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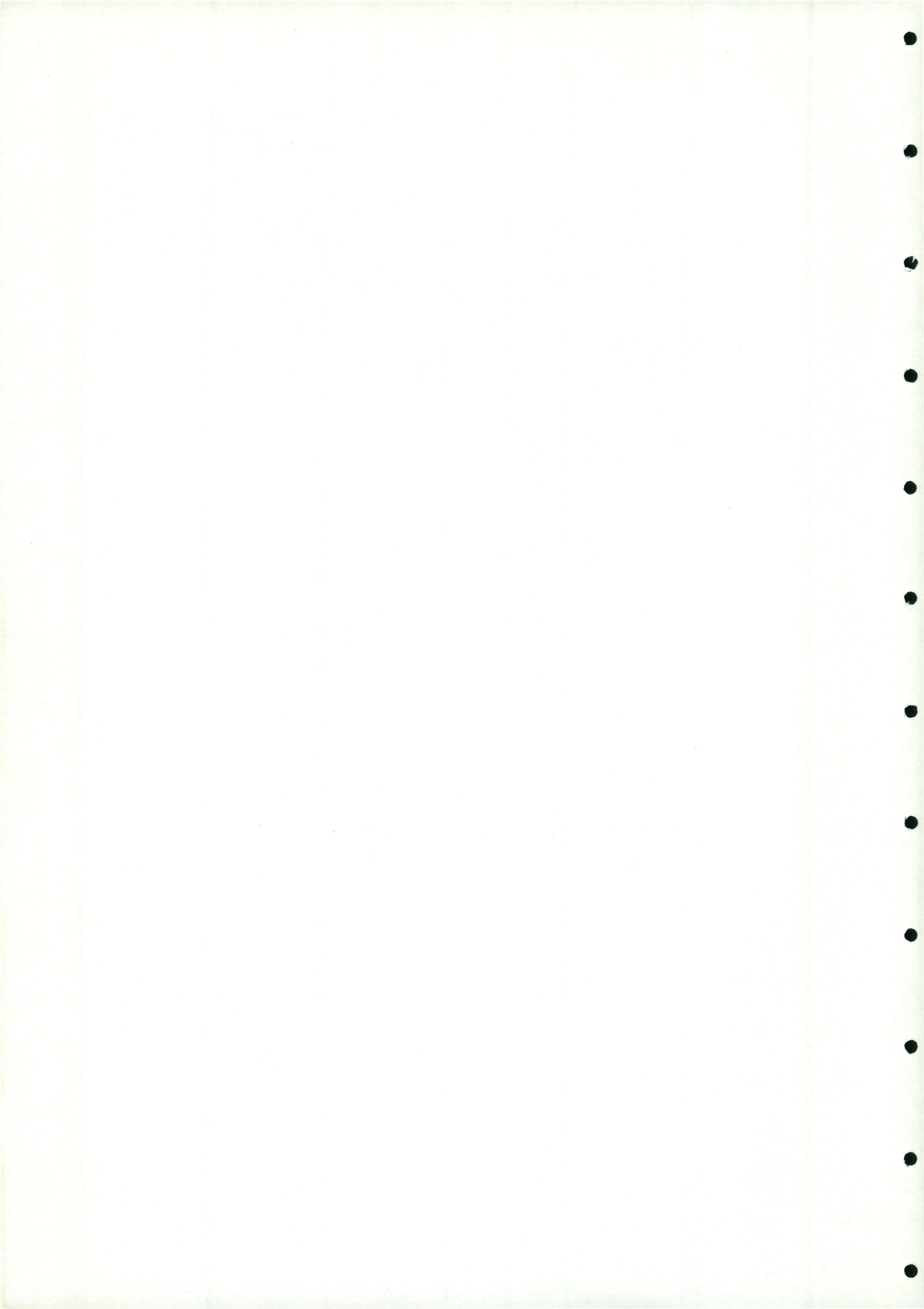
NATIONAL COLLEGE OF
ART AND DESIGN

FINE ART PRINT

Wild Animals in Irish Mythology

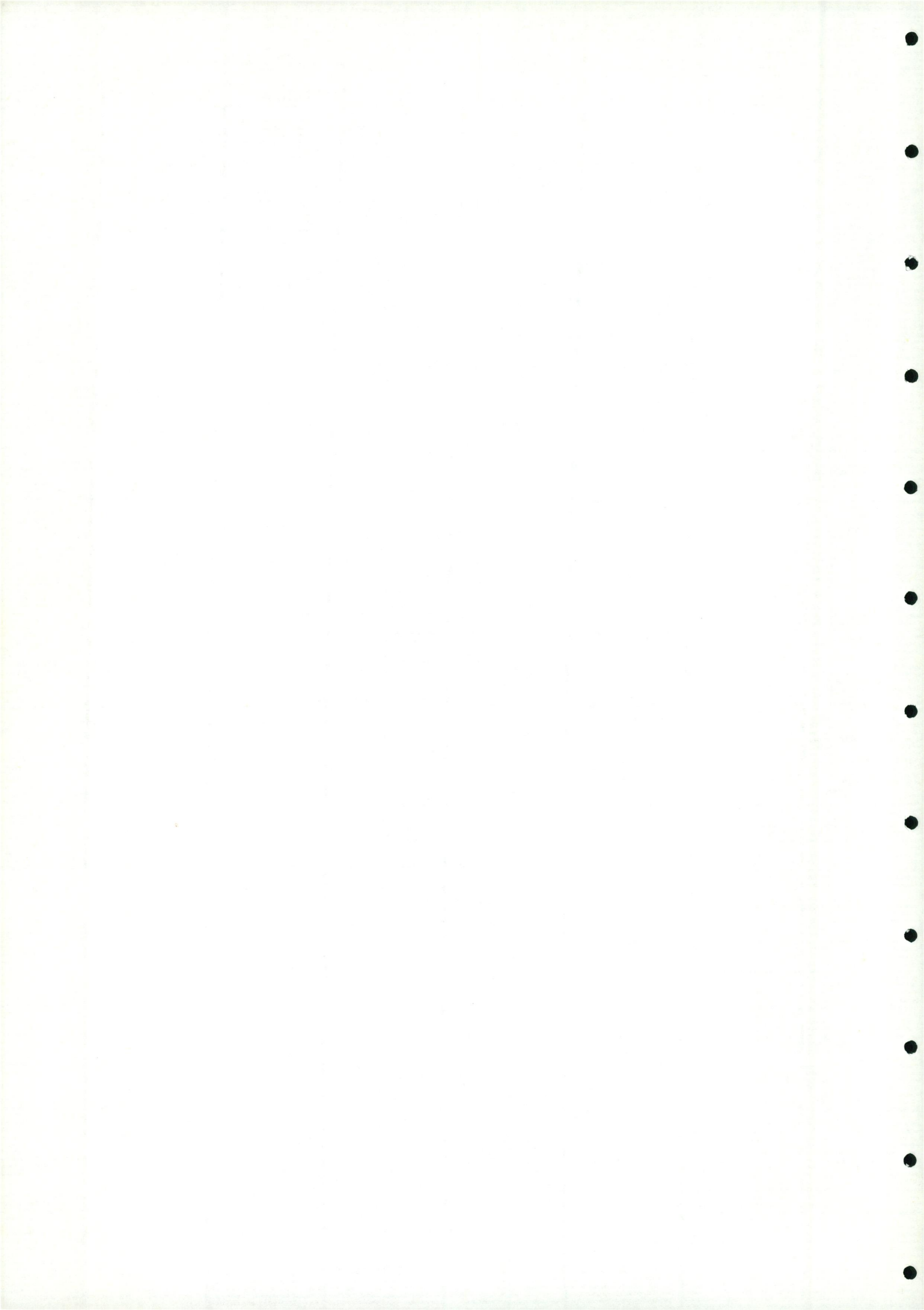
by Sadhbh Caroline McElveen

Submitted to the faculty of History of Art and Design and
Complimentary Studies in candidacy for the Degree of B.A. Fine
Art Print.



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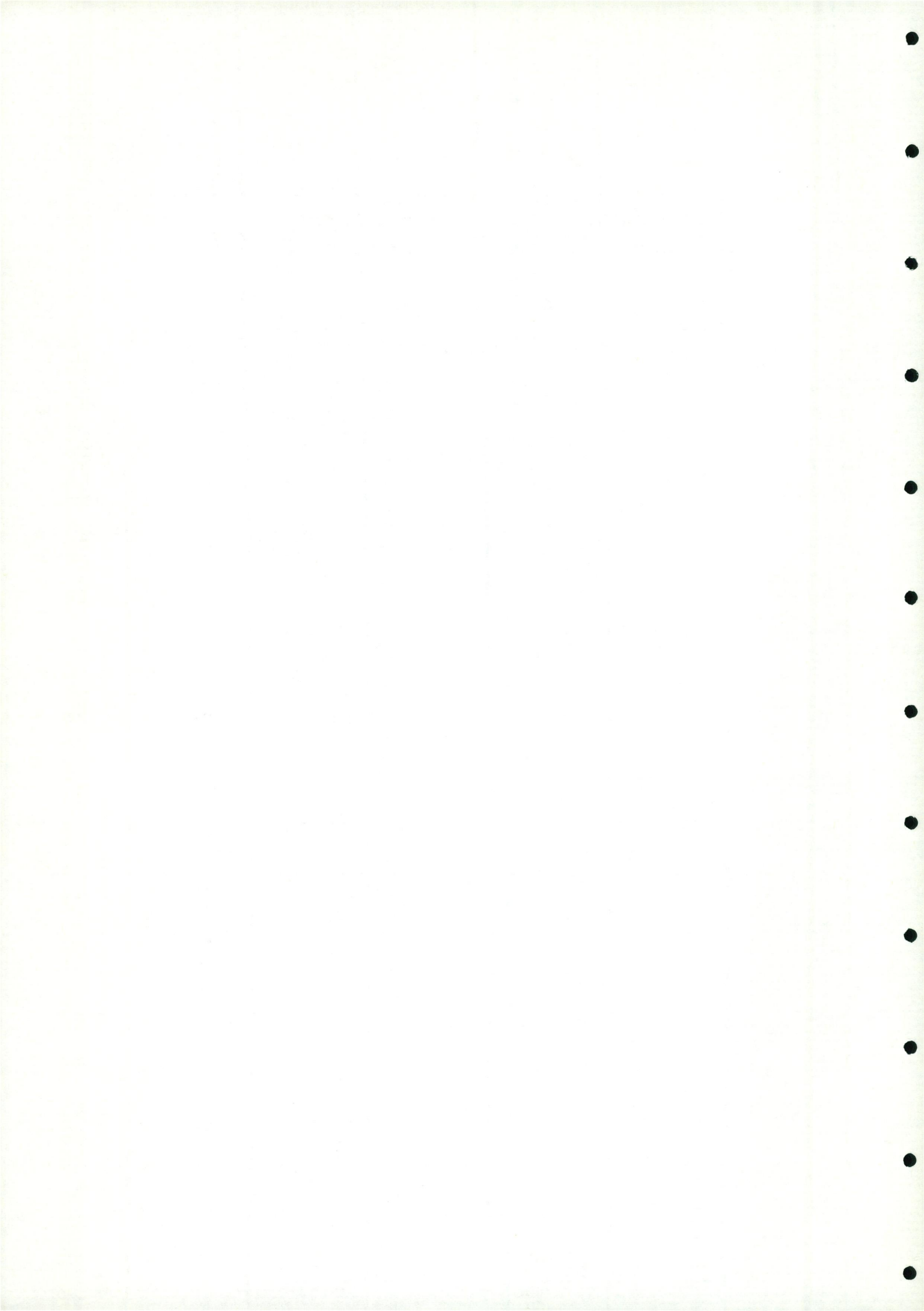
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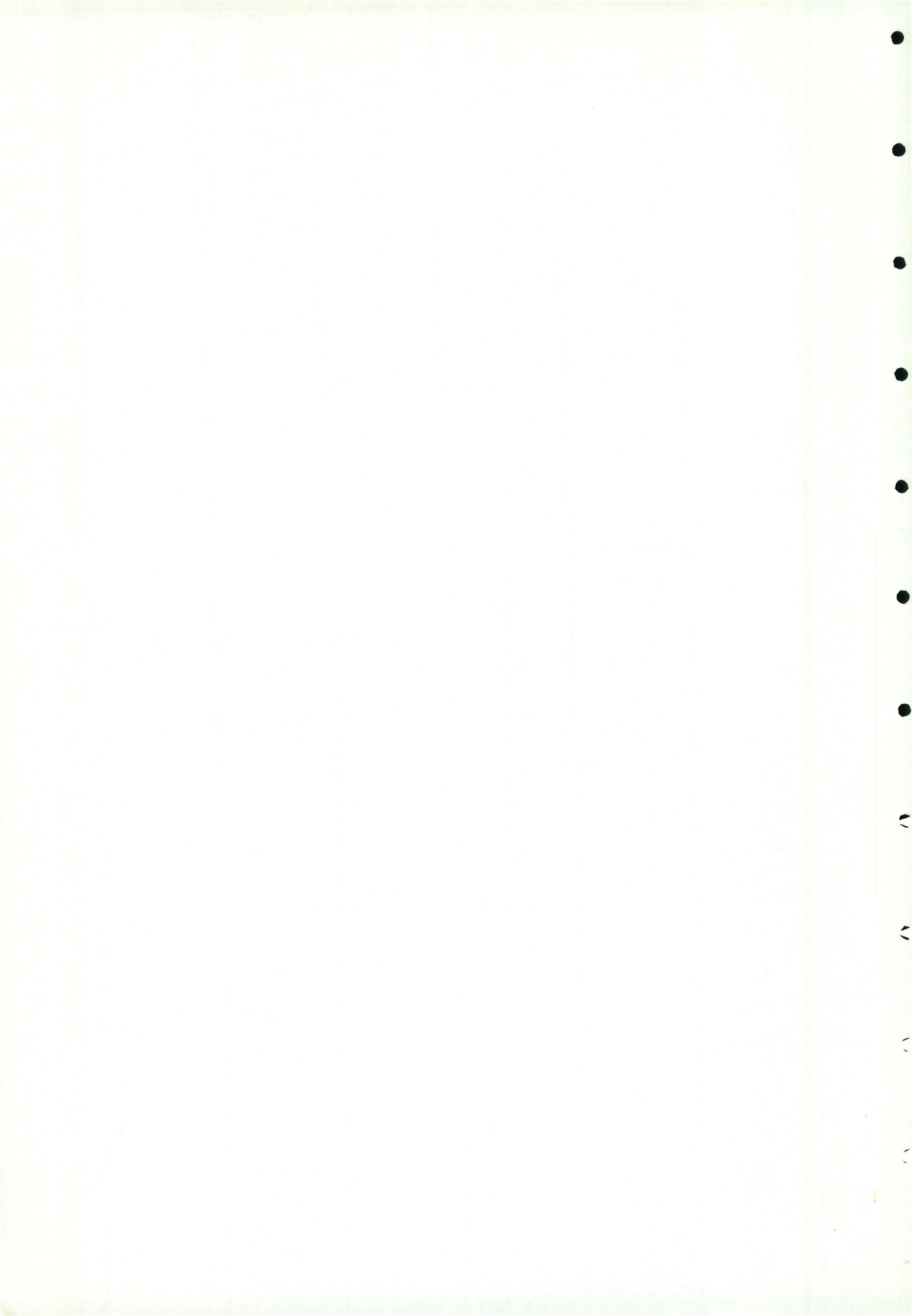
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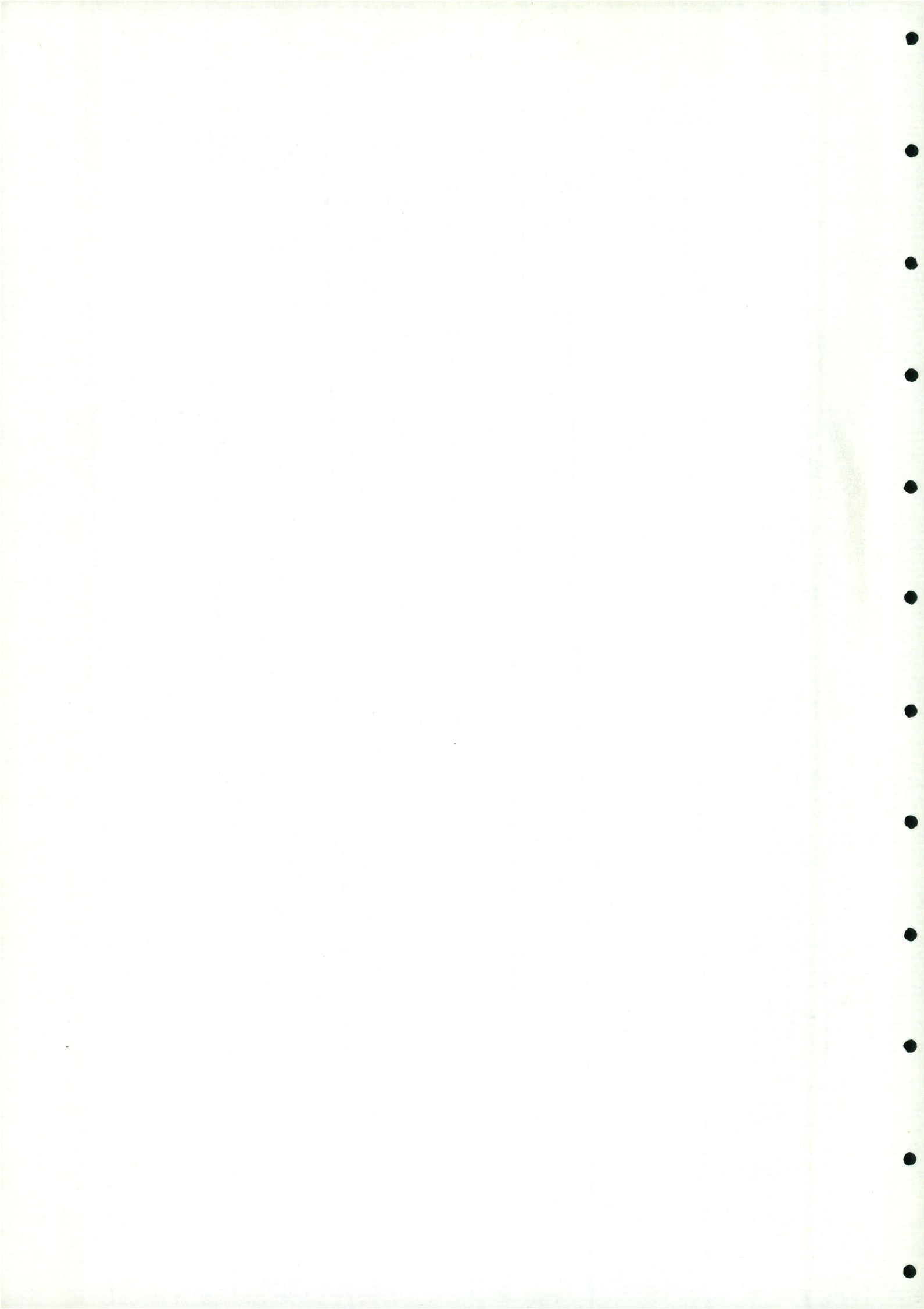
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Introduction

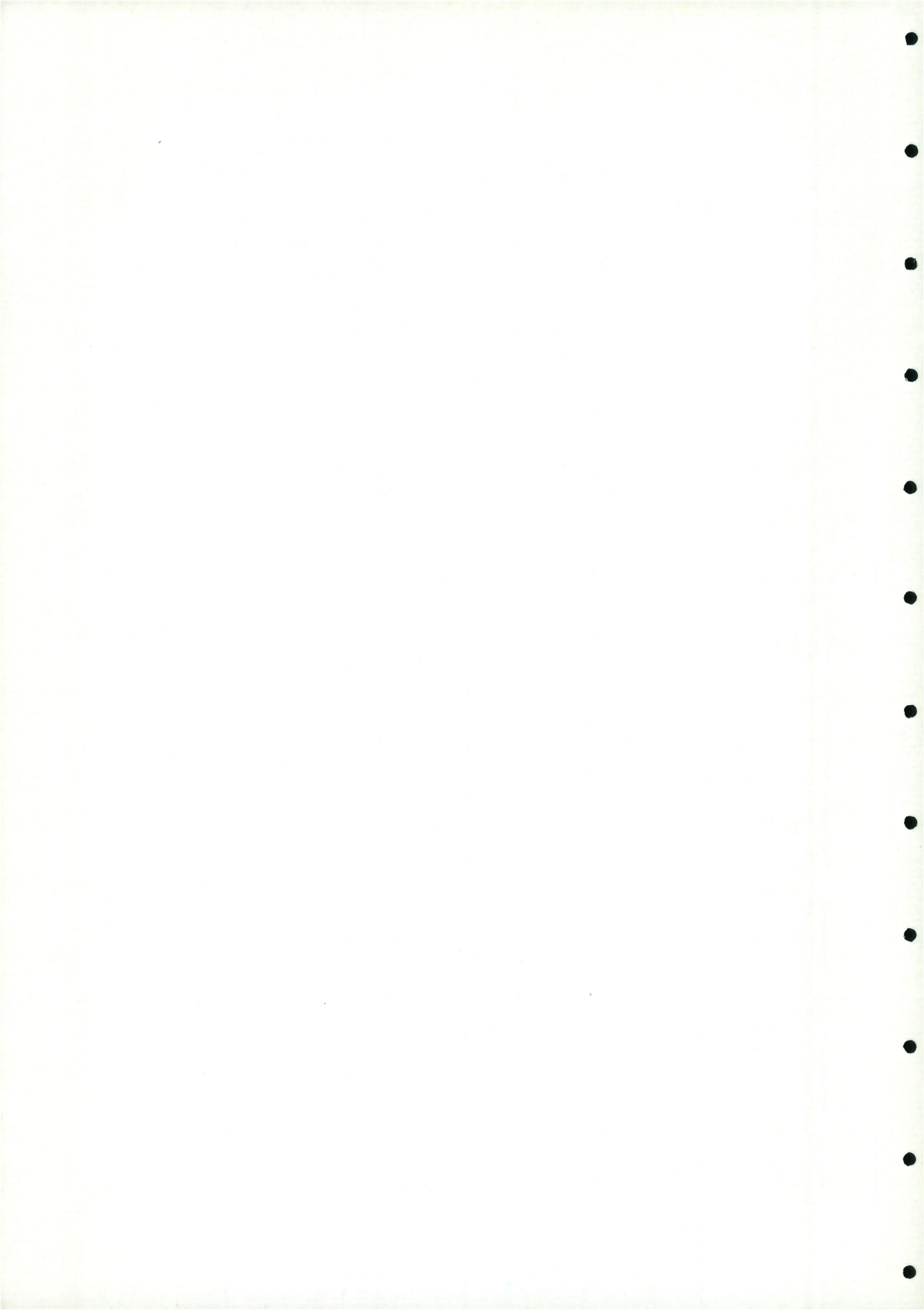
Irish mythology gives us a great insight into the lives and thoughts of ancient Irish peoples. They are about supernatural and imaginary people these were the popular beliefs of the people of that time. These myths are not taken seriously and are compared to fairy tales. They are highly imaginative amusing stories that can be read simply as that. I feel we should look at them more carefully and we could find some clues to life in pre-Christian Ireland.

I started reading myths and legends of Ireland in secondary school, starting with the Cú Cullain stories then stories of the Fianna. In my readings I discovered that my name Sadhbh belonged to the wife of Fionn, she was one of the people from the mounds who could change shape into a deer. Since this I have been fascinated by animal imagery found in Old Irish stories, as nearly every story features animals, an often these creatures are supernatural. I have decided to look at the animal imagery in these stories and examine its importance. I have also noted the similarities between the stories of some early Irish Christian Saints and Celtic legends.

My art work at the moment is based on an old walled orchard at my home. The orchard for me is my physical haven. The Celtic stories are my mental haven where inspiration and imagination oozes off the pages.

For my thesis I have used books from the National Library. In the books I read I was often reading simple translations a quarter of the length of the actual story in Irish. I can only imagine what I missed. Many of the manuscripts have not yet been translated. I also came across books in Latin from which Fergus Kelly translated small pieces for me.

In the first chapter I introduce the reader to the people and animals of early Ireland briefly outlining when they came. I take a quick look at how they lived with their environment. The second chapter looks at pagan religions with animal imagery and how these religions could have influenced mythology. The third chapter deals with mythology itself. The last chapter looks at early Christian stories and the role animals had with saints and how some of the imagery was borrowed from pagan religion. I hope in the future that I can bring these stories into my work. They are a valuable part of our history that is sitting hidden in old Irish waiting to be unveiled again.







nam quam po

dico uobis

angelis oī

penitentia

Cautem h

duos filii

uos exal

pationem

...



Chapter 1 Introduction to the first settlers of Ireland

I have news for you;
The stag bellows,
winter snows
summer is gone

Scéal le duibh;
dordaid dam,
sigid gaim
i fáith sam.

The wind is high and cold,
The sun is low;
its course is brief,
the tide runs high

Gáetth ard úar,
ísel grian,
gair a rith
ruirtheah mán.

The bracken has reddened,
its shape has been hidden;
the wild goose has raised his customary cry,

Rorúad raith,
ro deth cruth,
ro gab gnáth
guigram guth

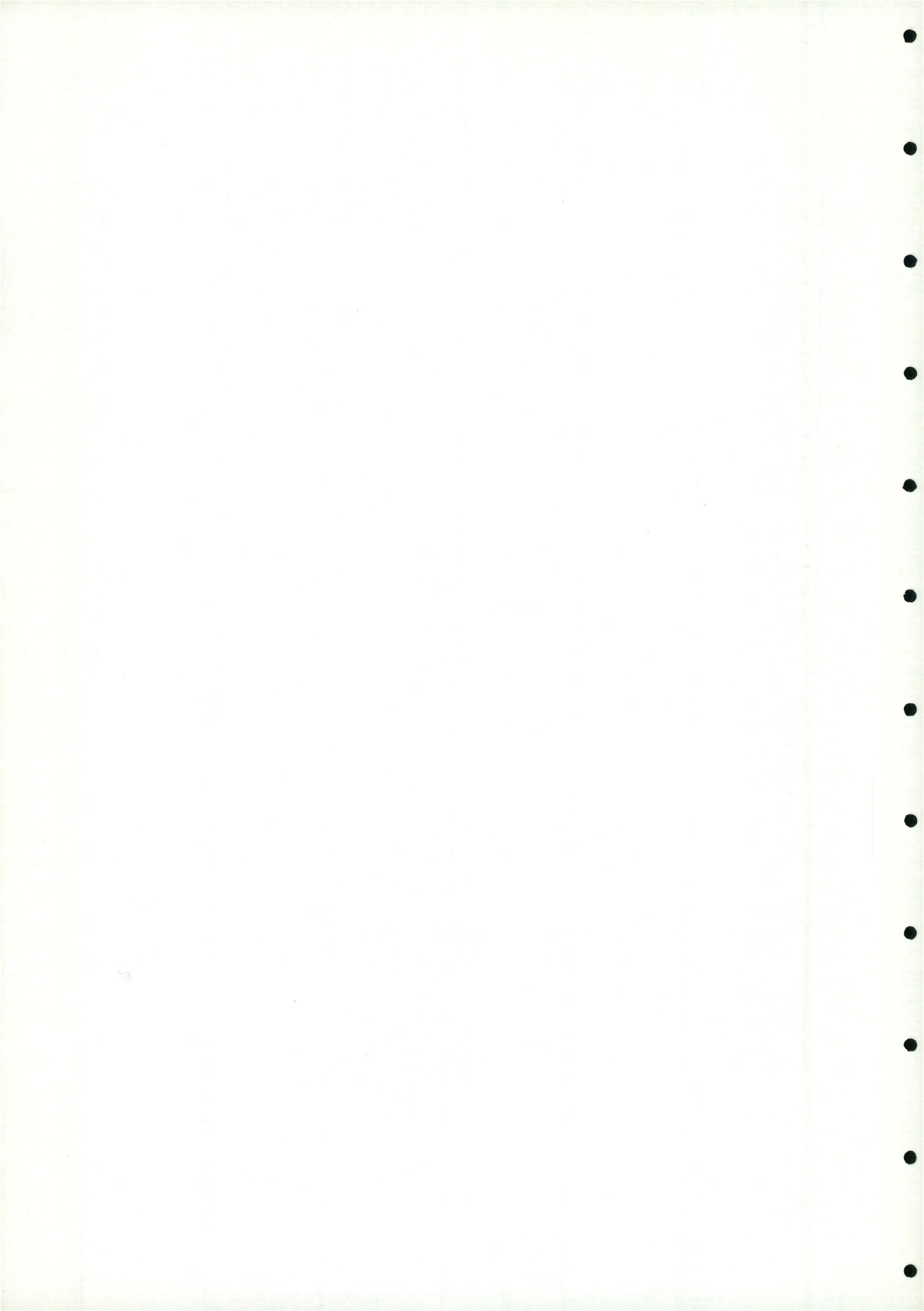
Cold has caught the wings
of birds;
Its the time of ice
these are my news.

ro gab úacht
e tli én;
aigríd ré
é mo scéal.

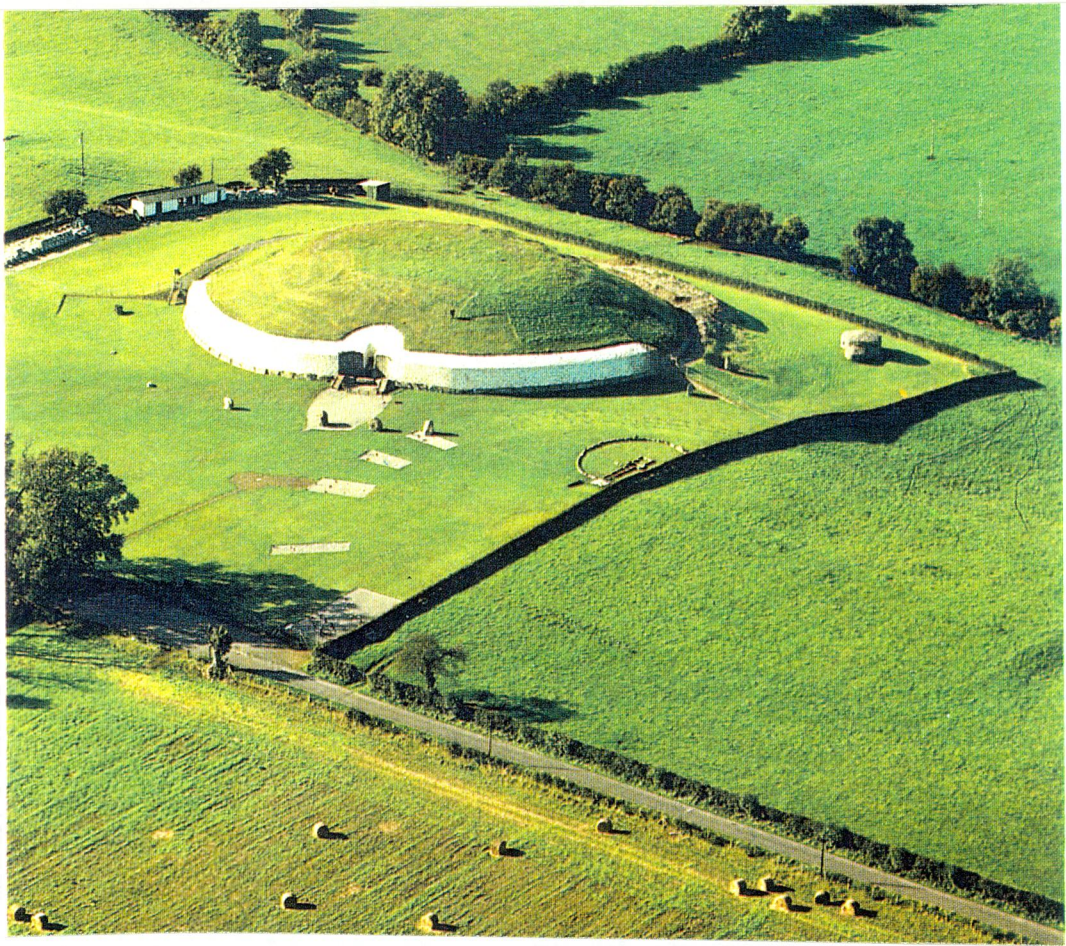
*1

Originally Ireland was uninhabited by man. When man came he blended in with nature. It took a long time for man to break with nature. In this chapter I will outline his arrival in Ireland. His dependence on his surroundings made him respect his environment and the animals that lived in it. I feel it is for this reason wild animals are so important in the myths and legends that have survived.

There were animals in Ireland long before man the animals that are truly native to Ireland are the pygmy shrew, fox, marten, stoat, badger, otter, red deer, Irish hare and bats. The hare, stoat and shrew could have come before or during the last part of the Ice Age. The rabbit, rat, house mouse hedgehog, squirell, sika deer and roe deer were to come later. An introduced animal is the mink. Not to be confused with







1.2



1.3

our native pine marten or stoat. We had wolves and also bears. Bear skeletons have been found in the Burren. The fact that we have no snakes has nothing to do with St. Patrick, it is simply because they never made it over the land bridge. We do though have a lizard. The viviparous lizard (*Lacerta vivipara*) is otherwise known as the common lizard. The largest lizard ever found and recorded was a female 178mm in length including tail. It was found in Co. Meath ². The tail of these lizards can break off and be regenerated. It was thought that they could be cut into pieces and would join together again. It was also believed that they came from fire. Lizards hide in logs when the log was thrown into a fire the lizard would try to escape the flames. Because of this another story came about that if you licked a lizard you could cure burns.

By the late stone age, man started coming to Ireland. He came in small leather boats called currachs. These boats or a similar type can be found still on the west coast of Ireland. There were Mesolithic settlements found in Ireland but the first farmers were Neolithic.³ They were first men to really have any impact on Ireland's environment. They tilled crops and kept herds of swine and brought with them sheep, cows and seeds. We can tell these farmers hunted deer as their antlers were used as picks and their bones for needles. Their hunting weapons have been found in the form of flint arrow and spear heads. The bogs have preserved part of their way of life and the tombs for their dead. These are court graves. Over 4000 have been found in Ireland⁴. Buried with the person were various objects that we presume were personal property. This is important as we know these people had a religion and believed in an after life. The earliest date for these tombs is 3000 B.C.⁵ Passage graves were built later and the earliest dates from around 2800 B.C.⁶ Some of the best examples are in Co. Meath at Newgrange, Nowth and Dowth. They were also decorated with stone carvings which probably hold some religious significance. In Newgrange the sun enters the chamber only once a year around the winter solstice. These symbols possibly represent a sun god. Other carvings could be abstract forms of other Gods. These Tombs from the late Stone Age hold great importance for the myths and folklore of later Ireland for they were seen as the forts of the people of the Goddess Danú, the Tuatha Dé Danann. The next influx of people brought the Bronze Age to Ireland. This happened shortly after 2000 B.C. These newcomers settled with the

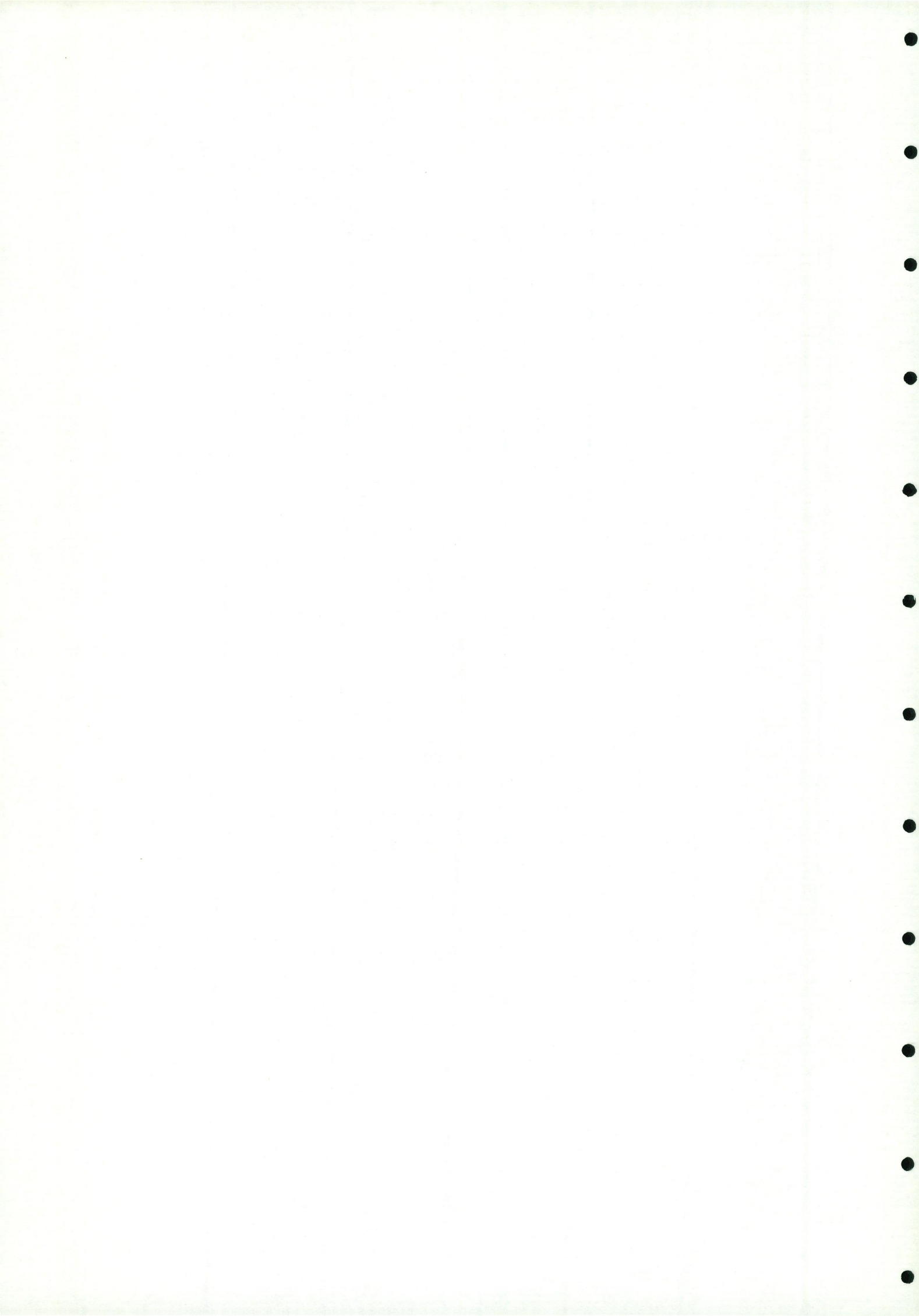
²1 Pg. 36

³Middle Stone Age people

⁴18 Pg. 13

⁵18 Pg.13

⁶18 Pg. 13

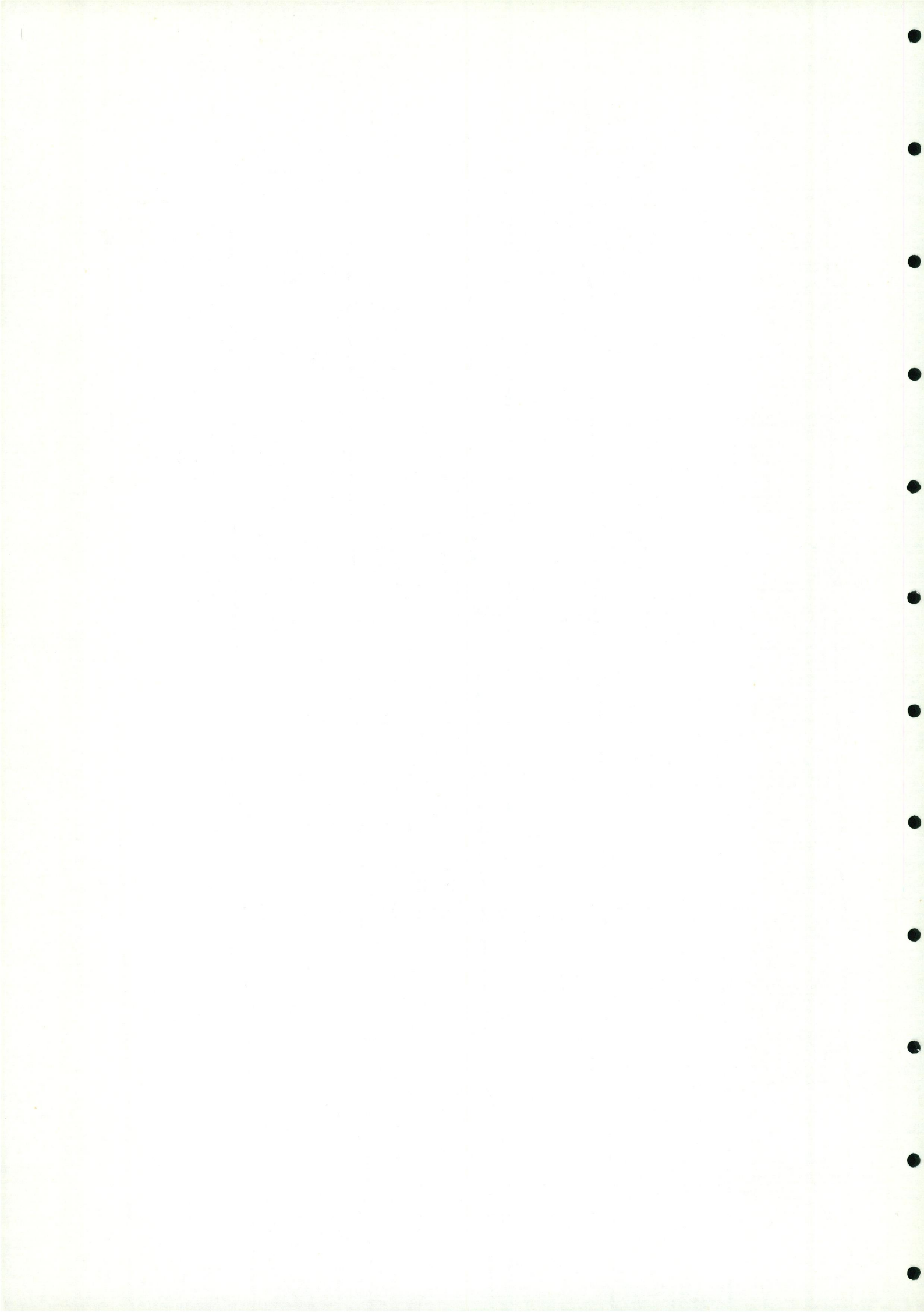


Native Neolithic inhabitants and became the dominant group. They built stone circles and much of their metal work is found in the forms of Bronze axes and beautiful gold pins and necklaces and other jewellery and ornaments. This art work was mainly decorated with Geometric patterns similar to that found in the Stone Age tombs. If these patterns represent Gods then these Gods date back to Neolithic man. The Bronze Age lasted till around 700 B.C. Ireland was then a completely Celtic country by 500 B.C.⁷ The Celts left behind them a vast amount of treasures and stories which give our present archaeologists a great deal of knowledge of how their society worked and many of their stories. The Celts brought with them the Iron Age and with this the methods of farming changed. Their tools were stronger than tools previously used their houses were more secure a form of society built up. A Greek geographer called Strabo wrote that they were savage cannibals and had no family or domestic structure 'The natives are wholly savage and lead a wretched existence because of the cold.'⁸ We know though the Celts were not quite as Barbaric as Strabo felt and their family structure was quite different. Strabo saw that there was a strong division between the educated and the common people. This however was probably the Celts on one side and the people they conquered on the other.⁹ The Celts were highly superstitious and somewhat gullible, fast to pick up new methods and quite vain, on top of this they were highly emotional. Possibly it is for this reason we were left with such interesting stories.

⁷18 Pg.17

⁸18 Pg. 18

⁹19 Pg. 39



Chapter 2 The importance of wild animals in pagan religion

"A year for the stake (cuaille)
three years for the field (gort)
Three lifetimes of the field for the hound (Cú)
Three lifetimes of the horse for the human being
(divine)
Three lifetimes of the human being for the stag
(damallaid)
Three lifetimes of the stag for the ousel (lon)
Three lifetimes of the ousel for the eagle (ilar)
Three lifetimes of the eagle for the salmon (bradán)
Three lifetimes of the salmon for the yew (iubar)
Three lifetimes of the yew for the world
from its beginning to its end.

Translated from the book of Lismore. ¹⁰

"To praise thee, O Tuis, we've come to this land;
Like an oak among shrubs, over King's thou dost stand;
Thy bounty, great monarch, shall gladden the bord;
And the Imnocta - fessa¹¹ I claim as reward.

Two neighbours shall war, with an O to an O;
A bard unrequited - how dreadful a foe!
Thy bounty shall add to thy wealth and thy fame;
And the Imnocta - fessa is all that I calim;

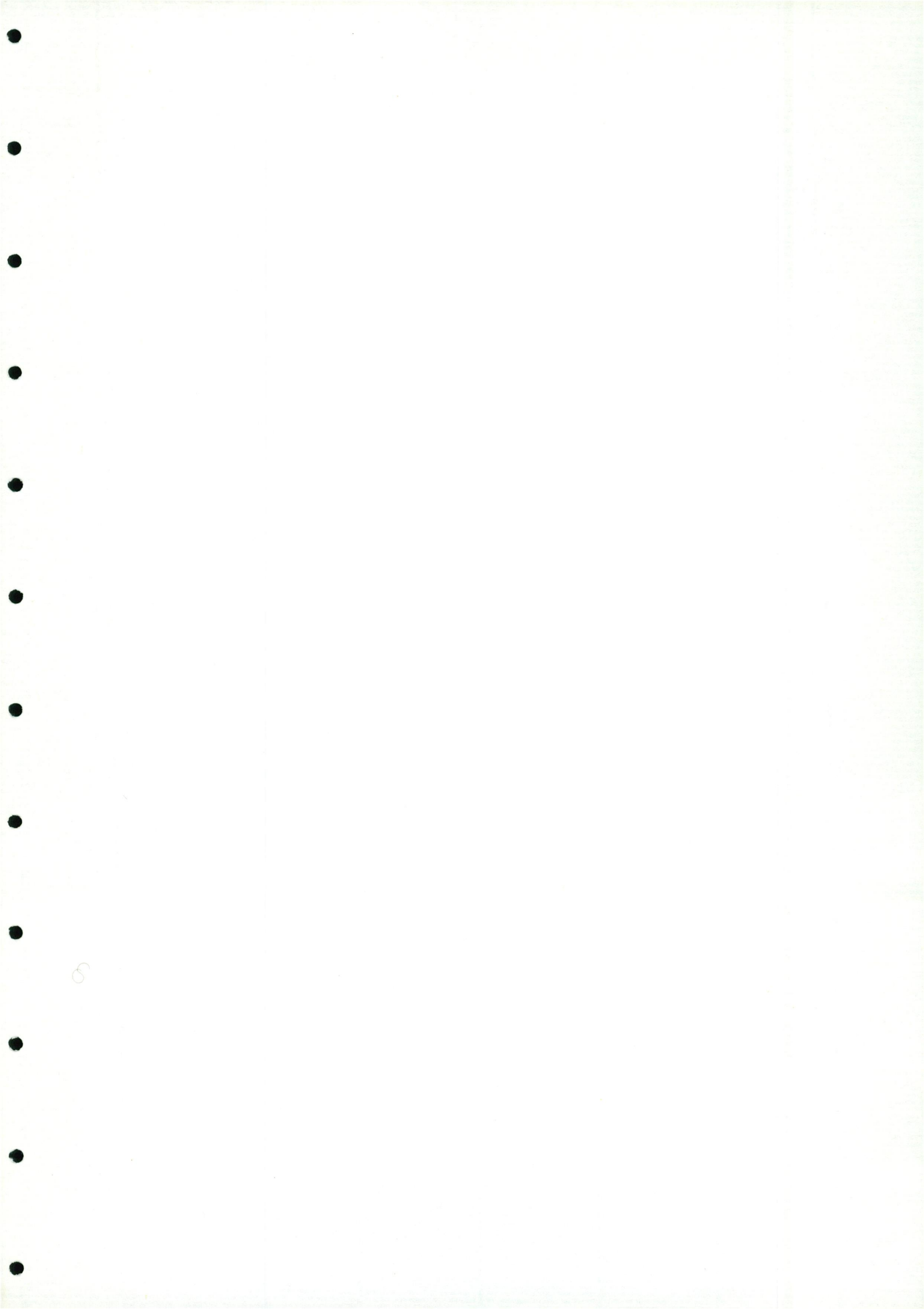
A poem Brian son of Turenn recited to the King of Greece informing him of his intentions to take the magic pig skin.

¹⁰Folklore 43 1932 National Library reference 399805

The Legends of the oldest animals. Hull Pg. 308

¹¹Imnocta 'skin' and fessa 'pig' 11, Pg. 69







2.1

One of the ways in which we can see the importance of animals in Pre-Christian Ireland is to look at the wild animal Gods in Celtic religion. The Celts settled through out Europe so I have used examples from Europe that I feel are relevant to the Irish Celts. In both illustrations and sources of information .Domestic animals also were to play a large part in Celtic religions but I am only going to look at wild animals.

Originally the Celts would have worshipped earth Gods and animal divinities. These people would have been dependent on hunted animals in a similar way to the American Indian. The cow would later replace the deer as forests and hunting became less important, with herds of domestic cattle growing. In this chapter I will look at the ancient religions of Ireland that influenced myth.

There have been incidents in Irish myth where three horned boar and deer have been seen. Caelite told St. Patrick of how he killed the three antlered stag: ¹²

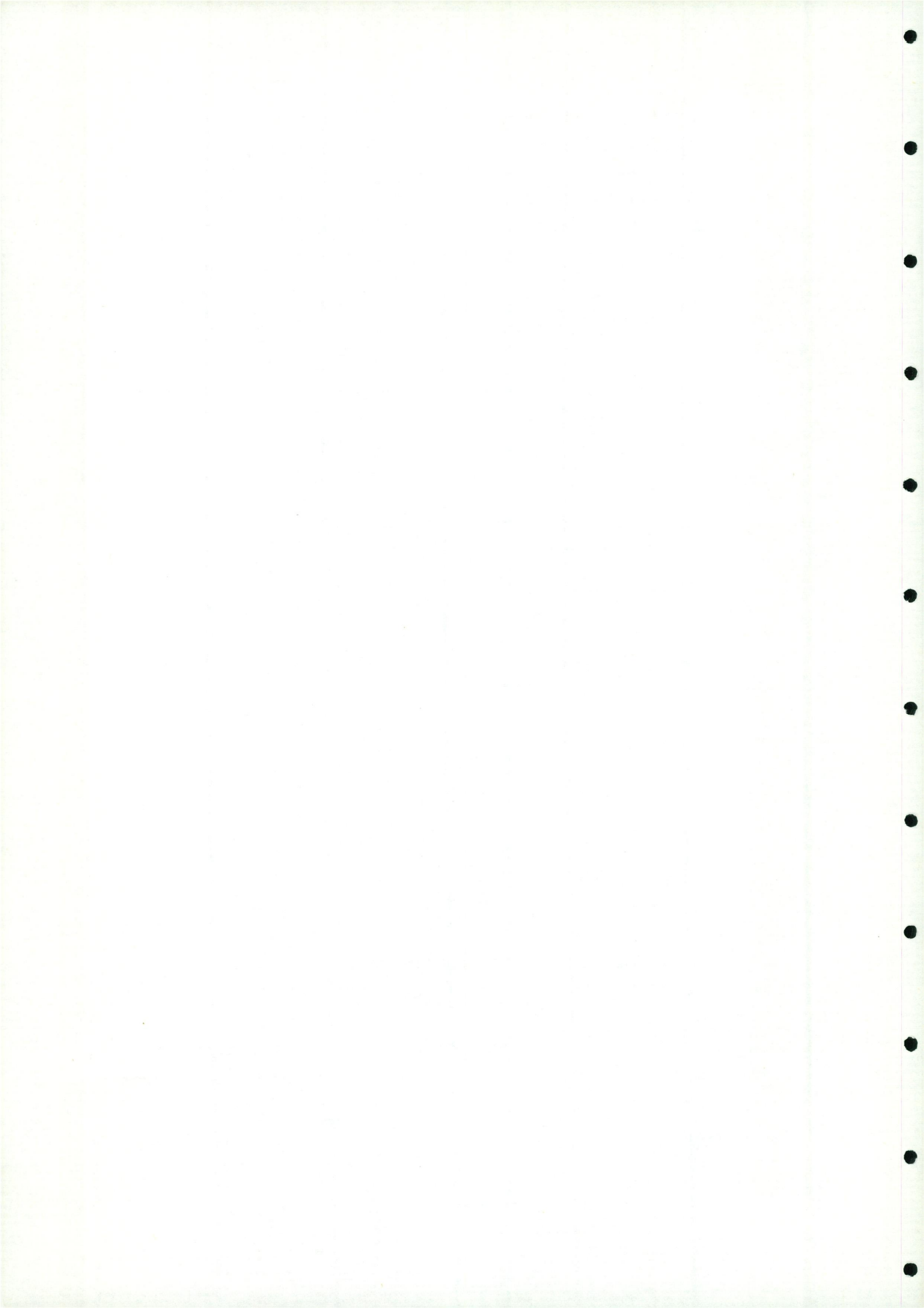
' and there was a notable rogue stag called liath na dtrí mbenn' or 'the grey one with three antlers; 'that for the space of seven and twenty years eluded the Fianna, both man and deer hound. Now a warrior of the Fianna killed him and that warrior am I.'

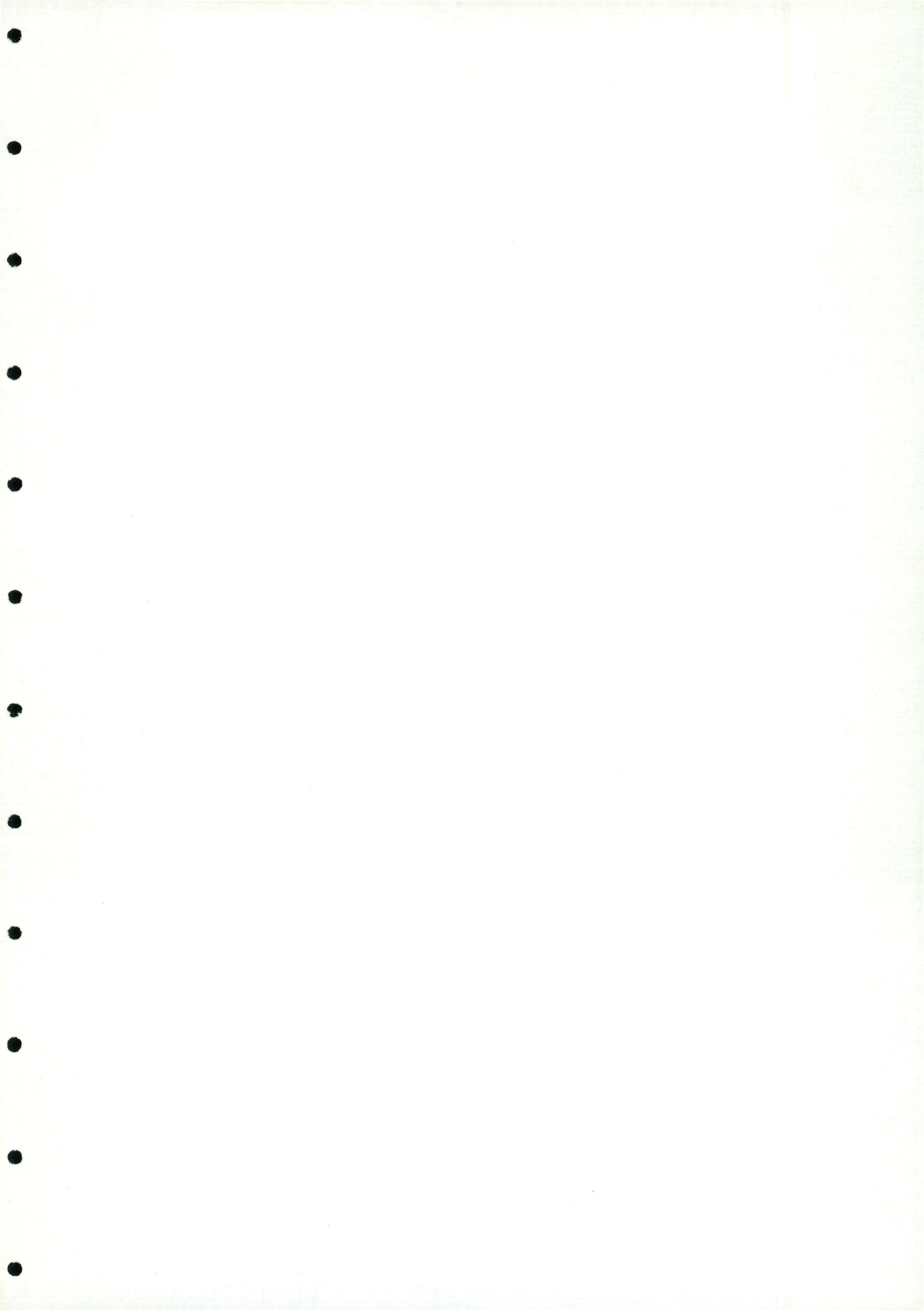
Possibly the killing of this stag was the killing of a pagan religion showing how Caelite had become a Christian.

The boar was certainly a divine symbol, many bronze images of these animals have been found. Often these beasts were not originally boars but reached their present state after a series of metaphorpheses in which they were ravens, stags, demons and worms. Boar would often belong to the lords of the other worlds. In many stories we see man being reincarnated as an animal. An example of this is in "The Legend of Túan MacCarell" which is found in "The Book of Dun Cow" a manuscript which dates from around 1100 AD. Túan is able to tell the history of Ireland to monks of St. Finian because he lived through history in the forms of various animals.

His entire clan had died of a fever he being the sole survivor. He was one of the Partholan, the first people who settled in Ireland. He lived wild and became old and decrepit. Then one evening he fell asleep and when he awoke he was a grey stag. "I have put on a new form and skin rough and grey. Victory and joy are easy to me; a little while ago I was weak and defenceless." So he became King of the Deer. He tells

¹² 9 The colloquy Pg. 123







how he saw the Nemadians come to Ireland and how they died. Then he felt old again and he was changed into a boar. He was young again and glad king of the boar herds. Then he became a "great eagle of the sea." He sees how the people of the Dana came and how they were conquered by the Miled another group of people. Next he became a salmon. Here he is caught and eaten by the wife of Carell and is born again but remembers all his other lives. The animals he turned into are recognised as having connections with pagan religions. Túan is a living history book. Early Celts did not write but remembered everything in verse.

The Boar was considered the 'choicest' of meats. Both in Ireland and in the next world. There were magic pigs that could be killed and cooked at night and then were alive and whole the next day. these were the 'Seven pigs of Easal of the Golden Pillars¹³.' There was also the pig skin of Tuis which cured all wounded and sick. If this was dipped into a stream it would turn the water into wine for 3 days.¹⁴

The Boar could also be fierce and destructive. Often it trampled crops and led hunters into the underworld.

Cernunnos, a bearded squatting God with three horns has been related to the stag, ram-headed serpent, the bull and the boar, also in a lesser sense birds and fish. It is felt that the deer Gods have a connection, or have been confused with this God.

Serpents or snakes, may have some part in the beliefs and religions of the Celts. Leog one of the heroes of the Cuchulainn cycle saw a two headed serpent on his visit to the other world. This is a possible connection with Cernunnos.

There may also have been a bear cult. There is some evidence that there was a cult because of the Irish name 'Art' in the Irish texts. 'Art' is a derivation of the Gaelic Artos, Arta meaning bear another place this can be seen is Artigan from Artigenos 'son of the bear' another Irish name for bear was math, MacMahon which is a corrupt form of Mac Math 'ghamain' it means son of the bear or simply 'of the of bear'. There may have been a bear tribe and possibly a bear God.

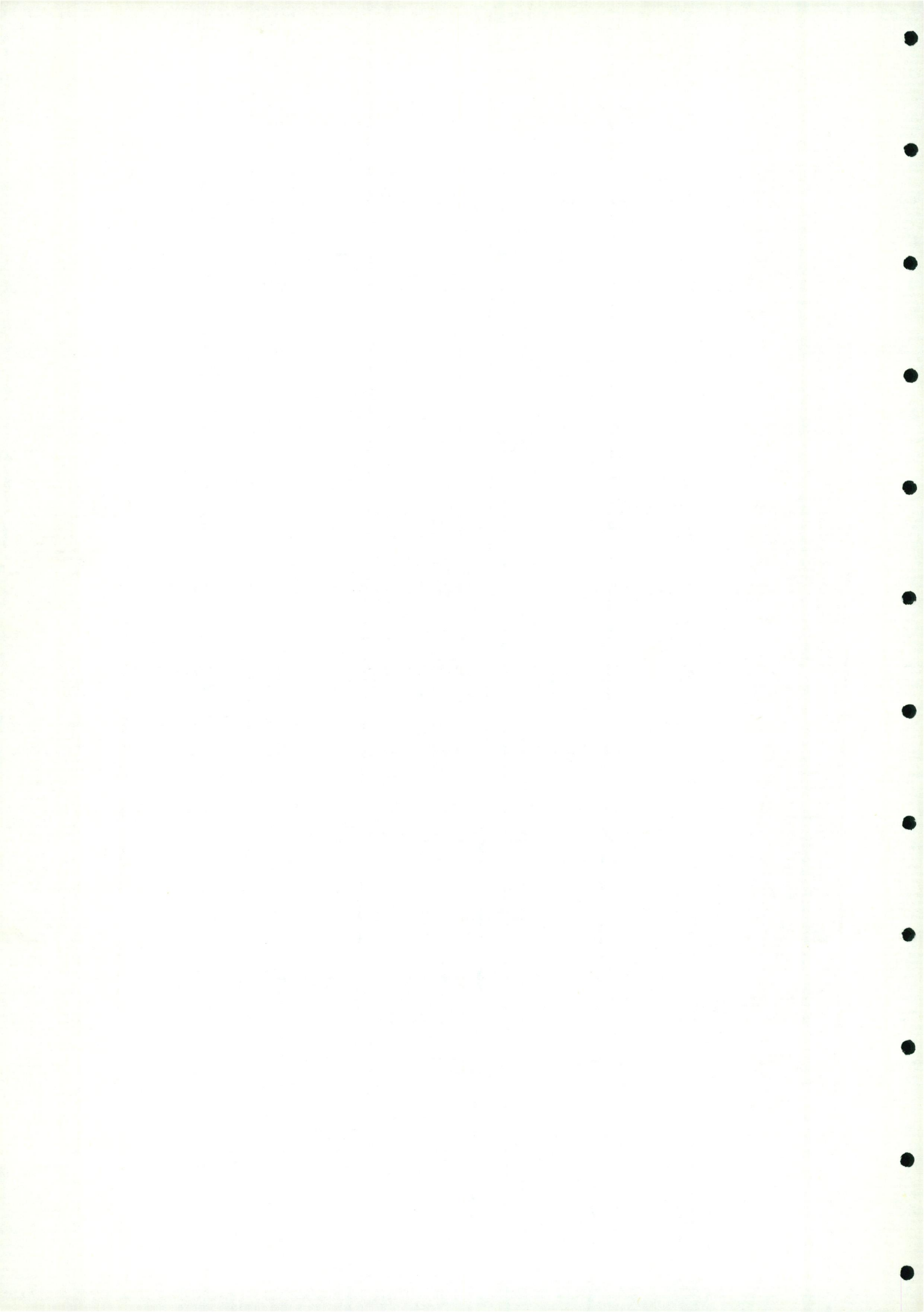
There is also a Deer cult which J.G. McKay has studied at length¹⁵. This beast too has been seen with three antlers in the Fionn sagas, again there may be a connection with Cernunnos.

McKay feels that the deer cult was pre-Celtic. Also she feels there is a connection with the Goddess Danu who also was associated with hunting.

¹³13, Pg. 78

¹⁴13, Pg. 67

¹⁵24, Pg. 144



The deer is often some sort of messenger for a Goddess. Hunters were continually chasing them into mounds; for example the story where Fionn, Caelite and other members of the Fianna chased a fawn. It led them to a mound. When they entered they found a group of fairies and fairy warriors. They were invited to join the party and then sent on a quest by the Queen of the mound.

Deer were looked upon as fairy cattle. It must be made clear that these fairies were not cute little people like Disney's Tinkerbell, but were more like the elven warriors in J.R.R. Tolkien's 'Lord of the Rings'.

It was common for women of these people to be able to transform themselves into deer and sometimes white horses. These fairies were probably local Gods.

Never could a witch change shape into a deer, witches, ordinary mortals would change into hares or cats.

Deer-goddesses are seen as huge but never referred to as giants . They speak of their 'darling deer' or 'the beast of my love' but they did not mind hunters. The Goddesses are seen as "benevolent and harmless".

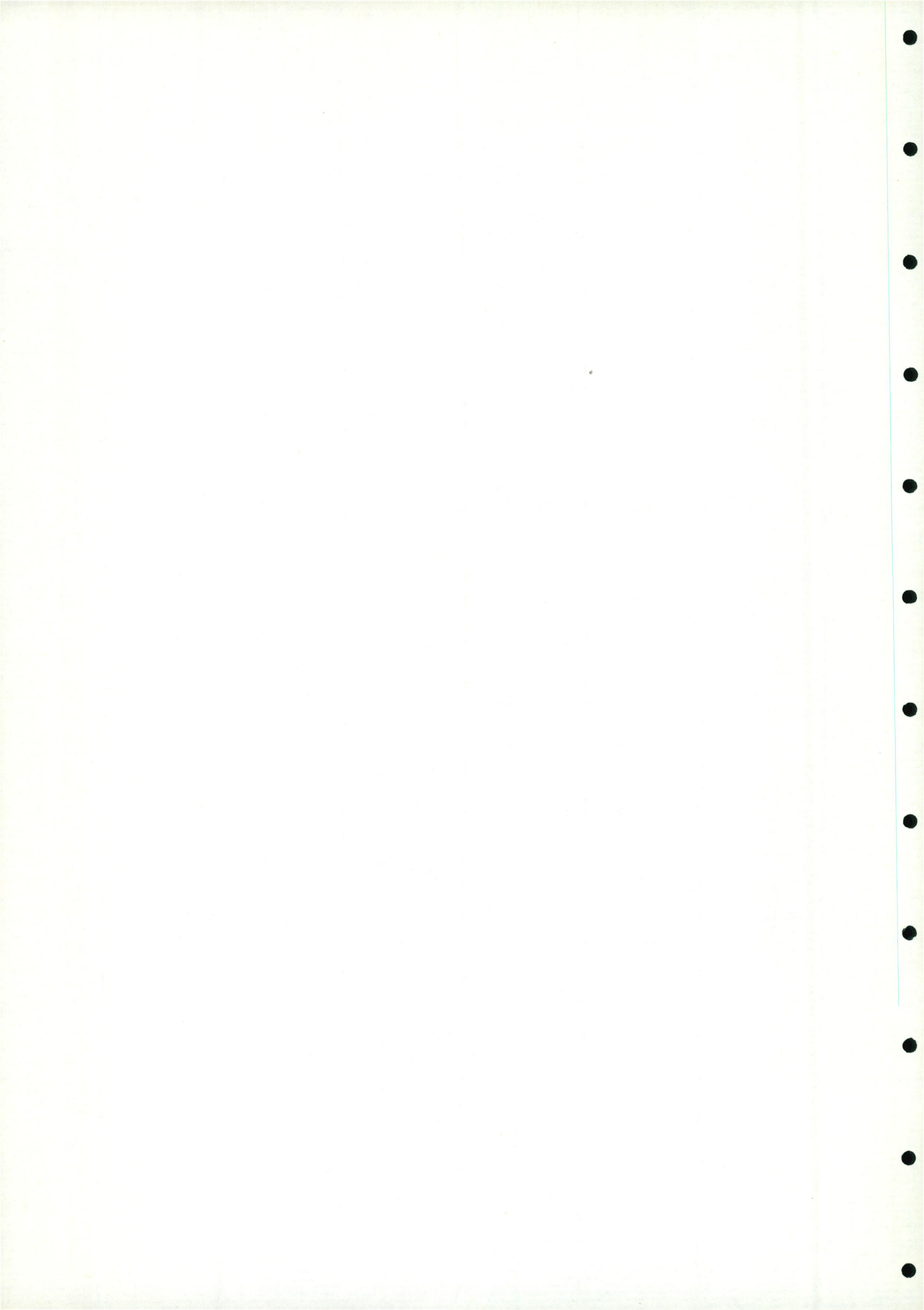
Their legends are considered the simplest this indicates age and shows they were probably pre-Celtic.

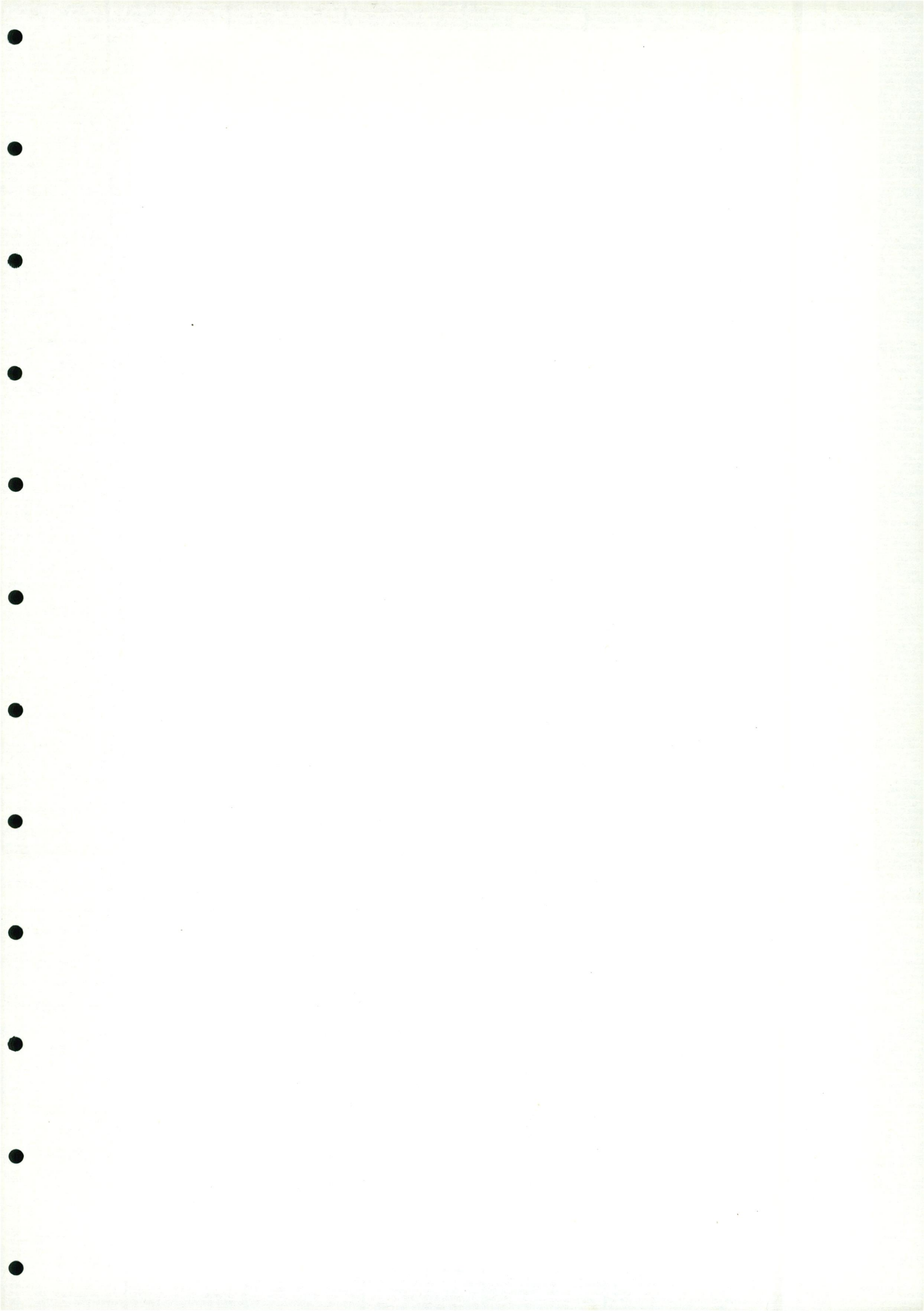
A reason for believing the deer cult was female was because women were frequently turning into deer as messengers and Goddess' are seen riding deer. Whereas men turning into a stag are rare .

There is an Irish Goddess "An Chailléach Bhéarach " the old woman of Beare. Beare is an island of Co. Cork. " In the chase of Ben Gulbin" she assumes the deer-shape in order to lead Fionn into a trap. It was written by Dean Swift that she rode in chariot drawn by four elks with golden horns.

There were witches and Priestess' that followed certain clans, it was to these witches that hunters often went to get their blessing or to buy a charm, so that their hunt would be successful. In payment they would also share the game with her. There are stories of a prosperous hunter refusing to share his gains with the witch, and when she goes to attack him he manages to beat her off. This illustrates the decline of the old religion.

There are also two types of stories about women turning into deer. One involves a priestess the other a Goddess.







Probably the Priestess dressed in Deer for ritual so that the hunter first sees a deer skin but then a woman and then falls in love. This could represent a man marrying a woman from a deer clan.

With the Goddess, they end up being taken or driven away because the man breaks one of the rules set down by the Goddess.

Deer women can also be fairies. In this case the love can be short lived such as the story of "MacPhies's Black Dog."

A hunter and the chief of the clan ran see a deer turn into a woman and instantly falls in love, but his love grows thin as this woman eats an ox every day and he is going to be ruined. So he sends for MacPhie (which means dark fairy) who drives her away and protects the chief with his black dog.

Sadhbh the mother of Oisín wife of Fionn was a fairy not a Goddess, and not mortal. She too was taken away by the dark fairy whom she originally ran away from. Fionn was heart broken and searches for her in vain more of that story later.

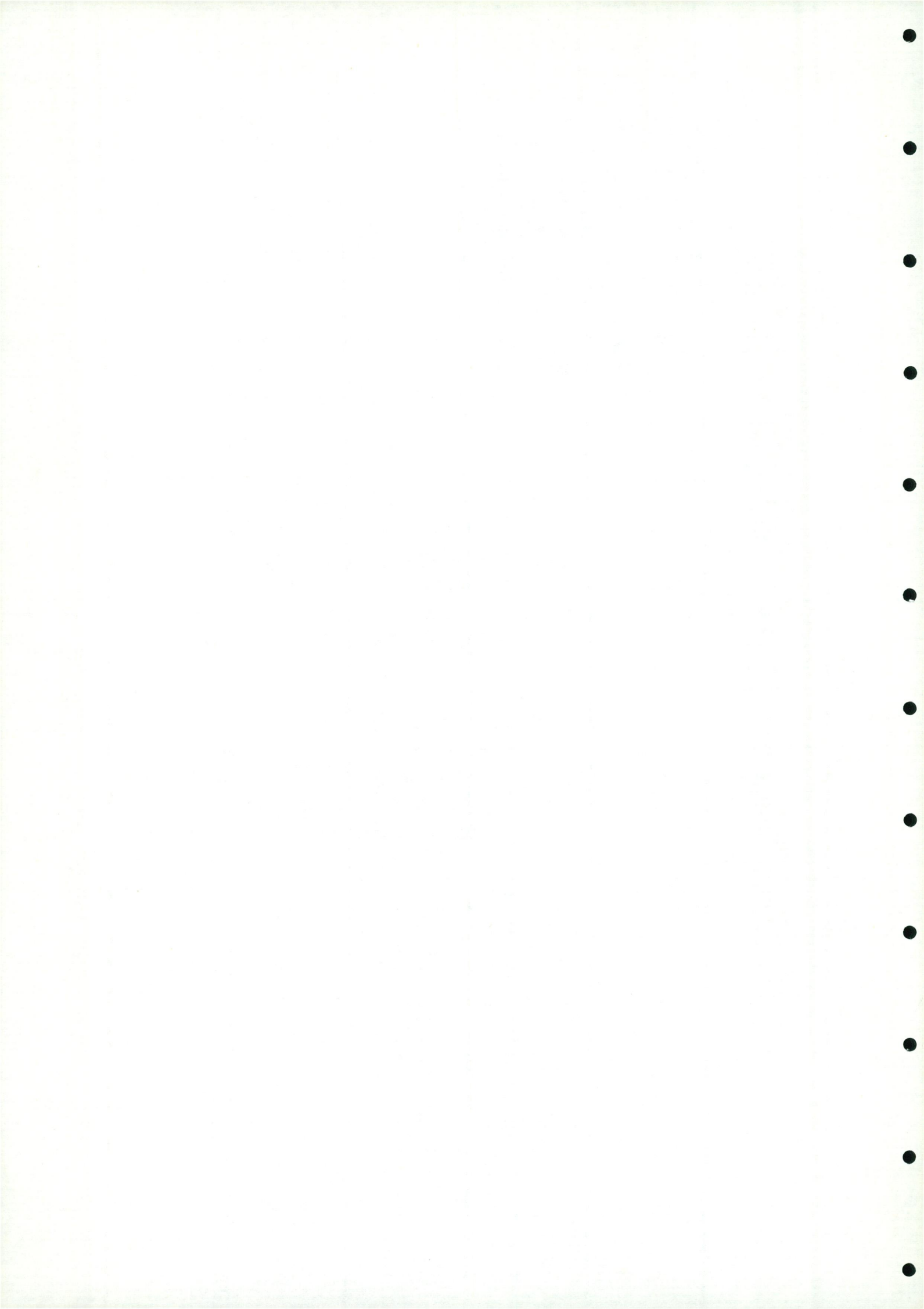
The horns are not the only reason that we can connect the Deer to Cernunnos. there is also the squatting posture. This story also shows hoe the deer priestess has no real power, also it may be Cernunnos dominating the Deer Goddess or it may be the old religion dying out.

A man comes and visits a witch. A witch never asks anyone to sit down. When he arrives at her door she asks him his name, and he says "William sit-down". She repeats his "William sit-down?". He pretends to take this as an invitation to sit and thanks her for her hospitality. The witch replies " William sit, yet siting, fare no better. Thou'lt get nought but poor food, poor drink and poor harboury, the bare ground, the earth full of holes ..."16

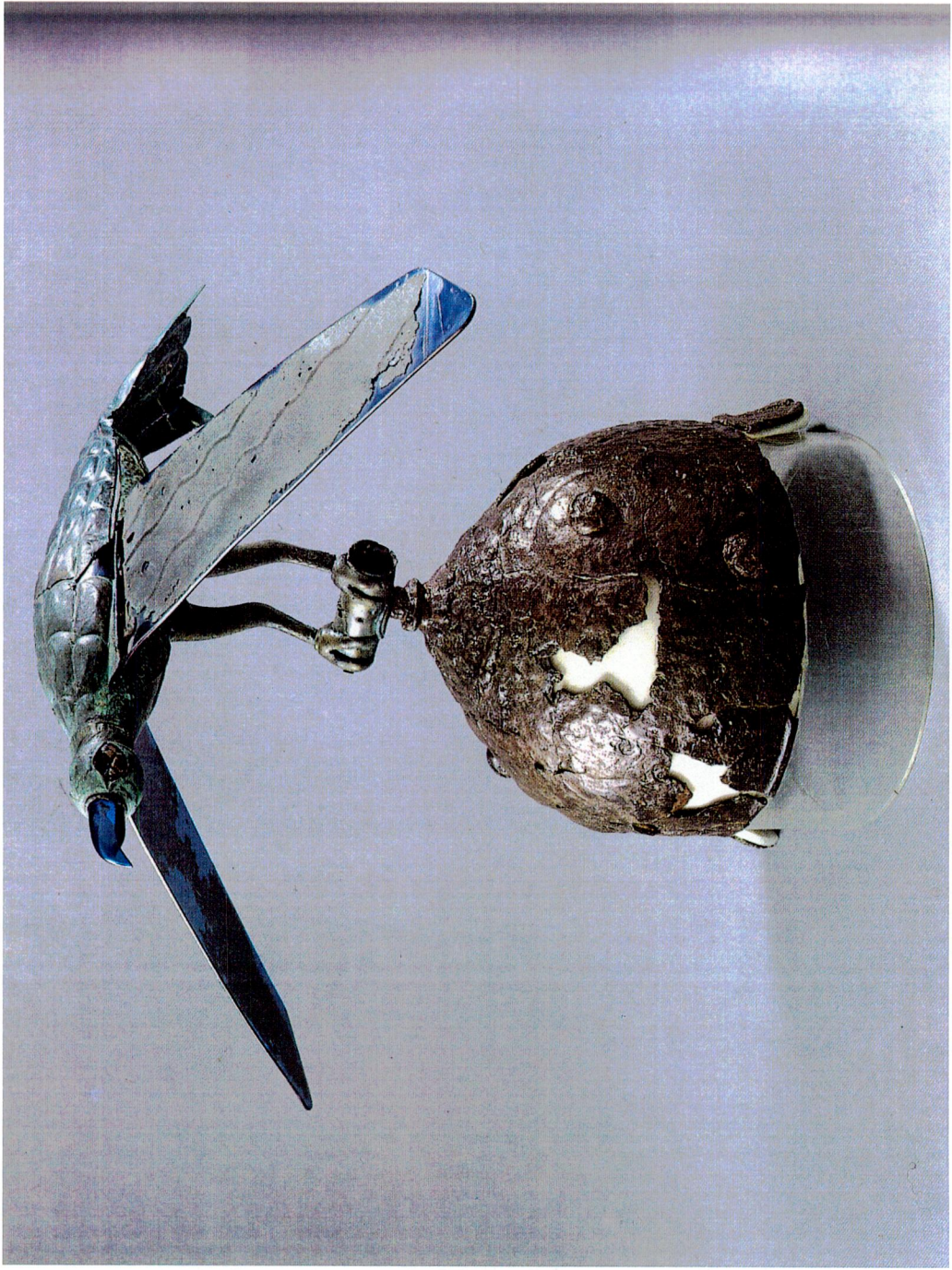
There were no chairs so he had to squat. Here is the connection with the squatting Cernunnos.

There may also have been Bird Gods. Birds of all colours sang in the other worlds and were used as messengers. Bran means raven, and the wren was considered the bird of the druid. The cuckoo was called eoh-sidhe or bird of the mounds, it was thought t have lived half of the year underground. The wren may have been a totem. In Ireland the hunt of the there would be , as the procession which would go to each

¹⁶24, Pg. 159







house, a feather would be given and materials for the feast were collected. This was not traditional in Ireland but introduced by the church. The wren can be identified with the druid 'drén' or 'draoiéan' meaning druid bard. It is probable the medieval church gave the wren a bad name to abolish druidic practices.

Swans when linked by a silver chain, the symbol of divine beings metamorphosed.

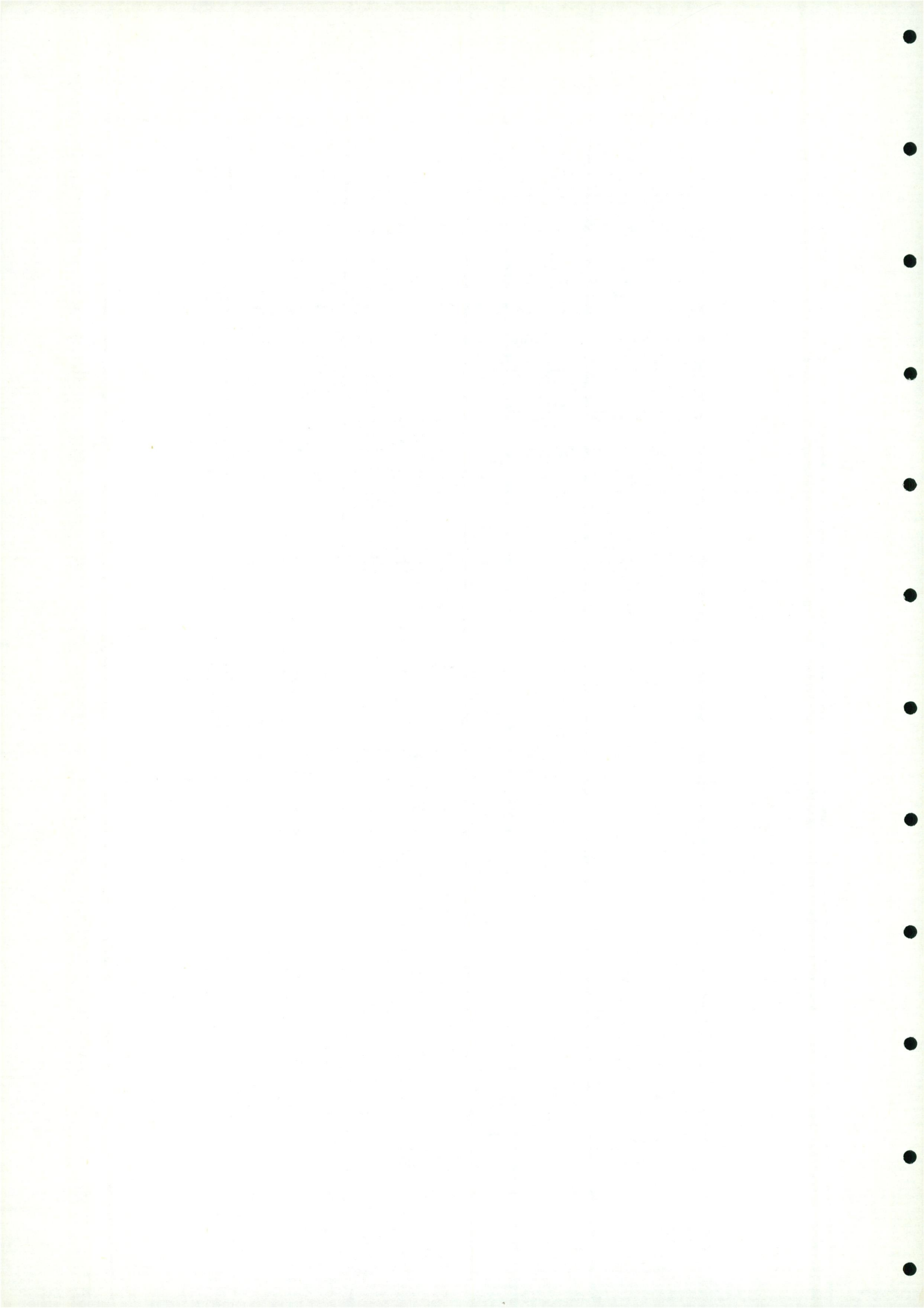
Animals were also taken as a totem for a clan.

Cormac Mac Art was brought up for a time by wolves. Art means bear so possibly the wolf may be a replacement for the bear, as they became extinct in Ireland, wolves began to replace them in stories.

It is felt that the wolf may have been a God of death or the other world because it hunted by night. People took the wolf as a God father does seem to suggest that it was worshipped.

There have been cases where animals come and fight a battle. The clan name could be remembered but the men forgotten. Owen's band of ravens battled against Arthur, could have been many men.

Here I have shown how the Celts represented their clans by animal names. It is possible that many animal stories are about clan wars or Gods. Also the hunted animals such as deer and boar were important Gods. This is directly related to the importance of those animals in the Celts lives. The Celtic religions have largely been lost. The animals in myth can be equated to gods doing miracles, miracles being relative. Many of the things we take for granted to-day would by have been viewed as being supernatural in the time of the celts.



Chapter 3 Wild animals in Irish mythology

Deirdre laments for the sons of Usna.

"Ainnli and Ardan, haughty and fierce in battle, to me
were ever loving and gentle; Naisi, Naisi beloved
spouse of my choice, thou canst not hear thy Deirdre
Lamnting thee."

"When they brought down the fleet red deer in the
chase, when they speared the salmon skillfully in the
clear water, joyful and were they if I looked on." ¹⁷

In the last chapter we have seen how animals played a large part in the religion of the people in early Ireland. Much of this knowledge has been backed up by the old stories. Possibly the stories were recordings of history. Through the ages there must have been mix-ups and remakes. The Irish ballad writers and story tellers were not worried about chronological ordering.

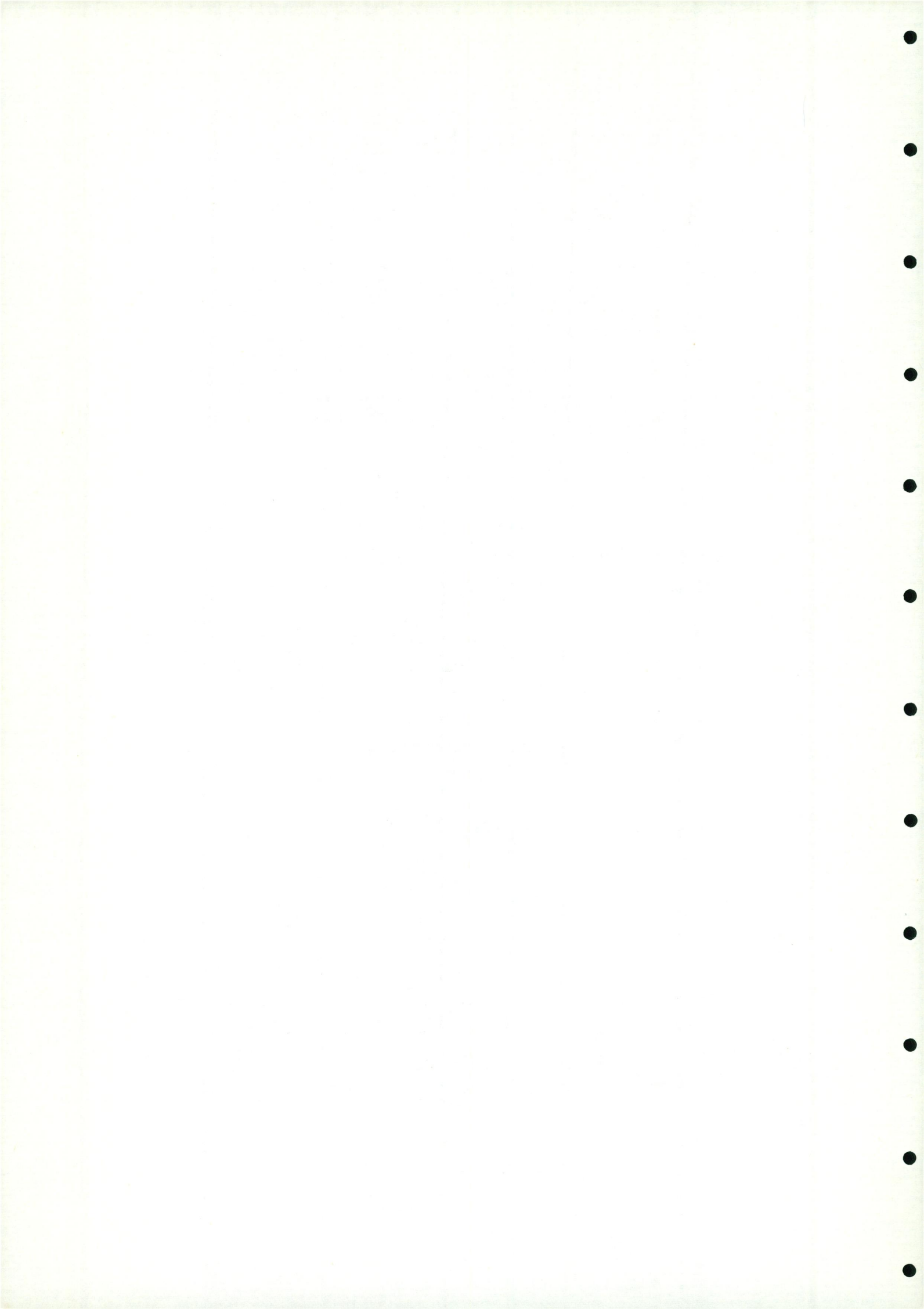
In this chapter I look at the stories of the Fianna that involve wild animals. these stories also tell a lot about how the people felt about animals. Here are some of the stories I have read. These are not necessarily the most common versions but I feel the more interesting ones. The Vikings did not invade until 300 years after St. Patrick's death. So we can not take the story's we received with any definite historic accuracy. But they do give us some insight into the feelings of the people of the time.

There was an interesting character called Céathach. He lived in time of Fionn and the Fianna. This story is very exciting and I have found many versions. They are all full of animal imagery.

¹⁸The King found his son Céatach was no scholar so he sent him to be apprentice under Rí na Lice Slemhaine. Here he meets his wife to be, but another apprentice Londubh (Blackbird) also loves the woman. They have a competition to decide who will have her as wife. At this time they were training to be blacksmiths. In the competition Céathach sends a shower of wheat, from his fire, Londubh sends a hen to eat the wheat then Céathach sends a fox to kill the hen and wins as his bride

¹⁷ 7 verses iv and v Pg. 452

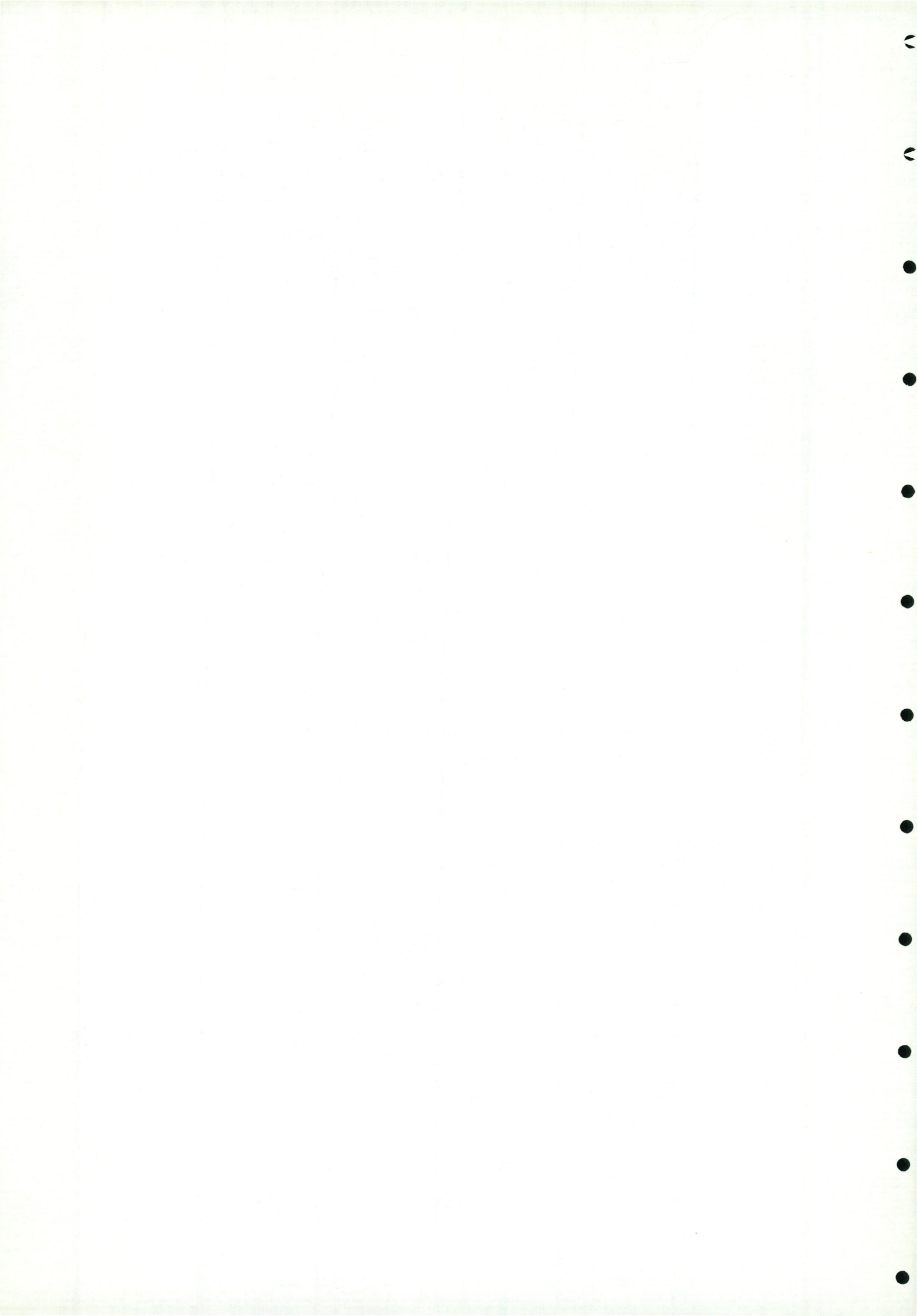
¹⁸4, Vol I, 1937, Pg. 151 to 155, 342 to 344



Pampóg. Now it was a condition that Céathach was first in the competition if he only if he let Londubh strike him and use no protection against the strike . Londubh did this and chopped off his head. Pampóg sails away with the body and gets healing balm from three giants. She promises that Céathach will kill their enemies after they heal him. Before the last enemy dies she puts him under a geasa (quest) to tell the hag of the churchyard what he has done. He goes to the hag tells her does battle with her kills her, but before she dies she puts him under a geasa to go to the lamb of the ford. He kills the lamb but again is put under a geasa, this time to go tell the Cat of the speckled cave what he has done. The cat and Céatach fight and though he kills the cat he also dies. The giants find him restore him to life. The translation has questions marks after the lamb of the ford and the cat of the speckled cave. Possibly the cat was some sort of monstrous pine marten. Céathach decides to join the Fianna. On the journey home Londubh descends on the ship in the shape of a bird and changes into human form and Céathach and Londubh begin to fight . They change into dogs, bulls, stallions and fiery hawks, in which form they kill each other. Céathach is brought back in the form of a bird. Meanwhile on land Pampóg watched the two birds fight. One of them was killed. A flock of birds arrive and cover the dead bird with leaves and the bird come back to life. Pampóg restores Céathach to life in a similar manner.

¹⁹Here we have men changing shape in battle and dying as birds of prey. The hawk was obviously an important bird in ancient times. It was used for hunting as well as being a symbol of wealth and majesty. This story of Céathach also seems to be very much about being reincarnated, changing shape and new life. These seem to have a very close connection in pagan Ireland. Was it thought that you were born again but not necessarily in human form? Or were these changes of shape symbolic a new stage of maturity? One feature all these versions retain is that after Céathach wins Pampóg, Londubh and Céathach only fight at sea and there is always the same sort of shape change involved. In another story about Céathach, he ventures forth to Africa with the Fianna. In this story Londubh is called Gruadhdhearg. Through their adventures the Fianna end up tied to the ground in a lady's house in Greece, all but Céathach are bound. Fionn chews his thumb and learns nothing will free them but the blood of the Reithe Glas (Grey Ram) of Africa. Now Céathach sets off for Africa and hunts and catches the ram and frees the Fianna . Céathach again ends up in Africa. this time it is because of a deer woman. Fionn is out hunting and she places Fionn under a geasa to bring her the Damh Dearg (red ox) from Africa. They hunt and catch the Damh Dearg and return home. They meet Gruadhdhearg. He throws his three

¹⁹4 Vol III, 1937, Pg. 398



spears and hits and kills Céathach with the last one. Fionn learns through chewing his thumb that they may revive Céathach by giving him the blood of the piglets of Cáin Bhreach (speckled sow of the Eastern World). Fionn kills the sow with an apple (ball?) of brass and they return and cure Céathach.

This story is quite different from the other versions I have found in that there are no giants and Céathach does not change shape though he is sent on quests to find animals. Also blood is the saviour both in freeing the tied men and bringing Céathach back to life. There is no healing balm. The common elements are women send the warriors on quests in both versions and the speckled sow and there may also be a connection with the cat of the speckled cave.

Sea animals also have played an important part in Irish mythology one of the most famous fish is the salmon of knowledge that Fin Mac Cumhaill eats. There are a number of versions of this story²⁰. Fionn was hiding in the mountain because the tribe of the Moiri wanted him dead. During this time King Cormac ruled Ireland and he had been told by his druid that :

"in the western land there was a salmon which if caught and eaten would communicate wisdom, prowess and good fortune to the eater, that from that day forth fame and prosperity would attend him in all his wars."

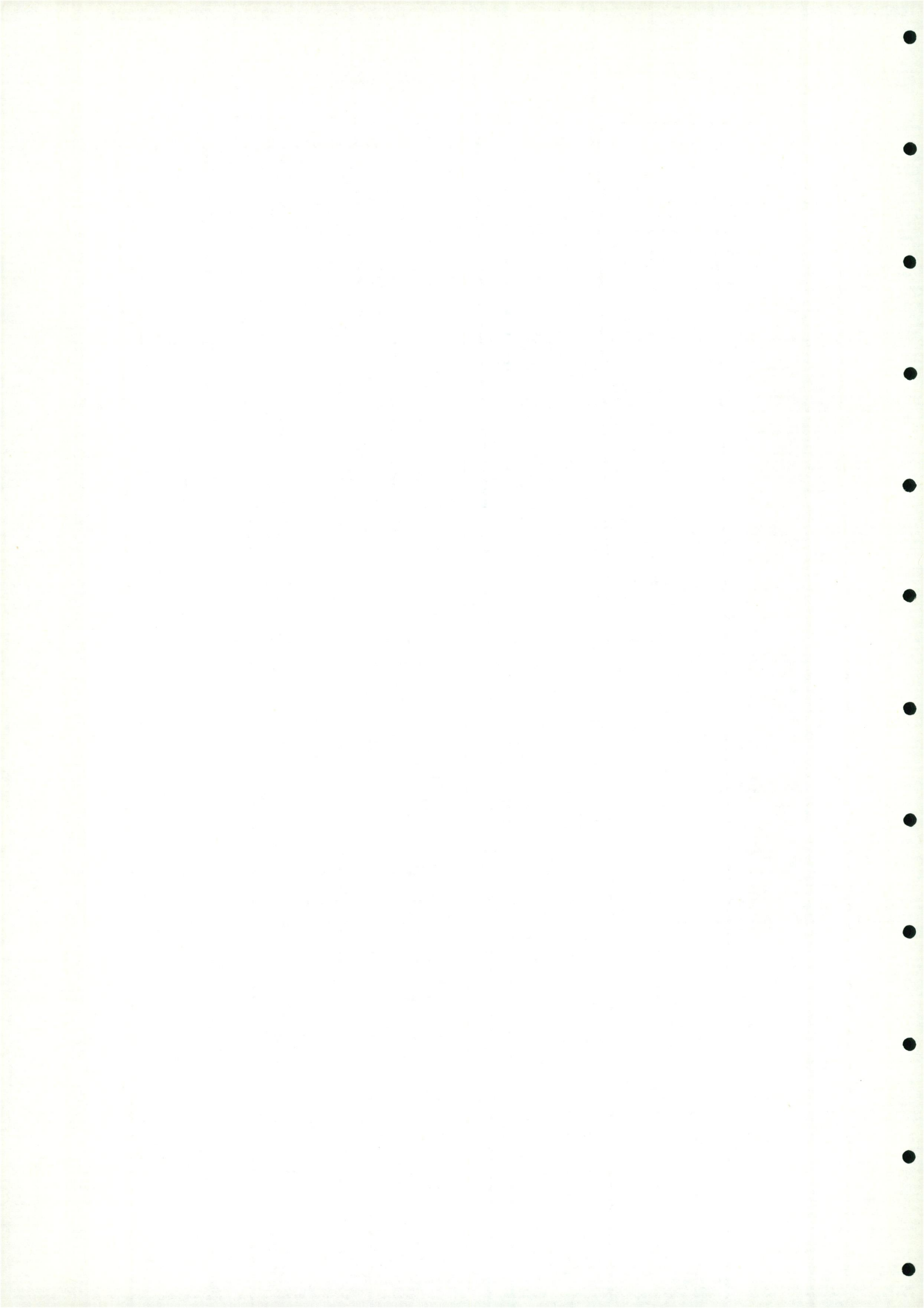
The King went in search of the fish and caught many salmon. None of the salmon conferred wisdom on him. Finally he started to make selections throwing back the smaller fish and keeping the more handsome to taste:

and here methinks the discretion of the King
and his druid was not evinced for many a time
oft ugly heads contain capacious brains and
sleek skins fail to enclose shining intellects. So
proved here

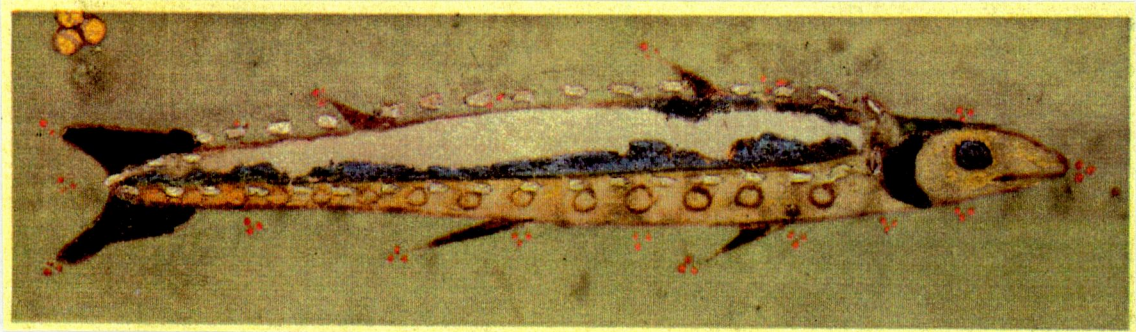
Now the King tossed a small ugly salmon and Fionn who had been watching took the salmon and cooked it for himself. As he was cooking it a blister appeared on the skin:

He pressed his thumb on it which caused it burst
and burning his thumb, he clasped into his
mouth. The instant it came between his teeth he
felt as wise and prudent as if he were a hundred
years old.

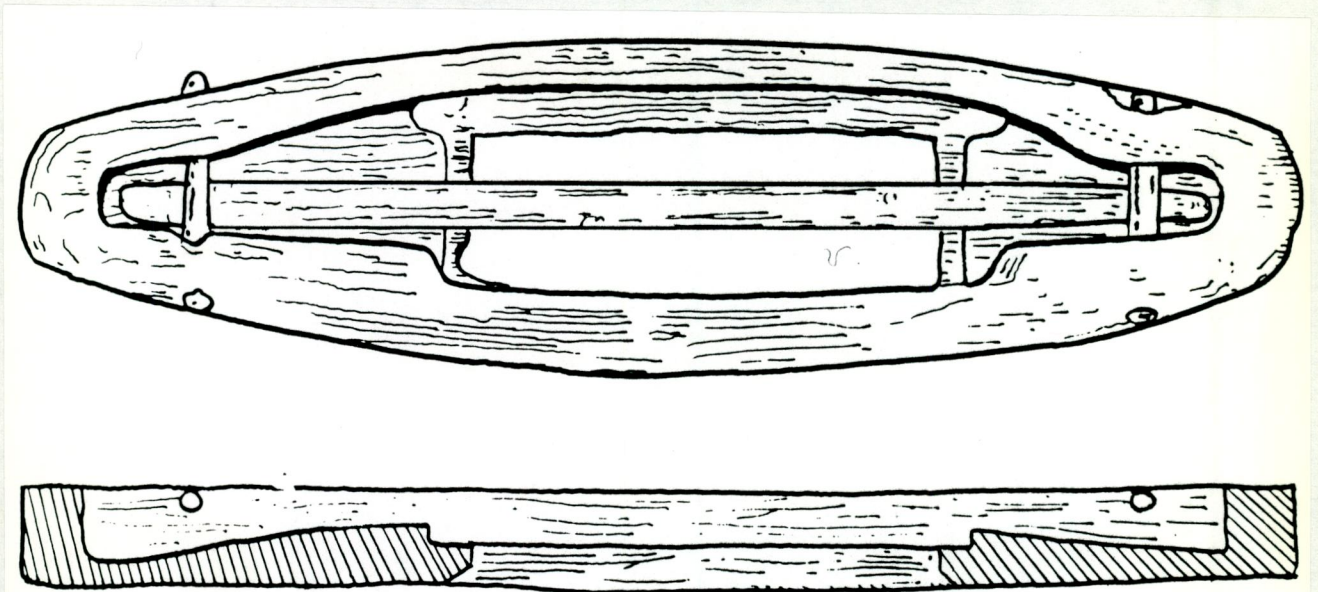
²⁰Folklore and Legends of Ireland Pg. 47







3.1



Ancient otter trap—one of several unearthed in Ulster during the nineteenth century.

3.2

There are so many variations of this story it must have some significance. Through his new found knowledge Fionn was able to overthrow his oppressors. The salmon may have been a clan considered unimportant and weak but if led by the strong ruler could become a strong and conquering force.

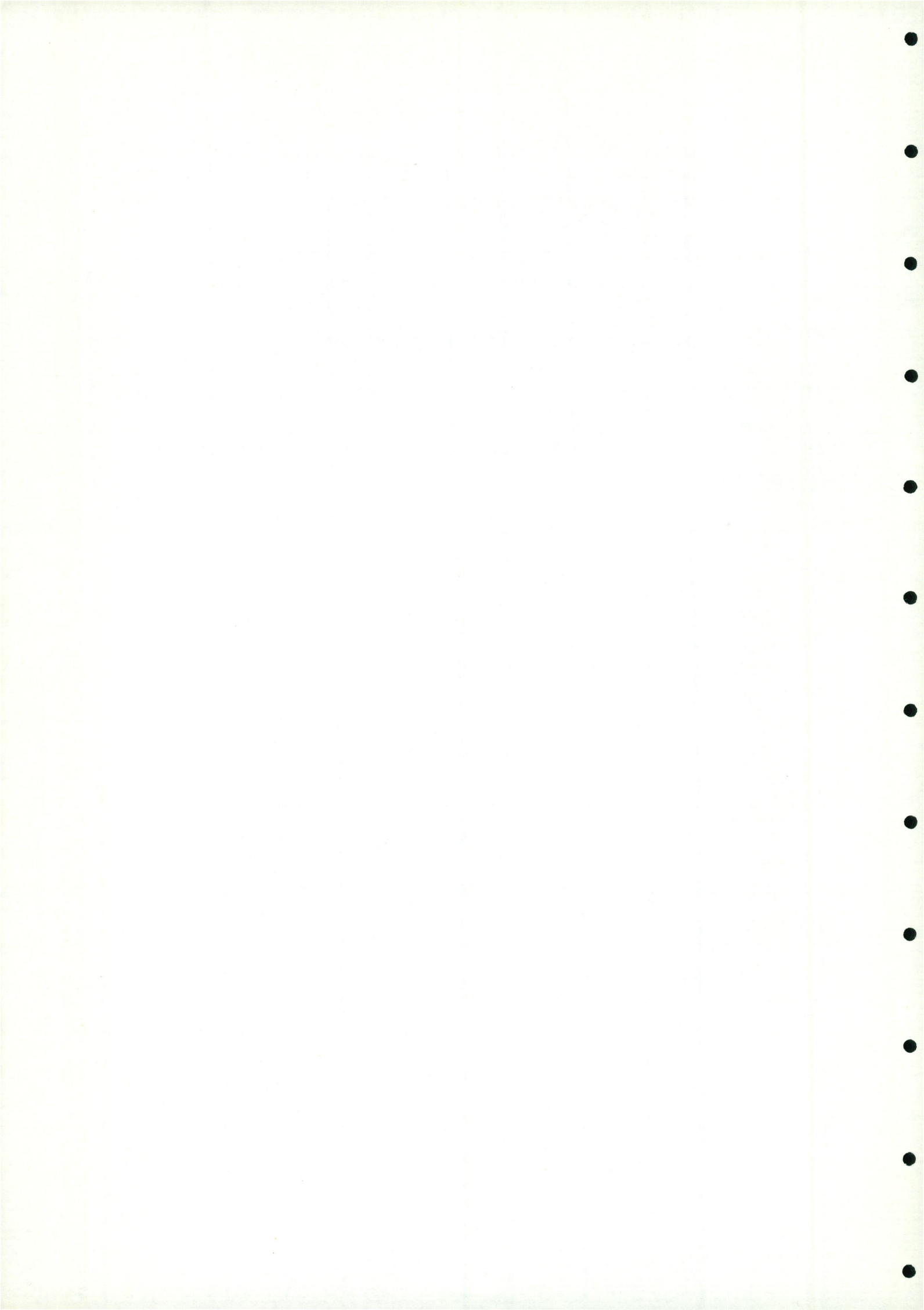
We know that in ancient times otters were hunted because several traps were unearthed in the bogs of Ulster in the last century. The turf cutters who found them took them for the coffins of an ancient race of dwarves and would no longer work that area of the bog.²¹ There was a man whose father was an otter. This happened when Cormac was King of Ireland. King Cormac had three daughters. While he was away they went to swim in a lake. An otter appeared it swam beside the youngest daughter and she became pregnant. The King acted as the boys father until he grew up. The son killed the King as he would not give him the Kingdom when he came of age. Shortly after the Kings death his Queen had a son who was taken at birth by wolves who reared him. Some hunters came across the child in a forest. The child was recognised as King Cormac's son because of a belt it was wearing. When he was grown he went to avenge his father. He was told that King Conn had someone tell him a story each night and if the King didn't like the story the storyteller would then be executed. The boy went and told the King stories all night and the King lay with his back to him. In the morning the King turned around and said they were the best stories he had ever heard. The lad asked was he not asleep. "I wasn't." said the King "I haven't closed an eye in sleep for seven years maybe twice seven."

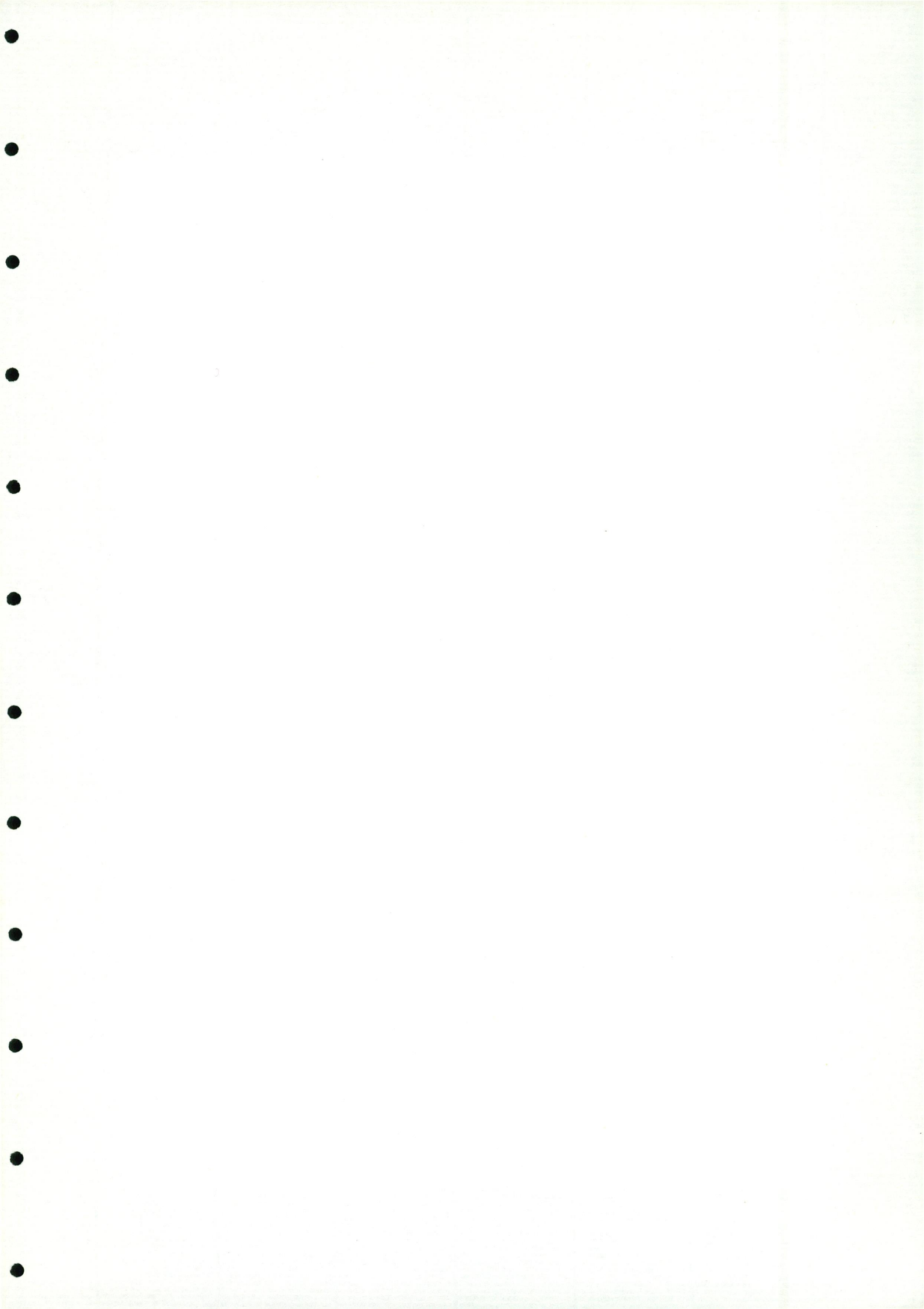
"Then you must have some of the otters nature in you." said the lad.

The King denied this but then went and asked his mother and she told him the truth. The lad told him he could get him the gift of sleep. Conn said he could have the kingdom when he died if he could accomplish this. What the boy did was place the King's bed in a boat on the lake with a chain to fasten it to the shore. King Conn got in it drifted into the middle of the lake. The King lay down and fell asleep for three days. The otter in the lake smelled the King that night crept into the boat and ate his head. Thus the boy became King of Ireland and all were prosperous again having the true King's son in his rightful place.

I would say the otter symbolises a lost tribe which forced its way to power and was overthrown then its King was assassinated by the original rulers restoring them to power. The story of the wolf bringing up a child is common in Ireland.

²¹5, Pg. 162







Any Irish stories about weasels must be about stoats because there were no weasels in Ireland. They were considered to be evil animals. It was thought they could spit poison.

They were also meant to be people enchanted or cursed. The pine marten is the cat of the Irish stories and supposedly the stoat is the cat of the Norsemen.

This is the story of a man called Cod who is overcome by weariness, but a little cat keeps coming up and disturbing his sleep. Finally he catches the cat and it turns into a beautiful woman and Cod marries her.

There is a poem translated by Reidar Christiansen about Fionn doing battle with cat and dog headed men. Possibly these men are wearing masks of their clan totem.²²

The Irish Celts thought the fox was the dog of the Norsemen.²³

Hares were also considered somewhat supernatural as often they were witches in the form of hares. Sometimes women changed into hares²⁴ such as the beautiful and mysterious woman O'Cronagan met. One time O'Cronagan was making his way to Kincora. When he was on Slieveluacha he saw a greyhound half white and half green, he took it. When he got to Kincora O'Conagan asked for the beagles that the King of France had given the King as a present. He went back to the mountain Slieveluachra. Soon one of the beagles started a hare so O'Conagan slipped the greyhound after it and sat down to watch. The hare ran towards O'Cronagan and with a cry of "Sanctuary O'Cronagan" the hare ran and crouched in his bosom. Where instantly she was turned into a beautiful young woman. "Thou shalt have it " he answered. The hare on old Irish money is the brown hare and not the native one.

There is an old Celtic word 'tarzyos' which means badger and it is thought that Tadhg's ancestors were badgers.²⁵

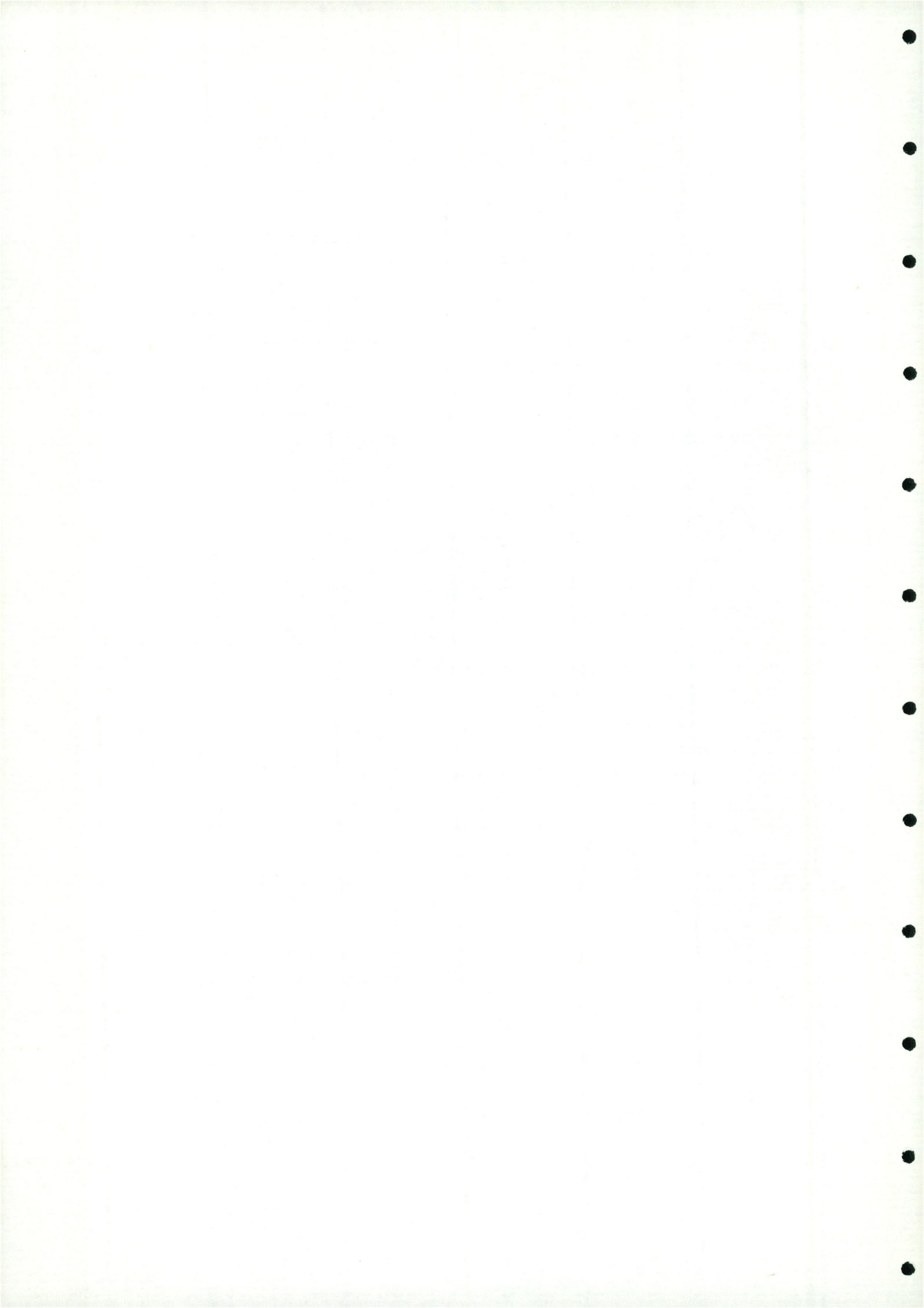
²⁶There was a feast being made for Tadhg with all sorts of meats but no badger meat, so Cormac his son went to a set and called the badgers out saying that

²² Vol III 1937 Pg. 398

²³ 12, Pg. 333

²⁴ 9, Pg. 333

²⁵ 12, Pg. 381





caecus est oculus
se
omnique unicus oculus



they would be protected under his father. When the badgers came out Cormac killed some of them and had them prepared for the feast. Tadhg was furious when he saw the meat and called him 'Gaileana' which means falling in honour and banished him.

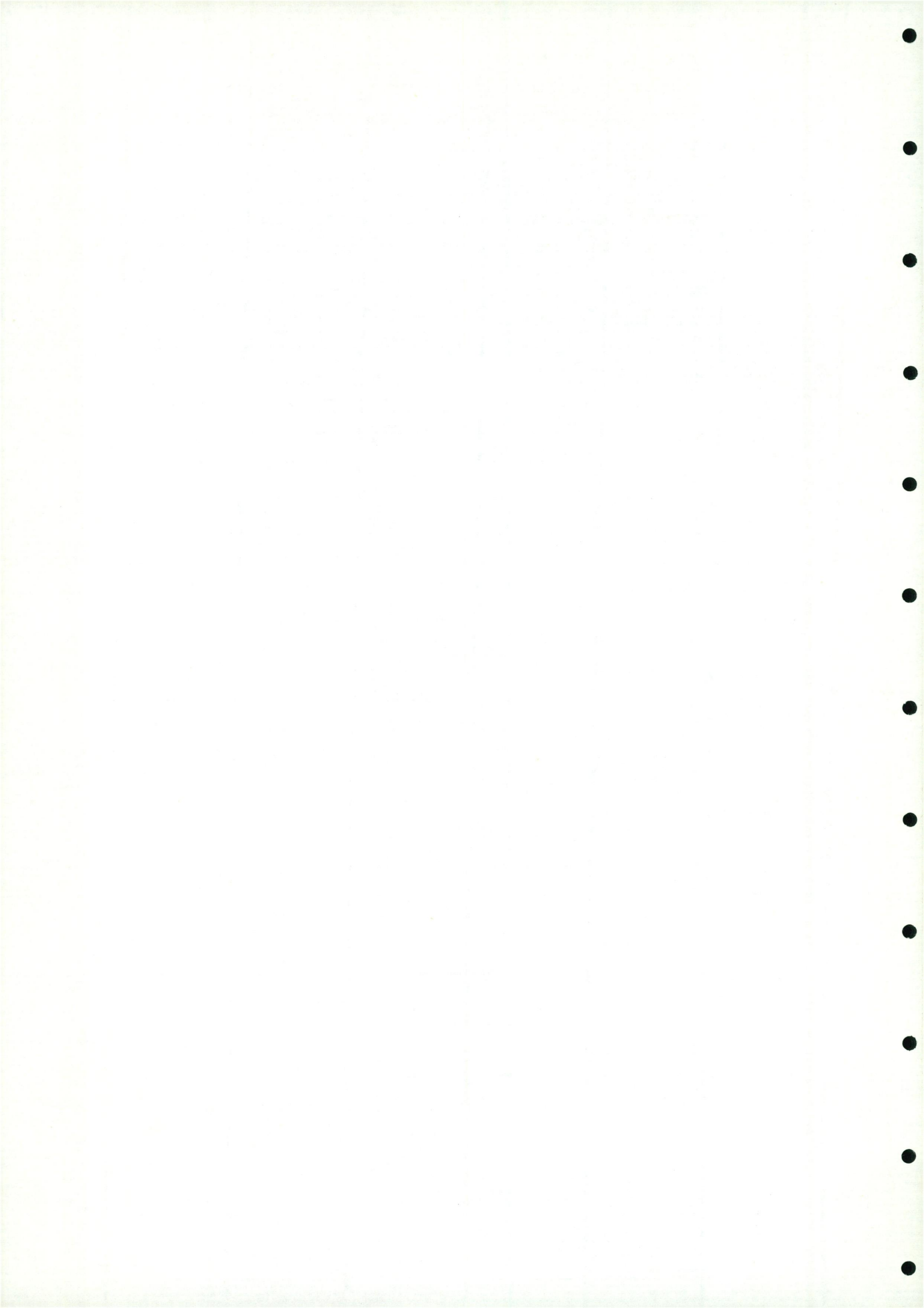
Hunting was very important to the Fianna. According to Caelite a member of the Fianna the best hunting the Fianna ever had was on Arran an island between Scotland and Ireland.

"Arran of many stags the sea impinges on her very shoulders!" But it is not only stags that thrived there "her wild swine, they were fat... under her river banks trout lie." This island was also covered in birds which they did not hunt. Thrice fifty separate flocks there were that encircle her and they clad in gay brilliance of all colours, as blue green, azure and yellow. They would come here on the first day of the Trojan month, and hunt till the cuckoo would call in Ireland.

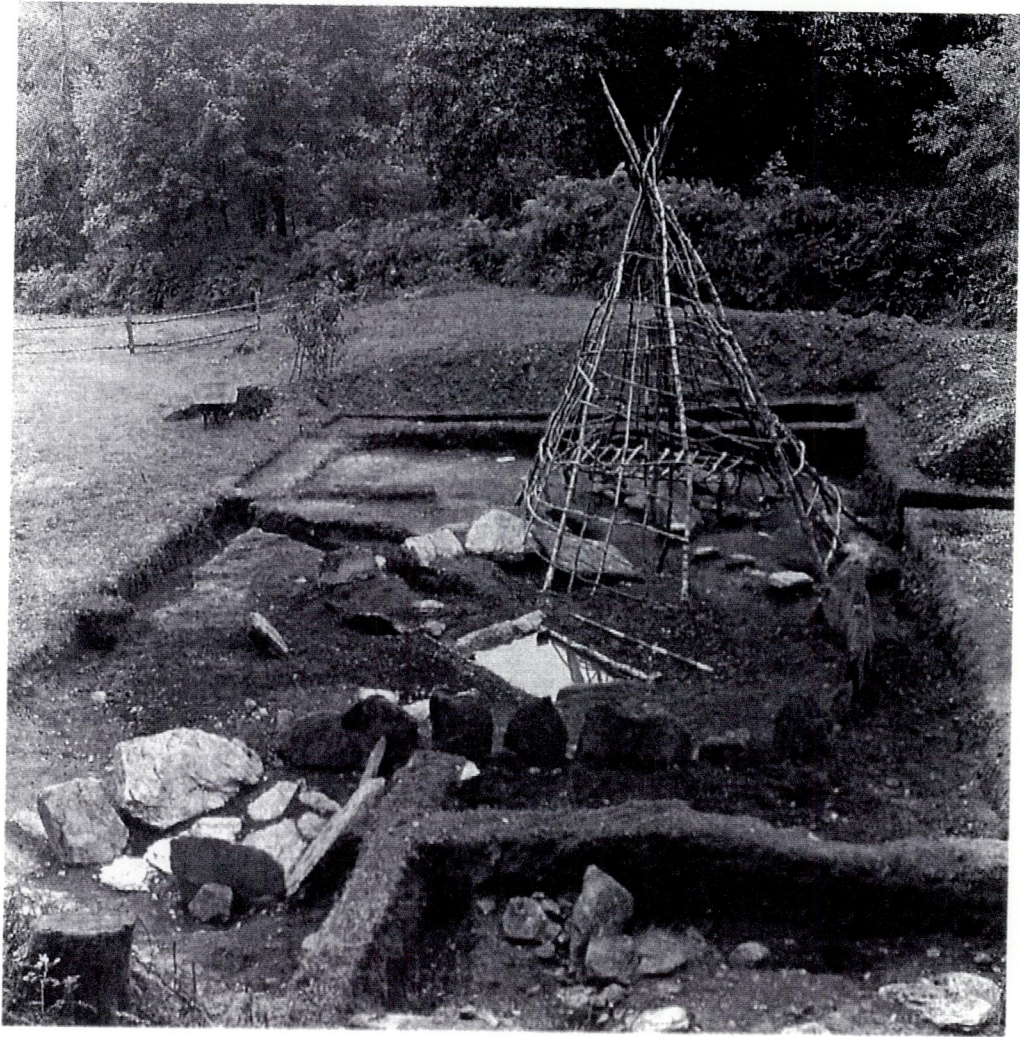
My favourite story of deer is the story of 'Sadhbh', Fionn's wife, the mother of Oisín. The story goes that when Fionn was out hunting on the hill of Allen, they started a beautiful fawn which they chased. Soon all the pursuers were left behind except Fionn and his two hounds, who were the children of his enchanted aunt. When the hounds caught up with the deer they began to play with her and lick her. He did not harm her and she followed Fionn home and lay beside him on his bed. That night she changed into the fairest woman Fionn had ever seen. She told him her name was Sadhbh and that she was seeking his protection, from the Dark Druid who had changed her into deer because she did not love him. Fionn fell in love with her and did not leave her side for many months. Eventually though he had to go as Norsemen were attacking the country. He was gone for seven days and when he returned, Sadhbh's lady in waiting came and told Fionn how the Dark Druid had disguised himself as Fionn when Sadhbh saw him she ran from the castle to greet him and was struck by him with a hazel wand which changed her back into a deer then the druid dragged her off. Fionn led the Fianna as before, but for seven years he searched for Sadhbh in the forests and eventually he gave up hope. Then one day he was out hunting on Ben Bulbann in Sligo when he heard dogs fighting. When he went to look he found his hounds protecting a boy from the other hounds. Fionn took the boy with him.

The boy knew no father or mother but was minded by a deer who cared for him. They lived in a valley shut on every side by cliffs. Often a dark man would

²⁶12, Pg. 381







come and talk to the deer but she would always back away from him. One day the man grew angry and struck her with his hazel wand and she followed him reluctantly. The boy found himself unable to move and fainted with anger. When he came to the man and the deer were gone and he had wandered through the forests ever since. Fionn realised this was his son and so called him Oisín which means little fawn.

Oisín had another encounter with a deer the story that is commonly known as "Oisín and the land of the Youth". It is common that Niamh comes to Oisín in the form of a deer.

Another version the deer is his mother who took him there to protect him from jibes or teasing he might have got for his mother being a deer. Another way Oisín was meant to get to the Land of the Youth was by a blackbird (Londubh). The bird steals a ring and he chases the bird which brings him to his mothers country. Campbell suggests that 'Lon' meant Elk originally. So possibly this blackbird was actually an elk.²⁷

Deer were also cooked in a special way, and there are many deer cooking sites. there is one at Drombeg one and half miles east of Glandore. There were two huts and a cooking place. The venison was cooked as follows:

There was a rectangular flag lined pit five feet by three feet which water would be poured into. (Five by three feet). Hot stones would be dropped into the water until it was boiling. The venison would probably have been wrapped in leaves and possibly herbs and cooked in the water. Experiments show that seventy-five gallons of water could be brought the boil in fifteen minutes in this way. This may have been used for special festivals.

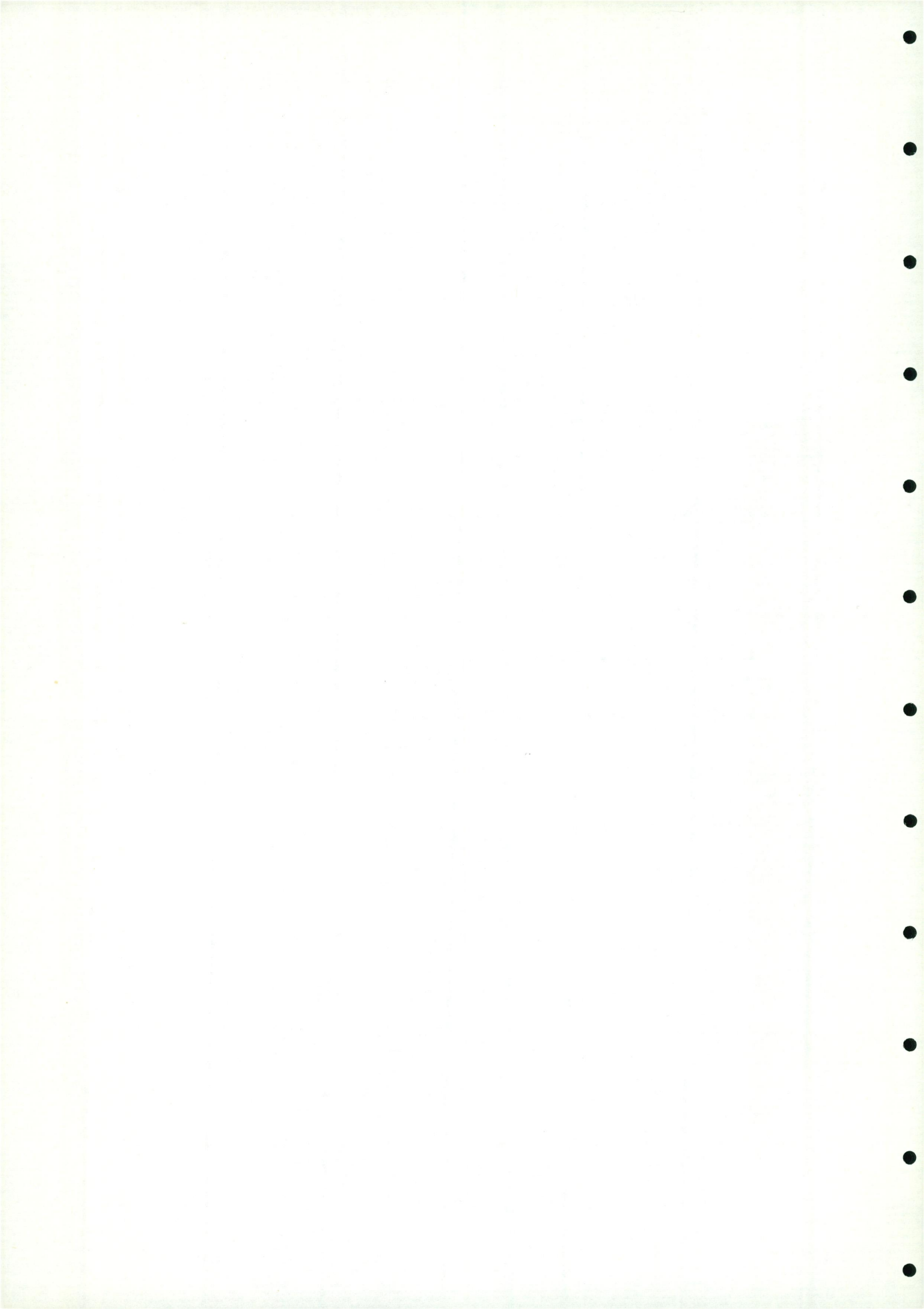
There is the story of Oisín's death where he performs his last great feat of strength and kills a giant crow. This is to prove to an insulting cook that he is not useless. She continued to deride him and he died shortly after.²⁸

Boar were worshipped and there have been many statues of them found. It is not surprising then that there are stories about them. Magic Pigs are said to have come from the cave of Cruachan (Hells Gate of Ireland) they were destroyed by Conall Cerachs father, but then came a flock of white birds which the Ulaidh²⁹

²⁷4, Vol I, 1937, Pg 221. Vol II, 1937 Pg. 258.

²⁸6, Pg. 137

²⁹Ancient people from whom the province of Ulster got its name. 9, Pg. 353



people killed these with slings. The swine reappeared and this time they could not be killed for they would keep disappearing. Also they could not be counted. Maeve went one day to try count them. She was sitting in her chariot when

one hog of them cleared it in a leap. All cried out 'There goes a pig over Maeve!' 'Never a bit' qouth the Queen as she caught the porkers shank [in transitu]; at that the beasts forehead the skin opened, so that in Maeve's hand was left with his hide [entire] with the shank[and so sped on his way]; nor from that time to this has it been known whither they all betook them. Hence magh mucrímha or 'the plain of swine counting'.³⁰

Dermot was killed by the boar of Ben Bulben. Dermot's father was Donn, his mother was unfaithful to Donn and had a child by another man. Donn kills the child and threw him on the floor. When the child's father returned and discovered what had happened, he called for the help of a druid who turned the body into a huge boar. Then he said to the boar " I charge you to bring Diarmuid Ó Duibhne to his death "; and the boar rushed out from the hall and roamed in the forests of Ben Bulben in Co. Sligo till the time when its destiny should be filled."

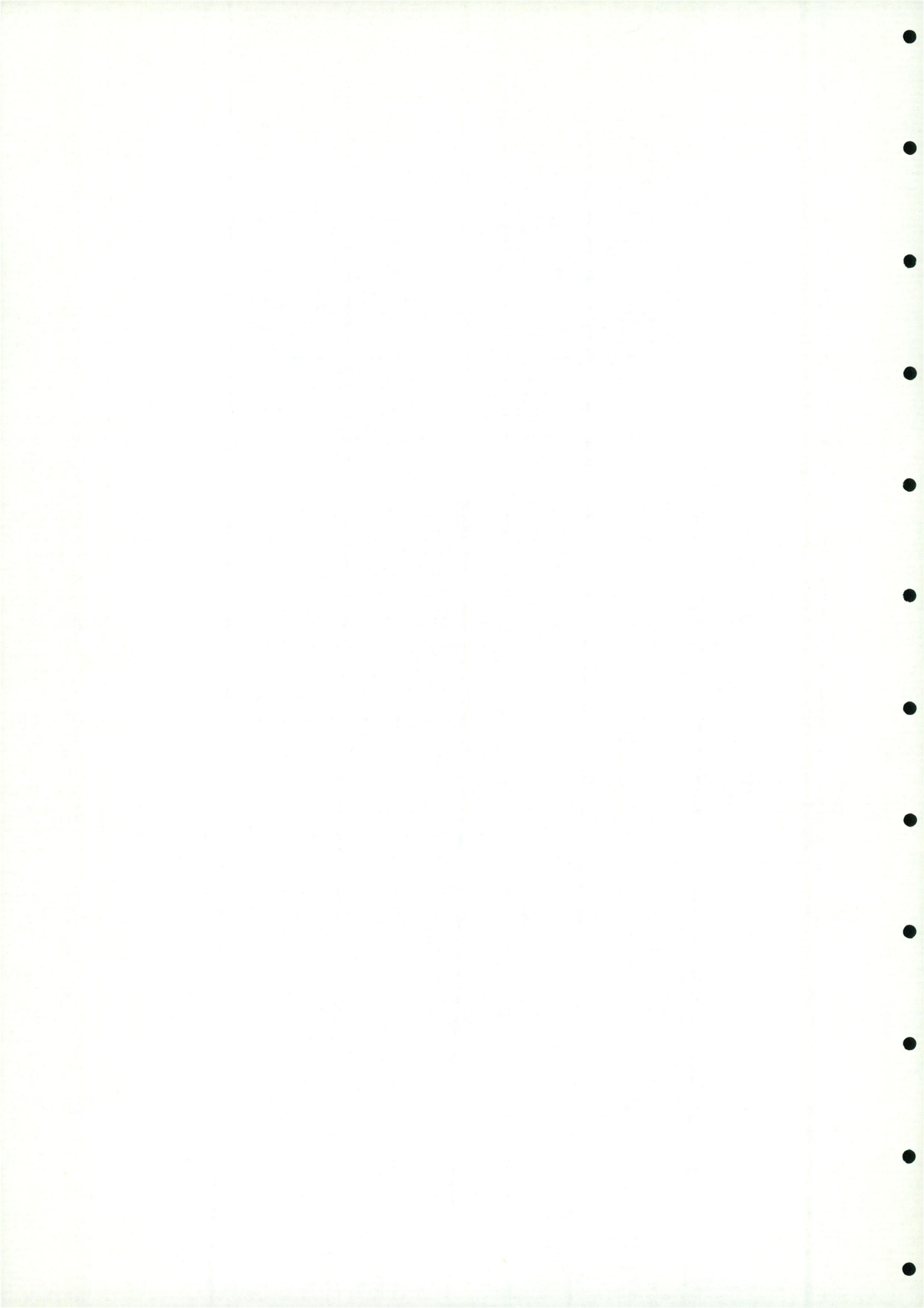
Years later Dermot dreamt he heard the sound of hunting hounds, the next day he went to the mountain of Ben Bulben where he saw Fionn being hunted. Fionn had raised up the Boar of Ben Bulben. Knowing that Dermot would never retreat from danger. Dermot faced the pig and killed it but died from battle wounds.

In ancient times wolves were a threat to livestock. Ring forts were built to keep wolves away from the live stock. I have no reference to wolves being hunted by the Fianna. Conall Caireach a contemporary of Cú Chulainn was hunted by the "three red wolves of the Martini"³¹ According to the ancient laws of Ireland (Brehon Law tracts) early Irish people kept wolves.

In this chapter I have mainly looked at romantic stories of the Fianna. These heroes spend a large amount of time having adventures which frequently involve deer, boar, and other hunted animals only they are supernatural. Often they are a

³⁰9, Pg. 353

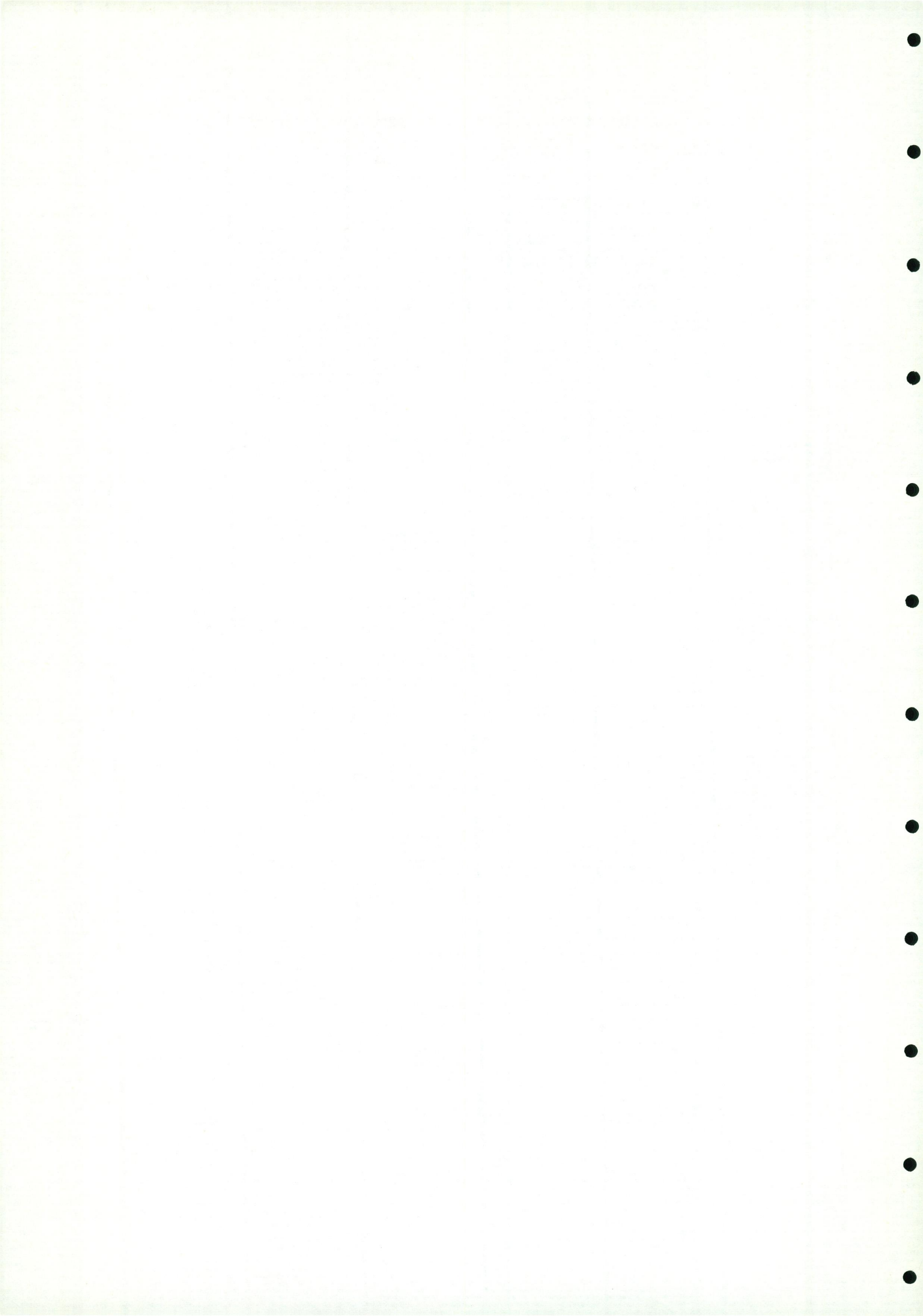
³¹7, Pg. 175



guide to a Goddess or the Goddess herself. They may hold the gift of healing. On the other hand they can be evil and the hero must destroy the beast.

It can also be seen how many clans and main characters such as Oisín and Art are called after important animals.

The fact that the same animals a boar for example can be both good and evil suggests a clan or an angry god. This is a small selection of stories. Most Fianna stories involve some animal imagery. This shows how important they were to the people of the time.



Chapter 4 Wild animals in the stories of the early Irish Saints

Saint Febor

"Well she had a whole- och, a library just of books ... and that way she used to convey them (I suppose she was travelling on horseback herself):

She had a deer.

"And she had these books in some kind of an article that she used to put them across the deer's back, do ye see. So the deer was the same as a dog as far as she was concerned. The deer used to follow her anyplace she went. All she had to do was go to this thing, take out a book, or books if she wanted them."

Hugh Nolan³²

It is difficult to really know how much the arrival of Christianity changed or destroyed the old Irish stories. Indeed if it were not for the early monks many stories may have been lost altogether as it was they who carefully recorded the stories. In this chapter I am going to look at the myths of saints in early Christian Ireland.

I feel the best place to begin is with the story of the last King of Tara. It was the clergy, legend has it, that finished the kingship, and in this story the fight was won partly because of seals.

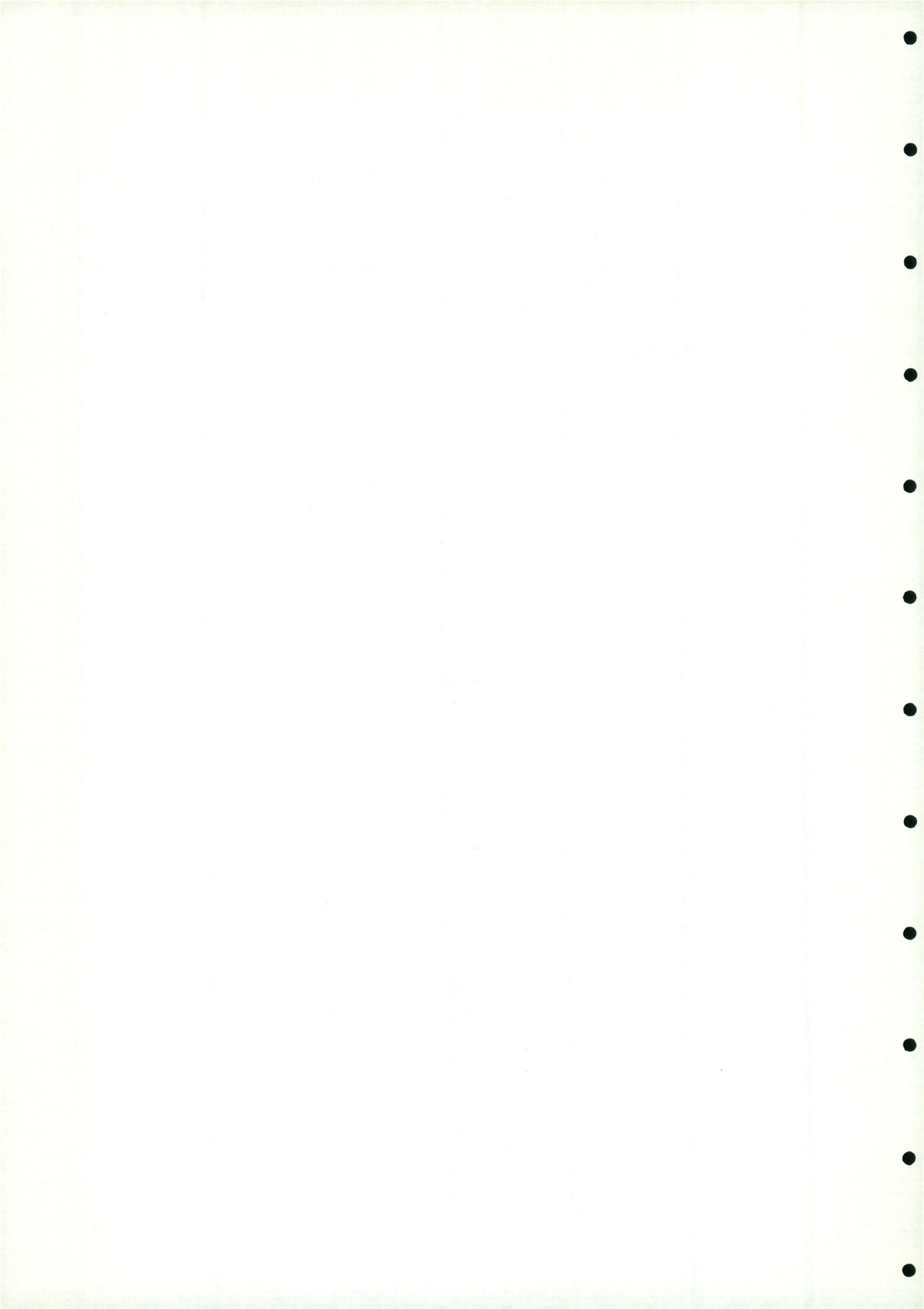
The story is known as the death of Dermot son of Fergus Cerrbeoil.³³

Dermot was King over Ireland. Aedh became angry with one of Dermot's stewards and killed him, but then fear took him and he fled to St. Ruadhan of Lorrhas for protection. But Dermot found him and took him to Tara to be tried. Ruadham then went to the King to demand Aedh Guaires safety. Dermot felt the clerics had no role in the politics of Ireland and cursed him.

may there a wild boar come that he grup up the hill on
which thou shalt be buried, and that thy relics be
scattered; also at nones continually be there in thy

³²7, Pg. 23

³³ O'Grady Silvia Gadelica Vol. 2 Pg. 76



churchyard howling of 'wild hounds' (i.e. wolves), and the alarm-cry every evening; neither be they its own monks that shall dwell in it.

I feel this boar had something to do with the old pagan gods. It is unlikely that Dermot was a Christian.

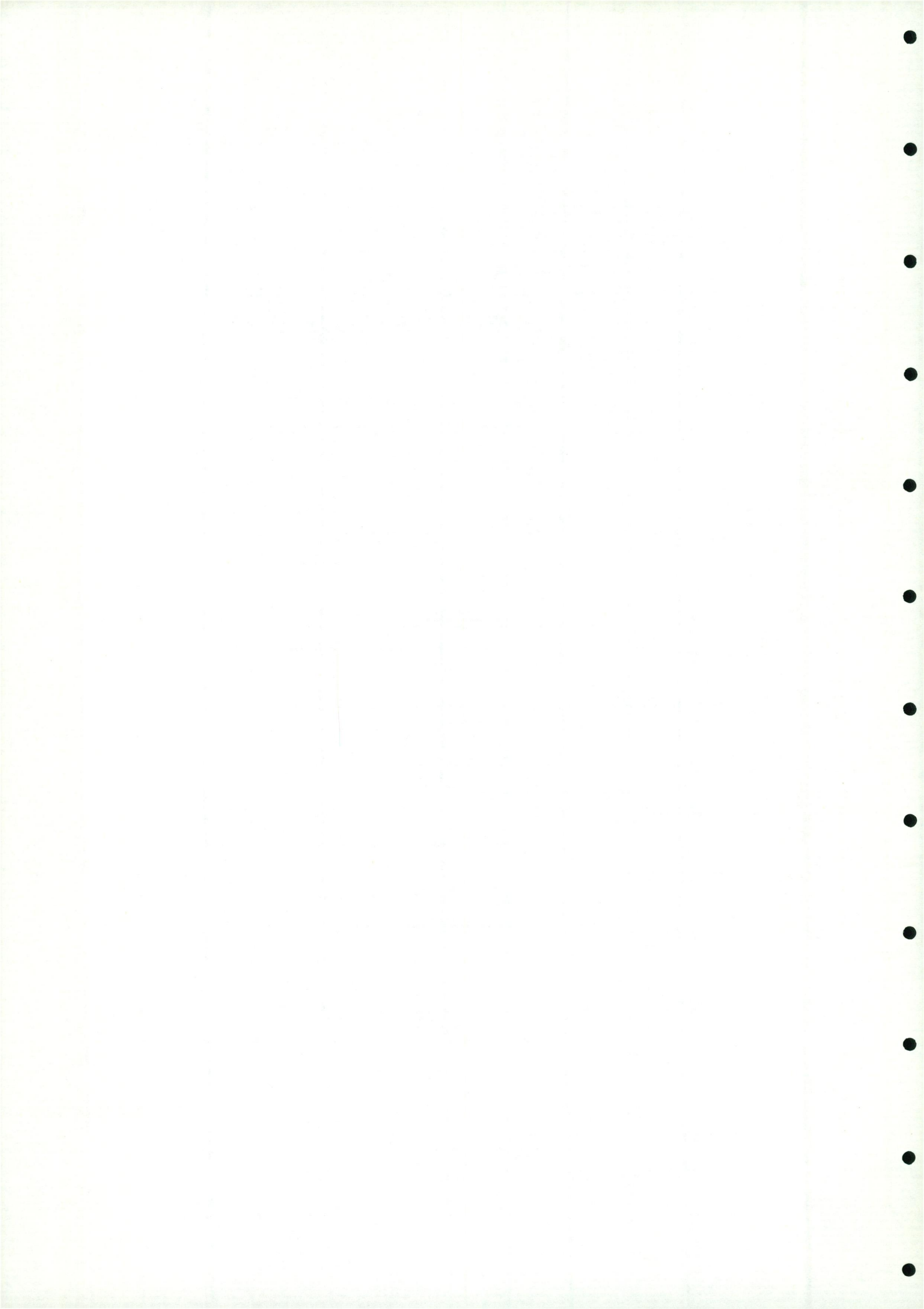
Then Dermot heard St. Brendan was coming this worried him so he said to St. Ruadhan "were ye to give me fifty horses, blue-eyed and with golden bridles, I would yield you up Aedh Guaire"

St. Brendan heard this so he turned fifty seals into horses the same as Dermot requested, and gave them to him in return for Aedh Guaire. When a year was up the horses became seals again. The horses one day raced on Tara's green, and the riders (judging their speed to be insufficient) pulled them with their horse-rods, at which they became frantic; nor could a pull be got at them before they, taking their riders with them dived into the sea, and both parties of them (men & horses) were turned into seals. Shortly after Dermot was to die and no king would rule Tara again.

Seals were meant to be the people who never made it on to Noah's Ark. Ireland was at one time populated by Noah's daughter and her people. The only survivor Fintan tells us the story. He travelled through time in the shape of different animals and is a great historian. Fintan lived from before the flood to the middle of the sixth century. Possibly the beginning of this story was to get over the problem of the flood in old Irish stories, Irish mythology goes back long before the time of the flood yet in the bible originally there was no mention of the flood.

All were drowned but one - Fintan - who survived to tell the tale. In his long life a salmon was one of the creatures he was changed into - and he tells the Hawk of Achill how he lost his eye on the coldest night in the world. The Hawk tells him it was he who plucked out his eye. It is interesting to note Fintan does not have to be converted. The Monks had a terrible problem trying to convert Túin a true pagan. Older than any of them is (the deer Goddess?) the old woman of Beare. The Hawk of Achill says to her "I give you the branch (of victory) you are as old as the old grandmother, long ago, who ate the apples".³⁴

³⁴24, Pg. 403







4.1



4.2



4.3

I take this as a reference to Eve in her old age?

There is another story of an old blackbird with a white wing and an ancient bard Ennaccan who asks it how it became so marked. The bird answers that it was Christ's doing.

Swans were said to sing to the monks of Colman Ela and swans from Killarney came at the call of Cainnech and St. Columcille. A blackbird was said to build its nest on St. Kevin's hand when he had it outstretched in prayer. The souls of the blessed were meant to take the form of doves and swans and lost souls in the form of ravens. These were birds of ill omen and also birds Druids talked with. There is a story of a saint and a singing bird. The saint could be one of two men St. Brendan or St. Mochaoi. One day the saint was out collecting wattles to make a church. Then he heard the most beautiful music of a bird singing. The bird said to him - you have worked hard, I have come from God to entertain you for a while - it seemed to him that he had been listening to the bird for an hour and so then thanked him for his music and went with his bunch of wattles back to the church. But when he returned he saw the church was finished and when he approached a monk he did not recognise him. St Mochaoi told them who he was and they told him he had been missing 150 years, so they built a shrine where he heard the bird sign. An old poet writes:

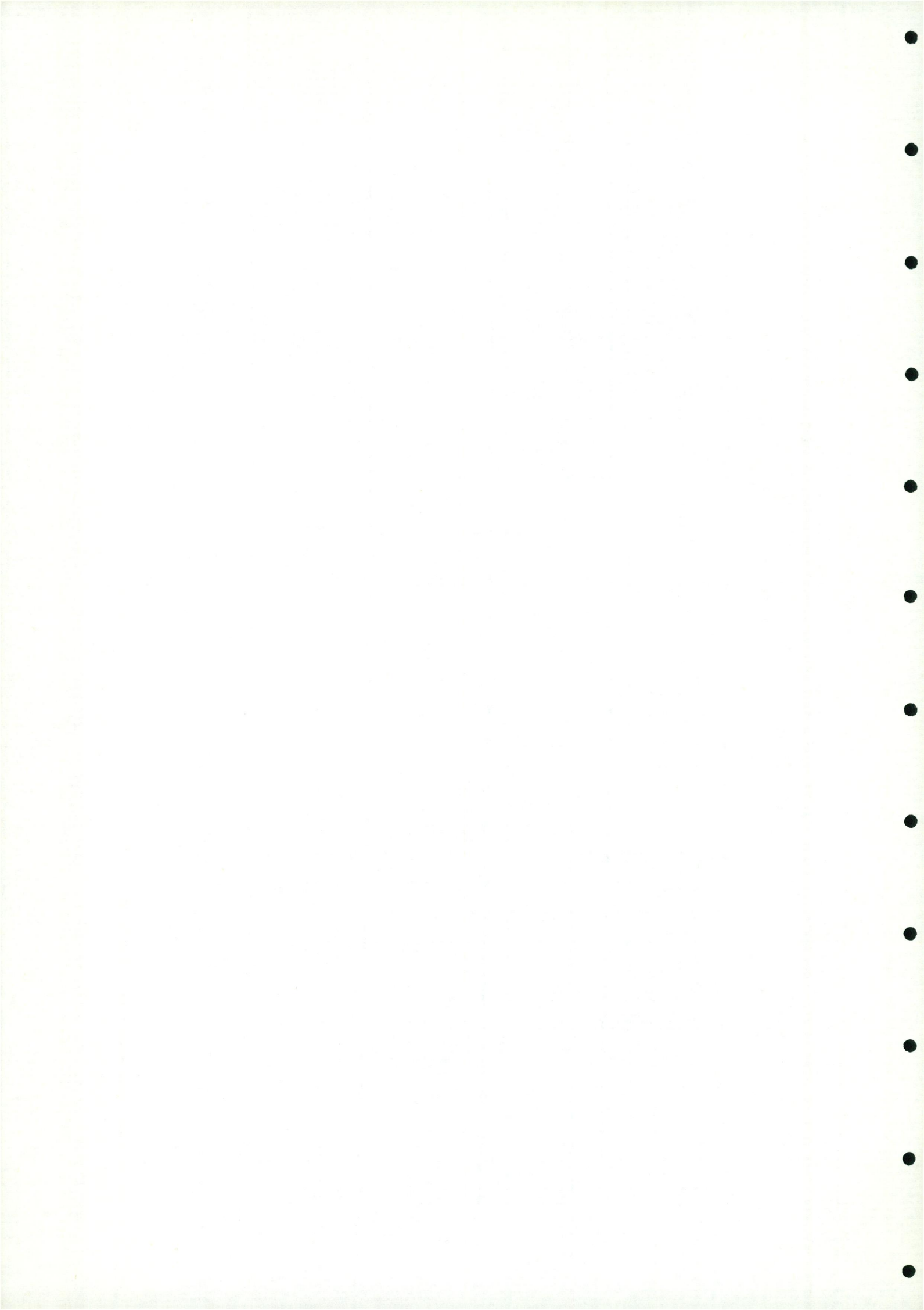
To Mochaoi the beautiful
Sang the little bird,
From the skies, from the tree-tops,
Three melodies, fifty years in each.³⁵

There is the story of a St. Molasius who was out one day at another Holy mans place. This man had a "book of ways" which Molasius would have liked to copy from, but he had no quill and neither did anyone present. Just then a flock of birds flew past - so the saint put out his hand and a perfect quill dropped into his hand
³⁶

It is thought that the robin is a bird to console the ill and dying and it is a common belief that it will come to the window of the ill and sing to them. St Conall became a saint after he repented for killing his father. He went to an island where

³⁵24, Pg. 409

³⁶9, Vol. 2 Pg. 32







there was not shelter so Conall lay down that night to sleep in the open. Now God put him into a deep sleep.

"The birds of the air thought he was dead, and one of them came and made her nest on his (outstretched) palm . Conall did not wake up till the young birds were fit to fly. As he awoke, the birds took to wing, and Conall found the empty nest in his palm. He know that his sin was forgiven" ³⁷ .

The early Christian saints were very interested in Irish stories. In the Book of Colloquy St. Patrick talks to Caelite and learns the stories of the Fianna. Caelite has quickly accepted Christianity and St. Patrick enjoys the stories. "Victory and blessing wait on the Caelite!" said Patrick "for the future thy stories and thyself are dear to us".

It is believed that there are trout that have lived in certain wells from time immemorial. As only certain people can see them it is a highly propitious omen. It is also considered very unlucky to interfere with them and an unbeliever who took one and brought it home to eat, they "put it on the gridiron to broil, but in a twinkling it disappeared and next day was found swimming in the well as before".³⁸

There is a woman who got turned into a salmon³⁹ her name was Liban. She was drowned in a flood with her lap dog . She stayed in the lake for 300 years.

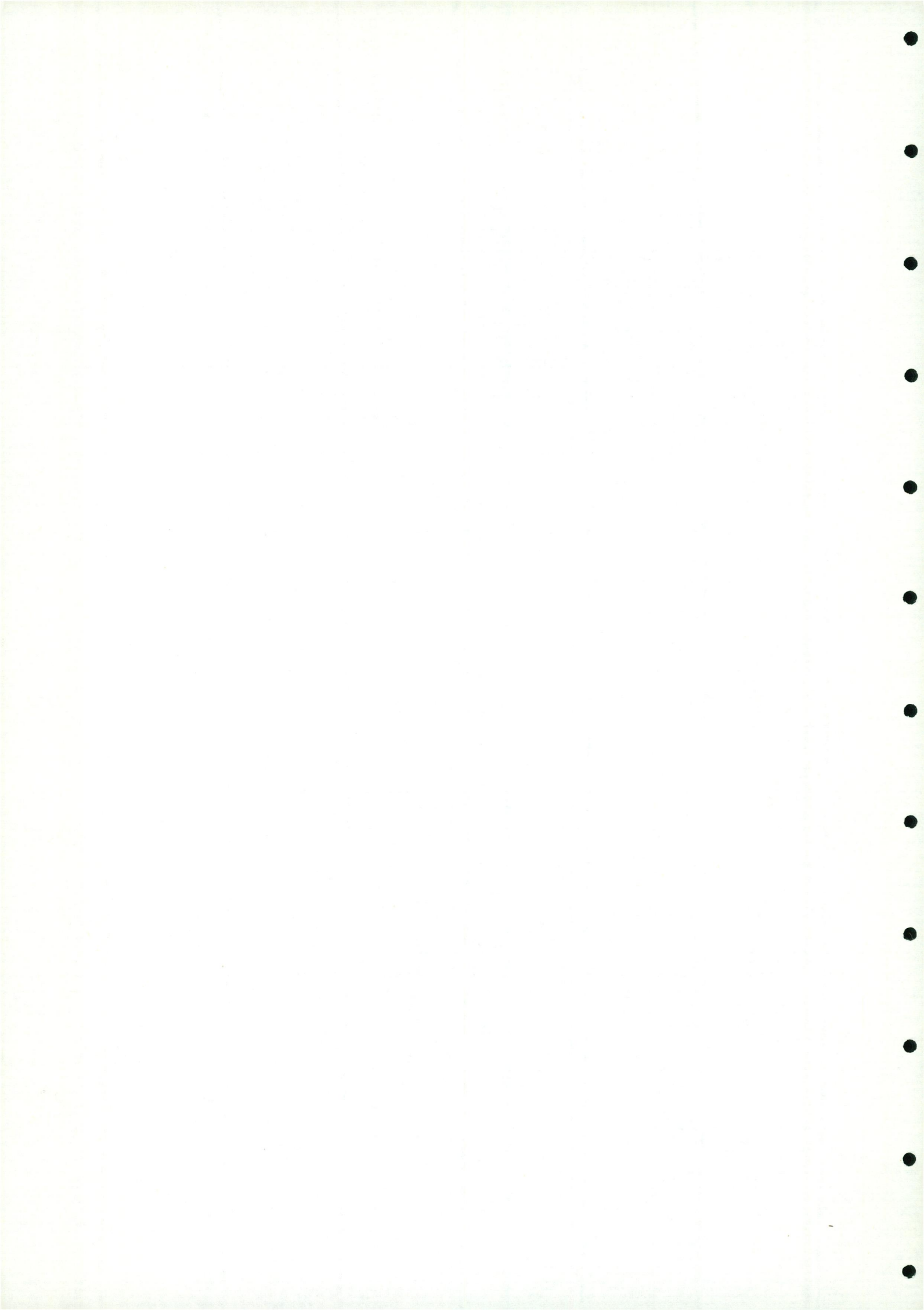
God preserving her the while from the waters of Loch Neagh, when she said one day: O Lord, happy the one that should be in salmon's shape, scouring the sea and swimming even as they do!. Then she was turned into salmons form, and her lap dog into an otter.

St. Beoun was at sea and he heard singing that sounded like an angels so he asked where it was coming from, Liban came out of the water and said she had been singing. The next year she met him at Innbher Ollorbor. He took her from the water and put her in a huge container. Men and saints came and looked at her and she talked to them. She is described here to as looking more like a mermaid. Now the men could not decide who should own her so they all fasted and prayed waiting for God to

³⁷4, 1937 Vol. 1

³⁸4, Vol. 6 Pg. 161

³⁹9, Pg. 267



give his judgement. An angel appeared to one of the saints and said that two stags would come and they will be drawing a chariot. The angel told them to put the mermaid on it and follow the deer. The deer came and they took her to Tech Dabheoc. So the clerics asked her would she like to be baptised and have 300 more years of life. She said she would like to go to heaven now so they baptised her 'prodigy of the sea' and she died. This is a curious story in the full length and it shows both pagan and Christian influence. It starts off quite pagan where she eloped with Eochaid the King of Munster's son, and was drowned because a maid forgot to put the lid on the well after drawing water from it so it overflowed. She is given a new life as a salmon and her lap dog an otter. It may be that the first part of the story is older than the second part, or that the storyteller has altered the ending.

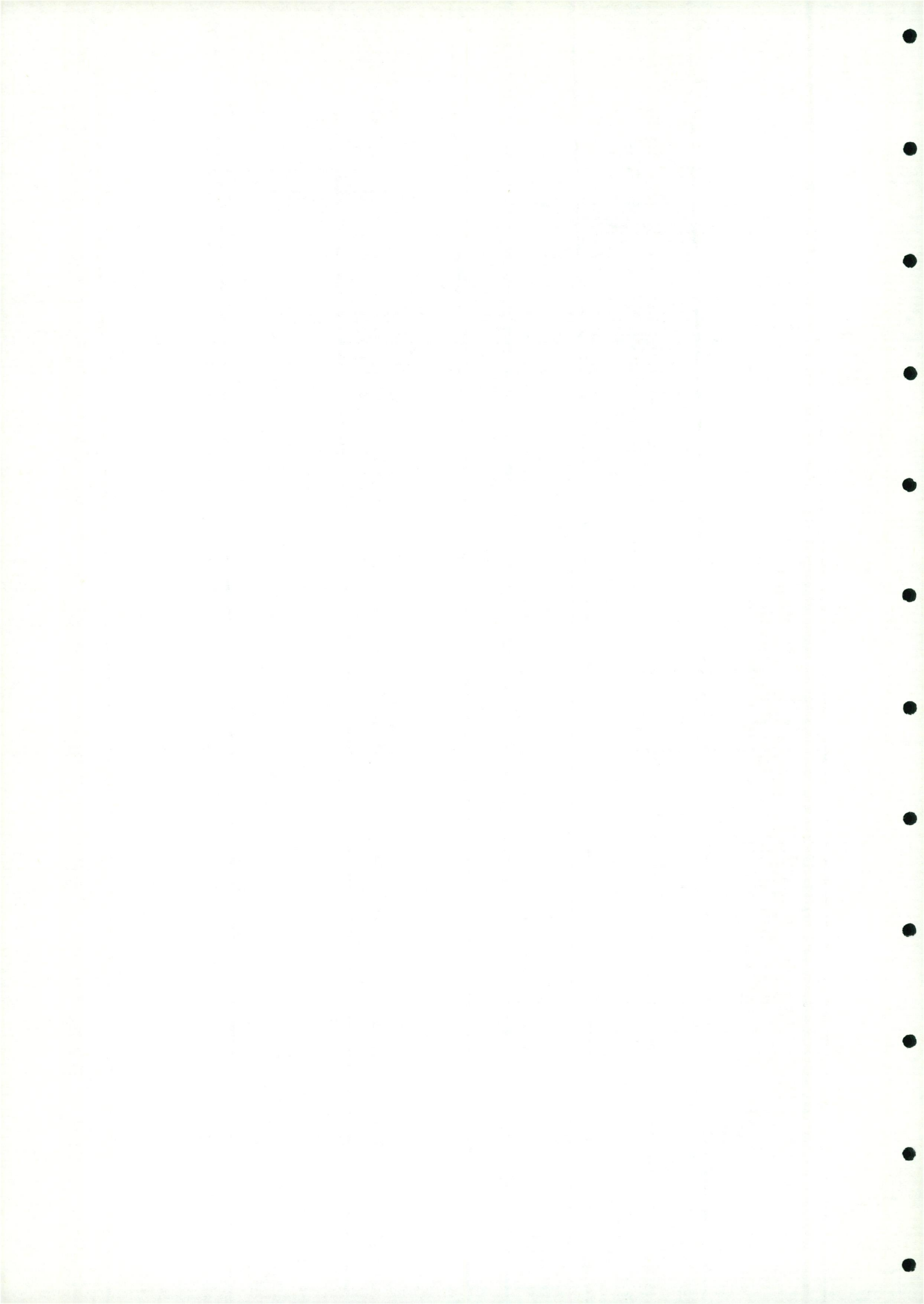
Whales also feature in early Irish saint's stories - St. Brendan was able to celebrate mass one day on one of his voyages because a whale came along side and acted as an island.

One animal Ireland does not have is the snake. There is the common story that St. Patrick banished them. It was also thought that Ireland was so holy that the evil creatures would die as soon as they touch Irish earth.⁴⁰

"Again, that land is so holy beyond other lands that no venomous creature may thrive therein, neither snakes nor toads and though such be carried thither from other lands, they die at once as soon as they touch the bare earth or stone. And if anything be taken out of that land, either wood or earth or sand and carried into other lands where venomous creatures are, and if with that sand or earth a ring be formed around them where they lie, then they never after come out of that ring, but lie therein all dead."

It was common for saints to have wild animals as pets. Another Irish saint who was very easy on animals and as a result got a lot of help from them was St. Kieran. Kieran was one day watching a little bird on its nest when a kite grabbed it. Kieran thought this a terrible thing to see. So the Kite turned back and placed the bird at Kierans feet. It was badly injured and near to death but Kieran "bade it rise and be whole". This it did and went back on its nest. St. Kieran's first disciples were animals his first a boar. I am sure this is significant to the pagan Gods. Kieran had been told where to build his church by St. Patrick and when Kieran found the place to build a church after many weeks travelling he built a small flimsy hut, before he began on a

⁴⁰Irish Mirabill translations from a Norse book 'Speculum Regale' written 1250 AD (approx.).







proper abode. One day shortly after his arrival he sat down under a large tree. On the other side of this tree there was a wild boar when it heard St. Kieran it went to run away. It was tamed by God's power, and began to help St. Kieran build a strong cell. Other animals then came to him, a fox, a brock (badger) a wolf and a doe. The fox had a big appetite and stole the brogues (?)⁴¹ and ate them all. A badger went to the fox and told him he must return to the monastery and they brought the remains of the brogues with them. Then Kieran asked the fox why had he done this, for they had water and good meat - he had not reason to have committed such a crime. So the fox asked for forgiveness and a punishment for his sins. The punishment was that while the fox was serving Kieran he would not eat meat. The fox did this and was as holy and righteous as the other animals from this time on.

Now Kieran's monastery flourished and women came to serve God too. So he built a separate cell for them. There was a particularly beautiful woman called Bruinnech (this story runs very familiar to one of St. Brigid). Now a King called Dima heard of her and he stole her by force and made her his wife. When Kieran comes to free the girl he is turned away, the King says she will only be returned if a stork (heron) wakes him in the morning. It is the wrong time of year for this, but the next morning on every house top a stork cried. The King heard this and fear came upon him so he returned the woman.

The closer you were to God's animals the closer you were to God was definitely the philosophy of the 8th century monks - as a English cleric Bede puts it:

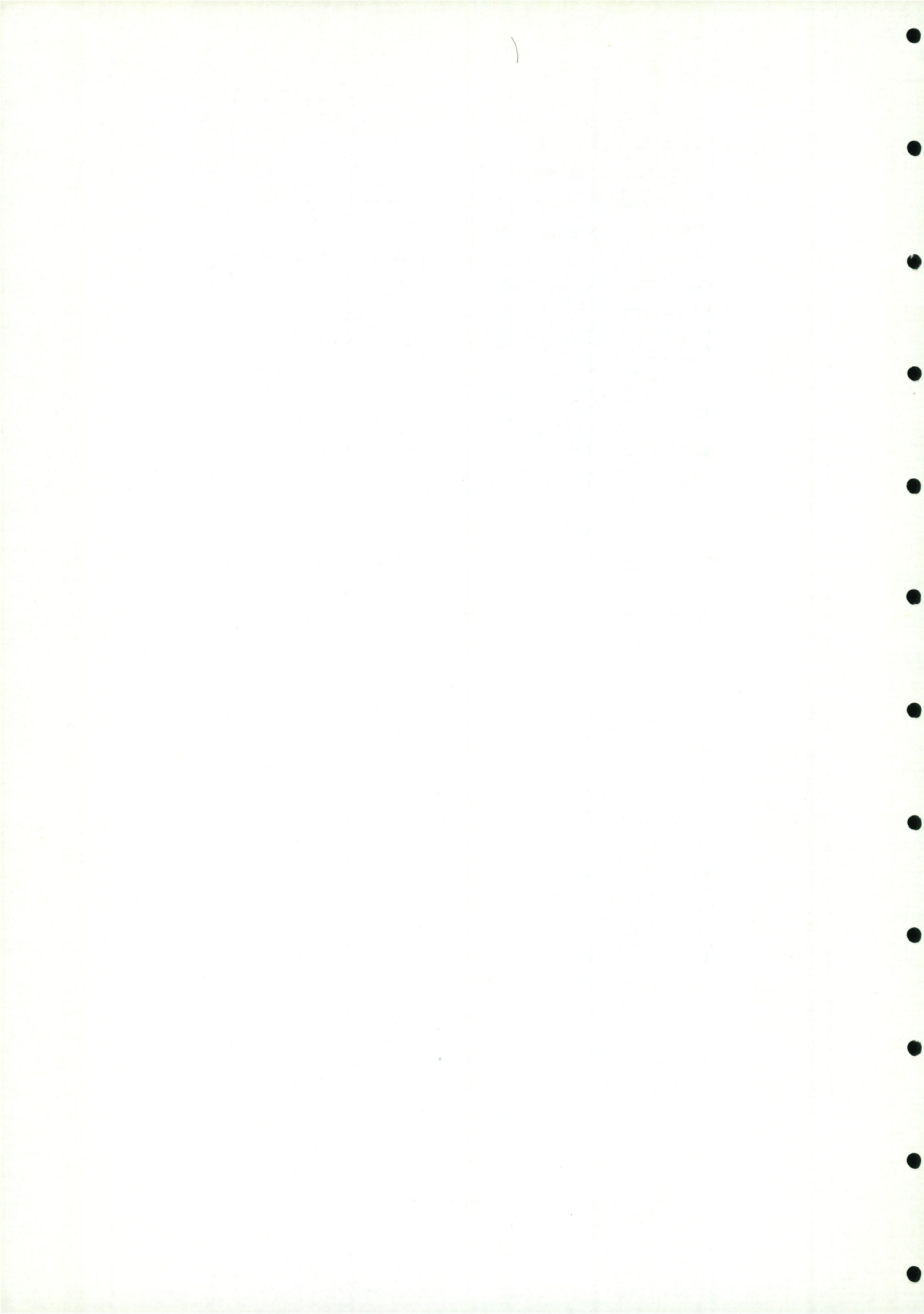
The more faithfully man obeys the creator, the more he
will regain his lost empire over the creatures⁴²

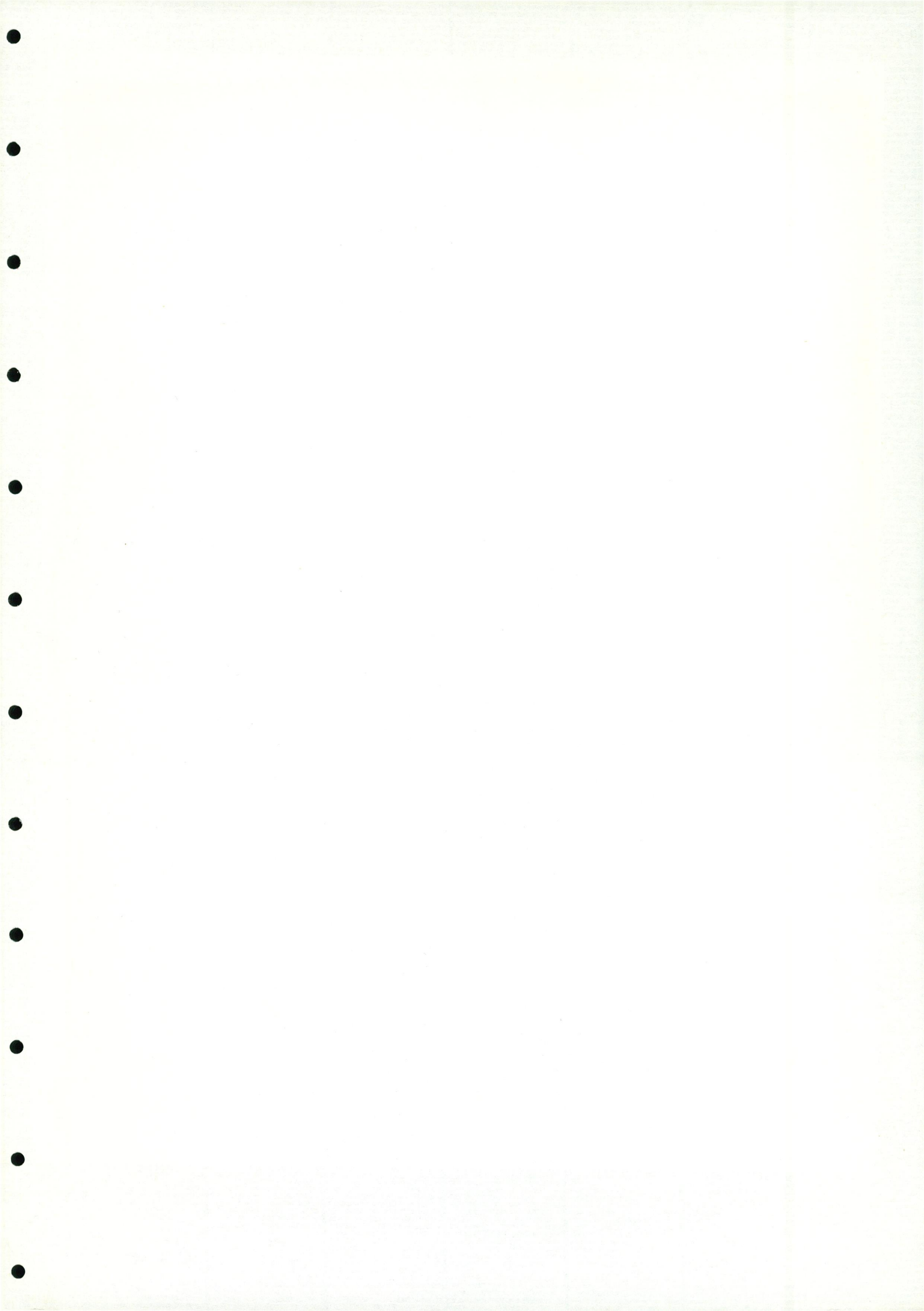
Wolves were friends of the saint according to Dr. Daithi O'Hogain⁴³. St. Caoimhghin and Maodhòg fed starving wolves. St. Molua is said to have had a feast for wolves. St. Colmàn MacLuachàin had a meeting place with wolves - here they would come and they would act like domestic dogs, and he told them if some one came upon them and said his name they must not kill them. Wolves were closely

⁴¹I can find no meaning for this word in the dictionary possibly it means young badger or eels, possibly hens Surely not shoes?

⁴²12, Pg. 381

⁴³Pg 381







connected with human beings perhaps there has been confusion between the animal and a Clann. St. Patrick is said to have turned an assembly of people, who would not listen to the word of God, into wolves.

It is said that the Holy Patricius was preaching Christianity in that land, there was one Great race most hostile to him than the other people that were in the land, And those men tried to do him many kinds of injury. And when he preached Christianity to them as to other men, and came to meet them when they were hold their assembly, they took this council to howl at him like wolves. But when St. Patrick saw that his message would succeed little with these people, then he became very wrathful and prayed God that he might avenge it on them by some judgement, that their descendants might forever remember their disobedience. And great punishment and fit and very wonderful has since befallen their descendants, for it is said that all men who come from that race are always wolves at a certain time, and run into the woods and have food like wolves and they are worse in this that they have human reason, for all their cunning and such desire and greed for men as for other creatures.⁴⁴

Wolves do not seem to have been St. Patrick's main helpers - if he felt that was all his unworthy congregation were fit for. They were the helpers of other saints but this did not stop the average layman from wanting to be rid of them.

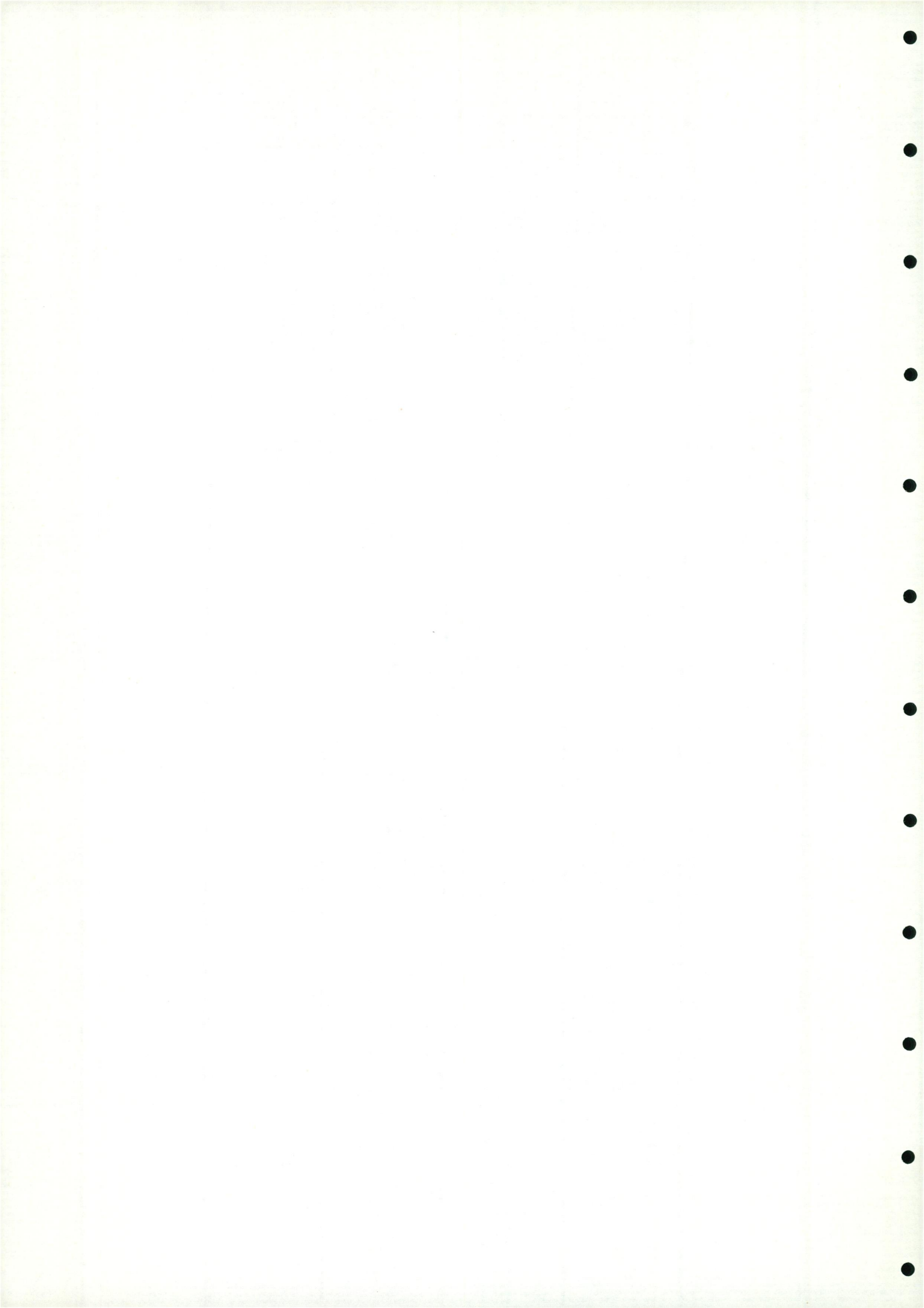
The saints would have had their share of domestic animals to work for them but sometimes it was necessary to have extra help and it was often the deer that would help here. Stags allowed their antlers to be used as book rests for saints studying.

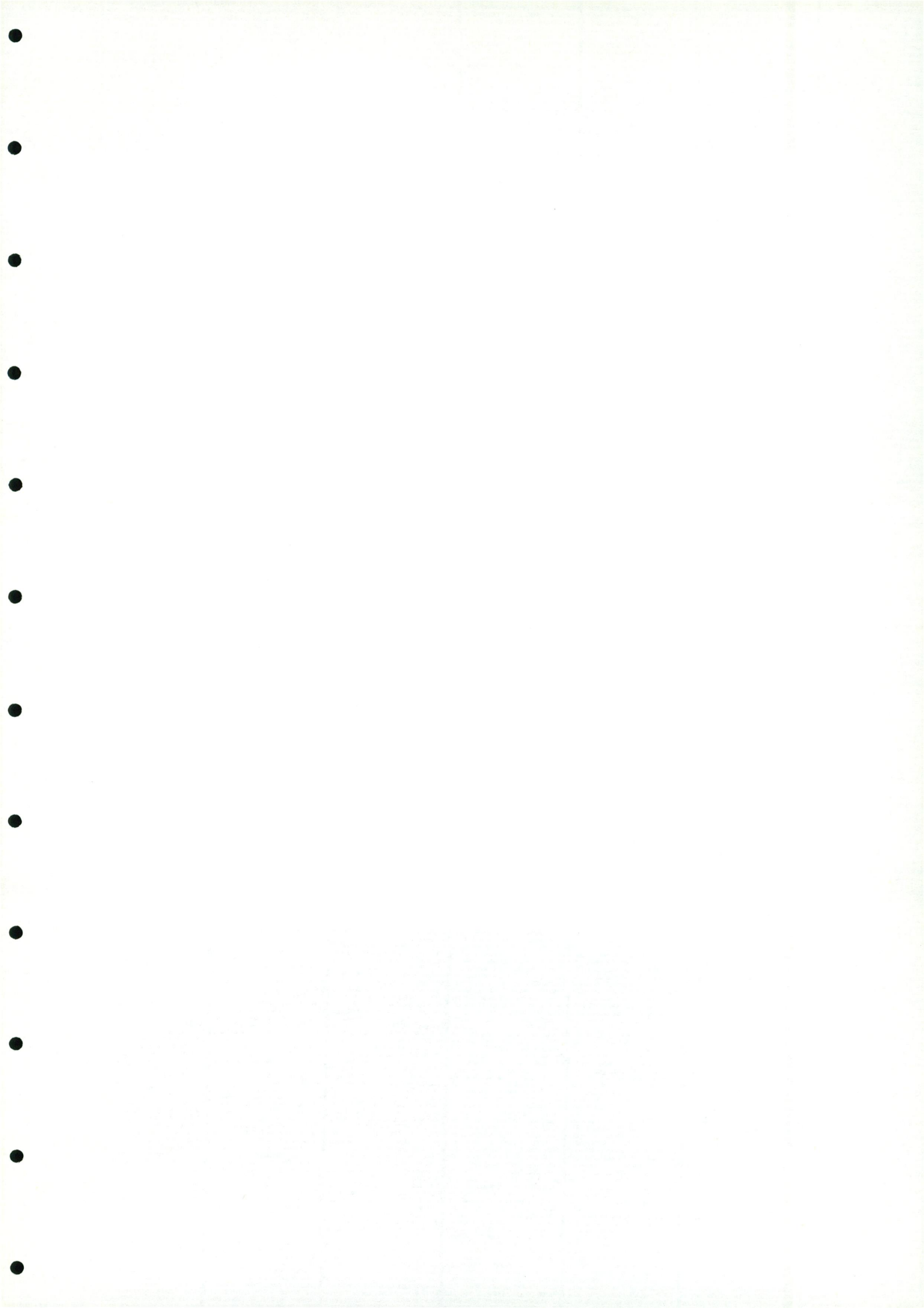
There is the story of St. Kevin of Glendalough who had a foster child, Faèlàn . One day he saw a doe with a fawn and asked the fawn to give half her milk to his foster child which she did. A wolf then came and ate her fawn so the saint told the wolf to take the place of the fawn and the doe continued to give milk to the foster child.⁴⁵

I cannot but wonder how happy the doe was with this arrangement. There is another story similar to this of St. Bairre (Fionnbarr) of Cork walking with a young boy who became thirsty. The saint tells his servant to go to a doe on a hill and milk a

⁴⁴9, Pg. 11

⁴⁵17, Life of Kevin of Glendalough







Woman at the Deerstone, Glendalough. One of the many legends of Glendalough concerns the deer who, at St Kevin's request, shed her milk into this hollow granite basin to feed the motherless twins of one of Kevin's workers.

vessel of milk from her. This he did and gave it to the boy. It was also common for deer to plough or draw a cart. An example of this would be of the poor man that came to the saint, he asked could he borrow two oxen from him. The saint tells the man to go into the forest, there he will find two deer and to bring them to him. the deer then obey the saint and plough the field for the poor man.⁴⁶

Animals also mourned the death of a saint. Such is the story after the death of Cellach. Cellach had been murdered - and his followers could find no church to bury him as the other church communities would not take him because they were afraid the enemy would attack them. But a miracle happened in the mourners despair.

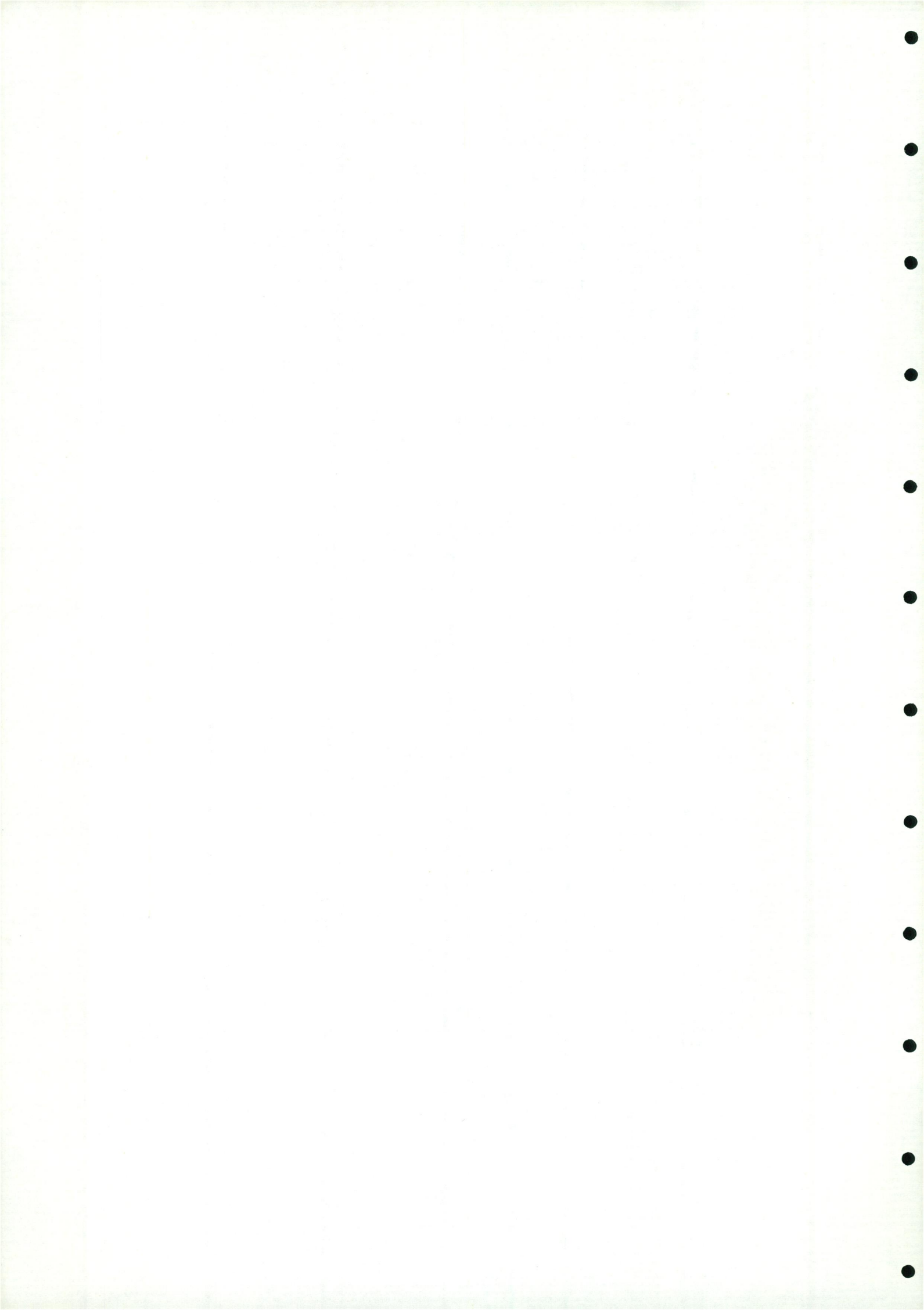
They being yet there saw towards them two wild deer with a wain, which with great effort they drew between them till they came abreast of the body. Amid that company the stags laid their bier upon the ground, and to all of them that which they saw enacted thus seemed passing strange; but at the miracle which for holy Cellach's sake was wrought by God they were rejoiced exceedingly. On the bier which the two stags had borne laid the corpse, then moved it on until they gained the Eskers in the west; there they perceived a church with a cell contiguous, at which cell's door the deer laid the body from them and the church-bells pealed of themselves. The clergy, being come forth and standing over the body, enquired whose it might be; and when they learned it, for his soul's rest they sang the psalms with zeal. A bevy of angels likewise, coming down from Heaven, did honour to his soul and to his place of rest on earth. Furthermore the same deer came daily and, like the oxen, ploughed. Their ploughing done, at noon then they frequented Cellach's tomb to lick it.

These animals all aided the saint in his work and helped show how close to God the holy man was - even at death.

Here I have shown that though the monks in early Ireland have recorded many stories they also altered them and used some of the ingredients for stories of their own saints. The animals in the saints stories are often the same as the animals that would have been worshipped by pagans.

Possibly this shows the clans joining with the Christians. The boar that helped St. Kieran may have symbolised a Clann and the fox may symbolise one that robbed but was forgiven.

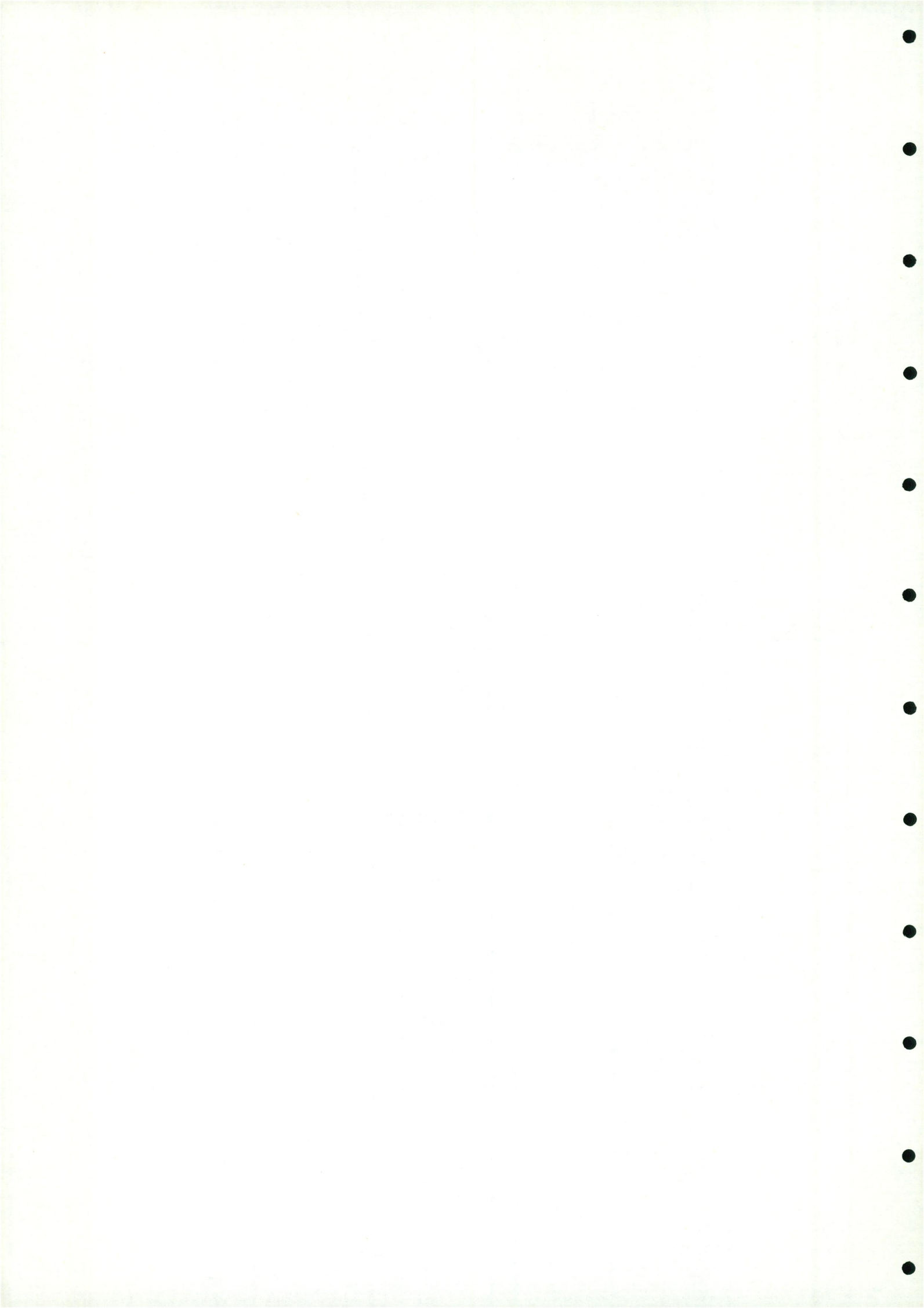
⁴⁶17, Life of Saint Bairre of Cork







It was important for the saints to be seen as close to animals as this symbolised their unity with God. This is similar to the Celts respect for nature as they saw animals as symbols of their gods.

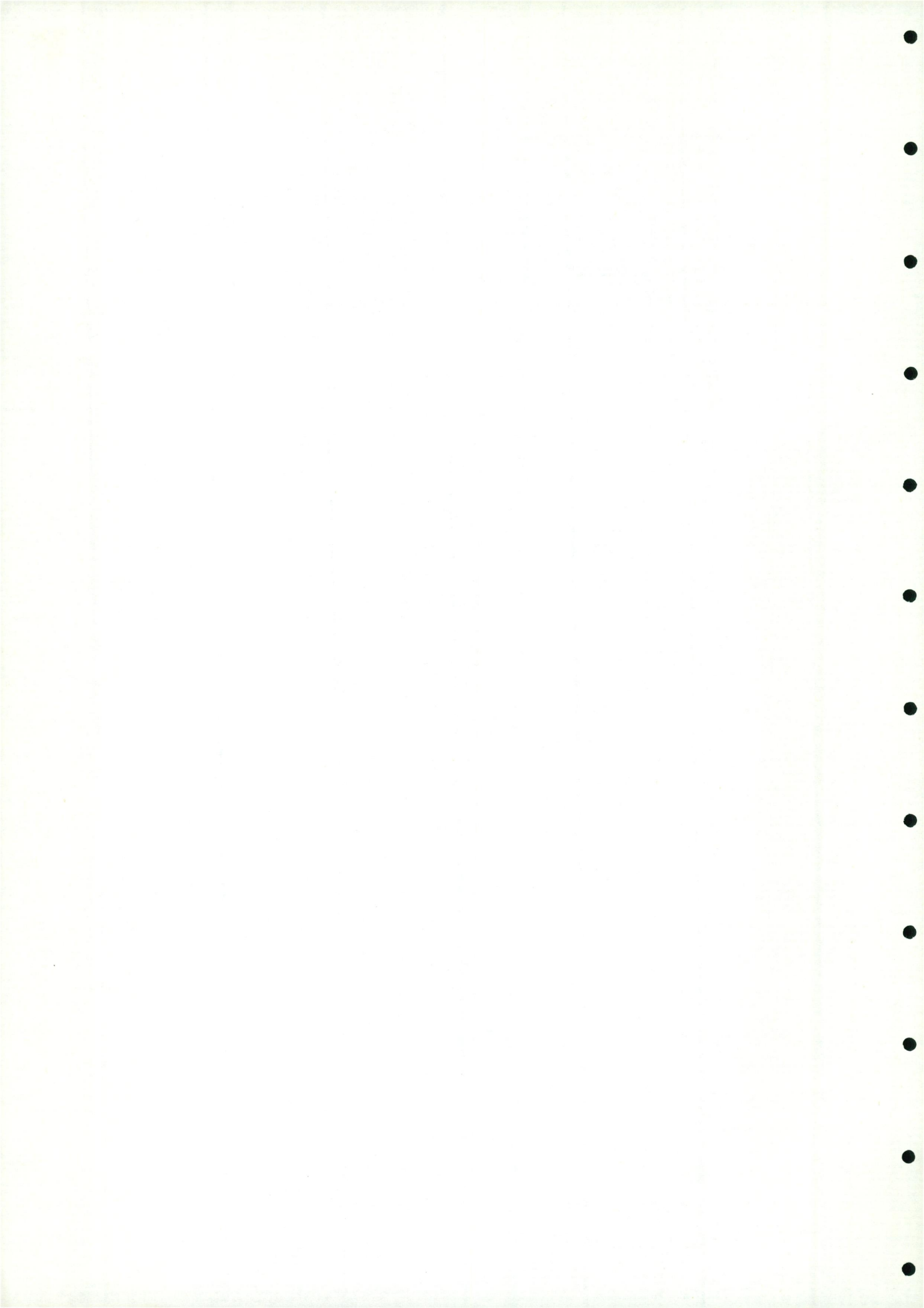


Conclusion

In this thesis I have shown how wild animals play an important part in Irish myth and legend. That they became figures of worship shows how important animals were to the early settlers, . It is natural for societies to keep records of what is important to them, obviously animals played a large part in the society of ancient Ireland. I have shown how man was originally dependent on hunting. That people took animal as clan names has also been identified. I believe that some of the stories are accounts of historical events.

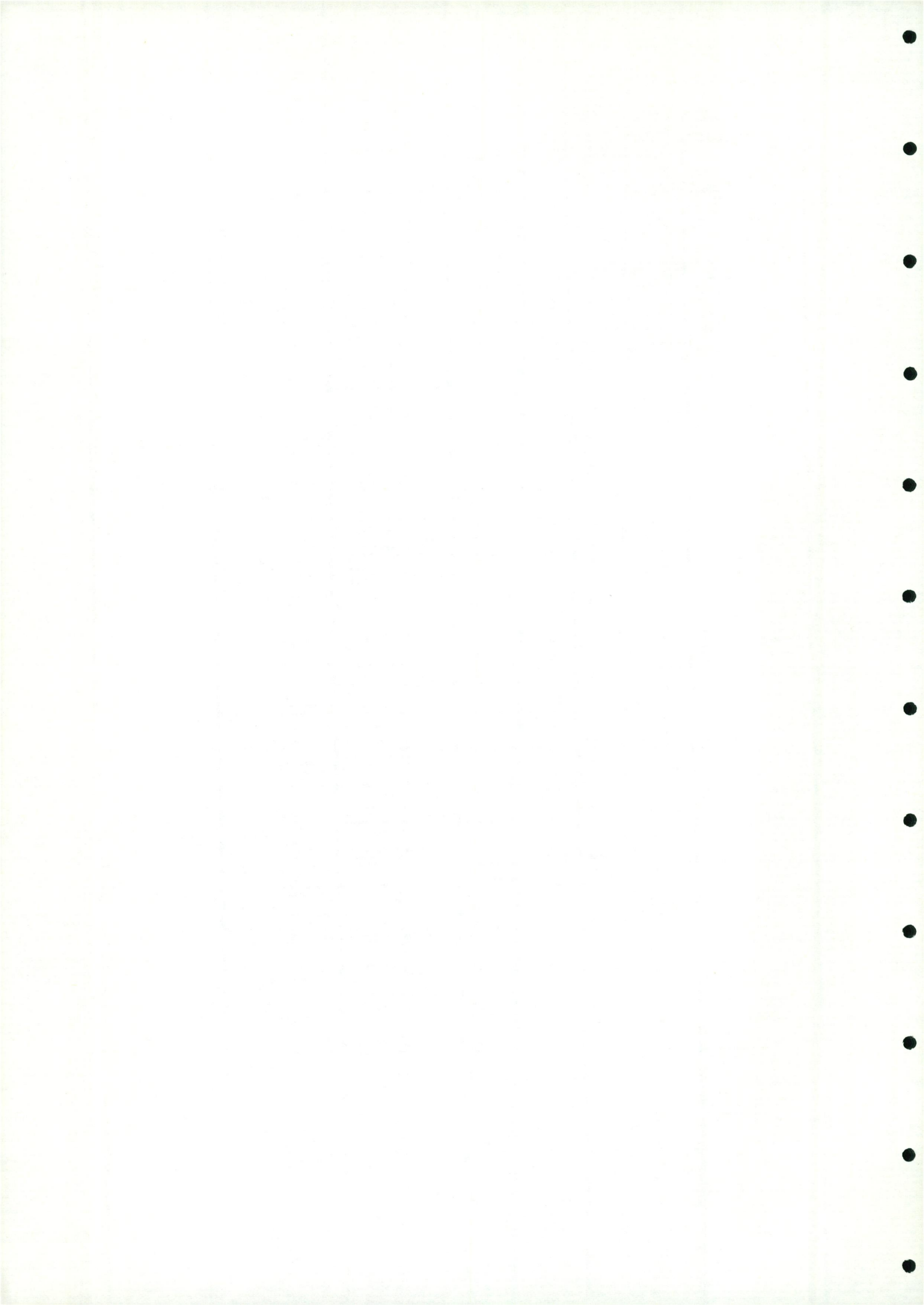
The borrowing of the cultural icons to introduce Christianity has been illustrated by the stories of early Irish Saints. These Saints are quite often associated with an animal which held some religious significance to the Celts. They are seen as submitting themselves to the will of the Saints. An early example of propaganda perhaps. The early church telling the people what was comfortable for them to hear, that their old Gods were not evil in the eyes of the church but have submitted themselves to the Christian God. This link between early Irish Christianity and Irish myth and legend stresses how important the myths were to the society of that time.

I have shown that Irish myths and legends have been distorted once to the advantage of the early church. This leaves me with the questions, how much are what we consider Celtic myths distorted? And to whose advantage?

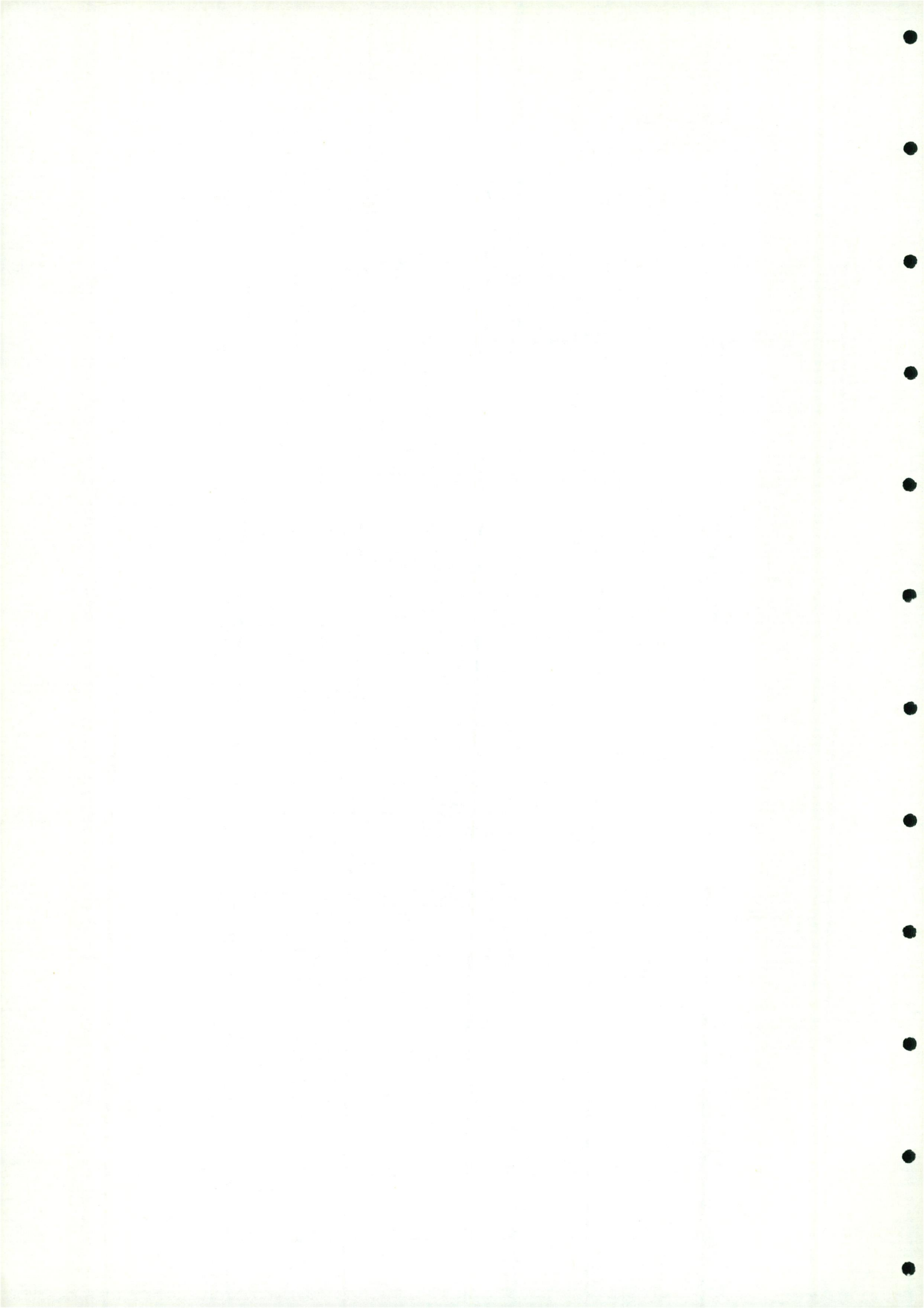


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