpatrick heraldic crest illustrations & carving, showing slight artistic variation. Image use courtesy of NLI.

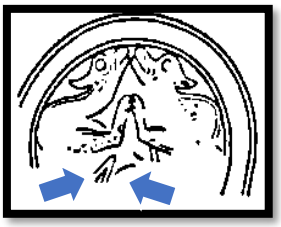
[32] An incomplete list of examples of lions fighting dragons includes: New York Cloisters 14 002 Fuentiduena chapel (Spain, ca. 1200); misericords in Ely cathedral Lady chapel, in a capital in the canopy, north side (ca. 1340); Worcester cathedral choir stalls (14th cent.); Carlisle cathedral (early 15th cent.); Abbey of St. Werburgh, #29, Chester (15th cent.), Manchester cathedral (early 16th century); Ripon cathedral; and Exeter cathedral; St. Mary's cathedral, Limerick (north transept, early 16th cent.). None attain the specific position seen in the Mac Giolla Phádraig/Fitzpatrick crest.

[33] Psalm 91:13 KJV

[34] Fitzpatrick and Zalewski, "Fitzpatrick Arms, Crests, Mottos and Supporters", in The Fitzpatrick-Mac Giolla Phádraig Clan Society; Heraldry & Tartan, p 3.

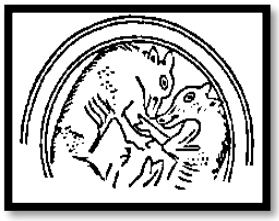
Other Possible Ossory Connections

Two of the other roundels on the forepillar possibly hint towards an Upper Ossory construction, but the evidence is weaker. To my knowledge, these other decorations are not an exact match to any known Irish arms. The Trinity College harp's other roundels show symmetrical beasts – a common motif which appears in the arms of many other Gaelic Irish surnames.[35] It is tempting to think that the two damaged canids with bushy tails on the lower left of the forepillar may be the two salient foxes depicted on the arms of the O'Dunphys, who claim to be a branch of the Fitzpatrick clan descended from Donnchadh Mac Giolla Phádraig, king of Osraige (d. 974).[36] Just as the harp's carver over-emphasized bushy fur of the lion's mane to ensure its proper identification, likewise he did so with these tails; making foxes the most likely candidates, given that foxes' tails are their chief ornament and most pronounced amongst all canids. *Burke's General Armory* shows a grant of arms for Henry Michael Dunphy using two foxes salient combatant; a very similar motif to the two canines on the Trinity forepillar.[37] Henry was the son of Michael Dunphy of Rathdowney, Co. Laois, in Upper Ossory.[38] However, these foxes may have been simply attached to the Dunphy name in modern times through the Ulster King of Arms office, merely because it shares the same root in Gaeilge as the O'Donoghue clan of Kerry who bear similar arms: "*O Donnchadh.*" This is speculative and requires confirmation either way.



Two foxes salient combatant, on the Trinity College Harp. Armstrong's illustration includes what is likely a portion of a bushy fox tail (blue arrows), matching the style of the very bushy tail and mane of the lion in the upper right roundel. Arms of Dunphy of Upper Ossory courtesy of Eddie Geohegan.

The two boars in another roundel are also tenuously reminiscent of the O'Doran arms. The O'Dorans were an illustrious *brehon* clan in service to the Mac Giolla Phádraigs of Upper Ossory and other ranking families throughout greater Leinster, such as the Mac Murrough-Kavanaghs. Only one counter-changed boar exists on the O'Doran arms today, but clearly the double-coloured boar is the primary totem of the O'Doran clan. Perhaps a 14th century O'Doran branch in Ossory used two boars, which may be alluded to in the black and white counter-changed colors. This suggests that the Trinity College harp, like the two later Fitzgerald harps, probably shows the heraldic devices of important clans who were socially connected to the Mac Giolla Phádraigs at the time of the harp's construction. Just as the later Fitzgerald harps show family symbols who were close to their owners, so to might a Gaelic harpist have reason to display the symbols of important regional families. The fourth roundel with the double lions or wolfhounds sejant regardant is obscure and does not have recognizable corresponding arms; but the ubiquity of mirrored beasts in Irish arms certainly lends itself towards a clan or sept interpretation. This could possibly represent another chief from a cadet branch of the Mac Giolla Phádraigs; or another important client kindred or marriage alliance, such as O'Carrolls of Ely; or perhaps even indicate the harp's maker or musician as a member of the *áes dána* (the class of skilled artisans). It could have been a symbol which has since been discarded, just as the modern MacKinnon clan no longer employs a unicorn statant over an otter enfished, as depicted on the Queen Mary.



Combatant boars with cloven hooves. (Armstrong, 1904.) The O'Doran arms below; brehons in Upper Ossory. Arms courtesy of Eddie Geohegan.

[35] Examples of symmetrical animals on arms (usually lions, often holding or supporting another charge): O'Brennan of Idough, Ely O'Carroll, Collins, O'Donnelly, O'Finnegan, O'Flaherty, O'Fogarty, Hynes, O'Holohan, O'Kelly of Ui Maine, MacKeown, O'Meagher, O'Mulvihil, O'Neill, O'Quinlan, O'Reilly, O'Shaunghnessy, O'Sullivan, and O'Trehy.
[36] Shearman, "Loca Patriciana", p 364.
[37] Burke, "The General Armory of England, Scotland, Ireland, And Wales; Comprising A Registry of Armorial Bearings from The Earliest to The Present Time*"*, p 308.
[38] Thanks to Eddie Geohegan for pointing this out.

Forepillar Placement & Shape

With regards to where these symbols are consistently displayed, the forepillar appears to be the surface which is best suited to present these miniature icons of status and power. Experts have speculated as to whether the decoration on the Trinity College harp long post-dated the forepillar's construction, and some even called into question if the forepillar itself was the original or a replacement. While Armstrong regarded some of the harp's decoration to post-date its initial construction, Simon Chadwick regards the decoration "is more likely to all be old if not original."[39] Paul Dooley's extremely thorough examination of the harp's construction proposed that the that the harmonic curve and the soundbox belong to each other and that "the forepillar, although it might be a replacement, was probably made for this harp."[40]

Karen Loomis and Simon Chadwick affirm that the right side of the harp would face the audience as the harpist played with their hands set in the left-treble/right-bass Gaelic style.[41] That means the *upper right* quadrant of the forepillar would be the most prominent surface area on which to carve important symbols for viewers to see. This is exactly where the image of the Mac Giolla Phádraig's lion and dragon crest is positioned on the forepillar, giving it pride of place where it would be most visible to an audience, and thus adds further weight to the conclusion that it was originally owned by the Upper Ossory dynasts. Not unlike heraldic quartering, where the divisions of the field reflect a predetermined rank-order according to seniority or paternity, one might expect the more dominant clan insignia to occupy the locus of increased visibility and status on a Gaelic harp. Thus, we can have greater confidence that these symbols are suggestive of the courtly environments of the harp's original commissioner, as the placement of the four roundels displays an inherent hierarchy of position according to each roundel's potential for visibility. Because the lion and dragon emblem occupy the highly visible upper right roundel, it further suggests the Mac Giolla Phádraigs were behind the harp's construction. It was their clan symbol which had the greatest visibility, carved into the wood.

In all four of the aforementioned early Gaelic harps—the Trinity College, the Queen Mary, the Fitzgerald-Kildare, and the Dalway—the forepillar serves as the most prominent location on the instrument where heraldic symbols were best-positioned to be seen, being the area least obscured by hands or long sleeves of a léine shirt as the harps were played. The earliest of these, the Trinity College and the Queen Mary harps, bear their four roundels on both the left and right sides of the forepillar, whereas the two later Fitzgerald harps bear their armorial decorations on the front. (As mentioned previously, the Trinity College and the Queen Mary harps each had later heraldic augmentations added to the front of the forepillar, post-construction, but now lost.) The forepillar of each of the older two harps is thus flat on both sides to accommodate the totemic roundels, with the front edge being rounded along the whole length of it. Both harps' forepillars have a fish with a head at both ends running the length of the middle. The double-headed fish is a curved cylinder, tapering at both ends, and therefore is ill-shaped for frontal display and better viewed in profile. However, we see the front edge of the later Fitzgerald forepillars has been smoothed flat to accommodate heraldic decoration. The same can be said for images of later harps, such as the portrait of Cork merchant William Archdeacon with his family (c. 1750) which clearly shows the Archdeacon arms painted on the flattened front of his low-headed Irish harp.[42] This evolution in the shape of forepillar corresponds with the deliberate planning and placement of heraldic insignia, as harp makers transitioned away from older Gaelic styles towards later forms.

The Lude harp and Castle Otway harp may be examples of intermediaries in this transition from placing Gaelic suaithentas within roundels on the sides of the forepillar, towards the eventual placement of roundels and later shield-type heraldry on the front edge instead. The Lude Harp bears an empty, undecorated, roundel in the center front of the forepillar, as if an artist mapped out where to display some

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[39] Chadwick, "Early Gaelic Harp Info: Trinity College Harp: Forepillar".

[40] Dooley, "Reconstructing the Irish Harp", p. 139. Dooley affirms the harmonic curve and soundbox are original; noting the possibility of the forepillar being a replacement but favors its likelihood of being purpose-built for this harp.

[41] Loomis, "The Organology of the Queen Mary and Lamont Harps, Vol. 1", p. 440-443. See also: Chadwick, "Early Gaelic Harp Info: Orientation".

[42] Unidentified artist. *An Irish harper on the continent, ca. 1750*. Irish Traditional Music Archive. *Taisce Cheol Dúchais Éireann*. ITMA Reference: 26626-BK

Gaelic emblem, but never finished it, as Loomis noted.[43] The display of hereditary family symbols on the front edge of the forepillar is a marked change requiring a flat surface on which to place them; which in turn requires the forepillar's fish to be modified. The busyness of the fish's intricate ornamentation and scaly knotwork would compete with the more meaningful dynastic symbols and were thus eliminated, yet while still retaining the overall double-headed fish shape. This may also signal a change in position between the intended audience and the harpist, who probably now faced the audience with forepillar forward, displaying a hereditary emblem on front. The rest of the Lude's body is nude and bare, and lacking the phenomenal beautification adorning the smaller Trinity and Queen Mary, indicating its unfinished state. While one source attributes the origin of the Lude harp to c. 1460, Simon Chadwick has pointed out the uncertainty of this, noting the Lude's construction accords with later harps, specifically mentioning that its forepillar is flat in front (as the Fitzgerald harps are), and not rounded in front as the Trinity and Queen Mary are.[44] This suggests that the Lude is not as old as the Trinity College or Queen Mary harps. The frontal placement of the Lude's roundel on its flattened forepillar likely indicates it is younger than the Trinity and Queen Mary, but probably older than the later Kildare and Dalway harps. The Castle Otway harp, possibly from the 17th or early 18th century has roundels on the sides of the forepillar, as well as two roundels on the flattened front edge, bearing some unidentified regardant beast. Both appear to hold to the tradition of including roundels on the forepillar long after the adoption of standardized heraldic norms. This evolution in harp form likely also corresponds with general social and political trends in Ireland and Scotland, concurrent with other changes in medieval Gaelic society.

The Scottish Lude harp shows a transitional forepillar, as heraldic imagery migrated from the sides of the forepillar to the front. The front edges of harps became flattened to accommodate this change. Blue arrow indicates a traced roundel in which a Gaelic clan badge was likely to be carved; decoration was planned but never executed. Image credit: Goldbunny 88.

The Harp's Commissioners

Who then built the harp? Given that the usual range historians assign to the Trinity College harp spans from the late 14th century to the early 16th, I would venture a few scenarios which plausibly connect the lion and dragon carving on the Trinity College harp to separate branches of the Mac Giolla Phádraig clan. The simplest hypothesis is that this harp was likely commissioned at a time when the Mac Giolla Phádraig lords felt strong and secure in Upper Ossory, and thus would have had both the need and the ability to patronize the arts in their domain. I would connect the construction of this harp then with building of Cullahill Castle, dated by Carrigan to ca. AD 1425 by lord Finighin Mac Giolla Phádraig, which became their principal stronghold in Upper Ossory.[45] The erection of such a large and imposing fortification as the five-storied Cullahill Castle was, indicates that the Mac Giolla Phádraig lordship in the early 15th century was in a period of internal development and possessed the resources to fund their own aggrandizement and expressions of power. The presence of a court harpist would have accorded with the completion of such a structure; indeed, it would have seemed an incomplete Irish castle without one. As the musician would have been a person in the employment of other leading families in Upper Ossory ca. 1425, the appearance of four distinct roundels with different clan suaithentas representing other major patronal lineages (such as the O'Dunphys and O'Dorans) would have been appropriate for display on the forepillar, status-ranked according to visibility. Exactly how this harp might have left Upper Ossory remains unknown, but the destruction of Cullahill by cannonading Cromwellian forces in 1650 could have been a later factor. However, it may very well have been much earlier than this, as the Mac Giolla Phádraigs were by no means confined to Upper Ossory. Several leading branches of the clan

[43] Loomis, "The Organology of the Queen Mary and Lamont Harps, Vol. 1", p. 179.
[44] Chadwick, "Early Gaelic Harp Info: the Lamont harp".
[45] Carrigan, "The History & Antiquities of the Diocese of Ossory, Vol. 2", p 231–233.

ventured westward and entrenched themselves near the top of Clare and Galwegian society at different periods. This is significant when considering the supposed provenance of the Trinity College harp within County Clare and its eventual discovery in Limerick.

An intriguing theory of the harp's origins rests with the Mac Giolla Phádraig clerical lineage of Inisgad (Canon Island), Co. Clare. Inisgad sits in the middle of the River Fergus estuary, and was an independent abbey, a prize of contention amidst 15th century disputes between rival clerical dynasties. That abbey came to be dominated by a cadet branch of the Mac Giolla Phádraig clan in 1426 – coincidentally the same time as the construction of Cullahill Castle back in Upper Ossory – with the arrival of a Dermot Mac Giolla Phádraig, a canon and subdeacon who was dispensed to hold Inisgad and reform the monastery.[46] This family claimed kinship with the Upper Ossory lineage, and their own dynastic grip on the abbey lasted into the early 16th century; bringing them into conflict with the locally powerful MacMahon clerical lineages.[47] As Michael Mac Mahon for the Clare County Library writes:

> "In the 15th century control of the abbey was frequently in contention between the Mac Giollapádraig (Fitzpatrick) and Mac Mahon families, the latter no doubt of the ruling family of Clonderlaw. Dermot Mac Giolla Pádraig was abbot from 1426-78. In 1452 serious charges were made against him by Thomas Mac Mahon who is described as 'a deacon of Killaloe'. Thomas accused the abbot of wilful murder or of having aided or abetted murder as well as breaches of the vow of celibacy and of simony. A papal mandate was issued to the precentor of Emly diocese to look into the case and, if he found the complaints true, to remove Mac Giolla Pádraig, and install Thomas as abbot in his stead. Unfortunately such complaints were commonplace in the medieval Church in Ireland; more often than not they reflected a clash of interests between powerful rival families. It seems clear from the papal letters that mercenary trends were rampant in the Church at this period and accusation and counter accusation by rival claimants to ecclesiastical benefices were the order of the day, each seeking to have the other disqualified on the grounds of some canonical impediment. … The complainant in this case, Thomas Mac Mahon, had himself been given a dispensation from a 'defect of birth' (i.e. canonical illegitimacy) as 'a child of unmarried noble parents'. Reading between the lines we can see that the whole affair was simply an attempt by the local Mac Mahon chieftains to get their hands on the possessions of the abbey. Eleven years later in 1463 another Dermot Mac Giolla Pádraig, who is almost certainly the abbot's son, was also given a dispensation from 'defect of birth' as the son 'of an Augustinian abbot and an unmarried woman'. In the event the abbacy remained in the Fitzpatrick family for virtually the whole of the 15th century. Such a state of affairs was by no means unusual for by that time the Church in Ireland had become almost entirely dynastic."[48]

The abbacy of Inisgad held by Dermot Mac Giolla Phádraig (a. 1426-1478) was succeeded by his son, also named Dermot (a. 1471-1491), and his grandson Maurice Mac Giolla Phádraig (a. 1491-1521).[49] We glimpse these Mac Giolla Phádraig abbots holding on to their position at Inisgad against accusatory clerical attacks from the neighboring MacMahons, who would have dislodged them if their accusations held any truth or merit. Jejune and unsubstantiated accusations against clerics were common in that era when attempting to oust a rival, and as such are inherently unreliable, especially in families of higher social grades.[50] Such claims even made their way into the records of the Vatican, but they cannot be taken at face value as the context of ecclesiastical warfare is the primary basis of such salacious accounts. It is important to note the geographical context here: Inisgad abbey was literally an island surrounded by MacMahon territory. Clonderalaw runs the

[46] McInerney, "Clerical and learned lineages of medieval Co. Clare", p 117-118; p 183-184.
[47] McInerney suggests the MacMahons of Corkavaskin; part of the wider MacMahon kindred of Co. Clare; these Dalcassian MacMahons of Clare not to be confused with the unrelated northern MacMahons of Oriel.
[48] Mac Mahon, "The Abbey of Inisgad (Canons' Island), Co. Clare".
[49] McInerney, "Clerical and learned lineages of medieval Co. Clare", p 118
[50] Ibid, p 182

length of the west side of the Fergus where it confluences with the Shannon, while on the east side of the Fergus sits Clenagh, where the McMahons built Clenagh Castle in the early 15th century. The MacMahons of Clenagh are named as possessors of the Trinity College harp and is itself is not far from Limerick where the harp came into modern light. Perhaps the MacMahons achieved their goals, and the harp plausibly came into their possession as stated in the discredited provenance narrative. Given that the harp bears religious ornamentation (crosses, IHS Christogram) as well as the unique lion and dragon symbol, I believe the harp likely holds some early connection with the three generations of 15th century Mac Giolla Phádraig abbots of Inisgad; whether or not it was constructed locally in Clare for them, or transported to Inisgad from Upper Ossory, ca. 1426.

Another tantalizing aspect to this theory is that this harp could have associations with different branches of Fitzpatricks living in West Clare and the Aran Islands. One Meic Giolla Phádraig branch arrived on the western seaboard to resettle in the Ibrickan region where they found military service under the Ua Briain lordship of Thomond. This branch claimed descent from Connor Mac Giolla Phádraig, brother to Donal, Lord of Upper Ossory which later became one of the dominant families around coastal Ibrickan, Galway, and the Aran Islands during the 17th and 18th centuries. A second branch of Fitzpatricks descending from the 4th Baron Upper Ossory later branched out towards Galway and the Aran islands in the 17th century. Editor James Hardiman, writing after historian Roderic O'Flaherty, Chief of the Name, states in the appendices of his 1846 publication of *A Chorographical Description West or H-Iar Connaught*:

> "In the early part of the last century "Fitzpatrick of Aran" was once one of the most opulent families in this part of Ireland; but the name is now extinct or sunk in poverty. It may, however, be curious to trace it a little, in consequence of its having been, with some probability, a branch of the ancient and noble stock of Upper Ossory. It appears…that in A.D. 1642 Richard Fitzpatrick was seneschal of Ibrickan, in the County of Clare, and receiver there for the Earl of Thomond; also, that Teige (Thady) Fitz-Patrick, resided there at the time. Ibrickan lies next to Aran."[51]

Grave of Moriertaugh FitzPatrick (d. 23 Aug 1723) at St Mary's Dominican, Claddagh Quay, Galway; with impaled arms and lion & dragon crest above in red; an example of the Upper Ossory crest used by west-coast Fitzpatricks. Image courtesy of Jacinta Kiely.

O'Flaherty's own son married a widow of Edmond Fitzpatrick of that same family, and Hardiman goes on in some detail about their assets. Fitzpatricks were notable in both Clare and Galway, surviving the vicissitudes of the Cromwellian confiscations, and even later holding high offices as local sheriffs, mayors, MPs and high military posts in Britain. According to Hardiman, by 1686, a John Fitzpatrick and his son Rickard were living on Inis Oírr and leasing the Aran Islands from Sir Stephen Fox, who sold them to Rickard's son Edmund and the Protestant bishop of Elphin in 1713. A descendant of this branch, another Rickard, represented Galway in the Irish Parliament for several years, from 1749 to 1761. His nephew Edward Fitzpatrick was twice sheriff of Galway in 1769 and 1797. Several large stone cenotaphs stand today as commemorative memorials to members of the clan on Inis Mór; as do heraldic gravestones in Galway and Limerick of related individuals bearing the classic Fitzpatrick arms with the same lion and dragon crest as the Upper Ossory Barons.[52] This testifies to the family's social standing and employing consistent armorial symbols over several generations despite being geographically disconnected from Upper Ossory. We may therefore regard members of these branches as serious candidates as owners of the Trinity College

[51] Hardiman, "A Chorographical Description West or H-Iar Connaught", p 430.

[52] A noteworthy example is the gravestone of Moriertaugh FitzPatrick (d. 23 Aug 1723, above) at St Mary's Dominican, Claddagh Quay, Galway, which displays his Fitzpatrick arms impaled with the Browne arms for his wife Ellen. His grave shows the lion and dragon crest, a visual claim to shared paternal descent with the Lords of Upper Ossory.

harp, which might also explain how an instrument bearing the Fitzpatrick crest may have changed hands to other leading families in the vicinity of West Clare, Galway, and Limerick. O'Gorman and Conyngham moved in these upper circles of west-coast Irish society as they joined forces to locate and preserve the harp which now rests at Trinity College.[53] Considering the Fitzpatricks' ties to Aran, Galway, and the west Clare region as a whole, is it merely a coincidence that a harp bearing a Fitzpatrick crest was discovered by Chevalier O'Gorman and William Burton Conyngham who had family ties to the same area themselves? Might these two west-Claremen, or Limerick's Counsellor MacNamara or Ralph Ousley have encountered a Fitzpatrick harp, not knowing its actual provenance, and fabricated the Brian Boru narrative to enhance its romantic value? A beautiful heirloom item such as this could have changed hands through marriages or as a gift, as suggested in the harp's provenance.

Remarkably, evidence of just such a west Clare Fitzpatrick-MacMahon marriage exists - terminating in Limerick city no less, where the harp was modernly discovered. The 1637 funeral entry of Darby (alias Dermot) Fitzpatrick of Lisdoonvarna, Clare, names him as the husband of Any (Ainé), daughter of Thomas Mac Morragh (Murtough/Murtagh) Caume MacMahon of Shyan (Sheeaun).[54] This is a fantastic record, with rippling implications for the ownership of the harp. A brief overview of the genealogy of Darby Fitzpatrick and Ainé MacMahon reveal that they each hailed from long-esteemed local lineages. Darby Fitzpatrick's funeral entry recites his pedigree stating that he was the eldest son and heir of a Florence Fitzpatrick, the eldest son and heir of another Florence Fitzpatrick of Dunsallagh, only son of another Darby Fitzpatrick, eldest son and heir of Gilleduff Fitzpatrick, who himself was descended from Connor Fitzpatrick, second brother to Donal Mór of Magh Lacha, Lord of Upper Ossory. Famed genealogist John O'Hart lists Donal Mór as 119 in the Fitzpatrick (No. 1) pedigree, noting that Donal Mór's brother Connor settled in Thomond and was the ancestor of Fitzpatrick of Limerick and Clare.[55] This Darby's father or grandfather Florence (Finín) Fitzpatrick of Dunsallagh built a tower house or fortified stone house in Lisdoonvarna in 1619. Preeminent Clare historian James Frost states:

> "In the townland of Lisdoonvarna existed a castle now utterly ruined, which, according to an inscription on a stone built into the corner of a farmhouse in the vicinity was built by Denis Cloghessy in 1619 for Finin Fitzpatrick. In the *Book of Distributions and Forfeitures*, this Fineen or Florence Fitz Patrick is set down as the owner of Lisdoonvarna and Ballyteige in 1641."[56]

The castle's commemorative stone plaque - all that remains of it now- is today located at the Ennistymon Post Office[57] and the Florence mentioned by Frost in 1619 is Darby's brother, according to Rev. Shearman. Thus, Darby's lineage appears to have integrated within the gentry of west Clare society from an early period, possibly resulting from the Norman advances into Ossory and the internal fractioning of the Mac Giolla Phádraig dynasty, and therefore at an even earlier date than the arrival of the Mac Giolla Phádraig abbots of Inisgad.[58] (Interestingly, Chevalier O'Gorman's own Mac Gorman ancestors were themselves late-12th

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[53] O'Halloran, "Antiquaries: Wine, genealogy and cross-dressing."

[54] Genealogical Office; *Funeral Entries, Vol. 7*. 317. Special thanks to Luke McInerney for pointing me to this invaluable source, also quoted by Rev. J.F. Shearman and James Frost. See: McInerney, *The Earl of Thomond's 1615 Survey of Ibrickan*, p 186, note 85; also, Shearman, *Loca Patriciana*, Ossorian Genealogy table No. II; also, Frost, *History and Topography of the County of Clare*, p 31, note 1. This was quite striking to me, as my own father is a Fitzpatrick, and my mother a McMahon; however, my mother's family comes from Monaghan, and has no relation to the Clare McMahons.

[55] O'Hart, "Irish Pedigrees", p 449-50. This is also noted by Shearman.

[56] Frost, "History and Topography of the County of Clare", p 31.

[57] Zalewski and Fitzpatrick, "Descendants of Bryan Fitzpatrick, Lord & First Baron of Upper Ossory, 2nd ed." p xxviii.

[58] There is a discrepancy in some genealogies as to which Donal Mór is the brother of Connor. It is less likely to be king Domhnall mac Donnchadh Mac Gilla Pátraic (r. 1162-1185) whose father founded Jerpoint Abbey, and rather much more likely to be Donal Mór of Magh Lacha (aka Clarmallagh), son of Scanlan Mac Gilla Pátraic. This same Donal Mór may well also be one and the same as Domhnall Clannach noted in the *Annals of Clonmacnoise* in A.D. 1212 in alliance with Mortagh O'Brien in defeating Cormac mac Art O'Melaghlyn; or Donal Mór may be a son of Domnall Clannach. Either way, it opens the possibility that the harp accompanied this branch of Ossorians out to Thomond in the early to

century transplants from the Ossory-Leinster border to Thomond, becoming hereditary marshals to the O'Briens. One of the final annal entries of the Mac Gormans before their exodus from their Ui Barriche homeland mentions that in 1042, "Donnchadh, son of Aedh, lord of Ui-Bairrche, fell by Gillaphadraig, son of Donnchadh, lord of Osraighe."[59] By the end of the next century the Mac Gorman chiefs of Ui Bairrche had moved west, and a branch of Upper Ossory dynasts did so as well after the same period.) Yet despite this geographic distance, they adopted the Normanized version of their surname and continued in the same heraldic tradition as the Barons of Upper Ossory, indicating their claim of shared ancestry. Thomas MacMahon, father-in-law to Darby, was the son and heir to Murtaugh Cam Mór MacMahon, whose death is recorded in the Annals of the Four Masters in 1598,[60] and whose genealogy is attended to by James Frost.[61] Frost's genealogies of the MacMahons shows that Any's line, -known as the Knockalough (Cnoc an Locha) MacMahons, along with the extinct Clenagh line are both branches of the wider Clonderalaw MacMahons, descendants of the lords of Corcabascin, descendants of Brian Boru. Any's family was one of the leading MacMahon lineages in Clare, which continued through the 17th and 18th centuries under the name of the MacMahons of Clonina. The funeral entry for Darby states that he died on 1 September 1637 in Limerick: the same city where the Trinity College harp was given a century later from Counsellor MacNamara to Ralph Ousley, to the antiquarian duo O'Gorman and Conyngham. Darby's funeral entry further cites that he only had two daughters: Onora, who died an infant, and Mary who married James Gould of Culeany (Cullenagh /Cuileannach). The fact that Darby died with no male heirs leaves open the possibility that if he did possess the harp, his death in Limerick may have been an event that transitioned the harp from Fitzpatrick ownership into MacMahon hands via his daughter's marriage, or more likely, his wife's family if she retained his possessions after his death.

Yet, how might the harp have plausibly come to Henry MacMahon of Clenagh remains a speculative conjecture, ripe with promise. Might the harp have been in Darby's possession when he died in Limerick? Might it have been inherited by the MacMahons of Clenagh through their kin, the Knockalough-Clonina MacMahons? Sometimes the devil is in the details. A major discrepancy in the received narrative is that Henry MacMahon is traditionally reported to have given the harp to Councellor MacNamara about 1756, but historian James Frost reports Henry as dead in 1747, nearly a decade prior.[62] Frost further states Henry's nephew and heir Stanislaus MacMahon inherited Henry's estate and Clenagh Castle and died in 1757. If MacNamara received the harp from the MacMahons of Clenagh, it would have therefore been through Stanislaus, and not Henry directly. Records indicate that Darby Fitzpatrick's brother-in-law, Murtough MacMahon had a son Thomas, who had a son Andrew MacMahon of Limerick who leased lands from Stanislaus MacMahon of Clenagh in 1755, prior to the harp's transfer to Counsellor Matthew MacNamara.[63] As James Molohan writes on the Clare County Library's website:

"We know that Andrew was the younger and only brother of Mortogh who married Mary Ellen McDonnell in 1750. We also know that he was 'of Limerick' in 1749 (*Memorial No 100689 McMahon to McMahon*). In 1755 Stanislaus McMahon of Clenagh Esq did demise set and to farm let to Andrew McMahon of the City of Limerick Gent the Lands of Crossderry in the Parish of Killdisart Barony of Clonderla for a term of ninety-nine years. (*Registry of Deeds, Memorial No 120626, Vol 182, p229, 19 Nov 1755, McMahon to McMahon.*)"[64]

Thus we see Any MacMahon's male-line Knockalough-Clonina relatives descending in time, moving to

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mid-13th century – nearly two centuries prior to the arrival of the Mac Giolla Phádraig abbots at Inisgad. Only scientific dating (radio-carbon, etc.) of the harp's wood can confirm it's construction with greater certainty.

[59] M1042.9. Thanks to Luke McInerney for alerting me to this.

[60] AFM1598.7. Frost states 1599, noting that according to the *Clare Inquisition* of 3 April 1626, this same Murtagh Cam died on 10 January, 1593.

[61] Frost, "History and Topography of the County of Clare", p 75.

[62] Frost, "History and Topography of the County of Clare", p 75.

[63] Molohan, James M. "Donated Material: Family Histories, Biographies & Memoirs: The McMahons of Clonina by James M. Molohan". (https://www.clarelibrary.ie/eolas/coclare/genealogy/don_tran/fam_his/mcmahon_clonina.htm) Molohan provides an extremely important family tree of the MacMahons of Knockalough-Clonina. See Image 1.

[64] Ibid. See his footnote 112.

Limerick, and having dealings with the Clenagh branch after Henry MacMahons's death, but before MacNamara received the harp. If this harp bearing the Fitzpatrick crest did pass to the MacMahons of Clenagh, then it very likely may have come from the lineage of Darby Fitzpatrick, through his marriage to Any MacMahon of the Knockalough-Clonina line. As the Clare MacMahons descend from Brian Boru through his great-great grandson Mahone, this Fitzpatrick harp may therefore still retain a familial connection to Brian Boru by way of marriage. However, it is important to note that no imagery on the harp stands out as being symbolic of the MacMahons, O'Briens, Burkes, O'Neills, or any other family noted in the discredited provenance narrative.

Map showing areas of Fitzpatrick activity and settlement in west Clare and Galway, as well as Inisgad's relation to MacMahon territory and Limerick City, where the Trinity College harp came to modern light.

Conclusions

It is clear that the highly unique Fitzpatrick/Mac Giolla Phádraig lion and dragon crest appears engraved into the forepillar of the Trinity College harp, predating their later Tudor grant of arms, showing it to be a native clan symbol of medieval Gaelic origination. Due to the strong probability that this carving is original to the harp's construction, it is the dynastic emblem Petrie and O'Curry were expecting, and very good evidence that Ireland's national harp was connected to the dynasts of Upper Ossory from the 15th century or earlier. Other clan symbols on the harp remain uncertain but suggest Ossorian clans. The harp was likely built ca. 1425-26 for the completion of Cullahill Castle and was later transported out of Upper Ossory by a branch of the MacGiollaPhádraig clan; probably via the arrival of canon Dermot MacGiollaPhádraig to Inisgad, Co. Clare in 1426, or carried down to modernity by one of the various Fitzpatrick lineages of West Clare (opening thus a speculative, yet less likely 12th-13th century origin/exodus from Ossory), perhaps arriving to attune with the construction of the now lost Fitzpatrick tower house a Lisdoonvarna in 1619 or after the destruction of Cullahill ca. 1650. The long-discredited narrative of the harp's origins may have truth in its latter portion, beginning when the harp passed from a branch of Fitzpatricks to other leading families in Clare or Galway, most notably the possible connection through Darby (Dermot) Fitzpatrick of Lisdoonvarna, through his wife

Any to the MacMahons after his death in Limerick where the harp was discovered. Its real associations with Brian Boru and the O'Neills remain spurious, and the harp has very likely never left Irish soil.

By looking at four early Gaelic armigerous harps together - the Trinity College, Queen Mary, Dalway, and Fitzgerald-Kildare - we can see a distinct pattern; a progressive native tradition of decorating the forepillars of medieval Irish and Scottish harps with hereditary Gaelic and Norman heraldic markings which display ownership and broader social connections. By comparing those four harps with the Lude and Castle Otway harps, it can be seen that the earlier 15th century Trinity and Queen Mary harps with their Gaelic roundels positioned on the sides of the rounded forepillar gradually evolved flattened frontal edges thereon to better incorporate forward-facing heraldic arms into the 17th century; and that this may signal a change of the harpist's sitting position from profile to forward-facing relative to the audience. Noting the role of forepillars in the display of hereditary arms or other clan symbols sheds light on their evolution and can help in dating these precious artifacts. These aristocratic instruments continued to reflect specific family or clan symbols representing the lord and other key clientele, while a Gaelic aristocracy existed in symbiotic relationship with court artisans. With the collapse of the Gaelic order amidst social upheaval in Ireland in the 17th century, harpists were reduced to itinerant minstrels, and the display of arms on harps ceased to be meaningful, except to retain some memory connected with a long-lost aristocratic past. This is a historical analysis based on the harp's carved images, and not a scientific assessment based on radiocarbon dating methodology and wood identification, as has been done by Loomis with the Queen Mary harp, and therefore a 1425-6 AD origin remains open for corroboration and refinement. Such avenues of investigation ought to be conducted if possible. The date aside, one thing is clear: this is not an O'Brien harp, nor an O'Neill harp, nor even a Trinity College harp, but as the marks on the wood reveal, Ireland's national icon truly is a Mac Giolla Phádraig - Fitzpatrick harp.

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