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THE IRISH KINGS AND THE ENGLISH INVASION

by

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## Preface

In keeping with the requirements of the History Department at Maynooth University, this thesis follows the style guidelines set out in the guide for contributors to *Irish Historical Studies* (available online at [www.irishhistoricalstudies.ie](http://www.irishhistoricalstudies.ie)). This system was developed and improved on in the series published as *A new history of Ireland (N.H.I.)* 1976–2005, and for the most part this extension has also been followed here, due to its fuller consideration of medieval material.

Surnames came into general use among the nobility in Ireland from the late tenth and early eleventh century, with individuals emphasising their descent from an esteemed ancestor through one of two forms: ‘Úa’ (later Ó), meaning grandson, and ‘Mac’ meaning son. By modern convention, the capitalised forms denote the surname, and the lowercase forms indicate that the individual concerned was actually a grandson or son of the named ancestor. So, for example, Toirdelbach úa Briain (d. 1086) was a grandson of Brian Bóraime. Toirdelbach’s son Muirchertach Úa Briain was a great-grandson of Brian and therefore his use of ‘Úa Briain’ was its first appearance as a surname. Similarly, lowercase ‘fitz’ among the early English arrivals means ‘son’ and is not a surname. By another modern convention, ‘Eóganachta’ is the collective term for dynasties whose monikers begin with ‘Eóganacht’ – like Eóganacht Chaisil, for example.

For the sake of consistency and in keeping with convention, the Cenél nEógain king who died in 1121 is referred to as ‘Domnall Mac Lochlainn’. Though his genealogy is questionable, it seems that he was a grandson of the ‘Lochlainn’ in question, and that his name could therefore be rendered ‘Domnall úa Lochlainn’. Later descendants used both ‘Úa Lochlainn’ and ‘Mac Lochlainn’ as a surname, but the latter is preferred here throughout.

Some alterations to the system in *N.H.I.* have been necessary. Perhaps the most important is that Anglicised plural forms like ‘the O’Briens’ or ‘the Mac Cárthaighs’ have been set

aside here in favour of Irish plurals – in this case ‘Uí Briain’ and ‘Meic Cárthaig’.

Occasionally, it is necessary to distinguish people both by their father and their surname, in which case forms like ‘Diarmait mac Cormaic Meic Cárthaig’ or ‘Derbforgaill ingen Murchada Uí Máel Sechlainn’ appear, following the appropriate grammatical rules. No effort has been made to standardise names or terms in direct quotes, either from manuscripts, modern editions and translations, or the commentaries of historians.

Both Old Irish (*c.* 700–900) and Middle Irish (*c.* 900–1200) appear but, in general, Middle Irish, the language of the period under consideration, is preferred. Where there is discussion of the development and semantic range of particular terms, like those concerning hostages and expulsion, their Old Irish forms, as per the electronic Dictionary of the Irish Language (*eD.I.L.*), are highlighted. Again, no standardisation is attempted with regard to such terminology as it appears in direct quotes.

Placenames other than those synonymous with a particular Irish group are generally rendered in their Anglicised forms, according to convention. So, Dublin, Kells, Derry and Inishowen appear alongside Ulaid, Airgíalla, and Bréifne. Certain provinces are also better known by their Anglicised forms, like Meath and Leinster for example, and these have been retained. Hybrid adjectival forms like ‘Bréifnian’ and ‘Airgíallan’ are used occasionally. Unlike other Irish terms, personal names and placenames are not italicised.

To avoid prejudicing an ongoing debate about the degree of urbanisation in twelfth-century Ireland, the words ‘town’ and ‘settlement’ are preferred to ‘city’ in this thesis.

Latin terms like ‘*civitas*’ and ‘*burgus*’ were used to describe places like Dublin and even Killaloe by contemporaries, including English administrators and chroniclers, but nonetheless caution is required in the absence of a more sustained analysis, which may provide a useable definition. ‘Town’ is also only used here in relation to settlements of Norse origin, in consideration of its doubtful applicability to monastic centres.

The organisation of this thesis, which will be discussed in more detail in the introduction, demands many of the same events be discussed in each chapter. By necessity, therefore, the text is heavily cross-referenced. For the sake of clarity, these cross-references will give both chapter and the page number, while ‘above’ and ‘below’ are reserved for material within the same chapter.

Certain other conventions, which rely on the arguments expounded here will be explained in the course of the thesis. ‘The North’ is often capitalised, for example, when referring to a specific territory. ‘English’ is also preferred to ‘Norman’, though ‘Anglo-Norman’ is sometimes used for the sake of variety. ‘King of Ireland’ is preferred to ‘High-king’ as well.

The en rule (–) is used for dates extending from the first to the second, the solidus (/) for alternative dates, and saltire (x) for a range within which an event can not be more precisely located. Each of these conventions is in keeping with the system set forth in *N.H.I.* The genealogies and maps included as appendices are all by the present author but, in both cases, they were created with reference to important secondary works. These are highlighted in a note which prefaces the appendices.



## Abbreviations

<b>A.F.M.</b>	<i>Annála rioghachta Eireann: Annals of the kingdom of Ireland by the Four Masters from the earliest period to the year 1616</i> , ed. and trans. John O'Donovan (7 vols, Dublin, 1851).
<b>A.L.C.</b>	<i>The Annals of Loch Ce: a chronicle of Irish affairs, 1014–1590</i> , ed. W.M. Hennessy (2 vols, London, 1871).
<b>A.U.</b>	<i>Annála Uladh, Annals of Ulster; otherwise Annála Senait, Annals of Sénat: a chronicle of Irish affairs, 431–1131, 1155–1541</i> , ed. W.M. Hennessy and B. MacCarthy (4 vols, Dublin, 1887–1901).
<b>Ann. Clon.</b>	<i>The Annals of Clonmacnoise, being annals of Ireland from the earliest period to A.D. 1408, translated into English, A.D. 1627, by Connell Mageoghagan</i> , ed. Denis Murphy (Dublin, 1896).
<b>Ann. Conn.</b>	<i>Annála Connacht, ... (A.D. 1224–1544)</i> ed. A. Martin Freeman (Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1944).
<b>Ann. Inisf.</b>	<i>The Annals Inisfallen (MS Rawlinson B 503)</i> , ed. and trans. Sean Mac Airt (Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1951).
<b>Ann. Tig.</b>	'The annals of Tigernach', ed. Whitley Stokes, in <i>Revue Celtique</i> , xvi–xviii (1895–7).
<b>Banshenchas [part one] [etc.]</b>	Margaret E. Dobbs, 'The Ban-shenchus' in <i>Revue Celtique</i> xlvii–xlix (1930–2).
<b>Caithr. Chell. Chaisil</b>	<i>Caithréim Ceallacháin Chaisil</i> , ed. Alexander S. Bugge (Christiania, 1905).
<b>Cog. Gaedhel</b>	<i>Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh; the war of the Gaedhil with the Gaill</i> , ed. J.H. Todd (London, 1867).
<b>Chron. Scot.</b>	<i>Chronicum Scotorum: a chronicle of Irish affairs... to 1135, and supplement ... 1141–1150</i> , ed. W.M. Hennessy (London, 1866).

<b><i>Cal.doc.Ire., 1171–1251 [etc.]</i></b>	<i>Calendar of documents relating to Ireland, preserved in her majesty's Public Record Office, London, 1171–1307 [etc.]</i> ed. H.S. Sweetman (5 vols, London, 1875–86).
<b><i>C.I.H.</i></b>	Binchy, Daniel A. (ed.), <i>Corpus iuris Hibernici: ad fidem manuscryptorum recognovit</i> (Dublin, 1978).
<b><i>Chronica</i></b>	Roger of Howden, <i>Chronica</i> , ed. William Stubbs (4 vols., London, 1868–71).
<b><i>D.I.B.</i></b>	Clarke, Aidan, <i>et. al.</i> (eds), <i>Dictionary of Irish Biography</i> , (9 vols, Dublin, 2009).
<b>Duffy (ed.), <i>Encyclopedia</i></b>	Seán Duffy (ed.) <i>Medieval Ireland: an encyclopedia</i> (London, 2005).
<b><i>eD.I.L.</i></b>	eDIL 2019: An Electronic Dictionary of the Irish Language, based on the Contributions to a Dictionary of the Irish Language (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1913–1976) (www.dil.ie 2019).
<b><i>Gesta</i></b>	<i>Gesta Regis Henrici Secundi Benedicti Abbatis: the chronicle of the reigns of Henry II and Richard I, A.D. 1169–1192, known commonly under the name of Benedict of Peterborough</i> , ed. William Stubbs (2 vols, London, 1867).
<b>Giraldus, <i>Expugnatio</i></b>	<i>Expugnatio Hibernica: the conquest of Ireland by Giraldus Cambrensis</i> , ed. A.B. Scott and F.X. Martin (Dublin, 1978).
<b><i>Gormanston Reg.</i></b>	<i>Calendar of the Gormanston register</i> , ed. James Mills and M. J. McEnery (R.S.A.I., Dublin, 1916).
<b><i>Mac Fhirbhisigh's Book</i></b>	Dubhaltach Mac Fhirbhisigh, <i>Leabhar mór na ngenealach: The great book of Irish genealogies</i> , ed. & trans. Nollaig Ó Muraíle (5 vols., Dublin, 2003).
<b><i>Misc.Ir. Annals</i></b>	<i>Miscellaneous Irish annals (A.D. 1114–1437)</i> , ed. Séamus Ó hIainne (Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1947).
<b><i>N.H.I.</i></b>	<i>A new history of Ireland</i> (9 vols, Oxford, 1976–2005).

<b>Ormond Deeds, 1172–1350 [etc.]</b>	<i>Calendar of Ormond deeds, 1172–1550</i> [etc.] ed. Edmund Curtis (Irish Manuscripts Commission, 6 vols, Dublin, 1932–43).
<b>Orpen, Normans</b>	Goddard Henry Orpen, <i>Ireland under the Normans</i> (4 vols, Oxford, 1911–20).
<b>O.D.N.B.</b>	Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (60 vols, Oxford, 2004–).
<b>Pipe roll Ire., 1211–12</b>	‘The Irish pipe roll of 14 John, 1211–12’, ed. Oliver Davies and David B. Quinn, in <i>Ulster Journal of Archaeology</i> , 3rd ser., v, supp. (July 1941).
<b>R.I.A.</b>	Royal Irish Academy.
<b>Rot. chart.</b>	<i>Rotuli chartarum in Turn Londinensi asservati, 1199–1216</i> (London, 1837).
<b>Rot. litt. claus., 1204–24 [etc.]</b>	<i>Rotuli litterarum clausarum in Turri Londonensi asservati, 1204–24 [etc.]</i> (2 vols, London, 1833, 1834).
<b>Rot. litt. pat.</b>	<i>Rotuli litterarum patentium in turri Londinensi asservati</i> , ed. T.D. Hardy (London, 1835).
<b>R.S.A.I.</b>	Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland.
<b>T.C.D.</b>	Trinity College, Dublin.
<b>The Deeds</b>	Evelyn Mullally (ed.), <i>The deeds of the Normans in Ireland: La Geste des Engleis en Yrlande. A new edition of the chronicle formerly known as The Song of Dermot and the Earl</i> (Dublin, 2002).
<b>U.C.C.</b>	University College, Cork.
<b>U.C.D.</b>	University College, Dublin.



## Introduction

### [0.1: The scene]

Giraldus Cambrensis, *Expugnatio Hibernica*:

Then at the urging of [Diarmait] Mac Murchada who, in a spirit of revenge, called to mind ancient feuds, they overran and devastated the territories of [Tigernán] Ua Ruairc king of Meath. When the whole of Meath had been ravaged by frequent raids, slaughter and burnings, Ruaidrí [Úa Conchobair] king of Connacht, seeing that it was very much his affair ‘when a neighbour’s wall is ablaze’ sent messages to Diarmait couched in the following terms: ‘Contrary to the conditions of our treaty you have invited to this island a large number of foreigners. Yet we put up with this with a good grace while you confined yourself within your province of Leinster. But now, since you are unmindful of your oath and without feelings of pity for the hostage you have given, and have arrogantly trespassed beyond the stipulated limits and your ancestral boundaries, you must either restrain the forays of your foreign troops for the future, or else we will send you without fail the severed head of your son’. Diarmait gave a haughty response to this, and added besides that he would not be deflected from his purpose until he had brought under his control Connacht, which belonged to him by ancestral right, together with kingship of all Ireland. Ruaidrí thereupon became enraged and condemned to death the son whom Diarmait had given him as a hostage.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 68–9: ‘*Instinctu Murchadide, antiquas inimicicias vindicem ad animum revocantis, Ororicii Medensis fines hostile invasio demoliuntur. Tota igitur Media crebris depredacionibus, cedibus quoque et incendiis iam exterminio date, Rothericus Connactensis, suam agi rem prospiciens paries ubi proximus ardet, nuncios Dermotio in hec verba transmisit: “Contra pacis formam exterorum multitudinem in insulam advocasti. Dum tamen intra Lageniam tuam te contituisti, equanimiter sustinuimus. Nunc autem, quoniam nec sacramenti memor, nec obsidis dati misertus, metas positas patriosque fines insolenter excessisti, aut exterorum tuorum de cetero compescas excursus, aut precisum tibi filii tui caput proculdubio remitemus.” Cum autem Dermotius ad hec superbe respondisset, adiciens quoque se a proposito non desiturum donec sibi Connacciam avito iure compententem cum totius Hibernie monarchia subiugaverit, indignans Rothericus filium eius, quem ei obsidem dederat, capitali sententia condemnavit’.*

The Annals of Tigernach, *sub anno* 1170:

A hosting led by MacMurchadha into Meath, and he plundered Clonard. Thence he went to Kells, and plundered and burned Kells and Dulane and Slane and many other churches, and thence he went to Slieve Gory, made plunderings on the Uí Briúin, and returned home.<sup>2</sup>

At the instigation of Tighearnán Ó Ruairc, the hostages of Leinster and of MacMurchadha were killed by Ruaidhrí Ó Conchobhair in consequence of those wrongs. For Ó Ruairc had pledged his conscience that Ruaidhrí would not be king of Ireland unless they were put to death. So then the son of Domhnall Caomhánach MacMurchadha and the son of Murchadh Ó Caellaighe were killed by the king of Ireland.<sup>3</sup>

So run some of the very different but equally intriguing lines in English and Irish sources, describing a key moment in the early course of the invasion of Ireland. The execution of Diarmait Mac Murchada's hostages took place towards the end of 1170, during a crisis in which his foreign mercenaries were only one contributing factor; as we will ultimately see, there were other reasons the situation reached this pitch.

The crisis stemmed from a sequence of events that was considered notorious even at the time. Diarmait Mac Murchada, the king of Leinster, was driven from Ireland in 1166 by his rival, the king of Uí Briúin Bréifne, Tigernán Úa Ruairc, whose wife he had abducted and raped in 1152. Mac Murchada sought assistance from Henry II, the king of England, who had entertained the notion of invading Ireland once before. The exiled king of

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<sup>2</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1170.12: 'Sluaighedh la Mac Murcadha a Midhi, cor' airg Clúain Iraid. Luid asen co Cenannus, cor' airg & cor' loisc Cenannus & Tuilén & Slaíne & cella imdha aile, & luidh as-sein co Sliab n-Guaire, co n-derna airgne for Uib Briúin, & ro saí dia thigh'.

<sup>3</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1170.14: 'Braithde Laigen & Maic Murcadha do marbad la Ruaidri h-Úa Concobair ar aslach Tigernáin Uí Ruairc andsna h-ecóraib-sin, uair tuc Ua Ruairc a chubais na budh rí Erenn Ruaidhri muna marbad íat, & ro marbad and mac Domnaill Caemanaigh Maic Murchadha & mac Murcaidh h-Úi Chaellaighe la rí Erenn'.

Leinster was permitted to recruit adventurers from among Henry's subjects but was offered no direct help.

Mac Murchada returned to Ireland in 1167 with a small band, only to be defeated by Úa Conchobair and Úa Ruairc. He was suffered to remain in his own territory however, where he would soon receive much more potent English support. By 1170, Mac Murchada and his foreign auxiliaries had re-taken Leinster, along with the Hiberno-Norse settlements of Wexford, Waterford, and Dublin. This led Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair, under pressure from Tigernán Úa Ruairc, to execute the hostages Mac Murchada had given up only the previous year, 1169.

The situation soon deteriorated even further. Mac Murchada died of an illness in 1171, but his English mercenaries remained in situ and in control of his re-conquered lands. Úa Conchobair and Úa Ruairc, now thoroughly alarmed, led a charge against them the same year. In Giraldus's words, 'So almost all the princes of Ireland gathered their forces from all sides and encircled Dublin, besieging it with an enormous number of troops',<sup>4</sup> while another English source, *The Deeds of the Normans in Ireland*, reported that 'The mighty king of Connacht summoned all the Irish of Ireland to come to him in order to lay siege to Dublin. The men came on a day their lord had appointed for them. When they had assembled, there were sixty thousand armed men. At Castleknock, on this occasion, the mighty king of Connacht was encamped, and Mac Duinn Shléibe of Ulster planted his banner at Clontarf, and Ua Briain of Munster was at Kilmainham with his fierce men, and Muirchertach, as I understand, was near Dalkey Island with his men'.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 78–80: 'collectis undique viribus, cum infinita totius fere Hibernie principes multitudine Dubliniam obsidione cinxerunt'.

<sup>5</sup> *The Deeds*, pp 97–8 ll 1744–1759: 'E de Connoth li riche reis De tut Yrlande le Yrreis A lui les ad fet mander Pur Dyvelin aseger. Icil vindrent a un jor Quemis lur aveit lur seignur. Quant il erent assemblez, Seissant mil erent armez. A Chastel Knoc, a cele feiz, De Connoth jout li riche reis, E Mac Dun Leve de Huluestere A Clontarf fiche sa banere, E O Briën de Monestre A Kylmainan od sa gent fere, E Murierdath, cum l'entent, Vers Dalkei fu od sa gent'.

What followed is known as the Battle of Dublin, and despite the fact that it was not much of a battle, it remains among the most important events in Irish history. The leading English barons, cognisant of Úa Conchobair's supremacy, determined 'that they must attack the king of Connacht first of all, as being the most important and senior prince, so that if he were defeated they would have no difficulty in routing the other armies'.<sup>6</sup> They sallied from the fortress and 'With this small force they valiantly attacked an army of thirty thousand men, which was completely off its guard and unsuspecting, after an earlier encounter on the morning of the same day'.<sup>7</sup>

Of this battle, *The Deeds* reported, 'The brave and renowned [English] vassals fell upon the Irish in their huts and tents and invaded their shelters, and the Irish, taken by surprise, fled away over the moors, fled away across the country, like panic-stricken animals [...] over a hundred were killed there as they were bathing there, and over fifteen hundred in all of these people were killed, whereas from the English side only one foot-soldier was wounded. The field [of victory] remained that day with Richard [de Clare], the brave earl, and the Irish fled, routed and vanquished. As God willed it, on this occasion, the field remained with our Englishmen'.<sup>8</sup> Giraldus Cambrensis described how 'These men, made conspicuous by their arms no less than their courage, followed hard on the heels of the enemy and dispatched many from the light of day down to the darkness of the lower world. Indeed Ruaidrí, who chanced just then to be sitting in the bath, only just escaped'.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 82–3: 'adiciens quoque Connactensium in regem tanquam primum et principalem in primis irruendum ut, illo confecto, aliorum exercituum haud difficilis fieret persecutio'.

<sup>7</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 82–3 'triginta milium virorum exercitum, propter matutinos eiusdem diei congressus improvidum penitus et improvisum, tam parva manu viriliter invadunt'.

<sup>8</sup> *The Deeds*, pp 102–3, ll 1927–35, 1947–58: 'Li barun vassals alosez E as loges e as trefs Unt les Yrreis asailiz E les tente[s] envaïs. Parmi les lands sunt fuïis; Fuïis'en sunt par la cuntré Comme bestes esgarré [...] Sente plus i out ossis En bain, u il erent assis; E plus de mil e cinc cent I out ossis de cele gent, E des Engleis [n']i out naufré Ne mes un serjant a pé. Le champ esteit remis le jor A Ricard, le bon cuntur. Et les Yrreis sunt returnez Desconfiz e debarez. Cum Deu volait, a cele feis Remist le champ a nos Engleis'.

<sup>9</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 82–3: 'viri armis et animositate conspicui, promptissime subsequentes, multos ad tenebrasa luce transmittunt. Multis igitur interemptis et cunctis omnino confectis, Rotherico vero, qui tunc forte in balneis sedebat, vix elapse'.



Unsurprisingly, the account in *Ann. Tig.* was more sober: ‘A hosting by Ruaidhrí Ó Conchobhair, by Tighearnán Ó Ruairc and by Muirheartach Ó Cearbhaill, king of Oriel, to Dublin in order to besiege Dublin and the Earl and Miles Cogan. For the space of a fortnight there were conflicts and skirmishes between them. Then Leth Cuinn separated, and Ó Conchobhair marched to meet the Leinstermen, and the cavalry of the men of Breifne and Oriel went to cut down the Englishmen’s corn. The Earl and Miles Cogan entered the camp of Leth Cuinn and killed a multitude of their rabble, and carried off their provisions, their armour, and their sumpter-horses’.<sup>10</sup>

It is tempting, and for many historians it has proved irresistible, to lend weight to the more detailed and more colourful Anglo-Norman accounts. This must be done with care since there are places where liberties have clearly been taken. The idea that Úa Conchobair addressed Mac Murchada by letter before executing his hostages, for example, is widely considered to have been one of Giraldus’s literary devices.<sup>11</sup> The numbers attributed to Úa Conchobair (thirty thousand according to Giraldus and sixty thousand according to *The Deeds*) are also exaggerated by orders of magnitude, and it strains credulity that only a single English soldier was lost in the sally, however successful it proved.

It is only fair to say that the intention in both narratives was to convey the significance of the events they described. In this respect they can not be doubted. Victory allowed the English to secure their position and welcome their own king to Ireland later the same year. It also destabilised Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair’s national supremacy and enabled his Irish rivals to limit his influence outside his own province, Connacht. With Henry’s

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<sup>10</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1171.2(ga), 1171.9: ‘*Sluaiged la Ruaidhri Ua Conchobair & la Tigernan h-Ua Ruairc & la Muirchertach h-Ua Cerbaill, ríg Airgiall, co hAth Cliath do forbaisi for Ath Cliath & ar in Iarla & ar Miligh Gogan. Deabaid & imresain aturo re re caictisi, cor’ scailset Leth Cuind, co n-dechaidh h-Ua Concobair a condí Laighen, & co n-dechatar marc-shluagh Fer mBreifne & Airgiall do buain arba Saxanach. Do-chuaidh an t-iarla & Miligh Gogan i l-longport Leithi Cuind, cor’ marbsat sochaidhi da n-daescur-sluagh & rucsad a lon & a n-edaighe & a caiple bitaille’.*

<sup>11</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 68–9, 304 n. 97.

arrival in Ireland came the endorsement of existing conquests and plans to annex even more territory (Henry granted the province of Meath to Hugh de Lacy before he left), and what followed was a period of gradual consolidation and extension that eventually brought most of Ireland under the English crown.

This thesis is concerned with that advance, but also the crisis outlined above, and more importantly still, the wider context in which those realities were born. In practice, this necessitates a wide lens, and what might be termed the ‘high-medieval period’, from the late eleventh to mid-thirteenth century, is our principal focus. Any such labelling or selection is arbitrary, but it is meant to emphasise continuity in a historical era that is so easily characterised by seismic change.

## **[0.2: Literature Review]**

The approach taken here is a novel one. 1169 has traditionally been regarded as an appropriate historiographical demarcation, being for some the concluding point and for many more the starting point of their histories. In relation to this thesis, the most important single work of either category is Goddard Henry Orpen’s four-volume magnum opus, *Ireland under the Normans*, published 1911–20.

Orpen’s chosen period was 1169–1333, and in it he traced the rise of ‘Norman’ civilisation in Ireland. He contrasted this with the ‘anarchic Ireland’ of the ninth to eleventh centuries, on which he offered some perfunctory commentary by way of an introduction. He wrote that ‘In the course of my study of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (which has been spread over many years) [...] I have been led to regard the domination of the English Crown and of its ministers in Ireland, during the thirteenth century, and indeed up to the invasion of Edward Bruce in 1315, as having been much more complete than has been generally recognised, and to think that due credit has not been given to the new rulers for creating the comparative peace and order and the

manifest progress and prosperity that Ireland enjoyed, during that period, wherever their rule was effective'.<sup>12</sup> This peace, order, and prosperity he termed the '*pax Normannica*'.

Orpen's view of pre-invasion history and historiography contrasted sharply and he made this similarly plain, writing that 'Throughout the whole historic period down to the coming of the Normans, the turmoil of inter-tribal conflicts has been the despair of writers who seek to tell a connected story, and in general they have passed over it rapidly, though perhaps not rapidly enough for their readers'.<sup>13</sup>

Orpen intended his work to be something of a riposte to the prevailing nationalist view of early Irish history, represented above all others by Eoin MacNeill. While the interests of the two men varied almost as much as their interpretations, any area of mutual research (like the twelfth century) led to tension and occasionally to animosity. Perhaps the best example of this is Orpen's use of the words 'tribe' and 'tribalism' to characterise Irish socio-political organisation, a usage abhorred and contested by MacNeill.<sup>14</sup>

The next major work in the field, *A history of mediaeval Ireland* by Edmund Curtis (1923, 1938), tried to find a middle ground between the two. Curtis acknowledged his reliance on both figures but noted particularly that 'Mr. Goddard Orpen's *Ireland under the Normans* (1166–1333) has been an invaluable guide for part of my period, and it is a pleasure to acknowledge my indebtedness to him. His work is, however, professedly devoted to the Norman colonists, whereas I have devoted more attention to the native side'.<sup>15</sup>

Curtis's history officially covered the period 1110–1513, but in practice his opening was constructed along the lines laid out by Orpen, and, after the introduction, the first chapter was entitled 'To the expulsion of Dermot, 1166'. Despite his reliance on Orpen, Curtis also displayed a notable propensity towards nationalist saws and clichés, in effect

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<sup>12</sup> Orpen, *Normans*, i, pp 7–8.

<sup>13</sup> Orpen, *Normans*, i, xxxiii.

<sup>14</sup> See *Comparative Analysis*, pp 434–5.

<sup>15</sup> Edmund Curtis, *A history of mediaeval Ireland from 1110 to 1513* (Dublin, 1923), v.

combining questionable aspects of both traditions. The opening words of his introduction, for example, were ‘The kingdom of Ireland was, in the year 1170, already nine centuries old. From Cormac mac Art, who founded the Monarchy of Tara circa 250 A.D., descended a line of kings who preserved till the year 1000 a practically unbroken succession in the High Kingship’.<sup>16</sup>

Curtis’s interpretation was never accepted by the profession in the same way as Orpen’s. In the words of James Lydon, ‘Curtis left no doubt that in his view medieval Ireland was a lordship wrongfully attached to the English crown and that it should rightfully have been a kingdom under its own native dynastic ruler. For this he was subsequently denounced as unhistorical, and to this day, especially in the view of the so-called revisionists, he is commonly regarded as not only out of date, but dangerous as well’.<sup>17</sup> Lydon sympathised with Curtis’s plight in this regard, and he contended that the latter remained ‘the only historian who has tried to combine in a single major historical work an account not only of the English in medieval Ireland, their relations with England and the crown, and the rise and fall of the greatest among them, but also tried to tell the story of the impact of all this on Gaelic Ireland’.<sup>18</sup>

Unlike Curtis, whose work is no longer in vogue, Orpen’s writings remain important in almost every respect. His history became the template for all subsequent professional historians who tackled the immediate post-invasion period. Borrowing a technique employed by Giraldus Cambrensis and the anonymous author of *The Deeds*, Orpen used Diarmait Mac Murchada as a bridge between the pre-invasion and post-invasion environments, with his death in 1171 conveniently relieving the necessity for any follow-up or close consideration of what he considered complex ‘inter-tribal’ relationships. This

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<sup>16</sup> Curtis, *A history of mediaeval Ireland*, p. 1.

<sup>17</sup> James Lydon, ‘Historical revisit: Edmund Curtis, *A history of medieval Ireland* (1923, 1938)\*’ in *Irish Historical Studies*, xxxi, no. 124 (November 1999), pp 536–48.

<sup>18</sup> Lydon, ‘Historical revisit: Edmund Curtis’, p. 548.

was adopted by Curtis, as we have seen, though he gave more attention to the ‘native side’, and others have followed Orpen even more closely.

Orpen’s importance to, and centrality in, subsequent literature was highlighted by Seán Duffy at the turn of the millennium. He wrote ‘Every monograph which has since appeared on this era of Irish history has paraphrased him, adjusted some of the minutiae of his account, added some details where a new source has been unearthed, or sought to tell the same story in a different tone. His work has not been surpassed, and it cannot be superseded, because it is the *fons et origo* of the professional historiography of Anglo-Norman Ireland’.<sup>19</sup>

A.J. Otway-Ruthven’s *A history of medieval Ireland*, published in 1968, is a good illustration of how entrenched this style became. Otway-Ruthven was so uncomfortable with pre-invasion Irish history that she had early medievalist Kathleen Hughes write an introduction covering that era; to this she added limited remarks on the ‘Scandinavian invasions’ and twelfth-century church reform before taking up the story of ‘The expulsion of Dermot MacMurrough’, and the affairs of Gaelic Ireland received scant attention thereafter.

Likewise, Lydon, whose defence of Curtis was mentioned above, published *The lordship of Ireland in the Middle Ages* in 1972, in which he compressed several centuries into an introductory chapter entitled ‘The prelude to the invasion’. For Lydon, ‘The death of Brian Boru at the Battle of Clontarf in 1014 marked the end of the most successful attempt to establish a kingdom of Ireland [...] As high-king he attempted to establish for his dynasty an unassailable position. But the revolt of the kingdom of Leinster put an end to his aspirations and left the high-kingship as a prize to be fought over by the strongest

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<sup>19</sup> Duffy, ‘Goddard Henry Orpen, *Ireland under the Normans, 1169–1333*’ in *Irish Historical Studies*, xxii, no. 126 (November 2000), pp 246–59 at 259.

dynasties in Ireland. Thus was created the political condition that allowed King Henry II of England to intervene in Ireland and to exercise his claim to feudal lordship there'.<sup>20</sup>

Robin Frame's *Colonial Ireland, 1169–1329*, published in 1981, was almost identical in approach. To his credit, Frame highlighted the 'possibly more urgent' need for a study 'dealing with the impact of conquest and settlement on Gaelic Irish society'.<sup>21</sup>

Nonetheless, his own work opened with Mac Murchada's expulsion and quickly moved past him to consider the invaders and their settlement in Ireland. Frame's other major work, *The political development of the British Isles, 1100–1400*, published 1990, had a similar structure where Ireland was concerned, and 1100–69 received limited treatment.

Lydon and Frame both contributed to a volume entitled *The English in medieval Ireland*, which comprised the 'proceedings of the first joint meeting of the Royal Irish Academy and British Academy, Dublin, 1982', and was published in 1984. Lydon was also the editor of the collection. As might be expected with such a title, the papers focused overwhelmingly on the colonists and the development of the colony. The only essay to take serious consideration of the English in medieval Ireland in relation to the Gaelic Irish was Gearóid Mac Niocaill's 'The interaction of the laws'.

By that point, Mac Niocaill was a well-known scholar of Gaelic Ireland and its manuscript tradition. His publications included studies of the *notitiae* or land transactions preserved in the Book of Kells, as well as the annals and law-texts.<sup>22</sup> His essay in *The English in medieval Ireland* therefore represented recognition of the need to take cognisance of Gaelic Ireland, but not a substantial effort to do so by those whose primary interest was the colony.

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<sup>20</sup> Lydon, *The lordship of Ireland in the Middle Ages* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Dublin, 2003), p. 11.

<sup>21</sup> Robin Frame, *Colonial Ireland, 1169–1329* (Dublin, 1981), vi.

<sup>22</sup> Gearóid Mac Niocaill, *Notitiae as Leabhar Cheanannais, 1033–1161* (Dublin, 1961); Mac Niocaill, *The medieval Irish annals* (Dublin, 1975); Mac Niocaill, 'Aspects of Irish law in the late thirteenth century' in G.A. Hayes-McCoy (ed.), *Historical Studies X: papers read before the eleventh Irish conference of Historians, 1973* (Galway, 1976), pp 25–42.

Mac Niocaill also contributed the first of a series of volumes on Irish history entitled *The Gill History of Ireland*. Mac Niocaill's volume, which dealt with an earlier period than that considered here, was called *Ireland before the Vikings* (1972). It was followed in the series by Donnchadh Ó Corráin's *Ireland before the Normans* (1972) and Michael Dolley's *Anglo-Norman Ireland* (1972).

The series, which was edited by Lydon and Margaret MacCurtain, did not impose stylistic uniformity on its contributors but the studies were required to be very brief and no footnotes were permitted. Ó Corráin chose to devote the space available to him to secular political history. He commented, 'Regrettably, the history of the church, of culture and of literature has suffered as a result, but I console myself in the belief that these aspects of Irish history have received their fair share of attention of late'.<sup>23</sup> While he was undoubtedly justified in this opinion, he was nevertheless criticised for it in some quarters.<sup>24</sup>

Others, like Hughes, were more impressed. She wrote that 'Almost every page of the political narrative has something worth comment'.<sup>25</sup> Ó Corráin was the first historian since Curtis to attempt to provide a coherent narrative of this period of Irish political history, and he did so by focusing extensively on the Irish annals and genealogies. He argued that the power of minor or petty kingships was eroded over time as the greater kings consolidated their own position, and this reading gained widespread acceptance.

Not long after *Ireland before the Normans*, an even more sustained account of pre-invasion politics appeared in the shape of Francis John Byrne's *Irish kings and high-kings* (1973). This work was immediately recognised for its importance, but also for its complexity and lack of clarity. Alfred P. Smyth, for example, said that Byrne was 'in

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<sup>23</sup> Donncha Ó Corráin, *Ireland before the Normans* (Dublin, 1972), ii–iii.

<sup>24</sup> See for example, Aubrey Gwynn, 'Review: new light on medieval Irish history' in *An Irish Quarterly Review*, lxii, no. 247/248 (Autumn/Winter 1973), pp 323–4.

<sup>25</sup> Kathleen Hughes, 'Review: *Ireland before the Vikings* by Gearóid Mac Niocaill; *Ireland before the Normans* by Donncha Ó Corráin' in *Studia Hibernica*, no. 12 (1972), pp 190–3 at 193.

danger of being condemned for those very faults which he abhors in the writings of his medieval predecessors – resorting to language which is “bombastic and deliberately obscure”.<sup>26</sup>

Hughes and Smyth were divided about the overall value of Byrne’s contribution. Hughes said that ‘no comparable attempt at a political history of early Ireland has ever been made’, and judged that ‘As a collection of evidence, much of which is familiar to very few, this book is first class’.<sup>27</sup> Smyth viewed it more negatively, commenting that ‘The book, with its lack of organization and the writer’s aversion to using conventional historical methods, underlines the need for a systematic survey of Irish sources before any further works of a general nature are attempted’.<sup>28</sup>

It is fair to comment, all the same, that Byrne’s pioneering work enabled many future works of Irish political history, including this one. His case studies of the early Irish kingdoms and attention to the genealogies revealed a great deal about the true origins of the polities which later dominated the island. It is on this subject, origins and roots, that Byrne’s analysis is most useful and, if his interpretations can be challenged, they can not be ignored.

Twelfth- and thirteenth-century Ireland has been treated in other series since *The Gill History of Ireland*. The series published as *A New History of Ireland* by Oxford University Press was much more extensive, but like *The Gill History*, it used 1169 as a dividing line between volumes. In the former case, the second volume of the series (1169–1534) was published in 1987, eighteen years before the first volume (early Ireland to 1169), which was published in 2005.

In her review of the second volume, Lisa Bitel noted that nineteen of the twenty-nine articles were play-by-play accounts of Anglo-Norman and Anglo-Irish gains and

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<sup>26</sup> Alfred P. Smyth, ‘Review: *Irish kings and high-kings* by F. J. Byrne’ in *The English Historical Review*, xc, no. 355 (April 1975), pp 416–17 at 416.

<sup>27</sup> Hughes, ‘Review: *Irish kings and high-kings*’, p. 102.

<sup>28</sup> Smyth, ‘Review: *Irish kings and high-kings*’, p. 417.



setbacks.<sup>29</sup> She attributed this difficulty partly to a traditional disposition in the historiography, which is also being highlighted here, but also because, in her view, ‘native politics were, if possible, even more confusing than relations among the Anglo-Irish themselves and with the kings across the Irish Sea. When the authors do mention Gaelic territories and leaders, they try to explain away the political disorganization for which the medieval Irish are historically famous, without promoting the charge of tribalism (to which Irish historians are sensitive)’.<sup>30</sup>

This view, evidently shared by Bitel as much as any of the contributors to *A New History of Ireland*, is best exemplified by F.X. Martin’s essays in the second volume. In one instance, he stridently asserted that between 1152 and 1166 Tigernán Ua Ruairc and Diarmait Mac Murchada ‘changed allies and partners with no apparent consistency or high policy’.<sup>31</sup> The implication, of course, was that this could be said of Gaelic Irish politics in general.

Martin, who was responsible for four essays and the introduction in that volume alone, advanced many more equally dubious interpretations. As C.A. Empey lamented, ‘to review the narrative sections comprehensively would be to lay siege to the text page by page’.<sup>32</sup> It suffices to say that Martin was out of sympathy with what he regarded as ‘nationalistic’ views; he dismissed the idea of the ‘invasion’ outright, for example, on the grounds that Mac Murchada had extended an invitation, he saw chaos in Irish politics, and he castigated the Irish annals for their failure to grasp the importance of English intervention.

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<sup>29</sup> Lisa M. Bitel, ‘Review: *A New History of Ireland, 2: Medieval Ireland, 1169–1534*’ in *Speculum*, lxxix, no. 4 (October 1994), pp 1147–9 at 1147.

<sup>30</sup> Bitel, ‘Review: *A New history of Ireland, 2: Medieval Ireland, 1169–1534*’, p. 1148.

<sup>31</sup> F.X. Martin, ‘Diarmait Mac Murchada and the coming of the Anglo-Normans’ in Art Cosgrave (ed.), *N.H.I. II – medieval Ireland 1169–1534* (Oxford, 1987), pp 43–66 at 50.

<sup>32</sup> C.A. Empey and Marianne Elliott, ‘Review: *A new history of Ireland*’, in *Irish Historical Studies*, xxv, no. 100 (November 1987), pp 423–31 at 424.

On this final point, he wrote ‘The most disappointing among the sources of this period are the native Irish records. None of them conveys a sense of the momentous events that were gathering irresistible force on the fringe of the Irish scene and were soon to transform the country out of all recognition’.<sup>33</sup> Martin believed that there was an excessive reliance on the Irish annals in modern historiography, arguing that ‘The true picture has to be pieced together with considerable difficulty from a variety of sources, such as genealogies, topographical poems, monastic charters, bardic poetry, papal records, archaeological remains, coins, inscriptions, art items’.<sup>34</sup>

As far as the first volume is concerned, it is worth remembering that its publication in 2005 does not mean that it was reflective of the scholarship of that decade. Instead, as Thomas O’Loughlin remarked in his review of the volume ‘most of the contributors were commissioned in the 1970s, and quite a few of the pieces were written then, and reflect concerns not just about the topics, but about the nature of early medieval history in general that belong to that time’.<sup>35</sup> Secular political history was dealt with in essays by Byrne, whom we have already discussed, and Dáibhí Ó Cróinín (for 400–800) and Marie Therese Flanagan, whose work we will meet below.

A recent comparable series, *The Cambridge History of Ireland* (2018), was no more innovative in approach. The general editor of the series, Thomas Bartlett, remarked that ‘A single twist of the historical kaleidoscope can suggest – even reveal – new patterns, beginnings and endings’.<sup>36</sup> With this admirable sentiment in mind, he suggested that ‘the periods covered in each volume are not the traditional ones and we hope that this may

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<sup>33</sup> Martin, ‘Diarmait Mac Murchada’, p. 47.

<sup>34</sup> Martin, ‘Diarmait Mac Murchada’, pp 47–8.

<sup>35</sup> Thomas O’Loughlin, ‘Review: *A new history of Ireland volume 1: prehistoric and early Ireland*’ in *Irish Historical Studies*, xxxvi, no. 141 (May 2008), pp 99–100 at 99.

<sup>36</sup> Thomas Bartlett, ‘General Introduction’ in Brendan Smith (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Ireland Volume I* (Cambridge, 2018), xxxi.

have the effect of forcing a re-evaluation of the familiar periodisation of Irish history and of the understanding it has tended to inspire'.<sup>37</sup>

The construction of the historiographical periods in this series was nothing to boast about, however. Medieval Ireland received one volume (from four), covering 600–1550. Pre-invasion (or rather pre-1200) coverage was dispensed with by page 182 of that volume and none of the six essays concerned with it attempted to provide a political chronology or analysis. As Duffy highlighted, the excuse offered for this, that the material had been adequately covered in *N.H.I.* volume one, was weak at best.<sup>38</sup>

As well as broadly conceived national histories, there have been several important local studies in this area. Again, early English settlement has garnered most attention. One example of this is Brendan Smith's *Colonisation and conquest in medieval Ireland* (1999). This project examined what is now the County Louth area, with its interesting history of conquest by the kingdom of Airgíalla before the English invasion, and subsequent early re-conquest by the English. Another example is Thomas Finan's *Landscape and history on the medieval Irish frontier* (2016). Finan looked at the five cantreds of eastern Connacht reserved by the English crown from baronial conquest and settlement; these also happened to be the five cantreds retained by the Uí Chonchobair, formerly kings of Connacht. We may also note here the many works of Empey, whose review of *N.H.I.* was mentioned above, including 'Conquest and settlement: patterns of Anglo-Norman settlement in north Munster and south Leinster' and 'The cantreds of medieval Tipperary'.

Gaelic Ireland is better served in some of these local studies than others. Finan's effort to include both Irish and English perspectives was described as his book's 'most

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<sup>37</sup> Bartlett, 'General Introduction', xxxi.

<sup>38</sup> Smith, 'Introduction' in *The Cambridge History of Ireland Volume I* (Cambridge, 2018), p. 6; Duffy, 'Review: *Cambridge history of Ireland, vol. 1*', in *History Ireland*, xxvi, no. 5 (September/October 2018), pp 58–60 at 58–9.

praiseworthy feature' by Smith.<sup>39</sup> In his own work, however, Smith described Airgíalla as 'The Ua Cerbaill kingdom', and did not explain that the strong leadership exhibited by the Uí Cherbaill in the twelfth century was anomalous for that kingdom. Empey, himself in the category of earlier writers, was still more traditional than either Smith or Finan; he focused on English settlement and paid little attention to Gaelic polities.

There are several general introductions to medieval Ireland that touch upon the present subject as well. Among these are Michael Richter's *Medieval Ireland: the enduring tradition* (1988), Ó Cróinín's *Early medieval Ireland: 400–1200* (1995), Matthew Stout's *Early medieval Ireland: 431–1169* (2017), and Clare Downham's *Medieval Ireland* (2018). Sadly, these works are all problematic, and nowhere more so than in the period of political history with which this study deals.

For one reviewer, the 'serious flaw' in the first of these was that 'Richter is not in adequate command of the vernacular evidence, and his presentation of the material is marred by frequent errors of language, of fact, and of reasoning'.<sup>40</sup> It also contained only the briefest of remarks about the English invasion. Similarly, Ó Cróinín devoted a mere sixty pages to the politics of 800–1200, on which are found a very weak account of the doings of selected Irish kings and confusion about the identities of early English magnates.<sup>41</sup>

The more recent studies by Stout and Downham have also been criticised on various points. Patrick Wadden's comment that Stout's book 'does not provide readers with an up-to-date guide to early Irish history' was a generous understatement.<sup>42</sup> As far as the

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<sup>39</sup> Smith, 'Review: Thomas Finan, *Landscape and history on the medieval Irish frontier: the King's Cantreds in the thirteenth century*' in *Peritia*, xxix (2018), pp 265–7 at 265.

<sup>40</sup> John Carey, 'Review: Michael Richter, *Medieval Ireland: the enduring tradition*' in *Speculum*, lxxv no. 2 (April, 1990), pp 489–90 at 489.

<sup>41</sup> For a full treatment of these issues, see Colmán Etchingham, 'Early medieval Irish history' in Kim McCone and Simms (eds), *Progress in medieval Irish studies* (Maynooth, 1996), pp 123–54 at 145–54.

<sup>42</sup> Patrick Wadden, 'Review: Matthew Stout, *Early medieval Ireland: 431–1169*; Clare Downham, *Medieval Ireland*; Smith (ed.), *The Cambridge history of Ireland volume I: 600–1550*' in *Early Medieval Europe*, xxviii no. 1 (2020), pp 162–70 at 164.

twelfth century is concerned, inaccuracies abound. 1148 as ‘the earliest indication’ that Toirdelbach Ua Conchobair’s power ‘was ebbing away’ is just one example; this arbitrary date was more than twenty years after Ua Conchobair had lost control of Munster.<sup>43</sup> Downham’s work was better, but the treatment of politics in the twelfth century suffered by repeating inaccuracies found in earlier works. We are told at the outset of the chapter ‘Politics 1100–1500’ that ‘no single king achieved island-wide supremacy’, for instance, an assertion that will be dealt with here in due course.<sup>44</sup>

The modern discussion of twelfth-century Ireland is best represented by two historians in particular, both of whom have already been mentioned in passing: Flanagan and Duffy. Flanagan, whose first monograph, *Irish society, Anglo-Norman settlers, Angevin kingship*, was published in 1989, tied her study together under the framework of ‘interactions’ between the two cultures. Here, as elsewhere, Diarmait Mac Murchada (and his expulsion from Ireland) appeared very early. It is only fair to say that Flanagan approached the topic with an unusual sensitivity to the motivations and concerns of all parties, as well as a marked assiduousness with source material.

Flanagan’s other works have also added much to academic discourse on the twelfth century. She promoted the study of Latin charters issued by the Irish kings in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries as a means of assessing their reigns and her book on this subject, *Irish royal charters: texts and contexts* (2005), was particularly well received. One reviewer described it as ‘an indispensable guide to a fateful period of Irish history’.<sup>45</sup> Flanagan contributed to various other aspects of twelfth-century historiography, most notably with another full-length study on the European ecclesiastical reform movement (sometimes called the Gregorian Reform movement). This was and is a particularly

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<sup>43</sup> Matthew Stout, *Early medieval Ireland: 431–1169* (Dublin, 2018), p. 253.

<sup>44</sup> Clare Downham, *Medieval Ireland* (Cambridge, 2018), p. 238.

<sup>45</sup> T.M. Charles-Edwards, ‘Review: Marie Therese Flanagan, *Irish royal charters: texts and contexts*’ in *Irish Economic and Social History*, xxxiii (2006), pp 115–6 at 116.

popular topic for historians of twelfth-century Ireland in general, and her book joined a wide collection of existing publications on the subject.

Duffy's publications have also led the way in the study of Ireland in this most critical of ages. His first monograph, *Ireland in the Middle Ages* (1997), was remarkable for placing 1169 in the middle of the narrative, offering new contexts and even advancing this as a new method of looking at the period. He wrote, 'Irish politics did not begin in 1169. Therefore, one must guard against the assumption that everything which occurred after that date is a product of the new age'.<sup>46</sup> He confidently predicted that 'With this generation of scholars the earlier barrier between Anglo-Ireland and Gaelic Ireland may with confidence be said to be breaking down. It is no longer acceptable to treat the affairs of one in a vacuum. Both natives and newcomers in medieval Ireland mingled in their daily lives; they must mingle too on the pages of history'.<sup>47</sup>

In his voluminous other writings, Duffy himself certainly devoted attention to both 'Anglo-Ireland' and Gaelic Ireland. His article on John de Courcy, for example, is critical for understanding the invasion of Ulaid in 1177; the implications of Duffy's argument there will be discussed in the appropriate chapter below.<sup>48</sup> Other examples include publications on the origins of the Geraldines, Henry II, and King John's 1210 expedition to Ireland.<sup>49</sup> On the other side of the balance sheet, we can point to his 2013 biography of Brian Bóraime, and the earlier sections of *The concise history of Ireland* (2000).

Duffy frequently brought greater awareness of Gaelic Ireland to topics in which it had been treated peripherally before. His article on King John in Ireland, for instance,

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<sup>46</sup> Duffy, *Ireland in the Middle Ages* (London, 1997), p. 2.

<sup>47</sup> Duffy, *Ireland in the Middle Ages*, p. 6.

<sup>48</sup> See The Uí Néill and the North, pp 184–5.

<sup>49</sup> Duffy, 'Gerald of Windsor and the origins of the Geraldines' in Peter Crooks and Duffy (eds), *The Geraldines and medieval Ireland: the making of a myth* (Dublin, 2016), pp 21–52; Duffy, 'Henry II and England's insular neighbours' in Christopher Harper-Bill and Nicholas Vincent (eds), *Henry II: new interpretations* (Woodbridge, 2007), pp 129–53; Duffy, 'King John's expedition to Ireland, AD 1210: the evidence reconsidered' in *Irish Historical Studies*, xl (1996), pp 1–24.

considered John's relationships with two major Irish kings, Áed Méith Úa Néill and Cathal Crobderg Úa Conchobair, and their reasons for quarrelling with the king of England. Similarly, his article published in Alan Hayden's excavation report of Trim Castle, entitled 'The key of the Pale', incorporated a discussion of the Uí Chaindelbáin controlled regional kingdom of Laegaire, the capital of which, Trim, was appropriated by Hugh de Lacy for his new castle.<sup>50</sup>

Nonetheless, Duffy did not redress the fact that the neglect of Gaelic Ireland in this period means that it is almost impossible to discuss it on an equal level with the English colony in Ireland. Lacking a systematic analysis of the Irish kingdoms, historians, including Duffy, have guessed at the motivations of the Irish kings and frequently assumed the pre-eminence of English actions in their considerations. The Gaelic Irish kingdoms did not exist in fundamental opposition to the English, nor should their political development be considered a 'prelude' to the (presumably greater) events inaugurated by the invasion; rather, these are assumptions that have been created by modern approaches to the subject. This is no less the case in Duffy's and Flanagan's work, despite their undoubted contributions to our understanding.

Between them, Flanagan and Duffy ushered in an era of study in which transnational connections and the wider European context were of paramount importance. Duffy's own PhD thesis was entitled *Ireland and the Irish sea region, 1014–1318*, and two of his articles on similar topics pre-dated its completion.<sup>51</sup> One of Flanagan's reviewers suggested that with her choice of subject (Irish royal charters in Latin), she was 'flying the flag for her national historiography'.<sup>52</sup> In other words, Flanagan sought to elevate the

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<sup>50</sup> Duffy, "'The key of the pale": a history of Trim castle' in Alan R. Hayden, *Trim castle, co. Meath: excavations 1995–8* (Dublin, 2011), pp 6–28.

<sup>51</sup> Duffy, 'The Bruce brothers and the Irish Sea world, 1306–29' in *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies*, xxi (1991), pp 55–86; Duffy, 'Irishmen and Islesmen in the kingdoms of Dublin and Man, 1052–1171', *Ériu*, xliii (1992), pp 93–133; Duffy, 'Ireland and the Irish Sea region, 1014–1318' (PhD thesis, T.C.D., 1993).

<sup>52</sup> Matthew Hammond, 'Review: *Irish royal charters: texts and contexts*' in *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, lvii, no. 4 (October 2006), pp 755–6 at 755.

scholarship on the very limited Irish charter material for the purpose of putting it on an equal footing with royal charter scholarship elsewhere in the British Isles. The point of this, of course, was to create a basis for comparison and to attempt to locate Ireland within that larger environment.

Comparison has proved popular in the historiography of the last thirty years. We can point to works like R.R. Davies, *Domination and conquest* (1990), Benjamin Hudson, *Irish Sea studies, 900–1200* (2006), and John Gillingham, *Conquests, catastrophe and recovery: Britain and Ireland, 1066–1485* (2014) as examples. There are also collections of essays like *Nations in medieval Britain*, edited by Hirokazu Tsurushima (2010), to which Flanagan contributed, and *Ireland and Europe in the twelfth century*, edited by Damian Bracken and Dagmar Ó Riain-Raedel (2006), to which Duffy contributed.

This approach is strongest at the point of overlap between the considered kingdoms, as if at the centre of a Venn diagram, but much weaker everywhere else. It worked well, for instance, when Flanagan used it to show how Ruaidrí Ua Conchobair opportunistically invaded Meath c. 1174, taking advantage of other rebellions against Henry II. It also served well in her discussion of the Treaty of Windsor of 1175.<sup>53</sup>

Where it has not worked well, so far as Ireland is concerned, is in understanding the Irish kingdoms on their own terms. By necessity, this approach must give priority to moments of interaction and connection and must also pass over other periods of relative isolation. Since it was Anglo-Norman and subsequently Angevin England which, by its expansionism, created most of the interactions that survive in the historical record, it is also a fundamentally Anglocentric perspective. This is openly recognised by some authors and titles, but usually it is passed over in silence.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Marie Therese Flanagan, *Irish society, Anglo-Norman settlers, Angevin kingship* (Oxford, 1989), pp 229–73.

<sup>54</sup> For an example of its recognition, see Duffy and Susan Foran (eds), *The English Isles: cultural transmission and political conflict in Britain and Ireland, 1100–1500* (Dublin, 2013).



Another stratum of the relevant historiography is that of Gaelic Ireland in the later Middle Ages. One of the key works on this subject was K.W. Nicholls's, *Gaelic and Gaelicized Ireland in the Middle Ages* (1972). In the preface to the second edition of this work (2003), Nicholls wrote that 'It is perhaps a measure of the neglect of research into the autonomous regions of Gaelic and Gaelicized Ireland in the later medieval period – which for Ireland can be taken as extending down to the completion of the English conquest in 1603 – that the first edition of this book, when it appeared in 1972, should have attracted such attention and that it has continued to exercise a great deal of influence, to judge by its frequent citation, in writings on the period. This was in spite of its being, as I admitted in the Preface to that first edition, no more than an "interim report" on my continuing research, of its being without references, in places badly expressed, and in others severely abridged by the considerations of space imposed by the publisher'.<sup>55</sup> While neglect of Gaelic Ireland remains a critical issue across the medieval period from early to late (and arguably even more widely), Nicholls's work helped to highlight the problem.

Katharine Simms devoted her career to Gaelic Ireland in the later Middle Ages, and of all Nicholls's successors, her sustained efforts have done the most to elucidate the subject for her readers, both academic and general. While she is perhaps best known for her expertise in bardic poetry, her discussion of Gaelic politics in relation to Gaelic cultural phenomena provided a template for all subsequent studies in this area, including the present project.

Simms's earliest monograph was entitled *From kings to warlords: the changing political structure of Gaelic Ireland in the later Middle Ages* (1987), and in it she too took issue with the prevailing focus on the English colony and lordship of Ireland. She wrote, 'As an undergraduate student of history at Trinity College, I complained that, while textbooks on mediaeval Ireland referred to the failure of the Norman conquest and to the

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<sup>55</sup> K.W. Nicholls, *Gaelic and Gaelicized Ireland in the Middle Ages* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Dublin, 2003), viii.

resurgence of the native Irish chieftains, their narrative concentrated on the fortunes of the dwindling English Pale and nobody was prepared to explain what the chieftains had done with their newly recovered power'.<sup>56</sup> In this respect her challenge to the existing historiography mirrors that taken here, though her focus was much later.

Simms's publications covered a wide variety of topics, and many will be referred to in this thesis. 'The contents of later commentaries on the Brehon law tracts', for example, appears in relation to the kingship of Ireland and in a discussion of the political development of the Northern Uí Néill.<sup>57</sup> Another article, 'The O Hanlons, the O Neills and the Anglo-Normans in thirteenth-century Armagh', is of use in our examination of the North, as is the recent title *Gaelic Ulster in the Middle Ages: history, culture and society* (2020). Simms's work stands out for balance and attention to detail, as well as for its focus on Gaelic Ireland.

For Simms, Nicholls, and other similar historians, the English invasion represents the origin of the Ireland of two nations which was their area of interest. In this respect their studies were also concerned with cultural transmission, not unlike those examining transnational connections. Some overlap between these strata is evident in a volume edited by Duffy and entitled *The world of the Galloglass: kings, warlords and warriors in Ireland and Scotland, 1200–1600* (2007).

Of the most recent generation of historians, Colin Veach best exemplifies Duffy's pronouncement that Gaelic and English figures needed to 'mingle' on the pages of Irish history. Veach has written predominantly on the early English colonists, and his book *Lordship in four realms: the Lacy family, 1166–1241* does represent two other continuities with earlier approaches: the invasion as a beginning point (as far as Ireland is concerned) and the weight given to transnational connections. Even so, Veach is notable

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<sup>56</sup> Katharine Simms, *From kings to warlords: the changing political structure of Gaelic Ireland in the later Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, 1987), viii.

<sup>57</sup> Simms, 'The contents of later commentaries on the Brehon law tracts' in *Ériu*, lxix (1998), pp 23–40; 'The Uí Néill and the North', pp 145–6.

for his inclusion of important Gaelic figures in his narrative; he was careful to discuss the importance of Hugh de Lacy's assassination of Tigernán Ua Ruairc, for instance, and elsewhere he published, with Freya Verstraten Veach, on William Gorm de Lacy, the son of Hugh de Lacy by Ruaidrí Ua Conchobair's daughter.<sup>58</sup>

Paul MacCotter is another historian whose approach to the period represents substantial progress. With *Medieval Ireland: territorial, political and economic divisions* (2008), MacCotter created an atlas of twelfth-century Ireland's sub-provincial political divisions. The Anglo-Norman 'cantred' was the equivalent of an Irish unit of assessment, the *trícha cé* (thirty hundreds), and MacCotter analysed the relationship between the two, and other territorial divisions, to re-create the boundaries of sub-divisions that spanned the pre- and post-invasion environments.

MacCotter's other publications are also important for a consideration of the impact of the English invasion on the Irish kingdoms, and they constitute a step beyond the analyses of settlement patterns offered by other historians. With 'The Rise of Meic Carthaig and the Political Geography of Desmumu', for example, MacCotter discussed the border between Thomond and Desmond. In this case, the English adopted an Irish boundary for the purposes of speculative grants. That boundary would change subsequently, as Thomond annexed land from Desmond, leaving the English grantees with a quandary.<sup>59</sup> For all who follow him, MacCotter's radical approach, using both English and Irish sources, has helped to locate the Gaelic Irish polities within more exact boundaries.

Others have been more conservative. As recently as 2008, Peter Crooks edited a collection of essays by Curtis, Otway-Ruthven, and Lydon, and a second edition of this work was released in 2019. Crooks presented the volume as a salutation of the three, each of whom had been, in turn, Lecky Professor of History at Trinity College Dublin.

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<sup>58</sup> Colin Veach and Freya Verstraten Veach, 'William Gorm de Lacy: "chiefest champion in these parts of Europe"' in Duffy (ed.), *Princes, prelates and poets in medieval Ireland: essays in honour of Katharine Simms* (Dublin, 2013), pp 63–84.

<sup>59</sup> *Cal.doc.Ire., 1171–1251*, p. 44, no. 289.

The guide to further reading in the first edition and the supplement to that guide in the second were both openly focused on ‘The English lordship of Ireland, 1171–1541’.<sup>60</sup>

Crooks himself has taken a very traditional approach to historiographical demarcations, and the article “‘Divide and rule’”: factionalism as royal policy in the lordship of Ireland, c. 1171–1265’ (2005) represents his earliest historical focus; that is, apart from the biography of Diarmait Mac Murchada he contributed to *Medieval Ireland: an encyclopedia*, edited by Duffy (2005). This, of course, only underlines earlier comments here concerning Diarmait Mac Murchada’s utility as a bridge to scholars of post-invasion Ireland.

One development in the historiography that must be discussed here is a lexical shift from ‘Norman’ to ‘English’ to identify the invaders. This is the outcome of an argument advanced by John Gillingham, both in a monograph – *The English in the twelfth century* (2000) – and a chapter in an edited collection – ‘Normanizing the English invaders of Ireland’ in *Power and identity in the Middle Ages: essays in memory of Rees Davies* (2007). Gillingham addressed the fact that ‘English’ had been the dominant term until the nineteenth century when it was replaced by ‘Norman’ in academic discussions and argued that ‘Both the general reader and student of modern history can be forgiven for assuming that the Norman turn followed the advance of modern scholarship, and that “Norman” was more accurate, better corresponding to twelfth-century reality. In fact, precisely the opposite was the case’.<sup>61</sup>

Unlike some others who had also questioned the validity of the shift from ‘English’ to ‘Norman’, Gillingham’s argument rested on the invaders’ self-identification as English. By comparison, Richter, for instance, argued for their identification as English based on

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<sup>60</sup> Peter Crooks (ed.), *Government, war and society in medieval Ireland: essays by Edmund Curtis, A.J. Otway-Ruthven and James Lydon* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Dublin, 2019), p. 1.

<sup>61</sup> John Gillingham, ‘Normanizing the English invaders of Ireland’ in Huw Pryce and John Watts (eds), *Power and identity in the Middle Ages: essays in memory of Rees Davies* (Oxford, 2007), pp 85–97 at 85.

their mother tongue, a reading Gillingham thought likely to cloud the issue.<sup>62</sup> Flanagan had pointed out that the Irish recognised the invaders as English, and had used the term *Frainc* to refer to Norman activity outside Ireland.<sup>63</sup> Duffy rested his use of the expression ‘English invasion’ on the term *Adventus Anglorum* used in contemporary documents.<sup>64</sup>

Gillingham suggested that those who used the term ‘Norman’ ‘wanted to take the heat out of debates’,<sup>65</sup> and marvelled at the ‘extraordinary reluctance of modern historians to use the word “English” even when it is staring them in the face’.<sup>66</sup> Though he did not select outstanding examples of this phenomenon, it is difficult to pass over Evelyn Mullally’s edition of *The Song of Dermot and the Earl* (an important source for the invasion which has already been quoted above) to support his point. Mullally translated *Engleis* as English everywhere except in the title of the poem, where *La Geste des Engleis en Yrlande* became *The Deeds of the Normans in Ireland*.

It would seem, therefore, that Gillingham best articulated a growing dissatisfaction with the terms ‘Norman’ and, to a lesser extent, ‘Anglo-Norman’ among professional historians. Certainly, his observations, along with those made by Richter, Flanagan, and Duffy, have been enthusiastically adopted by others in more recent publications.

Whereas Ó Corráin published *Ireland before the Normans* in 1972, for instance, he released *The Irish church, its reform and the English invasion* in 2016.

The term ‘invasion’ was also once questioned by Martin, who called it a ‘nationalist myth’ in *N.H.I.* From his perspective, ‘the Anglo-Normans came not as invaders but by

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<sup>62</sup> John Gillingham, *The English in the twelfth century: imperialism, national identity and political values* (Woodbridge, 2000), p. 151.

<sup>63</sup> Marie Therese Flanagan, ‘The Normans in Ireland’ in *Irish history in the classroom: seminar held at Cultra manor, Holywood, Co. Down* (Belfast, 1987), pp 23–32 quoted in Gillingham, *The English in the twelfth century*, p. 153.

<sup>64</sup> Duffy, *Ireland in the Middle Ages*, pp 56–81 quoted in Gillingham, *The English in the twelfth century*, p. 157 n. 62.

<sup>65</sup> Gillingham, ‘Normanizing the English invaders of Ireland’, p. 92.

<sup>66</sup> Gillingham, *The English in the twelfth century*, p. 158.

invitation'.<sup>67</sup> This view ignores Henry's own designs on Ireland; the papal bull *Laudabiliter*, by which Henry later claimed right to Ireland, was issued in the 1155. It is likely to be a mischaracterisation of Mac Murchada's intentions, the limits of which have been examined by T.M. Charles-Edwards, and it certainly also neglects the military conquests outside Leinster and the formal grants to Irish territory that usually encouraged them.<sup>68</sup> In more recent years, therefore, alongside 'English', 'invasion' has gained general acceptance.

### **[0.3: Methodology & Presentation]**

This thesis is divided into six chapters. The three major provincial kingdoms of the period are each assigned a dedicated chapter, and Leinster, though not considered a major kingdom, is also assigned a chapter. Additionally, there are two thematic chapters addressing topics of general importance. Kingdoms are defined as 'major' by having successfully advanced a claim to the kingship of Ireland in the twelfth century. Since the successes of one inevitably came at the expense of the other two there is some overlap in the narrative, but each merits a separate discussion. Leinster is included with reference to its centrality in current historiography, and the role of its king in precipitating the English invasion.

The kingdom-focused chapters will proceed chronologically from an important point in the late eleventh century to an important point in the mid-thirteenth century. There is some flexibility in this approach since no single year or moment bookended the period in all three kingdoms. As well as this, in some cases, particularly Munster, reference to the more distant past is required; this has the effect of distending the considered period somewhat further.

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<sup>67</sup> Martin, 'Diarmait Mac Murchada', p. 43.

<sup>68</sup> Charles-Edwards, 'Ireland and its invaders, 1166–1186' in *Quaestio Insularis*, iv (2003), pp 1–34; see Leinster, pp 327–8.

The principal aim of the kingdom-focused chapters is to establish the strategic realities and aims of each. Contrary to Martin's assertion that the Irish kings operated without 'high policy', this thesis will show both their objectives and the designs by which they attempted to gain them. By explaining their conduct in a systematic fashion, it will be possible to understand both their relationships with one another and subsequently, their reception and management of the English invasion.

The first thematic chapter will examine material relating to women and marriage as factors in political life. Here, the widest expanse of time will be covered for two reasons: to allow for the relatively sparse source material concerning those topics, and to use the opportunity afforded by this limitation to chart change from the early to high medieval periods. Women's experience of violence and role in their husbands' entourages will be discussed, as will female wealth and the political connections that were created through marriage. The link between these themes and the English invasion will also be explored.

The second thematic chapter will discuss two major items. It will first assess the kingship of Ireland, the prize for which the major provincial kingdoms contended with one another and the position that motivated many of the greatest military campaigns of the twelfth century. This office has been the subject of historiographical controversy since the early twentieth century, and it is perhaps the one aspect of Gaelic Irish politics to attract sustained attention. It will therefore be approached first with an extensive review of existing literature, and secondly with insights derived from the present examination.

The second subject covered in the final chapter of the thesis will be a comparative analysis of the experience of the English invasion in the three major kingdoms. Material in earlier chapters will be used to inform an interpretation of both themes. The conclusions, which will be harmonious with earlier analyses, will also follow on from them and develop them further.

This thesis is motivated by the desire to provide a conceptual corrective to the existing historiography. Through its emphasis and focus, it will restore the agency of Irish kings

and dynasties, who have been the principal victims of the orthodox approach. Their actions and stories are vital to understand Ireland before, during, and after the invasion, and their virtual exclusion from modern accounts represents a fundamental inadequacy.

The invasion of 1169 is as suitable a starting point for a history as any, but its overuse has also contributed to an excessive concentration on invaders and colonists, almost implying that history began with their arrival. Placing the key year, 1169, at the centre of the narrative and analysis does not undermine the importance of the event, but instead provides a superior basis for assessing its consequences. This has been noted by others, particularly Duffy, but as yet there has been no systematic approach to the Irish provincial kingdoms using this framework.

Not unlike the Gaelic kings and kingdoms, important women have been overlooked in much of the relevant modern literature. There is evidence for their tangible influence on events, and discussion of women is too often reductive, diminishing this evidence to focus on literary tropes and supposed character types. As with the other subjects of this thesis, their agency will be restored through concentration on their influence.

This thesis therefore represents the ‘twist of the historical kaleidoscope’ that Bartlett suggested Irish history could benefit from. It will offer new interpretations in every chapter, bringing the strategy of the leaders of the Irish kingdoms to the fore. In doing so, it will provide a greater perspective on English leaders as well, since their stories are poorly served by an approach that places them in a vacuum or explores their trials with an assumption of eventual success.

This study proceeds on the understanding that the English invasion was something that happened to and in Gaelic Ireland. This reality has been lost in favour of one in which the invasion represents the beginning of a new epoch in Irish history, one distinguished by the energy and innovations of a new culture. These interpretations are not mutually exclusive; both happened, and both are important. Equally, there are other ways of



looking at the same events that other scholars, past, contemporary, or future, can use to re-create the past. Nonetheless, the excessive focus on the early Anglo-Norman colony hereto has minimised all other perspectives, and chief among these is the experience of the invaded kingdoms.

To recover this perspective, a methodology which is not typical of histories of this period will be employed here. It is in the Irish annals that the vast majority of existing material pertinent to Irish political strategy and development is to be found, and it is therefore on the annals that this study must rely. It would not be possible to write a history of this topic without depending heavily on the annals, and it may be partly due to their preoccupation with achieving a balance between consulted sources that previous historians have avoided such an approach.

This does not mean that the testimony of the annals is accepted uncritically here or preferred when multiple sources are available. Where appropriate, conflicting information from elsewhere is favoured, including evidence drawn from law-texts, genealogies, and bardic poems. Similarly, Anglo-Norman sources occasionally provide better and more verifiable information concerning the Irish kings, especially as regards their relationships with the newcomers. In this respect, the present study remains a conventional and balanced one, albeit one whose subject is dominated by a particular type of material.

This also naturally lends a certain character to the portraits of each kingdom discussed and is further underlined by the regional variations and biases of the collections. There are few detailed descriptions or expanded narratives; instead, the most must be made of brief comments, especially where they are illustrative of wider themes. This has already been shown by the quotes from *Ann. Tig.* included above, when compared with the dramatic versions offered by Giraldus and *The Deeds*. What follows is a brief discussion of the major collections of annals, in recognition of the fact that they are our principal sources.

The annals are ‘a record of events arranged under the year of occurrence, without any necessary connexion between them’.<sup>69</sup> They are deceptive in their apparent simplicity. Underlying their terse and straightforward descriptions of events is a complexity stemming from long centuries of development. Each extant collection contains unique material, and each contains material from the earlier generations of annalistic manuscripts from which it descended, or to which it was otherwise related. While it is often possible to speculate on the relationships between collections, it is sometimes difficult to judge the extent to which each has been re-worked. The extant manuscripts are all also later than the twelfth century, and the original language and sense has sometimes been corrupted as a result.

The collections or chronicles with which we are mainly concerned are the Annals of the Four Masters (*A.F.M.*), the Annals of Tigernach (*Ann. Tig.*), *Chronicon Scottorum* (*Chron. Scot.*), the Annals of Ulster (*A.U.*), the Annals of Loch Cé (*A.L.C.*), the Annals of Inisfallen (*Ann. Inisf.*), Mac Cárthaigh’s Book (*Misc.Ir. Annals*), the Annals of Connacht (*Ann. Conn.*), and the Annals of Clonmacnoise (*Ann. Clon.*). Other, minor, collections are consulted occasionally, including *Leabhar Oiris* and *Annála as Bréifne*, but these are peripheral to our considerations.

As the name suggests, the Annals of Ulster are largely concerned with the north of Ireland. *A.U.* is of great importance in early medieval history for its preservation of material from the so-called ‘Chronicle of Ireland’, which has been described as ‘the earliest monastic chronicle in the Latin west’.<sup>70</sup> The existence of this document, which seems to have been created at Iona, has been deduced from material common to *A.U.* and the ‘Clonmacnoise group’ of annals, which we will discuss below.

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<sup>69</sup> Mac Niocaill, *Medieval Irish annals*, p. 13.

<sup>70</sup> Roy Flechner, ‘The chronicle of Ireland: then and now’ in *Early Medieval Europe*, xxi no. 4 (2013), pp 422–54 at 422.

Given *A.U.*'s detailed knowledge of ecclesiastical affairs at Armagh, that site can be regarded as a 'centre of chronicling' for the collection from at least the late tenth century and perhaps earlier.<sup>71</sup> Aubrey Gwynn argued that an existing connection to Derry became closer in the twelfth century under the influence of Archbishop Gilla Mac Liag, who was associated with both.<sup>72</sup> He said that during Mac Liag's life, 'The Annals of Ulster are almost as much Annals of Derry as Annals of Armagh'.<sup>73</sup> From 1189 to 1223 the focus moved entirely to Derry, where it seems the chronicle was moved out of fear of English expansion.<sup>74</sup>

For almost the entirety of our period, *A.U.* and *A.L.C.* present a common text. This is the case from the beginning of *A.L.C.* in 1014 down to 1223. *A.L.C.* belongs to the 'Connacht group' of annalistic collections, and from 1224 onwards its text is shared by the Annals of Connacht (*Ann. Conn.*). *A.L.C.* becomes particularly useful, for the present purpose, from the 1190s onwards, when the quality of both entries and chronology in *A.U.* drop substantially.

The 'Clonmacnoise group' includes *Ann. Tig.*, *Chron. Scot.*, and the *Ann. Clon.* Like *A.U.*, these collections retain items from the putative 'Chronicle of Ireland' and a stratum of material concerned with the province of Meath. The independence of the Clonmacnoise group has been dated to after 911, when the material related to Meath peters out in *A.U.*<sup>75</sup>

*Ann. Tig.* and *Chron. Scot.* derive from a common source kept at Clonmacnoise c. 1113 or later.<sup>76</sup> The entries in *Ann. Tig.* are far more detailed than those in *Chron. Scot.*, and the latter breaks off entirely at 1150. The divergence of the two is characterised by a

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<sup>71</sup> Evans, *Present and past in medieval Irish chronicles* (Woodbridge, 2010), p. 27; Mac Niocaill, *Medieval Irish annals*, p. 29

<sup>72</sup> Gwynn, 'Cathal Mac Maghnusa and the Annals of Ulster (continued)' in *Clogher Record*, ii, no. 3 (1959), pp 370–84.

<sup>73</sup> Gwynn, 'Cathal Mac Maghnusa (continued)', pp 372–3.

<sup>74</sup> Gwynn, 'Cathal Mac Maghnusa (continued)', p. 376.

<sup>75</sup> Evans, *Present and past in medieval Irish chronicles*, p. 43.

<sup>76</sup> Kathryn Grabowski and David Dumville, *Chronicles and annals of medieval Ireland and Wales* (Woodbridge, 1984), pp 159–74; Evans, *Present and past in medieval Irish chronicles*, p. 45.

much greater focus on Connacht in *Ann. Tig.* after 1113; that this occurs around the same time as Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair's rise to the provincial kingship in 1114 is probably not a coincidence.<sup>77</sup> Indeed, Flanagan went so far as to describe *Ann. Tig.* as an 'Ua Conchobair house chronicle' for the remainder of the twelfth century.<sup>78</sup>

We possess two collections whose primary focus is Munster: *Ann. Inisf.* and Mac Cárthaigh's Book. Of these, *Ann. Inisf.* is by far the earlier and more important. From about the middle of the eleventh century the text appears to have been transcribed at Killaloe, until c. 1119, when it was moved to Lismore. There is a substantial lacuna in the mid-twelfth century, as there is in *A.U.* and *A.L.C.* When the text resumes, internal evidence suggests it had been moved again and was being kept at Inisfallen. This relocation from east Munster to west Munster corresponds with an increased interest in the doings of the Meic Cárthaig at the expense of the Uí Briain, which will make sense when we examine that province.<sup>79</sup> Here it suffices to say that it would not be possible to include Munster in the present examination were it not for the evidence provided by *Ann. Inisf.*

The other Munster chronicle, Mac Cárthaigh's Book, draws on *Ann. Inisf.* for many of the entries in the twelfth century, though it contains strata that do not belong to *Ann. Inisf.* Its author also used Giraldus's *Expugnatio Hibernica* as a source for the early course of the English invasion, though he misdated many events. Its greatest use here is as a record of events of interest in Munster alone, which do not appear in *Ann. Inisf.* Care is needed, however, as its modern editor Seamus Ó hInnse noted, 'Since several of these entries are not in other annals, there is no external evidence to resolve the difficulties of chronology'.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Grabowski and Dumville, *Chronicles and annals of medieval Ireland and Wales*, pp 165–6.

<sup>78</sup> Flanagan, *Irish society, Anglo-Norman settlers, Angevin kingship*, p. 259.

<sup>79</sup> *Ann. Inisf.*, xxix–xxx.

<sup>80</sup> *Misc.Ir.annals*, xiii.

Chronologically, the latest of the major sets is *A.F.M.*, compiled in the 1630s. This collection, which brought together material from a wide variety of sources, is sometimes neglected because of its late date. Simms noted how ‘Today’s historians [...] would prefer a source as close as possible to the events it described rather than opting for the “the last” account’.<sup>81</sup> Simms was not endorsing this attitude, but it should be noted that it makes little sense. All collections of annals are compilatory to some extent, and the fact that *A.F.M.* was later and more consciously so does not diminish their value. Indeed, they include material from sources that are now lost.

The four masters themselves, Mícheál Ó Cléirigh, Cú Choigcríche Ó Cléirigh, Fearfeasa Ó Maoil Chonaire, and Cú Choigcríche Ó Duibhgeannáin, were professionally trained historians from south-west Ulster and north Connacht.<sup>82</sup> The Ó Chléirigh family were historians to the Uí Dhomhnaill (earlier Uí Domnaill) of Cenél Conaill or Tír Chonaill, and the influence of this connection is noticeable in the annals. This has been particularly well recognised for the early modern period, but it also applies to a lesser extent to the presentation of twelfth-century entries.<sup>83</sup>

The major collections of annals relevant here have all been translated and published in modern editions. John O’Donovan’s edition of *A.F.M.* was published in the mid-nineteenth century and is considered a classic of the genre. It comprised seven volumes of dual-language text, along with copious notes which remain especially useful for the identification of places mentioned in the text. It resurrected a text that had ‘almost vanished without trace’ and earned O’Donovan lasting fame; he was described as ‘the fifth master’ by Nollaig Ó Muraíle in 1997.<sup>84</sup> Nonetheless, the age of O’Donovan’s edition means that it poses some problems for users today, including archaic language

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<sup>81</sup> Simms, *Medieval Gaelic sources* (Dublin, 2009), p. 20.

<sup>82</sup> Bernadette Cunningham, *The Annals of the Four Masters: Irish history, kingship and society in the early seventeenth century* (Dublin, 2010), p. 7.

<sup>83</sup> Cunningham, *The Annals of the Four Masters*, pp 176–214.

<sup>84</sup> Bernadette Cunningham, ‘John O’Donovan’s edition of “The annals of the four masters”: an Irish classic?’ in *European Studies*, xxvi (2008), pp 129–49 at 140, 147; Nollaig Ó Muraíle, ‘Seán Ó Donnabháin, “an cúigiú máistir”’ in *Léachtaí Cholm Cille*, xxvii (1997), pp 11–82.

and commentary which has been superseded – though much of the latter is of enduring value.

We are not so fortunate with all other collections. Whitley Stokes's edition of *Ann. Tig.*, for example, was published in segments over 1895–7 in the journal *Revue Celtique*. As well as being difficult to use, it was, in Nicholas Evans's words, 'edited with numerous inaccuracies by Whitley Stokes, although fragments 974–1003 and 1018–1178 seem to have been better edited than previous sections'.<sup>85</sup> William Hennessy's edition of *Chron. Scot.* was also criticised by Evans, this time because 'no account was taken of the loss or addition of annals, with dates being counted from the correct year at the start of the fragment, so the dates in the edition are often different from their real AD dates'.<sup>86</sup>

Thankfully, much work has been done by those named above, and others, to correct chronological errors in both the original texts and the modern editions. It is worth mentioning Evans and Daniel Mc Carthy in particular here for their investigations of this subject, even if they disagreed in their conclusions.<sup>87</sup> We may also note the modern editions produced by Seán Mac Airt (*Ann. Inisf.*, 1951), Mac Airt and Mac Niocail (*A.U. to 1131*, 1983), Ó hInnse (*Misc.Ir.Annals* including Mac Cárthaigh's Book, 1947).<sup>88</sup>

It is to be hoped that the forthcoming edition of *Ann. Clon.* by Ó Muraíle will not only add to this list, but also significantly improve our understanding of that troublesome collection.<sup>89</sup> As mentioned above, *Ann. Clon.* belongs to the Clonmacnoise group of annals, and exhibits many common features with *Ann. Tig.* and *Chron. Scot.* At present, the text is available only in a seventeenth-century English translation; the original Irish has regrettably been lost. Furthermore, whether as a result of the exemplar from which it

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<sup>85</sup> Evans, *Present and past in medieval Irish chronicles*, p. 11.

<sup>86</sup> Evans, *Present and past in medieval Irish chronicles*, xi.

<sup>87</sup> See D.P. Mc Carthy, *The Irish annals: their genesis, evolution and history* (Dublin, 2008); Evans, *Present and past in medieval Irish chronicles*.

<sup>88</sup> Ó hInnse (ed. and trans.), *Miscellaneous Irish annals*; Seán Mac Airt and Mac Niocail (ed. and trans.), *The annals of Ulster (to AD 1131)* (Dublin, 1983); *The Annals Inisfallen (MS Rawlinson B 503)*, ed. and trans. Sean Mac Airt (Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1951).

<sup>89</sup> See De Búrca Rare Books catalogue Winter 2021, p. 145. Accessed online ([www.deburcararebooks.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Catalogue-144.pdf](http://www.deburcararebooks.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Catalogue-144.pdf)) (26 April 2021).

was created or the translation itself, events are grouped under certain years. 1108, for example, covers events from 1108 down to 1130. Therefore, to a greater degree than most, *Ann. Clon.* must be used in conjunction with other collections.

One outcome of the work of those named above, and others, is the inclusion of many collections of annals with corrected chronologies on the Corpus of Electronic Texts project (CELT), hosted online by U.C.C. In most collections, the annals have been further subdivided, with each entry given an individual number. Some historians, like Evans, have preferred to refer to these as ‘unit’ numbers, but provided it is understood that there was often an implicit link between points that are now numbered separately, the term ‘entries’ can also be used.<sup>90</sup> In the few places where there is a discrepancy between the unit or entry numbers in the English and Irish versions provided by CELT, this is indicated here in the footnotes by ‘(ga)’ for the Irish.

In our period, the late eleventh to early thirteenth century, the various collections of annals are generally complementary. There are few places where the order of events can not be reconstructed with confidence, and those will be dealt with in turn. Where this occurs, it is usually because of confusion within the collections themselves. In terms of general chronology, Mc Carthy has argued that the ‘Connacht group’, including *A.L.C.* and *Ann. Conn.* should be regarded as ‘comprehensively reliable’ over the interval 1014–1478, notwithstanding lacunae.<sup>91</sup> Therefore, when there are conflicting chronologies, as occurs under the 1190s and early 1200s for example, their evidence will be preferred.

Usually, when an item appears in multiple collections, several relevant examples will be cited. This should not be taken to mean that the entries in the cited collections are necessarily identical; often they represent complementary or even conflicting accounts. Since there are many places where it is desirable to place emphasis on a single entry, or

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<sup>90</sup> Evans, *Present and past in medieval Irish chronicles*, xi.

<sup>91</sup> Mc Carthy, *The Irish annals*, p. 349.

small group of entries, comprehensiveness is not attempted in this regard. The selected entries are chosen for themselves, or as being indicative of a greater body of evidence.

Direct quotes from the annals and other sources are often used in this thesis. Unless explicitly stated in the footnotes, the English translation is taken directly from the standard editions listed under ‘Abbreviations’ above. The capitalisations, renderings of names (personal and geographical), and terminology employed in those editions are often erratic, inconsistent, and archaic. Nonetheless, they are retained here in direct quotes because the modernisations and corrections required are beyond the scope of the present study. However, in recognition of the frequently problematic nature of existing translations for cited sources, the original language will be included in full in all cases. This practice has been extended to all primary sources quoted, not just the annals.

Before beginning our assessment of the major kingdoms of Ireland, it is also worth saying that Martin’s description of the annals’ ‘disappointing’ character with regard to the English invasion was unjustified. It joined Orpen’s remark, also quoted above, that ‘the turmoil of inter-tribal conflicts has been the despair of writers who seek to tell a connected story’. In both cases the comments reflect the interests and specialties of the writers and not the quality of the sources.

Remarkably, Martin elsewhere voiced an opinion that shows just why the annals are worth the effort they require. Writing in the foreword to Mac Niocaill’s *The medieval Irish annals*, he said ‘The quantity and quality of the annals are formidable. Previous to the coming of the Normans, the country certainly lacked documents of an administrative nature – chartularies, taxation lists and the like – but as far as annals are concerned Ireland has an *embarras de richesse*. Few European countries, if any, can claim a similar body of literature on a national scale’.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Martin, ‘Foreword’ in Mac Niocaill, *Medieval Irish annals*, p. 5.



It is therefore time for a history that pays attention to the story told in the Irish annals, instead of dismissing them for not matching the popular narrative. Since many of the document types associated with other European kingdoms are lacking, that story inevitably looks different. To understand the Irish kingdoms on their own terms must be the priority nonetheless; setting them in a broader context is a secondary consideration. This thesis sets out on these terms, and by this methodology will recover the perspective of each of the major provincial kingdoms of Ireland in the twelfth century.

## Connacht

### [1.0: Introduction]

Connacht takes its name from the Connachta, who were, by tradition, the descendants of a mythical king known as Conn Cétchathach. This was a later explanation, of the early medieval period, for a name that was no longer understood. In reality, the name originally derived from ‘*conn*’ or ‘*cond*’, meaning ‘head’, and so referred to the ‘headship’ or ‘supremacy’ of this grouping.<sup>93</sup> As we shall see in our discussion of Munster, Conn Cétchathach and his nemesis Mug Nuadat were reputedly responsible for the division of Ireland along the *eiscir riada*, with ‘Leth Cuinn’ or ‘Conn’s half’ representing the northern half of the island and ‘Leth Moga Nuadat’ (often shortened to ‘Leth Moga’) the southern half. It was over the southern party that the northerners were theoretically supreme, before and after the myth was devised.

East of the Shannon in Leth Cuinn, the Uí Néill and Airgíalla also claimed descent from Conn Cétchathach and so acknowledged affinity with the most important dynasties in Connacht. The latter group included the Uí Ailella, Uí Briúin, and Uí Fiachrach, with their various offshoots.<sup>94</sup> More distantly, it also included the Uí Maine. This grouping invented a genealogy that made them descendants of Colla Focrith, and therefore close relations of the Airgíalla. Their members included several important families and their territory covered most of the south-east of the province. The region was generally ruled by the Uí Chellaig of Cenél Coirpre Cruim but others like the Uí Madadáin of Síl nAnmchada and Uí Domnalláin of Clann Bhreasail were often important as well.<sup>95</sup>

Schematically, the Uí Fiachrach were the descendants of Fiachra son of Eochaid Muigmedón, who was a brother of Brión (from whom descended the Uí Briúin) and Niall Noígíallach (from whom descended the Uí Néill). There were two major branches of the

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<sup>93</sup> See T.F. O’Rahilly, *Early Irish history and mythology* (Dublin, 1946), pp 282, 514–5; David Sproule, ‘Origins of the Éoganachta’, in *Ériu*, xxxv (1984), pp 31–7 at 32.

<sup>94</sup> The Uí Ailella kingdom collapsed c. 800, and some of their territory, Mag Luirg, was later taken over by the Uí Máel Ruanaid family of Síl Muiredaig and Uí Briúin Ai.

<sup>95</sup> For more detail on the Uí Maine, see J.V. Kelleher, ‘Uí Maine in the annals and genealogies to 1225’, in *Celtica*, ix (1971), pp 61–112.

Uí Fiachrach in Connacht in our period, situated at the northern and southern extremes of the province. In the south, the Uí Fiachrach Aidne, who bordered Munster, were ruled by the Uí hEidín. In the north, the Uí Fiachrach Muaide were typically headed by Úa Dubda of Tír nAmolngada.

The Uí Briúin were a significantly more elaborate grouping than either Uí Fiachrach or Uí Maine, not least because they were in fact several different groups, most of whom had no genuine connection to one another. The Uí Briúin proper were the Uí Briúin Ai of central and eastern Connacht, in our period the most powerful region in Connacht, and possibly also the Uí Briúin Seóla, who occupied south-central Connacht until they were pushed west of Loch Corrib and Lough Mask by the Uí Briúin Ai around the mid-eleventh century. That there was an actual connection between these two groups may be supported by the application of the title ‘king of the Uí Briúin of the South’ to one of the ancestors of Uí Briúin Seóla as early as the mid-eighth century.<sup>96</sup> They also received a similar honorific, ‘king of Uí Briúin’, as late as the eleventh century.<sup>97</sup>

Whatever the potential validity of this link, other Uí Briúin designations are certainly spurious. The Uí Briúin na Sinna were known as Cenél Maic Ercae in an earlier period, while the title ‘Uí Briúin Umail’ was a re-branding of Fir Umail in the eighth century.<sup>98</sup>

Uí Briúin Bréifne has also been shown to be a fictitious connection, created somewhat later, perhaps in the late eleventh century.<sup>99</sup> In essence, ruling dynasties in each of these regions constructed genealogies making themselves descendants of Brión, and therefore ‘Uí Briúin’, like their powerful neighbours. This gave each ‘free’, or non-tributary status under any prospective Uí Briúin overlordship, as well as a certain amount of prestige by association.

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<sup>96</sup> *Ann. Tig. 757.8: ‘ríg h-Úa m-Briúin in Desceirt’.*

<sup>97</sup> Anne Common, ‘Uí Briúin’, in Duffy (ed.), *Encyclopedia*, p. 486.

<sup>98</sup> Francis John Byrne, *Irish kings and high-kings* (London, 1973), p. 246.

<sup>99</sup> Eoghan Ó Mórdha, ‘The Uí Briúin Bréifni genealogies and the origins of Bréifne’, in *Peritia*, xvi (2002), pp 444–50 at 449–450.

Construction of these genealogical fictions was a prudent move in each case, considering the dominant position the Uí Briúin Ai occupied after the eighth century. But just as other dynasties were taking on the Uí Briúin title, the Uí Briúin Seóla and the Uí Briúin Ai dropped it. The former became defined by their new territory, 'Iar-Chonnacht' or 'west Connacht'. The latter was dominated by one branch so completely that almost all others were dispossessed and replaced, or constructed genealogies grafting themselves onto this branch, and its name, Síl Muiredaig, eclipsed that of the wider group.<sup>100</sup>

The Síl Muiredaig did not sacrifice any power along with the name Uí Briúin Ai.<sup>101</sup> They remained the most powerful group in Connacht, acting principally through their royal dynasty, the Uí Chonchobair, who were beyond challenge from other dynasties within Connacht after the rise of Toirdelbach. There were other prominent families in Síl Muiredaig, including the Uí Máel Ruanaid, later Meic Diarmata, who carved themselves a significant territory around Mag Luirg in north-eastern Connacht, formerly the home of the defunct Uí Ailella kingdom.<sup>102</sup>

The Uí Briúin Bréifne were one of the groups whose ambitions were stunted by Síl Muiredaig's dominance in Connacht. Their leading dynasty, the Uí Ruairc, vied for the provincial kingship of Connacht in the late tenth and eleventh centuries, but found themselves eclipsed at the beginning of the twelfth. Their response was to push eastward from their homeland in modern County Leitrim, capturing territory at the expense of the Southern Uí Néill kingdom of Meath. Their success in this regard led to Uí Briúin

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<sup>100</sup> This was a process which often took place in Gaelic Ireland. See Ó Corráin, 'Irish regnal succession: a reappraisal' in *Studia Hibernica*, xi (1971), pp 7–39, especially at 8: 'Irish dynasties consist of polysegmental agnatic lineage groups which are constantly being created [...] These segments exist in opposition to each other and their opposition derives from the fact that there exists, at any given time, within the dynasty a large number of royals (and their supporters) who regard the kingship as common property, though it can be held by only one of their number at any given time.' and later, at 31, where he follows, 'the purpose of each segment is to monopolise the kingship and exclude all other segments if possible. However, no sooner does a segment achieve its aim and exclude all others than it is overtaken and again divided by its own internal incipient and developing segmentation ... The inevitable corollary of such a power-based segmental succession is that whole lineage segments are regularly excluded from the kingship.'

<sup>101</sup> The Síl Muiredaig were the descendants of Muiredach Muillethan, himself the tenth generation in descent from Brión.

<sup>102</sup> See above, p. 38 n. 95.

Bréifne's development from a region of Connacht into a provincial kingdom, and 'king of Uí Briúin' in the twelfth century could only mean king of Uí Briúin Bréifne. A corollary is that twelfth-century Connacht proper was somewhat more constricted than its modern equivalent, as was the Archdiocese of Tuam established in 1152, which was based on the province's boundaries.

While the Shannon provided a natural boundary for most of Connacht, the area that now comprises County Clare belonged to Munster or Thomond (north Munster) in the twelfth century, just as it does today. By tradition, this territory was conquered from Connacht in the fifth century, but the evidence suggests that the seventh-century king of Connacht Guaire Aidne mac Colmáin controlled at least some of it, and that the Munster dynasties did not take full possession until the eighth century.<sup>103</sup>

Guaire Aidne, and later Muirgius mac Tomaltaig, were unusually powerful kings of Connacht. For the most part, the western province was an irrelevance in early medieval politics. In the words of Byrne, its 'affairs impinged little on the main course of Irish history until the spectacular and totally unexpected career of Toirdelbach Ua Conchobair as high-king of Ireland in the twelfth century'.<sup>104</sup> The metamorphosis of Connacht under Toirdelbach can be explained with reference to his political strategy.

It will here be shown that control of Thomond west of the Shannon was the dominant strategic concern for Toirdelbach and his successors. The rise of the Dál Cais dynasty of that territory under Brian Bóraime, and later under his descendants Toirdelbach and Muirchertach Úa Briain, meant that Connacht's kings could achieve national supremacy if they could first control Dál Cais.<sup>105</sup> This dynamic provided the immediate background

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<sup>103</sup> Verstraten, 'Connacht' in Duffy (ed.), *Encyclopedia*, pp 103–5 at 104; Dan M. Wiley, 'Dál Cais' in Duffy (ed.), *Encyclopedia*, p. 121.

<sup>104</sup> Byrne, *Irish kings and high-kings*, p. 230; For the problems associated with the use of the term 'high-king' in modern historiography, see *Comparative Analysis*, pp 438–41. In this thesis, holders of that position will be referred to as 'king of Ireland', which was also the dominant term in the annals.

<sup>105</sup> For the use of the term 'national', see *Comparative Analysis*, pp 437–9.

of Toirdelbach's 'spectacular' career arc, the logic behind his approach, and the context for his son Ruaidrí's management of the early stages of the English invasion. Because that territory was a backdoor into Connacht, it also provided the rationale for the relationship between the Uí Chonchobair and the English crown in the early decades of the thirteenth century, as we will see.

There were, of course, other political relationships of importance, the vagaries of which often dictated events. There were also other territories of immediate strategic concern for Toirdelbach and his successors. In the former category, the Uí Néill, who, with Munster and Connacht targeted kingship of Ireland, often took precedence in Uí Chonchobair considerations. In the latter category, control of the east bank of the Shannon, especially in west Meath, was a recurring interest. This chapter will trace the development of these themes, and their impact on events after the English invasion.

Since Connacht held the kingship of Ireland at the time of the English invasion and was the dominant kingdom in Ireland for longer periods of the twelfth century than either Munster or the Uí Néill, this chapter will also deal with some matters of wider relevance. For instance, the 1175 Treaty of Windsor between Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair and Henry II was supposed to set the terms of a future relationship between Irish kingdoms and English lordships. Even though this was soon abandoned, Connacht's leadership of Ireland at this juncture had wide ranging implications.

English control of Thomond and the east bank of the Shannon set the stage for the frequent invasions of Connacht in the early thirteenth century. These invasions ultimately led to its conquest and settlement by the newcomers. As such, Connacht's fall mirrored its rise from a strategic point of view. A pattern of internal conflict, in which one or both parties would turn to the English for support, also contributed to its eventual downfall.

### [1.1: A new order: turning the tables on Munster]

Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair's career was foreshadowed by the more limited successes of his father, Ruaidrí na Saide Buide, and grandfather, Áed in Gaí Bernaig. Both Ruaidrí and Áed struggled to maintain their authority within Connacht, especially against the Uí Flaithbertaigh of Uí Briúin Seóla and Uí Ruairc of Uí Briúin Bréifne, but they also showed awareness of the dual threat and opportunity presented by the proximity of a powerful Dál Cais. In 1051, for example, Áed attacked Dál Cais, and later, in 1059, he actually secured the submission of Brian Bóraime's son Donnchad.<sup>106</sup> Ruaidrí, though hamstrung by internal difficulties, was capable of successfully opposing Muirchertach Úa Briain, king of Munster and aspiring king of Ireland, on several occasions.<sup>107</sup>

In 1092, Ruaidrí was blinded by Flaithbertach Úa Flaithbertaigh.<sup>108</sup> Though he did not actually die until 1118, his blinding removed him from the kingship, and opened an opportunity for Úa Briain to reorganise the western province.<sup>109</sup> This he did, taking overlordship of Connacht upon himself, rather than appointing a client king.<sup>110</sup> He also installed a prospective client, Gilla na Naem Úa hEidin of Uí Fiachrach Aidne, in the vacant kingship of Síol Muireadaig instead of promoting an Úa Conchobair to this position as might have been expected.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> See Duffy, 'Ua Conchobair, Áed [Aedh O'Connor, Áed in Gaí Bernaig] (d. 1067)', in *O.D.N.B.*, accessed online (<https://doi-org.jproxy.nuim.ie/10.1093/ref:odnb/20508>) (16 June 2021); Ailbhe Mac Shamhráin, 'Ua Conchobair, Áed in Gaí Bernaig ("of the gapped spear")' in *D.I.B.*, accessed online (<http://dib.cambridge.org/viewReadPage.do?articleId=a8720>) (16 June 2021).

<sup>107</sup> See *A.F.M.* 1088.10, 1089.8, 1089.9; *A.U.* 1088.2; *Ann. Tig.* 1088.2, 1088.3, 1089.1; *A.L.C.* 1088.1; *Chron. Scot.* 1088.1, 1089.2; *Ann. Clon.* 1087; *Ann. Inisf.* 1089.3. The breakdown of the relationship between Muirchertach and Ruaidrí appears to have come at the start of 1088, when a double-sided marriage alliance collapsed. Ruaidrí's sister Dub Coblaid, who was Muirchertach's wife, died, and Mór, Muirchertach's sister and Ruaidrí's wife, also died. No comment is made as to whether this was coincidental. See *A.F.M.* 1088.5, 1088.6; *Ann. Tig.* 1088.4, 1088.5; *Chron. Scot.* 1088.3, 1088.4; *Ann. Clon.* 1086.

<sup>108</sup> *A.F.M.* 1092.7; *A.U.* 1092.3; *Ann. Tig.* 1092.1; *A.L.C.* 1092.2; *Chron. Scot.* 1092.1; *Ann. Inisf.* 1092.3.

<sup>109</sup> *A.F.M.* 1118.1; *A.U.* 1118.9; *Ann. Tig.* 1118.7; *A.L.C.* 1118.11; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1118.5; *Chron. Scot.* 1118.4.

<sup>110</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1092.3.

<sup>111</sup> *A.F.M.* 1092.17; *Ann. Tig.* 1092.5; *Chron. Scot.* 1092.3.

As was mentioned above, Uí Fiachrach Aidne was the regional kingdom of Connacht which most closely neighboured Munster, and though Úa Briain was not making Úa hEidin king of Connacht, he was making him the most powerful king in Connacht. This scheme failed, however. Gilla na Naem appears to have taken the name ‘Úa Conchobair’,<sup>112</sup> and to have gone native to the extent that, in the wake of a rebellion, Úa Briain invaded Connacht and imprisoned him in 1093.<sup>113</sup>

After further conflict with the Síl Muiredaig, now back under Uí Chonchobair control, Úa Briain used the internal conflicts in Connacht to his advantage.<sup>114</sup> He installed the leading Uí Ruairc candidate, Domnall mac Tigernáin, as provincial king.<sup>115</sup> Again he experimented, as on this occasion he excluded certain regions, including Uí Fiachrach and Uí Maine, from Úa Ruairc’s control.<sup>116</sup> Unfortunately for Úa Briain, this did not cement his control of the province either, though it did stir tensions.

Flaithbertach Úa Flaithbertaigh, the man who had blinded Ruaidrí na Saide Buide Úa Conchobair in 1092, seized upon the death of one of Ruaidrí’s sons in 1097 to claim kingship of Síl Muiredaig for himself.<sup>117</sup> When he was, unsurprisingly, killed the next year, he received a range of titles in his obituaries, including ‘king of Connacht’.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> The sources that refer to Gilla na Naem Úa hEidin upon his accession to Síl Muiredaig (*Ann. Tig.* 1092.5; *Ann. Inisf.* 1093.2; *Chron. Scot.* 1092.3), refer to Gilla na Naem Úa Conchobair upon his capture by Úa Briain a year later (*Ann. Tig.* 1093.6; *Ann. Inisf.* 1093.7, 1093.8; *Chron. Scot.* 1093.3). Though Gilla na Naem did not recover kingship of Síl Muiredaig after 1093, his obituary is noted in the annals under the year 1100. There he is called ‘Úa hEidin’ in almost every entry (*A.F.M.* 1100.10; *A.U.* 1100.7; *Ann. Tig.* 1100.4; *A.L.C.* 1100.8; *Chron. Scot.* 1100.1), but importantly, ‘Úa Conchobair’ with ‘Úa hEidin’ inserted superlinearly in the Annals of Inisfallen (*Ann. Inisf.* 1100.4; See also MS Rawlinson B 503 folio 31 recto, column c).

<sup>113</sup> *A.F.M.* 1093.12; *A.U.* 1093.3; *Ann. Tig.* 1093.6; *A.L.C.* 1093.3; *Ann. Inisf.* 1093.2; *Chron. Scot.* 1093.3. Though Gilla na Naem appears never to have recovered control of Síl Muiredaig after this deposition, some of his obituaries award him the titles ‘king of Síl Muiredaig and all Connacht’ – See *Ann. Tig.* 1100.4; *Chron. Scot.* 1100.1.

<sup>114</sup> *A.F.M.* 1094.7, 1094.10; *A.U.* 1094.9, *Ann. Tig.* 1094.2; *A.L.C.* 1094.7; *Ann. Inisf.* 1094.3; *Chron. Scot.* 1094.2.

<sup>115</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1095.11.

<sup>116</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1095.11.

<sup>117</sup> *A.F.M.* 1097.4, 1097.11; *A.U.* 1097.2; *Ann. Tig.* 1097.1, 1097.3; *A.L.C.* 1097.1; *Chron. Scot.* 1097.2.

<sup>118</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1098.3: ‘rí Connacht’; *A.F.M.* 1098.15; *A.U.* 1098.1; *Ann. Inisf.* 1098.2.



Domnall mac Tigernáin Uí Ruairc died in 1102, and, though his authority in Connacht is doubtful, he also received the same title.<sup>119</sup>

Úa Ruairc was the last even titular king of Connacht for more than a decade. Úa Briain chose to leave the position vacant thereafter, and he continued to monitor the Síil Muiredaig closely as the group most likely to attempt its restoration. This vigilance led to direct intervention in 1106. In that year, Úa Briain installed his nephew Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair as king of Síil Muiredaig, deposing Toirdelbach's half-brother Domnall from the same position.<sup>120</sup>

The unremarkable start of Toirdelbach's career has at times been overlooked, and the distinction between his regional and provincial kingships has been ignored or blurred.<sup>121</sup>

Úa Briain did not want any king of Connacht, perhaps anticipating the strategic difficulties it could create, and he merely installed Toirdelbach as king of Síil Muiredaig in 1106, as he had done with Gilla na Naem Úa hEidin in 1092.<sup>122</sup> Far from challenging the king of Munster during this period, Toirdelbach served as part of his armies in 1109 and 1113, on the former occasion in Bréifne, and on the latter occasion in Ulaid.<sup>123</sup>

Furthermore, he took no steps to establish lordship over other regional kingdoms in Connacht, evidently for fear of Úa Briain.

Toirdelbach would hold the position of regional king for eight years before he became king of Connacht, a period during which he did little to indicate that he would go on to

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<sup>119</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1102.1; *A.F.M.* 1102.6.

<sup>120</sup> *A.F.M.* 1106.10; *Ann. Tig.* 1106.2; *Chron. Scot.* 1106.3; *Banshenchas* [part two], p. 191. Mór ingen Toirdelbaigh Uí Briain was Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair's mother and Muirchertach Úa Briain's sister. She was not Domnall Úa Conchobair's mother on the evidence of the *Banshenchas*. Ruaidrí na Saide Buidhe was the father of both Domnall and Toirdelbach.

<sup>121</sup> See for example, Emmet O'Byrne, 'Ua Conchobair, Tairrdelbach', in Duffy (ed.), *Encyclopedia*, pp 471–474 especially at 471 where O'Byrne suggests that Úa Briain groomed Toirdelbach to be king of Connacht. Úa Briain did not make him king of Connacht, and there is no indication that he ever intended to do so. See also Curtis, *A history of medieval Ireland*, p. 30, who says that Toirdelbach became king of Connacht in 1106.

<sup>122</sup> *A.F.M.* 1106.10: 'Domhnall, son of Ruaidhri Ua Conchobhair, was deposed by Muircheartach Ua Briain; and his brother, i.e. Toirdhealbhach, was inaugurated at Ath-an-tearmoinn, as king over the Sil-Muireadhaigh after Domhnall'.

<sup>123</sup> *A.F.M.* 1109.4, 1113.10; *Ann. Tig.* 1109.2; *A.U.* 1113.7; *A.L.C.* 1113.5.

become a figure of national significance. As regional king, he suffered separate attacks by both the Northern Uí Néill and Conmaicne Réin in 1110. The provincial title was prematurely applied to him in *Ann. Tig.* for his victory over the latter group, because they were associated with the Uí Briúin Bréifne.<sup>124</sup> He also raided Cenél Conaill in 1111 in response to Uí Néill aggression, suggesting his ambition was to become provincial king, though his raid seems to have been minor compared with Domnall Mac Lochlainn's bold seizure of 'three thousand prisoners and many thousand cattle' the year before.<sup>125</sup>

Úa Conchobair did not make any move to take the provincial kingship until 1114, and only then after the king of Munster fell seriously ill. Úa Briain became a 'living skeleton' in the summer of that year,<sup>126</sup> and the news of his sickness 'went throughout Ireland'.<sup>127</sup> Only once this obvious power vacuum had emerged did Toirdelbach move to assert his supremacy in Connacht, and even then, he was not the only one, as his half-brother Domnall also made a bid for power.

Toirdelbach acted quickly enough to secure his position. He first dealt with Domnall's attempt to supplant him, and soon the latter fled towards Munster.<sup>128</sup> The Uí Maine supported Toirdelbach's claim to the provincial kingship by capturing Domnall as he tried to pass through their territory. They delivered him to Toirdelbach,<sup>129</sup> in whose custody he remained for some time, perhaps until his death in 1118.<sup>130</sup> Whether he died in custody or not, this defeat certainly ended his political career.

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<sup>124</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1110.2.

<sup>125</sup> *A.F.M.* 1110.9; *co t-tuc trí mhíle do bhraitt, & il-mhíle do chethraibh*; *A.U.* 1110.9; *A.L.C.* 1110.4.

<sup>126</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1114.2; *A.F.M.* 1114.9; *A.U.* 1114.2; *Ann. Tig.* 1114.3; *A.L.C.* 1114.1; *Chron. Scot.* 1114.1.

<sup>127</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1114.3: '*Galar do gabail Muirchertaig h-Úi Bríain co n-dechaidh a tasc fo Erinn*'.

<sup>128</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1114.4; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1114.5; *A.F.M.* 1114.11.

<sup>129</sup> *A.F.M.* 1114.11; *Ann. Tig.* 1114.6.

<sup>130</sup> It is probable that Domnall remained in Toirdelbach's custody until his death in 1118 (*A.F.M.* 1118.3; *A.L.C.* 1118.10; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1118.6) but there is some confusion on this point. Mac Carthaigh's Book refers to Domnall being released after an assassination attempt on Toirdelbach, which it places in 1114 but every other source places in 1115 (*Misc.Ir. Annals* 1114.4; *A.F.M.* 1115.7; *A.U.* 1115.3; *A.L.C.* 1115.3; *Ann. Inisf.* 1115.5; *Chron. Scot.* 1115.3). *Misc.Ir. Annals* also places Domnall's rebellion after the assassination attempt on Toirdelbach (*Misc.Ir. Annals*

Next, Toirdelbach established his authority over the other regional kingdoms of Connacht. Most appear to have offered no resistance to this, though notably he found it necessary to bring a hosting into Uí Fiachrach Aidne to consume their grass and corn, and so exert control over them.<sup>131</sup> He also expelled some of the Conmaicne of Mag nAí from the province.<sup>132</sup> Connacht was entirely under Toirdelbach's control by the end of 1114, bringing an end to a long interregnum in the provincial kingship of Connacht, and an even longer absence from that position for the Síol Muiredaig.<sup>133</sup> There were dire implications for Dál Cais and Munster.

There followed a period of about four years during which it was unclear who was the leading power in Ireland. Domnall Mac Lochlainn, king of the Northern Uí Néill, who had been Muirchertach Úa Briain's only opponent of equal stature for many years, was moved to action by the latter's illness. He gathered an army in Leth Cuinn, which included Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair, and invaded Thomond through Connacht. Diarmait Úa Briain, Muirchertach's brother, who had seized the kingship of Munster, was able to negotiate a year's truce with the invaders, perhaps taking advantage of tension between Mac Lochlainn and Úa Conchobair.<sup>134</sup> Mac Lochlainn did not invade Munster again.

Instead, Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair and Diarmait Úa Briain were left to test each other's strength. Toirdelbach plundered Thomond and Limerick in 1115, killing an Úa Briain

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1114.5). This chronology is at odds with all other sources, and as there are known issues with *Misc.Ir. Annals*'s chronology, it is more likely that Domnall remained in Toirdelbach's custody from his rebellion in 1114, until his death in 1118 (*A.F.M.* 1118.3; *A.U.* 1118.10; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1118.6).

<sup>131</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1114.10.

<sup>132</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1114.4. This incident appears along with the banishment or flight of Domnall Úa Conchobair to Munster, and it is probable that the Conmaicne had supported Domnall's claim.

<sup>133</sup> For a similar reading of Toirdelbach's accession to the provincial kingship, see Simms, 'Ua Conchobair, Toirdelbach Mór [Turlough the Great O'Connor] (1088–1156)', in *O.D.N.B.*, Accessed online (<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/20524>) (2 October 2017).

<sup>134</sup> *A.F.M.* 1114.10; *Chron. Scot.* 1114.3; *Ann. Tig.* 1114.5; *A.U.* 1114.3; *A.L.C.* 1114.3, 1114.4; *Ann. Inisf.* 1114.3. Both *Chron. Scot.* and *Ann. Tig.* refer to Toirdelbach acting 'dar sarugud Leth Cuinn', or 'in spite of Leth Cuinn', while *Ann. Inisf.* refers to the Leth Cuinn coalition undergoing 'clomchod ciall', which has been translated as a 'change of mind', while they were in Munster.

dynast.<sup>135</sup> He also made a further significant attack on Kincora in 1116.<sup>136</sup> Diarmait Úa Briain attempted to raid Connacht in response in 1116 and again in 1117.<sup>137</sup> Though Diarmait was defeated on both expeditions, he was at least able to deter Úa Conchobair from more ambitious undertakings in Munster.

Diarmait Úa Briain's short reign ended with his death in 1118.<sup>138</sup> His demise emboldened Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair, who was now confident enough to reverse the traditional order, and, for the first time, establish Connacht's suzerainty over Munster. Following an uprising by the Meic Cárthaig in Desmond, Úa Conchobair invaded Munster on the pretext of restoring Muirchertach Úa Briain to power.<sup>139</sup> Once present, though, he abandoned Muirchertach and divided the province. Thomond was placed under two sons of Diarmait Úa Briain, Toirdelbach and Conchobar, while Desmond was given to Tadc Mac Cárthaig.<sup>140</sup> Both new kingdoms were to remain under Úa Conchobair's suzerainty.

Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair's kingship of Ireland, which he claimed from at least 1120, can be deemed to have started in 1118 with the establishment of control over Munster, and to have ended in 1127, with the collapse of the same.<sup>141</sup> Aside from Munster's own importance, this was also because of the relationship between it and Leth Moga at large, as constituted under Toirdelbach and Muirchertach Úa Briain. Their example made Úa Conchobair's push eastward beyond Munster into Osraige and Leinster a logical extension.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> *A.F.M.* 1115.4, 1115.6; *A.U.* 1115.8, 1115.5; *A.L.C.* 1115.8, 1115.5; *Ann. Tig.* 1115.2; *Ann. Inisf.* 1115.9; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1115.1.

<sup>136</sup> *A.F.M.* 1116.7; *Chron. Scot.* 1116.1.

<sup>137</sup> *A.F.M.* 1116.8, 1117.15, 1117.17; *Ann. Tig.* 1116.6, 1117.1; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1117.3; *A.U.* 1117.4; *A.L.C.* 1117.2.

<sup>138</sup> *A.F.M.* 1118.2; *A.U.* 1118.2; *Ann. Tig.* 1118.1; *A.L.C.* 1118.2; *Ann. Inisf.* 1118.2; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1117.10.

<sup>139</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1118.8; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1118.3.

<sup>140</sup> *A.F.M.* 1118.1; *A.U.* 1118.9; *Ann. Tig.* 1118.7; *A.L.C.* 1118.11; *Chron. Scot.* 1118.2; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1118.5.

<sup>141</sup> See below, pp 59–60, for his celebration of the *Óenach Tailten*.

<sup>142</sup> For a detailed discussion of this, see *The Two Munsters*, pp 216–33.

It was the Meic Cárthaig who made the greatest efforts to throw off Úa Conchobair's suzerainty, despite the latter's role in the creation of the kingdom of Desmond.<sup>143</sup> 1120, 1124, and 1127 all saw major challenges to Toirdelbach emerge from Desmond, and the 1127 effort succeeded in reunifying Munster under a Mac Cárthaig king. The first upset to the new status quo, in 1120, came when Tadc Mac Cárthaig forced Donnchad Mac Gilla Phátraic, king of Osraige, to submit to his authority.<sup>144</sup> Úa Conchobair correctly interpreted Mac Cárthaig's move as a first step towards establishing a wider lordship in opposition to his own. In retaliation, he raided widely in Desmond, took 'countless cattle spoils', and was successful in establishing a short-lived peace.<sup>145</sup>

A change of kingship in Desmond determined the brevity of that peace. Tadc Mac Cárthaig's brother Cormac took the kingship when Tadc fell ill in 1123, and he quickly rebelled against Úa Conchobair.<sup>146</sup> His effort was joined by Leinster, Osraige, and the Hiberno-Norse of Limerick in Leth Moga; notably, the Uí Briain were not involved. In Leth Cuinn, the Uí Briúin Bréifne and Uí Máel Sechlainn of Meath also participated.<sup>147</sup> The rebellion broke down, and it is remarkable that Úa Conchobair executed Mac Cárthaig's hostages while 'A respite was given to the hostages of the other folk'.<sup>148</sup>

So serious was the rebellion of 1124 that it was 1127 before Toirdelbach subdued Desmond. He spent the interim marching through Bréifne, Meath, Leinster, and Osraige, isolating Desmond by re-establishing his supremacy in all other regions.<sup>149</sup> He even

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<sup>143</sup> Conflict between Connacht and Desmond became so normal that it was remarked of the year 1122, 'peace in the above year between Connachta and Desmumu' (*Ann. Inisf.* 1122.2). For the rationale for Meic Cárthaig opposition to Úa Conchobair, see *The Two Munsters*, pp 252–3.

<sup>144</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1120.4; see *The Two Munsters*, pp 239–40.

<sup>145</sup> *A.F.M.* 1121.6, 1121.7; *A.U.* 1121.4, 1121.5; *Ann. Tig.* 1121.6, 1121.7; *A.L.C.* 1121.2, 1121.3; *Ann. Inisf.* 1121.6, 1121.7; *Chron. Scot.* 1121.3, 1121.4; *Misc.Ir.Annals* 1121.2.

<sup>146</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1123.6, 1124.2; *A.F.M.* 1123.13; *A.U.* 1124.2; *Ann. Tig.* 1123.3; *A.L.C.* 1124.2; *Misc.Ir.Annals* 1123.4; *Chron. Scot.* 1124.2.

<sup>147</sup> *A.F.M.* 1124.16, 1124.17; *A.U.* 1124.6; *Ann. Tig.* 1124.4; *A.L.C.* 1124.6; *Chron. Scot.* 1124.5; *Misc.Ir.Annals* 1124.3; *Ann. Inisf.* 1124.5.

<sup>148</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1124.4: 'Tucad cairdi do etirib in luchta aile'.

<sup>149</sup> *A.F.M.* 1124.16, 1125.6, 1126.10; 1126.10, 1126.11; *Ann. Tig.* 1124.4, 1126.2, 1126.3; *Ann. Inisf.* 1124.5, 1125.9, 1126.8; *Misc.Ir.Annals* 1124.3, 1126.2; *Chron. Scot.* 1124.5, 1124.8, 1126.2, 1126.4; *A.U.* 1125.3, 1126.2, 1126.7; *A.L.C.* 1125.3, 1126.2.

imposed his own son as king of Dublin and Leinster in 1126.<sup>150</sup> When he reached Cork in 1127, the de-facto capital of Meic Cárthaig Desmond, he forced Cormac Mac Cárthaig to retire to Lismore as a pilgrim. He also presided over a renewed partition of the province.<sup>151</sup>

But, no sooner had he returned to Connacht than Thomond and Desmond joined forces against him and launched a successful campaign to end his control of their province.<sup>152</sup> The leading Uí Briain dynasts, Conchobar and Toirdelbach, sons of Diarmait (d. 1118), recognised Cormac Mac Cárthaig as king of Munster, in a clear repudiation of Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair. In the words of Mac Cárthaigh's Book, they 'turned against Toirdhealbhadh son of Ruaidhrí, and went to Lismore, and clasped hands with Cormac Mac Carthaigh, and brought him back to lay life'.<sup>153</sup> They were quickly followed in this volte-face by the Leinster men, who deposed Úa Conchobair's son from the kingships of Dublin and Leinster, which he had received as recently as 1126.<sup>154</sup>

It is perhaps needless to add that Toirdelbach had counted on the mutual antagonism of the Uí Briain and Meic Cárthaig preventing any such alliance, and he was unable to respond effectively. He attacked Leinster in 1128 but not Munster, took no action in the south in 1129, and made some ineffective naval raids on Desmond in 1130. With Munster again operating as a unified provincial kingdom, Úa Conchobair began to slip into a dormant phase in his career. Between 1127 and 1151 he found himself on the back foot as often as not, as loss of control in Munster undermined his claim to kingship of Ireland.

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<sup>150</sup> *A.F.M.* 1126.10.

<sup>151</sup> *A.F.M.* 1127.13; *A.U.* 1127.1; *A.L.C.* 1127.1; *Ann. Inisf.* 1127.3.

<sup>152</sup> *A.F.M.* 1127.14; *A.U.* 1127.5; *A.L.C.* 1127.5; *Ann. Inisf.* 1127.4; *Ann. Tig.* 1127.2; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1126.11.

<sup>153</sup> *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1126.11: 'do impodh ar Toirdealbac mac Ruaidhri & dul doibh co Lis Mor Mo Cuda, & a lamha do tabhairt a laim Chormaic Mic Carrthaigh & a tabhairt leo cum an t-saeghail arís'.

<sup>154</sup> *A.L.C.* 1127.5.

Munster was still critical to Connacht's political outlook, except now it was once again as a threat. Efforts by Toirdelbach to raid Munster in response, at the beginning of the 1130s, proved ineffective.<sup>155</sup> He even had the misfortune to have two of his raiding forces engage each other by mistake on the confines of Thomond in 1131.<sup>156</sup> And, despite his attempts to retain overlordship of Leinster after losing Munster, an army led by the Uí Briain invaded Leinster and took its hostages, also in 1131.<sup>157</sup> That same army then proceeded into Meath and defeated a force of his cavalry.<sup>158</sup>

Toirdelbach was also unable to prevent the destruction of some of his bridges, castles, and forts as the fortunes of war turned against him. Invading Munster armies demolished Bun-Gaillimhe in 1132, along with Dun-Mugdhorn and Dun-Mor in 1133.<sup>159</sup> The bridge and castle of Athlone were also destroyed in 1133 by Tigernán Úa Ruairc and Murchad Úa Máel Sechlainn, who took advantage of Úa Conchobair's difficulties, as we will see.<sup>160</sup>

The king of Connacht was not particularly active in opposition. His main policy now was to broker peace with Munster.<sup>161</sup> The peace agreement reached in 1134 was quite successful in this regard, largely thanks to subsequent disharmony between the Uí Briain and Meic Cárthaig.<sup>162</sup> Connacht suffered no further invasions from Munster until Úa Conchobair himself resumed activity in the early 1140s.

One of Úa Conchobair's most interesting actions in support of his defensive policy was his diversion of the river Suck in 1139. Under that year, *Ann. Tig.* reports that 'The Suca river was dug by Toirdhealbhach Ó Conchobair so that it came into the marsh of the south of the plain and the marsh of Aedh, making large lakes of them, and it went into

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<sup>155</sup> *A.F.M.* 1130.9, 1131.3, 1131.13; *A.U.* 1131.1; *Ann. Tig.* 1131.1; *A.L.C.* 1131.1.

<sup>156</sup> *A.F.M.* 1131.13; *Chron. Scot.* 1131.2.

<sup>157</sup> *A.F.M.* 1131.4; *A.U.* 1131.2; *Ann. Tig.* 1131.1, 1131.2; *A.L.C.* 1131.3.

<sup>158</sup> *A.F.M.* 1131.4; *A.U.* 1131.2; *Ann. Tig.* 1131.2; *A.L.C.* 1131.3.

<sup>159</sup> *A.F.M.* 1132.9, 1133.9; *Ann. Tig.* 1132.6, 1133.2; *Chron. Scot.* 1132.3, 1133.1; *A.L.C.* 1133.1; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1132.1.

<sup>160</sup> *A.F.M.* 1133.12, 1133.13; see below, p. 56.

<sup>161</sup> *A.F.M.* 1133.14; *Ann. Tig.* 1134.3; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1134.5.

<sup>162</sup> See *The Two Munsters*, pp 233–63.

the river of Ednech and into Loch Rí, and there was a muster of Connachtmen doing that work'.<sup>163</sup> Some commentators have suggested this was to protect the Síl Muiredaig from the Uí Maine, but more recent research has quite rightly pointed to the threat from Munster as a motivating factor.<sup>164</sup>

Toirdelbach's renewed activity outside Connacht, which may have been encouraged by the death of Cormac Mac Cárthaig in 1138, quickly alarmed the Uí Briain, who were back in control of Munster.<sup>165</sup> They attacked Connacht first in 1141, then again in 1142, 1143, 1145, and 1146, with comparable attacks by Úa Conchobair on Munster in some of the same years.<sup>166</sup> This period is comparable to 1114–1118 insofar as Connacht and Munster found themselves on relatively equal footing, though on this occasion Munster was the more aggressive party. A short-lived peace in 1144 was probably intended by both sides to be just that, as an epidemic was affecting both provinces particularly badly.<sup>167</sup>

The battles, raids, and skirmishes of the 1140s proved inconclusive, and it may be fair to say Úa Conchobair's difficulties elsewhere, against the Uí Briúin Bréifne and Meath, played a part in diverting his attention and resources. On at least one occasion, the Uí Briain coordinated an attack on Connacht with Úa Ruairc and Úa Máel Sechlainn to exacerbate these problems.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1139.4: 'In t-Suca do tochailt la Tairrdelbach O Choncobair co tanic i Turloch Desceirt in Muighe & Turlach Aeda, co n-derna locha mora dib & co n-deachaidh a n-Abaind na h-Eidhnighe & a Loch Rí, & ro báí tínol Connachtach ac denom an gnima-sin'.

<sup>164</sup> For the former theory see Ó Cróinín, 'Ua Conchobair, Tairdelbach (O'Conor, Turlough)' in *D.I.B.*, accessed online (<http://dib.cambridge.org/viewReadPage.do?articleId=a8728>) (7 October 2017); For the more recent research highlighting the threat from Munster, see Connon & Brian Shanahan, 'Creating borders in twelfth-century Ireland? Toirdelbach Ua Conchobair's diversion of the River Suck', in Jenifer Ní Ghrádaigh & Emmett O'Byrne (eds), *The march in the islands of the medieval west* (Leiden, 2012), pp 139–69, especially pp 164–7.

<sup>165</sup> See *The Two Munsters*, pp 242–5.

<sup>166</sup> *A.F.M.* 1141.9, 1142.6, 1142.8, 1143.15, 1145.10, 1145.17; *Ann. Clon.* 1134, 1139; *Ann. Tig.* 1143.3, 1145.7, 1145.8, 1146.5; *Chron. Scot.* 1143.4, 1145.3.

<sup>167</sup> *A.F.M.* 1144.5, 1144.9; *Ann. Tig.* 1144.8.

<sup>168</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1146.5.



The real significance of the new hostilities was that they led directly into the momentous events of 1151. The exact sequence of events will be elaborated elsewhere, but here it suffices to say that the king of Munster, Toirdelbach Úa Briain, was beset by a series of problems in that year.<sup>169</sup> He faced a challenger from within his own family, an uprising by the Meic Cárthaig, and an invasion of Munster. The invasion was led by Úa Conchobair, who linked up with the king of Leinster, Diarmait Mac Murchada, on this occasion.

When the news reached Úa Briain that Úa Conchobair had invaded Thomond while he was attacking the Meic Cárthaig in Desmond, he hurried back northward. In his haste, harried at the rear by the Meic Cárthaig, and under the cover of a heavy fog, Úa Briain did not perceive the enemy armies until he was in their midst, and he suffered a massive, debilitating defeat.<sup>170</sup> The Battle of Móin Mór was one of the largest pitched battles in twelfth-century Ireland, and it settled the question of which province, Connacht or Munster, would have supremacy over the other until the English invasion.

The final comment on the Battle of Móin Móir in *A.F.M.* illustrates its immediate impact: ‘Chief sway over Munster was assumed by Toirdhealbhach Ua Conchobhair on this occasion, and Toirdhealbhach Ua Briain was banished’.<sup>171</sup> Despite Mac Murchada’s presence at the battle, therefore, suzerainty of Munster was to fall to Úa Conchobair, and hostages would presumably have gone along with this.

The fallout from Móin Móir would last decades, but in the short term it eliminated Munster as a major power. It also justifiably alarmed Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn, who claimed national supremacy at that point. This point will be elaborated below, but here it suffices to say that Mac Lochlainn immediately demanded hostages from both Úa Conchobair and Mac Murchada, both of whom had already submitted to him. When Úa

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<sup>169</sup> See *The Two Munsters*, pp 244–5.

<sup>170</sup> *A.F.M.* 1151.14; *Ann. Tig.* 1151.3; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1151.3; *Ann. Clon.* 1141.

<sup>171</sup> *A.F.M.* 1151.14: ‘*Ard-nert Mumhan do ghabhail do Thoirdhealbhach Ua Conchobhair don cur-sin & Toirdhealbhac Ua Briain d’ionnarbadh*’.

Conchobair partitioned Munster in 1153 it provoked war with Mac Lochlainn, who tried to deny the king of Connacht that authority.

Try as Mac Lochlainn might, though, Munster did indeed stay under Úa Conchobair's control, and it also stayed divided. In the year he died, 1156, Toirdelbach launched a fleet on Lough Derg 'and Toirdhealbhach Ua Briain came into his house, and delivered him hostages for obtaining the half of Munster'.<sup>172</sup> When 'The kingdom of Connaught was assumed by Ruaidhri, son of Toirdhealbhach Ua Conchobhair', after the latter's death, 'Toirdhealbhach Ua Briain came to Ruaidhri Ua Conchobhair, and left him twelve hostages of the chieftains of Dal-gCais'.<sup>173</sup> As such, Ruaidrí acceded not only to Connacht, but also to Toirdelbach's wider overlordship in 1156.

### [1.2: Strategy beyond Munster]

Other than Leth Moga and his own province of Connacht, Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair's claims of overlordship extended over just two other provincial kingdoms: Meath and Uí Briúin Bréifne. In one respect their strategic importance was identical: they lay on the east side of the Shannon, with easy access into Connacht and even to the lands of Síl Muiredaig. In terms of prestige, they were vastly different. Meath was an old province linked with the kingships of Tara and Ireland, while Uí Briúin Bréifne was a constituent part of Connacht that only latterly claimed provincial status. Whether Úa Conchobair was minded to acknowledge Uí Briúin Bréifne's development in this regard is also open to doubt.

In 1114, at the outset of his own provincial kingship, Úa Conchobair witnessed Domnall Mac Lochlainn march through Meath and into Connacht over Athlone, and then through Connacht into Thomond. He showed his appreciation of this weakness the very next year, as he put a fleet on the Shannon and fortified an island on the river. He also

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<sup>172</sup> A.F.M. 1156.7: '*Táinic dna, Toirdhealbhach Ua Briain ina theach, co t-tarat braighde dhó dar cenn leithe Mumhan do thabhairt dhó*'; *Ann. Tig.* 1156.1.

<sup>173</sup> A.F.M. 1156.10: '*Ríge Connacht do ghabháil do Ruaidri, mac Toirddealbaig Uí Concobair*', 1156.13: '*Toirdhealbhach Ua Briain do thocht h-i c-cenn Ruaidhri Uí Conchobhair, & dá bhraghaid décc do mhaithibh Dail c-Cais do fhagbháil dó aige*'.

accepted the submission of Murchad Úa Máel Sechlainn, king of Meath, and Cú Sléibhe Úa Fergail of Muintir Angaile (a group belonging to the Conmaicne Réin, who were associated with Uí Briúin Bréifne). He then partitioned Meath between Murchad and a rival, and made a substantial donation to Clonmacnoise, a church traditionally in the Meath orbit, but one that was now to become increasingly associated with Connacht.<sup>174</sup> He signalled, as such, that he intended to master all provinces on the Shannon.

The king of Uí Briúin Bréifne, Áed in Gilla Srónmael Úa Ruairc, joined Úa Conchobair's subordinates by 1118, when both he and Murchad Úa Máel Sechlainn accompanied Úa Conchobair in an invasion of Munster.<sup>175</sup> This was an interesting development, since only the year before, Úa Ruairc had launched his own violent assault on Meath, where he burned the monastery at Kells.<sup>176</sup>

Úa Conchobair did not intervene in their conflict, nor did he take any action when Úa Máel Sechlainn reprised kingship of all Meath, overcoming the partition of 1115 by killing his rival.<sup>177</sup> Áed Úa Ruairc was killed on one of his incursions into Meath in 1122, but his son Tigernán, who acceded to the kingship in 1124, would also dedicate himself to eastward expansion at the expense of the Uí Máel Sechlainn kings of Meath.

Occasionally, Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair tried to use Tigernán Úa Ruairc's interest in Meath to help control the province. In 1125, for example, Úa Ruairc submitted to Úa Conchobair, and received a territorial award in Meath shortly afterwards.<sup>178</sup> On this occasion, Meath was being carved up for Murchad Úa Máel Sechlainn's participation in Cormac Mac Cárthaig's rebellion of 1124, which was discussed above, and Úa Máel Sechlainn was also banished temporarily from the kingdom.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> See Comparative Analysis, pp 490–2.

<sup>175</sup> *A.F.M.* 1118.6; *Ann. Inisf.* 1118.8; *A.U.* 1118.6; *A.L.C.* 1118.6.

<sup>176</sup> *A.F.M.* 1117.12; *Ann. Inisf.* 1117.2; *A.U.* 1117.3; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1117.8.

<sup>177</sup> *A.F.M.* 1115.11.

<sup>178</sup> *A.F.M.* 1125.6; *A.U.* 1125.3; *A.L.C.* 1125.3; *Chron. Scot.* 1125.3; *Ann. Inisf.* 1125.9; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1125.2.

<sup>179</sup> *A.F.M.* 1125.6; *A.U.* 1125.3; *A.L.C.* 1125.3; *Chron. Scot.* 1125.3; *Ann. Inisf.* 1125.9; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1125.2.

The share formally awarded to Tigernán Úa Ruairc in 1125 may have been no more than recognition of land taken by his father Áed in Meath. Evidence preserved in the Book of Kells suggests that the *trícha cét* of Caílle Follamáin, situated in north-eastern Meath, was already under Uí Ruairc control by 1124.<sup>180</sup> This territory included Kells and so, given the assault on that monastery in 1117, it probably only fell to the Uí Ruairc in the interim.<sup>181</sup>

The relationship between Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair and Tigernán Úa Ruairc soon soured. After Úa Conchobair lost control of Leth Moga, Úa Ruairc added to his woes by submitting to the Uí Néill in 1132.<sup>182</sup> In the decade that followed, he attacked Connacht on at least three occasions.<sup>183</sup> Úa Conchobair survived these raids, and in 1140 he sought to separate Conmaicne Réin from Uí Briúin Bréifne, a move which is likely to be of greater significance than its brief mention in the annals suggests.<sup>184</sup> There was further violence between the two when Úa Conchobair's 1145 partition of Meath saw Úa Ruairc granted only a small share.<sup>185</sup>

A major incident followed in 1148. *Ann. Tig.* reports that there was 'A great meeting by Toirdhealbhach Ó Conchobhair and Tighearnán O Ruairc at the Shannon. Domhnall Ó Fearghail with his people conspired against Ó Ruairc and the ex-cleric Ó Fearghail hit him with a sword and mangled him greatly, and for this he himself was killed.

Eachmarcach son of Branán and the son of Aireachtach Ó Raduibh was killed there while pursuing Ó Ruairc in order to try again to kill him, and Ó Ruairc's *eric* was exacted from the Conmhaicne as they were killed'.<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Mac Niocaill, 'The Irish "charters"', in Peter Fox (ed.), *The book of Kells, MS 58 Trinity College Library Dublin: commentary* (Luzern 1990), pp 153–65 at 155.

<sup>181</sup> *A.F.M.* 1117.12; *Ann. Inisf.* 1117.2; *A.U.* 1117.3; *Misc.Ir.Annals* 1117.8.

<sup>182</sup> *A.F.M.* 1132.6.

<sup>183</sup> *A.F.M.* 1132.15, 1135.17, 1137.15, 1137.18, 1137.19; *Ann. Tig.* 1132.4, 1135.2, 1137.1, 1137.6; *Chron. Scot.* 1132.6; *A.L.C.* 1137.8.

<sup>184</sup> *A.F.M.* 1140.4.

<sup>185</sup> *A.F.M.* 1144.7, 1145.7.

<sup>186</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1148.1: 'Mór-choinde la Toirrdelbach Ó Conchobair & la Tigernan h-Úa Ruairc im Sinaind. Domnall h-Úa Fergail cona muntir do chongar h-Úi Ruairc, & ín t-Aithcleireach h-Úa

It seems likely that Úa Conchobair's hand was behind this assassination attempt, even though it was carried out by Domnall Úa Fergail of the Muintir Angaile, one of Úa Ruairc's subordinates. This family was mentioned above for their submission to Úa Conchobair in 1115. The Uí Fergail and their wider dynastic group Muintir Angaile also belonged to the Conmaicne Réin, whom Úa Conchobair hoped to detach from Uí Briúin Bréifne in 1140.<sup>187</sup>

It is telling that when Úa Fergail failed to kill Úa Ruairc, two Connacht dynasts rushed forward to finish the job, only to be killed themselves. They were Mac Branáin of Corcu Achlann and Úa Raduibh of Síl Muiredaig. As clients of Úa Conchobair, they would have been unlikely to attack Úa Ruairc without his orders. In any case, Úa Ruairc barely escaped with his life, being badly 'mangled',<sup>188</sup> by the attack, something which probably accounts for his being described as 'one-eyed' at the time of the English invasion.<sup>189</sup>

Though Úa Ruairc seems to have been cowed by this near miss, still further action was taken by Úa Conchobair. In 1152, he conducted a campaign against the king of Uí Briúin Bréifne, bringing his ally from the Battle of Móin Móir, Diarmait Mac Murchada. On that occasion, Mac Murchada abducted Úa Ruairc's wife, Derbforgaill, bringing her back to Leinster. This humiliation still motivated Úa Ruairc some fourteen years later, as we will see.<sup>190</sup> In 1152, the immediate result was that Úa Ruairc was temporarily deposed from his kingship, and Úa Conchobair suffered no further invasions of Connacht from that direction.

Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair's relationship with the king of Meath, Murchad Úa Máel Sechlainn, was little better. Úa Conchobair deposed Úa Máel Sechlainn in 1120, 1125,

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*Fergail da bualadh do chloidim, cor' ledair co mor, cor' marbad e fén ind. Eachmarcach mac Branán & Mac Airechtaigh h-Úi Raduib do marbadh and ac dul a n-dáidh h-Úi Ruairc da athmarbad, & eraic h-í Ruairc do búain do Conmaicnib amal ro marbtaís'.*

<sup>187</sup> *A.F.M.* 1140.4.

<sup>188</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1148.1: 'cor' ledair co mor'.

<sup>189</sup> Giraldus Cambrensis refers to Úa Ruairc as 'monoculus', or 'one-eyed' on several occasions in his 'Expugnatio Hibernica'. For example, see Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 112–5.

<sup>190</sup> See Women and Marriage, pp 375–9.

and 1143, and frequently experimented with partitions of Meath in which its neighbours, including Úa Ruairc and Mac Murchada, sometimes received a share. He did this, for instance, in 1115, 1125, 1144, and 1152, adopting the example Muirchertach Úa Briain had set in Meath in 1105.<sup>191</sup>

Úa Máel Sechlainn was not a major king, and he rarely conducted campaigns beyond Meath.<sup>192</sup> Úa Conchobair's dissatisfaction with him is more likely to result from a failure to pay tribute or to provide military support, than for the threat he posed. Nonetheless, in 1143 Úa Conchobair tried to remove him permanently, placing his own son Conchobar, formerly king of Dublin and Leinster, in the kingship of Meath.

Conchobar Úa Conchobair fared even more poorly in Meath than he had in Leinster. He was assassinated in 1144 'by Ua Dubhlaich, lord of Feara-Tulach, for he considered him as a stranger in sovereignty over the men of Meath'.<sup>193</sup> There is some suggestion that Úa Dubhlaich was not alone, since *Ann. Tig.* records that 'for a secret conspiracy of all the men of Midhe was he killed'.<sup>194</sup> Naturally, the immediate aftermath saw an invasion by Úa Conchobair 'and he divided Meath between two kings, after inflicting slaughter and loss on the Meathmen, so that the battle he delivered on the descendants of Seanchán was like the day of judgement'.<sup>195</sup> It was the organisation of this 1145 partition that antagonised Úa Ruairc, it will be remembered.

In support of his efforts to control Meath and Uí Briúin Bréifne, Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair invested in physical infrastructure. He built bridges across the Shannon at regular intervals, for example. The bridge at Athlone was first built in 1120, and it was

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<sup>191</sup> *A.F.M.* 1105.8, 1115.11, 1125.6, 1144.7; *A.U.* 1105.6, 1125.3; *A.L.C.* 1125.3; *Ann. Tig.* 1115.7, 1144.1; *Chron. Scot.* 1115.7, 1125.3; *Ann. Inisf.* 1125.9; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1115.5, 1125.2, 1143.2; *Ann. Clon.* 1140.

<sup>192</sup> One notable exception is an attack on the bridge at Athlone in 1133, in which he assisted Úa Ruairc (*A.F.M.* 1133.13).

<sup>193</sup> *A.F.M.* 1144.7: '*la h-Ua n-Dubhlaich, tigherna Fەر Tulach, uair ba rí eachtair-cheneóil lais a bheith-siomh i ríge uas Fearaibh Midhe*'; *Ann. Tig.* 1144.1; *Chron. Scot.* 1144.2; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1143.2; *Ann. Clon.* 1140.

<sup>194</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1144.1: '*do choccar Fer Midhe uile co h-incleithe ro marbadh*'.

<sup>195</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1144.5: '*coro roind Midhi itir da ríge, tar eis áir & esbadha do tabairt ar Midhechaib cur' bo indamail lai bratha ín tres tuc .i. ar Uib Senchain*'.

subsequently re-constructed in 1129 and 1140.<sup>196</sup> Another bridge was built at Ballyleague, crossing into the land of the Uí Fergail, in 1140.<sup>197</sup> The bridge of ‘Ath-Croich’ was built along the Shannon in 1120 as well, and this is thought to correspond with Shannon Harbour in modern County Offaly.<sup>198</sup> Toirdelbach also erected a castle (*caislén*) at Athlone in 1140.<sup>199</sup>

The castle at Athlone proved to be important, and it would later be re-fortified by the English when they took control of the area in 1210.<sup>200</sup> It also appears to have been garrisoned by Úa Conchobair at least some of the time.<sup>201</sup> Raids by the king of Connacht across Athlone into Meath in 1146, 1148, 1153, and 1155 show how it supported his strategy of overlordship where Meath was concerned.<sup>202</sup> Naturally these raids were resented and resisted, especially by the men of Tethba, a group situated in west Meath, and the castle and bridges were attacked at intervals.<sup>203</sup> It is also worth noting that when Úa Conchobair took Úa Ruairc’s hostages in 1152, they were brought to Athlone. This will be considered elsewhere as it relates to the abduction of Derbforgaill.<sup>204</sup>

As Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair created and developed his wider overlordship, he did so in the shadow of the Uí Néill, who controlled the only other conglomeration of multiple provincial kingdoms after 1114. An agreement of mutual spheres of influence was reached by Úa Conchobair and Mac Lochlainn in 1120, when Úa Conchobair’s deposition of Úa Máel Sechlainn provoked Mac Lochlainn to come to the king of

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<sup>196</sup> *A.F.M.* 1120.7, 1129.11, 1140.6; *A.U.* 1129.5; *A.L.C.* 1129.4; *Ann. Tig.* 1120.3, 1140.1; *Chron. Scot.* 1120.2; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1120.5.

<sup>197</sup> *A.F.M.* 1140.4.

<sup>198</sup> *A.F.M.*, ii, pp 1010–1011 n. e (*s.a.* 1120); O’Donovan (ed.), *Tribes and customs of Hy-Many* (Dublin, 1843), p. 5 n. g.

<sup>199</sup> *A.F.M.* 1129.11; *A.U.* 1129.5; *A.L.C.* 1129.4.

<sup>200</sup> *A.L.C.* 1210.13.

<sup>201</sup> An attack on the fortress of Athlone by the Tethba in 1147 saw Domnall son of Toirdelbach defeated, and Úa Flainn of the Síol Máel Ruain branch of Uí Maine killed (*A.F.M.* 1147.14; *Chron. Scot.* 1147.2).

<sup>202</sup> *A.F.M.* 1148.16, 1153.13, 1155.14; *Ann. Tig.* 1146.1, 1148.2, 1153.7; *Chron. Scot.* 1148.3; *Ann. Clon.* 1141.

<sup>203</sup> *A.F.M.* 1147.14, 1148.16, 1155.16, 1159.12; *Ann. Tig.* 1148.2, 1159.6, 1159.14; *Chron. Scot.* 1147.2; *Ann. Clon.* 1141, 1159.

<sup>204</sup> See *Women and Marriage*, p. 377.

Meath's defence.<sup>205</sup> Úa Conchobair then disregarded the agreement, and managed to bring Meath into his wider domain, as we have seen. He also used that opportunity to celebrate the *Óenach Tailten*. This festival, which had been last recorded during a celebration by Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill in 1007, was reserved for kings of Ireland, so it announced Úa Conchobair's intentions.

Similarly, Úa Conchobair commissioned the Cross of Cong in 1123, a piece which has been described as 'the most important surviving piece of Irish 12th-century metalwork'.<sup>206</sup> It was made to enshrine a piece of the True Cross,<sup>207</sup> and it was inscribed with the words 'A prayer for Tairdelbach Ua Conchobair, king of Ireland, by whom was made this ornament'.<sup>208</sup> It was therefore in the early 1120s that Úa Conchobair advertised his still shaky ascendancy, and described himself as king of Ireland.

He also flirted with the idea of detaching Airgíalla from Uí Néill hegemony. After partitioning Meath in 1125, he installed Domnall Úa Cerbaill as king of Airgíalla, according to one set of annals.<sup>209</sup> This may have been partly inspired by Domnall Mac Lochlainn's death in 1121, after which The North was a less cohesive entity.<sup>210</sup>

Unfortunately for Úa Conchobair, his Úa Cerbaill client king was killed almost

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<sup>205</sup> The 'false peace' was made after the restoration of Úa Máel Sechlainn by Mac Lochlainn, i.e. with two separate interventions by Úa Conchobair, one to depose Úa Máel Sechlainn, and a later attack after Úa Máel Sechlainn's restoration, when Úa Conchobair celebrated the *Óenach Tailten*. See *A.F.M.* 1120.3; *A.U.* 1120.1; *Ann. Tig.* 1120.5; *A.L.C.* 1120.1. *Ann. Inisf.* 1120.5; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1120.3, 1120.5.

<sup>206</sup> Griffin Murray, 'Cross of Cong' on Grove Art Online, accessed online (<https://doi-org.jproxy.nuim.ie/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.article.T2220294>) (20 June 2021).

<sup>207</sup> See *Ann. Tig.* 1123.1: 'Christ's Cross in Ireland this year, and a great tribute was given to it by the king of Ireland, Toirdhealbhach Ó Conchobhair, and he asked for some of it to keep in Ireland, and it was granted to him, and it was enshrined by him at Roscommon', from the Irish '*Croch Crist a n-Erinn isin bliadain-sin, co tucadh mor-chuairt di la rí g n-Ereinn .i. la Tairrdelbach h-Úa Concobair, 7 cor' chuindigh ni di d' fhasadh a n-Erinn, 7 ro leced do, 7 do cumdaighedh laís h-í a Ros Coman*'.

<sup>208</sup> From the Irish, '*or[óit] do therrdel[buch] u choncho[bair] do rí g erend lasa nderrnad in gres sa*'. See the National Museum of Ireland website ([https://www.museum.ie/en-IE/Collections-Research/Irish-Antiquities-Division-Collections/Collections-List-\(1\)/Early-Medieval/The-Cross-of-Cong](https://www.museum.ie/en-IE/Collections-Research/Irish-Antiquities-Division-Collections/Collections-List-(1)/Early-Medieval/The-Cross-of-Cong)) (20 June 2021).

<sup>209</sup> *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1125.2.

<sup>210</sup> See The Uí Néill and the North, pp 147–52.



immediately, perhaps during a raid of Meath, and the king of Connacht made no further efforts establish control of that province.<sup>211</sup>

When Úa Conchobair was at the nadir of his fortunes, the Meic Lochlainn tried to eat into his domain. In 1131 they conspired with Munster, under Cormac Mac Cárthaig, to invade Connacht at the same time.<sup>212</sup> Both prongs of this invasion were defeated, but in 1132 Conchobar Mac Lochlainn managed to secure the submission of Tigernán Úa Ruairc, detaching Uí Briúin Bréifne from Connacht.<sup>213</sup>

In general, Connacht and the North alike were satisfied with peaceful co-existence. This is most obvious in the marriages they contracted,<sup>214</sup> but also in the fact that Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair submitted to Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn in 1150, when the latter was advancing his own credible claim to national kingship.<sup>215</sup> Mac Lochlainn awarded him with a share in a partition of Meath shortly afterwards, probably in the west considering its direct strategic importance. It was only after the Battle of Móin Móir, which saw Úa Conchobair re-establish his dominance over Munster, that the relationship between Connacht and the North began to break down.

Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn brought an army across Assaroe into Connacht in 1151, shortly after Úa Conchobair's victory at Móin Móir. Prudently, Úa Conchobair did not oppose him on this occasion, but gave up hostages instead.<sup>216</sup> Diarmait Mac Murchada also sent hostages to Mac Lochlainn, who was clearly alarmed by the change in the balance of power.<sup>217</sup> In 1152 as well, 'A meeting took place between Mac Lochlainn and

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<sup>211</sup> *Misc.Ir.Annals* 1125.3.

<sup>212</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1131.3; *Chron. Scot.* 1131.3.

<sup>213</sup> *A.F.M.* 1132.6.

<sup>214</sup> See *Women and Marriage*, pp 406–7.

<sup>215</sup> *A.F.M.* 1150.15.

<sup>216</sup> *A.F.M.* 1150.15.

<sup>217</sup> *A.F.M.* 1151.16; *Ann. Tig.* 1151.5.

Toirdhealbhach Ua Conchobhair at Magh-Ene, where they made friendship under the Staff of Jesus, and under the relics of Colum-Cille'.<sup>218</sup>

Ultimately, their relationship could not survive the strain placed upon it by Úa Conchobair's newfound power. Mac Lochlainn chose to help Toirdelbach Úa Briain in 1153, after the latter left Munster in search of a supporter. Mac Lochlainn defeated Úa Conchobair in the major engagement of that year and Toirdelbach Úa Briain returned to Munster, but this victory was not lasting. Before long, Úa Briain found it expedient to submit to Úa Conchobair again, repudiating Mac Lochlainn in the process.<sup>219</sup> At the same time, Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair was unable to defeat Mac Lochlainn outright. The king of Connacht died in 1156, and it was therefore left to his son Ruaidrí to resolve this situation.

### [1.3: Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair's kingship]

The comment in *A.F.M.* that 'The kingdom of Connaught was assumed by Ruaidhri, son of Toirdhealbhach Ua Conchobhair, without any opposition' is somewhat undermined by the very next entry, which records that 'The three sons of Toirdhealbhach Ua Conchobhair, Brian Breifneach, Brian Luighneach, and Muircheartach Muimhneach, were taken prisoners by the Sil-Muireadhaigh, and given into the custody of Ruaidhri, son of Toirdhealbhach'.<sup>220</sup>

Toirdelbach had at least twenty-two sons, so it is not surprising that Ruaidrí had brothers who could threaten him.<sup>221</sup> For many years, Toirdelbach's favourite son had been Conchobar, whom he had positioned to succeed him. This included Conchobar's

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<sup>218</sup> *A.F.M.* 1152.8: 'Comdhál etir Ua Lachlainn, & Toirdhealbhach Ua Conchobhair i Maigh Ene, co n-dernsat caradradh fo Bhachail Iosa, & ro mhiondaibh Cholaim Chille'.

<sup>219</sup> *A.F.M.* 1156.7; *Ann. Tig.* 1156.1.

<sup>220</sup> *A.F.M.* 1156.10: 'Ríge Connacht do ghabháil do Ruaidri, mac Toirdealbaig Uí Concobair, gan nach freasabhra', 1156.11: 'rí mic Toirdhealbhaigh Uí Concobhair, Brian Breifneach, Brian Luighneach, & Muircheartach Muimhneach do érghabháil lá Siol Muireadhaig, & a t-tabhairt for chomus Ruaidri mic Toirdhealbhaigh'.

<sup>221</sup> See *Women and Marriage*, pp 406–8; see also *Mac Fhirbhisigh's Book*, i, §219.16, pp 486–487; Seamus Prender (ed.), 'The O Clery book of genealogies 23 D 17 (R.I.A.)', in *Analecta Hibernica*, no. 18 (1951), pp ix, xi–xxxiii, 1–198, at §894, p. 102.

imposition in the kingships of Dublin and Leinster in 1126, and in Meath in 1143, where he was killed, as we have seen. He also led the Síl Muiredaig and Uí Maine on military expeditions in the 1130s and '40s.<sup>222</sup>

Ruaidrí, by contrast, was distrusted by Toirdelbach while Conchobar was alive. In 1136, for example, Ruaidrí was imprisoned by his father, as was Uada Úa Concenainn of Uí Diarmata (a subdivision of Síl Muiredaig).<sup>223</sup> This was a year of much intrigue in the province; an Úa Conchobair dynast was lured to his death through a false offer of regional kingship, for example, while Toirdelbach actually blinded one of his sons, Áed, known from then on as 'Áed dall' or 'blind Áed'.<sup>224</sup> Úa Concenainn himself was also blinded by Toirdelbach after his imprisonment, so while we do not know why Toirdelbach had the two men arrested, it is evident that Ruaidrí was lucky to escape this fate.<sup>225</sup>

Ruaidrí was arrested again in 1143, by Conchobar on Toirdelbach's orders on this occasion.<sup>226</sup> Again, it is unclear why Ruaidrí was arrested or what his father and brother had in store for him. Their plans were rendered moot by Conchobar's assassination, after which Ruaidrí was released, with his ecclesiastical allies receiving the credit in the annals.<sup>227</sup> Conchobar's death was clearly a godsend for Ruaidrí, as was the death of another brother, Tadc, from disease.<sup>228</sup>

By 1146 Ruaidrí was leading troops,<sup>229</sup> and by 1153 at the latest, when he led the battalions of west Connacht in battle against Mac Lochlainn, he was Toirdelbach's clear favourite.<sup>230</sup> Some other sons remained active in political life, with varying results. Domnall was apparently not considered a threat by Ruaidrí despite having an active

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<sup>222</sup> *A.F.M.* 1135.21, 1142.15.

<sup>223</sup> *A.F.M.* 1136.23; *Ann. Tig.* 1136.2.

<sup>224</sup> *A.F.M.* 1136.11, 1136.14; *Ann. Tig.* 1136.1, 1136.7; *A.L.C.* 1136.4.

<sup>225</sup> *A.F.M.* 1137.10; *Ann. Tig.* 1138.1.

<sup>226</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1143.5; *Chron. Scot.* 1143.3; *Ann. Clon.* 1139; *A.F.M.* 1143.12.

<sup>227</sup> *A.F.M.* 1144.8; *Ann. Tig.* 1144.7.

<sup>228</sup> *A.F.M.* 1144.6; *Ann. Tig.* 1144.6, 1145.1; *Chron. Scot.* 1144.2.

<sup>229</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1146.7.

<sup>230</sup> *A.F.M.* 1153.13; *Ann. Tig.* 1153.7.

profile, for instance, but, as we have seen, Ruaidrí did arrest three of his brothers upon his accession. One of these men, Brian Brefnach, was eventually blinded.<sup>231</sup>

These precautionary arrests aside, the new king of Connacht was more concerned with affairs outside his province. For the first decade after his accession, this meant a contest with Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn for national supremacy. This was a war he would win, partly thanks to his greater finesse in political management. Indeed, in several areas Ruaidrí surpassed his father's achievements, as well as those of the king of the North.

One example is his management of Uí Briúin Bréifne. As discussed above, the relationship between Tigernán Úa Ruairc and Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair deteriorated markedly after 1132.<sup>232</sup> As a deputy of Toirdelbach's, Ruaidrí had also been involved in this conflict, raiding Uí Briúin Bréifne in 1146.<sup>233</sup> As king, he took a different approach. He met with Úa Ruairc in 1159 and formed an alliance.<sup>234</sup> While its terms are not recorded, it proved long-lasting, mutually beneficial, and crucial to the course of events until Úa Ruairc's death in 1172.

Their alliance had immediate implications for Meath. Ruaidrí at once built a bridge at Athlone, in the tradition established by Toirdelbach, and was opposed militarily by Donnchad Úa Máel Sechlainn.<sup>235</sup> This represented an important shift in the political dynamic. Donnchad had, as recently as 1158, fled to Connacht when Tigernán Úa Ruairc had imposed his half-brother Diarmait Úa Máel Sechlainn as king of Meath.<sup>236</sup> The alliance between Úa Ruairc and Úa Conchobair meant that Connacht would no longer support Donnchad's claim to kingship of Meath, as was immediately apparent to the latter. Instead, they would support Úa Ruairc's client, Diarmait Úa Máel Sechlainn.

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<sup>231</sup> *A.F.M.* 1156.12; *Ann. Tig.* 1156.7.

<sup>232</sup> See above, pp 56–7.

<sup>233</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1146.7.

<sup>234</sup> *A.F.M.* 1159.10; *Ann. Clon.* 1159.

<sup>235</sup> *A.F.M.* 1159.11, 1159.12; *Ann. Tig.* 1159.6, 1159.14; *Ann. Clon.* 1159.

<sup>236</sup> *A.F.M.* 1158.17.

Ruaidrí insisted on his prerogatives in Munster throughout his conflict with Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn for the kingship of Ireland. He went to Munster again in 1157, for example, and affirmed the partition of the province under Toirdelbach Uí Briain and Diarmait Mac Cárthaig.<sup>237</sup> He would receive further confirmations of his suzerainty with submission offered to him by the Uí Briain in 1160, 1161, 1166, and 1167.<sup>238</sup> They also provided a military contingent for the Battle of Ardee in 1159.<sup>239</sup>

The Meic Cárthaig were in a similar situation, though they were clearly secondary in importance to Connacht. For example, in 1157, Diarmait Mac Cárthaig gave Uía Conchobair hostages, but it was strangely remarked that they ‘were to fall to him [Uía Conchobair], unless Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn should come to defend them’.<sup>240</sup> The Meic Cárthaig did not provide a contingent to support Uía Conchobair at Ardee in 1159 either.<sup>241</sup> Therefore, when Mac Lochlainn tried to compromise with Uía Conchobair in 1161 and allowed him an overlordship beyond Connacht, ‘the half of Munster’ he intended was certainly Thomond.<sup>242</sup>

In the midst of their contest, the Battle of Ardee in 1159 stands out for being, to borrow a famous expression from the historiography of a more modern period, ‘a turning point that failed to turn’.<sup>243</sup> It saw Mac Lochlainn inflict a major defeat on Uía Conchobair, and the list of casualties from Connacht and Uí Briúin Bréifne suggests it was a particularly bloody battle.<sup>244</sup> The importance of the victory was not lost on Muirchertach and his men, who ‘returned to their houses with victory and exultation’.<sup>245</sup> Mac Lochlainn also followed up his victory with a quick campaign in Connacht, where he ‘burned Dun-mor,

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<sup>237</sup> *A.F.M.* 1157.12; *Ann. Clon.* 1153.

<sup>238</sup> *A.F.M.* 1160.23, 1161.7, 1166.15, 1167.11; *Ann. Tig.* 1160.12, 1166.19.

<sup>239</sup> *A.F.M.* 1159.13; *A.U.* 1159.3; *Ann. Tig.* 1159.6

<sup>240</sup> *A.F.M.* 1157.12; *Ann. Clon.* 1153.

<sup>241</sup> *A.F.M.* 1159.13; *A.U.* 1159.3; *Ann. Tig.* 1159.6.

<sup>242</sup> *A.F.M.* 1161.9: ‘*leithe Mumhan*’; *A.U.* 1161.4.

<sup>243</sup> G.M. Tevelyan, *British history in the nineteenth century and after* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., London, 1937), p. 292.

<sup>244</sup> *A.F.M.* 1159.13; *A.U.* 1159.3; *Ann. Tig.* 1159.10; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1158.3.

<sup>245</sup> *A.F.M.* 1159.13: ‘*7 ro soisgt iar sin Conaill 7 Eoghain im Muircertach dia t-tíghibh co c-cosccar 7 comhmaoidhēmh*’.

Dun-Ciarraighe, Dun-na-nGall, and destroyed a great part of the country generally’, and subsequently ‘Another army was led by Mac Lochlainn, into Meath, to expel Ua Ruairc’.<sup>246</sup>

Perhaps as a result of problems within his own province, Mac Lochlainn was unable to capitalise in the longer term. He met *Úa Conchobair* at Assaroe in 1160, but parted without the king of Connacht’s submission.<sup>247</sup> It may have been with this failure in mind that Mac Lochlainn brought his army south shortly afterwards, ‘for the purpose of taking the hostages of the men of Meath and the men of Breifne’.<sup>248</sup> This proved to be another failure, as ‘An army was led by Ruaidhri Ua Conchobhair to Magh-Gartchon, to relieve Tighearnan Ua Ruairc, lord of Breifne, and Diarmaid Ua Maeleachlainn, King of Meath. But God separated them, without battle or conflict, without peace, without armistice’.<sup>249</sup>

As alluded to above, Mac Lochlainn compromised with *Úa Conchobair* in 1161, and it was a deal in which he made considerable concessions. He recognised *Úa Conchobair* as suzerain of Thomond and west Meath, while he retained Desmond and east Meath (in addition to his other provinces).<sup>250</sup> Incredibly, notwithstanding the new arrangement, Mac Lochlainn’s subsequent attempt to expel *Úa Ruairc* from east Meath in 1161 was unsuccessful as well.<sup>251</sup> By allowing *Úa Conchobair* an overlordship beyond Connacht, Mac Lochlainn fatally undermined his own kingship of Ireland.

It took some years for this to become manifest. Notice of a forthcoming challenge was given by Ruaidrí in 1165 when he took Mac Cárthaig’s hostages, but it was not until 1166 that this began in earnest.<sup>252</sup> Capitalising on Mac Lochlainn’s difficulties with

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<sup>246</sup> A.F.M. 1159.14: ‘*ro loiscset Dún Mór, Dún Ciarraighe, Dún na n-Gall, 7 ro mhillsset mór don tír archena*’, 1159.15: ‘*Shuaighedh ele bheós lá h-Ua Lachlainn i Mídhe do ionnarbadh Uí Ruairc*’.

<sup>247</sup> A.F.M. 1160.21.

<sup>248</sup> A.F.M. 1160.22: ‘*ar dhaigh Fēr Midhe 7 Fēr m-Breifne do ghabháil*’.

<sup>249</sup> A.F.M. 1160.22: ‘*Sloighedh lá Ruaidhri Ua c-Conchobhair co Magh n-Gartchon h-i foirithin Tighearnáin Uí Ruairc, tigherna Breifne, 7 Dhiarmada Uí Mhaoileachlainn, rí Mídhe. Acht ro deiligh Dia gan cath, gan cathrae, gan sídh, gan osadh*’.

<sup>250</sup> A.F.M. 1161.9; A.U. 1161.4.

<sup>251</sup> A.F.M. 1161.9; A.U. 1161.4

<sup>252</sup> A.F.M. 1165.7; *Ann. Tig.* 1165.11; *Ann. Inisf.* 1165.7; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1164.2.

Airgialla and Ulaid, Úa Conchobair performed a blitzkrieg tour of Ireland, taking the hostages of Donnchad Úa Cerbaill in Airgíalla, the Hiberno-Norse in Dublin, Diarmait Mac Murchada in Leinster, and Donnchad Mac Gilla Phátraig in Osraige along the way.<sup>253</sup>

He paused back in Connacht for just four days before he invaded the Northern Uí Néill with Úa Ruairc and Úa Cerbaill to complete the takeover.<sup>254</sup> Úa Conchobair targeted the Cenél Conaill, while Úa Ruairc, accompanied by Úa Cerbaill, attacked Mac Lochlainn's own Cenél nEógain. They defeated Mac Lochlainn, who seems to have been deserted by most of his men, and one of Úa Ruairc's soldiers killed him.<sup>255</sup>

From that moment until the English invasion, Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair was peerless among the kings of Ireland. During that time, 1166–69, he held a series of conventions where he established the terms of his national kingship. He also intervened in Munster and Meath when assassinations in those provinces threatened to de-stabilise them. Short as this period was, it was the first time since Brian Bóraime that the number of major kingdoms had been reduced to one.

The *túarastal* awarded by Ruaidrí reflect his interest in maintaining a comprehensive kingship of Ireland. These payments, the acceptance of which constituted submission to an overlord, are illustrative of Ruaidrí's priorities. Like hostages and tribute, *túarastal* were an essential part of the symbology of royal authority. They did not originate with Ruaidrí, of course, but by virtue of his dominance he had an unusual number of important subordinates whose honour and prestige demanded significant and mutually comparable payments.

Middle-Irish literature shows concern with the *túarastal* owed to subordinate kings, and other issues of financial importance, like tribute and honour-price. This is not to say that

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<sup>253</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1166.1.

<sup>254</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1166.2.

<sup>255</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1166.3.

there was an agreed scheme; on the contrary, the amounts paid varied wildly according to time and place. The Book of Rights, which seems to be a compilation of often contradictory texts, is a classic example of this literary genre; it details not only *túarastal* owed, but also the other social prerogatives of the various kings. For instance, in one passage it states that ‘The king of Ailech [Northern Uí Néill], when he is not king of Ireland, is himself entitled to sit beside the king of Ireland at a drinking-bout and at an assembly and to precede the king of Ireland at transactions, councils, and petitions’.<sup>256</sup>

Another text, the *Boroma Laigen*, which is preserved in the Book of Leinster and the Book of Lecan, deals primarily with the tribute owed the king of Ireland by the kings of Leinster. It also shows an interest in the *éric* fine imposed by Tuathal Techtmar, king of Ireland, on the Leinster men, for the killing of his daughters. The *éric* payment, which was related to honour-price or *eineach*, was exaggerated by orders of magnitude in this tale. It included, for example, ‘thrice five thousand cows’ and ‘thrice five thousand swine’.<sup>257</sup> The resonance of such matters during Ruaidrí’s reign will soon become apparent.<sup>258</sup>

Ruaidrí’s first award of *túarastal* in 1166 came before Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn’s death, at least according to one source. While at Dublin, he was ‘inaugurated king as honourably as any king of the Gaoidhil was ever inaugurated; and he presented their stipends [*túarastal*] to the foreigners in many cows, for he levied a tax of four thousand cows upon the men of Ireland for them’.<sup>259</sup> This was both an enormous amount and a

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<sup>256</sup> Myles Dillon (ed.), *Lebor na Cert – the Book of Rights* (Dublin, 1962), pp 64–5: ‘*Dligid didiu rí Ailig fodesin in tan nach fa rí for Éirind leath-láim rig Éirind ac ól 7 ac aenach 7 remimthús rig Éirind i coraib 7 i comairlib 7 impidib*’.

<sup>257</sup> Stokes, ‘The Boroma’, in *Revue Celtique*, xiii (1892), pp 32–117 at 41: ‘*Tri choicait cét bó*’, ‘*tri cóicait cét muc*’.

<sup>258</sup> For another example of Middle-Irish literature concerned with payments that establish submission or hierarchy, see Elizabeth Boyle and Liam Breatnach, ‘Seanchas Gall Átha Clíath: aspects of the cult of St Patrick in the twelfth century’, in Carey, Kevin Murray and Caitríona Ó Dochartaigh (eds) *Sacred Histories. A Festschrift for Máire Herbert* (Dublin, 2015), pp 22–55, especially §§ 8–10 & 29–34, pp 37, 40, 43, 44–5.

<sup>259</sup> A.F.M. 1166.13



substantial increase, since Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn had paid 1,200 cows as Dublin's *túarastal* in 1154.<sup>260</sup>

Before the end of 1166, Ruaidrí convened a meeting at Athlone, 'on account of stipend'.<sup>261</sup> The 4,000 cow *túarastal* of Dublin was either confirmed or proposed for the first time; *Ann. Tig.* mentions it for the first time in relation to the convention at Athlone, whereas *A.F.M.* places it at Ruaidrí's first campaign in 1166.<sup>262</sup> Various other payments were also made. For example, it is said in the same entry in *Ann. Tig.* that 240 cows and 200 coloured garments were given to the Cenél Conaill, and 300 cows to Úa Cerbaill, king of Airgíalla.<sup>263</sup>

In 1167 Ruaidrí led an enormous army into Cenél nEógain, and the Cenél nEógain submitted 'through the felicity of Ruaidhri Ua Concobair and of the Men of Ireland likewise', indicating a substantial *túarastal*.<sup>264</sup> The next year, 1168, they again submitted to Ruaidrí at Athlone, 'and they carried gold, raiment, and many cows with them to their houses'.<sup>265</sup> It was rare for the Cenél nEógain and Cenél Conaill to submit to any outsider, so the payments in 1167 and '68 were probably considerable.

A meeting convened by Ruaidrí at Tlachta in 1167 saw kings (and ecclesiastical leaders) from across Ireland gather in one place and subsequently separate, 'in peace and amity, without battle or controversy, or without any one complaining of another at that meeting, in consequence of the prosperousness of the king, who had assembled these chiefs with their forces at one place'.<sup>266</sup> There are further examples too: Úa Conchobair escorted

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<sup>260</sup> *A.F.M.* 1154.13.

<sup>261</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1166.20: '*a l-los tuarastail*'.

<sup>262</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1166.20; *A.F.M.* 1166.13.

<sup>263</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1166.20.

<sup>264</sup> *A.U.* 1167.2: '*tria rath Ruaidhrí h-Ui Concobair & Fer n-Erenn archena*'.

<sup>265</sup> *A.F.M.* 1168.23: '& rucsat ór & édach & bú iomdha leó dia t-ticchibh'.

<sup>266</sup> *A.F.M.* 1166.10: '*Ro scarsat sein iar sin fó shídh, & fo chaoín-loisi gan ughra gan agra gan athchosan nech for a chéle isin comhdháil tré rath an rígh ro thionóil na maithe-sin cona slóghaibh go h-aoin-ionadh*'. It will be noted that the term translated in *A.U.* 1167.2 as 'through the felicity of Ruaidhrí Ua Concobair', is the same term translated here as 'in consequence of the prosperity of the king', i.e. '*tria rath Ruaidhrí h-Ui Concobair*', or '*tré rath an rígh*'.

Mac Cárthaig home through Thomond in 1167, ‘with many jewels and riches’.<sup>267</sup> In fact he presented Diarmait Mac Cárthaig with his father’s sword, while he gave Muirchertach Úa Briain his father’s drinking horn.<sup>268</sup>

Throughout these years the continued importance of the Connacht–Bréifne–Meath axis is apparent. For example, the meetings organised by Úa Conchobair were all held in Meath or its environs: Athlone in 1166, Tlachta (Hill of Ward) in 1167, Ochainn (Faughan Hill) in 1168, and Tara in 1169. Tigernán Úa Ruairc was also present on every occasion, and the fact that he was not named among the recipients of *túarastal* reflects the closeness of his alliance with Úa Conchobair.<sup>269</sup> He continued to be essential to the king of Connacht’s supremacy, as would be shown repeatedly in the military campaigns of these and subsequent years. Indeed, the fact that Meath and Bréifne were now considered the core of Connacht’s overlordship (like Leth Moga for Munster and the North for the Northern Uí Néill) is confirmed by an entry in *Ann. Tig.* under 1166, where Úa Conchobair, Úa Ruairc, and Úa Máel Sechlainn are described as ‘the nobles of Connacht’.<sup>270</sup>

In one respect, this axis informed the payments of *túarastal*. Of course, the specific numbers and types of *túarastal* paid in general are dubious – for example, it is stated in one account that the Cenél Conaill received 240 cows and 200 garments,<sup>271</sup> but in another that they received only 160 cows, along with gold and clothing.<sup>272</sup> Similarly, Mac Gilla Phátraig, king of Osraige, is recorded to have received 240 cows,<sup>273</sup> but elsewhere twenty-five horses.<sup>274</sup>

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<sup>267</sup> *A.F.M.* 1167.11: ‘*ro iodhnaic Ua Conchobhair tigherna Deasmhumhan, cona sochraide dar Tuadmhumhain fo dheas go h-Aine Cliach go sédaibh & mainibh iomdha leó*’.

<sup>268</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1167.4.

<sup>269</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1166.20, 1168.1, 1168.3; *A.F.M.* 1167.10, 1168.12, 1168.13, 1169.10, 1169.11.

<sup>270</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1166.1: ‘*co mathaib Connacht*’.

<sup>271</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1166.20.

<sup>272</sup> *A.U.* 1166.12.

<sup>273</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1166.1.

<sup>274</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1166.20.

All the same, the payments made to Dublin and to the leaders of Uí Fáeláin and Uí Failge in north Leinster stand out as especially notable. We have already noted that the Hiberno-Norse community of Dublin received 4,000 cows; Uí Fáeláin and Uí Failge received 240 cows each, despite being merely regional kings. This makes more sense when considered alongside Diarmait Uí Máel Sechlainn's obituaries of 1169. He was described in *Ann. Tig.* as 'king of Meath and most of Leinster', and in *A.F.M.* as 'Diarmaid Ua Maelseachlainn, King of Meath, of the foreigners of Ath-clíath, of Uí-Failghe, and Uí-Faelain'.<sup>275</sup>

The case that the *túarastal* offered Dublin 1166 was a demonstration of its increasing importance of Dublin as a national 'capital' is not entirely undermined by this evidence, though it is impacted.<sup>276</sup> It appears that the direct context of these substantial payments was a decision by Ruaidrí Uí Conchobair to link the kingship of Meath to territories that were traditionally associated with Leinster. This lends weight to the idea that the payment to Dublin was made after Diarmait Mac Murchada left Ireland, and therefore at the convention at Athlone rather than on Ruaidrí's first campaign in 1166.

There were other matters of financial importance. Two regicides in subject provinces, both in 1168, offered Ruaidrí opportunities to extract an income to offset his new expenditure. The first of these was the killing of Murchad Uí Finnalláin, king of Delbna in Meath, by the king of Meath Diarmait Uí Máel Sechlainn. Uí Finnalláin's safety had been guaranteed by both Uí Conchobair and Uí Cerbaill at an earlier date.<sup>277</sup> Following his assassination, Uí Conchobair immediately held a convention at Ochainn (Faughan Hill), as mentioned above, and demanded that an *éric* be paid to the Delbna, and a further

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<sup>275</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1169.5: 'Diarmuit h-Úa Mael Sechlainn, rí Midhi 7 urmóir Laigen'; *A.F.M.* 1169.4: 'Diarmaid Ua Maoil Seachlainn, rí Mídhe 7 Gall Atha Cliath, Ua Failghe, 7 Ua f-Faoláin'.

<sup>276</sup> Duffy, 'Ireland's Hastings: the Anglo-Norman conquest of Dublin', in Christopher Harper Bill (ed.), *Anglo-Norman Studies XX* (Woodbridge, 1998), pp 6–85 at 80; For a discussion of Dublin's importance to all kings of Ireland in this period, see *Comparative Analysis*, pp 463–6.

<sup>277</sup> *A.F.M.* 1168.12.

payment to himself and Úa Cerbaill in satisfaction of their *eineach* or honour. This extra payment amounted to either 700 or 800 cows, a very substantial sum.<sup>278</sup>

The other killing occurred in Munster. Muirchertach mac Toirdebaigh Uí Briain, king of Thomond, was killed by a wide-reaching conspiracy, which included the grandson of Conchobar Úa Briain and the sons of Muirchertach Mac Cárthaig. Quite a few of the conspirators, including the Úa Briain dynast, were immediately killed by Úa Faeláin of the Déise, ‘who did this deed for Ruaidhri Ua Conchobhair’.<sup>279</sup>

Once again the payment of *éric*, which would have been considered satisfied by the death of the conspirators, was deemed insufficient by Úa Conchobair.<sup>280</sup> He invaded Munster and extracted 720 cows from the Meic Cárthaig as an additional payment to himself, just as he had done in Meath.<sup>281</sup> There is some ambiguity here since roughly the same payment (700–800 cows) was made to Úa Conchobair alone in one case (for Úa Briain’s assassination) and to Úa Conchobair and Úa Cerbaill together in the other (for Úa Finnalláin’s). Nonetheless, the two payments were clearly analogous.

Flanagan equated them with the *forbach flatha* or ‘lord’s portion’, which was the share of compensation legally due a lord for injuries against his client, and which usually amounted to one third.<sup>282</sup> The example of Muirchertach Úa Briain having imposed a fine of fifty cows as *forbach flatha* for the murder of Áed Úa Conchobair in 1092 contrasts sharply enough with the huge payments demanded by Ruaidrí to show something had changed significantly, even if the law-texts still provided the underlying rationale.<sup>283</sup>

The only fly in the ointment was Leinster. As we saw, Úa Conchobair took Mac Murchada’s hostages and left him in situ as king during his first circuit of Ireland in

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<sup>278</sup> A.F.M. 1168.12.

<sup>279</sup> A.F.M. 1168.8: ‘*bá do Ruaidhri Ua c-Concobhair do-roine-siumh an gniomh h-ishin.*’

<sup>280</sup> Consider the evidence of the attempted assassination of Tigernán Úa Ruairc in 1148, of which it was said that ‘Ó Ruairc’s *eric* was exacted from the *Connhaicne* as they were killed’ (*Ann. Tig.* 1148.1: ‘*eraic h-í Ruairc do búain do Connaicnib amal ro marbtais*’).

<sup>281</sup> A.F.M. 1168.8, 1168.18; A.U. 1168.1, 1168.3.

<sup>282</sup> Flanagan, *Irish society*, pp 238–240.

<sup>283</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1092.3, 1093.8.

1166.<sup>284</sup> After Mac Lochlainn's execution, Tigernán Úa Ruairc launched his own campaign against Leinster, supported by Diarmait Úa Máel Sechlainn and the Hiberno-Norse of Dublin.<sup>285</sup> Seeing some of his own men turn against him and fearing they would 'sell him to Ua Ruairc', Mac Murchada fled from Ireland and sought help from Henry II of England.<sup>286</sup>

When Mac Murchada returned in 1167, he brought only a small force of foreign mercenaries, and they were easily defeated by Úa Conchobair and his army.<sup>287</sup> Úa Conchobair then tried to establish terms by which Mac Murchada could be rehabilitated. Mac Murchada was forced to pay Úa Ruairc 100 ounces of gold in satisfaction of the latter's *eineach*, and 'in compensation for his wife'.<sup>288</sup> In return, he was allowed to remain in Ireland and to hold kingship of Uí Chennselaig, but not of Leinster.<sup>289</sup>

The fragile peace was broken by the arrival of more Anglo-Norman adventurers in 1169, and the use to which Mac Murchada quickly put them. As in 1167, Úa Conchobair invaded Leinster, accompanied by Úa Ruairc and also by Úa Máel Sechlainn, who was styled more simply 'King of Teamhair' on this occasion.<sup>290</sup> Again, Ruaidrí showed himself to be committed to a peaceful solution, and he offered terms after demonstrating his military superiority.

Mac Murchada was to receive recognition of his restoration to the provincial kingship, and a daughter of Ruaidrí's in marriage. In return he was to accept Ruaidrí's overlordship, to send home his foreign mercenaries, and to give up hostages.<sup>291</sup> This agreement was more equitable than that of 1167, but it also had its limits; Mac Murchada

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<sup>284</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1166.1.

<sup>285</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1166.13.

<sup>286</sup> *The Deeds*, p. 58 l. 211: 'A O Roric liverer e vendre'.

<sup>287</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1167.5.

<sup>288</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1167.5: 'i l-lógh a mna'

<sup>289</sup> *A.F.M.* 1167.13; *Ann. Tig.* 1167.5.

<sup>290</sup> *A.F.M.* 1169.11: 'rí Tēmhrach'.

<sup>291</sup> *A.F.M.* 1169.11; *Ann. Tig.* 1169.2; Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 50–51.

was again the king of most of Leinster, but not of Uí Fáeláin, Uí Failge, or Dublin, which remained attached to Meath.

That Ruaidrí grasped the gravity of the situation is confirmed by the hostages he took. They included Diarmait's son and prospective heir, Conchobar, and members of Diarmait's own foster-family, the Uí Chaellaighe. In other words, Ruaidrí incentivised Diarmait with the prospect of acceptance back into the national hierarchy, and the threat of death to some of his closest family if he did not comply.

Despite these substantial safeguards, Diarmait abandoned the treaty and campaigned again in 1170, following the arrival of yet more English supporters. Most important among this group was Richard de Clare, also known as 'Strongbow'. Waterford fell to de Clare with no delay upon his arrival in Ireland in August 1170, and following this de Clare and Mac Murchada combined forces, turning their attentions to Dublin.<sup>292</sup>

Úa Conchobair's plan was to anticipate and cut off the approaches Mac Murchada and the English were likely to take, in the forest passes south of Dublin, and so prevent any siege taking place. This failed, since Mac Murchada's scouts informed him of the position of Úa Conchobair's men, and he was able to guide his forces over open and mountainous ground to the outskirts of the town.<sup>293</sup>

The Dubliners decided to come to terms with the army now surrounding them, but they were still negotiating when a surprise attack overwhelmed their defences. The king of Dublin, Ascall Mac Turcail, took to the sea in flight.<sup>294</sup> According to *The Deeds*, Úa Conchobair had withdrawn once the town was surrounded, leaving the Hiberno-Norse to fend for themselves; his plan to ambush the English and Mac Murchada in the forest

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<sup>292</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 64–67; *The Deeds*, pp 91–92 ll 1504–1518.

<sup>293</sup> *The Deeds*, pp 93–94 ll 1574–1597; Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 66–67.

<sup>294</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 68–68; *The Deeds*, p. 96 ll 1688–1697; *A.F.M.* 1170.13; *A.U.* 1170.3, 1170.5; *Ann. Tig.* 1170.10; *A.L.C.* 1170.4; *Ann. Inisf.* 1170.4.

passes having failed.<sup>295</sup> On the other hand, the Irish annals suggest that Úa Conchobair offered open battle to Mac Murchada for several days before withdrawing.<sup>296</sup>

Following the successful conquest of Dublin, Mac Murchada argued for attacks on Úa Ruairc's territory, and a significant expedition was launched into Meath and Bréifne, doing widespread damage.<sup>297</sup> Mac Murchada also attacked Uí Fáeláin at this time, presumably because they remained associated with Meath.<sup>298</sup> And here we arrive at the sequence of events with which this thesis opened; Mac Murchada's campaigns had not only violated the agreement of the previous year, but they had also taken him far beyond even the most generous definition of Leinster's borders.

It was now that Úa Ruairc insisted Mac Murchada's hostages be executed as he 'had pledged his conscience that Ruaidhrí would not be king of Ireland unless they were put to death'.<sup>299</sup> This threat reflected both the danger posed by the resurgent king of Leinster, in tandem with his foreign auxiliaries, and Úa Ruairc's own importance to Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair's supremacy.

It must have also been at this moment that the siege of Dublin was planned. It was not the result of Diarmait Mac Murchada's death (around 1 May 1171), as implied in *The Deeds*, since extensive preparations were necessary.<sup>300</sup> For example, Úa Conchobair had to re-establish his authority over Thomond, as we will see in more detail below.<sup>301</sup> He also offered a financial reward to the men of the Isles for naval support of the siege.<sup>302</sup> Even so, he failed to coordinate his attack with Ascall Mac Turcaill, the ousted ruler of

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<sup>295</sup> *The Deeds*, pp 94–95 ll 1628–1637.

<sup>296</sup> *A.F.M.* 1170.13; *A.U.* 1170.3, 1170.5; *Ann. Tig.* 1170.10; *A.L.C.* 1170.4; *Ann. Inisf.* 1170.4.

<sup>297</sup> *A.F.M.* 1170.13; *Ann. Tig.* 1170.10; Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 68–9.

<sup>298</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1170.11; *A.F.M.* 1170.19.

<sup>299</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1170.14: 'tuc Ua Ruairc a chubais na budh rí Erenn Ruaidhri muna marbad íat'.

<sup>300</sup> *The Deeds*, p. 97 ll 1731a–1734.

<sup>301</sup> See below, pp 78–81.

<sup>302</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 78–79.

Dublin. Mac Turcaill attempted a comeback of his own before Úa Conchobair launched his siege, but he was defeated and executed by the English.<sup>303</sup>

Despite the Mac Turcaill's demise, the deck was stacked in Úa Conchobair's favour. As will be remembered from the introduction to this thesis, no faith can be placed in the absolute size of the armies as recorded, but they do indicate the overwhelming relative superiority of Úa Conchobair's forces and position. Indeed, his army is described in *The Deeds* as 'all the Irish of Ireland', and by Giraldus as 'an enormous number of troops', including 'almost all the princes of Ireland'.<sup>304</sup>

After the siege had been maintained for about two months, the situation came to a head abruptly. Richard de Clare offered to recognise Úa Conchobair as overlord and hold Leinster under him.<sup>305</sup> This was refused by Úa Conchobair, who made a counteroffer by which de Clare would be granted Dublin, Waterford, and Wexford under the same terms. This was accompanied by a threat to storm Dublin if de Clare refused.<sup>306</sup>

That de Clare disregarded this offer and organised a sortie from the town may be taken to mean he was at less of a military disadvantage than some sources allow. Perhaps the sortie itself ought to have been anticipated by Úa Conchobair, but it is reported that a skirmish on the morning of the battle had given the Irish the impression that fighting had concluded for the day.<sup>307</sup> All the same, it is unlikely that either Úa Conchobair or de Clare would have expected a sally to create enough panic to disperse the besieging forces. Thrown into confusion, the constituent parts of the army were led back to their home provinces by their respective kings.

Remarkably, there would be yet another siege of Dublin that year. Around the beginning of September, Tigernán Úa Ruairc led an army to the town, supported by Murchad Úa

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<sup>303</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 76–77.

<sup>304</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 78–9: 'cum infinita totius fere Hibernie princeps multitudine Dubliniam obsidione cinxerunt'.

<sup>305</sup> *The Deeds*, p. 100 ll 1831–1836.

<sup>306</sup> *The Deeds*, p. 100 ll 1847–1856.

<sup>307</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 82–83.



Cerbaill and Domnall Bregach Úa Máel Sechlainn.<sup>308</sup> The initial clash seems to have gone Úa Ruairc's way, but another unexpected sally saw Úa Ruairc's son Áed Manach killed, and the king of Bréifne was driven to flight once again.<sup>309</sup> The loss of Áed, who was Úa Ruairc's only surviving son and who was widely esteemed, was a significant blow.<sup>310</sup>

Henry II landed in Ireland on 18 October 1171.<sup>311</sup> His presence, along with the large army that accompanied him, was enough to persuade many of the Irish kings to pre-emptively acknowledge his suzerainty. Despite his determined assault on Dublin less than two months before, Úa Ruairc was among these kings.<sup>312</sup> Henry accepted Úa Ruairc's submission, which appears to have been given for Meath as well as for Bréifne.<sup>313</sup> Úa Ruairc would also seem to have been amongst the group of Irish kings who spent Christmas with Henry outside Dublin.<sup>314</sup>

Though Úa Ruairc did not live long enough to show his intentions, it is unlikely that this submission to Henry constituted a break with Úa Conchobair. At one point, Henry planned to campaign against Connacht in 1172, and that would certainly have put the king of Bréifne's allegiances to the test.<sup>315</sup> Since that did not happen, it may be safe to assume that Úa Ruairc was simply biding his time. Ultimately, Henry outmanoeuvred Úa Ruairc in this regard when he granted Meath to Hugh de Lacy on the eve of his departure in April 1172.

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<sup>308</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 90–91; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1171.4.

<sup>309</sup> *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1171.4; *A.F.M.* 1171.20; *Ann. Tig.* 1171.10; *A.L.C.* 1171.4; *A.U.* 1171.7; *Ann. Inisf.* 1171.4; Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 90–91.

<sup>310</sup> Generally called Áed 'Manach', meaning the skilled or dexterous, his obituary is widely recorded. Giraldus referred to him as 'an excellent young man' (Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 90–91).

<sup>311</sup> *Gesta*, i, p. 25; Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 94–95.

<sup>312</sup> *A.L.C.* 1171.7; *A.U.* 1171.10; Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 94–95.

<sup>313</sup> Veach, 'Henry II's grant of Meath to Hugh de Lacy in 1172: a reassessment', in *Ríocht na Midhe*, xviii (2007), pp 67–94 at 75–6; Seán Ó Hoireabhárd, 'The assassination of Tigernán Ua Ruairc, the last king of Meath' in *Peritia*, xxix (2018), pp 111–42 at 122.

<sup>314</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 94–95; *Gesta*, i, pp 28–29.

<sup>315</sup> *Gesta*, i, p. 29.

Following Henry's departure from Ireland, an arrangement was made in Dublin for a meeting between Úa Ruairc and de Lacy. At that meeting Úa Ruairc was assassinated by de Lacy's men after a brief skirmish. His body was then brought to Dublin, where it was gibbeted upside-down, while his head was set over the door of the fortress.<sup>316</sup> His death allowed de Lacy the time and space to take possession of Meath and turn it into an English lordship.

Úa Conchobair was conspicuous by his absence during these events. As we will now see, this was partly because Thomond, which was still a strategic concern, demanded his direct attention. Domnall Úa Briain, who acceded in 1168, saw Diarmait Mac Murchada's return with English support as a means to reverse his own subjection to the Uí Chonchobair. He rebelled against Ruaidrí in 1170, seeking aid from the English in Mac Murchada's camp, which they duly provided.<sup>317</sup>

Úa Briain's rebellion was an ongoing concern for Ruaidrí throughout 1170 and much of 1171. Giraldus placed the events concerned before the arrival of Richard de Clare on the 23 August 1170. In his account, the aid offered by the invaders was decisive. He wrote that with their help, Domnall Úa Briain 'was everywhere victorious after battles of varying outcome. Ruaidrí withdrew humiliated to his own territory and completely gave up his claim to the kingship. In these expeditions, as in all others, Meiler [fitz Henry] and Robert de Barry were conspicuous for their amazing valour'.<sup>318</sup>

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<sup>316</sup> *A.F.M.* 1172.4; *Ann. Tig.* 1172.8; *A.L.C.* 1172.2, 1172.3; *A.U.* 1172.2; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1173.3; Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 114–115.

<sup>317</sup> *A.F.M.* 1170.10; *Ann. Inisf.* 1170.5; Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 52–53.

<sup>318</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 52–53: '*Quorum fultus auxilio post varios conflictus ubique victoria potitus, Rotherico cum dedecore ad sua revertente, se ab eius dominatu omnino subtraxit. In etiam expeditionibus, sicut et in aliis cunctis, mira strenuitate cum Roberto Barrensi Meilerius emicuit*'. Incidentally, illustrating Giraldus's tendency to harp on particular themes, he had used almost the exact same words to praise Robert de Barry (his brother), and Meiler (a son of his grandmother) for their bravery earlier in *Expugnatio* (pp 36–37), while on campaign in Osraige; 'In these engagements, as in all others, Meiler and Robert de Barry were conspicuous amongst all the rest by reason of their praiseworthy valour', translated from the Latin, '*In his vero conflictibus, sicut et aliis cunctis, inter universos strenuitate laudabili cum Roberto Barrensi Meilerius emicuit.*'

It is difficult to reconcile Giraldus's account with others. *Ann. Inisf.* and *Ann. Tig.* place conflict between Connacht and Thomond after the fall of Dublin,<sup>319</sup> while in *A.F.M.* it appears both before and after.<sup>320</sup> More significantly still, under 1171, *A.F.M.* records that the fleet of Connacht was brought against Thomond on the Shannon and Lough Derg 'from Allhallowtide [31 October] to May-day [1 May]', a formulation which in this context clearly means from the 31 October 1170 to the 1 May 1171.<sup>321</sup>

While this was ongoing, the regional kingdoms of Connacht contributed to Úa Briain's difficulties by making extensive raids.<sup>322</sup> At the end of this period of sustained pressure, Ruaidrí succeeded in extracting hostages from Úa Briain and establishing suzerainty once again.<sup>323</sup> This is what formed the background to Úa Briain accompanying Úa Conchobair at the siege of Dublin in 1171.<sup>324</sup>

Giraldus's version of events does not appear to be reliable in this case. Even if we construe Ruaidrí's kingship, in his statement quoted above, to apply to Thomond only, it is obvious that Ruaidrí did not give up his claim of overlordship in 1170. We are also told in *The Deeds* that Meiler, who supported Úa Briain, was present when the English took Dublin on the 21 September 1170.<sup>325</sup> This makes it difficult to envision English support of Úa Briain in 1170 being of much value. The fact of Úa Briain's rebellion was important though, as was the support given it by the English, even if it amounted to little practical good.

These developments go some way to explain Ruaidrí's conduct at Dublin in 1170 and 1171. His hesitancy to force battle in 1170 may well have stemmed from a belief his forces were insufficient; he was only supported by Tigernán Úa Ruairc and Murchad Úa

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<sup>319</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1170.4, 1170.5; *Ann. Tig.* 1170.10, 1170.17, 1170.18, 1170.19.

<sup>320</sup> *A.F.M.* 1170.10, 1170.13, 1170.21, 1170.22.

<sup>321</sup> *A.F.M.* 1171.27.

<sup>322</sup> *A.F.M.* 1171.15, 1171.21, 1171.22, 1171.24.

<sup>323</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1171.5.

<sup>324</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, p. 98 ll 1756–7.

<sup>325</sup> *The Deeds*, p. 92 ll 1550–51, p. 94 1626–1627.

Cerbaill on that occasion.<sup>326</sup> Further, a defeat for Úa Conchobair at Dublin while Úa Briain was hostile would have given the king of Thomond an opportunity to do real damage to Connacht and to his wider authority. Even in 1171, having re-asserted suzerainty over Úa Briain, Úa Conchobair may have doubted his reliability as a subordinate, perhaps even preferring not to launch an all-out assault on the town for that reason.

After the Battle of Dublin, Richard de Clare hurried south to relieve fitz Stephen, who was also besieged by Irish forces at Wexford. Fitz Stephen had already been captured by the time he arrived, so de Clare set about bringing Leinster and Osraige back under his control. To this end, he enlisted Úa Briain's aid. Úa Briain, fresh from supporting Úa Conchobair at the siege of Dublin, arrived with a large force to help de Clare.<sup>327</sup> His assistance is interpreted in *The Deeds* with reference to his marriage to one of Mac Murchada's daughters, but as ever it was opportunism with an eye to the relationship between Thomond and Connacht that motivated Úa Briain.<sup>328</sup>

The episode is generally overlooked but bears great significance because of Úa Ruairc's siege of Dublin in September. It is unlikely that Úa Ruairc attempted this assault without first requesting the king of Connacht's support. If it is correct to suppose that Úa Conchobair's distrust of Úa Briain constituted the major cause of his non-participation, as it appears, then the tension between the Uí Briain and Uí Chonchobair had profound implications.

With Úa Ruairc's assassination clearing the way for English settlement in Meath, Úa Conchobair remained fixated on Thomond. The problem he now faced was how to retain suzerainty over Munster while preventing the English gaining further territory. Over the next few years his policy pivoted between support of Úa Briain against the English and

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<sup>326</sup> *A.F.M.* 1170.13; *A.U.* 1170.3, 1170.5; *Ann. Tig.* 1170.10; *A.L.C.* 1170.4; *Ann. Inisf.* 1170.4.

<sup>327</sup> *The Deeds*, p. 105 ll 2031–2052, pp 160–1 ll 2091–2102.

<sup>328</sup> *The Deeds*, p. 105 ll 2039–2046.

attempts to remove Úa Briain using English help. In 1173, for example, he sent a battalion to support Úa Briain as the latter attacked Kilkenny castle,<sup>329</sup> while in 1175 he expelled Úa Briain from his kingship.<sup>330</sup> As we will now see, this tension was at the heart of the Treaty of Windsor, and its failure.

#### [1.4: The Treaty of Windsor and Connacht's retreat]

The Treaty of Windsor of 1175 set out the terms of the relationship between Henry II and Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair. The agreement, probably reached in advance, was brought from England to Ireland by Cadhla Úa Dubthaig, who, in the triumphant words of *Ann. Tig.*, 'came from England from the Son of the Empress, having with him the peace of Ireland, and the kingship thereof, both Foreigner and Gael, to Ruaidhrí Ó Conchobhair, and to every provincial king his province from the king of Ireland, and their tributes to Ruaidhrí'.<sup>331</sup>

The terms of the Treaty of Windsor survive, so we are not reliant on this description.

This is just as well, since it is largely inaccurate, though it does reflect Úa Conchobair's satisfaction with its terms. Under its provisions, Úa Conchobair was recognised as king of Connacht and overking of the other surviving provincial kingdoms, for which he would render a tribute to Henry of one hide out of every ten slaughtered animals.

In return, he abandoned his claim over territories won by the English, including Leinster and Meath, and agreed to send back to them those Irish of non-noble class who had fled since the conquests, and who were wanted by the colonists to perform labouring roles.

He would receive the aid of the English in Ireland, if necessary, to exact the tribute owed by other provincial kings to Henry II and to himself, as a condition of the agreement.<sup>332</sup>

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<sup>329</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1173.10.

<sup>330</sup> *A.F.M.* 1175.11; *Ann. Tig.* 1175.15.

<sup>331</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1175.17: 'Cadhla Ua Dubtaigh do thiahtain a Saxanaib o Mac na Perisi 7 sith na hEreinn lais, 7 a righe, etir Gall 7 Gaedel, do Ruaidhri Ua Chonchobair, 7 a chóicedh do gach coicedhach o rig Ereinn, 7 a cissa do Ruaidhri'.

<sup>332</sup> For the text of the treaty, see Flanagan, *Irish society*, pp 312–13. For an English translation, see Curtis and R.B. McDowell (eds), *Irish historical documents 1172–1922* (London, 1943), pp 22–24.

The treaty can not be understood from an Irish perspective alone. Contrary to the traditional view, which suggested *Úa Conchobair* requested the codification of his relationship with the king of England, Flanagan has argued that it was formed at Henry's instigation following a series of political calamities elsewhere in his domains.<sup>333</sup> He was put under pressure by the rebellion of his son, 'Henry the young king', on continental Europe 1173–1174, a related invasion of northern England by the king of Scotland, William I 'the Lion', and an opportunistic revolt in Wales.<sup>334</sup>

To these may be added *Úa Conchobair*'s invasion of Meath, c. 1174; this was supported by the *Uí Máel Sechlainn* of Meath, *Uí Ruairc* of *Bréifne*, *Uí Máel Doraid* of *Cenél Conaill*, *Meic Dúinn Sléibe* of *Ulaid*, *Uí Cherbail* of *Airgíalla* and *Uí Néill* of *Cenél nEógain*, showing *Úa Conchobair* retained his leading status among the Irish royal families at this point.<sup>335</sup> Like the Welsh uprising, this invasion was surely conducted in view of Henry's difficulties.

For some historians, the treaty was never more than a mutually appealing deception. Orpen considered it unworkable, because in his view *Úa Conchobair* was never likely to be able to enforce the payment of tribute in his domain, perhaps including in his own province.<sup>336</sup> Lydon likewise believed that *Úa Conchobair*'s inability to collect the specified tribute constituted one of the great failures of the treaty, though he diplomatically balanced this with Henry II's supposed failure to control his barons in Ireland. Lydon argued that the treaty broke down between the English barons and 'the Irish kings who had never accepted the high-kingship of O Connor and were not prepared to do so now'.<sup>337</sup>

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<sup>333</sup> See Flanagan, *Irish society*, p. 247; For examples of the traditional argument see Orpen, *Normans*, i, p. 349 & Lydon, *The lordship of Ireland*, p. 50

<sup>334</sup> Duffy, 'Henry II and England's insular neighbours', pp 129–153.

<sup>335</sup> *The Deeds*, pp 136–137 ll 3246–3259.

<sup>336</sup> Orpen, *Normans*, i, p. 351.

<sup>337</sup> Lydon, *The lordship of Ireland*, pp 51–52.

The same analysis was made by Robin Frame, who argued ‘Rory had not the means to enforce his side of the bargain, while Henry, amidst his multifarious commitments, was unlikely to find the time and resources necessary to restrain his vassals from spilling over into O’Connor’s sphere of influence’. For Martin, who regarded Ruaidrí as ‘a weak ruler’, ‘the fallacy in the treaty of Windsor was the supposition that Ruaidrí would prove to be an effective *ard-rí*’.<sup>338</sup>

In Davies’s view, the treaty was a ‘monumental illusion’ because it applied ‘the concepts of feudal obligations, territorial power and judicial responsibility’, to Ireland. Davies argued this was unworkable, and said of the treaty, ‘it was little wonder that it was itself sucked into oblivion in a few years’.<sup>339</sup> This rationale is similar to those quoted above, but Davies attributed the failure of the treaty to the nature of Irish kingship rather than Úa Conchobair himself. Davies argued of the treaty that ‘both the advisors of Henry II and historians have accorded it a constitutional status, which, in truth, it could never hope to enjoy’.<sup>340</sup>

Entirely the opposite case had been made by Flanagan in her monograph, *Irish society, Anglo-Norman settlers, Angevin kingship: interactions in Ireland in the late twelfth century*, which was published a year before Davies’s *Domination & conquest*. Flanagan examined each of the characteristics that were subsequently identified by Davies as feudal impositions, concluding that they reflected the ‘Irish character’ of the treaty, couched in English legalisms.<sup>341</sup> She pointed out that the service owed by Ruaidrí to Henry was left undefined in the treaty, and that ‘tribute was a consequence of political submission in pre-Norman Ireland’.<sup>342</sup>

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<sup>338</sup> Martin, ‘Overlord becomes feudal lord 1172–85’, in Cosgrave (ed.), *N.H.I. II*, p. 109.

<sup>339</sup> R.R. Davies, *Domination & Conquest: the experience of Ireland, Scotland and Wales 1100–1300* (Cambridge, 1990), pp 64–65.

<sup>340</sup> Davies, *Domination & Conquest*, p. 65.

<sup>341</sup> Flanagan, *Irish society*, pp 235, 247.

<sup>342</sup> Flanagan, *Irish society*, p. 235.

The question of how long the treaty operated for has also engendered debate. In 1176 there were attacks by the English on Airgialla and by the Northern Uí Néill on the English, which were breaches of the respective spheres of influence.<sup>343</sup> In 1177, John de Courcy invaded Ulaid without the permission of Henry II. Later the same year, at the Council of Oxford, Henry awarded his son John the title ‘lord of Ireland’, while also making speculative grants of Thomond and Desmond to feudatories.<sup>344</sup> Some years later, in 1180, Úa Conchobair had envoys sent to Henry because of a ‘sudden quarrel’ with the king of England.<sup>345</sup> Later again, in 1183, Ruaidrí abdicated his kingship.

Where in this timeline did the treaty cease to operate? For most historians, the Council of Oxford constitutes the clearest break. Flanagan, who believed it was still operable in some respects in 1180, is the most notable exception.<sup>346</sup> It may be best to see it as a gradual breakdown rather than a sudden abandonment, but it certainly failed to live up to expectations from a very early point.

Úa Conchobair used the English support to which the treaty entitled him when he deposed Domnall Úa Briain in 1175, but that contingent, under Raymond le Gros, unexpectedly ensconced themselves in Limerick. In response, Úa Conchobair sought to reinstate Úa Briain. He accepted Úa Briain’s hostages, and the two conspired to capture Limerick in 1176.<sup>347</sup> Under pressure, and well behind enemy lines, the English were forced to abandon the town, despite relieving an initial siege.<sup>348</sup> Their abandonment of Limerick was welcomed, initially, by Henry II.<sup>349</sup>

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<sup>343</sup> *A.F.M.* 1176.2, 1176.10; *A.U.* 1176.5, 1176.9; *A.L.C.* 1176.5, 1176.8.

<sup>344</sup> *Gesta* i, pp 161–5; *Chronica*, ii, pp 133–7.

<sup>345</sup> Charles Plummer, ‘Vie et miracles de S. Laurent archevêque de Dublin’, in *Analecta Bollandiana*, xxxiii (1914), pp 121–86 at 152; *Gesta*, i, p. 270; *Chronica*, ii, p. 153.

<sup>346</sup> Flanagan, *Irish society*, pp 254–263.

<sup>347</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1175.18, 1176.2.

<sup>348</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 160–167; *A.F.M.* 1176.7; *A.U.* 1176.1; *A.L.C.* 1176.1; *Ann. Inisf.* 1176.6; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1176.9.

<sup>349</sup> He is quoted in *Expugnatio*, 166–167, saying, ‘The assault of Limerick was a bold enterprise, the relief of the city even more so, but only in abandoning the place did they show any wisdom’, from the Latin ‘*Magnus fuit ausus in aggrediendo, maior in subveniando, sed sapientia solum in destituendo*’.



Úa Conchobair's failure to control the English troops reflected a general slackening of his authority, which would be further shown by other events not long afterwards. In 1176, the English raided Airgialla,<sup>350</sup> and in response northern parties invaded Meath and burned the castle of Slane.<sup>351</sup> In 1177 too, John de Courcy invaded Ulaid without royal approval.<sup>352</sup> Miles de Cogan also led an expedition against Connacht itself in 1177, employing a son of Úa Conchobair's as a guide.<sup>353</sup> Úa Conchobair made no attempt to intervene east of the Shannon, choosing to focus on the defence of Connacht and control of Thomond.

With his barons in Ireland acting according to their whims, it is little surprise that Henry changed his policy for Ireland at the Council of Oxford in May 1177. The crises that beset him in 1173–4 had also subsided by 1177, mitigating the need for good relations with Úa Conchobair. Such was Munster's importance to the Uí Chonchobair, as discussed throughout this chapter, that the grants of Desmond and especially Thomond, which were made on that occasion, clearly abandoned the Treaty of Windsor as an overall framework. It is not obvious what Úa Conchobair hoped for from the embassy he sent to Henry in 1180, but if it was a response to English expansionism it was certainly a belated one.

By that time, Úa Conchobair had enough trouble to occupy him in Connacht without looking for it elsewhere. He struggled to manage the changing borders of his province, for example. At an unknown point between 1172 and 1181, Cairpre Dromma Cliab, an area corresponding to the modern barony of Carbury, County Sligo, which had belonged to Uí Briúin Bréifne, was annexed into Connacht.<sup>354</sup>

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<sup>350</sup> *A.F.M.* 1176.2; *Ann. Tig.* 1176.7; *A.U.* 1176.6; *A.L.C.* 1176.5; *Misc.Ir.Annals* 1176.14, 1176.15.

<sup>351</sup> *A.F.M.* 1176.10; *Ann. Tig.* 1176.21; *A.U.* 1176.9; *A.L.C.* 1176.8; *Misc.Ir.Annals* 1176.17.

<sup>352</sup> *A.F.M.* 1177.3; *A.L.C.* 1177.1; *A.U.* 1177.1; *Ann. Tig.* 1177.3.

<sup>353</sup> *A.F.M.* 1177.5; *A.U.* 1177.2; *Ann. Tig.* 1177.14, 1177.15; *Ann. Inisf.* 1177.3, 1177.4, 1177.5; *Misc.Ir.Annals* 1178.3.

<sup>354</sup> See Mac Niocaill, 'The Irish "charters"', pp 160–1, where Tigernán Úa Ruairc is described as ruling as far west as Trácht Eothaile or 'Trawohelly' on Ballysadare Bay in modern County Sligo.

This becomes suddenly apparent when the annals record, under 1181, ‘the Battle of the territory of Carbury’, fought between various Connacht princes and Flaithbertach Úa Máel Doraid, king of Cenél Conaill.<sup>355</sup> The battle was a decisive victory for the Cenél Conaill, giving control of Cairpre Dromma Cliab to Úa Máel Doraid, but it did not constitute a final settlement. Instead, Úa Máel Doraid’s victory initiated a period of contention between the two provinces on this new frontier.

As regards Connacht’s own seizure of the territory from Uí Briúin Bréifne, there is a telling remark in *A.L.C.*: ‘Donnchadh, son of Domhnall Midhech O’Conchobhair, it was that brought Flaithbhertach O’Maeldoraidh, to defend the territory of Cairpre for himself’.<sup>356</sup> From other evidence, it seems that Donnchad mac Domnaill Midigh’s claim on Cairpre, which led directly to the battle, was founded on inheriting his father’s position.

Upon his death in 1176, Domnall Midech was called ‘lord of the north of Connaught’.<sup>357</sup> He was also buried in Maigh Eo, rather than Clonmacnoise, which was the more typical burial place of major Uí Chonchobair dynasts.<sup>358</sup> More importantly still, Domnall was styled ‘Tanist of Bréifne’ in fifteenth-century genealogies.<sup>359</sup> As such, it seems Bart Jaski was correct to suggest that this title was linked to the Cairpre Dromma Cliab region.<sup>360</sup>

The annexation of Cairpre by Connacht can therefore be dated with some confidence to the period between Tigernán Úa Ruairc’s death in 1172 and Domnall Midech’s death in 1176.<sup>361</sup> It is difficult to say whether it was Domnall Midech himself who conquered the region, or whether it was appropriated diplomatically by the king of Connacht; we shall

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<sup>355</sup> *A.F.M.* 1181.4; *A.U.* 1181.2; *A.L.C.* 1181.1; *Ann. Inisf.* 1181.4.

<sup>356</sup> *A.L.C.* 1181.2: ‘Donnchad mac Domnaill Midhigh h-I Conchobair ro thairring Flaithbertach .H. Moel Doraidh do chosnum criche Cairpri dhó feisin’.

<sup>357</sup> *A.F.M.* 1176.12: ‘Domhnall mac Toirdealbhaigh Uí Concobhair ticchernu thuaisceirt Connacht’.

<sup>358</sup> *A.F.M.* 1176.12; *Ann. Tig.* 1176.9.

<sup>359</sup> ‘The Book of Lecan’ R.I.A. MS 23 P 2, folio 64 verso: ‘tanusti na breifne’.

<sup>360</sup> Bart Jaski, *Early Irish kingship and succession* (Dublin, 2000), p. 265.

<sup>361</sup> It is possible that Tigernán Úa Ruairc himself ceded the territory to Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair, but this seems unlikely.

see below how the latter occurred in the case of Tír Tuathail, another territory which was co-opted into Connacht at the expense of Uí Briúin Breífné.<sup>362</sup>

The battle of 1181 itself was fought between Donnchad mac Domnaill Midigh and Flaithbertach Úa Máel Doraid on one side, and the rest of the named princes of Connacht on the other. The slain reportedly included sixteen sons of kings, along with many others.<sup>363</sup> The dead of the Uí Chonchobair dynasty alone included Brian Luigneach and Magnus, both sons of Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair, as well as Máel Sechlainn, Muiredach, and Muirchertach, three sons of Áed mac Toirdelbaigh. It was clearly a massive affair, and it even received a notice in *Ann. Inisf.*, a collection which typically only recorded the most important events outside Munster: ‘A battle between the Connachta and the Cenél Conaill, in which many nobles of the Connachta fell’.<sup>364</sup>

The most curious aspect of the affair is Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair’s absence. The size of the battle suggests some preparation, and Ruaidrí was not noted to have been active elsewhere. In 1182, he endeavoured to reverse the effects of the defeat, showing that by then at least he recognised its importance. Alongside his son, Conchobar Maenmaige, he inflicted a defeat on Úa Máel Doraid, who still had Donnchad mac Domnaill Midigh Uí Chonchobair as an ally.<sup>365</sup>

Nonetheless, it was Flaithbertach Úa Máel Doraid’s victory and not Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair’s that had the lasting effect. Due largely to the contests that were about to erupt for the kingship of Connacht, as well as the killing of Donnchad mac Domnaill Midigh, Úa Máel Doraid was able to retain control of Cairpre Dromma Cliab.<sup>366</sup>

Throughout the remainder of the period under consideration it would remain Cenél

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<sup>362</sup> See below, p. 88.

<sup>363</sup> *A.F.M.* 1181.4.

<sup>364</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1181.4: ‘*Cath eter Chonnacta & Chenél Conaill in quo multi nobiles Connachtorum ceciderunt*’.

<sup>365</sup> *A.U.* 1182.4; *A.L.C.* 1182.6; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1183.2.

<sup>366</sup> *A.U.* 1183.3.

Conaill territory, being regularly targeted by enemies of Cenél Conaill and the Northern Uí Néill generally.

Tír Tuathail was also acquired by Connacht, but in the reign of Ruaidrí's son and immediate successor Conchobar Maenmaige (1183–1189), rather than Ruaidrí himself. In 1186, 'Conchobhar Maenmhaighe came to Mucart, and Aedh O'Ruairc went into his house, and gave hostages to Conchobhar, and gave Tir-Thuathail to the Connachtmen'.<sup>367</sup> Before this, Tír Tuathail belonged to Muintir Eolais of Conmaicne Réin. It was situated in the north of the modern barony of Boyle, County Roscommon, around Kilronan parish. More importantly, it was located on the west side of the Shannon.

By virtue of its location, Tír Tuathail remained Gaelic Irish territory after the conquest of most of Connacht in 1237, being a part of the 'five cantreds' allocated to the Uí Chonchobair at that time. Down to the sixteenth century, it was at different times associated with the Meic Diarmata kings of Mag Luirg and the Meic Magnusa offshoot of the Uí Chonchobair, who became entrenched in the territory.<sup>368</sup>

As noted above, Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair's problems in Connacht multiplied from the late 1170s onwards. His son Murchad accompanied and guided Miles de Cogan's raiding force through Connacht in 1177, for example. Murchad may have expected to gain favour with the English, but after they retreated hurriedly across the Shannon Ruaidrí had him blinded.<sup>369</sup>

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<sup>367</sup> A.L.C. 1186.9: 'Conchobar Maon Maige do techt co Mucart, 7 Aodh .H. Ruairc do techt ina tech, 7 braighde do thaphairt do Conchobar, 7 Tír Tuathail do taphairt do Connachtuiiph'.

<sup>368</sup> See for example A.U. 1340.14; A.L.C. 1568.1; *Ann. Conn.* 1458.2, 1464.35, 1499.3; 'The Book of Ballymote' R.I.A. MS P 12 folio 59 recto: 'Is é in Tomaltach sa [Tomaltach Mac Diarmata, reigned 1383–1397] ba righ ar Airteach & ar Thir Oilell & ar Dha Chorand & ar cúig baili Cloinne Fearnhuighe & ar Tir Tuathail ag scribhadh in leabairsea' = 'It was this Tomaltach who was king of Airteach, and of Tirerril and of the two Coranns and the five townlands of Glanfarne and of Tir Tuathail when this book was being written'. Translation adapted from Ruairí Ó hUiginn, 'The Book of Ballymote: scholars, sources and patrons', p. 2 (published online [https://www.ria.ie/sites/default/files/o\\_huiginn\\_ruairi\\_handout\\_bb.pdf](https://www.ria.ie/sites/default/files/o_huiginn_ruairi_handout_bb.pdf)) (16 May 2018); The Meic Magnusa were the descendants of Magnus (d. 1181), son of Toirdelbach Mór. For examples of their subsequent association with Tír Tuathail, see A.L.C. 1411.20, 1540.19, 1586.3; *Ann. Conn.* 1411.21, 1464.35.

<sup>369</sup> A.F.M. 1177.5; A.U. 1177.2; *Ann. Tig.* 1177.14, 1177.15; A.L.C. 1177.3, 1177.4, 1177.5; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1178.3.

Ruaidrí also imprisoned another son, his eventual successor Conchobar Maenmaige.<sup>370</sup> Whether Conchobar Maenmaige was also complicit in Miles de Cogan's foray or the 'improper deeds' for which he was imprisoned were unrelated is impossible to say on existing evidence.<sup>371</sup> The fact that he was liberated without Ruaidrí's consent by a group including two of the Uí Flaithbertaigh, and others described as his 'men of trust' in 1178 shows that he already had considerable political support of his own by this point.<sup>372</sup>

Conchobar Maenmaige increased his profile in subsequent years, while Ruaidrí's standing only declined. The former emerged victorious from a significant battle with the Uí Chellaig of Uí Maine in 1180, for instance, though little detail is known.<sup>373</sup> Meanwhile, the English lord of Meath Hugh de Lacy established tribute from Connacht before his death in 1186.<sup>374</sup> This is likely to have originated with his attacks on Clonmacnoise in 1178 and '79, which had long been in Connacht's orbit.<sup>375</sup> In this context, Ruaidrí's offer of a daughter in marriage to Hugh c. 1180 only confirmed Connacht's new subordinate position.<sup>376</sup>

Conchobar Maenmaige forced Ruaidrí to retire to the monastery of Cong in 1183, replacing him in the kingship of Connacht.<sup>377</sup> The new king's *crech rí* (or inaugural military act) was an attack on an English castle, and this may well reflect a dissatisfaction with Ruaidrí's attitude towards the English which had helped bring Conchobar to power.<sup>378</sup> That power was by no means secure, though, and when Ruaidrí abandoned Cong in an effort to reprise the kingship in 1184, two years of fighting followed.

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<sup>370</sup> *A.U.* 1177.8.

<sup>371</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1178.2: '*ina ecóraib fen*'.

<sup>372</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1178.2: '*da aes gradha archena*'.

<sup>373</sup> *A.F.M.* 1180.6; *A.U.* 1180.8; *A.L.C.* 1180.4; *Ann. Inisf.* 1180.4; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1180.4.

<sup>374</sup> *A.F.M.* 1186.5; *A.L.C.* 1186.10, 1186.11, 1186.12.

<sup>375</sup> *A.F.M.* 1178.8, 1179.7; *Ann. Tig.* 1178.3; For more detail on Connacht's association with Clonmacnoise, see *Comparative Analysis*, pp 490–2.

<sup>376</sup> *Gesta*, i, p. 270.

<sup>377</sup> *A.U.* 1183.5; *A.L.C.* 1183.1.

<sup>378</sup> *A.F.M.* 1184.6; *A.U.* 1184.5; *A.L.C.* 1184.7.

One of the most notable features of their conflict was a reliance on English support. Conchobar Maenmaige paid 3,000 cows to his English mercenaries, for example.<sup>379</sup> Ruaidrí also relied on external forces, including English mercenaries and his erstwhile enemy Domnall Úa Briain. Their aid was sufficient to win him a share of Connacht in an agreement of 1186, albeit not a long-lasting one.<sup>380</sup>

As Orpen suggested, the English support of one or both these men is likely to have been composed in part by deserters from the entourage of Prince John.<sup>381</sup> John visited Ireland in 1185 and suffered considerable defections to the Irish.<sup>382</sup> These deserters were willing to sacrifice their standing with the English crown to pursue financial reward in Connacht. They may have been inspired by the example of Gilbert de Angulo, whose adventures in Connacht we will examine below.<sup>383</sup>

Despite gaining a settlement in 1186, it appears very few in Connacht now supported Ruaidrí over Conchobar Maenmaige. Conchobar was able to resume full rule by the end of 1185,<sup>384</sup> and in 1186 he drove Ruaidrí into exile again.<sup>385</sup> Eventually, Ruaidrí was placated with a single *trícha céd* of land in Connacht, while Conchobar Maenmaige remained king.<sup>386</sup>

The latter continued to be generally hostile towards the English. In 1187 he attacked and demolished the castle at Killare,<sup>387</sup> which had been built only a few years previously, when the conflict for the kingship of Connacht was just beginning.<sup>388</sup> The English did not miss the significance of Connacht's resurgent aggression, and, in 1188, John de Courcy

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<sup>379</sup> *A.F.M.* 1185.9.

<sup>380</sup> *A.L.C.* 1185.3.

<sup>381</sup> Orpen, *Normans*, ii, p. 101 n. 1.

<sup>382</sup> *Gesta*, i, p. 339: 'Maxima namque pars equitum et peditum qui cum eo venerant, ab eo recesserunt, et ad Hibernenses contra eum pugnatuos perrexerunt.'

<sup>383</sup> See below, pp 92–6.

<sup>384</sup> *A.L.C.* 1185.19.

<sup>385</sup> *A.F.M.* 1186.4; *A.L.C.* 1186.5; *A.U.* 1186.5, 1186.8.

<sup>386</sup> *A.F.M.* 1186.4.

<sup>387</sup> *A.F.M.* 1187.6.

<sup>388</sup> *A.F.M.* 1184.5; *A.L.C.* 1184.6; *A.U.* 1184.4.

launched a raid into Connacht.<sup>389</sup> Like de Cogan eleven years previously, de Courcy had inside help. Conchobar Úa nDiarmata, another son of Ruaidrí, accompanied the expeditionary force.

Orpen suggested the purpose of the invasion was to restore Ruaidrí, and this may well have been the case.<sup>390</sup> Conchobar Úa nDiarmata was certainly an enemy of Conchobar Maenmaige, and he would in fact instigate the latter's assassination the next year, 1189.<sup>391</sup> Whether he was promoting Ruaidrí's claim to the kingship or his own in 1188 is difficult to say, but he had been involved in previous conflict between Conchobar Maenmaige and Ruaidrí, so there is some basis for the suggestion.<sup>392</sup>

The English attack of 1188 was a disaster. This time Domnall Úa Briain supported Conchobar Maenmaige, and when the English tried to use the route through Cairpre Dromma Cliab to escape they found themselves caught between a pincer: Conchobar Maenmaige and Domnall Úa Briain on one side, and Flaithbertach Úa Máel Doraid with the Cenél Conaill on the other.<sup>393</sup> Only with difficulty was de Courcy ultimately able to retreat to safety.

The assassination of Conchobar Maenmaige in 1189 prevented this from being the foundation of a resurgence. Instead, the provincial kingship of Connacht was again contested by two prominent Uí Chonchobair dynasts. This time they were Cathal Carrach, a son of Conchobar Maenmaige, and Cathal Crobderg, a son of Toirdelbach. Ruaidrí was considered as well: he was sent for by the Síl Muiredaig and briefly reprised the kingship, but soon he was forced out again.<sup>394</sup> He sought help in Cenél Conaill, Cenél nEógain, Meath and Munster, but was refused in all quarters.<sup>395</sup>

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<sup>389</sup> *A.F.M.* 1188.8; *A.U.* 1188.6; *A.L.C.* 1188.7.

<sup>390</sup> Orpen, *Normans*, ii, p. 116.

<sup>391</sup> *A.F.M.* 1189.8, 1189.9, 1189.10; *A.U.* 1189.6; *A.L.C.* 1189.6; *Ann. Inisf.* 1189.4.

<sup>392</sup> *A.F.M.* 1185.7.

<sup>393</sup> *A.F.M.* 1188.8; *A.U.* 1188.6; *A.L.C.* 1188.7.

<sup>394</sup> *A.F.M.* 1189.11.

<sup>395</sup> *A.F.M.* 1191.1.

Ruaidrí's rejection in Meath is even more notable since, thanks to research by Veach, we now know that Walter de Lacy had seisin of Meath by this point.<sup>396</sup> Whether it was Walter's hesitancy or Ruaidrí's candidacy that prevented further English intervention, the latter was eventually sent for by the Síl Muiredaig, who placated him with some lands, just as they had in 1186.<sup>397</sup> By the time he died in 1198, Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair had long ceased to be politically relevant in Connacht and was even further removed from his remarkable kingship of Ireland.<sup>398</sup>

### **[1.5: Cathal Crobderg's rise and Connacht's further decline]**

At first, Cathal Crobderg and Cathal Carrach avoided open conflict. They even met at Clonfert in 1190 but failed to reach terms.<sup>399</sup> After this point, Cathal Crobderg appears to have gained general recognition as king, which may have been because of his seniority. He was a son of Toirdelbach's, after all, while Cathal Carrach was a son of Conchobar Maenmaige, himself a son of Ruaidrí.

Despite de Lacy's refusal to back Ruaidrí, other more peripheral English parties used the opportunity provided by the contested kingship to launch opportunistic raids into Connacht. In 1193, Áed Úa Máel Brenainn, '*dux*' of the Clann Chonchobair branch of Síl Muiredaig was killed by the English of Dublin, for instance.<sup>400</sup> The same year, Gilbert de Angulo, accompanied by the sons of Conchobar Maenmaige and his own entourage, made a raid upon Inis-Clothrann, a location where important hostages were often kept.<sup>401</sup>

This was de Angulo's first noted participation in a campaign in Connacht, though he may have been active west of the Shannon for some time. The fact that he supported Conchobar Maenmaige's sons in 1193 could hint at a link with the dead king, since in the

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<sup>396</sup> Veach, 'A question of timing: Walter de Lacy's seisin of Meath 1189–94', in *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy: Archaeology, Culture, History, Literature*, cix C (2009), pp 165–193.

<sup>397</sup> *A.F.M.* 1191.1.

<sup>398</sup> *A.F.M.* 1198.2; *A.U.* 1198.3, 1199.1; *A.L.C.* 1198.2; *Ann. Inisf.* 1198.2; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1198.1.

<sup>399</sup> *A.F.M.* 1190.4.

<sup>400</sup> *A.F.M.* 1193.8; *A.L.C.* 1193.9.

<sup>401</sup> *A.F.M.* 1193.10.



latter's obituary of 1189, he is called 'king of all Connaught, both English and Irish'.<sup>402</sup> That title might seem remarkable in the light of Conchobar's attacks on English castles, but, as we have seen, he was also prepared to employ English mercenaries. This could have led to the settlement of such adventurers in Connacht, including, perhaps, de Angulo.

Interestingly, by 1195 de Angulo had switched sides and become a supporter of Cathal Crobderg. We know that in *c.* 1197 he was deemed to be the holder of Cairpre Dromma Cliab by Prince John, who was confiscating his territory.<sup>403</sup> We also know that in 1194 he led an unsuccessful attack to Assaroe against the Cenél Conaill.<sup>404</sup> It is therefore reasonable to speculate that it was through an arrangement concerning Cairpre Dromma Cliab that Cathal Crobderg brought Gilbert into his entourage.

If this supposition is correct, the grant by Cathal Crobderg was remarkably like those made by Henry II; a speculative grant of lands not yet conquered. It is also evident that de Angulo endeavoured to square the circle of dual loyalties by agreeing to hold the territory of Cairpre Dromma Cliab from John as lord of Ireland. In his award of Cairpre to Walter de Lacy, whom he intended to replace de Angulo, John stipulated that de Lacy was to hold it on the same (unspecified) terms as de Angulo.<sup>405</sup> At no point in this sequence of events did either Gilbert de Angulo or Walter de Lacy hold Cairpre in reality; it continued to belong to the Cenél Conaill, who had taken possession *c.* 1181, as was discussed above.

It was as a direct result of his association with Cathal Crobderg that Gilbert found himself outlawed by John. He participated in the king of Connacht's attack on English castles in Munster in 1195,<sup>406</sup> which will be discussed below, and may even have been

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<sup>402</sup> *A.F.M.* 1189.8: 'airdri Connacht eittir Gallaibh & Ghaoidealaibh'.

<sup>403</sup> *Gormanston Reg.*, pp 7, 179.

<sup>404</sup> *A.F.M.* 1194.5; *A.U.* 1194.4; *A.L.C.* 1194.6.

<sup>405</sup> *Gormanston Reg.*, pp 7, 179.

<sup>406</sup> *A.F.M.* 1195.8, 1195.9; *A.L.C.* 1195.6, 1195.8.

captured.<sup>407</sup> He was outlawed the following year and his remaining lands in Meath were seized by the justiciar on John's instructions.<sup>408</sup> There is no further record of him until 1200, when he appears once again in the entourage of Cathal Crobderg,<sup>409</sup> but it is still possible that he led the 'company of bowmen' perhaps better translated as 'mercenaries', who were sent by Úa Conchobair to support Desmond against the English in 1196.<sup>410</sup>

In 1207, John offered his peace to de Angulo and made a 'further grant that Gilbert have the cantred of Momeniach which the King of Connaught delivered to him'.<sup>411</sup>

'Momeniach', an Anglicisation of Maenmag, was in Uí Maine. It was the place from which Conchobar Maenmaige derived his sobriquet, evidently because of his fosterage there.

This shift of de Angulo's land holdings within Connacht from north to south corresponds with a change of focus to Munster on the part of Cathal Crobderg. William de Burgh's support for Cathal Carrach at the beginning of the thirteenth century represented a significant threat to Cathal Crobderg from the Munster direction, and it is in this context that Cathal Crobderg's decision to situate de Angulo in Maenmag ought to be understood.<sup>412</sup>

Notwithstanding his new holdings in Maenmag or failure to make headway in Cairpre Dromma Cliab, de Angulo did not abandon his claim in the north – even after he had officially lost seisin to Walter de Lacy. Walter's brother Hugh rebelled against John in 1210 and when the former became embroiled, he was dispossessed by the king of England. This meant Cairpre Dromma Cliab was again a prize for the taking, as far as de Angulo was concerned.

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<sup>407</sup> *A.L.C.* 1195.5: '*Mac Goisdalb do ghab[áil]*'.

<sup>408</sup> Dublin Annals of Inisfallen, Trinity College Dublin MS. 1281, sub anno 1196; *A.F.M.*, iii, p. 107 n. 1.

<sup>409</sup> *A.L.C.* 1200.2.

<sup>410</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1196.6: '*rúta sersenach*'.

<sup>411</sup> *Cal.doc.Ire., 1171–1251*, p. 46, no. 311; *Rot. litt. claus., 1204–24*, p. 78: '*Et cōcedim<sup>9</sup> quod habeat cantredū de Momeniach quod Rex Connac ei libavit*'.

<sup>412</sup> See below, p. 96.

De Angulo was further encouraged by a dispute between John and Áed Méith Úa Néill, king of the North, which occurred when John visited Ireland in 1210. That incident will be discussed in more detail elsewhere, but here it suffices to say that in its wake the Irish justiciary was instructed to attack Úa Néill's kingdom, which included Cenél Conaill and therefore Cairpre Dromma Cliab.<sup>413</sup>

De Angulo's name does not appear in the record of the first subsequent attack on Cairpre, in 1211, but he may well have been present.<sup>414</sup> This effort was directed against a place called 'Cael-uisce' or 'Narrow-water',<sup>415</sup> and was repulsed by Áed Úa Néill.<sup>416</sup> Cael-uisce was targeted again in 1212 by the justiciary, and this time de Angulo was certainly present. They built a castle at the site, and it is likely enough that it was intended to be just the first of several castles guarding that part of the river Erne.<sup>417</sup>

In 1213, Úa hÉignigh of Fir Manach, a follower of Áed Úa Néill, attacked and demolished the castle of Cael-uisce. He also killed Gilbert de Angulo, who was among its defenders.<sup>418</sup> In so-doing, Úa hÉignigh cut short an interesting experiment on both the English and Irish sides. De Angulo's service in Connacht certainly constituted a form of English infiltration, as shown by the fact that he tried to hold his lands from the king of England as well as the king of Connacht, but it was also illustrative of Irish attempts to adapt.

It is difficult to say what relationship Cathal Crobderg expected to have with Gilbert's Cairpre Dromma Cliab, should it have been successfully taken from the Cenél Conaill. Clearly, in the 1190s, a tenurial relationship with the English lordship of Ireland had

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<sup>413</sup> See *The Uí Néill and the North*, pp 198–203.

<sup>414</sup> *A.U.* 1211.1.

<sup>415</sup> This location has received different identifications. O'Donovan identified it as Belleek, east of Ballyshannon (*A.F.M.*, iii, p. 368 n. k.). P.J. Ó Gallachair argued for a location much further eastward, Corrakeel in Inishmacsaint parish. See Ó Gallachair, 'The Erne forts of Cael Uisce and Belleek' in *Clogher Record*, vi no. 1 (1966), pp 104–118 at 107.

<sup>416</sup> *A.U.* 1211.1.

<sup>417</sup> *A.L.C.* 1212.1; *A.U.* 1212.5; *A.F.M.* 1211.4.

<sup>418</sup> *A.L.C.* 1213.2; *A.U.* 1213.7; *A.F.M.* 1212.3.

been envisioned; the involvement of the justiciar in 1212 would indicate that something similar was intended on the second occasion.

We also do not know whether service to Cathal Crobderg was a condition of the award of Cairpre Dromma Cliab. Similarly, Maenmag was granted on unknown terms. It is generally repeated that the latter was 'given' to de Angulo,<sup>419</sup> from the statement in the close rolls that the cantred of Maenmag was originally 'delivered' by Cathal Crobderg to de Angulo, but it may be that Cathal Crobderg granted the lands on terms like those by which Henry had annexed several Irish provinces.<sup>420</sup>

De Angulo, for his part, was prepared to sacrifice or risk holdings in Meath to take service in Connacht. In doing so he displayed confidence that the kings of Connacht both desired English military assistance over an extended period and that they were prepared to richly reward someone who would provide it. To observers at the time, including the kings of Connacht, the eventuality of permanently alienating any territory awarded in this way must have been a consideration. Nevertheless, Cathal Crobderg, and perhaps Conchobar Maenmaige before him, made the grants such was the value they placed on de Angulo's service.

As Cathal Crobderg established himself in the 1190s, the English made a major advance into Thomond, effectively conquering most of that province. This will be elaborated in the appropriate chapter, but here it suffices to say that shortly before his death in 1194, Domnall Úa Briain allowed English grantees to make progress in his own kingdom. He allied himself with William de Burgh, one of these grantees, and consented to the construction of some castles, 'for the purpose of distressing Mac Cárthaig'.<sup>421</sup>

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<sup>419</sup> See for example, Orpen, *Normans*, ii, p. 155; Hellen Walton, 'The English in Connacht 1171–1333' (PhD thesis, T.C.D., 1980), pp 24–25.

<sup>420</sup> *Rot. litt. claus.*, 1204–24, p. 78: 'ei libavid'.

<sup>421</sup> Dublin Annals of Inisfallen *sub anno* 1193, quoted in Orpen, *Normans*, ii, p. 148. See also *Ann. Inisf.* 1193.2: 'The castle of Brí Uis was built by the foreigners with the consent of Ua Briain, as some say, and to injure Desmumu therefrom', and *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1193.1: 'The castle of Brí Uis was built by the Galls, with the consent of Ó Briain, if the general report be true, as a check on Domhnall son of Mac Carthaigh'; see also *The Two Munsters*, pp 289–90.

As has been developed throughout this chapter, Thomond was Connacht's primary strategic concern. This remained the case now, as evidenced by Cathal Croibderg's 1195 invasion of Munster, mentioned above, and his military support of Mac Cárthaig in 1196.<sup>422</sup> This was also clearly understood by the English, who immediately made plans for the conquest of Connacht.

Some have speculated that Cathal Croibderg's attack on the English of Munster in 1195 was motivated by a grant of Connacht to William de Burgh, which 'apparently' or 'probably' took place in or before 1195.<sup>423</sup> Alternatively, others have suggested that William de Burgh 'was given a speculative grant of the whole of the province of Connacht by John sometime around 1195, in response to raids by Cathal Mór Croibderg Ua Conchobair'.<sup>424</sup>

This ambiguity arises from an unclear chronology. At some point, which can be dated no more precisely than 1189x99, Hugh de Lacy was granted six cantreds in Connacht by Prince John.<sup>425</sup> Subsequently, at another uncertain point in that range, John changed his mind and granted all Connacht to William de Burgh,<sup>426</sup> who in a 'compensatory gesture',<sup>427</sup> granted de Lacy ten cantreds under him in north Connacht.<sup>428</sup> At no point until at least 1199 did either de Lacy or de Burgh try to make these grants effective.

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<sup>422</sup> See *The Two Munsters*, pp 291–3.

<sup>423</sup> Perros (Walton), 'Ua Conchobhair, Cathal [Cathal O'Connor, Cathal Croibhdhearg] (1152–1224)', in *O.D.N.B.*, accessed online (<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-20513>) (22 August 2018); Empey, 'Burgh, William de (d. 1206)' in *O.D.N.B.* (<http://www.oxforddnb.com.jproxy.nuim.ie/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-4000?rskey=9wsop3&result=1>) (23 August 2018); R. Dudley Edwards, 'Anglo-Norman relations with Connacht, 1169–1224', in *Irish Historical Studies*, i, no. 2 (September 1938), pp 135–153 at 145.

<sup>424</sup> David Beresford, 'Burgh, William de' in *D.I.B.*, accessed online (<http://dib.cambridge.org/viewReadPage.do?articleId=a1146>) (23 August 2018).

<sup>425</sup> *Cal.doc.Ire.*, 1171–1251, p. 37, no. 241; *Rot. chart.*, p. 139b.

<sup>426</sup> *Rot. chart.*, p. 218b.

<sup>427</sup> Daniel Brown, *Hugh de Lacy, first Earl of Ulster – rising and falling in Angevin Ireland* (Woodbridge, 2016), p. 28.

<sup>428</sup> *Gormanston Reg.*, pp 143–4.

An *A.L.C.* entry of 1195 reports that there was ‘A hosting by John de Curci and the son of Hugo de Laci, to assume power over the Foreigners of Laighen and Mumha’,<sup>429</sup> and later, that John de Courcy and Hugh de Lacy were at Athlone making the so-called ‘peace of Athlone’ with Cathal Crobderg, after the latter’s attack on the English of Munster.<sup>430</sup> Therefore, like de Burgh, de Lacy was active in the settlement of Munster and the response to the invasion from Connacht.

The agreement Cathal Crobderg concluded with de Lacy and de Courcy in 1195 constituted a change of policy by the king of Connacht. Whereas he had tried to defend Connacht by controlling Thomond west of the Shannon before, he now tried to secure Connacht’s position through a formal relationship with the English. This did not mean complete passivity as the latter party advanced – he attacked the English in 1199 for example – though it generally tended in this direction.

*Ann. Inisf.* also makes it clear that Cathal Crobderg abandoned his undertakings in Munster around this time: ‘In the above year [1195] Cathal Crobderg, king of Connachta, came to Mumu and demolished many castles, but they were renovated again. And everyone expected that he would destroy all the foreigners on that expedition, and he arranged to come again, but he did not come’.<sup>431</sup>

This comment was not entirely fair. As mentioned, Cathal Crobderg sent significant mercenary support to Domnall Mac Cárthaig in 1196, but it is true that he did not venture south himself on that occasion, and in general his policy became much more cautious thereafter. His very absence in 1196 may have discouraged Mac Cárthaig from making an attack on Cork.<sup>432</sup>

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<sup>429</sup> *A.L.C.* 1195.3.

<sup>430</sup> *A.L.C.* 1195.7.

<sup>431</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1195.2: ‘*Issin bliadain sen tanic Catal Crobdearc, ri Connacht, i m-Mumuin gura disgilestar castelu imda, giara hadnuagit daridissi, agus ra suil cách gu n-nisguilfed Gullu uli don turussean, agus ro dál go dicfac daridissi agus ni tanic*’.

<sup>432</sup> See *The Two Munsters*, pp 291–3.

Arguments as to whether John's grants in Connacht preceded or followed Cathal Crobderg's attack are speculative. Their exact point of origin is less important than the fact that the wholesale grant of Connacht was made to an individual who was crucial to the conquest and settlement of Thomond, and whose relationship with the Uí Briain, who remained kings of a much-restricted Irish Thomond, meant that he now controlled access across their lands into Connacht. As much as anything, this illustrates how the English had an intimate understanding of Irish politics, and how they used existing dynamics to their own advantage.

Details of the relationship between Cathal Carrach and Cathal Crobderg in the 1190s are in short supply. It appears that the former was in exile for a time. When, in 1196, Mathgamain Úa Conchobair (son of Conchobar Maenmaige and brother of Cathal Carrach) was killed by men belonging to Úa Morda of the Laígis in Leinster, for example, Cathal Carrach was on hand to exact immediate revenge on Úa Morda.<sup>433</sup>

This came to an end early in 1199, when 'Peace was made by Cathal Crobderg and Cathal Carrach; and Cathal Carrach was brought into the country, and land was given to him'.<sup>434</sup> While this bears a resemblance to the pacification of Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair with lands on two occasions, 1186 and 1191, Cathal Crobderg tried to have Cathal Carrach killed soon afterwards, perhaps fearing the latter would make a move for the kingship.<sup>435</sup>

The attempted assassination of Cathal Carrach had another context: that of a widespread English advance into Connacht's environs. In addition to the settlement of Thomond and parts of Desmond, there were attacks by John de Courcy on Cenél nEógain and Cenél Conaill from 1196 to '99, and the castle of Granard was also built in 1199.<sup>436</sup> Similarly, there appears to have been some English settlement in Athlone, which provoked Cathal

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<sup>433</sup> *A.L.C.* 1196.12, 1196.13; *A.F.M.* 1196.10.

<sup>434</sup> *A.L.C.* 1199.1; *A.F.M.* 1198.9; *A.U.* 1199.5.

<sup>435</sup> *A.L.C.* 1200.3.

<sup>436</sup> *A.L.C.* 1199.5.

Crobergh to make an attack there in 1199.<sup>437</sup> He followed this with a raid across the Shannon into west Meath, which ended disastrously.<sup>438</sup> Since the English were still trying to annex Athlone a decade later, their settlement in 1199 is likely to have been on the east bank of the Shannon only.

So, in relation to the king of Connacht's attack on Cathal Carrach, while *A.L.C.* criticised it as 'a treacherous and malicious hosting, of which came the destruction of Connacht, and his own destruction', it was probably done in anticipation of an attempt on the kingship by Cathal Carrach with English support.<sup>439</sup> Furthermore, the idea that 'his attacks on Anglo-Norman settlements along and beyond the Shannon in 1199–1200 were very much in the Irish cattle-raid tradition' ignores Cathal's strategic concerns, particularly the wider importance of Munster and Athlone to the provincial kingship of Connacht.<sup>440</sup>

Unfortunately for Cathal Crobergh, he failed to kill Cathal Carrach. The latter immediately sent messengers to William de Burgh requesting his assistance, and the very situation Cathal Crobergh was trying to avoid came to pass.<sup>441</sup> Of what followed, *Ann. Inisf.* concisely commented that 'The foreigners took the kingship of Connachta, and Cathal Crobergh was banished, and Cathal Carrach installed by them'.<sup>442</sup> This was the first time since 1092 that contemporary chroniclers had felt that succession in Connacht was determined by outsiders.<sup>443</sup>

Cathal Crobergh was unable to withstand the force that William de Burgh and Cathal Carrach brought against him, including as it did English based in Dublin, Leinster,

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<sup>437</sup> *A.L.C.* 1199.3.

<sup>438</sup> *A.L.C.* 1200.2.

<sup>439</sup> *A.L.C.* 1200.3: '*tinól meabhla & míbhretri, dá tainic milled Connacht & a milled féin*'.

<sup>440</sup> Perros (Walton), 'Ua Conchobhair, Cathal [Cathal O'Connor, Cathal Croibhdhearg] (1152–1224)', in *O.D.N.B.*, accessed online (<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-20513>) (30 August 2018).

<sup>441</sup> *A.L.C.* 1200.3.

<sup>442</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1200.6: '*Gaill do gabail rígi Connacht & Cathal Crobergh do innarba, & Cathal Carrach, do sudiugud doib ann*'.

<sup>443</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1092.3.



Munster, and Limerick, along with some of the Uí Briain.<sup>444</sup> He abandoned Connacht to seek the aid of Úa Néill and Úa hÉignigh in the North, and of John de Courcy in Ulaid.<sup>445</sup> In convincing de Courcy to accept his request for aid, Cathal Crobderg created disharmony in the English position, and it was this achievement which effectively saved him.

The subsequent civil war in Connacht ultimately saw Cathal Crobderg reprise his kingship of Connacht, but in a manner which only emphasised the reduction in Connacht's stature, and his own. Two expeditions launched in 1201 were little more than debacles. On the first occasion, Úa Néill and Úa hÉignigh tried to retreat when they realised Cathal Carrach had English support, which they had been told he lacked. Their retreat was cut off. Úa hÉignigh was killed and Úa Néill was forced to give hostages to Cathal Carrach.<sup>446</sup>

Then John de Courcy and Hugh de Lacy marched into Connacht alongside Cathal Crobderg. Cathal Carrach defeated them easily, even without the assistance of William de Burgh, and then pursued them across the Shannon.<sup>447</sup> Once back in Meath Cathal Crobderg was arrested for fear he would not pay his dues.<sup>448</sup> Cathal was taken to Dublin, and it appears he was forced to promise away some lands in Connacht to obtain his release.<sup>449</sup> John de Courcy was likewise taken prisoner, as Hugh de Lacy turned on his former ally.

At this point, there was a change of alliances. Cathal Crobderg managed to convince William de Burgh to abandon Cathal Carrach and support his own candidacy.<sup>450</sup> It is not known why de Burgh agreed to this; it has been suggested that Cathal Crobderg was

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<sup>444</sup> *A.L.C.* 1200.3.

<sup>445</sup> *A.L.C.* 1200.3.

<sup>446</sup> *A.L.C.* 1201.5; *A.U.* 1201.4.

<sup>447</sup> *A.L.C.* 1201.8; *A.U.* 1201.5.

<sup>448</sup> *A.L.C.* 1201.8; *A.U.* 1201.5.

<sup>449</sup> Orpen, *Normans*, ii, pp 188–89.

<sup>450</sup> *A.L.C.* 1202.3; *A.F.M.* 1200.7.

easier to control, but it is as likely that Cathal Crobderg offered greater financial incentives or land grants.<sup>451</sup>

Their invasion was successful more quickly than anyone could have expected. De Burgh and Cathal Crobderg entrenched at the monastery of Boyle, and they were still constructing a stone wall to fortify the position when Cathal Carrach was killed in a skirmish with their forces.<sup>452</sup> Since there were no other viable contenders, Cathal Crobderg was again king of Connacht.

The question of payment then arose, and William de Burgh billeted his troops throughout Connacht.<sup>453</sup> *A.L.C.* reported that a false rumour circulated the province, according to which William de Burgh was dead. Again, according to *A.L.C.*, the communities where the English soldiers had been billeted all spontaneously decided to kill their guests, resulting in about 900 casualties.<sup>454</sup>

*Ann. Inisf.* offered a more believable account: ‘Subsequently Ua Conchobair and the nobles of Connachta turned against William, inflicting a great slaughter on him, but he himself (William) escaped from it in defeat’.<sup>455</sup> It seems that once again Cathal Crobderg tried and failed to assassinate a major rival, this time being well placed to have his enemy’s troops killed as well. This was evidently the view taken by de Burgh himself, as, having escaped to Munster, he immediately prepared to attack Cathal Crobderg.

When de Burgh invaded Connacht in 1203, he did so with the aim of conquering the province and making good on his grant. He ‘built a castle around the church’ at Mílec (Meelick), in much the same way he had fortified Boyle the previous year.<sup>456</sup> From there he raided extensively, targeting Clonfert, Clonmacnoise, Cong, and Tuam.<sup>457</sup> He met

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<sup>451</sup> Walton, ‘The English in Connacht’, p. 29.

<sup>452</sup> *A.L.C.* 1202.5; *Misc.Ir.Annals* 1202.1; *A.F.M.* 1201.12; *Ann. Inisf.* 1202.2.

<sup>453</sup> *A.L.C.* 1202.5; *A.F.M.* 1201.12; *Ann. Inisf.* 1202.2.

<sup>454</sup> *A.L.C.* 1202.5.

<sup>455</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1202.2: ‘*Ar sain ro impá Ua Conchobair acus mathi Connacht ar Ulliam goro cured aar mór ar Ulliam co tanic féin i madmum as*’.

<sup>456</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1203.2: ‘*go nernai chasleán im tempul Mílice*’.

<sup>457</sup> *A.L.C.* 1203.1, 1203.3, 1203.9; *Misc.Ir.Annals* 1203.3.

with no resistance from Cathal Crobderg, either through fear or awareness of an impending move against de Burgh by the Irish justiciar, Meiler fitz Henry.

Fitz Henry led a force into Munster while de Burgh's campaign in Connacht was still ongoing. Eventually, the latter went south to meet the justiciar.<sup>458</sup> His lands were confiscated, he was forced to give up hostages, and he was ordered to appear before John.<sup>459</sup> It would be September 1204 before de Burgh had his lands restored to him, and at that time Connacht was explicitly excluded. On that occasion, John informed fitz Henry, still the justiciar, that de Burgh would be restored to all his lands in Ireland, 'save Connaught, whereof he was disseised by reason of the appeals aforesaid, and the dissension between the justiciary and himself'.<sup>460</sup>

It has been shown that this entire affair was provoked by a fear that de Burgh was about to conquer Connacht outright. John now wished to reserve some important territory to the crown, especially Athlone and Galway, and he used the justiciary in Ireland to prevent de Burgh making good on a grant whose terms he now regretted.<sup>461</sup> Connacht was not restored to de Burgh before his death in 1205.

Cathal Crobderg patently agreed that Connacht was on the brink of conquest by de Burgh in 1203. Avoiding challenging the latter while he was in his province, he later brought an army into Thomond to support the justiciar.<sup>462</sup> Though de Burgh had left a garrison in his new castle at Mílec, he subsequently sent for the men. Only once this castle was left deserted was it demolished by Cathal's forces.<sup>463</sup>

Having staved off the conquest and occupation of his territory, Cathal Crobderg sought permanent terms with the English crown. He was in contact with John from at least

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<sup>458</sup> *A.L.C.* 1203.6; *Ann. Inisf.* 1203.3.

<sup>459</sup> Walton, 'The English in Connacht', p. 33.

<sup>460</sup> *Cal.doc.Ire., 1171–1251*, p. 36, no. 230.

<sup>461</sup> Walton, 'The English in Connacht', pp 33–37.

<sup>462</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1203.3; *A.L.C.* 1203.6.

<sup>463</sup> *A.L.C.* 1203.6.

March 1204,<sup>464</sup> and in August the same year he made an extraordinary offer to quitclaim two-thirds of Connacht and hold the remainder as a heritable estate for 100 marks annually.<sup>465</sup>

The offer was obviously acceptable to John, but because he wanted the justiciar put in possession of the quitclaimed two-thirds before he would give Cathal security of tenure for the remaining third, no progress was made in making this deal a reality.<sup>466</sup> When William de Burgh died in early 1205, Cathal changed his terms. He now wished to hold one-third of Connacht as a barony for 100 marks per year as before, but also now to retain the remaining two-thirds for 300 marks annually. He would only cede two cantreds in their entirety under the new proposal, and these were offered only to sweeten the deal.<sup>467</sup>

While Cathal feared the English in general, then, and desired a formalisation of his relationship for that reason, his greater fear was of William de Burgh. Once de Burgh was dead, coming to an agreement was much less urgent as far as the king of Connacht was concerned. This assessment rested on de Burgh's situation in Thomond, and the strategic threat that location posed.

John accepted Cathal's terms, having allowed the opportunity for conquest to pass, and sometime before February 1207 a charter had been given to Úa Conchobair, probably on similar terms to those proposed after de Burgh's death.<sup>468</sup> Richard de Burgh, William's son, was still some years from his majority, and Cathal Crobderg, who clearly understood the particulars of English government, used this to his advantage to make a better deal.

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<sup>464</sup> *Cal.doc.Ire., 1171–1251*, p. 31, no. 205.

<sup>465</sup> *Cal.doc.Ire., 1171–1251*, p. 34, no. 222.

<sup>466</sup> Walton, 'The English in Connacht', pp 38–39.

<sup>467</sup> *Cal.doc.Ire., 1171–1251*, p. 41, no. 279.

<sup>468</sup> *Cal.doc.Ire., 1171–1251*, p. 46, no. 311.

Cathal Crobderg's second reign lasted until his death in 1224. It was characterised by his efforts to make this newly formulated relationship with the English crown work.

Towards the end of his life, he also worked determinedly to ensure that his son Áed would succeed him in this position. Unfortunately for Cathal his compromises meant Connacht lost ground to the English that would later prove crucial to the province's conquest.

This occurred for the first time in 1210, with the cession of Athlone. In that year, King John visited Ireland and at first Cathal Crobderg made every effort to show his loyalty. He travelled to Ardraccan in Meath to submit to John in person, and he brought with him a significant force to support John's campaign against Hugh de Lacy, who was in rebellion.<sup>469</sup>

John's campaign against de Lacy was successful, but he ran into difficulty negotiating with Áed Úa Néill, who refused to give him hostages.<sup>470</sup> When Úa Conchobair, who was present with John at Carrickfergus, was leaving to return home, John requested the king of Connacht meet him a fortnight later at Rathwire. Úa Conchobair agreed and offered to bring his son and prospective heir Áed to the meeting. John encouraged this by offering to issue a charter to Áed for a third of Connacht, the same third Cathal himself held as a barony, and which he certainly desired to pass on to Áed.<sup>471</sup>

After taking the advice of his wife and other important nobles, and perhaps reflecting on Úa Néill's decision to avoid giving hostages, Úa Conchobair thought better of this plan.<sup>472</sup> When he met John at Rathwire he was without his son. John was enraged by the breach of agreement and seized several of Cathal Crobderg's entourage as hostages.

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<sup>469</sup> Some ambiguous references in the Irish annals to a fleet and Úa Conchobair's participation in John's campaign at Carrickfergus and at the Isle of Man might suggest Úa Conchobair offered naval support as well (*A.L.C.* 1210.6, 1210.7, 1210.8; *Ann. Clon.* 1208/9). However, *Histoire des ducs de Normandie*, a source for John's expedition to Ireland, mentions only land forces. This source is printed in Duffy, 'King John's expedition to Ireland, 1210', pp 22–24.

<sup>470</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1210.2; see *The Uí Néill and the North*, pp 198–203.

<sup>471</sup> *A.L.C.* 1210.10.

<sup>472</sup> See *The Uí Néill and the North*, pp 198–203; Duffy, 'King John's expedition to Ireland, 1210', pp 16–19.

More significantly, the quarrel provided a pretext for the use of force against Connacht. John left instructions with the justiciar John de Gray to construct three castles in Connacht.

Immediately, de Gray seized Athlone and had a bridge and castle constructed.<sup>473</sup> A simultaneous attack by the English of Munster, supported by Áed mac Ruaidrí Uí Chonchobair, Donnchad Cairprech Úa Briain, and an Úa Flaithbertaigh prince, was clearly organised to place greater pressure on Úa Conchobair, and he did not stand up to it well.<sup>474</sup>

He made peace with the invaders from the south, allowing them safe passage out of Connacht through Athlone on the condition that they intercede on his behalf with the justiciar, who was still in situ at that location.<sup>475</sup> De Gray then readily made peace with Úa Conchobair on the understanding that the latter give more hostages, including a son, Toirdelbach.<sup>476</sup>

Toirdelbach mac Cathail remained in captivity after the other hostages taken by John returned to Ireland in 1211, and in fact, he would die in England in 1213.<sup>477</sup> His inclusion as a condition of peace was of little importance compared to the seizure of Athlone, which remained in English hands. His death was also ignored by the king of Connacht, who remained just as committed to peace with the English afterwards.

Indeed, once peace was re-established, Úa Conchobair was anxious to show his commitment to it. He spent Christmas of 1211 with the justiciar in Dublin, for example,<sup>478</sup> he paid tribute in 1212,<sup>479</sup> and he supported Gilbert de Angulo and the justiciary in their campaign in Cairpre Dromma Cliab the same year.<sup>480</sup> That effort ended

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<sup>473</sup> *A.L.C.* 1210.13.

<sup>474</sup> *A.L.C.* 1210.14.

<sup>475</sup> *A.L.C.* 1210.16.

<sup>476</sup> *A.L.C.* 1210.17.

<sup>477</sup> *A.L.C.* 1211.5; *A.U.* 1211.3; *A.F.M.* 1210.3; *Ann. Clon.* 1213.

<sup>478</sup> *Ann. Clon.* 1211.

<sup>479</sup> *Pipe roll Ire., 1211–12*, pp 36–37.

<sup>480</sup> *A.L.C.* 1212.1; *A.U.* 1212.5; *A.F.M.* 1211.4.

in disaster, but it was not the only ongoing English campaign. A push into west Meath, targeting the Uí Máel Sechlainn, was ignored by Cathal Crobderg.<sup>481</sup>

Another encroachment followed in 1214, with the construction of the castle of Clonmacnoise.<sup>482</sup> This ostensibly related to fighting between the English of Meath and the Uí Máel Sechlainn, who retained a small rump of territory in west Meath.<sup>483</sup> Nonetheless, it is the first indication we have that Clonmacnoise was no longer in Connacht's sphere of influence. Perhaps, like Athlone, its cession had been a condition of peace in 1210, but such formality may not have been necessary.

Whichever the case, Úa Conchobair was consciously encouraged to maintain his passive stance by the English. In 1214 the justiciar was ordered by the crown that Cathal be given 'protection during faithful service', and in September 1215 John issued two charters for Connacht; one for Cathal Crobderg and one for Richard de Burgh.<sup>484</sup> The terms were simple: Úa Conchobair was to have seisin of Connacht for 300 marks annually 'during good service'.<sup>485</sup> The grant to Richard de Burgh was held in abeyance, pending any breach of that service.

In other words, Cathal Crobderg still enjoyed no real security and held Connacht only as long as he did not interfere with English expansion. Such was his commitment to peace that the additional encouragement was probably unnecessary. Still, it showed that further English expansion into Connacht was inevitable. This in turn strengthened Úa Conchobair's preoccupation with the preservation of a third of the province as a core territory.

Cathal Crobderg's successful opposition to de Lacy expansion in the early 1220s stands as one late example of his defence of Connacht against English expansion. Walter de

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<sup>481</sup> *A.F.M.* 1212.13; *Ann. Clon.* 1212.

<sup>482</sup> *A.L.C.* 1214.1.

<sup>483</sup> *A.L.C.* 1214.1, 1214.2, 1214.3.

<sup>484</sup> *Cal.doc.Ire., 1171–1251*, p. 81, no. 509.

<sup>485</sup> *Cal.doc.Ire., 1171–1251*, pp 100–1, no. 654.

Lacy tried to build a castle at the strategic location of Ballyleague, where invading parties had entered Connacht before, but once Úa Conchobair marched against him he abandoned the undertaking.<sup>486</sup> His opposition was an aberration and de Lacy's surprise underlines this fact; the king of Connacht may have felt more confident on this occasion because the Lacys were in rebellion against the crown.

In 1224 Cathal Crobderg sought a charter for Connacht for his son Áed, matching his own. He further asked that Áed be given a charter for the territories of 'Ubrin, Conmacin, and Caled in Connaught'.<sup>487</sup> This was an interesting development, since these lands (Uí Briúin, Conmaicne, and Caladh na hAngaile or Muintir Angaile) formerly constituted the provincial kingdom of Uí Briúin Bréifne. The provincial structure of that kingdom had collapsed early in the thirteenth century, and at this moment it was in danger of outright conquest by the rebellious William Gorm de Lacy.

Úa Conchobair had no doubt been cognisant of the historic ties between Bréifne and Connacht when Walter de Lacy tried to establish himself at Ballyleague in 1221, but he also had other reasons for taking an interest. Despite his assertion that its territories were in Connacht, he was taking advantage of Bréifne's deterioration and his request that Áed be given a charter for Bréifne was an attempt at expansion.

Bréifne, especially the Muintir Angaile of Conmaicne Réin, had also become a haven for Cathal Crobderg's rivals. In 1211, Ruaidrí's sons had come from that area with support and retreated back into it after defeat by Áed mac Cathail Crobdeirg.<sup>488</sup> Then in 1219 and 1220, Muchad Carrach Úa Fergail of Muintir Angaile launched successive attacks on Connacht,<sup>489</sup> with support from some of the English of Meath on one occasion, and perhaps also with the support of disaffected Uí Chonchobair rivals.<sup>490</sup>

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<sup>486</sup> *A.L.C.* 1221.4, 1221.5; *A.F.M.* 1220.5.

<sup>487</sup> *Cal.doc.Ire., 1171–1251*, pp 180, 181, nos 1184, 1195.

<sup>488</sup> *A.F.M.* 1210.7.

<sup>489</sup> *A.L.C.* 1219.3, 1220.7; *A.F.M.* 1218.8.

<sup>490</sup> *A.F.M.* 1218.8.



It is also likely that Úa Conchobair wanted Áed to have the additional territory to bolster his strength for prospective contests with Richard de Burgh. Since 1219, de Burgh had been more active in seeking seisin of Connacht, using various ploys and offers. In September of that year, he made three simultaneous offers to the regency government of Henry III.

According to the first, he would give up three cantreds of Connacht to Henry III (in addition to the two already held by the crown) plus a gift of 1000 marks. In the second offer, de Burgh offered an increase of 200 marks in the annual rent owed for Connacht on his charter of 1215 (which would bring the annual rent to 500 marks). Finally, in the third proposal, he offered a gift of £1000 on the terms that he and Cathal Crobderg should both hold half Connacht each (for half the service each) for the remainder of Cathal's life, and that after Cathal's death he, Richard, should have full seisin.<sup>491</sup>

Despite the influence and efforts of his uncle Hubert de Burgh, the justiciar in England, none of these offers were accepted. Hubert did manage to get orders issued twice for Richard to be put in control of all the Irish territories his father had been dispossessed of, in 1220 and 1223, which would have meant Connacht also, but as far as the latter was concerned these did not take effect in practice.<sup>492</sup>

Úa Conchobair had remained steadfastly loyal to the English crown for some time, and he evidently had English supporters who opposed any confiscation of his territory. These included the justiciar of Ireland during 1215–1221, Geoffrey de Marisco, who had been told to consider de Burgh's ultimately rejected offers.<sup>493</sup> In 1220, Úa Conchobair petitioned Hubert de Burgh to maintain friendship with him, perhaps following the first order to put Richard in control of all his father's territories. Cathal had already been granted protection for four years earlier in 1220, beginning at Easter (29 March) the same

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<sup>491</sup> *Cal.doc.Ire., 1171–1251*, p. 184, no. 900.

<sup>492</sup> *Cal.doc.Ire., 1171–1251*, pp 146, 170, nos 954, 1117.

<sup>493</sup> *Cal.doc.Ire., 1171–1251*, p. 184, no. 900.

year, but he was clearly well-aware of the competing visions for Connacht amongst the English which still threatened his kingship.<sup>494</sup>

Hugh de Lacy's arrival in Ireland in late 1223 changed the dynamic, as the threat of Cathal joining the rebellion bolstered the king of Connacht's negotiating position. 1224 saw his protection renewed indefinitely, the recommendation by the justiciar and Henry de Loundres, Archbishop of Dublin, that Henry III should hear Cathal's messengers, suggesting that 'they will expound matters to the honour and profit of the King', and ultimately, the grant of Uí Briúin Bréifne to Áed mac Cathail Crobdeirg.<sup>495</sup>

Cathal quite deliberately invoked the rebellion in his communications, saying first, 'Hugh de Lascy, enemy of the King, of the King's father, and of Kathal, whom King John by Kathal's advice expelled from Ireland, has without consulting the King come to that country to disturb it. Against Hugh's coming, Kathal remains, as the Archbishop of Dublin knows, firm in his fidelity to the King. But the closer Kathal adheres to the King's service, the more he is harassed by those who pretend fealty to the King, and as the justiciary knows, shamefully fail against his enemy',<sup>496</sup> and later, in reference to Bréifne, saying the province was 'detained by William de Lascy, Cathal's enemy, and kinsman of the King's enemy'.<sup>497</sup> In short, without ever intending to support de Lacy or even implying such an intent, Úa Conchobair emphasised his important role in maintaining the English king's authority in Ireland.

Cathal died later in 1224, having held the kingship of Connacht, for the second time, for twenty-two years.<sup>498</sup> This second kingship was won with the assistance of William de Burgh, who had already been granted all of Connacht by John at the time. Perhaps Cathal always intended turning on de Burgh and perhaps it was de Burgh's decision to billet his

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<sup>494</sup> *Cal.doc.Ire., 1171–1251*, p. 140, no. 928.

<sup>495</sup> *Cal.doc.Ire., 1171–1251*, p. 180, no. 1183.

<sup>496</sup> *Cal.doc.Ire., 1171–1251*, p. 178, no. 1174.

<sup>497</sup> *Cal.doc.Ire., 1171–1251*, p. 180, no. 1184.

<sup>498</sup> *Ann. Conn.* 1224.2; *A.L.C.* 1224.2; *A.F.M.* 1224.7.

men throughout Connacht that provoked him, but the failed assassination attempt on de Burgh led to a first attempt to conquer the province outright in 1203.

Luckily for Úa Conchobair, neither the justiciary nor John wanted to see the conquest occur at that moment, and it was their interference that prevented it. The king of Connacht immediately developed a new policy towards the English, such was the impact these events made on him. For the remainder of his reign, he stuck to the principle that avoiding conflict with the English was his best course of action.

While William de Burgh lived, Cathal countenanced losing two-thirds of the province outright to enjoy security of tenure in the remaining third. After the former's death, his terms were less generous. This was a direct reflection of the importance of Thomond, and de Burgh's situation there, as well as the latter's grant. In this respect, Cathal Crobderg operated with the same strategic principles as Toirdelbach and Ruaidrí.

On the other hand, such was his determination to keep peace, Cathal was easily manipulated by the English crown. This was made manifest on several occasions, but perhaps most notably in his loss of Athlone, a pivotal location, and one which had long been fortified. Such losses seriously undermined the position of his successors, even if the idea of seeking accommodation within the English lordship of Ireland was not inherently flawed.

Clearly, between 1203 and 1205, everyone, including Úa Conchobair, believed Connacht was on the brink of outright conquest. Close to his death in 1224, the king of Connacht must have believed his acquiescent posture had saved his province from that eventuality. The de Burgh grant still loomed heavily over the province, but the idea of leaving the Uí Chonchobair in control as crown subjects had also gained credibility among important English officials and advisors.

Nevertheless, there were indications that Úa Conchobair was only postponing conquest. For instance, the fact that de Burgh was issued a charter in 1215, albeit one which was

held in abeyance, ought to have shown the king of Connacht he had made little progress. Similarly, the two unfulfilled orders to put de Burgh in control of all his father's Irish territories, in 1220 and 1223, strongly suggested that the Connacht question would not be considered settled until de Burgh was in possession.

### [1.6: Conquest]

Áed mac Cathail Crobdeirg, who had been 'king in effect by the side of his father' for many years, did not fare well when he became king in his own right.<sup>499</sup> He struggled to establish his authority, and faced successive rebellions by Connacht's major dynasties in 1225. His relationship with the English was similarly turbulent, as by turns he attacked or requested their assistance.

He inaugurated his reign with an assault on the motte at Lissardowlan in modern County Longfort, which he may have regarded as being the lands of Bréifne; as mentioned above, his rights in Bréifne had been recognised by the English crown. His army captured the fortification, 'burning and slaying every Gall and Gael they found therein'.<sup>500</sup>

We know that Áed was considered to be in breach of the English king's peace for these actions.<sup>501</sup> In the short-term this was an irrelevance, and he was quickly and easily brought back to that peace, but in the long-term, when it proved expedient, this would be considered grounds to dispossess him. Incidentally, on this occasion the English treated with Áed through a daughter of Ruaidrí's, who had been married to Hugh de Lacy (d. 1186) and subsequently to another English baron.<sup>502</sup>

Áed's attack on Lissardowlan was also prompted by the need to show other parties in Connacht that he was willing to be more active than his father. Some years later, in 1230, Áed mac Ruaidrí Uí Chonchobair (then king of Connacht) would be forced to rebel

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<sup>499</sup> *Ann. Conn.* 1224.3: '*ba ri ar tohacht re lamaib a adur reme*'.

<sup>500</sup> *Ann. Conn.* 1224.14; *A.L.C.* 1224.11.

<sup>501</sup> *Cal.doc.Ire., 1171-1251*, pp 182-3, no. 1203.

<sup>502</sup> See *Women and Marriage*, p. 401.

against the English by his subordinates, ‘who all vowed they would never own a lord who should bring them to make submission to the Galls’.<sup>503</sup> It is quite likely that Áed mac Cathail faced similar concerns at the outset of his reign.

Nothing he did was sufficient to mollify the regional kings of Connacht, and both rebellions of 1225 had widespread support. Donn Óg Mac Oireachtaig of Síl Muiredaig instigated the whole thing on behalf of Ruaidrí’s sons by inviting Áed Úa Néill to invade.<sup>504</sup> The meic Ruaidrí had regularly sought shelter with the king of the North throughout Cathal’s reign, and he was happy to oblige.

Many of Connacht’s leading nobles supported the invasion. Eogan Úa hEidin of Uí Fiachrach Aidne, Tuathal and Taichlech Úa Dubda of Uí Fiachrach Muaide, and Áed Úa Flaithbertaigh of west Connacht, for example, all revolted against Áed. Indeed, the king of Connacht had limited support. He relied on Cormac Mac Diarmata of Síl Muiredaig and Úa Flainn of Síl Maelruain in Uí Maine. Úa Taidc and Úa Maelbrenainn of Síl Muiredaig were other minor supporters, but even Úa Taidc originally supported the meic Ruaidrí, and only changed sides under pressure.<sup>505</sup>

Why the rebellion against Áed was so popularly supported is open to question. Reference is made to almost all the members of the *airecht* (the assembly that elected the king) inviting the meic Ruaidrí in, and this has drawn some attention.<sup>506</sup> It is possible, considering the reference to Áed being ‘king in effect by the side of his father’, that the traditional election of a king had not taken place in 1224.<sup>507</sup>

This theory may be supported by the fact that the English ensured their choice of successor in 1228, Áed mac Ruaidrí, was elected king in a traditional manner.<sup>508</sup> There

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<sup>503</sup> *Ann. Conn.* 1230.2: ‘Uair do radsad-sein breithir nach betis ac tigerna do berad hi tech Gall iatt co brath’.

<sup>504</sup> *A.L.C.* 1225.8; *A.F.M.* 1225.7; *Ann. Conn.* 1225.4.

<sup>505</sup> *Ann. Conn.* 1225.9; *A.L.C.* 1225.11; *A.F.M.* 1225.9.

<sup>506</sup> *Ann. Conn.* 1125.3: ‘Uair robo tarisi le macaib Ruaidri a n-airecht fein arna cuiread do cech oen fo leth dib-sin’; Simms, *From kings to warlords*, p. 44.

<sup>507</sup> *Ann. Conn.* 1224.3: ‘ba ri ar tohacht re lamaib a adur reme’.

<sup>508</sup> *A.L.C.* 1228.4.

was no question of a different outcome on that occasion, of course, despite the strong candidacy of Toirdelbach mac Ruaidrí. The decision was taken ‘in the presence of Galls and Gaels’.<sup>509</sup>

There is also some evidence that discontent with Áed was an extension of similar feelings towards Cathal Crobderg. Both had reputations as harsh rulers. Cathal was described in his obituary as ‘the king who was the fiercest and harshest towards his enemies that ever lived’ and ‘the king who most blinded, killed and mutilated rebellious and disaffected subjects’.<sup>510</sup>

Some examples are recorded in the annals, including the killing of Dub Dara Úa Máille in 1220 by Cathal, and the blinding of Donnchad Úa hEidin in 1213 by Áed.<sup>511</sup> Similarly, Cathal dispossessed Ruaidrí Úa Flaithbertaig in 1196,<sup>512</sup> and Donn Óg Mac Oirechtaig was deprived of his lands by Áed in 1225, an action which led the latter to instigate the first rebellion of that year.<sup>513</sup>

Helen Perros (Walton) also argued that the 1225 rebellions were ‘as much against Cathal Crobderg as against Aodh’, but her theory that Cathal Crobderg applied ‘an Anglo-Norman model of kingship to Connacht’ is difficult to prove.<sup>514</sup> His single marriage, for example, might be taken as evidence of such, or similarly, his use of Latin charters, but in all cases there were other Irish kings before him, and before the invasion, who had done the same.

In 1225 Áed recognised that his limited support in Connacht would be insufficient to retain the kingship. When the first rebellion broke out, *Ann. Conn.* informs us that ‘As

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<sup>509</sup> *Ann. Conn.* 1228.4: ‘i fiadnaise Gall & Gaidel’.

<sup>510</sup> *Ann. Conn.* 1224.2: ‘Ri is crodae 7 is antrenta re hescardib tanicc riam’, ‘Ri is mo ro dall 7 ro marb acus ro chirph do merlichib 7 d’escardib na rige’; *A.L.C.* 1224.2; *A.F.M.* 1224.7.

<sup>511</sup> *A.L.C.* 1213.3, 1220.1; *A.U.* 1213.8; *A.F.M.* 1212.5.

<sup>512</sup> *A.L.C.* 1196.4, 1196.5, 1196.6, 1196.9.

<sup>513</sup> *Ann. Conn.* 1225.4; *A.L.C.* 1225.8; *A.F.M.* 1225.7.

<sup>514</sup> Helen Perros (Walton), ‘Crossing the Shannon frontier: Connacht and the Anglo-Normans, 1170–1224’ in Terry Barry, Frame, and Simms (eds), *Colony and frontier in medieval Ireland: essays presented to J.F. Lydon* (London, 1995), pp 117–39 at 135, 138.

for Aed mac Cathail Chrobdeirg, he sought the protection of the Galls, and it happened fortunately for him that the Galls of Ireland were holding a great Court at Athlone; and each one of them was a friend to him on his father's account as well as his own, since he, like his father before him, was liberal of wages and gifts to them'.<sup>515</sup>

Similarly, when the second rebellion erupted, 'Cathal's son sent messengers and writings to the Galls, telling them of this second revolt and asking for more troops. They responded with alacrity, for these expeditions were profitable to the Galls, who got much booty thereby, though not incurring the dangers of the conflict'.<sup>516</sup> They avoided conflict largely because Úa Néill and the meic Ruaidrí opted not to confront them, waiting until they had left to reassert their position.

Despite the advantages of good pay and little danger, this dynamic could not last for long. The English, who did not really trust Úa Conchobair and demanded hostages as security for their pay, saw little point in supporting a king who could only enforce authority with their help.<sup>517</sup> With Connacht now in a vulnerable position, preparations were made to disseise Áed in favour of Richard de Burgh.<sup>518</sup> The pretext for doing so was Úa Conchobair's hither-to overlooked action against Lissardowlan.

Not all the English were happy with the forthcoming move against Úa Conchobair, though, and the support earl William Marshall offered the king of Connacht has received attention elsewhere.<sup>519</sup> Here it suffices to say that Marshall advised Úa Conchobair against attending a court at Dublin to which he had been summoned.<sup>520</sup> Realising that he

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<sup>515</sup> *Ann. Conn.* 1225.6: 'Dala immorro Aeda meic Cathail Crobdeirg dochuaid i nn-ucht Gall, & dorala co sodanach do-som. Uair is ann batur Gaill Erenn for cuirt moir hoc Ath Luain & ba cara do-sam cech oen dib trena athair & tremit fein. Ar ba hacmaingech tuarasdail & tindlaicti e-sim & a athair reme doib'; *A.L.C.* 1225.9; *A.F.M.* 1225.8.

<sup>516</sup> *A.L.C.* 1225.27; *A.F.M.* 1225.18; *Ann. Conn.* 1225.19: '& do chuir mac Cathail techta & scribenna d'innsaigid Gall d'indisin doib in athimpaid & d'iarraid thuillid sochraití. Do freccrad co soindib e-sim. Uair ba tuillmech na turusa-sin do Gallaib, uair do gebtis etala mora & ni fagbaitis gada na imsergna'.

<sup>517</sup> *Ann. Conn.* 1225.18; *A.L.C.* 1225.26; *A.F.M.* 1225.17.

<sup>518</sup> See Orpen, *Normans*, iii, pp 164–6.

<sup>519</sup> Orpen, *Normans*, iii, pp 166–8; Walton, 'The English in Connacht', pp 57–58, 60–62.

<sup>520</sup> Orpen, *Normans*, iii, p. 170.

was to be betrayed when a subsequent meeting was organised near Athlone, Áed turned on the English delegation, killing some and capturing others.

He then marched on Athlone and burned the town, later using his prisoners to ransom the hostages that were held by the English.<sup>521</sup> Despite the jubilant way in which these events were recorded in the Irish annals, as ‘being of profit to the whole of Connacht’, they led directly to renewed war in the province, at the end of which Connacht would be conquered.<sup>522</sup>

In May 1227, the grant of Connacht to de Burgh was executed, and campaigns against Áed mac Cathail Crobdeirg began.<sup>523</sup> Both Áed mac Ruaidrí and Toirdelbach mac Ruaidrí joined the English invasion of Connacht, and Áed mac Cathail was driven out of the province.<sup>524</sup> By contrast with the meic Ruaidrí, when they had suffered exile, he sought shelter with Úa Domnaill and the Cenél Conaill rather than the Cenél nEógain.<sup>525</sup>

The next year, 1228, Áed mac Cathail was assassinated in the court of Geoffrey de Marisco. Though we are evidently missing some information, not knowing how, why, or under what guarantees Áed mac Cathail left Úa Domnaill and joined de Marisco’s company, we do have a report of the assassination. According to *Ann. Conn.*, he ‘was killed with one blow of a carpenter’s axe in the court of Geoffrey de Mareys while the carpenter’s wife was bathing him; and the man who struck him down was hanged by Geoffrey the next day. This deed of treachery was done on this righteous, excellent prince at the instigation of Hugo de Lacy’s sons and of William son of the Justiciar. And

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<sup>521</sup> *Ann. Conn.* 1227.3; *A.L.C.* 1227.2; *A.U.* 1227.1; *A.F.M.* 1227.7.

<sup>522</sup> *Ann. Conn.* 1227.3: ‘*ropa gnim sochair do Connachtaib uili sin*’.

<sup>523</sup> *Calendar of the charter rolls preserved in the Public Record Office* (6 vols., Public Record Office, London, 1903–27), i, p. 42.

<sup>524</sup> *Ann. Conn.* 1227.10, 1227.11; *A.L.C.* 1227.8, 1227.9, 1227.10, 1227.12; *A.F.M.* 1227.11, 1227.12.

<sup>525</sup> *Ann. Conn.* 1227.10; *A.L.C.* 1227.8, 1227.9, 1227.10; *A.F.M.* 1227.11.



it was said that the carpenter struck him in jealousy for there was not in Ireland a man of fairer mould or livelier courage than he'.<sup>526</sup>

Clearly, there were conflicting reports of the cause of the assassination (i.e., whether it was a spontaneous or politically motivated), but there is reason to believe Áed mac Cathail would have been used by the English in subsequent years had he lived. English policy when the kingships of Thomond and Desmond were disputed in the thirteenth century threw on multiple contenders, as we will ultimately see.<sup>527</sup>

Despite de Burgh's charter finally being put into effect, and the death of Áed mac Cathail, it would still be almost a decade before Connacht was conquered. That conquest, completed by a settlement in 1237, saw the Uí Chonchobair retain five cantreds while the rest of Connacht was settled by the English. From de Burgh's perspective, the delay was caused first by problems in Ireland and later, from 1232–34, by difficulties stemming from the fall of his uncle, Hubert de Burgh, from the king's grace and the position of justiciar in England.

Taking first the Irish issues, it seems that, in the late 1220s, de Burgh still needed an Irish king who would follow his lead. In 1228, He installed Áed, the younger of the two active sons of Ruaidrí, hoping to gain greater influence.<sup>528</sup> This did not really work, and perhaps aware of the impending settlement of their province, the regional kings of Connacht forced Áed mac Ruaidrí to rebel against de Burgh in 1230.<sup>529</sup> It will be remembered from above that they warned Áed mac Ruaidrí that 'they would never own a lord who should bring them to make submission to the Galls'.<sup>530</sup>

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<sup>526</sup> *Ann. Conn.* 1228.2: 'do marbad d'oenbuilli do thuaig sairsi i cuirt Sefraid Mares & se oca folcad oc mnai in tsair, acus an fer do buail he do crochad ac Sefraid arabarach. Tre faslach immorro mac Uga de Laci & Uilliam .i. Meic in Giustis doronad in fell-sin arin flaith firen forglidi-sin. Et adubrad conab tre ed do buail in saer e. Uair ni raibi ind Erinn cre duine bad aille ina bad beodha inas'.

<sup>527</sup> See *The Two Munsters*, pp 293–8.

<sup>528</sup> *A.L.C.* 1228.4.

<sup>529</sup> *Ann. Conn.* 1230.2; *A.L.C.* 1230.1, 1230.2.

<sup>530</sup> *Ann. Conn.* 1230.2: 'Uair do radsad-sein breithir nach betis ac tigerna do berad hi tech Gall iatt co brath'.

De Burgh used Áed mac Cathail's younger brother Felim as an alternative to the meic Ruaidrí, and he was installed as king in 1231. Unfortunately for de Burgh, this did not work either, and the English baron imprisoned Felim in 1231.<sup>531</sup> He came to terms with Áed mac Ruaidrí and allowed the latter to reprise the kingship.<sup>532</sup> Soon afterwards, in 1232, Hubert de Burgh lost power in England, and the conquest of Connacht was stalled by the threat this posed to Richard.

Richard was ordered to release Felim Úa Conchobair from custody, and later, the justiciar of Ireland, Maurice fitz Gerald, took Connacht into the king's hand.<sup>533</sup> These developments, coupled with correspondence from Henry III, encouraged Felim. He made a play for the kingship of Connacht and killed Áed mac Ruaidrí.<sup>534</sup> Having done this, he destroyed some English castles, which had recently been built by de Burgh and his subordinates, including Bun-Gaillimhe and Dunamon.<sup>535</sup>

Unfortunately for Felim Úa Conchobair, Richard de Burgh restored his standing with the king of England by helping to defeat Richard Marshal in April 1234.<sup>536</sup> Shortly afterwards the crown restored Connacht to de Burgh, and the invasions recommenced.<sup>537</sup> This time, de Burgh was urged by Henry III to 'strenuously exert himself to take possession of the land' in Connacht, and he did just that.<sup>538</sup>

At no point after 1234 did it appear likely Connacht would emerge from the crisis as a quasi-autonomous kingdom. Despite the long delay and the intricacies of both English and Irish politics, which each in turn prolonged the life of the kingdom, no leader in Connacht during this period was able to muster enough internal or external support to

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<sup>531</sup> *Ann. Conn.* 1231.6; *A.L.C.* 1231.5; *A.F.M.* 1231.12; *Ann. Inisf.* 1231.2; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1231.2; *A.U.* 1232.10.

<sup>532</sup> *Ann. Conn.* 1232.4; *A.L.C.* 1232.3; *A.F.M.* 1232.8.

<sup>533</sup> Orpen, *Normans*, iii, p. 180; *Calendar of the patent rolls preserved in the Public Record Office, Henry III* (Public Record Office, 6 vols., 1901–13), i, p. 10.

<sup>534</sup> *Ann. Conn.* 1233.2; *A.L.C.* 1233.1; *A.U.* 1233.1; *A.F.M.* 1233.4; *Ann. Inisf.* 1233.1.

<sup>535</sup> *Ann. Conn.* 1232.4, 1232.5, 1233.4; *A.L.C.* 1232.3, 1232.4, 1233.5; *A.U.* 1233.2; *A.F.M.* 1232.9, 1233.4.

<sup>536</sup> Orpen, *Normans*, iii, pp 73–74, 180.

<sup>537</sup> *Cal.doc.Ire., 1171–1251*, p. 324, no. 2189.

<sup>538</sup> *Cal.doc.Ire., 1171–1251*, p. 324, no. 2189.

ward off de Burgh. The most they were able to do was force him to change horses, reliant as he was on finding a candidate for the kingship who would allow a relatively peaceful settlement of the province.

Felim mac Cathail launched major campaigns to defend his kingship, and two years of intense warfare followed. In the end, his efforts were only sufficient to see him awarded five cantreds, while the rest of Connacht became de Burgh's lordship. In fact, the five cantreds allotted to Felim and his successors were the same as those reserved to the king of England; a similar duality to Cairpre Dromma Cliab and Maenmag under Gilbert de Angulo, as outlined above. This set the scene for considerable tension in the next phase of the Connacht's history.<sup>539</sup>

### **[1.7: Conclusion]**

In the period considered here, Connacht became the most powerful and most important kingdom in Ireland. Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair, whose imposition as a client king of Síol Muiredaig so clearly reflected the weakness of Connacht at the start of the twelfth century, identified the key strategic problems facing his province. As a regional king and occasional participant, he served a political apprenticeship observing the campaigns of Muirchertach Úa Briain. That an Uí Briain-led kingship of Ireland guaranteed the continued subservience of the Connacht dynasties could only have been obvious to Úa Conchobair, who patiently waited until 1114, when Muirchertach fell ill, to make his move for provincial kingship.

As king of Connacht, it was imperative for Toirdelbach to prevent the Uí Briain recovering the power that dissipated with Muirchertach's health and ensuring Munster's weakness became his principal policy. To this end, he partitioned Munster a number of times, and launched numerous military campaigns. It was also under Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair that the kingdom of Connacht took control of the east bank of the Shannon,

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<sup>539</sup> See Thomas Finan, *Landscape and history on the medieval Irish frontier: the king's cantreds in the thirteenth century* (Turnhout, 2016).

securing locations like Athlone and Ballyleague, and using them to ensure control of Meath and Bréifne. Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair's strategic flair launched Connacht as a major power, and even though he suffered major setbacks in his later career and many of his schemes were unsuccessful, the Connacht he bequeathed to his successor was among the challengers for the kingship of Ireland.

Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair improved on his father's momentous reign by following a similar template, complemented with lessons learned from other kings. One feature of the kingship of Ireland as practiced by Ruaidrí was a focus on financial affairs. He was particularly generous with the *túarastal* he paid to subordinate kings, and he was also innovative in the methods he used to extract payments. Certain more incidental actions suggest wealth characterised Ruaidrí's approach to politics more generally. He made generous payments to the men of the Hebrides for their naval support of his siege of Dublin in 1171, and he forced Mac Murchada to pay a fine to Úa Ruairc in 1167.

Ruaidrí's reign as king of Ireland was interrupted by Mac Murchada's return. In the past, historians have been critical of the posture Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair adopted towards Mac Murchada, but Úa Conchobair had every reason to view Mac Murchada as a wayward subordinate rather than a rival for power. Only when it became obvious that the latter was campaigning for more than his traditional holdings did Úa Conchobair become alarmed.

Ruaidrí's efforts to prevent the English establishing an enclave in Ireland involved mustering an army of unparalleled size. It was partly through poor generalship that the siege of Dublin in 1171 failed, but the difficulty of organising a force from so many different regions is emphasised by its rapid dissolution in the face of a single defeat. Complicating and aggravating Úa Conchobair's efforts was Domnall Úa Briain, who was eager to take advantage of the Connacht king's difficulties to secure his own independence.

After suffering several major setbacks, Ruaidrí settled into a more passive posture towards the English, breaking from this only once, in 1174, when Henry II suffered rebellions and attacks from other directions. Even then, there is every indication that the king of Connacht intended to improve his negotiating position, rather than expel the English from any area they now held. The Treaty of Windsor soon resulted, but more significantly the English in Ireland became aggravated by the official policy of conciliation with Úa Conchobair, when, as they correctly perceived, the situation was very much to their advantage.

Raymond le Gros tried to hold Limerick before being outmanoeuvred, but John de Courcy effectively won a lordship for himself in Ulaid by exploiting Úa Conchobair's passivity. Miles de Cogan's expedition against Connacht might have been unsuccessful in and of itself, but the cautious tactics adopted by Úa Conchobair on that occasion emphasised the fact that he was no longer willing to challenge the English openly. This conduct contributed to a destabilisation of his kingship; by contrast, his son and successor Conchobar Maenmaige was notable for his attacks on English castles.

After Ruaidrí was deposed in favour of Conchobar Maenmaige, a less stable but still very wealthy Connacht was gradually infiltrated by English mercenaries. These mercenaries were much sought after and well paid for their trouble. Some of them became permanent residents of Connacht, including Gilbert de Angulo, who received formal grants of land from Cathal Crobderg Úa Conchobair, and perhaps also from Conchobar Maenmaige.

The willingness of notable Anglo-Normans to risk or outright sacrifice lands and position elsewhere in this pursuit underlines the level of opportunity Connacht presented. English participation played a major role in the contests between Ruaidrí and Conchobar Maenmaige, and Cathal Carrach and Cathal Crobderg. All the same, it was English progress in Munster that led to the next revolution in Connacht's political posture.

Controlling Munster, especially Thomond, remained the principal strategic objective of the kings of Connacht. Following the rapid English progress there in the early 1190s, Cathal Crobderg launched an attack to reassert his dominance in 1195. He also entertained the possibility of creating a lasting settlement with the English later the same year, with the so-called 'Peace of Athlone', perhaps because his province was now subject to an English grant as well.

The breaking of that peace agreement with attacks on the English in 1199 and 1200 was clearly motivated by recent English expansion, including in Munster. By challenging the English and failing to assassinate his rival, Cathal Carrach, Cathal Crobderg opened the door for a campaign to oust him. Unsurprisingly, this was led by William de Burgh, one of the leading feoffees in Thomond and the recipient of the grant of Connacht.

Cathal Crobderg was fortunate to reprise his kingship after these missteps, and he only managed to do so because of King John's duplicity. Connacht could well have been taken at this point had John allowed de Burgh to proceed. With his subsequent attempted assassination of de Burgh, Cathal betrayed an ongoing fear for his position from de Burgh and Thomond, and this fear governed the remainder of his reign.

Between 1203 and 1224, Cathal Crobderg operated on the basis that securing the favour of, and legal recognition from, the English crown, constituted the best hope of achieving long-term security for himself and his successors. In this effort, he sought and obtained charters for lands, and sacrificed control of strategic points considered pivotal by his predecessors.

There can be little doubt that the root of the subsequent conquest of Connacht is to be found in the loss of control over affairs in Munster, particularly Thomond, and locations on the Shannon through which Connacht could be invaded, like Athlone. Some effort was made by Cathal Crobderg to defend Ballyleague from similar English incursions, but

perhaps only because it was led by the Lacys, who were in rebellion against the English king at the time.

The era after the death of Cathal Crobdeirg saw a somewhat predictable deterioration of stability. Áed mac Cathail Crobdeirg, who by contrast with his father overestimated his strength, gave the English the excuse they wanted to intervene further in the province when he attacked Lissardowlan. He may have survived for longer had he commanded the loyalty of his own regional kings.

As it happened the conquest took place gradually, with various English parties extracting value from the province by backing different contenders for kingship until, ultimately, Richard de Burgh made his grant of Connacht a reality. The Uí Chonchobair eventually accepted their fate, effectively reduced to lords of Síol Muiredaig, and their territory would be reduced further in the years that followed.

## The Uí Néill and the North

### [2.0: Introduction]

If Munster was a province that collapsed into two kingdoms in the twelfth century, the three kingdoms in the north of Ireland were on the opposite trajectory. Though still clearly distinct from one another, a progressively closer relationship between two of these kingdoms, and the slow but certain eclipse of the third, led to de-facto provincial status for ‘the North of Ireland’ in the eyes of contemporaries. Where ‘the North’ is capitalised in this thesis, it is this de facto kingdom that is referred to.

The title ‘king of the North’<sup>540</sup> had once meant control of the two major segments of the Northern Uí Néill, Cenél nEógain and Cenél Conaill,<sup>541</sup> but by the twelfth century it meant control of the three kingdoms: Northern Uí Néill, Airgíalla, and Ulaid.<sup>542</sup> Under this new arrangement, ‘the people of the North of Ireland’, as described in the annals,<sup>543</sup> collectively formed the armies with which Munster and Connacht would compete for dominance.<sup>544</sup>

Therefore, while this chapter is largely concerned with the Northern Uí Néill, a wider lens encompassing all three kingdoms is required to provide the proper context. The

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<sup>540</sup> Sometimes from ‘*rí in Fhochlai*’, or ‘*rex Aquilonis*’, but more usually ‘*rí in Tuaiscirt*’, this title is generally accepted to indicate only the collective kingship of Cenél Conaill and Cenél nEógain. See for instance, James Hogan, ‘The Irish law of kingship, with special reference to Ailech and Cenél Eoghain’ in *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy Section*, xl C (1931/2), pp 186–254 at 201–202; Immo Warntjes, ‘Regnal succession in early medieval Ireland’ in *Journal of Medieval History*, xxx (2004), pp 377–410 at 399–400.

<sup>541</sup> For example, Domnall mac Áeda Muindeirg (d. 804), styled king of the north on two occasions (*A.U.* 779.10, 804.1) and the similarly titled Fergal mac Domnaill (*A.F.M.* 919.16, 936.10; *Chron. Scot.* 938.1) were kings of the Northern Uí Néill and not overlords of the three northern provinces.

<sup>542</sup> By contrast with notes 541 and 542, see the obituary of Conchobar Mac Lochlainn of 1136; *A.F.M.* 1136.9: ‘Conchobhar, son of Domhnall Ua Lochlainn, who was first lord of Aileach, and king of all the north, both Cinel-Conaill and Cinel-Eoghain, Ulidians and Airghialla, and also royal heir of Ireland, was killed by the men of Magh-Itha, by treachery’. See also the same man’s obituary in *A.L.C.* (*A.L.C.* 1136.3) where he is called ‘king of Oilech’, and in *Ann. Tig.* (*Ann. Tig.* 1136.3) where he is called ‘king of the North of Ireland’.

<sup>543</sup> This is the standard translation of ‘*tuaiscirt Ereann*’, literally ‘the north of Ireland’, which appears almost universally in the entries cited below, note 545.

<sup>544</sup> For examples of ‘the people of the north of Ireland’ in a collective army, see *A.F.M.* 1088.10, 1103.10, 1109.5, 1113.10, 1131.5, 1149.10, 1150.15, 1154.12, 1154.13, 1156.17, 1157.10, 1159.13, 1160.22, 1162.11, 1199.9; *A.U.* 1103.5, 1109.5, 1159.3; *A.L.C.* 1103.3, 1103.4, 1109.3, 1113.5, 1113.6, 1113.7, 1131.4; *Ann. Tig.* 1103.3, 1103.4, 1131.3, 1154.6, 1159.10; *Ann. Inisf.* 1103.3, 1103.4; *Chron. Scot.* 1131.3; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1130–1.1, 1130–1.2, 1130–1.3, 1158.3.



Northern Uí Néill enjoy pre-eminence in this analysis because theirs was the dominant kingdom, and they provided the driving force for the reconstitution of 'the North' as a single political entity. This would never be fully achieved, and it was partly with resistance to their overlordship in this realm that the kings of the Northern Uí Néill grappled in the twelfth century. This resistance came from the Ulaid to a much greater degree than from the Airgíalla.

In the period considered in this thesis, the Northern Uí Néill advanced two successful claimants to the kingship of Ireland: Domnall Mac Lochlainn (d. 1121) and Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn (d. 1166). Though both men were acknowledged by contemporaries to be worthy of the title, the nature of their kingships differed substantially. The differences between them will be explained with regard both to internal policies, and to changes outside the North. In the former case, the relationship with Airgíalla will be given in-depth consideration, while in the latter the fall of Munster and rise of Connacht will be shown to have fundamentally altered Uí Néill strategy.

The English invasion occurred at a particularly challenging time for the Northern Uí Néill, shortly after the collapse of their national supremacy. The immediate aftermath of Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn's fall saw widespread change, some of which can be attributed to the actions of Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair, as we have already seen in the chapter on Connacht, and some to the English themselves.

The partition of the Northern Uí Néill along the Cenél Conaill and Cenél nEógain boundary, which had been formally imposed by Úa Conchobair in 1167, endured long after the English invasion. This was despite the efforts of Úa Máel Doraid of Cenél Conaill to resurrect his dynasty's claim to provincial kingship at the end of the twelfth century. The Cenél Conaill claim had not carried much weight since *c.* 800, with Cenél nEógain effectively dominating the common kingship thereafter. Only Ruaidrí úa Canannáin (d. 950) successfully interrupted their monopoly before Úa Máel Doraid (d. 1197), who enjoyed limited success.

Cenél Conaill aspirations could be characterised as a destabilising factor and there were many of these, including, for instance, the conquest of Ulaid and partial conquest of Airgíalla by the English, both of which were well underway by the 1190s. An undercurrent of hostility between the Meic Lochlainn and Uí Néill Glúnduib within Cenél nEógain itself also intensified at times, including in the 1170s.<sup>545</sup> Ultimately, the Northern Uí Néill avoided outright conquest, but other parts of the North were not so fortunate.

The Uí Néill were the descendants of the fifth-century king Niall Noígíallach. Like other ancestor figures, Niall appears in numerous apocryphal stories, but he is regarded by some historians as a historical figure.<sup>546</sup> The chronology of his life is uncertain, and this mirrors general confusion surrounding the rise of his descendants.<sup>547</sup> In the words of John V. Kelleher, ‘the fact is, we know less about the origin of the Uí Néill, and therefore of the Connachta and Airgíalla, than of any other major people in Ireland. The Uí Néill emerge into history like a school of cuttlefish from a large ink-cloud of their own manufacture; and clouds and ink continued to be manufactured by them or for them throughout their long career’.<sup>548</sup>

The cuttlefish, to continue the analogy, quickly multiplied from the fourteen sons attributed to Niall. Eight of these sons were the eponymous ancestors of major sub-branches of the Uí Néill, five of whom were associated with the south (i.e., the midlands, later known as Meath) and three with the north. Some others were certainly spuriously grafted onto the Uí Néill pedigree later as the Uí Néill gradually became the most important collection of families in Ireland, hence the ‘clouds’ of mystery with which they

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<sup>545</sup> See note 563.

<sup>546</sup> Fergus Kelly, ‘Niall Noígíallach (d. c. 452), high-king of Ireland’ in *O.D.N.B.* ([www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-20074](http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-20074)) (29 Apr. 2019).

<sup>547</sup> James Carney, *Studies in Irish literature and history* (Dublin, 1955), pp 324–73.

<sup>548</sup> Kelleher, ‘Early Irish history and pseudo-history’ in *Studia Hibernica*, no. 3 (1963), pp 113–27 at 125.

are surrounded.<sup>549</sup> This process was later paralleled by the Uí Briúin dynasties in Connacht, as discussed in the previous chapter.<sup>550</sup>

The geographical origin of the Uí Néill is obscure. The generally accepted view is that they came from Connacht and migrated eastwards and northwards,<sup>551</sup> though this is not universally accepted.<sup>552</sup> From at least the early historical period onwards their territory comprised a province in the north-west of modern Ulster, and a midlands province stretching ‘from the Shannon to the sea’. The creation of these provinces is reflected in the fact that the two early enemies of the Uí Néill were the Ulaid and the Laigin, from whom these lands are likely to have been conquered.<sup>553</sup>

These two Uí Néill provinces had separate leadership: different branches ruled in each, referred to simply as ‘Northern’ and ‘Southern’ Uí Néill respectively. As was generally the case in Ireland, the name of the people also applied to their territory. By the twelfth century, the midlands province had taken the name ‘Mide’, anglicised ‘Meath’, which originally applied only to a small area around the Hill of Uisneach, and the term ‘Southern Uí Néill’ consequently fell out of use. A common kingship encompassing Northern and Southern Uí Néill existed until the late tenth or early eleventh century, but this position was not always filled, and it too became obsolete.

The main division among the Northern Uí Néill was that of Cenél Conaill and Cenél nEógain. The weaker of these two, the Cenél Conaill, were situated in the north-west extremity of the island, giving their name to Tír Conaill. In the eighth century, the Cenél Conaill and Cenél nEógain alternated in the provincial kingship, and the Cenél Conaill

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<sup>549</sup> Kelly, ‘Níall Noígíallach (d. c. 452), high-king of Ireland.’, in *O.D.N.B.* (<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-20074>) (29 Apr. 2019).

<sup>550</sup> See Connacht, pp 39–41.

<sup>551</sup> See for example, Eoin MacNeill, ‘Colonisation under the early kings of Tara’ in *Journal of the Galway Archaeological and Historical Society*, xvi (1935), pp 101–24; Byrne, *Irish kings and high-kings*, pp 83–6.

<sup>552</sup> O’Rahilly, *Early Irish history and mythology*, pp 173–83, 478–79.

<sup>553</sup> For a sketch of the early history in this regard, see Ó Cróinín, ‘Ireland, 400–800’ in Ó Cróinín (ed.), *N.H.I. I – prehistoric and early Ireland* (Oxford, 2005), pp 182–234 at 201–12.

advanced a claimant as late as 804. Thereafter the kingship was monopolised by the Cenél nEógain, with the exception of Ruaidrí úa Canannáin, as was already noted above.

It has been argued that Cenél Conaill decline was a consequence of their territorial restriction. While the Cenél nEógain cut off expansion to the east, the Connachta limited it in the south. In 704, the Cenél Conaill king of Ireland Loingsech mac Óengusso was defeated at the battle of Corann in north Connacht, and the eventual loss of parity with Cenél nEógain has been attributed to this failure.<sup>554</sup> Remarkably, the resurrection of Cenél Conaill prominence by Flaithbertach Úa Máel Doraid closely followed his seizure of Cairpre Dromma Cliab from Connacht in 1176, suggesting this theory may have some merit.

The Cenél Conaill had four significant regional groups in the twelfth century. These were the Cenél Énna, Cenél Lugach, Cenél Bógúine, and Cenél Áeda. The Cenél Énna occupied the land from Lough Swilly in the north to Barnesmore Gap and Sruell in the south.<sup>555</sup> An unnamed native king of Cenél Énna was killed in 1083, and they notably fell under the influence of the Cenél nEógain and Cenél Lugach at different times in the twelfth century.<sup>556</sup>

The Cenél Lugach were situated between the Swilly and Gweedore rivers.<sup>557</sup> They would rise to prominence latterly through the families of Úa Dochartaigh and Úa Domnaill. The first Úa Dochartaigh king of Cenél Conaill appears in 1198,<sup>558</sup> and Éicnechán Úa Domnaill, who died in 1207, was the first of his family to hold the title.<sup>559</sup> The Cenél Bógúine held land bounded by the Gweedore in the north and the Enny Water in the south.<sup>560</sup> The Cenél Áeda were located in between the Enny Water and Assaroe.<sup>561</sup> They

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<sup>554</sup> Byrne, *Irish kings and high-kings*, p. 247.

<sup>555</sup> Paul MacCotter, *Medieval Ireland: territorial, political and economic divisions* (Dublin, 2008), pp 222–23.

<sup>556</sup> *A.L.C.* 1199.10; *A.F.M.* 1177.4, 1199.4; *A.U.* 1177.6

<sup>557</sup> MacCotter, *Medieval Ireland*, pp 222–3.

<sup>558</sup> *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1197.5; *A.L.C.* 1198.5; *A.F.M.* 1198.5.

<sup>559</sup> *A.L.C.* 1207.4; *A.F.M.* 1207.1; *A.U.* 1207.7; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1207.2.

<sup>560</sup> MacCotter, *Medieval Ireland*, pp 222–3.

<sup>561</sup> MacCotter, *Medieval Ireland*, pp 222–3.

gave rise to the Uí Chanannáin and Uí Máel Doraíd, who dominated the kingship of Cenél Conaill in the twelfth century.

By comparison, the Cenél nEógain were significantly more complicated, having proliferated into numerous distinct segments by the twelfth century. Among the most important were Clann Néill, Clann Domnaill, Cenél Moen, Clann Chonchobair, and Clann Diarmata. The Clann Neill included the Uí Néill, descendants of Niall Glúndub (d. 919), who grew in importance and became dominant in the thirteenth century.<sup>562</sup>

The Clann Domnaill included the Uí Flaithbertaigh and the Meic Lochlainn. The Meic Lochlainn held the kingship of Cenél nEógain and the North generally from the late eleventh century until the thirteenth century. The Uí Flaithbertaigh also had royal aspirations, briefly seizing the kingship from 1186–7. The Cenél Moen were generally represented by the Uí Gairmledaig, who usurped the Meic Lochlainn from 1143–5, and occasionally by Uí Luinigh. The Clann Chonchobair were led by the Uí Chatháin, and the Clann Diarmata, who were an offshoot of Clann Chonchobair removed by one generation, gave rise to the Uí Chairelláin.

In addition to having more important segments than the Cenél Conaill, the Cenél nEógain were more territorially fluid. This was simply because Cenél nEógain expansion met with success, and they consistently added to their holdings over the course of many centuries. In the early medieval period, the Cenél nEógain stronghold was on the Inishowen peninsula. Their capital, the Gríanan Ailech, was on Inishowen, and from this derived the ‘king of Ailech’ stylisation frequently synonymous with ‘king of the north’ (in the earlier sense) when under a Cenél nEógain representative. The title remained in use even after the royal families of Cenél nEógain had abandoned the peninsula and the Gríanan had ceased to be an important base.

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<sup>562</sup> This family are everywhere referred to as Uí Néill or Clann Néill in just the same way as the wider group descended from Niall Noígíallach. To avoid confusion, they will be termed Uí Néill Glúnduib in this thesis.

The area immediately south of the peninsula, Mag Ítha, illustrates the movement of the various branches of Cenél nEógain. The Clann Chonchobair were associated with the territory in the eighth century and are known in some genealogical records as Clann Chonchobair Maige Ítha.<sup>563</sup> It has been suggested their move into the adjacent Tír Meic Cáirthin can be placed as early as 800,<sup>564</sup> and they would extend their dominion further eastwards, conquering Ciannachta, Fir na Craíbe, and some of Fir Lí, from the Airgíalla by 1138.<sup>565</sup>

In the meantime, authority in Mag Ítha itself was transferred to the Clann Domnaill. They are recorded as holders of the kingship of Mag Ítha in the tenth and eleventh centuries.<sup>566</sup> In the twelfth century, ‘Fir Maige Ítha’ or ‘the men of Mag Ítha’, was applied to both the Cenél Moen and Clann Diarmada, showing that it had again changed hands.<sup>567</sup> This is probably a reflex of the move by the Clann Domnaill and Clann Néill south-east across the Sperrins to Telach Óc.<sup>568</sup> Like other areas adjacent to Cenél nEógain mentioned above, Telach Óc was originally territory of the Airgíalla; in this case the Uí Thuirtre branch. By the late eleventh century, Telach Óc had become the inauguration site of the kings of Cenél nEógain.

The origin of the Airgíalla is bound up with that of the Uí Néill and, is if anything, more obscure. The medieval convention was that the Airgíalla descended from ‘the three Collas’, mythical figures who theoretically lived at some point from the third to the fifth centuries AD. This provided them with a genealogical link to the Uí Néill, as the three Collas, like the Uí Néill, were reckoned to be descendants of Conn Cétchathach.

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<sup>563</sup> See, for example, ‘The Book of Ballymote’ MS 23 P 12, folio 45 recto column c; ‘The Book of Lecan’ MS 23 P 2, folio 57 verso column a.

<sup>564</sup> MacCotter, *Medieval Ireland*, p. 225.

<sup>565</sup> *A.F.M.* 1138.6.

<sup>566</sup> *A.F.M.* 1023.5; *A.U.* 1016.3, 1080.7; *Ann. Tig.* 994.5.

<sup>567</sup> *A.F.M.* 1135.12; *A.U.* 1177.6.

<sup>568</sup> Jaski, *Early Irish kingship and succession*, pp 196–7.

The link was the important part: the Airgíalla fell under the sway of the Uí Néill as the latter group conquered large parts of modern Ulster from the Ulaid, and the genealogists were tasked with providing a respectable ancestry for the new subjects of the Uí Néill.<sup>569</sup> Their inferior status and non-eligibility for kingship despite such a close genealogical link was explained away by a transparent story, which claimed that the three Collas had been guilty of kin-slaying, and their descendants were therefore ineligible for kingship of Tara.<sup>570</sup>

T.F. O’Rahilly suggested that the three Collas were none other than the three sons of Niall Noigíallach associated with the conquests in the north, namely Eogan, Conall, and Énda, and that ‘Colla’, from ‘Conlae’, was originally an honorific (meaning ‘great’), rather than a personal name.<sup>571</sup> This may place too much faith in the origin story, and, for most other parts of Ireland, such myths are regarded as entirely invented.

Another linguistic issue is that the name ‘Airgíalla’ simply means ‘hostage-givers’. In other words, as a collective description ‘Airgíalla’ denoted those whose submission to the Uí Néill was established, rather than the descendants of a common ancestor. This explains the large number of distinct segments, and rare appearances of outright kings of Airgíalla, especially in the early historical period.

For our purposes, the important branches of the Airgíalla were the Fir Fernmaige, Fir Manach, and Uí Méith (all descendants of the Uí Chremthainn segment prominent in earlier times), the Uí Thuirtre, Fir Lí, and the Airthir. The Airthir (meaning easterners) was a collective name for the Uí Nialláin, Uí Bressail Macha, and Uí Echach. As noted above, the Cenél nEógain gradually conquered territory from the Airgíalla over the centuries, while the Airgíalla themselves pushed eastwards in response, meaning that the shape of the province remained in flux even in the twelfth century.

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<sup>569</sup> O’Rahilly, *Early Irish history and mythology*, p. 231.

<sup>570</sup> O’Rahilly, *Early Irish history and mythology*, p. 232.

<sup>571</sup> O’Rahilly, *Early Irish history and mythology*, pp 225–232.

The Fir Manach kingdom was located around Lough Erne, giving its name to modern County Fermanagh. The Fir Fernmaige, Dartraige, and Uí Méith were situated close to Clones in modern County Monaghan. The Airthir, as their name suggests, were from the east of the province. The Uí Nialláin held the area equivalent to the modern barony of Oneilland West, County Armagh, while the Uí Bressail Macha gave their name to Clanbrassil, alias Oneilland East.<sup>572</sup> The portion of Airthir held by the Uí Echach seems to have been further south.<sup>573</sup> The Uí Thuirtre were active east of the Bann as early as the eighth century, having been pushed out of Telach Óc by Cenél nEógain, and by the twelfth century their core territory was roughly equivalent to the baronies of Toome, Lower Antrim, and Lower Glenarm.<sup>574</sup>

The third kingdom of the North, Ulaid, gave its name to the modern province of Ulster, which was also dominated by this group before the rise of the Uí Néill.<sup>575</sup> They were forced east of the Bann and Newry rivers by Uí Néill expansion, and perhaps also by a loss of suzerainty over the groups that later became the Airgíalla. They remained in this relatively restricted area in twelfth century.

The name 'Ulaid' had two meanings. It could apply, in its wider sense, to the provincial kingdom and all its peoples, or in its more constricted sense to the leading group of the kingdom, otherwise known as the Dál Fiatach. It has been reckoned, from a reading of the kinglist in the Book of Leinster, that the Dál Fiatach provided fifty-six of the sixty-nine or seventy historical kings of the province down to the thirteenth century.<sup>576</sup>

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<sup>572</sup> MacCotter, *Medieval Ireland*, p. 240.

<sup>573</sup> MacCotter, *Medieval Ireland*, p. 240.

<sup>574</sup> MacCotter, *Medieval Ireland*, p. 232.

<sup>575</sup> For more detail, see Deirdre Flanagan, 'Transferred population or sept-names: Ulaidh (a quo Ulster)' in *Bulletin of the Ulster Place-Name Society*, second series, i, pp 40–3.

<sup>576</sup> Byrne, 'Clann Ollaman Uaisle Emna' in *Studia Hibernica*, no. 4 (1964), pp 54–94 at 58.



In addition to this group, the province included the prominent Cruithin groups,<sup>577</sup> Dál nAraide, Conaille Muirthemne, and Uí Echach Cobo.<sup>578</sup> These groups later abandoned the Cruithin pedigree and tried to claim that they were the ‘true Ulaid’, while conceding that that term had come to apply to the Dál Fiatach.<sup>579</sup> Another prominent group was the Dál Riata, who, having failed to expand in Ireland in the early medieval period, colonised the west of Scotland successfully. In the early medieval period, the Dál nAraide were the strongest group in Ulaid apart from Dál Fiatach, providing ten or eleven kings of Ulaid, and intermarrying frequently with the stronger dynasty.<sup>580</sup>

At one time the capital of the kingdom was Downpatrick, but just as the prominent Cenél nEógain families abandoned the Gríanan Ailech, the main branch of Dál Fiatach moved northwards to the land around Duneight before our period, leaving Downpatrick under the junior Cenél nÓengusso segment.<sup>581</sup> The Dál nAraide held land on the north and east coasts of modern County Antrim, centred on Rath Mór Maige Line, while the Dál Riata held a large portion of the same north coast. Despite the former importance of both, they fell under the control of the Uí Thuire of Airgíalla in the twelfth century. South of Dál Fiatach, the Uí Echach Cobo held what would become the baronies of Iveagh, County Down.

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<sup>577</sup> The term ‘Cruithin’, from ‘*Priteni*’ and thus equivalent to ‘*Britanni*’, was also used by medieval Irish writers of the Picts. It is generally agreed that the application of the term to the Dál nAraide and other linked groups means that they were regarded as ancient inhabitants who predated the Goídil. However, there is disagreement about whether it indicates a link between the Picts of Scotland and the Irish groups to whom the name was applied or was simply used of both as a general name for the indigenous inhabitants of both Ireland and Britain. For the former position, see O’Rahilly, *Early Irish history and mythology*, pp 344–345; Ó Cróinín, ‘Ireland, 400–800’, p. 213. For the latter position, see Richard Warner, ‘Cruthin (Cruithin, Cruithni)’ in S.J. Connolly (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Irish History* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Oxford, 2002), pp 136–7.

<sup>578</sup> On Conaille Muirthemne, see Laurence P. Murray, ‘The Pictish kingdom of Conaille-Muirthemhne’ in John Ryan (ed.), *Féil-Sgríbhinn Éoin Mhic Néill* (Dublin, 1940), pp 445–53.

<sup>579</sup> Murray, ‘The Pictish kingdom of Conaille-Muirthemhne’, pp 445–453, at 445–446; Ó Cróinín, ‘Ireland, 400–800’, p. 213.

<sup>580</sup> Byrne, ‘Clann Ollaman Uaisle Emna’, p. 58; On the marriages between Dál Fiatach and Dál nAraide, see *Women and Marriage*, pp 416–7.

<sup>581</sup> MacCotter, *Medieval Ireland*, p. 234.

## [2.1: The North]

When Domnall Mac Lochlainn took the kingship of the Cenél nEógain in 1083, he inherited a divided kingdom in which strong leadership had been absent for some time. In fact, not since Domnall úa Néill (d. 980) had the Northern Uí Néill advanced a claim to the kingship of Ireland. Since then, the kings of Meath had also been unable to enforce their authority over their northern relations, and the kingship of Tara had lost its synonymity with kingship of Ireland.<sup>582</sup>

Domnall succeeded Áed mac Néill meic Máel Sechlainn.<sup>583</sup> The exact relationship between the two men is uncertain, mirroring a lack of clarity in the Meic Lochlainn pedigree generally, but it is likely that both belonged to Clann Domnail. A brother of this Áed, Donnchad, also seems to have claimed authority in 1083 but nothing is known of him beyond a single entry under that year where he is styled ‘king of Aileach’ and noted to have killed the head of the Cenél Enna of Cenél Conaill.<sup>584</sup>

In his obituaries of 1121, Domnall Mac Lochlainn was given the alternative titles ‘king of Ireland’ and ‘king of the North of Ireland’.<sup>585</sup> The application of the wider title is illustrative of Mac Lochlainn’s importance on the national scene, while the more restrictive refers to his development of a new core territory encompassing the three provincial kingdoms. Both aspects of Mac Lochlainn’s career will be examined in this section.

His attempts to create a new sphere of influence were vigorously challenged by the Ulaid. There would be at least three invasions of Cenél nEógain by the Ulaid during his reign, 1083–1121, and many more invasions of Ulaid by Mac Lochlainn. The year after Mac Lochlainn acceded to power, the Ulaid were campaigning abroad themselves, enjoying the significant success of taking the king of Bréifne, Donnchad Cail Úa Ruairc,

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<sup>582</sup> See Comparative Analysis, pp 347–9.

<sup>583</sup> *A.F.M.* 1083.7; *A.U.* 1083.2; *Ann. Inisf.* 1083.3; *Ann. Tig.* 1083.1; *Chron. Scot.* 1083.1.

<sup>584</sup> *A.U.* 1083.5: ‘*righ n-Ailigh*’.

<sup>585</sup> *A.F.M.* 1121.2; *A.U.* 1121.2; *A.L.C.* 1121.1; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1121.1.

into their pay.<sup>586</sup> The prospect of the Ulaid building a broader powerbase of their own justifiably alarmed Mac Lochlainn, and he invaded their territory in response.<sup>587</sup>

By 1088, Mac Lochlainn was able to muster all the North of Ireland to attack first Connacht, and then Munster, where he demolished Kincora. Despite this success, he did not make follow-up campaigns, and when he was given hostages by the kings of Munster, Meath, and Connacht in 1090, it was in an apparent bid to keep him from interfering outside the North.<sup>588</sup>

The opposition of the Uí hEochada kings of Ulaid continued to preoccupy him. Indeed, the Ulaid invaded Cenél nEógain in 1091, notwithstanding Mac Lochlainn's growing reputation. That invasion was a disaster for the Ulaid, with their king, Donn Sléibe Úa hEochada, falling in battle.<sup>589</sup> This failure rankled with the Ulaid, who felt that 'the host of Eógain of Ailech boasted in perpetuity of their violent deed against Donn Sleibe'.<sup>590</sup>

Donn Sléibe's successor, Donnchad Úa hEochada, was powerful and astute enough to avoid counter-invasion by the Uí Néill. In 1093, Mac Lochlainn met him at the banks of Lough Neagh on their shared border and persuaded him to assist against Úa Briain and Munster 'by reason of a common hostility'.<sup>591</sup> This acknowledgment is significant, as it suggests that it was through enmity with Munster that the Ulaid were prepared to recognise Uí Néill suzerainty.

Úa hEochada was probably also cognisant of his relative weakness in 1093, and the meeting at Lough Neagh did not provide the basis for long-lasting cooperation. The Ulaid launched major rebellions in 1097 and 1103, receiving the support of Muirchertach

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<sup>586</sup> *A.F.M.* 1084.7; *A.U.* 1084.4; *A.L.C.* 1084.4.

<sup>587</sup> *A.F.M.* 1084.7; *A.U.* 1084.4; *A.L.C.* 1084.4.

<sup>588</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1090.6; *A.F.M.* 1090.5; *A.U.* 1090.4; *A.L.C.* 1090.1; see also *Women and Marriage*, pp 370–1.

<sup>589</sup> *A.U.* 1091.3; *A.L.C.* 1091.3; *Ann. Tig.* 1091.9; *Ann. Inisf.* 1091.3; *Chron. Scot.* 1091.2.

<sup>590</sup> Byrne, 'Clann Ollaman Uaisle Emna', pp 72, 79–80: '65. *Ro maídset sluag Eógain Ailig ainécht ar Donn Sléibe i sír*'.

<sup>591</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1093.4: '*tre chombaig i n-agid*'.

Úa Briain on both occasions.<sup>592</sup> In 1099, immediately following another Úa Briain invasion of the North, Mac Lochlainn invaded Ulaid and cut down the tree called Cráeb Tulcha (Crew Hill, County Antrim) at which the kings of Ulaid were inaugurated.<sup>593</sup> Much later, in 1111, the Ulaid had their revenge. They attacked Tulach Óc, inauguration site of the kings of Cenél nEógain, and cut down its trees.<sup>594</sup>

Both Mac Lochlainn and Muirchertach Úa Briain perceived that Ulaid was relatively weakly attached to the Uí Néill overlordship. Indeed, this would have been hard to miss; in 1094, while part of one of the rare expeditions Mac Lochlainn led outside the North, the Ulaid refused to plunder Leinster and returned home.<sup>595</sup> In 1109, a peace settlement between Úa Briain and Mac Lochlainn was followed by Mac Lochlainn invading Ulaid,<sup>596</sup> while in 1113, Úa Briain invaded Ulaid after Mac Lochlainn had enforced new arrangements.<sup>597</sup>

Domnall Mac Lochlainn's invasions of Ulaid were of limited success in tackling the problem that province posed to his wider kingship, even though they always demonstrated his military superiority. He used other techniques as well. When the Ulaid deposed Donnchad Úa hEochada in 1095, for example, Mac Lochlainn sheltered him and supported his return to the kingship.<sup>598</sup> Later, in 1100, Mac Lochlainn took Úa hEochada prisoner, eventually releasing him in exchange for valuable hostages: the latter's son and foster-brother.<sup>599</sup>

In 1113, he invaded and deposed Úa hEochada, before dividing the kingdom between the rival Dál Fiatach families of Uí Mathgamna and Uí hEochada. On this occasion, he also

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<sup>592</sup> *A.F.M.* 1097.6, 1103.10; *A.U.* 1097.6, 1103.5; *A.L.C.* 1097.2, 1097.3, 1103.3, 1103.4; *Ann. Tig.* 1103.3, 1103.4; *Ann. Inisf.* 1103.3, 1103.4; *Chron. Scot.* 1103.2.

<sup>593</sup> *A.F.M.* 1099.7; *A.U.* 1099.8; *A.L.C.* 1099.5.

<sup>594</sup> *A.F.M.* 1111.4; *A.U.* 1111.6; *A.L.C.* 1111.3, 1111.4; *Ann. Inisf.* 1111.6.

<sup>595</sup> *A.F.M.* 1094.2.

<sup>596</sup> *A.F.M.* 1109.5; *A.U.* 1109.5; *A.L.C.* 1109.5.

<sup>597</sup> *A.F.M.* 1113.9, 1113.10; *A.L.C.* 1113.4, 1113.5, 1113.6, 1113.7, 1113.8, 1113.9; *A.U.* 1113.7.

<sup>598</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1095.4, 1095.5.

<sup>599</sup> *A.F.M.* 1100.9, 1101.11; *A.U.* 1100.2, 1101.7; *A.L.C.* 1100.1, 1101.4; *Ann. Tig.* 1100.2; *Ann. Inisf.* 1100.6; *Chron. Scot.* 1100.2.

retained extensive lands in his own hand; Dál nAraide and Uí Echach Cobo.<sup>600</sup> This was comparable to Muirchertach Úa Briain's treatment of Connacht in 1095,<sup>601</sup> and it seems to have been successful, since the Ulaid caused no further problems for the Cenél nEógain until the Domnall Mac Lochlainn's death in 1121.<sup>602</sup>

Unfortunately for Mac Lochlainn, the Ulaid were not the only party in the North to trouble him, and the Cenél Conaill resisted almost as much. In 1093, for example, he blinded Áed Úa Canannáin, king of Cenél Conaill.<sup>603</sup> Similarly, in 1103, he deposed another Úa Canannáin.<sup>604</sup> There was even a battle between the Cenél Conaill and Cenél nEógain in 1098.<sup>605</sup>

Fifteen years later, Mac Lochlainn imposed his son Niall as king of Cenél Conaill, an unprecedented move that almost certainly stemmed from continuing difficulties with that portion of his kingdom.<sup>606</sup> Niall was unable to retain this new kingship. Another Úa Canannáin was killed by the Cenél nEógain in 1114,<sup>607</sup> suggesting immediate conflict, and a battle took place between the Cenél Conaill and Cenél nEógain in 1117.<sup>608</sup> By 1118 Niall Mac Lochlainn was attacking Cenél Conaill with the Cenél nEógain.<sup>609</sup>

So, while Mac Lochlainn's reign saw the North of Ireland become a more cohesive entity, with the operation of collective armies and the acknowledgment of mutual hostility with Leth Moga, it was nevertheless a slow process that often met with resistance. The main area from which the resistance came was the kingdom of Ulaid, whose Uí hEochada kings entertained their own ambitions. One of Mac Lochlainn's main preoccupations was countering the revival of the Ulaid, who launched numerous

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<sup>600</sup> *A.F.M.* 1113.9, 1113.10; *A.L.C.* 1113.4, 1113.5, 1113.6, 1113.7, 1113.8, 1113.9; *A.U.* 1113.7.

<sup>601</sup> See *Connacht*, pp 44–5.

<sup>602</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1121.5.

<sup>603</sup> *A.F.M.* 1093.6; *A.U.* 1093.4; *A.L.C.* 1093.4.

<sup>604</sup> *A.F.M.* 1103.7; *A.U.* 1103.2; *A.L.C.* 1103.2.

<sup>605</sup> *A.F.M.* 1098.11; *A.U.* 1098.10; *A.L.C.* 1098.3.

<sup>606</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1113.7.

<sup>607</sup> *A.F.M.* 1114.5; *A.L.C.* 1114.6; *A.U.* 1114.4; *Ann. Tig.* 1114.8.

<sup>608</sup> *A.F.M.* 1117.16; *A.U.* 1117.5; *A.L.C.* 1117.3; *Ann. Inisf.* 1117.5.

<sup>609</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1118.10.

invasions of Uí Néill territory during his reign. He also had issues with the Cenél Conaill, perhaps mainly because a strong kingship of the Northern Uí Néill had been lacking since the death of Domnall úa Néill (d. 980). He was successful in dealing with these problems to a remarkable degree, and the template he laid for the management of the North would be followed and built on by his successors.

## [2.2: Phony War]

Mac Lochlainn has been examined by historians largely by comparison with his contemporary, the king of Munster Muirchertach Úa Briain. Like Mac Lochlainn, Úa Briain was given the title ‘king of Ireland’ in his obituary, predeceasing Mac Lochlainn by just two years.<sup>610</sup> The comparison between the two men is quite natural given these facts alone, but the apparent competition between them, particularly around the turn of the twelfth century, only makes it more appropriate. As it stands, existing commentary makes several assumptions about their relationship with each other, and with a third party, the *comarbai* of Pádraig, or abbots of Armagh, that are not supported by the existing evidence.

The standard analysis of the competition between these men originates with Ó Corráin, who said that ‘Muirchertach was to spend the next twenty years of his life [after 1094] in a vain attempt to dominate the north and compel Mac Lochlainn to submit to him, an effort foiled more often by the well-intentioned intervention of the church than by any military defeat by Mac Lochlainn’.<sup>611</sup>

Ó Cróinín followed suit, reporting that ‘between 1097 and 1113 Muirchertach [Úa Briain] marched against O’Loughlin [Mac Lochlainn] no fewer than ten times: in 1097, 1099, 1100, 1101, 1102, 1103, 1104, 1107, 1109 and 1113 the near annual ritual took place and on every occasion he failed to compel O’Loughlin to acknowledge his claim to

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<sup>610</sup> *A.F.M.* 1119.4; *Ann. Tig.* 1119.1; *Chron. Scot.* 1119.1; *A.L.C.* 1119.2; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1119.4.

<sup>611</sup> Ó Corráin, *Ireland before the Normans*, p. 146.

be high-king. On most of these expeditions his efforts were frustrated by the intervention of successive abbots of Armagh, whose peace-making efforts ensured a stand-off between the rival armies'.<sup>612</sup> Duffy concurred,<sup>613</sup> as did Flanagan,<sup>614</sup> and Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, who remarked, 'in truth, however, Muirchertach's advances were frequently halted not by Mac Lochlainn's military might but by the negotiating tactics of his ecclesiastical ally, the abbot of Armagh'.<sup>615</sup>

The points of consensus in these analyses are obvious: Muirchertach Úa Briain campaigned to bring Domnall Mac Lochlainn to submission and failed, while Mac Lochlainn's success in resisting this advance was largely due to an alliance with the *comarbai* of Pádraig in Armagh, who repeatedly prevailed upon Úa Briain to make peace. If this assessment is to be superseded, it must be through examination of the following factors: the relationship between Mac Lochlainn and Úa Briain, and the nature of their campaigns in one another's territory, their relationships with the *comarbai*, and the function of the *comarbai* as peacemakers.

Mac Lochlainn took the hostages of Munster only twice; in 1088 and 1090.<sup>616</sup> On the first occasion, it was after a major campaign that saw the king of the North destroy the Uí Briain headquarters at Kincora. One version of the story intimates that the decision to attack Úa Briain was taken by Mac Lochlainn only after the latter failed to help in an attack on Connacht.<sup>617</sup> On the second occasion, there was no active campaign. Instead, the hostages, *aitiri* and not *géill*, were given to Mac Lochlainn in return for his non-interference in an Uí Briain march.<sup>618</sup>

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<sup>612</sup> Ó Cróinín, *Early medieval Ireland, 400–1200* (London, 1995), p. 279.

<sup>613</sup> Duffy, 'Muirchertach Ua Briain', in Duffy (ed.), *Encyclopedia*, pp 459–462 at 461.

<sup>614</sup> Flanagan, 'High-kings with opposition, 1072–1166', in Ó Cróinín (ed.) *N.H.I. I*, pp 899–933.

<sup>615</sup> Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Ua Briain, Muirchertach' in *D.I.B.*, accessed online (<http://dib.cambridge.org/viewReadPage.do?articleId=a8712>) (2 August 2019).

<sup>616</sup> *A.F.M.* 1088.10, 1090.5; *A.U.* 1088.2, 1090.4; *A.L.C.* 1088.1, 1090.1; *Ann. Tig.* 1088.3; *Chron. Scot.* 1088.1.

<sup>617</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1088.3.

<sup>618</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1090.6; *A.F.M.* 1090.11; see *Women and Marriage*, pp 370–1.

In 1094, Mac Lochlainn led his army southward in opposition to Muirchertach Úa Briain, achieving little,<sup>619</sup> and in 1100 he plundered Dublin.<sup>620</sup> These relatively isolated events constituted almost all his acts of aggression against Úa Briain before 1114. In taking this passive line, he allowed Úa Briain to rise to a powerful position. The king of Munster established control of Leinster, Connacht, and Meath in the 1090s without any significant intervention by the king of the North.

In 1096 Úa Briain rebuilt Kincora, a remarkable eight years after it had been destroyed by Mac Lochlainn.<sup>621</sup> The next year, his campaigns against the North began. To amend slightly the list provided by Ó Cróinín, Úa Briain marched northward annually from 1097 to 1104, with the exception of 1102. There would also be subsequent similar campaigns in 1107, 1109, and 1113.

The first point of note regarding these campaigns is that they were almost exclusively directed at the peripheral regions of Mac Lochlainn's overkingdom, particularly those areas which had proved troublesome to the king of the North: Ulaid and Cenél Conaill. On almost every occasion Úa Briain went to or towards the territory of the Ulaid. On the one occasion when he did not lead his own army into Ulaid, in 1100, he marched against Cenél Conaill, another noted area of concern for Mac Lochlainn, and had the Leinstermen march to Slíab Fuait and the part of Airgíalla closest to Ulaid.<sup>622</sup>

In 1097, Úa Briain went to Mag Conaille, while Mac Lochlainn marched to Fid Conaille to provide opposition.<sup>623</sup> In 1098 and 1099, Úa Briain went to Slíab Fuait.<sup>624</sup> In 1103 both parties converged on the district immediately adjacent to Armagh,<sup>625</sup> while in 1104 Úa

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<sup>619</sup> *A.F.M.* 1094.2.

<sup>620</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1100.7; *A.U.* 1100.3.

<sup>621</sup> *A.F.M.* 1096.10.

<sup>622</sup> *A.F.M.* 1100.6, 1100.16; *A.U.* 1100.4; *A.L.C.* 1100.3.

<sup>623</sup> *A.F.M.* 1097.6; *A.U.* 1097.6; *A.L.C.* 1097.2, 1097.3.

<sup>624</sup> *A.F.M.* 1098.13.

<sup>625</sup> *A.F.M.* 1103.10; *A.U.* 1103.5; *A.L.C.* 1103.3, 1103.4; *Ann. Tig.* 1103.3, 1103.4; *Ann. Inisf.* 1103.3, 1103.4; *Chron. Scot.* 1103.2.



Briain brought his army to Mag Conaille again.<sup>626</sup> In 1109, he returned to Slíab Fuait.<sup>627</sup> It was principally from these locations that forays into Ulaid were made, especially the nearby Mag Coba region.

There were several reasons why Úa Briain adopted this approach. In the first place, he closely followed a template laid out by his predecessors for campaigns into this part of Ireland.<sup>628</sup> Secondly, the periphery offered greater opportunities than the centre, both for military access and to take advantage of political divisions.<sup>629</sup> The third reason is that he wished to be near Armagh. This link is made explicit under 1103 when Úa Briain left his base at Mag Coba to go to the monastery, but a wider significance is apparent.<sup>630</sup> The conduct of the *comarbai* of Pádraig at Armagh, to which this is related, helps to explain the purpose of these ostensibly fruitless marches north.

As the quotes from the historiography above argued, the *comarbai* of Pádraig were notable for making peace and apparently frustrating Úa Briain. On seven occasions (1097, 1099, 1102, 1105, 1107, 1109, and 1113), different men holding this office were recorded as peacemakers between the two powerful kings.<sup>631</sup> Typically, these terms were reached after Úa Briain marched north, but in 1105 Domnall mac Amalgada died on his way to Dublin to make the peace accord,<sup>632</sup> and in 1102 and 1107 peace agreements were reached without any recorded military manoeuvres.<sup>633</sup> In 1098, 1100, 1101, 1103, and 1104 there were confrontations between the two kings in which the *comarbai* did not

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<sup>626</sup> *A.F.M.* 1104.10; *A.U.* 1104.5; *A.L.C.* 1104.3.

<sup>627</sup> *A.F.M.* 1109.5; *A.U.* 1109.5; *A.L.C.* 1109.3.

<sup>628</sup> See *The Two Munsters*, pp 216–33.

<sup>629</sup> See *Comparative Analysis*, pp 496–505.

<sup>630</sup> *A.F.M.* 1103.10.

<sup>631</sup> *A.F.M.* 1097.6, 1099.6, 1102.9, 1105.14, 1109.5, 1113.10; *A.U.* 1097.6, 1099.7, 1102.8, 1105.3, 1107.8, 1109.5; *A.L.C.* 1097.2, 1097.3, 1099.4, 1102.7, 1105.2, 1107.6, 1109.3, 1113.5, 1113.6, 1113.7; *Chron. Scot.* 1105.3, 1113.5; *Ann. Inisf.* 1105.6.

<sup>632</sup> *A.F.M.* 1105.14; *A.U.* 1105.3; *A.L.C.* 1105.2; *Chron. Scot.* 1105.3; *Ann. Inisf.* 1105.6.

<sup>633</sup> *A.F.M.* 1102.9; *A.U.* 1102.8, 1107.8; *A.L.C.* 1102.7, 1107.6.

interfere. Where information is provided on the details, the peace was to last for a year each time and it was secured by the mutual commitment of hostages to the *comarbai*.<sup>634</sup>

In two successive years Muirchertach Úa Briain conducted campaigns that did not resonate with this overall pattern. In 1100, he himself led the army over Assaroe into Cenél Conaill, while the Leinstermen went to Slíab Fuait.<sup>635</sup> The Dublin fleet was also employed on this campaign, and they attacked Inishowen and Derry.<sup>636</sup> This was the first time he directed his forces against Cenél nEógain itself, but he was unexpectedly prevented from progressing after defeats to the Cenél Conaill.

Úa Briain followed up with a more extensive assault the following year. On that occasion, he marched across Cenél Conaill, destroyed the Gríanan Ailech and marched eastwards to take the hostages of Ulaid.<sup>637</sup> It is likely that this had been his intention in 1100 as well, but it is noticeable that even now he did not go deeper into Cenél nEógain, especially in the direction of Telach Óc, to challenge Mac Lochlainn or to try to take his hostages. He satisfied himself with the symbolic revenge represented by the destruction of the Gríanan.

The assumption that Muirchertach Úa Briain was the stronger of the two kings is not borne out by their military engagements, or lack thereof. Certainly, it is indicative that Úa Briain was on the front foot, but there are other points to be considered. In 1097, ‘Domnall Ua Lochlainn came with the mustered forces of the North’<sup>638</sup> to face down Úa Briain and his armies, and on the repeat journey in 1099 Mac Lochlainn ‘was in readiness to meet them’.<sup>639</sup> Both standoffs resulted in peace settlements.

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<sup>634</sup> *A.F.M.* 1099.6, 1102.9, 1109.5, 1113.10; *A.U.* 1099.7, 1102.8, 1107.8, 1109.5; *A.L.C.* 1099.4, 1102.7, 1107.6, 1109.3, 1113.5, 1113.6, 1113.7; *Chron. Scot.* 1113.5.

<sup>635</sup> *A.F.M.* 1100.16; *Ann. Tig.* 1100.3.

<sup>636</sup> *A.U.* 1100.5; *A.L.C.* 1100.4.

<sup>637</sup> *A.F.M.* 1101.6; *A.U.* 1101.4; *A.L.C.* 1101.2; *Ann. Tig.* 1101.2; *Ann. Inisf.* 1101.2; *Chron. Scot.* 1101.2.

<sup>638</sup> *A.F.M.* 1097.6: ‘*táinicc Domhnall ua Lochlainn go t-tionól an Tuaisceirt*’; *A.U.* 1097.6; *A.L.C.* 1097.2, 1097.3.

<sup>639</sup> *A.F.M.* 1099.6: ‘*boí Domhnall i n-erlaimhe for a chionn*’; *A.U.* 1099.7; *A.L.C.* 1099.4.

In 1100, the Cenél Conaill were able to turn Úa Briain back without support.<sup>640</sup> In 1103, Úa Briain was once again confronted by Mac Lochlainn, ‘so that he prevented the people of the four provinces of Ireland from committing depredation or aggression any further in the province’.<sup>641</sup> When Úa Briain then split his forces, the men of the North inflicted a significant defeat on them. A raid in Mag Conaille by Úa Briain in 1104 was also followed immediately by a counterstrike.<sup>642</sup>

There is no evidence to support the idea that the *comarbai* were dishonest brokers, supporting Mac Lochlainn over Úa Briain and frustrating the latter’s attempts to take the former’s hostages. On only two occasions did Úa Briain attack Mac Lochlainn’s core kingdom, Cenél nEógain, in 1100 and 1101, and the *comarbae* was not involved in a peace settlement in either year – as he surely would have been if he was simply a defender of Mac Lochlainn’s interests. On another occasion, in 1103, Úa Briain led a particularly large army northward and was confronted by Mac Lochlainn near Armagh. Úa Briain left an offering of eight ounces of gold at Armagh on that occasion, with the further promise of 160 cows.<sup>643</sup> Again, the *comarbae* did not oversee a peace agreement. Muirchertach Úa Briain’s great-grandfather Brian Bóraime had been very successful in establishing a relationship with Armagh, and Armagh had endorsed Brian’s overkingship. In an analogous episode, Brian had left twenty ounces of gold at Armagh in 1005.<sup>644</sup> It is apparent that Muirchertach entertained the hope of creating a similar link with the most important church in Ireland, and in general he sought to replicate Brian’s approach.<sup>645</sup>

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<sup>640</sup> *A.F.M.* 1100.6; *A.U.* 1100.4; *A.L.C.* 1100.3.

<sup>641</sup> *A.F.M.* 1103.10: ‘*ar na ro léigeadh do cheithre choigheadhaibh Ereann foghail no díbherg do dhenamh ní as uille isin chúigeadh*’.

<sup>642</sup> *A.F.M.* 1104.10, 1104.11; *A.U.* 1104.5, 1104.6; *A.L.C.* 1104.3, 1104.4.

<sup>643</sup> *A.F.M.* 1103.10.

<sup>644</sup> *A.U.* 1005.7.

<sup>645</sup> See *The Two Munsters*, pp 216–33.

By 1103 the *comarbae* had been a peace broker between Úa Briain and Mac Lochlainn at least three times, and the donation suggests that the relationship between Úa Briain and the *comarbae* remained positive. There is no reason to suppose that this payment was a bribe for the non-intervention of the *comarbae* on Mac Lochlainn's behalf. As we have seen, the *comarbae*'s interventions were by no means a ubiquitous feature of these campaigns.

The *comarbae* as a peacemaker, then, was not an agent of Mac Lochlainn alone but of both kings, as they attempted to out-manoeuvre one another. When Úa Briain enjoyed success against Mac Lochlainn the *comarbae* was not employed, and when the two men were at a stalemate he was. The fact that Úa Briain directed his army to the region adjacent to Armagh is telling: it allowed him to target the Ulaid, as the periphery of Mac Lochlainn's overkingdom, and to be close to the place where a peace agreement would inevitably be worked out. In 1113, it is even reported that Úa Briain mustered 'the nobles of Ireland, both laymen and clerics', to make his trip northwards.<sup>646</sup> The clerics, of course, were on a diplomatic rather than a military or ecclesiastical mission.

Two very different descriptions of this 1113 march underscore the point. *Ann. Tig.* describes the *comarbae* as being sent by Mac Lochlainn to make peace with Úa Briain,<sup>647</sup> while *Ann. Inisf.* reports 'a great hosting by Muirchertach to Ard Macha and Mag Coba, and he returned with peace.'<sup>648</sup> In other words, both men sought to confirm the terms of their relationship, and the *comarbae* was the main functionary through whom they negotiated.

Úa Briain's campaigns against Mac Lochlainn were therefore not the failure that they have been made out to be, nor was Mac Lochlainn's successful defence dependent on the intercession of the church. The twenty-year period from 1094 to 1114 was predominantly

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<sup>646</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1113.2: 'la mathaib Erenn, laechaib cleirchib'.

<sup>647</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1113.2.

<sup>648</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1113.9: 'Sluaged mór la Muirchertach co h-Ard Macha & co Mag Coba & a impuhd cum pace'.

a phony war between the two most powerful kings in Ireland – both of whom were, for the most part, happy to accept the status quo. Had Úa Briain thought himself strong enough to overcome Mac Lochlainn in battle he would certainly have pushed for it at one of their confrontations.

Úa Briain may have been concerned that Mac Lochlainn's consolidation of the three northern kingdoms would be a precursor to expansion, but Mac Lochlainn was satisfied with the North as a domain. Even after Úa Briain's fall in 1114, he did not take hostages from Munster. This was, according to some sources, the result of disagreement with Úa Conchobair during their invasion of Munster in that year, but Mac Lochlainn made no subsequent campaign to Leth Moga.<sup>649</sup>

This is the context for two competing definitions of the kingship of Ireland in glosses on the law texts, which were brought to general attention by Simms. The first includes the comment, 'it might be from the successor of Patrick that a fief would be given to the king of Ireland i.e. when the estuaries are under him, Dublin and Waterford and Limerick besides'.<sup>650</sup>

This clearly represents Muirchertach Úa Briain, whose interest in those settlements will be outlined later.<sup>651</sup> It must also be understood that it implicitly recognises Mac Lochlainn's hold over the North; otherwise, a clarification of what was meant by 'king of Ireland' would be unnecessary. Similarly, the reference to the *comarbae* locates it during the standoff between Mac Lochlainn and Úa Briain, as well as showing that the relationship between Úa Briain and Armagh remained positive.

Simms tentatively suggested that the second definition could apply either to one of the Meic Lochlainn kings (Domnall or Muirchertach), or to a notable northern king of the

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<sup>649</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1114.5; *Ann. Inisf.* 1114.3; see Connacht, p. 47.

<sup>650</sup> Simms, 'The contents of later commentaries on Brehon Law tracts' pp 32–3: '*no cumudh o comurba padruid dobertha rath do ri erunn .i. in tan bit na hinbir fui, ath cliath & port lairge & luimnuich olchena*'.

<sup>651</sup> See *The Two Munsters*, pp 263–8.

thirteenth century, Brian Ó Néill. There are good reasons to believe it referenced Domnall Mac Lochlainn in particular. The first is that its list of honour-prices gives twenty-one *cumala* for a ‘king of Ireland with opposition’ and twenty-eight *cumala* for a ‘king of Ireland without opposition’.<sup>652</sup> As will become apparent in our discussion of royal honour-prices, these values were obsolete by the mid-twelfth century.<sup>653</sup>

As was also developed elsewhere, the very idea of a king of Ireland with opposition was not in vogue before the late eleventh century.<sup>654</sup> The standoffs between Úa Briain and Mac Lochlainn probably gave rise to the terminology. This is further suggested by the description of a king of Ireland with opposition: ‘for even if he has only one province in Ireland, if he takes his troops safely out of every other province, as did Conchobhar [mac Nessa], he gets the honour-price of a king with opposition’.<sup>655</sup>

Since Domnall Mac Lochlainn was trying to incorporate the Ulaid into his kingdom, the reference to Conchobar mac Nessa, their ancestor, cultivated a comparison that would otherwise not make sense.<sup>656</sup> It also reflects Domnall Mac Lochlainn’s achievements, not those of Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn or Brian Ó Néill, much less Conchobar mac Nessa. Domnall had conducted campaigns through the other Irish provinces and returned safely, and these were the only grounds he had to be called ‘king of Ireland’ beyond refusing to submit to Úa Briain.

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<sup>652</sup> Simms, ‘The contents of later commentaries’, pp 32–33: ‘*rí erund co freasabra*’, ‘*rí erund cin freasabra*’.

<sup>653</sup> See Women and Marriage, pp 384–90.

<sup>654</sup> See Leinster, pp 341–7.

<sup>655</sup> Simms, ‘The contents of later commentaries’, pp 33–34: ‘*uair cinco roib acht aon .u.edh a nerinn aigi, madia tabra a lorg imlan as gac .u.edh amail dobereth concabar, is eneclann rig co fresabra dó*’.

<sup>656</sup> See also the description of Áed Méith Úa Néill in *Ann. Conn.* 1230.9: ‘Aed O Neill, king of Conchobar’s Province, defender of Leth Cuind Chetchathaig against the Galls and against Leth Moga Nuadat’, from the Irish ‘*Aed h. Neill ri Coicid Conchobair 7 cosnamaig Lethe Cuinn Ceicathaig re Gallaib 7 re Leth Modha Nuadat*’.

### [2.3: Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn's kingship]

Úa Briain fell ill in 1114 and never recovered his former strength, but this barely impacted Domnall Mac Lochlainn's approach to inter-provincial politics. Certainly, the king of the North reacted immediately, as he took the hostages of Ulaid, Bréifne, Meath and Connacht in quick succession, and invaded Munster.<sup>657</sup> All the same, this was his last journey to Leth Moga and his penultimate campaign outside the North.

Just as he had allowed Muirchertach Úa Briain to establish control over every province outside the north in the 1090s, he now allowed Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair to do the same in the 1110s. There were no annual campaigns to the North by Úa Conchobair either to challenge Mac Lochlainn or to secure a renewal of the status quo, nor did Mac Lochlainn attempt to take hostages from Úa Conchobair after 1114.

Even when Úa Conchobair invaded Meath in 1120, Mac Lochlainn's response was half-hearted.<sup>658</sup> He tried to arrange terms with the king of Connacht, which would see Murchad Úa Máel Sechlainn restored to kingship of Meath, but when the Úa Conchobair celebrated the *Óenach Tailten*, effectively announcing himself as king of Ireland, Mac Lochlainn did nothing. This is particularly surprising considering Uí Néill links to Tara and its 'institutions'.<sup>659</sup>

The North remained relatively isolated after Mac Lochlainn's death. This was both because Úa Conchobair did not exert himself in this direction, and because Mac Lochlainn's successors were unable to establish themselves effectively.<sup>660</sup> 1131, Conchobar Mac Lochlainn aligned with Munster in a joint invasion of Connacht that

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<sup>657</sup> *A.F.M.* 1114.10; *A.U.* 1114.3; *A.L.C.* 1114.3, 1114.4; *Chron. Scot.* 1114.3.

<sup>658</sup> *A.F.M.* 1120.3, 1120.8; *A.U.* 1120.1; *A.L.C.* 1120.1; *Chron. Scot.* 1120.3; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1120.3, 1120.5; *Ann. Tig.* 1120.2, 1120.5.

<sup>659</sup> For further discussion of this point, see *Comparative Analysis*, pp 435–6, 458.

<sup>660</sup> Úa Conchobair made only perfunctory raids on the North, including on Fir Manach in 1122 (*Ann. Tig.* 1122.6) and Cenél Conaill in 1126 and 1130 (*A.F.M.* 1126.12; *A.U.* 1126.6; *A.L.C.* 1126.6; *Ann. Tig.* 1126.4; *Chron. Scot.* 1126.5). His effort to place a client king over Airgíalla was also ultimately unsuccessful (*Misc.Ir. Annals* 1125.2).

ended in disaster. Both Munster and the North were defeated, and Tigernán Úa Ruairc raided Airgíalla and Ulaid while their armies were away.<sup>661</sup>

This was not the first occasion that Úa Ruairc had troubled Domnall Mac Lochlainn's successors. In 1128, Conchobar Mac Lochlainn won a significant victory over the Uí Briúin Bréifne and Tigernán Úa Ruairc at Ardee,<sup>662</sup> which was probably a response to Tigernán Úa Ruairc's raids in Airgíalla and Armagh the same year.<sup>663</sup> After Úa Ruairc's opportunistic attacks in 1131, Mac Lochlainn led an army to Ardee and received the king of Bréifne's formal submission.<sup>664</sup>

Conchobar Mac Lochlainn made no further campaigns of note outside the North and was killed by the Cenél nEógain in 1136.<sup>665</sup> His successor, Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn, struggled to establish himself until the middle of the following decade, and, as will be shown below, only did so through unorthodox tactics. As we have already seen, Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair's Connacht also receded from a position of widespread control to one of relative weakness during these years. This contributed to the North's isolation, since the 'common hostility' that had helped Domnall Mac Lochlainn battle Úa Briain was absent.

It was therefore internal rather than external dynamics that defined the next stage of history in the North, as Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn tried to replicate his grandfather's (relative) success in unifying the three kingdoms. His ability to do so rested on the relationship between the Uí Néill and the Airgíalla in particular, which now showed a remarkable change, as the former came to rely on the latter more heavily than ever before.

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<sup>661</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1131.3; *Chron. Scot.* 1131.3; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1130–1.2, 1130–1.3.

<sup>662</sup> *A.F.M.* 1128.13; *A.U.* 1128.3; *A.L.C.* 1128.3.

<sup>663</sup> *A.U.* 1128.3, 1128.5, 1128.7, 1128.8; *A.L.C.* 1128.3, 1128.4, 1128.7, 1128.8; *A.F.M.* 1128.13, 1128.14.

<sup>664</sup> *A.F.M.* 1132.6; *A.L.C.* 1132.3.

<sup>665</sup> *A.F.M.* 1136.9; *A.L.C.* 1136.3.



Throughout the historic period, segments of Cenél nEógain pushed eastwards at the expense of counterparts in Airgíalla. Several examples of this were mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, including the displacement of Uí Thuirtre from Telach Óc. It has even been argued that the transfer of the inauguration site of the Cenél nEógain from Ailech to Telach Óc took place in the guise of Cenél nEógain overlordship of Airgíalla.<sup>666</sup>

The corollary was that the Airgíalla themselves pushed eastwards, at the expense of neighbours on that side, principally the Ulaid. The Uí Thuirtre, for instance, seem to have occupied parts of Dál nAraide in Ulaid as early as the eighth century.<sup>667</sup> In the late eleventh and early twelfth century the expansion of the Airgíalla was principally directed against the Conaille Muirthemne and Uí Echach Cobo regions in south Ulaid.

The fact that acquisition of these territories is usually attributed to Donnchad Úa Cerbaill is somewhat misleading; conflict on these borders preceded his rise to power by at least half a century. There were skirmishes and battles in the region in 1086, 1089, and 1094 for example.<sup>668</sup> Little by little, the Airgíalla seem to have established their dominance, and as we shall see, there is reason to believe they captured land close to and perhaps including Newry.

They enjoyed more success further south, where they would eventually annex Conaille Muirthemne. Cross-border conflict between these neighbours can be found at an early date, with significant battles to be found as early as 998,<sup>669</sup> and under 1041, 1078, and 1081 there are more entries showing ongoing warfare.<sup>670</sup> The success of the Airgíallan parties is evident in an entry recorded under both 1089 and 1091, when an attack by the king of Meath Domnall Úa Máel Sechlainn on the Airgíalla included Conaille

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<sup>666</sup> Hogan, 'The Uí Briain kingship of Telach Óc' in Ryan (ed.), *Féil-Sgríbhinn Eóin Mhic Néill*, pp 406–44 at 420.

<sup>667</sup> Hogan, 'The Uí Briain kingship of Telach Óc', pp 414–18.

<sup>668</sup> *A.F.M.* 1086.7, *A.U.* 1086.7, 1089.5; 1094.3; *A.L.C.* 1094.3.

<sup>669</sup> *A.F.M.* 998.7.

<sup>670</sup> *A.F.M.* 1041.10, 1078.8, 1081.10.

Muirthemne, along with the more recognisably Airgíallan regions of Uí Méith, Mugdorna, and Fernmag.<sup>671</sup>

In 1128, Tigernán Úa Ruairc attacked the Airgíalla.<sup>672</sup> His assault included Armagh and Mag Conaille, but also Lugmad and Cuailgne. Lugmad and Cuailgne were formerly parts of Conaille Muirthemne, so this suggests an extension of Airgíalla's control. Úa Ruairc opportunistically made another assault on the same regions in 1131, when the armies of the North were absent on campaign in Connacht.<sup>673</sup> There can be no doubt this targeted Airgíalla and not Meath, given his actions at Armagh.<sup>674</sup>

If Donnchad Úa Cerbaill did not provide the impetus for Airgíalla's eastward push, he certainly did marshal it to his advantage. As with Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair, there has been some confusion over his accession. It has been placed by Aidan Breen *c.* 1130,<sup>675</sup> and by Smith at 1125.<sup>676</sup> In fact, his first appearance in the annals is later, under 1133.<sup>677</sup>

The case for 1125 is certainly a misreading of Mac Cárthaigh's Book, which reports under that year that Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair placed Domnall Úa Cerbaill in the

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<sup>671</sup> *A.F.M.* 1089.10; *Ann. Tig.* 1091.6.

<sup>672</sup> *A.U.* 1128.5; *A.L.C.* 1128.4; *Ann. Inisf.* 1128.7.

<sup>673</sup> *A.F.M.* 1131.6; *A.L.C.* 1131.5, 1131.6, 1131.7; *Ann. Tig.* 1131.3; *Chron. Scot.* 1131.3; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1130–1.2, 1130–1.3.

<sup>674</sup> *A.L.C.* 1128.4; *A.U.* 1128.5: 'A detestable and unprecedented deed of evil consequence, that merited the curse of the men of Ireland, both laity and clergy, and of which the like was not previously found in Ireland, was committed by Tigernán ua Ruairc and the Uí Briúin, i.e. the successor of Patrick was insulted to his face, that is, his company was robbed and some of them killed, and a young cleric of his own household that was in a *cuilebadh* was killed there. The aftermath that came of that misdeed is that there exists in Ireland no protection that is secure for anyone henceforth until that evil deed is avenged by God and man. The insult offered to the successor of Patrick is as an insult to the Lord, for the Lord Himself said in the Gospel: "He who despiseth you despiseth me, He who despiseth me despiseth Him who sent me"', translated from the Irish and Latin '*Gnim granna anaithnigh ainiarmartach ro thoill escoine fer n-Erenn eter loech 7 cleirech do nach frit macsamhla i n-Erinn riam do dhenamh do Thigernan H. Ruairc 7 do h-Uib Briuin .i. comarba Patraic do nocht-sharughadh ina fhiadhnuise .i. a chuidechta do shlat 7 dream dibh do marbadh 7 mac-cleirech dia mhuinntir fein do bi fo chuilebadh do marbadh ann. Is e imorro na iarmuirt do fhass don mhi-gnim-sa conach fuil i n-Erinn comuirce is tairisi do dhuine fodhesta no curo dhighailter o Dhia 7 o dhoeinibh in t-olc-sa. In dinsemh-sa tra tucadh for comarba Patraic iss amal 7 dingsim in Comdhegh uair adrubairt in Coimdheo fein isin t-shoiscéla; "Qui uos spernit me spernit, qui mé spernit spernit eum qui mé misit"'*.

<sup>675</sup> Aidan Breen, 'Ua Cerbaill, Donnchad' in *D.I.B.*, accessed online (<http://dib.cambridge.org/viewReadPage.do?articleId=a8718>) (7 August 2019).

<sup>676</sup> Smith, *Colonisation and conquest in medieval Ireland* (Cambridge, 1999), p. 13.

<sup>677</sup> *A.F.M.* 1133.10; *A.L.C.* 1133.2.

kingship of Airgíalla, having first enforced a new arrangement in Meath.<sup>678</sup> This Domnall Úa Cerbaill was killed by Diarmait Úa Máel Sechlainn almost immediately according to the same source, showing his name was not a scribal error for Donnchad.<sup>679</sup> Nor did Donnchad succeed Domnall, as one Cú Mide Úa Crichain is named as ‘king of Fernmhagh and Oirghialla’ by Mac Cárthaigh’s Book under 1130 (*recte* 1131),<sup>680</sup> and as king of Fernmag only in the same entries in *A.F.M.*, *A.L.C.*, *Ann. Tig.*, and *Chron. Scot.*<sup>681</sup>

Presumably, the case for a c. 1130 date of accession for Donnchad Úa Cerbaill assumes that he was the successor of Úa Crichain and, of course, that may be so – though there is no positive evidence for it. The other point, and this is where his case mirrors Úa Conchobair’s, is that there is nothing to support the idea that Úa Cerbaill immediately became king of Airgíalla.<sup>682</sup> His first appearance in the record is a description of an attack with the men of Fernmag, and this is a clear indication that it was the regional and not the provincial kingship that he held at that time.<sup>683</sup>

There are more references to Fernmag under 1135 and 1136, and it is 1138 before there is an unambiguous description of Donnchad Úa Cerbaill as king of Airgíalla.<sup>684</sup> This should be no surprise: regional kingships were the norm for provinces that had recently been unstable, and Úa Cerbaill’s later importance should not be projected backwards. A tendency to overlook this point has meant his very close links with Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn have been missed or underestimated.

Úa Cerbaill’s accession to the kingship of Airgíalla occurred proximately with Mac Lochlainn’s accession in the Northern Uí Néill. Conchobar Mac Lochlainn was killed by

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<sup>678</sup> *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1125.2.

<sup>679</sup> *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1125.3.

<sup>680</sup> *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1130–1.3.

<sup>681</sup> *A.F.M.* 1131.6; *A.L.C.* 1131.7; *Ann. Tig.* 1131.; *Chron. Scot.* 1131.3.

<sup>682</sup> See *Connacht*, p. 45.

<sup>683</sup> *A.F.M.* 1133.10; *A.L.C.* 1133.2.

<sup>684</sup> *A.F.M.* 1138.10.

the Cenél nEógain of Mag Ítha in 1136,<sup>685</sup> and Muirchertach replaced him.<sup>686</sup> Even though he would one day hold the kingship of Ireland his early reign was far from auspicious. It was 1139 before he took revenge for his predecessor, and this was the first recorded act of his reign.<sup>687</sup>

In that year, the Ulaid felt sufficiently safe to make an opportunistic attack against Tulach Óc, the first time they had led an army into Cenél nEógain since 1121.<sup>688</sup>

Remarkably, there was no counter-strike by the Cenél nEógain.<sup>689</sup> In 1142, Mac Lochlainn was severely wounded fighting the Fir Droma of Cenél nEógain<sup>690</sup> and, in 1143 he was briefly deposed from his kingship in favour of Úa Gairmledaig by another party of the Cenél nEógain.<sup>691</sup>

His rise from this low point relied on the development of a symbiotic relationship with Úa Cerbaill. The effective beginning of this was the reclamation of the kingship from Úa Gairmledaig. Úa Cerbaill was on hand to assist with this in 1145, as were the Cenél Conaill.<sup>692</sup> The Cenél Conaill turned on Mac Lochlainn in 1158, whereupon Úa Cerbaill was on hand to help again.<sup>693</sup>

Úa Cerbaill benefitted from their relationship by support of his interests in Meath, where he looked to conquer territory from the failing Uí Máel Sechlainn kingdom. He was preoccupied with this advance from an early point, and it may be presumed that his attack on Dublin in 1133, his first appearance in the record, was related.<sup>694</sup> In a series of events in 1135 and 1136, the Fernmag cooperated with the Uí Briúin Bréifne, who were also expanding under Tigernán Úa Ruairc, in actions against east Meath. In 1136, for

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<sup>685</sup> *A.F.M.* 1136.9; *A.L.C.* 1136.3.

<sup>686</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1136.11.

<sup>687</sup> *A.F.M.* 1139.4.

<sup>688</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1121.5.

<sup>689</sup> *A.F.M.* 1139.3.

<sup>690</sup> *A.F.M.* 1142.7.

<sup>691</sup> *A.F.M.* 1143.10.

<sup>692</sup> *A.F.M.* 1145.5, 1145.6.

<sup>693</sup> *A.F.M.* 1158.11, 1158.12; *A.U.* 1158.2.

<sup>694</sup> *A.F.M.* 1133.10; *A.L.C.* 1133.2.

instance, they coordinated and targeted Clonard, in the south-east of the province, where the Uí Máel Sechlainn had one of their bases.<sup>695</sup>

Úa Cerbaill remained on the offensive in Meath in the 1140s. Murchad Úa Máel Sechlainn made raids of his own in reply, alternatively reported as having been in Fernmag or in Cuailgne.<sup>696</sup> From later evidence, it is clear that the region of Meath known as Fir Airde Cíanachta was a part of Airgíalla by the English invasion,<sup>697</sup> even though in the twelfth-century Book of Rights, it appears as a division of Meath.<sup>698</sup> In Murchad Úa Máel Sechlainn's obituary of 1153 he is given title to Airgíalla, and this may well be an implicit acknowledgment of the acquisition of Fir Arda Ciannachta by Úa Cerbaill at some point before the middle of the century.<sup>699</sup>

Taking account of Úa Cerbaill's expansion, Mac Lochlainn used his broad authority of 1150 to grant the king of Airgíalla a share in a partition of Meath.<sup>700</sup> Úa Cerbaill remained loyal when Úa Ruairc turned on the king of Ireland in 1159, and he was on the winning side at the Battle of Ardee that year.<sup>701</sup> The next year, Úa Cerbaill supported Mac Lochlainn as Úa Gairmledaig challenged him again.<sup>702</sup> Without this support it is unlikely that Mac Lochlainn would have been able to retain his kingship of Ireland.

Úa Cerbaill had an interest in church affairs, perhaps greater than Mac Lochlainn's, but this too became an area of cooperation. The 1157 consecration of Mellifont was effectively a jointly sponsored event. Mellifont, like St Mary's Abbey, had been established in Úa Cerbaill's territory in 1142 by Máel Máedoc Úa Morgair, better known

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<sup>695</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1136.5.

<sup>696</sup> *A.F.M.* 1145.14, 1145.16.

<sup>697</sup> MacCotter, *Medieval Ireland*, p. 236.

<sup>698</sup> Dillon, *Lebor na cert*, pp 102–3; Paul Walsh, 'Meath in the Book of Rights' in Ryan (ed.), *Féil-Sgríbhinn Eóin Mhic Néill*, pp 508–21 at 518–19.

<sup>699</sup> *A.F.M.* 1153.5.

<sup>700</sup> *A.F.M.* 1150.15.

<sup>701</sup> *A.F.M.* 1159.13; *A.U.* 1159.3; *Ann. Tig.* 1159.10; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1158.3.

<sup>702</sup> *A.F.M.* 1160.19; *A.U.* 1160.6.

as St Malachy.<sup>703</sup> Subsequently, at the consecration of the site, substantial endowments were made by both kings. Úa Cerbaill gave sixty ounces of gold to the Cistercian establishment. Mac Lochlainn gave the same in gold, along with 140 cows, and, remarkably, ‘he granted them also a townland at Droicheat-atha, i.e. Finnabhair-naninghean’.<sup>704</sup> This land lay in Úa Cerbaill’s kingdom, and its alienation by Mac Lochlainn argues for a very close collaboration between the two men.

There is also the case of Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn’s charter to Newry Abbey, which was issued close to the same time (certainly no later than 1157), and which exhibits many of the same features.<sup>705</sup> Newry too was Cistercian, being a daughter house of Mellifont. As noted above, its location is ambiguous, being close to the border between Airgialla and Uí Echach Cobo. Because Mac Lochlainn had alienated Úa Cerbaill’s newly conquered land at Mellifont, and since Úa Cerbaill is given a higher title in the charter than the king of Ulaid or the king of Uí Echach Cobo, the balance of probability is that something very similar occurred at Newry.<sup>706</sup> Furthermore, it was in the management of Ulaid that Mac Lochlainn and Úa Cerbaill’s collaboration reached its greatest extent.

Indeed, in the latter half of their careers, the interests of these two kings coalesced principally around the kingdom of Ulaid. Muirchertach, like Domnall Mac Lochlainn before him, was concerned with maintaining suzerainty over Ulaid as a pre-requisite to wider authority. For Úa Cerbaill, Ulaid would become his primary target for territorial gain after his success in Meath. Three years in succession, 1147, 1148, and 1149, saw the

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<sup>703</sup> Flanagan, ‘Malachy [St Malachy, Máel Máedoc Ua Morgair]’ in *O.D.N.B.*, accessed online (<https://doi-org.jproxy.nuim.ie/10.1093/ref:odnb/17853>) (7 August 2019); Ailbhe Mac Shamhráin, ‘Malachy (Máel-M’áedóc) Ua Morgair’ in *D.I.B.*, accessed online (<http://dib.cambridge.org/viewReadPage.do?articleId=a5406>) (7 August 2019).

<sup>704</sup> *A.F.M.* 1159.9: ‘Do-rad dóibh bheós baile oc Droichet Átha .i. Fionnabhair na n-Inghen’.

<sup>705</sup> Cú Ulad Mac Dúinn Sléibe, who appears in the charter, died in 1157 (*Ann. Tig.* 1157.5); Flanagan, *Irish royal charters, texts and contexts* (Oxford, 2005), pp 116, 292–3.

<sup>706</sup> Flanagan, *Irish royal charters, texts and contexts*, pp 292–3: ‘Donchadh O Cearbail regis totius Ergalliae et Murchadh eius filii regis Ometh et Tricaced Erther, et Conla regis Ultoniae, et Donaldi O Heda regis Oneach’, translated ‘Donnchad Ua Cerbaill, king of all Airgialla, and Murchad, his son, king of Uí Méith and the trícha cét of Airthir, and Cú Ulad, king of Ulaid, and Domnall Ua hAitéid, king of Uí Echach’.

establishment of an organisation in that province that would be challenged twice by the Ulaid, in 1156 and 1165, unsuccessfully on both occasions.

A raid by the king of Ulaid, Cú Ulaid Mac Dúinn Sléibe, in Fernmag, provided the slight pretext for a major invasion of Ulaid by the Cenél nEógain and Airgíalla in 1147.<sup>707</sup>

Though they took hostages from their defeated opponents, they were unsatisfied and invaded again in 1148. On this occasion they divided the province among four native kings, but the scheme was short-lived, and possibly not the product of an agreement between the invaders. It is reported in the same entry that ‘the Ulidians and Airghialla turned against Mac Lochlainn and the Cinel-Eoghain after this’.<sup>708</sup>

It is evident from what happened next that Úa Cerbaill and Mac Lochlainn had competing visions for the future of Ulaid. Mac Lochlainn marched into the province again, and removed from authority Cú Ulad Mac Dúinn Sléibe, deposing him in favour of Donnchad Mac Dúinn Sléibe.<sup>709</sup> In response, Úa Cerbaill allied with his half-brother Tigernán Úa Ruairc and invaded Ulaid to restore Cú Ulad.<sup>710</sup>

Whatever the nature of their disagreement, though, the two northern kings ensured it did not erupt into conflict. Úa Cerbaill was present at a meeting to give hostages to Mac Lochlainn later the same year.<sup>711</sup> The same disagreement arose in 1149. For the second year in a row, Cú Ulad unsuccessfully tried to reclaim the kingship of his province.

Again, Mac Lochlainn was disposed to prevent this from happening, but on this occasion ‘Ua Cearbhaill prevented them, for he delivered his own son up to them, for the sake of Ulidia’.<sup>712</sup>

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<sup>707</sup> *A.F.M.* 1147.9, 1147.10; *Misc.Ir.Annals* 1145–7.5.

<sup>708</sup> *A.F.M.* 1148.9: ‘*Ulaidh & Airghialla do iompódh for Mag Lachlainn & for Cenel n-Eoghain iar sin*’.

<sup>709</sup> *A.F.M.* 1148.10.

<sup>710</sup> *A.F.M.* 1148.11.

<sup>711</sup> *A.F.M.* 1148.12.

<sup>712</sup> *A.F.M.* 1149.9: ‘*co ro thairmiscc Ua Cerbhaill impú, uair do-rad a mhac fein dóibh tar cenn Uladh*’.

The arrangement of 1149, by which Úa Cerbaill made his own son a hostage to ensure his continued power over Ulaid, had a lasting influence in the province. A brief rebellion in 1156 was put down by Mac Lochlainn, apparently without any need for any assistance.<sup>713</sup> In the meantime, the king of Airgíalla reaped the benefits of control over his eastern neighbour. At the death of Cú Ulad Úa Floinn, who belonged to the Uí Thuirtre of Airgíalla, he was given the extensive and alternative titles of ‘lord of Ui-Tuirtre and Dal-Araidhe’<sup>714</sup> and ‘the king of Dál Riada’.<sup>715</sup> This is not necessarily a contradiction or error. A successor, Cú Maige Úa Floinn, was given a more inclusive title in his obituary of 1176. He is there described as king of Uí Thuirtre, Fir Lí, Dál Riada, and Dál nAraide.<sup>716</sup>

The inclusion of prominent segments of the Ulaid in the Uí Floinn domain is illustrative of the terms of the arrangements made by Mac Lochlainn and Úa Cerbaill in that province. Úa Cerbaill’s own obituary of 1168 also has remarkably extensive titles. ‘He seized kingship of Meath as far as Clochán na hImrime, and the kingship of Ulaid’, according to Mac Cárthaigh’s Book.<sup>717</sup> It is also recorded there that he was ‘offered many times the kingship of Cinéal Eóghain’.<sup>718</sup> This presumably references the regional kingship of Telach Óc, which was also given to two Uí Briain dynasts in the eleventh century.<sup>719</sup>

Both the symbiotic relationship of Mac Lochlainn and Úa Cerbaill and their political organisation of the Ulaid were fated to end in disaster, however. The Ulaid launched another rebellion in 1165, which would indirectly bring about the fall of Mac Lochlainn. The initial targets of the rebelling party included the Uí Méith and Uí Bresail Airthir of

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<sup>713</sup> *A.F.M.* 1156.15, 1156.16; *A.U.* 1156.2.

<sup>714</sup> *A.F.M.* 1158.10.

<sup>715</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1158.8.

<sup>716</sup> *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1176.18; *A.F.M.* 1176.6; *Ann. Tig.* 1176.17; *A.L.C.* 1176.9; *A.U.* 1176.10.

<sup>717</sup> *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1167.5: ‘*an ti do gabh righi Mighi gu Clochan na h-Imirimi & righi Uladh*’ (own translation); *A.F.M.* 1168.17; *A.U.* 1168.4; *Ann. Tig.* 1168.9.

<sup>718</sup> *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1167.5: ‘*dia targas gu minic righi Cinel Eoghain*’.

<sup>719</sup> See Hogan, ‘The Uí Briain kingship of Telach Óc’, pp 406–44.



Airgíalla. They also included Dál Riada, again underlining recent territorial acquisitions made by the Airgíalla.<sup>720</sup>

At first, the response took a familiar course. Mac Lochlainn and Úa Cerbaill invaded Ulaid and deposed the sitting king, on this occasion Eochaid mac Con Ulad Meic Dúinn Sléibe.<sup>721</sup> When Eochaid tried to reclaim his kingship almost immediately after the invaders were gone, the Ulaid themselves ‘expelled him through fear of Ua Lochlainn and he was fettered by Donnchadh Ua Cerbaill, arch-king of Airgíalla, by order of Ua Lochlainn’.<sup>722</sup>

Just as Úa Cerbaill had supported the kingship of Cú Ulad Mac Dúinn Sléibe when Mac Lochlainn had favoured an alternative arrangement, he now supported Cú Ulad’s son. Despite having the erstwhile king of Ulaid in custody, he promoted his restoration at a meeting with Mac Lochlainn and, remarkably, he prevailed upon the king of Ireland to accept this.

Mac Lochlainn’s dissatisfaction and hesitancy is evident: he demanded a son of every *taoisech* in Ulaid and Mac Dúinn Sléibe’s own daughter as the hostages to guarantee the arrangement.<sup>723</sup> Mac Dúinn Sléibe gave up more territory to Mac Lochlainn as well, and Mac Lochlainn immediately granted this territory to Úa Cerbaill.<sup>724</sup> This final example of territorial change illustrates the mechanics governing the collaboration of Mac Lochlainn and Úa Cerbaill. Both sought to control Ulaid, and in terms of territory at least, Úa Cerbaill was to be the beneficiary.

It would seem, though, that Mac Lochlainn deeply resented the control Úa Cerbaill had of the kingship of Ulaid if not the territory. In 1166, less than a year after the rebellion,

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<sup>720</sup> *A.F.M.* 1165.4; *A.U.* 1165.4.

<sup>721</sup> *A.F.M.* 1165.4; *A.U.* 1165.4.

<sup>722</sup> *A.U.* 1165.9: ‘*co ro dichuirset Ulaidh h-e, ar h-uamhon h-Ui Lochlainn & co ro geimhligedh h-e la Donnchadh h-Ua Cerbaill, la h-ardrigh Airgiall, tre forchongra h-Ui Lochlainn*’.

<sup>723</sup> *A.F.M.* 1165.5; *A.U.* 1165.5.

<sup>724</sup> *A.F.M.* 1165.5: ‘He also gave up the territory of Bairche to Ua Lochlainn, who immediately granted it to Ua Cearbhaill, i.e. Donnchadh; and a townland was granted to the clergy of Sabhall, for the luck of the reign of Mac Lochlainn’.

arrest, and restoration of Mac Dúinn Sléibe, Mac Lochlainn captured Mac Dúinn Sléibe and his retainers. He had Mac Dúinn Sléibe blinded, and he had the retainers killed.<sup>725</sup> In so doing, he must have realised that he would provoke war with Úa Cerbaill. This was practically guaranteed to occur not because Úa Cerbaill's honour as a guarantor of the restoration of Mac Dúinn Sléibe had been impugned, as some have imagined through a literal reading of the description in the annals, but rather because Mac Lochlainn was clearly breaking with the spirit of their cooperative approach as well as the specific agreement of 1165.

Úa Cerbaill could not have overthrown Mac Lochlainn on his own, but the latter's wider authority had made him plenty of enemies. His kingship beyond the North dated from 1149, when he took the hostages of Tigernán Úa Ruairc for Bréifne, Murchad Úa Máel Sechlainn for Meath, and Diarmait Mac Murchada for Leinster.<sup>726</sup> He also 'made a complete peace between the foreigners and the Irish' at Dublin, which may well indicate the submission of the Hiberno-Norse.<sup>727</sup> The following year, he was able to extend his authority over Connacht as well. Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair gave up hostages freely, perhaps in consideration of his other difficulties, and received in return a share in a partition of Meath.<sup>728</sup>

Had the Battle of Móin Móir not occurred, it is likely that Mac Lochlainn would have tried to establish suzerainty over Munster, perhaps after consolidating his hold on the other provinces. The battle, which appears in more detail elsewhere, saw two of Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn's subordinates, Úa Conchobair and Mac Murchada, inflict a debilitating defeat on the one major king who had not yet accepted Mac Lochlainn's supremacy, Toirdelbach Úa Briain.<sup>729</sup>

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<sup>725</sup> *A.F.M.* 1166.10; *A.U.* 1166.8; *Ann. Tig.* 1166.3; *Ann. Inisf.* 1166.6.

<sup>726</sup> *A.F.M.* 1149.12; *Ann. Tig.* 1149.6; *Chron. Scot.* 1149.8.

<sup>727</sup> *A.F.M.* 1149.12: 'do-roine Ua Lachlainn ógh-shídh etir Ghallaibh & Ghaidhelaibh'.

<sup>728</sup> *A.F.M.* 1150.15; see Connacht, p. 61.

<sup>729</sup> See Connacht, p. 53; The Two Munsters, pp 245–6.

Munster was afterwards partitioned into the rival halves of Thomond and Desmond, and overlordship of both fell to Úa Conchobair. Úa Briain was effectively removed from the competition for national supremacy, while Úa Conchobair was elevated to a higher standing. Mac Lochlainn's alarm at these developments is evident. While Diarmait Mac Murchada immediately re-affirmed his submission to the king of the North by sending more hostages,<sup>730</sup> Mac Lochlainn felt it necessary to lead his army into Connacht, where Úa Conchobair's hostages were also brought to him without challenge.<sup>731</sup>

The next year, 'a meeting took place between Ua Lochlainn and Toirdhealbhach Ua Conchobhair at Magh-Ene [Moy near Ballyshannon], where they made friendship under the Staff of Jesus, and under the relics of Colum-Cille'.<sup>732</sup> The two men also collaborated against Tigernán Úa Ruairc in 1152, but the removal of Toirdelbach Úa Briain by Úa Conchobair around the same time upset their uneasy relationship.<sup>733</sup>

Toirdelbach Úa Briain was able to assume kingship of Thomond 'through the power of Muirchertach Ua Lochlainn' in 1153, but Mac Lochlainn struggled to translate this into lasting control.<sup>734</sup> The real breakthrough in this conflict came in 1156, when Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair died.<sup>735</sup> It was somewhat by default that 1156 was later described as 'the first year of Muirchertach Ua Lochlainn over Ireland'.<sup>736</sup> Furthermore, Connacht had not been defeated. Toirdelbach's son Ruaidrí immediately confirmed his ambition to rival Mac Lochlainn by taking Úa Briain's hostages.<sup>737</sup>

As early as 1157, it became apparent that Mac Lochlainn would lose the battle for control of Thomond. He launched an extensive attack, banishing Úa Briain, and sending

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<sup>730</sup> *A.F.M.* 1151.16; *Ann. Tig.* 1151.5.

<sup>731</sup> *A.F.M.* 1151.15; *Ann. Tig.* 1151.4.

<sup>732</sup> *A.F.M.* 1152.8: '*Comdhál etir Ua Lachlainn, & Toirdhealbhach Ua Conchobhair i Maigh Ene, co n-dernsat caradradh fo Bhachaill Iosa, & ro mhiondaibh Cholaim Chille*'.

<sup>733</sup> *A.F.M.* 1152.10; *Ann. Tig.* 1152.3, 1152.6.

<sup>734</sup> *A.F.M.* 1153.15: '*tria neart Muirchertaigh Mheg Lachlainn*'.

<sup>735</sup> *A.F.M.* 1156.9; *A.U.* 1156.1; *Ann. Tig.* 1156.4; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1156.2; *Ann. Clon.* 1153.

<sup>736</sup> *A.F.M.* 1156.1: '*An chéd-bhliadhain do Mhuirchertach Ua Lachlainn uas Erin*'.

<sup>737</sup> *A.F.M.* 1156.13; see *Connacht*, p. 54.

raiding parties into Connacht.<sup>738</sup> While this was happening, Úa Conchobair himself invaded Cenél nEógain.<sup>739</sup> After Mac Lochlainn returned home, Úa Conchobair went to Thomond and restored Toirdelbach Úa Briain, quickly and easily undoing Mac Lochlainn's work. There would be no repeat march to Munster by Mac Lochlainn in 1158.<sup>740</sup>

Mac Lochlainn also lost ground to Úa Conchobair in Uí Briúin Bréifne and Meath. While, in 1157, Mac Lochlainn had endorsed Tigernán Úa Ruairc's choice for the kingship of Meath, by 1159 he was no longer satisfied with the king of Bréifne's control in Meath.<sup>741</sup> He removed Diarmait Úa Máel Sechlainn, Úa Ruairc's preferred candidate, and re-installed Donnchad Úa Máel Sechlainn, whom he had formerly favoured.<sup>742</sup> Úa Ruairc's response was to form an alliance with Úa Conchobair, lending his support to Mac Lochlainn's only rival for the kingship of Ireland.<sup>743</sup>

With Thomond and Bréifne now providing military backing for his challenge, Úa Conchobair felt ready to confront Mac Lochlainn. In 1159, he made his move against Úa Cerbaill, perhaps hoping to detach the king of Airgíalla from Mac Lochlainn's overlordship. The battle he forced at Ardee ended in disaster, and many of the leading nobles of Connacht and Bréifne were slain.<sup>744</sup>

The momentum, which had been with Úa Conchobair, now switched dramatically to Mac Lochlainn, who followed up with an extensive raid in Connacht and another expedition into Meath 'to expel Ua Ruairc'.<sup>745</sup> He even billeted the men of Cenél Conaill and Cenél nEógain on Meath for a month in 1159, to act as a kind of garrison against Úa Ruairc and Úa Conchobair.<sup>746</sup> All the same, as discussed in detail elsewhere, Mac Lochlainn

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<sup>738</sup> *A.F.M.* 1157.10.

<sup>739</sup> *A.F.M.* 1157.11; *Ann. Tig.* 1157.7.

<sup>740</sup> *A.F.M.* 1157.12.

<sup>741</sup> See *Women and Marriage*, pp 390–2.

<sup>742</sup> *A.F.M.* 1155.11; *Ann. Tig.* 1155.2.

<sup>743</sup> *A.F.M.* 1159.10.

<sup>744</sup> *A.F.M.* 1159.13; *A.U.* 1159.3; *Ann. Tig.* 1159.10; *Misc.Ir.Annals* 1158.3.

<sup>745</sup> *A.F.M.* 1159.15: 'do ionnarbadh Uí Ruairc'; *Ann. Tig.* 1159.13; *Misc.Ir.Annals* 1158.9.

<sup>746</sup> *A.F.M.* 1159.15; *Ann. Tig.* 1159.13.

eventually decided to compromise with Úa Conchobair, and in 1161 they set out their respective spheres of control.<sup>747</sup> Úa Conchobair gained greatly through this, but he also acknowledged Mac Lochlainn as his superior.

This was the status quo for the next five years. Mac Lochlainn had styled himself ‘*rí Erend*’ when freeing Ardraccan in Meath of political interference in 1161,<sup>748</sup> and ‘*rex totius Hiberniae*’ in his c. 1157 charter to Newry Abbey, and this was the position he still held.<sup>749</sup> He continued to influence matters outside the North, notably pursuing a vendetta against Dublin in 1162.<sup>750</sup> He also continued his sponsorship of selected ecclesiastical centres, adding Derry to Mellifont, Newry, and Ardraccan in 1164.<sup>751</sup>

So, when Úa Cerbaill led the Airgíalla and Ulaid in a rebellion in 1165, Úa Conchobair was on-hand and in a position to capitalise fully. The king of Connacht quickly established authority over Airgíalla, Leinster, and Osraige, and returned to Connacht to prepare an attack on the North.<sup>752</sup> While Úa Ruairc supported Úa Cerbaill in the assault on Cenél nEógain, Úa Conchobair invaded Cenél Conaill to forestall any support Mac Lochlainn might receive from that direction.<sup>753</sup>

Mac Lochlainn, who had been abandoned by most of his men at this point, was killed by one of Úa Ruairc’s soldiers. Úa Conchobair immediately established his own kingship of Ireland. The next year, 1167, he returned to the North and established a new organisation: not only would the Cenél nEógain be separated from Cenél Conaill, but they would also be divided in two, with Niall Mac Lochlainn given the territory north of the Sperrins, and Áed Úa Néill given south of the Sperrins.<sup>754</sup>

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<sup>747</sup> *A.F.M.* 1161.9; *A.U.* 1161.4.

<sup>748</sup> Mac Niocaill, ‘The Irish “charters”’, p. 159.

<sup>749</sup> Flanagan, *Irish royal charters*, pp 292–3.

<sup>750</sup> *A.F.M.* 1162.11; *A.U.* 1162.4; *Ann. Tig.* 1162.1.

<sup>751</sup> *A.F.M.* 1164.3; *A.U.* 1164.6.

<sup>752</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1166.1.

<sup>753</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1166.2, 1166.3.

<sup>754</sup> *A.F.M.* 1167.11; *A.U.* 1167.2; *Ann. Tig.* 1167.4.

Ultimately, Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn's career, both rise and fall, was defined by his relationship with Donnchad Úa Cerbaill. This was an exercise in experimentation: never before had a king of the Northern Uí Néill tolerated a strong king of Airgíalla and Mac Lochlainn did not just tolerate Úa Cerbaill: he relied on him. Having had the support of the king of Airgíalla to establish his control over the Cenél nEógain, Mac Lochlainn confirmed Úa Cerbaill's authority in the parts of Meath and Ulaid that had recently fallen to the Airgíalla. He assisted Úa Cerbaill's conquest of further territory and he collaborated in the sponsorship of new religious orders.

There can be little doubt, though, that dependence on Úa Cerbaill eventually undermined Mac Lochlainn's suzerainty. Mac Lochlainn tried to confirm his superiority on one occasion by briefly deposing Úa Cerbaill (in 1152), but his failure to enforce his own authority over the arrangements in Ulaid proved fatal.<sup>755</sup> It is clear too, that this rankled with Mac Lochlainn: there could be little rationale behind the blinding of Mac Dúinn Sléibe other than an ill-conceived attempt to stamp authority on the North. What Mac Lochlainn did not envision was just how drastically his support would waver in the wake of these actions. When Úa Cerbaill attacked, aided by Úa Ruairc, only a small party of the Cenél nEógain remained to defend him.<sup>756</sup>

Had Mac Lochlainn capitalised on his victory at Ardee in 1159 and thoroughly dismantled Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair's authority outside Connacht, it is likely that he would have survived the rebellion of 1166; it is even possible that Úa Cerbaill would not have dared to rebel at all. As it was, he allowed an obvious challenger to remain in place waiting for an opportunity to strike.

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<sup>755</sup> *A.F.M.* 1152.7.

<sup>756</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1166.3; *A.F.M.* 1166.11; *A.U.* 1166.10; *Ann. Inisf.* 1166.6.

## [2.4: The disintegration of the North]

The slow coalescence of the three provincial kingdoms of the North has commanded focus so far; their relatively speedy disintegration after the death of Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn must now be examined. It was not that Mac Lochlainn's successors made no effort to replicate his success, or that no traces of the process remained, but two major events in quick succession made the wider definition of the north politically impracticable from 1166 onwards. The first was Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair's kingship of Ireland, under which the North was deliberately divided and the central component, Cenél nEógain, was partitioned. The second was the English invasion of Ireland, which, though it was less important initially, had a more lasting impact.

In this section the factors that led to the disintegration of the North will be examined. These include the separation of Ulaid from the bloc by the English invasion, the rapid rise of Airgíalla under Úa Conchobair's overlordship, as an extension of Mac Lochlainn's own policy, the subsequent decline and regionalisation of Airgíalla after Úa Conchobair retreated to his provincial kingship, the independence of Cenél Conaill from Cenél nEógain, which lasted into the thirteenth century, and finally the challenges the Cenél nEógain faced as they attempted to project their authority. Collectively, these issues made the North a complex environment and help explain the course and progress of the English invasion.

It should be noted first that throughout this tumultuous period when the elements of the North became more disparate, the expression nevertheless survived as a collective description. In 1201, the army of Úa Néill and Úa hÉignigh was described as 'the northern party',<sup>757</sup> and their defeat was a defeat for 'the forces of the north'. An Timpánach Úa Coinnicén was described as 'chief poet of the North of Erin',<sup>758</sup> while Magnus Úa Catháin, who died in 1206, was described in his obituary as 'tower of

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<sup>757</sup> A.L.C. 1201.5: '*lucht an tuaisceirt*'; A.U. 1201.4; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1201.5; A.F.M. 1199.9.

<sup>758</sup> A.L.C. 1177.8: '*ollam tuaisceirt Erenn*'; A.U. 1177.4.

championship and courage of the North'.<sup>759</sup> Gilla Críst Mac Cathmhail of Fir Manach was called 'head of counsel of the North of Erin',<sup>760</sup> while Úa Breslén of Cenél Conaill was praised as 'the lamp of the hospitality and valour of the north of Ireland' in his obituary.<sup>761</sup> Eigneacán Úa Domhnaill, king of Cenél Conaill, was similarly lauded as 'the tower of valour, and honour, and strength of the North of Erin', when he fell by the Fir Manach in 1207.<sup>762</sup>

The Ulaid were generally, though not exclusively, regarded as a part of this reconstituted North. In Conchobar Mac Lochlainn's obituary he is called 'king of all the north, both Cinel-Conaill and Cinel-Eoghain, Ulidians and Airghialla',<sup>763</sup> and during the invasion of Connacht in 1131 the reference to 'the north' clearly does encompass the Ulaid, who were detained in Connacht after the defeat of Mac Lochlainn's army.<sup>764</sup> In 1159, the army of Mac Lochlainn is described as 'having the Cinel-Conaill, Cinel-Eoghain, the Airghialla, and all the northerns',<sup>765</sup> in the Four Masters, and elsewhere the Ulaid are explicitly named.<sup>766</sup> When 'the chieftains of the north'<sup>767</sup> went to meet Úa Conchobair in 1169, they included Magnus Úa hEochada in their number, and when Dúinn Sléibe Úa hEochada killed Mac Gilla Easpaig in 1172 it was said to have been in violation of the relics of the North.<sup>768</sup>

On the other hand, no king of Ulaid or other native of that kingdom in the relevant period was described as being 'of the North' in their obituaries. Nor was any particular role noted for the nobles of Ulaid in the army of the north, unlike Úa hAinbeith of Uí Méith for instance, who was styled 'leader of the cavalry of the king of Oilech'.<sup>769</sup> Perhaps

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<sup>759</sup> A.U. 1206.1: '*tuir gaiscidh & beoghachta in Tuaisceirt*'; A.F.M. 1205.4.

<sup>760</sup> A.L.C. 1186.17: '*cenn comairle tuaiscert Erenn*'; A.U. 1185.4; A.F.M. 1185.3

<sup>761</sup> A.U. 1186.6: '*coinnel éinigh & gaiscidh Tuaiscert Erenn*'; A.F.M. 1186.3, 1186.7.

<sup>762</sup> A.L.C. 1207.4: '*tuir engnuma, & einigh, & calmatais tuaisceirt Erenn*'; A.F.M. 1207.1; A.U. 1207.7; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1207.2.

<sup>763</sup> A.F.M. 1136.9.

<sup>764</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1131.3; *Chron. Scot.* 1131.3; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1130–1.2, 1130–1.3.

<sup>765</sup> A.F.M. 1159.14.

<sup>766</sup> A.U. 1159.4; *Ann. Tig.* 1159.11; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1158.8.

<sup>767</sup> A.F.M. 1169.10: '*maithe Thuaisceirt Erenn*'.

<sup>768</sup> *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1173.5.

<sup>769</sup> A.L.C. 1170.8; A.F.M. 1170.25; A.U. 1170.7.



more significantly still, ‘the North’ was sometimes used in a more confined sense. Not, as it had once been, a term for the Northern Uí Néill only, but rather for the Northern Uí Néill and the Airgíalla together.

This occurs in 1149, for example, when *A.F.M.* records ‘another army was led by the son of Niall Mac Lochlainn, being joined by the people of the north of Ireland, namely, the Cinel-Conaill, the Cinel-Eoghain, and the Airghialla, into Ulidia’, on an attack.<sup>770</sup>

Similarly, one account of the invasion of Connacht by Conchobar Mac Lochlainn in 1131 reports that he had with him ‘the people of the north of Ireland, and the Ulidians’.<sup>771</sup>

Between the recency with which ‘the North’ had taken a new sense, and the frequency with which the Ulaid rebelled against the Northern Uí Néill, as detailed above, it is not surprising that they should sometimes have been regarded as independent from the grouping.<sup>772</sup> What is perhaps more important is that the more confined meaning became dominant after the conquest of Ulaid by John de Courcy.

De Courcy himself, after his deposition by Hugh de Lacy, was noted to have come ‘with the Cinéal Eóghain from the north into Ulaidh to recover his lordship’, in 1204.<sup>773</sup> The English led a hosting against ‘the north of Ireland’ in 1212, which certainly excluded the Ulaid.<sup>774</sup> When Doire was plundered in 1213 the possessions of the North of Ireland were taken,<sup>775</sup> and Áed Úa Néill’s obituary of 1230, which described him as ‘king of the north’,<sup>776</sup> probably also intended the more confined sense. In this case de Courcy’s invasion of Ulaid itself contributed to disintegration by exacerbating an existing

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<sup>770</sup> *A.F.M.* 1149.10: ‘Slóighedh ele lá mac Néill h-Uí Lochlainn, co t-tuaiscert Ereann uime .i. Cenel Conaill, Cenel Eoghain, & Airghialla, i n-Ulltoibh’.

<sup>771</sup> *A.F.M.* 1131.5: ‘la Tuaiscert n-Ereann, & lá h-Ulltoibh’.

<sup>772</sup> See above, pp 134–8.

<sup>773</sup> *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1204.1: ‘Sean do Cuirse & Cinel Eoghain do teacht atuaigh a n-Ulltaibh’; *A.F.M.* 1204.2.

<sup>774</sup> *A.L.C.* 1212.2; *A.U.* 1212.2; *A.F.M.* 1211.2.

<sup>775</sup> *A.L.C.* 1213.6; *A.F.M.* 1213.3; *A.U.* 1214.2.

<sup>776</sup> *A.U.* 1230.10.

weakness in the cohesion of the three kingdoms; the exact way in which this happened will be discussed below.<sup>777</sup>

Returning to 1166, both Airgíalla and Ulaid quickly found themselves aligned with Connacht by rebelling against Mac Lochlainn and precipitating his downfall. Though the Ulaid were removed from the fray by Mac Lochlainn's violence against their king and leading nobles, a new representative, Magnus Mac Dúinn Sléibe, attended the major convention *Úa Conchobair* held at Tlachta in 1167.<sup>778</sup> A daughter of *Úa Conchobair*'s, Nualad, was called 'Queen of Ulaid' in her obituary of 1226, and her marriage to Mac Dúinn Sléibe is certain to date from the short period when her father held sway over the whole island.<sup>779</sup>

More importantly, Ruaidrí *Úa Conchobair* recognised the importance of Donnchad *Úa Cerbaill*, and Airgíalla's dominance of Ulaid remained the prevailing dynamic under his overlordship. *Úa Cerbaill* was among the first to give hostages to *Úa Conchobair* in 1166, and as has been noted, he co-led the invasion of *Cenél nEógain* with *Úa Ruairc* that year.<sup>780</sup> When *Úa Conchobair* took the hostages of *Cenél nEógain* in 1167, four were placed in *Úa Cerbaill*'s custody, underlining the point that under *Úa Conchobair*, *Úa Cerbaill* would be recognised as the leading king in the North.<sup>781</sup>

*Úa Cerbaill* was present at *Úa Conchobair*'s convention at Athlone in 1166, where he received a considerable *túarastal* of three hundred cows.<sup>782</sup> The Airgíalla were also represented at Tlachta in 1167,<sup>783</sup> Ochainn in 1168,<sup>784</sup> and Tara in 1169.<sup>785</sup> *Úa Cerbaill* and *Úa Conchobair* were the only two named guarantors of the life of the king of Meath, Diarmait *Úa Máel Sechlainn*, and the meeting they convened at Ochainn in 1168 was to

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<sup>777</sup> See below, pp 182–95.

<sup>778</sup> *A.F.M.* 1167.10.

<sup>779</sup> *A.F.M.* 1226.6; *A.L.C.* 1226.6; *Ann. Conn.* 1226.6.

<sup>780</sup> *A.U.* 1166.9; *A.F.M.* 1166.13; *Ann. Tig.* 1166.1.

<sup>781</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1167.4.

<sup>782</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1166.20.

<sup>783</sup> *A.F.M.* 1167.10.

<sup>784</sup> *A.F.M.* 1168.12.

<sup>785</sup> *A.F.M.* 1169.10.

enforce the payments owed by his assassins.<sup>786</sup> *Úa Cerbaill* had not been a noted supporter of *Diarmait Úa Máel Sechlainn* before 1166, and so his guarantee of *Úa Máel Sechlainn*'s life was part of his incorporation into *Úa Conchobair*'s core bloc.

Regarding the meeting at *Tlachta*, the number of soldiers present with each of the major kings was recorded. According to this report, 'six thousand were Connaughtmen, four thousand with *O'Ruairc*, two thousand with *Ua Maeleachlainn*, four thousand with *Ua Cearbhaill* and *Ua hEochadha*, two thousand with *Donnchadh Mac Fhaelain*, [and] one thousand with the Danes of *Ath-cliath*'.<sup>787</sup> This description suggests that, unlike the other provinces, the forces of *Airgíalla* and *Ulaid* were a combined contingent. Given the background, the implication is not that they were in alliance, but that *Úa Cerbaill* was the dominant party, and *Magnus Úa hEochada*, who could only have been king for a year, was present as his subordinate.

In 1168, *Donnchadh Úa Cerbaill* was assassinated. He 'was mangled with the [battle-]axe of a serving gillie of his own, namely, *Ua Duibhne* of *Cenel-Eogain* whilst the king [was] drunk and he died thereof'.<sup>788</sup> It is unclear whether high-politics played a role, but it is notable that it was one of the *Cénel nEogain* who killed him. He was replaced by his son *Murchad* and the meeting at *Tara* in 1169, attended by *Úa Cerbaill* and *Úa hEochada*, can be viewed as a re-affirmation of existing arrangements.<sup>789</sup> In this regard, it is worth noting that a daughter of *Úa hEochada*'s, *Áne*, was *Murchad Úa Cerbaill*'s wife according to her 1171 obituary.<sup>790</sup>

*Magnus Úa hEochada* was not fated to last long as king, and he was killed by his brother *Donn Sléibe* in 1171.<sup>791</sup> *Donn Sléibe* himself was also murdered by a brother, *Ruaidrí*, in

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<sup>786</sup> *A.F.M.* 1168.12.

<sup>787</sup> *A.F.M.* 1167.10: '*tri fichit céd do Chonnachtaibh, dá fhichitt céd im Ua Ruairc, fiche céd im Ua Maoileachlainn, da fhichitt céd lá h-Ua c-Cerbhaill, & lá h-Ua n-Eochadha, fiche céd lá Donnchadh Mac Faolain & déch céd lá Gallaibh Atha Cliath*'.

<sup>788</sup> *A.U.* 1168.4: '*do letradh do thuaigh gillai fhritholmha dó féin, .i., Ua Duibne do Ceniul Eogain 7 in rí for méscá 7 a éc dé*'; *Ann. Tig.* 1168.9; *Ann. Inisf.* 1169.2; *A.F.M.* 1168.17.

<sup>789</sup> *A.F.M.* 1169.10.

<sup>790</sup> *A.F.M.* 1171.26; *A.U.* 1171.6.

<sup>791</sup> *A.F.M.* 1171.11; *A.L.C.* 1171.9; *A.U.* 1171.5; *Ann. Tig.* 1171.8; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1172.3.

1173.<sup>792</sup> On this latter occasion, Uí Echach Cobo and all three branches of the Airthir (Uí Niallain, Uí Bresail, and Uí Echach) are reported to have played a part in the assassination, which also result in a ‘great slaughter of all the Ulaidh’.<sup>793</sup> Though Murchad Úa Cerbaill is not accredited with any role in these events, the result, the continued weakening of the leading dynasty of the Ulaid, certainly played into his hands.

In 1176, the English of Meath attacked Airgíalla ‘from the Boyne to Sliabh Fuaid’, targeting modern County Louth in particular.<sup>794</sup> At the same time, they were also constructing castles in north-eastern Meath, including at Kells and Slane.<sup>795</sup> The foray into Airgíalla provoked a much greater response than anticipated. A major coalition of Irish forces came southwards, notably seizing and destroying Slane, described as the location ‘wherefrom the Airgialla and Ui-Briuin and Fir-Midhe were being pillaged’.<sup>796</sup> They killed the garrison including its builder, Richard Fleming. Three other castles, Kells, Galtrim, and Derrypatrick, were then quickly abandoned by the English ‘through fear of the Kinel-Owen’.<sup>797</sup>

Here, however, we encounter an inconsistency in the record. Because, while the annals do record a minor victory by the Airgíalla over the English at Mag Conaille,<sup>798</sup> they attribute leadership of the invasion of Meath to Máel Sechlainn Mac Lochlainn, the new king of Cenél nEógain.<sup>799</sup> By contrast, *The Deeds* makes Úa Cerbaill the leader of the attack and does not mention Mac Lochlainn. Instead, it records that ‘Ua Cerbaill, who was king of Airgíalla, attacked him [Richard Fleming] with the rebel Mac Duinn Shléibe from the region of Ulster; Ua Ruairc was with them too and king Ua Máel Sechlainn. On that occasion fully twenty thousand Irishmen attacked them’.<sup>800</sup>

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<sup>792</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1173.1; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1173.5.

<sup>793</sup> *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1173.5.

<sup>794</sup> *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1176.15: ‘o Boin gu Sliab Fuaid’.

<sup>795</sup> *A.U.* 1176.7, 1176.9.

<sup>796</sup> *A.U.* 1176.9: ‘as a rabhus ic milliudh Airgiall & h-Ua m-Briuin & Fer Midhe’.

<sup>797</sup> *A.F.M.* 1176.10: ‘ar uamhan Cenél n-Eoghain’.

<sup>798</sup> *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1176.14; *Ann. Tig.* 1176.7.

<sup>799</sup> *A.F.M.* 1176.10; *A.L.C.* 1176.8; *A.U.* 1176.9; *Ann. Tig.* 1176.21.

<sup>800</sup> *The Deeds*, p. 134 ll 3182–9.

This is important because it betrays differing perceptions of the North and the leading dynasty there. All records agree that Airgíalla was a region that had suffered from the English assault. However, the annals do not mention Úa Cerbaill by name either for the minor victory at Fid Conaille, which they attribute to the men of Fernmag, or the invasion of Meath, during which the Airgíalla in general are noted to have supported Mac Lochlainn.

The view of Máel Sechlainn Mac Lochlainn as the leader of the North is an interesting one, considering he only acceded to power in 1176, the year of the invasion of Meath. There is also a record of him taking the hostages of Ulaid upon his accession.<sup>801</sup> This suggests that the question of who was more powerful, between Mac Lochlainn and Úa Cerbaill, could have rested on control of Ulaid. Alternatively, it may be that even though the Uí Cherbaill and Airgíalla had been more powerful than the Uí Néill for some time, a decade by this point, the annalists were still more comfortable recording the Uí Néill as the leading faction of any joint action.

The period when the Airgíalla could claim parity with or supremacy over the Uí Néill would not last long, and the ambiguity was therefore short-lived. Airgíalla's decline began as early as 1168, with Úa Cerbaill's assassination.<sup>802</sup> He was succeeded by his son Murchad, who adopted his father's policies early in his reign. As outlined above, he attended Úa Conchobair's meeting at Tara in 1169,<sup>803</sup> and he supported Úa Conchobair in the march on Dublin in 1170.<sup>804</sup> That action failed to prevent Mac Murchada and his English allies from seizing the town, and when Mac Murchada then used Dublin as a base to attack Meath and Bréifne, he also seized hostages from Úa Cerbaill.<sup>805</sup>

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<sup>801</sup> *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1176.12.

<sup>802</sup> *A.F.M.* 1168.17; *A.U.* 1168.4; *Ann. Tig.* 1168.9; *Ann. Inisf.* 1169.2; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1167.5.

<sup>803</sup> *A.F.M.* 1169.10.

<sup>804</sup> *A.F.M.* 1170.13; *A.U.* 1170.3.

<sup>805</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1170.20.

The reversal of this move, which is not recorded, must have followed shortly, at least immediately after Mac Murchada's death and possibly before, because Úa Cerbaill supported both sieges of Dublin in 1171.<sup>806</sup> With both sieges failing Úa Cerbaill again pivoted, and with Mac Dúinn Sléibe, Úa Ruairc, and several other major kings, he submitted to Henry II when he arrived in Ireland.<sup>807</sup> Though the submission to Henry was certainly prudent, his vacillation in 1170 weakened his authority, and this foreshadowed the weakening of central authority in Airgíalla during his reign.

With the assassination of Donn Sléibe Mac Dúinn Sléibe by the Airthir in 1172, and the 1176 invasion of Meath, Úa Cerbaill was actually in a reasonably strong position when de Courcy invaded Ulaid in 1177. He supported the Ulaid in battle against de Courcy that year,<sup>808</sup> while the Cenél nEógain succoured Úa Floinn and the Uí Thuitre and Fir Lí against the same opponent.<sup>809</sup> However, when cooperative action against the English ended in the early 1180s, Úa Cerbaill adopted a more passive approach. For instance, he took no action to prevent the Cenél nEógain targeting Uí Thuitre and Fir Lí, in a likely attempt to assert control over that region, nor did he make any attacks of his own on the English.<sup>810</sup>

On the contrary in fact, by 1183 Úa Cerbaill himself was employing Hugh de Lacy and the English to help him reassert control over parts of Airgíalla.<sup>811</sup> The Airthir and the north of Fermag, the regions in question, ought to have formed core elements of Úa Cerbaill's powerbase, so their disaffection suggests fundamental issues with Úa Cerbaill's leadership, as does the fact that Úa Cerbaill relied on de Lacy to enforce his position. De Lacy died in 1186 and was described as king of Meath, Bréifne, and

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<sup>806</sup> *A.F.M.* 1171.18, 1171.20; *Ann. Tig.* 1171.9, 1171.10; *A.L.C.* 1171.4; *A.U.* 1171.7; *Ann. Inisf.* 1171.4; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1171.4.

<sup>807</sup> *A.U.* 1171.10; *Ann. Tig.* 1171.12; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1172.5.

<sup>808</sup> *A.F.M.* 1177.3; *A.L.C.* 1177.1; *A.U.* 1177.1

<sup>809</sup> *A.F.M.* 1177.3; *A.L.C.* 1177.1, 1177.9; *A.U.* 1177.1, 1177.5; *Ann. Tig.* 1177.16.

<sup>810</sup> *A.L.C.* 1181.7; *A.F.M.* 1181.6; *A.U.* 1181.3.

<sup>811</sup> *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1184.2.

Airgíalla, which suggests, at least, that Úa Cerbaill had given tribute to the lord of Meath.<sup>812</sup>

When Murchad Úa Cerbaill died in 1189, the English moved quickly to destabilise Airgíalla. Úa Máel Ruanaid, king of Fir Manach, was deposed ‘and a Foreign army came into the country’, though whether this party had also arranged for the deposition is not recorded.<sup>813</sup> Úa Máel Ruanaid took shelter with Muirchertach Úa Cerbaill, and together they marched against the trespassers.

The English defeated them with apparent ease and Úa Máel Ruanaid was killed.<sup>814</sup> Armagh was also raided extensively around the same time.<sup>815</sup> Úa Cerbaill survived, but he never established himself as a formidable king of Airgíalla. It is likely he made some efforts to defend the province from English incursions, though, because in 1193 it is reported that ‘O’Carroll, Lord of Oriel, was taken by the English, who first put out his eyes, and afterwards hanged him’.<sup>816</sup>

This was the effective end of a unified kingdom of Airgíalla. From this point onwards, the former constituent regional kingdoms took centre stage, enjoying varying degrees of success but rarely cooperating with one another. The late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries were notable in this regard for the rise to prominence of the Fir Manach. The Úa hÉignigh king of Fir Manach in 1198 was sufficiently powerful for the prospect of his forming an alliance with the Cenél Conaill to alarm Áed Úa Néill of Cenél nEógain. Úa Néill managed to forestall that development, and Úa hÉignigh supported Úa Néill on campaign in Connacht in 1201.<sup>817</sup>

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<sup>812</sup> *A.F.M.* 1186.5; *A.L.C.* 1186.10, 1186.11, 1186.12.

<sup>813</sup> *A.L.C.* 1189.5: ‘*sluag Gall do teacht isintir*’; *A.U.* 1189.5.

<sup>814</sup> *A.L.C.* 1189.5; *A.U.* 1189.5.

<sup>815</sup> *A.L.C.* 1189.8; *A.U.* 1189.7.

<sup>816</sup> *A.F.M.* 1193.9: ‘*Ua Cerbhaill ticcerna Airghiall do ghabhail la Gallaibh, & a dalladh leo o thús, & a chrochadh iar t-tain*’.

<sup>817</sup> *A.L.C.* 1201.5; *A.U.* 1201.4; *Misc.Ir.Annals* 1201.5.

Any further cooperation was precluded by Úa hÉignigh's death on that very campaign, but the 1214 obituary of Ben Mide, wife of Úa Néill, and daughter of Úa hÉignigh, also shows the importance of the king of Fir Manach.<sup>818</sup> Later, the Meic Mathgamna became the royal family of Fir Manach, notably clashing with the Cenél Conaill, and even launching their own attacks on Armagh and Louth.<sup>819</sup> They maintained the positive relationship with Úa Néill to such an extent that 'Úa hÉignigh' is incorrectly given as the name of a supporter of Úa Néill in one record of the 1212 attack on Cael Uisce,<sup>820</sup> while 'Mac Mathgamna' correctly appears elsewhere.<sup>821</sup>

Another contributory factor in the disintegration of the North was a rise in the prominence of Cenél Conaill, and their continued autonomy from Cenél nEógain after 1166. On that occasion, Úa Conchobair himself had marched through Assaroe and taken the hostages of Cenél Conaill, sending his allies against the Cenél nEógain.<sup>822</sup> At his convention in Athlone later the same year, Úa Conchobair allotted a considerable *túarastal* of 240 cows and 200 coloured garments to the Cenél Conaill, though in cattle at least this was fewer than Úa Cerbaill received.<sup>823</sup>

No action of note was taken by the Cenél Conaill in the years immediately after, but under Flaithbertach Úa Máel Doraid, the Cenél Conaill 'made prodigious havoc' of the Cenél nEógain in a battle in 1172, signalling both a return to military activity and continued opposition to the domination of Cenél nEógain.<sup>824</sup> Over the remainder of the twelfth century, and into the first decade of the thirteenth, the Cenél Conaill clashed repeatedly with their kinsmen and eastern neighbours, with particularly notable outbreaks in the late 1170s and late 1190s.

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<sup>818</sup> *A.L.C.* 1214.13; *A.U.* 1215.2; *A.F.M.* 1214.3.

<sup>819</sup> *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1196.6, 1206.4.

<sup>820</sup> *Ann. Clon.* 1212.

<sup>821</sup> *A.L.C.* 1212.2; *A.U.* 1212.2; *A.F.M.* 1211.2.

<sup>822</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1166.2, 1166.3; *A.F.M.* 1166.12; *A.U.* 1166.12.

<sup>823</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1166.20.

<sup>824</sup> *A.F.M.* 1172.8: '*Do-bertsad ár adhbhal*'; *A.L.C.* 1172.4; *A.U.* 1172.4, 1172.5.



There are some indications that a contest over the Inishowen peninsula was at the root of these hostilities. The two great branches of the Northern Uí Néill clashed there in 1117, and in 1154 Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair raided Cenél Conaill and Inishowen, suggesting a possible link, even at that early stage. By 1198, one of the Uí Duibh Dírma, the leading family of the peninsula at this time (and genealogically Cenél nEógain) was among the Cenél Conaill killed by the Cenél nEógain during a skirmish at Mag Ítha, just south of the peninsula itself.<sup>825</sup>

Shortly afterwards, when Úa Néill marched into Connacht, having prevented the Cenél Conaill and Fir Manach of Airgíalla creating an alliance, his own army was pointedly reported to contain ‘the men of Moy-Itha and the men of Oriel’.<sup>826</sup> Later, in 1208, Úa Néill raided the peninsula and fought a destructive battle against the Cenél Conaill.<sup>827</sup> By contrast, in 1211 Úa Domnaill of Cenél Conaill targeted the peninsula in cooperation with the English, at least according to one set of annals.<sup>828</sup>

The complex warfare of the 1170s takes a more definite shape when this later evidence is considered. In 1175, the Cenél Énda of Cenél Conaill lost a battle to Úa Gairmleadaig of Cenél Moen and Úa Catháin of Clann Chonchobair.<sup>829</sup> It may well have been this defeat that saw the Cenél Énda fall under the sway of the Cenél Moen, with Úa Gairmleadaig given the title ‘Lord of the men of Magh-Ithe and Kinel-Enda’, in his obituary of 1177.<sup>830</sup> The accuracy of the title is somewhat doubtful. The same year, 1177, saw Úa Cairelláin of Clann Diarmata (closely related to Clann Chonchobair, it will be remembered) win a battle against Úa Máel Doraid in which Úa Serrigh of Cenél Énda was killed, almost

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<sup>825</sup> *A.F.M.* 1198.7; *A.U.* 1199.4.

<sup>826</sup> *A.F.M.* 1199.9: ‘*go b-feraihb Maighe h-Íotha, & co n-Airghiallaibh*’.

<sup>827</sup> *A.L.C.* 1208.5; *A.U.* 1208.1; *A.F.M.* 1208.2.

<sup>828</sup> *A.L.C.* 1211.8.

<sup>829</sup> *A.F.M.* 1175.5; *A.L.C.* 1175.3; *A.U.* 1175.6.

<sup>830</sup> *A.F.M.* 1177.4; *A.U.* 1177.6.

certainly in support of the king of Cenél Conaill.<sup>831</sup> The title may have been more a claim to territory than overlordship, in this case.

The conflict between Cenél Conaill and Cenél nEógain was exacerbated by internal contention among the latter party. Violence erupted in Cenél nEógain north of the Sperrins in 1177, beginning when Niall Úa Gairmledaig was assassinated by Donnchad Úa Cairreláin at Derry.<sup>832</sup> The next year, 1178, Úa Luinigh briefly seized kingship of Cenél Moen from Domnall Úa Gairmledaig, the man who had succeeded Niall.<sup>833</sup> Úa Luinigh himself was deposed within three months and Úa Gairmledaig made his return.

The Uí Flaithbertaigh of Cenél Moen also pursued a claim to this regional kingship, engaging in a killing spree that saw the deaths of Úa Gairmledaig and several other nobles. There is a suggestion that some of this conflict in Cenél Moen was also instigated and promoted by the Uí Chairrelláin, who remained hostile to the Cenél Moen.<sup>834</sup> Then, when in 1179, a peace was brokered between Úa Cairreláin and Úa Gairmledaig, Úa Cairreláin quickly broke it and assassinated Úa Gairmledaig the following day.<sup>835</sup>

These events closely concerned Cenél Conaill. Whereas Úa Cairreláin and Úa Gairmledaig had cooperated in a battle against Cenél Conaill in 1175, they were at war with each other by 1177 – the same year Úa Gairmledaig was given title to Cenél Énda in his obituary. Furthermore, after Úa Cairreláin had broken faith with Úa Gairmledaig in 1179, he suffered at the hands of the Cenél Conaill who killed him ‘in revenge of his treacherous conduct towards O’Gormly, and by the miracles of the saints whose

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<sup>831</sup> *A.F.M.* 1177.6; *A.L.C.* 1177.2.

<sup>832</sup> *A.F.M.* 1177.4; *A.U.* 1177.6.

<sup>833</sup> *A.F.M.* 1178.4; *A.L.C.* 1178.1, 1178.2, 1178.3; *A.U.* 1178.1, 1178.2, 1178.3.

<sup>834</sup> *A.F.M.* 1178.4: ‘Randal, the son of Eachmarcach O’Kane, had been slain by the Kinel-Moen in the beginning of this summer, and in revenge of this were slain Galagh O’Loony and Murtough O’Petan; and it was in revenge of this, moreover, the aforesaid act of treachery was committed against the Kinel-Moen’, translated from the Irish ‘*Ragnall mac Eachmarcaigh Uí Chatháin do mharbhadh la Cenél Moáin a t-tosach an t-samhraidh-sin cona i n-a dhioghail-sidhe do-rochair Galach Ua Luinigh 7 Muircheartach Ua Peatain, 7 as na dioghail bheós do-ronadh in meabail remraite for Cenél Moáin*’.

<sup>835</sup> *A.F.M.* 1179.5; *A.L.C.* 1179.1, 1179.2, 1179.3; *A.U.* 1179.1.

guarantee he had violated,<sup>836</sup> while a relation, Ragnall Úa Cairrelláin, was killed by the Cenél Moen.<sup>837</sup>

At the least, this suggests the Cenél Conaill were guarantors for the peace agreement between the two Cenél nEógain dynasts, but it seems more likely that they were even more intimately concerned. The death of Úa Cairrelláin, who may, like Úa Gairmledaig, have aimed to establish his authority over parts of Cenél Conaill, effectively ended this episode, and the later evidence discussed above suggests the Cenél Conaill gained territorially by these events.

More territorial gains were soon to follow, as Flaithbertach Úa Máel Doraid, king of Cenél Conaill, captured Cairpre Dromma Cliab from Connacht in 1181. The events leading to that conquest principally concern Connacht and have already been discussed in that chapter. Here, it suffices to say that Úa Máel Doraid successfully utilised conflict among the Uí Chonchobair to advance a claim to the key strategic territory. Cairpre Dromma Cliab, equivalent to the modern barony of Drumcliff, County Sligo, had belonged to the Uí Briúin Bréifne for much of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, but had clearly been seized by Uí Chonchobair after Tigernán Úa Ruairc's death.<sup>838</sup>

*A.L.C.* report that 'Donnchadh, son of Domhnall Midhech O'Conchobhair, it was that brought Flaithbhertach O'Maeldoraidh, to defend the territory of Cairpre for himself', and the ultimate consequence of his involvement was the capture of the territory by the king of Cenél Conaill.<sup>839</sup> The conquest may have been justified partly with reference to the fact that the Cairpre were genealogically Uí Néill, not Connachta. A poem in the

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<sup>836</sup> *A.F.M.* 1180.4: 'Donncaadh Ua Cairealláin do mharbhadh la Cenél c-Conaill i n-díoghal a mheabhla ar Ua n-Gairmleadhaigh tre miorbailibh na naemh isa h-eneach ro sharaigh'; *A.L.C.* 1180.4; *A.U.* 1180.6.

<sup>837</sup> *A.F.M.* 1180.3; *A.L.C.* 1180.2; *A.U.* 1180.3.

<sup>838</sup> See Connacht, pp 85–7.

<sup>839</sup> *A.L.C.* 1181.2: 'Donnchad mac Domnaill Midhigh h-I Conchobair ro thairring Flaithbertach .H. Moel Doraidh do chosnum criche Cairpri dhó feisin'.

Book of Fenagh notes that ‘the seed of mild Cairbre have Druim-Cliabh, though the Connacians like it not’.<sup>840</sup>

Though it would be a contested region again in the future, there was no immediate Connacht backlash. Instead, due largely to wars of succession in Connacht, the relationship between Cenél Conaill and Connacht developed along different lines. In 1191, when Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair left Connacht in search of outside support, he was refused by Úa Máel Doraid, and was forced to journey to other kingdoms for help.<sup>841</sup>

It was perhaps in recognition of this refusal that Cathal Crobderg Úa Conchobair sent support, comprised of both Connacht men and English mercenaries, when Úa Dochartaigh and some of the Cenél Conaill turned against Úa Máel Doraid in 1195. So doing, Cathal Crobderg successfully helped Úa Máel Doraid retain his kingship and the powerful position in the North that he had developed.<sup>842</sup>

The next generation of *rígdomnai* in Connacht was divided between the meic Cathail and the meic Ruaidrí, and it was likewise the meic Cathail who had a superior relationship with the Cenél Conaill. By contrast, the meic Ruaidrí had a favourable relationship with the Cenél nEógain. In 1225, for example, the meic Ruaidrí induced Áed Úa Néill to lead an invasion of Connacht and when this failed, they were said to have been banished to the king of Cenél nEógain ‘again’. It is not recorded when they had first been exiled.<sup>843</sup> By contrast, in 1227 Áed mac Cathail Crobdeirg sought shelter with the Cenél Conaill, who were by this time under an Uí Domnaill king.<sup>844</sup>

The strong position Úa Máel Doraid achieved in the North developed slowly through his capture of territory and his resistance to the Cenél nEógain. After Conn Úa Breislén of Cenél Conaill was killed by Mac Lochlainn and the Cenél nEógain in 1186, Úa Máel

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<sup>840</sup> W.M. Hennessy (ed.) and D.H. Kelly (trans.), *The Book of Fenagh* (Dublin, 1875), pp 398–9: ‘*Druim chliab ac síl Cairbre chain gen gur miad le Connachtaib*’.

<sup>841</sup> *A.F.M.* 1191.1; *A.L.C.* 1191.1; *A.U.* 1191.1.

<sup>842</sup> *A.L.C.* 1195.5, 1196.6.

<sup>843</sup> *A.L.C.* 1224.13; *Ann. Conn.* 1225.4, 1225.5; *A.U.* 1225.4.

<sup>844</sup> *Ann. Conn.* 1227.10; *A.L.C.* 1227.8, 1227.9, 1227.10; *A.F.M.* 1227.11.

Doraid launched a raid of Cenél nEógain in response.<sup>845</sup> Ruaidrí Úa Flaithbertaigh, who was king of Cenél nEógain at this point, tried to establish his authority over Cenél Conaill by invading, but he was killed in the attempt.<sup>846</sup> Úa Máel Doraid subsequently consolidated his authority further by killing Ruaidrí Úa Canannáin, who had a claim on the kingship, and putting down a rebellion with the aid of troops from Cathal Crobderg.<sup>847</sup>

Úa Máel Doraid was also notable for resisting English incursions. When de Courcy, as justiciar, led an army into Connacht in 1188, he tried to extract himself from the province over Assaroe, but was prevented by Úa Máel Doraid.<sup>848</sup> It is likely that de Courcy not only wanted to get out of Connacht, but also hoped to intimidate the Uí Néill by marching through their territory. In 1195, Muirchertach mac Muirchertaigh Meic Lochlainn, king of Cenél nEógain, was killed.<sup>849</sup> De Courcy invaded to take advantage, and it was Úa Máel Doraid who responded. On that occasion he led not just Cenél Conaill but also Cenél nEógain, and for so doing was described as king of both.<sup>850</sup> Similarly, in his obituary, which followed soon after, he is called ‘king of Cenel-Conaill, and Cenel-Eoghain, and Airghiall’.<sup>851</sup>

Cenél Conaill leadership of the North proved to be an aberration, and with Úa Máel Doraid’s death conflict between Cenél Conaill and Cenél nEógain soon broke out again. In 1198, perhaps alarmed by Áed Úa Néill’s victories over de Courcy, the Cenél Conaill met Úa hÉignigh of Fir Manach ‘for the purpose of forming a league of amity with him’ against Úa Néill and the Cenél nEógain.<sup>852</sup> As noted above, Úa Néill pre-empted this and

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<sup>845</sup> *A.F.M.* 1186.3, 1186.7; *A.U.* 1186.6; *A.L.C.* 1186.19.

<sup>846</sup> *A.L.C.* 1187.1; *A.U.* 1187.1.

<sup>847</sup> *A.L.C.* 1188.1; *A.F.M.* 1188.4; *A.U.* 1188.1.

<sup>848</sup> *A.L.C.* 1188.7; *A.F.M.* 1188.8, 1188.9; *A.U.* 1188.6.

<sup>849</sup> *A.L.C.* 1195.13; *A.F.M.* 1196.2; *A.U.* 1196.3; *Misc.Ir.Annals* 1196.8.

<sup>850</sup> *A.L.C.* 1196.17; *A.U.* 1197.1; *A.F.M.* 1197.1.

<sup>851</sup> *A.L.C.* 1196.20; *A.U.* 1197.4; *A.F.M.* 1197.3, 1197.4.

<sup>852</sup> *A.F.M.* 1198.6: ‘Cenél Conaill do coimchengal la h-Ua n-Eccnigh i n-acchaidh Cenél Eoghain’; *A.U.* 1199.4.

brought *Úa hÉignigh* into his own camp.<sup>853</sup> The *Cenél Conaill* remained autonomous though, and when *Úa Néill* was briefly deposed in 1201 his replacement *Conchobar Beg Mac Lochlainn* was killed in an invasion of *Cenél Conaill*,<sup>854</sup> as were the *Uí Ruairc* dynasts he had arranged to support him.<sup>855</sup>

Some understanding was reached in 1208, and *Úa Domnaill* and *Úa Néill* ‘entered into an alliance to assist each other against such of the English or Irish as should oppose them’,<sup>856</sup> but further clashes followed in 1211 and 1212.<sup>857</sup> As conflict between the two great branches of the Northern *Uí Néill* ceased suddenly around 1212, it is possible that the agreement in 1208 provided the basis for a renewed alliance thereafter. *Úa Domnaill*’s obituary of 1241 probably gives the clearest indication of the terms by which peace was achieved, being the creative ‘king of *Tir-Conaill*, and of the *Feara-Manach*, and of the lower part of *Connacht* as far as *Corr-sliabh*, and of *Oirghiall* from the plain downwards’.<sup>858</sup>

In exchange *Úa Néill* received something akin to overlordship, even if this was not explicitly acknowledged. In his obituary he was alternately described as ‘king of *Cenél nEogain*’<sup>859</sup> and ‘king of the north’, emphasising the equivocality of the arrangement.<sup>860</sup> It was effective though, and *Úa Domnaill* confined himself to a single expansionist drive thereafter. This was against *Bréifne* in 1219, rather than the *Cenél nEógain*.<sup>861</sup> In 1226, the *Cenél Conaill* gave up hostages to the *Cenél nEógain* for the first time since the fall of *Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn*.<sup>862</sup>

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<sup>853</sup> *A.F.M.* 1198.6; *A.U.* 1199.4.

<sup>854</sup> *A.L.C.* 1201.11.

<sup>855</sup> *A.U.* 1201.6; *A.F.M.* 1200.4, 1200.5, 1200.9, 1201.14.

<sup>856</sup> *A.F.M.* 1208.3: ‘*ro naidmsiot a c-caratradh fri aroile i n-acchaidh Gall & Gaidheal no chuirfeadh i n-a n-aghaidh*’.

<sup>857</sup> *A.L.C.* 1211.8, 1212.6, 1212.7; *A.F.M.* 1212.9

<sup>858</sup> *A.L.C.* 1241.4: ‘*ri thíre Conaill, & Fer Manach, & iochtair Connacht co Coirrsliabh, & Oirghiall o chlár anuas*’; *A.U.* 1241.1; *A.F.M.* 1241.3; *Ann. Conn.* 1241.5.

<sup>859</sup> *A.L.C.* 1230.13: ‘*ri Cenel Eogain*’.

<sup>860</sup> *A.U.* 1230.10: ‘*ri Tuaisceirt*’; *A.F.M.* 1230.6.

<sup>861</sup> *A.F.M.* 1219.4.

<sup>862</sup> *Ann. Conn.* 1226.12.

The equalisation of power in the North caused by Úa Conchobair and the English in turn, to which the rise of Cenél Conaill and both the rapid rise and fall of Airgíalla may be attributed, was reflexively felt as a loss of dominance by the Cenél nEógain. The Cenél nEógain did not actually give hostages to Úa Conchobair in 1166, and they were not awarded any *túarastal* at Athlone.

Their ambiguous position was dealt with in 1167, as Úa Conchobair invaded their territory and partitioned it between Áed in Macáem Tóinlesc Úa Néill, who was to hold Cenél nEógain south of the Sperrins, and Niall mac Muirchertaigh Meic Lochlainn, who was to hold the corresponding territory in the north.<sup>863</sup> Each of the new kings gave two prominent hostages to Úa Conchobair. In recognition of their acknowledgment of his suzerainty Úa Conchobair belatedly included them in the new scheme of *túarastal*, as in 1168 ‘the chieftains of Cinel-Eoghain and the comharba of Doire came into the house of Ruaidhri Ua Conchobhair, king of Ireland, at Ath-Luain; and they carried gold, raiment, and many cows with them to their houses’.<sup>864</sup>

The kingdom of Cenél nEógain remained in disarray for a long time after, as other parts of the North enjoyed varying degrees of success. The partition enforced by Úa Conchobair seems to have remained in effect, with Áed in Macáem Tóinlesc Úa Néill styled ‘for some time Lord of the Kinel-Owen’, in one of his obituaries and simply ‘king’ in another.<sup>865</sup> Úa Néill had not been a particularly active king in the decade between the partition and his death, but the Meic Lochlainn, who were responsible for his assassination, took the lead in attempts to resurrect the lordship of the North in its widest sense. Their failure in this regard was marked by the truncated reigns of successive kings in the immediate post-invasion period.

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<sup>863</sup> *A.F.M.* 1167.11; *A.U.* 1167.2; *Ann. Tig.* 1167.4.

<sup>864</sup> *A.F.M.* 1168.23: ‘*Maithe Cenél Eóghain, & comarba Doire, do thocht h-i teach Ruaidhri Uí Chonchobhair, rí Ereann co h-Ath Luain, & rucsat ór & édach & bú iomdha leó dia t-ticchibh*’.

<sup>865</sup> *A.F.M.* 1177.2; *Ann. Tig.* 1177.7. See also *A.U.* 1177.3; *A.L.C.* 1177.5, 1177.6; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1178.7.

This pattern began in 1169, with Conchobar Mac Lochlainn taking the kingship. His authority may or may not have been accepted by Úa Néill, but it was certainly rejected by the Airthir of Airgíalla. Áed Beg Mac Cána and the Uí Characáin of Uí Bresail Macha assassinated him in 1170.<sup>866</sup> His successor Niall began his reign auspiciously, raiding Ulaid in apparent retaliation for an attack by Ulaid.<sup>867</sup> He is also recorded to have taken hostages from the Airgíalla in 1171, but this is likely to mean a region of Airgíalla, probably the Airthir, and not from the king of Airgíalla, Murchad Úa Cerbaill. Like Conchobar, Niall would suffer for the attempted resurrection of Cenél nEógain, and he was assassinated by the Dál mBuinne of Ulaid in 1176.<sup>868</sup>

Máel Sechlainn Mac Lochlainn, the man who succeeded Niall, also quickly asserted himself in a similar manner. As noted above, he is credited with taking the hostages of Ulaid, and with leading the opposition to the English attacks in 1176 and 1177.<sup>869</sup> He is, however, curiously absent from the record thereafter. In his place, Domnall mac Áeda Meic Lochlainn is noted to have led attacks against the Uí Thuirtre, Fir Lí, and Ulaid in 1181,<sup>870</sup> and against the English in Dál Riata in 1182.<sup>871</sup>

In both actions he was supported by the Cenél nEógain, especially the Uí Chatháin. It is therefore quite likely that he was advancing a competing claim to the kingship of Cenél nEógain. When Máel Sechlainn Mac Lochlainn was ‘treacherously’ killed by the English in 1185 (perhaps during an invasion of Meath)<sup>872</sup> he was certainly called ‘king of Cenél nEogain’, but the fact that he was succeeded by Domnall mac Áeda shows that the latter’s command of military actions undermined Máel Sechlainn’s leadership.<sup>873</sup>

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<sup>866</sup> *A.F.M.* 1170.6; *A.L.C.* 1170.1; *A.U.* 1170.1; *Ann. Tig.* 1170.5.

<sup>867</sup> *A.F.M.* 1171.8, 1171.9.

<sup>868</sup> *A.F.M.* 1176.3; *A.U.* 1176.5; *Ann. Tig.* 1176.6; *Ann. Tig.* 1176.6; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1176.11.

<sup>869</sup> *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1176.12; *A.F.M.* 1176.10, 1177.3; *A.L.C.* 1176.8, 1177.1; *A.U.* 1176.9, 1177.1; *Ann. Tig.* 1176.21.

<sup>870</sup> *A.L.C.* 1181.7; *A.F.M.* 1181.6; *A.U.* 1181.3.

<sup>871</sup> *A.L.C.* 1182.1; *A.F.M.* 1182.3; *A.U.* 1182.1.

<sup>872</sup> *A.L.C.* 1185.16: ‘*tre mebhail*’; *A.F.M.* 1185.4; Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 234–5.

<sup>873</sup> *A.L.C.* 1185.16: ‘*ri Cenel Eogain*’; *A.F.M.* 1185.4.



At this point, the conflict in and with Cenél Conaill began to affect the choice of leaders in Cenél nEógain itself. Domnall mac Áeda was deposed and replaced by Ruaidrí Úa Flaithbertaigh in 1186.<sup>874</sup> Úa Flaithbertaigh, whose attention was directed at Cenél Conaill, was killed while raiding there the next year.<sup>875</sup> Domnall mac Áeda again succeeded, but was killed shortly afterwards, in 1188, by the English.<sup>876</sup> He was awarded the title ‘king of Ailech’ in his obituary, but this exaggerates the stability of his control of Cenél nEógain, to say nothing of Cenél Conaill, which remained outside his domain. Muirchertach mac Murchertaigh Meic Lochlainn succeeded on this occasion. Nothing of significance is recorded of him other than his obituary, in which he was called a ‘destroyer of foreigners and castles’.<sup>877</sup> He was killed by one of his own men in 1195, becoming the seventh king of Cenél nEógain to die violently since 1167.

Fortunately for the Cenél nEógain, this period of instability was about to come to an end. Áed Méith Úa Néill, son of Áed in Macáem Tóinlesc, became king and reigned (with one brief interruption) until 1230. Áed Méith is best known for his successful opposition to English invasions of his territory, but the reason he was able to do this, and arguably just as impressive an achievement, was his arrest of the disintegration of the north. Even if this success did not culminate in an overlordship like that enjoyed by Domnall and Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn, it was enough to allow the recovery of Cenél nEógain.

Áed Úa Néill very carefully managed the issues that had vexed his predecessors. On two occasions, he sought to come to terms with the Cenél Conaill. In 1198, ‘terms of peace and friendship were agreed on between the parties’,<sup>878</sup> after two notable clashes in Mag Ítha, while a decade later, he and Úa Domnaill ‘entered into an alliance to assist each other against such of the English or Irish as should oppose them’.<sup>879</sup> Neither of these

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<sup>874</sup> *A.L.C.* 1186.2; *A.F.M.* 1186.2; *A.U.* 1186.2.

<sup>875</sup> *A.L.C.* 1187.1; *A.U.* 1187.1.

<sup>876</sup> *A.L.C.* 1188.6; *A.F.M.* 1188.6, 1186.M; *A.U.* 1188.5.

<sup>877</sup> *A.L.C.* 1195.13; *A.F.M.* 1196.2; *A.U.* 1196.3; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1196.8.

<sup>878</sup> *A.F.M.* 1198.8: ‘do-rónadh blodhadh sithe & cadach etorra don chur sin’; *A.U.* 1199.4.

<sup>879</sup> *A.F.M.* 1208.3: ‘ro naidmsiot a c-caratradh fri aroile i n-acchaidh Gall & Gaoidheal no chuirfeadh i n-a n-aghaidh’.

accords put an immediate end to fighting, but they contributed to the eventual peace between Cenél Conaill and Cenél nEógain. Their significance is likely to lie in the fact that Áed Úa Néill did not demand hostages or acknowledgment of his suzerainty on either occasion.

Another contributory factor to stabilisation in the North was Áed Úa Néill's speedy move to prevent Úa hÉignigh aligning with the Cenél Conaill, first by military means and then diplomatic, as he broke up their conference and subsequently married Úa hÉignigh's daughter. The significance of this is apparent, as it halted the resurgence of a then powerful Cenél Conaill. Úa hÉignigh would go on to support Úa Néill's campaign in Connacht in 1201, where he was killed.<sup>880</sup> Later the Meic Mathgamna kings of Fir Manach would be notable supporters of Úa Néill in his battles against the English. So too, in fact, would the Cenél Conaill, who seem to have recognised Úa Néill's pre-eminence from the second decade of the thirteenth century onwards.

## **[2.5: The impact of the English invasion]**

Foreign mercenaries arrived in Leinster in 1167, but it was 1176 before a significant English force penetrated the North; even then, it was only a raiding party. Nevertheless, the English invasion of Ulaid in 1177 came as a complete surprise to the Irish polities. The unpreparedness of the northern kings is understandable because unlike Leinster and Meath, and later Munster and Connacht, the invasion was not the outcome of a speculative grant or even a vague permission given by the king of England. It was rather the personal project of a single English baron, John de Courcy, and its character reflected that of its leader.

It is true that contrary to this interpretation, *The Deeds* attributes a grant of Ulaid to de Courcy 'provided he could conquer it by force', supposedly made by Henry II while in

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<sup>880</sup> A.L.C. 1201.5; A.U. 1201.4; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1201.5.

Ireland, but this carries little weight.<sup>881</sup> *The Deeds*, never too strong on chronology, is not supported by other evidence, and de Courcy, who was present in Henry's entourage on that expedition, left Ireland with the king in 1172. By comparison, Hugh de Lacy, who received both a grant of Meath and custodianship of Dublin on that occasion, and Robert fitz Bernard, who was given custody of Waterford, stayed in Ireland.<sup>882</sup>

De Courcy returned to Ireland no earlier than 1176, this time in the company of the new chief governor William fitz Audelin. Fitz Audelin was the object of much criticism, especially through the pen of Giraldus Cambrensis, one of our principal sources for these events, because he clashed with the latter's extended family, the Geraldines. As such, Giraldus can not be relied upon for an accurate report of fitz Audelin.

Giraldus's description of fitz Audelin, including the remark that he was 'a snake lurking in the grass' only underlines the point, though his main complaint was that fitz Audelin was too passive.<sup>883</sup> His comments reveal the attitude, probably widespread at the time, that aggression was the best policy against the Irish kings. Giraldus certainly believed in the potential profitability of campaigns like that launched by de Courcy, and de Courcy is lauded for his initiative and courage in *Expugnatio Hibernica*.

It may be taken from the comparative presentation of the two men that de Courcy's secondment of a portion of the Dublin garrison was not endorsed by fitz Audelin. As discussed above in relation to the disintegration of the north, a coalition of Irish armies in 1176 had seen Meath invaded and the castle at Slane destroyed.<sup>884</sup> Though the exact date of that assault is not recorded, it was certainly late in the year and de Courcy's action must be seen in this immediate context. De Courcy marched with a small force

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<sup>881</sup> *The Deeds*, p. 123 l. 2732: 'Si a force la peust conquere'.

<sup>882</sup> *The Deeds*, pp 122–3 ll 2711–2735.

<sup>883</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, p. 173: 'semper latens anguis in herba'.

<sup>884</sup> *A.U.* 1176.9; *A.F.M.* 1176.10.

northward from Dublin in late January 1177 and reached Downpatrick about 1 February.<sup>885</sup>

As well as retaliating against the Uí Néill and Airgíalla, either of whom may have led the attack, de Courcy's response was calculated to capitalise on complacency on the part of the northern kings. The latter party must have believed, after the destruction of Richard Fleming's castle at Slane and the abandonment of the castles at Kells, Galtrim, and Derrypatrick, that the English had been temporarily cowed. It would certainly have been difficult to anticipate an English response so early in the campaigning season, and that is why de Courcy was able to march through Meath and Airgíalla without being perceived. When confronted with the English host at his capital, 'with their horses in full battle-dress', the king of Ulaid Ruaidrí Mac Dúinn Sléibe elected to retreat from the field and seek aid from his neighbours.<sup>886</sup>

De Courcy's personality and personal circumstances had a great bearing on the invasion of Ulaid. He was, reportedly, 'a man of courage and a born fighter',<sup>887</sup> who had 'an extraordinarily bold temperament'.<sup>888</sup> He was also impetuous, and, at least according to Giraldus, more suited to the role of an ordinary soldier than that of a commander.<sup>889</sup> More importantly, he was not a wealthy magnate or earl like de Lacy or de Clare.

Called 'poor and needy' by Giraldus, modern historians have concurred that he had no extensive holdings elsewhere in the Angevin Empire.<sup>890</sup> He came from Stoke Courcy (Stogursey) in Somerset, and held an estate in Middleton Cheney in Northamptonshire, which likely came to him through his mother, though it has been suggested that its modest size indicates illegitimacy.<sup>891</sup> Duffy has demonstrated that most of his tenants in

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<sup>885</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 174–5.

<sup>886</sup> *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1178.1: 'guna n-eachaibh lan d[apos] eideadh'.

<sup>887</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 180–1: 'vir fortis et bellator'.

<sup>888</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 180–1.

<sup>889</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 178–81.

<sup>890</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 176–7: 'pauperem et mendicum'.

<sup>891</sup> Duffy, 'Courcy [Courei], John de' in *O.D.N.B.*, accessed online (<https://doi-org.jproxy.nuim.ie/10.1093/ref:odnb/6443>) (25 November 2019).

Ulaid came from Cumbria, contacts he had through his maternal relations, but like de Courcy none of these men was particularly wealthy or influential.<sup>892</sup>

These facts go some way towards explaining de Courcy's conduct in Ireland. In the first place, the invasion was ambitious if not reckless. Ulaid itself may have been the weakest kingdom still untouched by the English in 1177, but as should now be very clear, it did not operate independently. An invasion of Ulaid would inevitably involve fighting not only the Ulaid themselves, but also the Airgíalla and Cenél nEógain, with their competing claims of overlordship.

The English, who were generally well-informed about Irish political affiliations, are certain to have been aware of this, especially after the combined invasion of Meath in 1176. This may even be why the North remained relatively untouched in 1177.

Furthermore, de Courcy's action, even if successful, would leave a corridor of Irish territory between his new holdings and other English conquests in Ireland, and this eventuality actually came to pass. Only de Courcy's link to Cumbria seems to explain why the English baron was unperturbed by being surrounded by Irish territory.<sup>893</sup>

The other aspect of de Courcy's conduct that was clearly influenced by his background was his self-promotion once he became established in Ulaid. Giraldus, believing de Courcy to be fulfilling a Columban prophesy reported that 'John himself keeps this book of prophecies, which is written in Irish, by him as a kind of mirror of his own deeds'.<sup>894</sup>

And though Giraldus noted of one of John's battles that it was 'truly an amazing achievement and one which deserves to be remembered by posterity',<sup>895</sup> he nevertheless

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<sup>892</sup> Duffy, 'The first Ulster plantation', pp 1–28; Flanagan, 'John de Courcy, the first Ulster plantation and Irish church men' in Smith (ed.), *Britain and Ireland, 900–1300* (Cambridge, 2009), pp 154–78 at 155.

<sup>893</sup> Duffy, 'The first Ulster plantation', pp 26–7.

<sup>894</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 176–7: '*Ipse vero Iohannes librum hunc propheticum Hibernice scriptum tamquam operum suorum speculum pre manibus habet*'.

<sup>895</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 178–9: '*miro conatu memoriaque dignissimo evaserunt*'.

gave only a brief account of the conquest of Ulaid, preferring to leave John's 'mighty exploits to be unfolded more fully by his own historians'.<sup>896</sup>

De Courcy sponsored not only histories but hagiographies as well. One such work, a late twelfth-century life of Saint Patrick by Jocelin of Furness, described its patron as 'Prince of Ulaid', evidently a stylisation favoured by John.<sup>897</sup> In some ways de Courcy did operate as a prince, and in the words of Orpen, 'he had virtually unlimited jurisdiction, appointed his own feudal officers, created barons and parcelled out the greater part of the territory among them'.<sup>898</sup>

Court chronicler Roger of Howden described him as 'Prince of Ulaid',<sup>899</sup> when reporting the death of John's brother Jordan in 1197. This could give weight to the idea that the title was generally accepted, but Howden also gave a list of sovereigns ruling in 1201, finishing with 'John de Courcy in Ulaid', and this is too much to take at face value, especially considering the limited extent of de Courcy's control, which will be discussed below.<sup>900</sup> Orpen said that Howden's comment had the 'air of being a court sarcasm current at the time'.<sup>901</sup>

De Courcy's invasion of Ulaid was not, then, really an outcome of English policy, either in its aggression or as a reaction to passivity. It was simply self-aggrandisement on the part of one of the barons who had the most to gain by attacking the Irish kingdoms. It was not even particularly opportunistic, given the events of 1176, though it may have been carefully planned. The fact that a major attack on Connacht was launched the same year may not be a coincidence.<sup>902</sup> Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair, who had been taking a more passive line in national politics, especially since the Treaty of Windsor, was unlikely to

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<sup>896</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 180–1: '*grandiaque eiusdem gesta suis explicanda scriptoribus relinquentes*'.

<sup>897</sup> Jocelin of Furness, 'Life of St Patrick' in J.T. Gilbert (ed.), *Facsimiles of National Manuscripts of Ireland* (Dublin, 1874–84), ii, plate liii: '*Ulidae princeps*'.

<sup>898</sup> Orpen, *Normans*, ii, p. 22.

<sup>899</sup> *Chronica*, iv, pp 24–25: '*Johannis de Curci principis regni de Ulvestir in Hibernia*'.

<sup>900</sup> *Chronica*, iv, p. 162: '*Johanne de Curci in Ulvestre*'.

<sup>901</sup> Orpen, *Normans*, ii, pp 137–8 n. 2.

<sup>902</sup> See Connacht, p. 85.

interfere in the North anyway, but this was made certain by Miles de Cogan's invasion of Connacht.

With the unlicensed secondment of troops and his own meagre land holdings in England, it is clear that de Courcy always aimed to carve out a lordship of his own in the North. It is not a surprise, therefore, that the papal legate Cardinal Vivian, who happened to be in Ulaid while these events were taking place, failed in his efforts to make peace between de Courcy and the Ulaid. Vivian proposed, amongst other things, that the Ulaid agree to pay an annual tribute if de Courcy and his men returned to their own territory.<sup>903</sup>

The cardinal may have prevailed upon de Courcy to release the bishop of Down, who was being held prisoner, if Roger of Howden is correct on a point that is not repeated elsewhere, but it is apparent from the combined evidence that de Courcy was the one who refused the terms.<sup>904</sup> Subsequently, Vivian, who seems to have sympathised with the Ulaid and to have stayed with them before de Courcy arrived, openly advised them to fight for their land.<sup>905</sup>

That fight would be a long and tumultuous one, and it was only with great difficulty that de Courcy emerged victorious. His eventual success has served to make the invasion and refusal of terms look like expedient decisions retrospectively, but both English and Irish accounts repeatedly emphasise the precariousness of his position and the problems he faced. *The Deeds*, for instance, passes comment on this subject. And while its chronology can be rejected, its statement that de Courcy 'suffered great hardship' in Ulaid is well-supported.<sup>906</sup>

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<sup>903</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 174–5.

<sup>904</sup> *Chronica*, ii, p. 120.

<sup>905</sup> William of Newburgh, *Historia Rerum Anglicarum*, ed. Hans Claude Hamilton (2 vols., English Historical Society Publications, London, 1856), i, p. 236: '*Forte illuc venerat a Scotia Vivianus, vir eloquentissimus, apostolicse sedis legatus; susceptusque honorifice a rege episcopis ejusdem provinciae, in civitate maritimaquae Dunum vocatur pro tempore morabatur. Hostium autem adventu praecognito, Hibernienses consuluere legatum quidnam in tali articulo esset agendum. Qui pugnandum esse pro patria dixit, et pugnaturis cum obsecrationibus benedixit*'.

<sup>906</sup> *The Deeds*, p. 123 l. 2734.

Giraldus briefly describes five of de Courcy's early battles on this expedition, comprised of three victories and two defeats. The two defeats came in Airgíalla, and not in Ulaid, though one was against the Uí Thuire and Fir Lí and therefore east of the Bann. As for the three victories, two were at Downpatrick itself and one at Newry, on the border between Ulaid and Airgíalla.<sup>907</sup> He too emphasises de Courcy's difficulties, saying that only 'after a lengthy war in which there were battles of varied outcome, and engagements in which both sides suffered heavily, he at last succeeded in scaling the pinnacle of complete victory'.<sup>908</sup>

While Giraldus elaborates the theme of victory against the odds, the Irish annals harp on the theme of de Courcy's hardships with more consistency and apparent enjoyment. They note that Úa Floinn burned the plain of Armoyn before the English, as they made an early foray north of Dál Fiatach territory, though they also acknowledge that on that occasion the English baron burned many churches including Coleraine on the border with Cenél nEógain. More interestingly still, *Ann. Tig.* records that de Courcy was taken prisoner in 1177,<sup>909</sup> a fact that Flanagan has supposed may explain why neither de Courcy nor Ulaid were mentioned at the Council of Oxford that year.<sup>910</sup>

Flanagan has also suggested that the fact this appears in *Ann. Tig.*, which she describes as an 'Ua Conchobair house chronicle', shows the continued Connacht interest in Ulaid.<sup>911</sup> This is possible, especially considering Úa Conchobair's involvement in the North and the marriage link outlined above. However, Steve Flanders, who adopts Flanagan's description of *Ann. Tig.*, suggests, in his history of the de Courcy family, that John was held prisoner by Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair himself.<sup>912</sup> This is out of the question. If *Ann.*

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<sup>907</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 178–9.

<sup>908</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 180–1: '*post varia belli diuturni prelia et graves utrinque conflictus tandem in arce victorie plene constitutus*'.

<sup>909</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1177.3.

<sup>910</sup> Flanagan, *Irish society*, p. 259.

<sup>911</sup> Flanagan, *Irish society*, p. 259; see also Introduction, pp 31–2.

<sup>912</sup> Steve Flanders, *De Courcy: Anglo-Normans in Ireland, England and France in the eleventh and twelfth centuries* (Dublin, 2008), p. 159.



*Tig.* is correct and de Courcy was captured, it must have been by those who engaged him in battle, and Úa Conchobair was not among them.

Again, if he was captured, this did not last long, and he was soon back on campaign. His difficulties were not at an end though, and he met with mixed fortunes in 1178. *Ann. Tig.* goes so far as to suggest that ‘the Foreigners who dwelt in Downpatrick were exterminated by the kindred of Eoghan and by the Ulaid and the men of Oriel’.<sup>913</sup> The defeat is attested elsewhere, both in Giraldus’s *Expugnatio* and other collections of annals, but de Courcy was certainly not exterminated. On the contrary, in fact, he marched northwards to raid Uí Thuire and Fir Lí.

Unfortunately for de Courcy, Úa Floinn caught up with him and inflicted another defeat, and ‘John himself escaped with difficulty, being severely wounded, and fled to Dublin’.<sup>914</sup> But, even as the entry above from *Ann. Tig.* suggests, ‘the foreigners who dwelt at Downpatrick’ had become entrenched, and de Courcy’s retreat was only temporary.<sup>915</sup>

In an entry in Mac Cárthaigh’s Book under 1180, which probably correctly belongs under 1179, it is recorded that de Courcy left Downpatrick and built a castle at Áth Glaise.<sup>916</sup> Áth Glaise is generally thought, with some reservations, to correspond with Castleskreen in County Down.<sup>917</sup> Despite the best efforts of the annalists to emphasise the Irish victories at de Courcy’s expense, little by little he was establishing himself in the province. He gained a significant victory over the Uí Néill in the north of Ulaid in

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<sup>913</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1178.17: ‘*Na Gaill do batar a n-Dun Da Lethglas do diligend la Cenel Eogain 7 la h-Ulltaib 7 la h-Airgiallaib*’.

<sup>914</sup> *A.F.M.* 1178.7; *A.L.C.* 1178.8, 1178.9, 1178.10; ‘Dublin’ is supplied by O’Donovan, the editor of the *Annals of the Four Masters*, and Lawlor has suggested this should read Down: see H.C. Lawlor, ‘Mote and mote-and-bailey castles in de Courcy’s principality of Ulster’ in *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, third series, i (1938), pp 155–64 at 162.

<sup>915</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1178.17: ‘*Na Gaill do batar a n-Dun Da Lethglas*’.

<sup>916</sup> *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1180.1.

<sup>917</sup> Deirdre Morton, ‘Some County Down place-names of the de Courcy period’ in *The Bulletin of the Ulster Place-Name Society* iii (1955), pp 29–34 at 33; C.W. Dickinson & D.M. Waterman, ‘Excavation of a rath with motte at Castleskreen, co. Down’ in *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, third series, xxii (1959), pp 67–82 at 81–2.

1182, and this seems to have ended Irish efforts to expel him from his new lordship.<sup>918</sup>

The implications of his successful entrenchment for the Irish nobles of Ulaid would prove to be drastic and the subsequent period was one of slow but certain advancement for the new English lordship of 'Ulster'.

The extent of de Courcy's lordship in Ulaid is a matter of some debate. The key point was discussed by Flanders, who commented 'overall, about seventy-five castles or defended sites might be attributable to John's lordship, at least in their inception. All but a handful are east of the Upper and Lower Bann, the region which can be regarded as the core of John's lordship. However, the interpretation of such sites is not always clear cut. Many are associated with native Irish raths and pose the question: when is a rath a motte-and-bailey and vice-versa'.<sup>919</sup> Flanders also fell foul of this problem, describing Dromore both as 'characteristically Norman' and as a site that is 'not so clear cut'.<sup>920</sup>

Discussion of this ranges back some time. Orpen ascribed wide control to de Courcy, saying he 'gradually extended his sway over Uladh, represented by the counties of Down and Antrim, and over much of Uriel [Airgialla] as well'.<sup>921</sup> His interpretation was challenged by H.C. Lawlor, who argued that several of the mottes identified by Orpen, including Galgorm, Scarva, Scrabo, and Farrel's Fort, did not answer to that description.<sup>922</sup> Instead, Lawlor proposed a map of de Courcy's principality in which his fortifications appear overwhelmingly in the east, in modern south Antrim and north Down, with outposts along the Bann and the tributary rivers of the Newry.<sup>923</sup>

Lawlor's argument was adopted by many. Dolley pointed out that de Courcy's effective lordship was in north County Down and south County Antrim.<sup>924</sup> In the words of T.E.

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<sup>918</sup> *A.L.C.* 1182.1; *A.F.M.* 1182.3; *A.U.* 1182.1.

<sup>919</sup> Flanders, *De Courcy*, p. 151.

<sup>920</sup> Flanders, *De Courcy*, p. 151.

<sup>921</sup> Orpen, *Normans*, ii, p. 13.

<sup>922</sup> Lawlor, 'Mote and mote-and-bailey castles', p. 155.

<sup>923</sup> Lawlor, 'Mote and mote-and-bailey castles', p. 160.

<sup>924</sup> Michael Dolley, *Anglo-Norman Ireland* (Dublin, 1972), p. 85.

McNeill, who wrote a seminal history of ‘Anglo-Norman Ulster’ published in 1980, ‘behind the façade he was not a great conqueror, certainly not to the extent of controlling Cos. Antrim and Down as he is often credited with’.<sup>925</sup> Instead, as Jonathan Bardon added in his perambulatory discussion of background history for the plantation of Ulster, ‘the earldom, however, was always a precarious marchland. In Down (which did not become a county until 1570) it never extended further west than the motte-and bailey castles of Dromore and Duneight, for example’.<sup>926</sup>

Though the limitations of de Courcy’s hold on Ulaid have been acknowledged by some, the vision of him as an all-powerful ruler in the former Irish kingdom of Ulaid has persisted. This strand of interpretation is represented by Otway-Ruthven, among others. She stuck to the view of a powerful de Courcy in the second edition of her history of medieval Ireland, published the same year as McNeill’s history of Anglo-Norman Ulster.<sup>927</sup> Flanagan cast de Courcy in similar terms in her work on Ireland’s relationship with the Angevins, from 1989.<sup>928</sup>

In his biography of Hugh de Lacy the younger, Daniel Brown presented a confused picture apparently based on both strands of the historiography. He reported that at its height John de Courcy’s domain was ‘coterminous with the native kingdom of Ulaid, east of the Bann and Newry rivers’, while simultaneously suggesting that Uí Echach Cobo and Uí Thuirtre lay outside these boundaries.<sup>929</sup> Moreover, in the same passage, Brown recognised that west County Down and Coleraine represented only outposts of de Courcy’s authority.<sup>930</sup>

The fairest representation of the evidence as it currently stands is that, while de Courcy was largely based in the east of Ulaid, he gradually extended his control over a wider

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<sup>925</sup> T.E. McNeill, *Anglo-Norman Ulster* (Edinburgh, 1980), p. 3.

<sup>926</sup> Jonathan Bardon, *The plantation of Ulster* (Dublin, 2011), p. 7.

<sup>927</sup> A.J. Otway-Ruthven, *A history of medieval Ireland* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., London, 1980), pp 64–5.

<sup>928</sup> Flanagan, *Irish society*, pp 265–67.

<sup>929</sup> Brown, *Hugh de Lacy, first earl of Ulster*, pp 62–3.

<sup>930</sup> Brown, *Hugh de Lacy*, p. 63.

area. This no doubt increased after 1182, when combined Irish efforts to expel him from the region came to an end. From at least 1189, and perhaps earlier, the English began to settle in modern County Louth, removing the corridor of Irish territory that separated de Courcy from the other English lands in Ireland. This was not necessarily to de Courcy's advantage though. While he had once counted parts of Louth as part of his domain,<sup>931</sup> he was replaced, through a grant by John, lord of Ireland, c. 1189, by Peter Pippard.<sup>932</sup> Later, Hugh de Lacy would accede, through marriage, to the parts of Airgíalla de Courcy may well have intended to claim for himself.<sup>933</sup>

The gradual extension of de Courcy's control combined with a century and a half of territorial losses to Airgíalla to squeeze the Ulaid into an ever more confined territory. To begin with at least, his influence did not extend throughout the land east of the Bann but centred instead on the core Dál Fiatach territory. As such it immediately displaced that dynasty, and de Courcy's entrenchment in the region, by means of castle-building, eventually made independent assaults impractical. The corollary of this was that the Ulaid, still led by the Meic Dúinn Sléibe, pushed westward against their Irish neighbours.

The main feature of the behaviour of the Meic Dúinn Sléibe after the English became established in their province is that they remained at odds with the principal conquistador, John de Courcy, and his people, while otherwise being flexible with their political alignments. As was touched on above, the first phase of the invasion was met with a combined opposition by all the kingdoms of the North, and while 'Ulaidh was laid waste, both church and lay property, by John de Courcy',<sup>934</sup> in 1179, 'Ruaidhrí Mac Duinn Shléibhe, king of Ulaidh, [was] in exile in Tír Eóghain'.<sup>935</sup>

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<sup>931</sup> Otway-Ruthven (ed.), 'Dower charter of John de Courcy's wife' in *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, third series, xii (1949), pp 77–81 at 79.

<sup>932</sup> *Ormond Deeds, 1172–1350*, p. 364, no. 863 (1).

<sup>933</sup> See Brown, *Hugh de Lacy*, pp 63–4.

<sup>934</sup> *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1179.6: 'Ulaigh do fasughadh idir cill & tuath la Sean do Cuirsi & leisna Gaeidilaibh do bi ina timcill'.

<sup>935</sup> *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1179.7: 'Ruaidhri Mac Duinn t-Sleibi, ri Uladh, ar innarbadh a Tir n-Eoghain'.

By 1181 and 1182, though, the Cenél nEógain were marching against the Irish of Ulaid and, separately, against the English of Ulaid.<sup>936</sup> The two latter parties were not allied against Cenél nEógain, and the engagements happened separately. The Ulaid supported neither the Cenél nEógain nor de Courcy when their forces met, remaining disinterested. This neutrality, presumably on the grounds of being equally hostile to both parties, would foreshadow their policy for the remainder of the century.

Ruaidrí Mac Dúinn Sléibe was nothing if not resourceful in his attempt to put his dynasty on a more secure footing, and the fact that he now targeted the Airthir suggests he was trying to assert control over Armagh. This advance seems to have started by 1194, when Conchobar Mac Dúinn Sléibe was killed at Armagh by Úa hAnluain of Uí Niallín.<sup>937</sup> The next year (or perhaps in 1196), Ruaidrí Mac Dúinn Sléibe hired some English and Irish, including ‘the sons of the kings of Connacht’, to support an attack on Airthir. The nobles in his army who were killed included not only a son of Máel Ísu Úa Conchobair and Brian Buide Úa Flaithbertaigh, but also a Mac Murchada from Leinster. Despite the ingenuity with which Mac Dúinn Sléibe created his force, though, it was defeated by the Airthir and Cenél nEógain.<sup>938</sup>

On another notable occasion Ruaidrí Mac Dúinn Sléibe attacked Armagh, augmenting his forces with English support. This was in 1199, but again, these were not de Courcy’s men. Instead, Mac Dúinn Sléibe employed the ‘foreigners of Meath’<sup>939</sup> or perhaps the ‘foreigners of Ardee’, for this expedition, and these are likely to have been his English allies in 1195.<sup>940</sup> Meanwhile, de Courcy himself also displayed an interest in exerting control over Armagh, perhaps prompted by other English parties. In 1184 and 1185 the English attacked Armagh twice, led first by de Lacy’s English of Meath, supporting Úa

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<sup>936</sup> *A.L.C.* 1181.7, 1182.1; *A.F.M.* 1181.6, 1182.3; *A.U.* 1181.3, 1182.1.

<sup>937</sup> *A.L.C.* 1194.5; *A.F.M.* 1194.7.

<sup>938</sup> *A.L.C.* 1195.11, 1195.12, 1196.8; *A.F.M.* 1196.3, 1197.1; *Misc.Ir.Annals* 1196.1; *A.U.* 1196.2.

<sup>939</sup> *A.L.C.* 1199.9: ‘*Galloib Midhe*’; *A.U.* 1200.4; *A.F.M.* 1199.4.

<sup>940</sup> *Misc.Ir.Annals* 1200.5: ‘*Gallaibh Atha Fir Diadh*’.

Cerbaill,<sup>941</sup> and later by the justiciary under Philip of Worcester.<sup>942</sup> In 1189 de Courcy plundered Armagh and in 1200 he attacked the Airthir, but on neither occasion was he supporting or receiving the support of the Irish of Ulaid.<sup>943</sup>

In fact, de Courcy was unable to harness the military forces of the Meic Dúinn Sléibe. He had some Irish allies in 1179, and later, in 1188, when it was reported that ‘a party of the Uí Echach Uladh’ supported the ‘foreigners of the castle of Magh Coba’ who had recently become entrenched in their territory against Cenél nEógain, but these were isolated incidents.<sup>944</sup> It was not simply that he had no use for Irish alliances either. In 1188, while justiciar, he had collaborated with Conchobar Úa nDiarmata in an invasion of Connacht,<sup>945</sup> and in 1196 (or perhaps 1195) he allied with Mac Mathgamna of Fir Manach in an attack on Louth.<sup>946</sup>

For the most part, de Courcy conducted his military campaigns without any royal Irish support. This includes both those in the North, chiefly conducted against the Cenél nEógain, and those elsewhere, which included multiple invasions of Connacht and even campaigns against fellow English barons. The fact that he was not actively opposed by Mac Dúinn Sléibe might be thought to indicate some level of cooperation, but in 1201, at a time when both were actively campaigning against Cenél nEógain, de Courcy had Ruaidrí Mac Dúinn Sléibe assassinated.<sup>947</sup>

The Meic Dúinn Sléibe, whom Orpen described as a family who were ‘always killing one another’, are not generally acknowledged or given much credit for independent action after de Courcy became established in their province.<sup>948</sup> But if de Courcy’s domain was limited to north County Down and south County Antrim, as discussed

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<sup>941</sup> *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1184.2; *A.L.C.* 1184.3; *A.U.* 1184.1; *A.F.M.* 1184.7.

<sup>942</sup> *A.L.C.* 1185.2; *A.F.M.* 1185.2; *A.U.* 1185.2.

<sup>943</sup> *A.L.C.* 1189.3, 1189.8; *A.U.* 1189.3, 1189.7.

<sup>944</sup> *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1179.6; *A.L.C.* 1188.6: ‘*drem do Uíbh Echach*’, ‘*Gaill chaislen Muighe Caba*’; *A.F.M.* 1188.6, 1186.M; *A.U.* 1188.5.

<sup>945</sup> *A.L.C.* 1188.7; *A.F.M.* 1188.8, 1188.9; *A.U.* 1188.6.

<sup>946</sup> *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1196.6.

<sup>947</sup> *A.L.C.* 1201.1; *A.U.* 1201.1; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1201.3.

<sup>948</sup> Orpen, *Normans*, ii, p. 11 n. 9.

above, it follows that the remaining territory was still under the lordship of Mac Dúinn Sléibe (and further north the Uí Floinn of Uí Thuirtre and Fir Lí). What little coverage the Meic Dúinn Sléibe receive in the late twelfth-century annals points to an attempt to carve out a new holding around Armagh. There is nothing to suggest they did so as vassals or subordinates of de Courcy. Instead, they were pushed to do so by de Courcy's entrenchment in what had been Dál Fiatach's core territory.

It is certainly the case that the Meic Dúinn Sléibe could not match de Courcy in battle, and the weakness of their military position is suggested by more than just a lack of confrontation with the *Princeps Ulidiae*. Ruaidrí Mac Dúinn Sléibe was forced to hire English mercenaries and nobles from Connacht to make up the bulk of his forces in 1195 or 1196, for example, and even when they were at war with the same opponent, Cenél nEógain, they were not allies. It must therefore be understood that the Irish of Ulaid remained at odds with de Courcy even after they became embroiled with Cenél nEógain and the Airthir. The Ulaid under the Meic Dúinn Sléibe were squeezed between two enemies in the late twelfth century.

## **[2.6: Preserving the remains of the North]**

De Courcy's slow but certain expansion of influence in Ulaid combined with the disaggregation of the North to make the political outlook progressively more ominous for the Airgíalla and Uí Néill. De Courcy had not acted in pursuance of a royal grant when he invaded Ulaid; consequently, he was not confined by any boundary except what he was able to win by force of arms.

That it was the late 1190s before he tried to conquer the remainder of the North is as strong a commentary on the difficulties he faced as anything offered by contemporary writers like Giraldus and the anonymous author of *The Deeds*. By that time, de Courcy was under pressure from other English barons like Hugh de Lacy, who had taken land in

lower Airgíalla and who were equally well-placed to advance claims to any newly conquered territory.

De Courcy's one and only major campaign in the North took place piecemeal over the years 1196–9. According to Roger of Howden it was prompted by the death of his brother Jordan at Irish hands, but this can not have been anything more than a pretext.<sup>949</sup> The first advance was made to Mount Sandel in modern County Derry, near Coleraine, perhaps late in 1196 or early in 1197.<sup>950</sup> On that occasion, de Courcy granted lands in the area, including Coleraine, to his wife's cousin Duncan of Carrick.<sup>951</sup> The assertion that they had been successfully subjugated, originally made by Howden and largely followed by modern historians, though it is difficult to substantiate.<sup>952</sup> This grant would be revisited in the second decade of the thirteenth century and made operative.

De Courcy had a castle built at Mount Sandel, and he left a large garrison in situ. The leader of this garrison was recorded in Irish as 'Rustel Pitun'.<sup>953</sup> This was once equated with Osberto T. Russel,<sup>954</sup> a witness of a de Courcy charter, but is now thought to represent Richard Fitton of Cheshire.<sup>955</sup> In his role as a subordinate of de Courcy, Fitton led raids into the surrounding parts of Cenél nEógain, targeting the harbour of Derry and Ciannachta in particular. While the defeat of Fitton's forces by Cenél Conaill is recorded in the annals,<sup>956</sup> only John Lodge's eighteenth-century *Irish Peerage* preserves the fact that he was killed on that occasion.<sup>957</sup>

Flaithbertach Úa Máel Doraid's victory over Fitton impressed his contemporaries and was given the guise of a victory for all the North as a result. He was awarded the

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<sup>949</sup> *Chronica*, iv, p. 25.

<sup>950</sup> *A.L.C.* 1196.14; *A.U.* 1197.1; *A.F.M.* 1197.1.

<sup>951</sup> *Chronica*, iv, p. 25.

<sup>952</sup> *Chronica*, iv, p. 25; Otway-Ruthven, *Medieval Ireland*, p. 74.

<sup>953</sup> *A.L.C.* 1196.15; *A.U.* 1197.1; *A.F.M.* 1197.1.

<sup>954</sup> J.W.H., 'The Anglo-Norman families of Lecale: in the county of Down' in *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, first series, i (1853), pp 92–100 at 93–4.

<sup>955</sup> Duffy, 'The first Ulster plantation', p. 16.

<sup>956</sup> *A.L.C.* 1196.16, 1196.17; *A.U.* 1197.1; *A.F.M.* 1197.1.

<sup>957</sup> John Lodge, *The peerage of Ireland; or A genealogical history of the present nobility of that kingdom*, ed. Mervyn Archdall (7 vols., Dublin, 1789), vi, p. 140.



generous title ‘king of Cenel-Conaill and Cenel-Eoghain’, and pointedly noted to have led both branches of the Uí Néill in descriptions of the victory, though his force was small.<sup>958</sup> When he died of an illness shortly afterwards, further honorifics were added. He was styled ‘king of Cenel-Conaill, and Cenel-Eoghain, and Airghiall, the defender of Temhair, and royal heir of all Erin’.<sup>959</sup> In the wake of his death de Courcy invaded the North again, and though this may have been planned anyway, Úa Máel Doraid’s death certainly helped the English baron.<sup>960</sup>

Úa Máel Doraid was succeeded by Echmarcach Úa Dochartaigh, the first of that family to hold the kingship. Úa Dochartaigh ‘was only a fortnight in the sovereignty when John de Curci, accompanied by a large army, went across Tuaim into Tir-Eoghain, and from thence to Ard-sratha, and afterwards round to Doire-Choluim-Chille, where they remained five nights’.<sup>961</sup> Úa Dochartaigh, perhaps trying to replicate Úa Máel Doraid’s success, engaged de Courcy in battle, but was defeated and killed.<sup>962</sup> De Courcy plundered Inishowen after his victory, and as this was the site of Cenél Conaill and Cenél nEógain tension, it may have been in an attempt to stoke division in the Uí Néill.

Next, in 1198, de Courcy launched an extensive attack against both Cenél nEógain and Cenél Conaill, reaching Derry where he remained for two weeks. Again, he deliberately targeted Inishowen.<sup>963</sup> On this occasion though, Áed Méith Úa Néill, appearing in the record for the first time, caused him major difficulties. Indeed, *A.F.M.* suggests that de Courcy ‘would not have withdrawn all his forces from thence [Cenél nEógain] had not Hugh O’Neill sailed with five ships to Killi in Latharna, burned a part of the town, and

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<sup>958</sup> *A.L.C.* 1196.17; *A.U.* 1197.1; *A.F.M.* 1197.1.

<sup>959</sup> *A.L.C.* 1196.20; *A.U.* 1197.4; *A.F.M.* 1197.3, 1197.4.

<sup>960</sup> *A.L.C.* 1196.20; *A.U.* 1197.4; *A.F.M.* 1197.3, 1197.4.

<sup>961</sup> *A.L.C.* 1196.20: ‘ní raibhe acht co eicidhis a righe an tan tainic Seón na Cúirti, co socraide moir maille ris, tar Tuaim a tír Eogain; assidhén co h-Ard sratha; iarsin timchell co Doire Coluim Cille, co rabhadar coic aidhche ann’.

<sup>962</sup> *A.L.C.* 1196.21.

<sup>963</sup> *A.L.C.* 1198.5; *A.F.M.* 1198.5.

killed eighteen of the English'.<sup>964</sup> This has been identified as Kilroot near Carrickfergus in modern County Antrim.<sup>965</sup> De Courcy invaded again in 1199, but Áed Úa Néill faced him in battle and won another tactical victory.<sup>966</sup>

De Courcy did not attack Cenél nEógain again in 1200. He had suffered several major defeats to Úa Néill, but perhaps more importantly still, there had been a change of kings in England. Richard I was killed at a siege and was replaced by his younger brother John, formerly the lord of Ireland. De Courcy was no friend to the new king, having supported Richard during John's rebellion from 1191 to '94. He is therefore likely to have foreseen conflict with his namesake.

When de Courcy and de Lacy jointly invaded Connacht in support of Cathal Crobderg in 1201, they met with disaster. De Courcy was fortunate to survive, but unfortunate in his ally de Lacy, who arrested him and conveyed him to Dublin, where he was held until he gave hostages as assurance 'that he would obey the king of the Saxons'.<sup>967</sup> By 1203, de Lacy would be the instrument through which King John would remove de Courcy from his position in Ulaid.

There would be a second English campaign to conquer or dismember the North during Úa Néill's reign. It was not launched by de Courcy though, who never returned to power in Ulaid, or even by Hugh de Lacy, who was belted 'earl of Ulster' in 1205. Instead, it was led by the representatives of King John, following a breakdown in relations between Úa Néill and the English king in 1210.

John was in Ireland putting down a rebellion by his new earl and arranged to meet the king of Cenél nEógain with the aim of establishing more permanent terms for their relationship. *Ann. Inisf.* provide the most interesting Irish description of John's meeting

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<sup>964</sup> *A.F.M.* 1198.5: 'ní raghadh ass itir i n-eallmha muna toirseadh Aodh Ó Néill lucht cóicc long co Cill i Latharnaibh, 7 ro loisc ní don bhaile, 7 ró mharbh ocht f-fir dhécc do Ghallaibh'.

<sup>965</sup> See *A.F.M.*, iii, p. 115 n. i.

<sup>966</sup> *A.L.C.* 1199.7; *A.U.* 1199.3, 1200.2; *A.F.M.* 1199.3.

<sup>967</sup> *A.L.C.* 1201.8: '& rucadh Eoain co h-Ath Cliath no gur fháguib braighdi ass fein re reir rí Saksan'.

with Úa Néill: ‘Ua Néill, as well as Ua Conchobuir, submitted to the king of England, but two or three of the nobles of the foreigners were held by his followers as a guarantee of his safe return from the king. Messengers came to him [Úa Néill] to his house to seek hostages, and he said: “Depart, O foreigners”, “I will give you no hostages at all this time”. The foreigners departed, and he gave no hostages to the king’.<sup>968</sup>

We are fortunate to also have a narrative record of these events, from a Norman-French source called *Histoire des ducs de Normandie et des rois d’Angleterre*. This account was re-published by Duffy in 1996, with an extensive commentary.<sup>969</sup> In this account, Úa Néill is depicted bringing a large army to his meeting with John, which, as Duffy pointed out, suggests that he was supporting King John’s expedition against Carrickfergus and the rebellious Hugh de Lacy.<sup>970</sup>

Discussions broke down, and the *Histoire* presents this as a result of John’s greed over the extent of Úa Néill’s prospective tribute. Duffy argued, on the contrary, that in keeping with the story in *Ann. Inisf.* and John’s quarrel with Cathal Crodberg Úa Conchobair,<sup>971</sup> the sticking point was John’s desire for hostages from the king of Cenél nEógain.<sup>972</sup> Perhaps the strongest evidence in support of this view is the fact that, in the Irish Pipe Roll for 1211–12, Úa Néill is recorded as having paid tribute even as the English prepared to march against him.<sup>973</sup>

It began in 1211 with an attempt to build a castle at Cael-Uisce on Lough Erne, under a commander called ‘*Hanri m-Beac*’, or ‘little Henry’ in the annals. This individual was killed very soon after by Úa Néill and Mac Mathgamna, when they captured and burned the new castle. As in 1196/7, the annals pointedly convey the sense that the North acted

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<sup>968</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1210.2: ‘Ó Néil do dul i degh ríog Sagsan ra cois I Concobairn, & dias nó triúr du mathib na Gall i l-láim a muntirisium ra techt dosum imlán a tig ríog Sagsan. Techt dosom d’íaraid brágdí dá thig, & adubairt-sium: “Imtigidsi, a Gullu,” ar se, “& ní tibeórsa brágdí achurs dúbsi idir, a Gullu,” ar se. Ra imtigedar na Gaill, & ní tucsum brágdí dun ríog’.

<sup>969</sup> Duffy, ‘King John’s expedition to Ireland, 1210’, pp 1–24.

<sup>970</sup> Duffy, ‘King John’s expedition to Ireland, 1210’, p. 14

<sup>971</sup> See *Connacht*, pp 105–7.

<sup>972</sup> Duffy, ‘King John’s expedition to Ireland, 1210’, pp 18–21.

<sup>973</sup> *Pipe roll Ire., 1211–12*, pp 36–7, 66–7.

collectively, saying that ‘Ua Neill assembled Cenel-Conaill and Cenel-Eogain and the Airghialla’ for the attack.<sup>974</sup> The underlying stability of the coalition can not have been certain, but cooperative action recognised a common threat as well as a collective identity that had become less important since 1166.

Undeterred by their first setback, the English made a second attempt in 1212. This time the campaign was led by the justiciar, John de Gray, and Connacht-based baron Gilbert de Angulo, and it saw castles erected at Cael Uisce and Clones.<sup>975</sup> The annals are even less equivocal on this occasion, remarking that the purpose of the expedition was ‘to take possession of the north of Erin’.<sup>976</sup> This assertion is corroborated by evidence in English sources, where it is clear, as Otway-Ruthven remarked, that the preparations for this campaign were ‘on a considerable scale’.<sup>977</sup> A payment of 180 cows was made to the 350 foot-soldiers ‘who went against Tyrone for 20 days’, for example.<sup>978</sup> There were also separate payments made to two groups of soldiers for guarding Ulaid while de Gray fortified Clones, and a further payment for successfully raiding Úa Catháin’s land and seizing cows.<sup>979</sup>

One other aspect of this advance against the North was King John’s endorsement of de Courcy’s plan to plant the Scots in Úa Néill’s territory. While de Courcy had granted Duncan, earl of Carrick, unspecified (but supposedly newly subjugated) lands in 1197, King John made more extensive arrangements.<sup>980</sup> Duncan was granted coastal lands in Antrim as a reward for aiding the king during the de Lacy rebellion,<sup>981</sup> while Alan fitz

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<sup>974</sup> *A.U.* 1211.1: ‘*co rotinoil Aedh h-Ua Neill Conaill & Eogain & Oirghiallu, co romarbadh leis*’; *A.F.M.* 1210.1, 1210.2; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1211.1.

<sup>975</sup> *A.L.C.* 1212.1, 1212.2; *A.U.* 1212.2, 1212.5; *A.F.M.* 1211.4, 1211.2.

<sup>976</sup> *A.L.C.* 1212.2: ‘*do gabháil tuaiscirt Erenn*’.

<sup>977</sup> Otway-Ruthven, *Medieval Ireland*, p. 83.

<sup>978</sup> *Pipe roll Ire., 1211–12*, pp 62–3: ‘*versus Kenelem per xx dies*’.

<sup>979</sup> *Pipe roll Ire., 1211–12*, pp 62–3.

<sup>980</sup> *Chronica*, iv, p. 25.

<sup>981</sup> Orpen, *Normans*, ii, pp 267, 290.

Roland, earl of Galloway and nephew of Duncan, was accorded an enormous 140 knights' fees, most of which were in Cenél nEógain.<sup>982</sup>

This grant encompassed all the land from the Foyle to the Glens of Antrim, excluding only ten fees each side of the Bann near the castle at Mount Sandel, retained by the crown, and the lands already assigned to Duncan by John de Courcy.<sup>983</sup> Thomas of Galloway, brother of Alan, attacked Derry and Inishowen by sea in 1213, and he may have challenged the cohesion of the Uí Néill in so doing, as it is recorded in one set of annals that he was assisted by Úa Domnaill.<sup>984</sup> He was perhaps only acting as an agent of Alan, but soon he too was enfeoffed in the region.

In 1215 John awarded him the twenty fees around Mount Sandel formerly reserved to the crown, including the castle at Coleraine that he, Thomas, had built.<sup>985</sup> This castle was, somewhat unusually, built with stone. The annals note that Thomas 'threw down all the tombs, and clochans, and structures of the town, excepting the church alone, in order to build this castle', and it was evidently sturdily built because it was not immediately captured and destroyed by Úa Néill.<sup>986</sup>

Unfortunately, from an English perspective, the same could not be said of the new castles at Clones and Cael Uisce. Victories over English raiding parties outside Cael Uisce and Clones, by Mac Mathgamna and Úa Néill respectively, gave the two kings confidence to attack the new structures the next year.<sup>987</sup> Both castles were destroyed, and Gilbert de Angulo was killed in the defence of Cael Uisce.<sup>988</sup> Úa Néill also launched an attack on 'the Carlongphort' and demolished it.<sup>989</sup> This does not seem to have meant Carlingford

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<sup>982</sup> *Cal.doc.Ire., 1171–1251*, p. 70, no. 427; Orpen, *Normans*, ii, pp 290–1; Otway-Ruthven, *Medieval Ireland*, pp 82–3.

<sup>983</sup> Orpen, *Normans*, ii, pp 291–3; *Rot. chart.*, p. 98.

<sup>984</sup> *A.L.C.* 1211.8.

<sup>985</sup> Orpen, *Normans*, ii, p. 292; *Rot. chart.*, p. 292.

<sup>986</sup> *A.L.C.* 1213.9: 'ro sgáilset reilge & clochana & cumdaighe in baile uile, cénmothá in tempall imháin, docum in caislein sin'; *A.U.* 1213.2, 1214.5.

<sup>987</sup> *A.L.C.* 1212.2; *A.U.* 1212.3.

<sup>988</sup> *A.L.C.* 1213.1, 1213.2; *A.U.* 1213.4, 1213.7; *A.F.M.* 1212.3, 1212.4.

<sup>989</sup> *A.L.C.* 1213.11; *A.F.M.* 1213.6; *A.U.* 1214.7.

itself, and Orpen suggested a minor fortified camp in the Coleraine area was intended.<sup>990</sup>

And though English efforts to conquer the North ended at this juncture, Úa Néill remained aggressive, raiding Ulaid in 1214.<sup>991</sup>

The effect of Úa Néill's victories was to preserve what remained of the North, with its shared identity and leadership. Had the English defeated him, it is unlikely that he could have compelled the Fir Manach and Cenél Conaill to maintain common cause with the Cenél nEógain, and in such an eventuality the English would certainly have made great advances. As it was, when the English raided Armagh in 1217,<sup>992</sup> Úa Néill was still able to call upon Mac Mathgamna to support his retaliatory attack,<sup>993</sup> while his authority over Cenél Conaill got progressively stronger.<sup>994</sup> In fact, the only permanent loss he suffered in this campaign was the enclave around Coleraine that was successfully occupied by the Scots.

Úa Néill may have felt he would eventually win back that land as well. He astutely used Hugh de Lacy's rebellion to his advantage when he attacked and destroyed the castle at Coleraine in 1222 on the pretext of supporting the erstwhile earl of Ulster.<sup>995</sup> Indeed, de Lacy sheltered with Cenél nEógain upon his return to Ireland, just as John de Courcy had when de Lacy had ousted him from power. It is notable, though, that with Hugh de Lacy's restoration in 1227, the castle at Coleraine was soon rebuilt.<sup>996</sup>

The king of the North died in 1230, and the earl in 1242, but no further campaigns against the North were launched in either's lifetime. This fact is not likely to be the result of lasting friendship between Úa Néill and de Lacy, especially since de Lacy supported the Meic Lochlainn claim to the kingship after Úa Néill's death. It is more likely to result

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<sup>990</sup> Orpen, *Normans*, ii, pp 293–4 n. 3.

<sup>991</sup> *A.L.C.* 1214.14; *A.U.* 1215.3.

<sup>992</sup> *A.L.C.* 1217.5.

<sup>993</sup> *A.L.C.* 1217.6.

<sup>994</sup> *Ann. Conn.* 1226.12.

<sup>995</sup> *A.L.C.* 1221.10; *A.U.* 1222.1; *A.F.M.* 1221.3.

<sup>996</sup> *A.U.* 1228.10.

from the fact that the terms of de Lacy's restoration included the stipulation that he would hold the earldom for his lifetime and could not bequeath it to a successor.<sup>997</sup>

For Úa Néill's part, his death in 1230 was met with interesting commentary. He was styled alternately 'the king of Cenel-Eoghain',<sup>998</sup> and 'king of the North',<sup>999</sup> as well as, more poetically, 'king of all the Half of Conn'.<sup>1000</sup> His career has been viewed by historians largely through his successful opposition to the English, and this appears to reflect the contemporary view as well. According to one obituary, he was 'a king who gave neither pledge nor hostage to Foreigner or Gaeidhel', and 'a king who inflicted great defeats and killings on Foreigners'.<sup>1001</sup> Another noted his proficiency in destroying castles, and finished by commenting 'it was never supposed that he would die in any other way than to fall by the English'.<sup>1002</sup> This final, very revealing, remark shows the fear and esteem in which the English were held, as well as the unusualness of Úa Néill's aggressive line against their expansion.

## [2.7: Conclusion]

This chapter has examined not one Irish provincial kingdom but three, because the strategies and behaviours of each were deeply interconnected. Under the pressure of the Northern Uí Néill, the Airgíalla and (to a lesser extent) the Ulaid formed the political bloc that supported a claim to kingship of all Ireland. The strength of the Uí Néill provided the driving force of this unification, and for this reason there was a focus on the Uí Néill in this chapter. It was only when the Meic Lochlainn kings achieved mastery over this immediate sphere of influence, called 'the North' by contemporaries, that they were able to turn their attention elsewhere.

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<sup>997</sup> *Cal.doc.Ire., 1171–1251*, pp 207–8, 226–7, nos. 1372, 1498.

<sup>998</sup> *A.L.C. 1230.13*: 'rí Cenel Eogain'.

<sup>999</sup> *A.U. 1230.10*: 'rí Tuaisceirt'; *A.F.M. 1230.6*.

<sup>1000</sup> *A.U. 1230.10*: 'rí Leithi Cuinn uile'; *A.F.M. 1230.6*.

<sup>1001</sup> *A.L.C. 1230.13*: 'rí na tucc giall na eittire do ghall na do Gaeidil', 'ri do rad madmonna & marbta mora ar ghalluib'.

<sup>1002</sup> *A.U. 1230.10*: 'duine is lughu rosailedh d'fhagbail bais innus aile acht le Gallaibh'; *A.F.M. 1230.6*.

Domnall Mac Lochlainn's career was examined first in terms of his relations with the Cenél Conaill and the Ulaid, two communities that challenged him repeatedly. He tried various methods to establish his supremacy, some more successful than others, including the symbolic felling of trees at the inauguration site of the Uí hEochada kings of Ulaid, and the imposition of his son Niall as king of Cenél Conaill. In his obituaries, Domnall was alternatively called 'king of Ireland' and 'king of the North', suggesting that being a strong ruler in the more limited sphere was an essential characteristic of his reign.

The next area to receive attention was Domnall Mac Lochlainn's relationship with Muirchertach Úa Briain, which, unlike most aspects of this history, has already been discussed extensively in the historiography. It was argued, contrary to the prevailing view, that Úa Briain was reasonably happy to accept terms of peace with Mac Lochlainn. Rather than repeatedly marching north only to be outmanoeuvred by Mac Lochlainn's employment of the church as an ally, it was shown that Úa Briain generally enjoyed no military advantage over the king of the North and did not force battle. Consequently, the *comarbai* of Armagh were functionaries through whom the two kings negotiated terms, rather than supporters of one or other.

The rise of Connacht impacted the Uí Néill and the North to the greatest extent in the mid-twelfth century. When Úa Conchobair destroyed Uí Briain power at the Battle of Móin Mór in 1151, it led to war between the kingdoms. Though Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair would die in 1156, his son and successor Ruaidrí took up the mantle of challenging Mac Lochlainn. Mac Lochlainn's failure to dismantle Úa Conchobair's wider overlordship after defeating Connacht at Ardee in 1159 was the root of his eventual downfall.

Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn's kingship, both in the North and outside it, was underpinned by his relationship with Donnchad Úa Cerbaill, the king of Airgíalla. The Airgíalla had been expanding at the expense of the Ulaid for at least fifty years before Donnchad Úa Cerbaill became king, pushed as they were by the movement of various



segments of Cenél nEógain. Úa Cerbaill formed a symbiotic relationship with Mac Lochlainn, which saw him advance and confirm those territorial gains.

In return he was an active campaigner on Mac Lochlainn's behalf, helping Mac Lochlainn to establish himself both in the North and outside it. Such an arrangement was certainly a development, as no king of the Northern Uí Néill had previously tolerated a strong king of Airgíalla. For the most part it was very successful, but Úa Cerbaill was in a position to bring Mac Lochlainn down if their relationship soured, and this is what happened in 1166.

If the English invasion of 1169 is the central turning point around which this thesis is based, it is nevertheless true that 1166 was more immediately important in the North. The momentum of twelfth-century politics, which had seen the slow coalescence and integration of the three provinces, was completely reversed. It was Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair who set this change in motion. He undermined the leading Uí Néill segment, Cenél nEógain, by partitioning them internally as well as dividing them from their kinsmen in Cenél Conaill. His elevation of the Uí Néill Glundúib to a share in the kingship would also have far reaching implications.

The disintegration of the North was a messy and complicated process, and each of its aspects was impacted by John de Courcy's invasion of Ulaid in 1177. The fact that the Ulaid had never accepted Uí Néill authority to the same extent as the Airgíalla seems to have led to their increasingly being excluded from the category of 'the North', while the expression was still applied to people from other regions.

Though Úa Conchobair took care to weaken the Cenél nEógain, like Mac Lochlainn he fostered Úa Cerbaill and confirmed the latter's authority over the Ulaid. With Donnchad Úa Cerbaill's death and Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair's retreat in the face of the English advance, followed the decline of Airgíalla as a major power. Before long, with the

influence of the English, Airgíalla would end up without a provincial king and with each region pursuing its own aims.

As mentioned above, Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair raised the Cenél Conaill to a higher level of prominence during his reorganisation of the North, and they retained this into the thirteenth century. They posed a lot of challenges to the Cenél nEógain, from whom they appear to have taken territory on Inishowen, while they also took territory from Connacht at Cairpre Dromma Cliab. The Cenél nEógain exhausted their stocks of *rigdomnai* battling the Cenél Conaill, the English, and themselves, and it was only in the person of Áed Méith Úa Néill, who found a working solution to the relationship with Cenél Conaill, that they were able to arrest their decline. Once the Cenél nEógain recovered internal stability, they were able to project their authority further afield again.

The English invasion of Ulaid was unanticipated by the kingdoms of the North. This was because it was de Courcy's personal project, which arose from his personality and circumstances, rather than a logical extension of English dominion. Indeed, it left a corridor of Irish-held land between the lordship of Meath and the new lordship of Ulaid he would create. De Courcy struggled initially, losing several battles and perhaps even enduring a brief captivity. Ultimately, though, he did entrench successfully in the east of Ulaid.

His success threatened the Meic Dúinn Sléibe and the Irish of Ulaid more immediately than the other provinces of the North. There is nothing to show that the Meic Dúinn Sléibe became his subordinates at an early stage. Instead, squeezed between the Airgíalla, who had been expanding at their expense since at least the eleventh century, and the English arrivals, the Ulaid tried to win new territory from the Airthir around Armagh. In this they were unsuccessful. Both Airgíalla and Ulaid lost more land in the final decades of the twelfth century, with de Courcy extending his reach somewhat further into west County Down, and the de Verdons and de Lacys seizing land in lower Airgíalla after Murchad Úa Cerbaill's death.

On two occasions in our period, the English launched major campaigns to capture territory from the North, or perhaps even to conquer it outright. The first, in the late 1190s, was led by John de Courcy, and the second, in the 1210s, was advanced by representatives of King John. Both campaigns were halted by military defeats at the hands of Áed Méith Úa Néill. Úa Néill had just risen to the kingship when de Courcy invaded the North. His victories provided an unexpected barrier to the English baron, who was fresh from a significant victory of his own against Cenél Conaill.

On the second occasion, Úa Néill actively provoked the English king, by telling him to come and take hostages if he wanted them. When John's men advanced and built castles at strategic locations, not only in Uí Néill territory but also in Airgíalla, Úa Néill burned them, killed the leaders of their garrisons, and followed up by invading English territory. He stopped short of trying to re-conquer those parts of Ulaid and Airgíalla in which the English had become entrenched, but he nevertheless prevented the conquest going any further. Because the English momentum petered out in the mid- to late thirteenth century, Áed Méith's victories have additional significance.

## The Two Munsters

### [3.0: Introduction]

‘*Cóic Mumain i Mumain móir*’ is the opening line of a Middle-Irish poem preserved in the sixteenth-century Book of Ballycummin.<sup>1003</sup> It can be translated literally as ‘there are five Munsters in great Munster’ or more simply as ‘all Munster is subdivided into five’.<sup>1004</sup> Territorially, the five constituent parts roughly correspond with Munster’s post-1152 dioceses according to this text. As such, Thomond (north Munster) is the corresponding political authority for Killaloe, Kilfenora, and Scattery; Desmond (south Munster) for Cork, Cloyne, and Ross; mid-Munster for Limerick, Mungret, and Emly; west Munster for Ardfert; and Ormond (east Munster) for Cashel, Waterford, Lismore, and Osraige.<sup>1005</sup>

This paradigm is considered a valid parallel to the political status quo because the architects of Ireland’s twelfth-century dioceses are known to have deliberately adopted political boundaries. Some of the bishoprics pre-dated the synod of Ráith Bressail in 1111, at which a definite scheme was first promulgated, and were at times identified by the political territory their ecclesiastical authority mirrored. For instance, the ‘bishops of Thomond’ who appear in the annals under the years 927, 953, and 1081, and whose rise mirrored that of Dál Cais, are to be identified with the diocesan centre of Killaloe, as shown by later entries under 1161 and 1164.<sup>1006</sup> Another example is that of the ‘bishop of Ciarraige Luachra’, whose diocesan centre was Ardfert.<sup>1007</sup>

There are problems with this model, though. For one thing, the inclusion of Osraige reflects an outdated vision of the province. In the pre-Viking era, Osraige was

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<sup>1003</sup> ‘The Book of Ballycummin’ R.I.A. MS 23 N 10, p. 101; see also *Ann. Clon.* 1141: ‘Munster in old time was divided in five Munsters, vidzt Ormond, Thomond, Desmond, Middle Munster, and West Munster’.

<sup>1004</sup> J.H. Lloyd, ‘The five Munsters’ in *Ériu*, ii (1905), pp 49–54 at 50–1.

<sup>1005</sup> Byrne, *Irish kings and high-kings*, p. 165.

<sup>1006</sup> Etchingam, *Church organisation in Ireland, AD 650 to 1000* (Maynooth, 1999), p. 180; *A.F.M.* 1161.2; *Ann. Tig.* 1161.2, 1164.7.

<sup>1007</sup> Flanagan, *The transformation of the Irish church in the twelfth century* (Woodbridge, 2010), p. 39.

‘indubitably part of Munster’,<sup>1008</sup> and one of the eastern Eóganachta branches may have originated there.<sup>1009</sup> Its association with Leinster is sometimes thought to have arisen from a formal treaty in 859, which saw the king of Munster Máel Guala cede it to Máel Sechnaill, king of the Southern Uí Néill;<sup>1010</sup> in fact, everything we know of Osraige’s history from the ninth century points to continuing links with both Munster and Leinster.<sup>1011</sup>

Even so, Leinster gradually became the main area with which Osraige was associated. A genealogical link between the Osraige and the Laigin was created, and the kings of Osraige advanced a claim to the kingship of Leinster in the tenth and eleventh centuries, finally enjoying success in the person of Donnchad Mac Gilla Phátraic, who successfully seized control of Leinster in 1036.

More important than the anachronistic claim to Osraige is the fact that the creators of the dioceses at Ráith Bressail attempted to make Cashel equal Armagh in the number of its suffragan houses. Armagh had twelve dioceses under its jurisdiction, therefore Cashel must also have twelve. Traditionally this has been viewed as an imitation of Gregory I’s instructions to Augustine for the organisation of dioceses in England, following a comment made by Geoffrey Keating in his seventeenth-century history of Ireland.<sup>1012</sup>

Flanagan has argued, on the contrary, that the relevant factor was the influence of ‘Pseudo-Isidore’, an important collection of forged decretals from the mid-ninth century, which promoted the idea that an ecclesiastical province should comprise twelve bishoprics. Keating’s comment was his own interpretation, reflecting his knowledge of

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<sup>1008</sup> Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* (Cambridge, 2004), p. 489.

<sup>1009</sup> Byrne, *Irish kings*, p. 178.

<sup>1010</sup> *A.U.* 859.3; Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 489.

<sup>1011</sup> See, for example, *A.F.M.* 846.13, 851.9, 862.7, 862.12, 868.16, 869.12, 869.13.

<sup>1012</sup> Geoffrey Keating, *History of Ireland*, eds D. Comyn and P.S. Dineen (4 vols, *Irish Texts Society* iv, viii, ix, xv, London, 1902–14), ix, pp 298–9; see also J.A. Watt, *The church and the two nations in medieval Ireland* (Cambridge, 1970), p. 16; Ó Corráin, *The Irish church, its reform and the English invasion* (Dublin, 2017), p. 73.

Bede, and was not derived from his source for the synod of Ráith Bressail, the now lost Book of Clonenagh.<sup>1013</sup>

Cashel actually ended up one bishopric down from the outset, as room was made for the eventual inclusion of Dublin in the scheme.<sup>1014</sup> Leinster was allotted five (including Osraige, incidentally), with the freedom to alter their borders but not to change their number, leaving six for Munster.<sup>1015</sup> The pressure to accommodate so many dioceses strained the commitment to political boundaries, and this was not remedied by alterations to the dioceses at the Synod of Kells-Mellifont in 1152.

For four of the ‘five Munsters’, the political parallel is obvious. In addition to Thomond and Desmond, which will be discussed below, Ormond was a recognised political division – albeit one that usually functioned as an extension of Thomond. Iarmumu or west Munster was also a distinct sphere, comprised of Eóganacht Locha Léin, Ciarraige, and Corco Duibne, and though it was more relevant as a distinct territory in the early medieval period it played an important role in the twelfth century.

Mid-Munster, on the other hand, did not reflect a coherent political zone and does not appear in the annals. It paired Emly, a locus of Eóganachta power (albeit one challenged by the Uí Briain) with Limerick, which, as we will see, became virtually synonymous with the latter party. As others have noted, the poem’s choice of a fivefold representation may have been an attempt to parallel the ‘fifths’ of Ireland, but it did not accurately reflect Munster in 1111 or 1152.<sup>1016</sup>

The real political division in twelfth-century Munster was bipartite. Thomond, under the Uí Briain, and Desmond, under the Meic Cárthaig, became de-facto provinces during the period, controlling the other regions between them. As such, the semantic range of

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<sup>1013</sup> Flanagan, *The transformation of the Irish church*, pp 54–8 & n. 117.

<sup>1014</sup> Ó Corráin, *The Irish church*, p. 74.

<sup>1015</sup> Keating, *History of Ireland*, ix, pp 298–301; Watt, *The church and the two nations*, p. 16.

<sup>1016</sup> Byrne, *Irish kings*, p. 165.

Thomond and Desmond extended from the narrow definitions expounded in the Book of Ballycummin to all of north and south Munster respectively.

The border between Thomond and Desmond, as halves of Munster, remained in flux up to the invasion and beyond but, in rough terms, Thomond extended eastward from the north of modern County Limerick towards Cashel, which was conquered from the Eóganachta in the late eleventh century, and south of this line was Desmond. Changes to the border will be discussed in the course of this chapter, which is concerned not with the ‘five Munsters’, but with the ‘two Munsters’ and their policies.

The Eóganachta were the dominant collection of dynasties in Munster from the seventh to the tenth century. There were, according to official tradition, seven branches of the Eóganachta: Eóganacht Chaisil, Eóganacht Áine, Eóganacht Locha Léin, Eóganacht Raithlinn, Eóganacht Ghlendamnach, Eóganacht Árann, and Eóganacht Ruis Argait. As noted by Byrne, ‘this enumeration must be quite early, for the Eóganacht Árann (otherwise Eóganacht Ninussa) – in the Aran Islands and the neighbouring part of the Burren – and the Eóganacht Ruis Argait, who may have moved from the north of Osraige into Ormond, disappear from history’.<sup>1017</sup> To this collection may be added a later segmentation, the Eóganacht Airthir Chliach, along with the Uí Fidgeinte and Uí Liathain, both of whom advanced claims to belong to the grouping.

The Eóganachta took their name from the later of two Eógans who appear in their pedigree; their eponym was a grandson of the earlier Eógan. The earlier Eógan, alias Mug Nuadat, was reckoned to be a contemporary of the second-century king Conn Cétcathach, ancestor of the Connachta, Uí Néill, and Airgíalla, and by opposition with him, to be responsible for the twofold division of Ireland into Leth Cuinn (Conn’s half) and Leth Moga (Mug’s half). It was Mug Nuadat and not Eógan Már with whom the Eóganachta tended to be most closely associated, perhaps to emphasise opposition to the

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<sup>1017</sup> Byrne, *Irish kings*, p. 178.

Uí Néill, even though there were other descendants of Mug Nuadat who were emphatically not considered Eóganachta.<sup>1018</sup>

The concept of a twofold division of the island was advanced from the seventh or eighth century onwards as an explanation for the respective spheres of influence exercised by Tara and Cashel.<sup>1019</sup> The dividing line was drawn at the Eiscir Riada, a natural gravel ridge running roughly straight across the middle of the island on the east–west axis.<sup>1020</sup> From there northwards was Leth Cuinn, and southwards Leth Moga. The Uí Néill, who regarded themselves as closely related to the Connachta and Airgíalla, dominated in the north, but they were rarely able to subjugate the descendants of Eógan Már.

Whereas Niall Noígíallach's existence is still accepted by many, it has long been recognised that Eógan Már, Mug Nuadat, and their northern equivalent Conn Cétchathach, were no more than 'ancestor deities'.<sup>1021</sup> It has also been argued that the former two characters were created to parallel the origin stories of the Uí Néill and Connachta. In other words, in the seventh or eighth century, at the same time as the promotion of the concept of Leth Cuinn and Leth Moga, the idea of an 'Eógan', from whom the Eóganachta descended, created an origin myth for a wide group of dynasties, only some of whom were related in reality.<sup>1022</sup>

What have been termed the 'true Eóganachta' were the descendants of Conall Corc mac Luigthig, the man who was accredited with 'finding' Cashel and making it the capital of the kingdom of Munster.<sup>1023</sup> That is just one of many apocryphal stories surrounding Conall. Another, 'Óebfhinn's dream', attempts to explain the geographical distribution of

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<sup>1018</sup> O'Rahilly, *Early Irish history and mythology*, pp 184–5.

<sup>1019</sup> Byrne, *Irish kings*, p. 168.

<sup>1020</sup> Byrne, *Irish kings*, p. 202; Charles Doherty, 'Leth Cuinn and Leth Moga' in Duffy (ed.), *Encyclopedia*, pp 274–6, at 274.

<sup>1021</sup> O'Rahilly, *Early Irish history*, p. 185.

<sup>1022</sup> Sproule, 'Origins of the Éoganachta', p. 33.

<sup>1023</sup> Dillon, 'The story of the finding of Cashel' in *Ériu*, xvi (1952), pp 61–73.



Eóganachta branches, and to dismiss the western Eóganachta as intruders.<sup>1024</sup> The western branch, Eóganacht Locha Léin, provided provincial kings only rarely, and there is no agreement on whether this reflects the fact that they were only later grafted onto the Eóganachta genealogy,<sup>1025</sup> or that they were an older and poorer segment of the group that was slowly excluded from royal authority.<sup>1026</sup> The Eóganacht Chaisil in the east and (latterly) the Eóganacht Raithlinn in the south tended to be the most powerful branches of the confederacy.

The original names of some of the newly re-branded Eóganachta dynasties survive; Uí Choirpre Luachra became Eóganacht Locha Léin, Uí Echach Muman became Eóganacht Raithlinn, and Uí Éndai Áine became Eóganacht Áine, for instance.<sup>1027</sup> Despite the conscious effort that must have lain behind the creation and spread of this new identity, the Eóganachta were never quite able to live up to its pretensions. Leinster tended to fall under the domination of the Southern Uí Néill rather than the Eóganachta, who remained confined to Munster. The great achievement of the Eóganachta was in resisting the Uí Néill in Munster, not in leading Leth Moga against Leth Cuinn.

Leth Cuinn can also be interpreted as ‘chief’s half’, and Leth Moga as ‘slave’s half’, a fact that was noted by MacNeill to be ‘suggestive of ancient politics’, and that represents the real origin of the denominations.<sup>1028</sup> Since ‘Connachta’ did not actually mean descendants of Conn, but rather ‘chiefs’, ‘Eóganachta’ can only have been created in imitation of what the name was thought to mean. This has been shown by David Sproule, with reference to the fact that, unlike the Connachta, branches of the Eóganachta were distinguished from one another by the addition of a placename.<sup>1029</sup>

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<sup>1024</sup> Angela Bourke (ed.), *The field day anthology of Irish writing, vol. IV: Irish women’s writing and traditions* (Cork, 2002), p. 181; M.A. O’Brien (ed.), *Corpus Genealogiarum Hiberniae vol. 1* (Dublin, 1962), pp 195–6; Ó Cróinín, ‘Ireland, 400–800’ in Ó Cróinín (ed.), *N.H.I. I*, p. 222.

<sup>1025</sup> Letitia Campbell, ‘Eóganachta’ in Duffy (ed.), *Encyclopedia*, pp 155–6, at 155.

<sup>1026</sup> Ó Corráin, *Ireland before the Normans*, p. 1.

<sup>1027</sup> Sproule, ‘Origins of the Eóganachta’, p. 33.

<sup>1028</sup> MacNeill, quoted in Byrne, *Irish kings*, p. 168.

<sup>1029</sup> Sproule, ‘Origins of the Eóganachta’, pp 31–2.

The Eóganachta domination of Munster ended in the late tenth century with the rise of the Dál Cais. Like 'Eóganachta', the name 'Dál Cais' pointed to an imaginary ancestor whose purpose was to provide the dynasty with a prestigious pedigree and so justification for a claim to provincial kingship. Meaning 'the share of Cas', the imagined eponym was made to be the son of Conall Echluath, a figure reputedly responsible for the conquest of what is modern County Clare from Connacht. More importantly, Cas was reckoned to be sixth in descent from Cormac Cass. Cormac Cass was also invented by the genealogists, and made a brother of Eógan Már, a highly prestigious position. This scheme was advanced in the tenth century, as the Dál Cais sought to 'become the Eóganachta' and take their place as the kings of Munster.<sup>1030</sup>

The real origins of the Dál Cais were modest. They belonged to the Déisi, a subject people (in fact their name means just that) with two branches in Munster.<sup>1031</sup> The name Déisi is still associated with the southern branch, Déisi Muman, in County Waterford and southern Tipperary. It was the other branch, the western Déisi, from whom the Dál Cais descended. Before rebranding as Dál Cais, they constituted the northern half of the western Déisi, and were known as Déisi Tuaiscirt.<sup>1032</sup> They migrated northwards from eastern County Limerick, conquering eastern County Clare in the early eighth century.<sup>1033</sup>

In the tenth century, two Dál Cais segments contested the kingship; the Clann Óengusso and the Uí Thairdelbaig. While the Clann Óengusso had dominated the kingship up to the mid-tenth century, it would be under the Uí Thairdelbaig that the Dál Cais reached the zenith of their power. It appears the Uí Thairdelbaig seized the office for the first time in 934,<sup>1034</sup> but also that they enjoyed prominence and positioned themselves for the

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<sup>1030</sup> Duffy, *Brian Boru and the battle of Clontarf* (Dublin, 2013), p. 39.

<sup>1031</sup> Dan M. Wiley, 'Déisi' in Duffy (ed.), *Encyclopedia*, p. 122.

<sup>1032</sup> Wiley, 'Dál Cais' in Duffy (ed.), *Encyclopedia*, p. 121.

<sup>1033</sup> Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Dál Cais' in Connolly (ed.), *The Oxford companion to Irish history*, p. 143.

<sup>1034</sup> Ó Corráin, *Ireland before the Normans*, p. 114.

kingship much earlier the same century.<sup>1035</sup> It was Cennétig mac Lorcáin of Uí Thairdelbaig (d. 951), who represented their first drive for provincial power and he was, by the time of his death, king of Dál Cais and ‘*rigdamna Cassil*’.<sup>1036</sup>

The Dál Cais enjoyed two periods of pre-eminence in Irish politics. The first, 977–1014, as Brian Bóraime (son of Cennétig) broke the back of Uí Néill power, and the second, 1068–1114, when his descendants Toirdelbach and Muirchertach dominated across the island. The periods when the Dál Cais struggled the most, after their rise to power, 1014–68, 1114–38, and 1151 onwards, were marked by dynastic division and the efforts of Eóganachta dynasties to reclaim the provincial kingship. As will be shown, Brian Bóraime developed a strategy for his kingship that built on his predecessors. It was Brian’s template that was followed by Toirdelbach and Muirchertach to re-establish the Dál Cais ascendancy, but commitment to this strategy also led them to neglect growing problems elsewhere.

In this chapter, it will be shown that pre-eminence in, and dominance throughout, Leth Moga, was the primary strategic focus of the kings of Munster, and equally, of its derivatives Thomond and Desmond. The whole scheme of Leth Cuinn and Leth Moga was created in the eighth century at the latest as an expression of the spheres of influence of Tara and Cashel, metonyms of the Uí Néill and the Eóganachta, the latter operating in imitation of the former. It was, as such, antiquated by the twelfth century when the Southern Uí Néill of Meath were in terminal decline and the Dál Cais had replaced the Eóganachta as the dominant party in Munster.

Pursuit of dominance over Leinster, whose flirtation with national power in the shape of Diarmait mac Máel na mBó ended in 1072, did not provide either the Uí Briain of Dál Cais or the Meic Cárthaig of Eóganacht Chaisil with a solid basis to challenge the rising

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<sup>1035</sup> Ó Corráin, *Ireland before the Normans*, pp 114–15; Duffy, *Brian Boru and the battle of Clontarf*, p. 64.

<sup>1036</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 951.2; *Chron. Scot.* 951.3.

powers of Connacht and the Northern Uí Néill; nor did a wary focus on the Southern Uí Néill. More to the point was the identification of Connacht as a rising threat, but the ultimate failure to incorporate the midlands provinces into the power bloc was rooted in the view of Leth Moga as a primary extra-provincial sphere of power.

Efforts to resurrect the full provincial kingship of Munster after the 1118 partition had mixed results, but the English invasion had the effect of confirming the fall from grace. Though included in Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair's overlordship by the Treaty of Windsor in 1175, both Thomond and Desmond were earmarked for conquest by official grants at the Council of Oxford in 1177. The Uí Briain and Meic Cárthaig held on to rump territories more in keeping with the Book of Ballycummin definitions of Thomond and Desmond than the expanded kingdoms of the mid-twelfth century, but they were permanently sundered from one another by the capture of much of Munster by the English.

### **[3.1: The kings of Leth Moga]**

Brian Bóraime's career was the template for his descendants as they sought to emulate his success. The strategies and priorities the 'emperor of the Irish' evinced as he ascended the hierarchy of kingships were followed closely by his successors, especially Toirdelbach and Muirchertach Úa Briain.<sup>1037</sup> With their dominance of Leth Moga and Ireland in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries, which must in some degree rest on this plan of attack, analysis of that period must necessarily encompass the events of Brian's career. Notwithstanding its initial success, commitment to Brian's strategy led to inflexibility and ultimately undermined Munster's ascendancy.

In 944, at a time when Brian's father Cennéitig mac Lorcaín was king, the term 'Thomond' first appears in the annals.<sup>1038</sup> Thomond here represented all modern County Clare, including the lands of Corco mRuad (Corcomroe) and Corco Baiscinn, but no

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<sup>1037</sup> 'The Book of Armagh' T.C.D. MS 52, folio 16 verso: '*imperator Scotorum*'.

<sup>1038</sup> A.U. 944.7; Duffy, 'Brian Bóruma [Brian Boru]' in *O.D.N.B.*, accessed online (<https://doi-org.jproxy.nuim.ie/10.1093/ref:odnb/3377>) (4 January 2020).

more. Thomond's appearance as a distinct entity is symptomatic of a Dál Cais challenge for the kingship of Cashel; indeed, it was in the report of a defeat to the reigning Eóganacht Caisil that the term appeared. Kingship of Thomond would be the base from which Cennéitig's sons Mathgamain and Brian would challenge for the provincial kingship as the first extension of their authority.

Mathgamain made his move in 967, marching east and camping around Cashel. It was the Eóganacht Raithlinn who offered opposition in the person of Máel Muad mac Brain, allying with the Uí Fidgeinte and the Norse of Limerick. Mathgamain defeated them at a location near Limerick Junction.<sup>1039</sup> This clearly won him the provincial kingship as he is styled 'king of Caisel' in *A.U.* description of the victory, and as leading 'the men of Munster', in another account of events later the same year.<sup>1040</sup> It may have taken him a while to become secure in that authority and he simply deposed Máel Muad instead of killing him.<sup>1041</sup>

Brian worked to step into the kingship of Munster in a similar manner. In 977, he tackled the coalition responsible for his brother's death.<sup>1042</sup> This once again comprised the Norse of Limerick and the Uí Fidgeinte, under the stewardship of Máel Muad, who had resurrected his career by killing Mathgamain and was again described as 'king of Caisel',<sup>1043</sup> though elsewhere 'king of Desmuman' and 'king of Uí Echach' (alias Eóganacht Raithlinn).<sup>1044</sup> Brian succeeded in toppling Máel Muad, and this time the latter was killed. Like Mathgamain, Brian had some way to go to establish control of the province after his initial victory and the fact that he 'rested on his oars' for the next four years reflects this consolidation.<sup>1045</sup>

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<sup>1039</sup> Ó Corráin, *Ireland before the Normans*, pp 116–117.

<sup>1040</sup> *A.U.* 967.5: 'ri Caissil'; *A.F.M.* 967.13: 'co Feraibh Mumhan'.

<sup>1041</sup> See, for instance, *A.F.M.* 967.13, 969.9, 970.8; *Ann. Inisf.* 968.1.

<sup>1042</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 977.2, 977.3; *Ann. Tig.* 977.2; *Chron. Scot.* 977.1.

<sup>1043</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 978.2: 'ri Cassil'.

<sup>1044</sup> *A.U.* 978.2: 'ri Desmuman'; *Ann. Tig.* 978.1: 'rí h-Úa n-Eachach'; *Chron. Scot.* 978.2: 'rí H. nEchach'.

<sup>1045</sup> Ó Corráin, *Ireland before the Normans*, p. 121.

When Mathgamain became king of Munster, his next move was to extend control over the rest of Leth Moga. Shortly after the victory that established Mathgamain in 967, Murchad mac Finn, the king of Leinster, moved against Osraige to demonstrate his supremacy. In response, Mathgamain brought his army, described as the men of Munster, the Norse of Waterford, the Éile, and the Déisi Muman, to support the Osraige. The Osraige joined his banner, and Murchad mac Finn was repelled.<sup>1046</sup>

Despite ongoing conflict between Osraige and Leinster parties in subsequent years, the king of Munster did not expand his authority in this region.<sup>1047</sup> His lack of follow-up in this sphere is explained by his weakness in his own province, exemplified by Máel Muad's capture of 'the hostages of Mumu' in Limerick in 974,<sup>1048</sup> and Mathgamain's own capture and execution at the same hands in 976.<sup>1049</sup>

Leth Moga was also Brian's priority after acceding to the kingship of Munster. In 982, in his return to action, he raided Osraige, though he lost a notable portion of his men and he failed to compel their submission.<sup>1050</sup> Nonetheless, Osraige was the first province outside Munster to give up hostages to Brian: they did so in 983, when their king Gilla Phátraic mac Donnchada was captured by the king of Munster.<sup>1051</sup> More dubiously, *Ann. Inisf.* also reports that Brian took the hostages of Leinster on that occasion.<sup>1052</sup>

Brian may have taken hostages from some of the less significant dynasties in Leinster, but the extensive preparations for a major campaign against Dublin and Leinster in 984 give lie to the idea that he was already in control of the region. He exchanged hostages with Gothbrith and Maccus, the joint kings of Man and the Hebrides, 'as a guarantee of both together providing a hosting to attack Áth Cliath'.<sup>1053</sup> The expedition took place,

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<sup>1046</sup> *A.F.M.* 967.12.

<sup>1047</sup> *A.F.M.* 972.9, 972.11, 972.12.

<sup>1048</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 974.5.

<sup>1049</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 976.3.

<sup>1050</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 982.2.

<sup>1051</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 983.4.

<sup>1052</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 983.4.

<sup>1053</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 984.2: 'coro chloemclaiset giallu and & mc. Cennetich im imthairec sluagid do dul ar Áth Cliath'.

and the victims of the coalition included the Uí Chennselaig and Osraige as well as Dublin. The efficacy of the campaign is suggested by the release of Gilla Phátraic from captivity once it was finished.<sup>1054</sup>

Whether 983 or 984, Brian's progression outside Munster made him lord of Leth Moga first. He was involved in conflict with Connacht and Meath around the same time, but he did not take hostages from them. When Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill of the Southern Uí Néill pre-emptively cut down the sacred tree at the Dál Cais inauguration site in 982, one description reports only that 'the tree of Mag Adar was broken by Leth Cuinn'.<sup>1055</sup>

Evidently, by opposition Brian was to be identified with Leth Moga.

Mathgamain never enjoyed the security to advance his power any further afield, but Brian's success in Leth Moga quickly brought him into contact with the Uí Néill and the rest of Ireland. This does not mean that his authority was universally and immediately accepted in the south; he had to work continuously to maintain his supremacy.<sup>1056</sup>

Nonetheless, Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill was forced to recognise Brian's parity in 997, and mutually exclusive spheres of influence were agreed.<sup>1057</sup> Leth Cuinn and Leth Moga was the arrangement selected.

To satisfy this arrangement, Máel Sechnaill had to deliver the hostages of Leinster and Dublin, which he held, to Brian, while later Brian delivered the hostages of Connacht to the Southern Uí Néill king. In fact, he first had to capture them to be able to mirror Máel Sechnaill's action.<sup>1058</sup> It is surely remarkable that a scheme developed to recognise Eóganachta and Uí Néill spheres of influence more than a century before was considered preferable to a new formulation reflecting currently held territories, even if it meant a

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<sup>1054</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 984.2.

<sup>1055</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 982.4: '*Bile Maige Adar do brissiud do Leith Chuind*'; *Ann. Tig.* 982.4; *Chron. Scot.* 982.4.

<sup>1056</sup> For instance, he was forced to retaliate against a raid by the Déise in 985 (*Ann. Inisf.* 985.2), he imprisoned a son of Mathgamain in 986 (*Ann. Inisf.* 986.2), and in 987 he took hostages from various parties in Desmond 'as a guarantee of the banishment of robbers and lawless people therefrom' (*Ann. Inisf.* 987.2).

<sup>1057</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 997.2; *A.F.M.* 997.7.

<sup>1058</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 997.2, 998.2; *Cog. Gaedhel*, pp 108–9.

less complicated frontier. It shows how ingrained the notion of a twofold division along the Esker Riada had become, and why it would survive Brian and remain important as late as the twelfth century.

Brian had spent some time establishing control over Connacht before the deal. In one aspect of this, too, he would be imitated by his successors: he launched fleets on the Shannon for the purpose. In 983, for example, his forces sailed up the river to target Connacht, albeit without taking hostages.<sup>1059</sup> He was more successful in 988, bringing a fleet of three hundred as far as Lough Ree, and from there attacking both Connacht and Meath.<sup>1060</sup> The same process was followed in 993,<sup>1061</sup> and probably in 998 as well, when the hostages of Connacht were taken by Brian for Máel Sechnaill's benefit.<sup>1062</sup> In his unsuccessful efforts to stall Brian's advance in 1001, Máel Sechnaill built 'a great obstruction' on the Shannon.<sup>1063</sup>

Leth Moga did not satisfy Brian's ambitions of course, and the agreement with Máel Sechnaill eventually broke down. After Brian secured Máel Sechnaill's submission, he embarked on campaigns to what would later be called 'the North'.<sup>1064</sup> The way these campaigns were conducted provided another template for Brian's successors. For instance, in 1002, he marched to Dundalk with the idea of using it as a location from which both the Ulaid and the Cenél nEógain could be targeted.<sup>1065</sup> On another occasion, in 1005, Brian led his forces to Armagh, this time marching over Assaroe.<sup>1066</sup> Once again he was looking to take hostages from the northern kingdoms, but he had other business as well. While there, he endorsed the primacy of the church of Armagh, making a

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<sup>1059</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 983.2.

<sup>1060</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 988.2; *Cog. Gaedhel*, pp 108–9.

<sup>1061</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 993.2.

<sup>1062</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 998.2.

<sup>1063</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1001.5: 'Mórimme mór'; *A.U.* 1001.6; *Ann. Tig.* 1001.4; On the use of maritime fleets and inland waterway navies, see Etchingham, 'Skuldelev 2 and viking-age ships and fleets in Ireland' in Emer Purcell, MacCotter, Julianne Nyhan & John Sheehan (eds), *Clerics, kings and vikings: essays in honour of Donnchadh Ó Corráin* (Dublin, 2015), pp 79–90 at 82–7.

<sup>1064</sup> See *The Uí Néill and the North*, pp 124–5.

<sup>1065</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1002.4; *Ann. Tig.* 1002.1; *A.U.* 1002.8; *Cog. Gaedhel*, pp 132–3.

<sup>1066</sup> *A.U.* 1005.7; *A.F.M.* 1005.8; *Ann. Inisf.* 1005.6; *Cog. Gaedhel*, pp 134–7.



substantial donation in gold, and in return Armagh endorsed Brian's own political primacy.<sup>1067</sup> Every aspect of Brian's approach to the north would re-surface later in the eleventh century.

It would be some time before Brian's successors were able to adopt his model for extending their power across the island, because Munster itself was a contested province for a generation. After Brian died at Clontarf in 1014, two of his sons, Donnchad and Tadc, contended for the kingship. Donnchad, who survived an assassination attempt in 1019, had Tadc killed in 1023.<sup>1068</sup> Tadc's son, Toirdelbach, subsequently took up the mantle of challenging Donnchad. It would be a long time before Toirdelbach won out, but in 1063 he successfully deposed Donnchad and the latter went on pilgrimage to Rome, where he died in 1064.<sup>1069</sup>

Just as Mathgamain and Brian followed the traditional Éóganachta political philosophy by attempting to extend authority eastward through Osraige and Leinster, so too did Toirdelbach úa Briain imitate them in the late eleventh century. Toirdelbach had more reason than the others to focus on Leinster, though, as he was assisted in his campaigns for the kingship by Diarmait mac Máel na mBó. Diarmait was the first king of Leinster to receive a title that acknowledged sway as extensive as kingship of Leth Moga in his obituary (under 1072)<sup>1070</sup> and the alliance he formed with Toirdelbach úa Briain was 'a decisive factor' in placing Brian's grandson in power.<sup>1071</sup>

Diarmait's supremacy in Leth Moga rested on Toirdelbach's loyalty. Toirdelbach is recorded to have taken 'valuables' from Leinster in 1068 and 1070, and these represent *túarastal*.<sup>1072</sup> The suggestion that he also took hostages in *Ann. Inisf.* may be a deliberate

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<sup>1067</sup> Denis Casey takes a different view of the relationship between Brian and Armagh. See Casey, 'Brian Boru, the Book of Armagh and the Irish church in the tenth and eleventh centuries', in Duffy (ed.), *Medieval Dublin XVI* (Dublin, 2017), pp 103–21.

<sup>1068</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1019.6, 1023.3; *A.F.M.* 1023.6.

<sup>1069</sup> *A.F.M.* 1064.6; *Ann. Tig.* 1064.2; *Ann. Inisf.* 1064.5; *A.U.* 1064.4; *A.L.C.* 1064.3.

<sup>1070</sup> *A.F.M.* 1072.3; *Ann. Tig.* 1072.1; *Chron. Scot.* 1072.1; *A.U.* 1072.4; *A.L.C.* 1072.1; *Ann. Inisf.* 1072.2.

<sup>1071</sup> Flanagan, 'High-kings with opposition, 1072–1166', p. 899.

<sup>1072</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1068.5; 1070.8.

attempt to misrepresent the relationship between the two men (see below), or it may have been a mutual exchange of hostages as a guarantee of continued good faith.<sup>1073</sup> Either way, Toirdelbach supported Diarmait when the latter was challenged within Leinster in 1071,<sup>1074</sup> while later the same year Diarmait came to Munster to endorse Toirdelbach once again.<sup>1075</sup>

Diarmait mac Maél na mBó died at the Battle of Odba against Conchobar úa Máel Sechlainn in 1072, clearing the way for Toirdelbach to expand his influence. The Munster-centric Annals of Inisfallen are the most important (and at times the only) source for these events, and they illustrate, through their presentation and omissions, what facts Toirdelbach sought to repress. For instance, they are among the collections that do not allow Diarmait mac Máel na mBó title to Leth Moga, instead calling him ‘king of Laigin and Osraige’.<sup>1076</sup> Even earlier than that, expeditions undertaken by Toirdelbach on Diarmait’s behalf, taking the hostages of Osraige and parts of Leinster, are presented as independent campaigns.<sup>1077</sup> They also report that Toirdelbach supported Úa Máel Sechlainn at the Battle of Odba, an assertion that does not appear elsewhere and that is not generally accepted.<sup>1078</sup>

In other words, being a subordinate king in Leth Moga was a politically sensitive position for Toirdelbach, because it was an area where the kings of Munster had traditionally dominated. For the same reason, success in that sphere brought prestige to the Laigin. It may be noted that, in *The Deeds*, Diarmait Mac Murchada laments ‘the great shame which the men of Leth Cuinn had previously inflicted on the men of Leth Moga in his territory’, and his desire to avenge it.<sup>1079</sup> If the self-identification of the

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<sup>1073</sup> See *Women and Marriage*, pp 370–1.

<sup>1074</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1071.3.

<sup>1075</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1071.6.

<sup>1076</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1072.2

<sup>1077</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1070.8, 1070.9.

<sup>1078</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1072.2.

<sup>1079</sup> *The Deeds*, p. 54 ll 45–7: ‘*Que cil de Leth Coin firent jadis A ces de Leth Munthe en son país*’.

Laigin as men of Leth Moga did not begin with Diarmait mac Máel na mBó, it is likely to have been bolstered by his dominance over Munster and Toirdelbach úa Briain.

Toirdelbach úa Briain made Leth Moga his number-one priority after the fall of Diarmait mac Máel na mBó. According to *Ann. Inisf.*, the leaders of Leinster, Dublin, Osraige, and Meath had all acknowledged his overlordship by the end of 1072.<sup>1080</sup> The inclusion of Meath may be dismissed because the named leader of that province was ‘the son of Conchobar Ua Máel Sechlainn’, rather than Conchobar himself, and the latter did not die until 1073.<sup>1081</sup> Furthermore, it was in the wake of Conchobar’s death that Toirdelbach advanced into Meath for the first time, on an occasion when his destination was recorded simply as Leth Cuinn in some accounts.<sup>1082</sup> As such, Leth Moga can again be seen as the next rank up from provincial kingship for kings of Munster (and kings of Leinster, should any seek to emulate Diarmait mac Máel na mBó).

Muirchertach Úa Briain became king of Munster in 1086, briefly sharing the honour with two of his brothers, Tadc and Diarmait. Tadc died of an illness ‘in his father’s bed’ just a month after Toirdelbach, and Diarmait fled Munster to find support.<sup>1083</sup> He went to Leinster, where Domnall mac Máel na mBó, brother of the slain Diarmait, was king. Muirchertach advanced against Leinster and the forces met in the ‘Battle of Ráith Etair’, perhaps near the hill of Howth, County Dublin, where Muirchertach enjoyed a significant victory.<sup>1084</sup> Both Diarmait Úa Briain’s resort to Leinster and Muirchertach’s speedy reaction emphasised the primacy of the Leth Moga orientation.

Muirchertach moved against Connacht next, in 1088, but he had not taken the hostages of the province before its king, Ruaidrí na Saide Buide Úa Conchobair, joined Domnall Mac Lochlainn and the army of the North in an invasion of Thomond. The forces of the

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<sup>1080</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1072.4, 1072.6.

<sup>1081</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1072.6: ‘*mc. Conchobuir h-Ui Maíl Sechnaill*’; *Ann. Tig.* 1073.1; *A.U.* 1073.2; *A.F.M.* 1073.4.

<sup>1082</sup> *A.F.M.* 1073.9; *A.L.C.* 1073.2.

<sup>1083</sup> *A.F.M.* 1086.9; *Ann. Inisf.* 1086.5, 1086.7; *A.U.* 1086.4; *A.L.C.* 1086.2, 1086.3.

<sup>1084</sup> *A.F.M.* 1087.8.

coalition burned Limerick and Mungarit, and ‘demolished’ Kincora, before being paid off by Úa Briain.<sup>1085</sup> It appears both that the attack was unexpected and that Úa Briain’s priorities lay elsewhere: *Ann. Inisf.* reports that there was ‘a hosting by Muirchertach into Laigin, and the Leth Cuinn came in his rear, burning Luimnech and Mungarit, and they levelled the fort of Cenn Corad and took captives from it’.<sup>1086</sup>

Like Brian Bóraime, both Toirdelbach and Muirchertach moved against the midlands after Leth Moga. Having established control of Leinster and Osraige in 1072, Toirdelbach led his army ‘into Leth-Chuinn’ in 1073.<sup>1087</sup> The death of Conchobar úa Máel Sechlainn at the hands of members of his own family aided the king of Munster in establishing authority over Meath;<sup>1088</sup> the fact that Toirdelbach plundered his grave and brought his head back to Munster points to the recollection of Brian Bóraime’s contest with Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill, and the expectation that Meath would be the primary obstacle to any wider expansion plans.<sup>1089</sup>

With Meath’s submission assured, Úa Briain marched west to coerce hostages from the Connachta. He took them from the Uí Chonchobair of Síl Muiredaig, the Uí Flaithbertaigh of west Connacht, and the Uí Ruairc of Uí Briúin Bréifne, reflecting the delicate balance of power in that province in 1073.<sup>1090</sup> It was with this relatively easy campaign that Toirdelbach extended his hold over the midlands, and only occasionally did he need to re-assert himself to maintain it. In 1076, for example, he briefly imprisoned Ruaidrí na Saide Buide Úa Conchobair, before releasing him and giving him *túarastal*.<sup>1091</sup> In 1084, it was Donnchad Cail Úa Ruairc ‘and the people of east

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<sup>1085</sup> *A.F.M.* 1088.10; *Ann. Inisf.* 1088.4; *Ann. Tig.* 1088.3; *Chron. Scot.* 1088.1; *A.U.* 1088.2; *A.L.C.* 1088.1.

<sup>1086</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1088.4: ‘*Sluaged la Muirchertach i l-Laighniu, co táncatar Leth Cuind dara h-éssi coro loiscset Luimnech & Mungarit & coro múirset cathir Cind Chorad & co rucsat bragti as*’.

<sup>1087</sup> *A.F.M.* 1073.9; *A.L.C.* 1073.2.

<sup>1088</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1073.1; *Chron. Scot.* 1073.1; *Ann. Inisf.* 1072.4; *A.U.* 1073.2; *A.L.C.* 1073.1; *A.F.M.* 1073.4.

<sup>1089</sup> *A.F.M.* 1073.6; *Ann. Tig.* 1073.1; *Chron. Scot.* 1073.1.

<sup>1090</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1073.4; *A.U.* 1073.4.

<sup>1091</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1076.2; *A.F.M.* 1076.6; *A.U.* 1076.4; *A.L.C.* 1076.4.

Connaught' who challenged him, but Úa Briain emerged successful and Úa Ruairc was killed.<sup>1092</sup> With the midlands submitting so quickly, Toirdelbach was able to turn his attention northwards.

Muirchertach's campaigns against Connacht and Meath were more extensive than those of Toirdelbach. The increased difficulty in bringing the midlands to heel may reflect the strengthened grip of the Síl Muiredaig on Connacht, or the fact that both provinces cooperated in opposition to him. As noted above, Muirchertach had already begun his challenge for overkingship of Connacht in 1088, before Domnall Mac Lochlainn invaded Thomond. Mac Lochlainn notably took the hostages of Connacht before moving against Munster, but between then and 1095 Úa Briain engaged Connacht every year, eventually succeeding in adding the kingdom to his domain.<sup>1093</sup>

Following his great-grandfather's example, Muirchertach launched fleets on the Shannon to great effect. These could be used to target Connacht and Meath simultaneously. An entire campaigning season, from 6 January to 21 November 1095, was spent in the siege of the unidentified Dún Tais, probably in Meath,<sup>1094</sup> while a fleet on Lough Ree forced hostages from the Conmaicne and Síl Muiredaig.<sup>1095</sup> On another occasion, in 1092, the fleet of Munster plundered Clonmacnoise while Úa Briain went over land into Connacht to take hostages, though the attack on Clonmacnoise may represent an action against Connacht, and not Meath.<sup>1096</sup>

The drawn-out nature of Muirchertach's efforts is illustrative of the difficulties he faced; Muirchertach's forces were frequently repelled by Úa Conchobair and Úa Máel Sechlainn, who proved that the Shannon could work just as well in the opposite

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<sup>1092</sup> *A.F.M.* 1084.8, 1084.9; *Ann. Inisf.* 1084.9; *Ann. Tig.* 1084.1, 1084.3; *Chron. Scot.* 1084.1; *A.U.* 1084.5, 1086.6; *A.L.C.* 1084.5, 1084.6.

<sup>1093</sup> *A.F.M.* 1088.10; *Ann. Inisf.* 1088.4; *Ann. Tig.* 1088.3; *Chron. Scot.* 1088.1; *A.U.* 1088.2; *A.L.C.* 1088.1.

<sup>1094</sup> *A.F.M.*, ii, pp 948–9 & n. t.

<sup>1095</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1095.3, 1095.6.

<sup>1096</sup> *A.F.M.* 1092.18; *Ann. Tig.* 1090.6; *Chron. Scot.* 1092.5; *A.U.* 1092.2; *A.L.C.* 1092.1; For the associations of Clonmacnoise, see *Comparative Analysis*, pp 490–2.

direction. In 1089 the passage of the Munster fleet was blocked by Ruaidrí na Saide Buide Úa Conchobair, forcing the ships to Athlone where Úa Máel Sechlainn ‘was in readiness to attack them’.<sup>1097</sup> Similarly, in 1090, Úa Máel Sechlainn raided Ormond and Úa Conchobair burned Dunachip near Limerick.<sup>1098</sup>

At length, Úa Briain triumphed over the midlands alliance. When Úa Flaithbertaigh blinded Úa Conchobair in 1092, it provided a perfect opportunity to make gains, and Úa Briain ‘took the high-kingship of Connacht’.<sup>1099</sup> He faced numerous challenges maintaining that position and met them with an experimental approach. He placed an Úa hEidin king of Uí Fiachrach Aidne in the kingship of Síl Muiredaig,<sup>1100</sup> the prerogative of the Uí Chonchobair, and on another occasion drove at least a portion of the Síl Muiredaig out of Connacht.<sup>1101</sup> When these ideas failed, he trialled an Úa Ruairc client king of Connacht, minus some key territories which were retained in his own hand.<sup>1102</sup>

Once Connacht was under control, it was only a matter of time before Úa Briain turned his attention to Meath and there too he met with success. 1094 proved to be a decisive year on this front as, on the pretext of a dispute with the Norse leadership of Dublin, Úa Briain marched north. He crossed the border into Meath and killed Domnall Úa Máel Sechlainn in a surprise attack. Úa Máel Sechlainn was highly regarded and his death was met with disbelief in some chronicles. *Ann. Tig.* calls him ‘overking of Tara, and moreover champion of Ireland’, adding an unusually emotional note, ‘this year is wretched!’ to emphasise the point.<sup>1103</sup> Thereafter Meath too joined Úa Briain’s banner,

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<sup>1097</sup> *A.F.M.* 1089.8: ‘*ba h-annsidhe baoi Ua Maoilechlainn .i. Domhnall mac Floinn, rí Temhrach in erlainhe for a c-cind*’; *Ann. Tig.* 1089.1; *Chron. Scot.* 1089.2.

<sup>1098</sup> *A.F.M.* 1090.7, 1090.8; *Ann. Tig.* 1090.3; *Chron. Scot.* 1090.3.

<sup>1099</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1092.3: ‘*Murchertach h-Ua Briain do gabail ardrige Chonnacht*’.

<sup>1100</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1093.2; *A.F.M.* 1092.17; *Ann. Tig.* 1092.5; *Chron. Scot.* 1092. 3.

<sup>1101</sup> *A.F.M.* 1093.12; *Ann. Tig.* 1093.6; *Chron. Scot.* 1093.3; *A.U.* 1093.3; *A.L.C.* 1093.3.

<sup>1102</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1095.11.

<sup>1103</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1094.1: ‘*Domnall h-Úa MaelSechlainn, aird-righ Temrach & cosnumaidh Erenn archena. Infelix hícc annus!*’

and Domnall's successor Donnchad Úa Máel Sechlainn accepted twenty ounces of gold as a *túarastal* in 1095.<sup>1104</sup>

The situation confronting Toirdelbach in 1074 and Muirchertach in 1096 was the same as Brian Bóraime faced in 1002. All three men had prioritised *Leth Moga*, and then, with different degrees of difficulty, extended their control over Connacht and Meath. In each case, it was by following the strategies of predecessors that power had been achieved; such was Brian's success that he had no precedent to follow for expanding beyond *Leth Moga*. It was, therefore, only to Brian that Toirdelbach could look as he tried to gain influence in the parts of the island most remote from Munster, while Muirchertach could look to them both.

Toirdelbach made his only significant foray into what would become 'the North', that is, beyond Meath and Connacht, in 1075. Brian had marched to Dundalk in 1002; Toirdelbach went to Ardee.<sup>1105</sup> Brian went to demand hostages from the Ulaid and Cenél nEógain;<sup>1106</sup> Toirdelbach went 'to demand hostages from the Oirghialla and the Ulidians'.<sup>1107</sup> The difference between the targets no doubt represents the growing importance of the Airgíalla by the late eleventh century. In an unwanted additional parallel, both were unsuccessful. Brian came away only with terms of peace,<sup>1108</sup> while Toirdelbach's forces, led into battle by his son Muirchertach, were defeated by the Airgíalla.<sup>1109</sup>

The indefatigable Brian went northwards again in 1004 and 1005, but his grandson Toirdelbach did not exhibit the same energy. His efforts to subdue the northern kingdoms

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<sup>1104</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1095.6.

<sup>1105</sup> *A.F.M.* 1075.10; *Ann. Inisf.* 1002.4; *Ann. Tig.* 1002.1, 1075.3; *A.U.* 1002.8, 1075.2; *A.L.C.* 1075.2; *Cog. Gaedhel*, pp 132–3.

<sup>1106</sup> *A.U.* 1002.8: 'Brian and Mael Sechnaill led an army to Dún Delca to demand hostages from Aed and Eochaid, and they parted on terms of truce', translated from the Irish '*Slogad la Brian 7 la Mael Sechlainn co Dun Dealga do chuinnidh giall for Aedh 7 for Eochaid coro scarsatar fo osadh*'.

<sup>1107</sup> *A.F.M.* 1075.10: '*co rángattar co h-Ath Fhir Diadh do chuingidh giall for Oirghiallaibh, & for Ultaihb*'.

<sup>1108</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1002.4; *Ann. Tig.* 1002.1; *A.U.* 1002.8; *Cog. Gaedhel*, pp 132–3.

<sup>1109</sup> *A.F.M.* 1075.10; *Ann. Tig.* 1075.3; *A.U.* 1075.2; *A.L.C.* 1075.2.

were forestalled by the 1075 defeat, and rather than marching again he took the more cautious option of fostering positive relations with the Ulaid. When the king of Ulaid Donn Sléibe Úa hEochada was deposed in 1078, he travelled to Úa Briain's house in Thomond.<sup>1110</sup> He was soon back in his kingship (without Úa Briain's help), but in 1080 he again travelled to Munster with his entourage to receive *túarastal*.<sup>1111</sup> Something similar is reported elsewhere under 1081, though this may be the same event.<sup>1112</sup> At least some of the entourage were still in Limerick in 1083 when one of the *rigdomnai* of Ulaid, Áed Úa hEochada, drowned in the Shannon.<sup>1113</sup>

Such a policy on Toirdelbach's behalf may also be rooted in the supposition that Brian took the hostages of Ulaid 'from under the nose of Áed Ua Néill in 1003', an argument that rests on the evidence of *Cog. Gaedhel* rather than the annals.<sup>1114</sup> *Cog. Gaedhel* suggested that Brian 'took the hostages of all Ulaid since Áed failed to give him battle'.<sup>1115</sup> What precedent *Cog. Gaedhel* had for the underlying concept is open to question, but as the story was current in Toirdelbach's time, it again illustrates the latter's reverence for his grandfather's approach to national politics.

The courting of Úa hEochada may have been preparatory to another campaign, but it never happened. Toirdelbach fell ill in 1085 and died in 1086.<sup>1116</sup> It was left to his son Muirchertach to develop on and improve Munster's record north of Meath and Connacht. In this Muirchertach undoubtedly showed more energy than his father, launching armies into the North on a virtually annual basis from 1097 to 1104, and again in 1107, 1109, and 1113. These campaigns and their purpose are the subject of a section in 'The Uí Néill

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<sup>1110</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1078.5.

<sup>1111</sup> *A.F.M.* 1080.5: 'ar cend tuarasdail'.

<sup>1112</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1081.5.

<sup>1113</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1083.2; *Chron. Scot.* 1083.2; *A.U.* 1083.4.

<sup>1114</sup> Duffy, *Brian Boru and the battle of Clontarf*, pp 137–8.

<sup>1115</sup> *Cog. Gaedhel*, pp 134–5: 'gur gab gialla Ulað uile ó do féimid Aod cath dó'.

<sup>1116</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1085.2, 1086.2; *Chron. Scot.* 1086.2; *A.F.M.* 1086.9; *Ann. Inisf.* 1086.4; *A.U.* 1086.4; *A.L.C.* 1086.2, 1086.3.



and the North' chapter of this thesis, but here it will suffice to remark on the precedents Muirchertach was following.<sup>1117</sup>

In 1097, 1098, 1099, 1102, 1103, 1104, and 1109, Muirchertach went to Mag Conaille, Slíab Fuait, or Armagh itself. This closely followed Brian, who travelled to Dundalk in 1002 and Slíab Fuait in 1005, and Toirdelbach, who went to Ardee in 1075. On two other occasions, 1100 and 1101, Muirchertach tried to cross Assaroe into Cenél Conaill, just as Brian had attempted unsuccessfully in 1004.<sup>1118</sup> Brian had courted the Ulaid, as had Toirdelbach; Muirchertach tried to intercede in their rebellion against Uí Néill overlordship in 1103.<sup>1119</sup> 'Brian left twenty ounces of gold as an offering upon the altar of Ard-Macha', in 1005,<sup>1120</sup> and Muirchertach 'left eight ounces of gold upon the altar, and promised eight score cows' in 1103.<sup>1121</sup> On the whole, the campaigns could scarcely have resembled each other to a greater degree, and explanation of this rests in the deliberate imitation of Brian by his descendants.

The three men discussed above developed a formula for widespread control and an order of progression that saw them advance well past not only what the previous leaders of Dál Cais had achieved, but also what any king of Munster had done. Brian assumed a title that suited that achievement in '*imperator Scotorum*', but despite their success in replicating him it was primarily headship of Leth Moga that identified Toirdelbach and Muirchertach to contemporaries, even when they led armies that clearly included more than Munster, Osraige, and Leinster contingents.<sup>1122</sup>

Toirdelbach úa Briain achieved dominance of the midlands very quickly, but even though the army he brought against Ulaid and Airgíalla in 1075 was composed 'of the

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<sup>1117</sup> The Uí Néill and the North, pp 138–46.

<sup>1118</sup> *A.F.M.* 1003.5 (recté 1004).

<sup>1119</sup> *A.F.M.* 1103.10; *A.U.* 1103.5; *A.L.C.* 1103.3, 1103.4; *Ann. Tig.* 1103.3, 1103.4; *Ann. Inisf.* 1103.3, 1103.4; *Chron. Scot.* 1103.2.

<sup>1120</sup> *A.U.* 1005.7; *A.F.M.* 1005.8; *Ann. Inisf.* 1005.6; *Cog. Gaedhel*, pp 134–7.

<sup>1121</sup> *A.F.M.* 1103.10: '*co f-fargoibh ocht n-unga óir fórsan altoir, & ro gheall ocht fichit bó*'; *Ann. Tig.* 1103.3, 1103.4; *Chron. Scot.* 1103.2.

<sup>1122</sup> 'The Book of Armagh' T.C.D. MS 52, folio 16 verso.

Meathmen, Connaughtmen, the foreigners, the Leinstermen, the Osraighi, and the Munstermen' according to one collection,<sup>1123</sup> it was elsewhere called 'a hosting by Tairdelbach and by Leth Moga'.<sup>1124</sup> Toirdelbach is again presented as a king of Leth Moga or even king of Munster in descriptions of the events of 1084. It was while 'the men of Munster' went into Meath that Úa Ruairc marched into Thomond at their rear,<sup>1125</sup> while *Ann. Inisf.* records 'a hosting by Tairdelbach Ua Briain to Leth Cuinn against the son of [in] Cailech Ua Ruairc'.<sup>1126</sup>

It was the 'Munstermen, the Osraighi, and the Leinstermen' that comprised Muirchertach's army in 1094, when he was outmanoeuvred in Leinster by Domnall Mac Lochlainn.<sup>1127</sup> In 1097, the army Muirchertach led northward was described as 'the people of Leath-Mhogha, the men of Meath, and some of the Connaughtmen'.<sup>1128</sup> Though his corresponding campaign of 1098 saw him lead only 'the Munstermen',<sup>1129</sup> that of 1099 was 'led by the people of Leath-Mhogha', and when peace was made it was 'between the north of Ireland and Leath-Mhogha'.<sup>1130</sup> Without any change in the extent of his authority, Muirchertach could be said to lead 'the choice part of the men of Ireland' in 1100.<sup>1131</sup> Muirchertach's northern campaign of 1101 was 'with the men of Munster, Leinster, Osraighe, Meath, and Connaught' though he is titled only 'king of

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<sup>1123</sup> *A.F.M.* 1075.10: 'co f-Feraibh Mídhe co Connachtaibh, co n-Gallaibh, Laighnibh, Osraighibh, & Muimhneachaibh'.

<sup>1124</sup> *A.U.* 1075.2: 'Slogadh la Tairrdelbach & la Leth Mogha'; *A.L.C.* 1075.2.

<sup>1125</sup> *A.F.M.* 1084.8: 'An army was led by the men of Munster into Meath; and it was on that expedition Conchobhar Ua Cetfadh, the dignity and glory of Munster, died. In their absence the Conmhaicni went into Thomond, and burned enclosures and fortresses, and carried off innumerable spoils', translated from the Irish 'Slóicheadh lá Fíora Mumhan a Midhe, 7 as for an slóighedh-sin at-bath Conchobhar Ua Cétfádh, ordán 7 oireachus Mumhan eisidhe. Do-chodard dna, Conmhaicne i Tuadhmhúmhain dar a n-éisi, co ro loisccset dúine, 7 diognadha iomdha, 7 do-bhertsat crecha dirímhe'.

<sup>1126</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1084.2: 'Sluaged la Tairdelbach h-Ua m-Briain i Leth Cuind do Saigid m. Cailich h-Ú Ruairc'.

<sup>1127</sup> *A.F.M.* 1094.2: 'co f-Feraibh Mumhan co n-Osraighibh & Laighnibh'.

<sup>1128</sup> *A.F.M.* 1097.6: 'Slóighedh lá Muirchertach Ua Briain go Leith Modha, & co f-Feraibh Mídhe, & co n-dreim do Connacht'; *A.U.* 1097.6; *A.L.C.* 1097.2, 1097.3.

<sup>1129</sup> *A.F.M.* 1098.13: 'Slóiccedh lá Muimhneachaibh'.

<sup>1130</sup> *A.F.M.* 1099.7: 'Slóighedh lá Muirchertach Ua n-Briain, & la Leith Mhodha'; *A.U.* 1099.7; *A.L.C.* 1099.4.

<sup>1131</sup> *A.F.M.* 1100.6: 'Slóiccedh lá Muirchertach Ua m-Briain co forcla fer n-Ereann'; *Ann. Inisf.* 1100.8; *A.U.* 1100.4; *A.L.C.* 1100.3.

Munster' in the same entry.<sup>1132</sup> The description of the synod of Cashel the same year calls it 'a meeting of Leath-Mogha'.<sup>1133</sup>

In 1103 Úa Briain was recorded to have gone north with 'the men of Munster, Leinster, and Osraighe, and with the chiefs of Connaught, and the men of Meath'.<sup>1134</sup> Elsewhere this is given more concisely as 'the whole of Magh Nuadhat's half and the Connachtmen and the men of Meath'.<sup>1135</sup> Though his army was quite inclusive, in other words, it was thought of as Leth Moga first, with Connacht and Meath secondary participants. When Muirchertach divided his army into two groups on that expedition, he did so along the same lines.<sup>1136</sup>

Though in 1105 he marched with 'the greater part of the men of Ireland', and in 1109 he led the unusual combination of Munster, Meath, and Connacht,<sup>1137</sup> his forces in 1113 could be described alternatively as comprising 'the men of Munster, Leinster, and Connaught',<sup>1138</sup> 'the nobles of Ireland',<sup>1139</sup> and 'the people of Leath-Mhogha, both laity and clergy'.<sup>1140</sup> On another occasion when the clergy were involved, at Ráith Bressail in 1111, Úa Briain was said to be present with 'the chiefs of Leath-Mhogha' as his entourage.<sup>1141</sup>

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<sup>1132</sup> A.F.M. 1101.6: 'Mór-shluaichcedh lá Muirchertach Ua Briain, la rígh Mumhan, co f-Feraibh Mumhan, go Laighnibh, go n-Osraigibh, & co f-Feraibh Mídhe, & co f-Feraibh Connacht'.

<sup>1133</sup> A.F.M. 1101.5: 'Comhdhál Leithe Modha'; Ann. Tig. 1101.8; Chron. Scot. 1101.1.

<sup>1134</sup> A.F.M. 1103.10: 'Muirchertach Ua Briain co f-Feraibh Mumhan, co Laighnibh, co n-Osraigibh, co maithibh Connacht, & co f-Feraibh Mídhe'.

<sup>1135</sup> Ann. Tig. 1103.3: 'Sluagad la Murchertach h-Úa mBriáin & Leth Mogha Nuadhad uile, & Connachta & Fir Midhi'; Chron. Scot. 1103.2.

<sup>1136</sup> A.F.M. 1103.10; Ann. Tig. 1103.3, 1103.4; Chron. Scot. 1103.2; Ann. Inisf. 1103.3, 1103.4.

<sup>1137</sup> A.F.M. 1105.8: 'Muircertach Ua Briain co f-forccla fer n-Erenn', 1109.4: 'Sluaighed lá Muirchertach Ua m-Briain, co f-Feraibh Mumhan, & co b-Feraibh Mídhe, & Connachtuibh'; A.U. 1105.6; Ann. Tig. 1109.2.

<sup>1138</sup> A.F.M. 1113.9(ga), 1113.10: 'Slóighedh lá Muirchertach Ua m-Briain co Feraibh Mumhan co Laighnibh, & co Connachtaibh'.

<sup>1139</sup> Ann. Tig. 1113.2: 'Mor-sluaighed la Muirchertach h-Úa m-Briáin, la rígh n-Erenn & la mathaib Erenn'.

<sup>1140</sup> A.U. 1113.8: 'Slogadh la Muircertach H. m-Briain & la Leith Mogha eter loech & cleiriuch'; A.L.C. 1113.8, 1113.9.

<sup>1141</sup> A.F.M. 1111.5: 'Muircheartach Ua m-Briain co maithibh Leithe Mhodha'; Ann. Inisf. 1111.3; Ann. Tig. 1111.6; A.U. 1111.8; A.L.C. 1111.6.

It is not just the annals that reflect the continued relevance of the concept of Leth Moga. The *Cog. Gaedhel*, which records the events of Brian Bóraime's career, but which was written for Muirchertach, also references the title repeatedly.<sup>1142</sup> For example, in one passage Brian is given a speech arguing that the battles of Corc mac Cas were not only in defence of Munster, but of 'Leth Mogha in general'.<sup>1143</sup> Later, a strong emphasis is placed on the speedy accession of Brian to kingship of Leth Moga before he turned his attention to Connacht and Meath.<sup>1144</sup>

In the description of Brian's settlement with Máel Sechnaill in 988, *Cog. Gaedhel* gives us the remarkable extra information that Brian was able to lay claim to the hostages of Uí Fiachrach Aidne and Uí Maine in Connacht because their territories lay south of the Esker Riada.<sup>1145</sup> Finally, the description of Brian's challenge to Máel Sechnaill in 1002 is emphatically reported as a battle between Leth Moga and Leth Cuinn, albeit one where the Northern Uí Néill did not aid their southern cousins.<sup>1146</sup> Given the time of composition, it is appropriate to consider all this as evidence of late eleventh-century respect for the theory of Leth Moga as a distinct unit, as well as of Brian's career.

We therefore can not accept the generally held view that Brian's career changed political reality to such an extent that for Toirdelbach and Muirchertach Úa Briain, 'the concept of Leth Moga was no longer of major significance'.<sup>1147</sup> On the contrary in fact, the concept was so important it informed their order of progression and defined their political philosophy. Leth Moga remained the primary extra-provincial extension for a king of Munster in the eleventh and twelfth century, and it was Brian's example that served as a template for Toirdelbach and Muirchertach as they established their dominance. No matter how extensive the expansion of these men beyond the south of Ireland they

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<sup>1142</sup> See below, p. 236 & n. 1161.

<sup>1143</sup> *Cog. Gaedhel*, pp 66–7: 'ocus Let Moga co cotcend'.

<sup>1144</sup> *Cog. Gaedhel*, pp 108–9.

<sup>1145</sup> *Cog. Gaedhel*, pp 108–9.

<sup>1146</sup> *Cog. Gaedhel*, pp 118–21.

<sup>1147</sup> Charles Doherty, 'Leth Cuinn and Leth Moga' in Duffy (ed.), *Encyclopedia*, pp 274–6, at 276.

remained kings of Leth Moga to contemporaries, and it was Leth Moga, even more than Munster, that was regarded as their province.

### [3.2: A divided province]

The era in which the Uí Briain could dominate Leth Moga and Ireland alike was soon to end permanently. Connacht, under the Uí Chonchobair, and to a lesser extent the Northern Uí Néill under the Meic Lochlainn, turned the tables on the Uí Briain and dominated the twelfth century after 1114. Their eclipse in national politics was compounded by the rise of the Eóganachta-descended Meic Cárthaig, who provided a counterweight to the Uí Briain in Munster and whose success led to the division of the province into the rival halves of Thomond and Desmond.

The formal partition of Munster in 1118 may have changed the political dynamic of the province, but it was only gradually that Munster's new internal border superseded Leth Moga as the primary focus of the Uí Briain and Meic Cárthaig. For some time, up to 1151 in fact, Leth Moga dominated their attempts to expand authority. Enmity between the two royal families grew in ferocity in the interim, until it became clear that eastward expansion had to be subordinated to that concern.

The crisis that precipitated this change of fortunes began in 1114, when Muirchertach Úa Briain fell ill.<sup>1148</sup> He became 'a living skeleton', and the 'report of his illness went throughout Ireland'.<sup>1149</sup> Muirchertach's brother Diarmait 'assumed the kingship of Munster after him [Muirchertach], without permission', and 'he banished Muirchertach from Luimnech to Cell Da Lua'.<sup>1150</sup> Muirchertach's sickness was directly linked to a collapse of political stability in *Ann. Inisf.* The annalist reported that 'the king of Ireland was struck down by disease this year in the middle of summer. Alas, indeed, we find it

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<sup>1148</sup> *A.F.M.* 1114.10; *Ann. Inisf.* 1114.2; *Ann. Tig.* 1114.3; *Chron. Scot.* 1114.1; *A.U.* 1114.2; *A.L.C.* 1114.1, 1114.2.

<sup>1149</sup> *A.F.M.* 1114.9(ga), 1114.10: 'co n-dearna anobracht de'; *Ann. Tig.* 1114.3: 'co n-dechaidh a tasc fo Erinn'.

<sup>1150</sup> *A.F.M.* 1114.9(ga), 1114.10: 'Diarmait, im, do gabháil ríge Mumhan ina fhiadhnaisi gan ceadughadh'; *Ann. Inisf.* 1114.4: 'Muircertach do innarba dó a Luimnuch co Cill Da Lua'.

impossible to relate the multitude of these evils: battles and fights, raids and murders, violations of churches and holy places throughout Ireland, both of laity and clergy! Woe to him who brought upon us this sickness of the king of Ireland!’<sup>1151</sup>

The record of the subsequent years certainly vindicates that perspective, but in his efforts to recover his authority Muirchertach was as much to blame as anyone for the increased violence. His retirement at Killaloe lasted only until 1115, when he recovered sufficiently to resume active campaigning. Diarmait did not concede the kingship to the recuperated Muirchertach, and it was, as such, contested by them.

When Diarmait captured Muirchertach’s son and key ally Domnall, who was also king of Dublin and threatened to blind him, Muirchertach surrendered all claims to the kingship and retired once more. Despite a further attempted comeback in 1118, he was, by the time of his death the next year, something of a forgotten man, and he received a rather perfunctory obituary in the Munster annals.<sup>1152</sup>

The contest between Diarmait and Muirchertach distracted both parties from the threat posed by Connacht aggression, and Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair pressed his advantage. He launched a navy on the Shannon, to great success, and he also marched to Limerick twice to enforce his will.<sup>1153</sup> On the first occasion he installed a minor dynast as king of Thomond and later the same year, with this man proving difficult to manipulate, he killed him.<sup>1154</sup>

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<sup>1151</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1114.2: ‘*Galar do gabáil rig Éirend isin bliadain so i medon samraid. Uch tra imad na n-olc so nucu n-etam a n-inisin: catha & chongala, crecha & marbad duine, saraighthe cell & neimed fo Éirind eter tuaid & eclais! Mairg fo-uair duin in galar so rí Éirend!*’

<sup>1152</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1119.2; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1119.4; Duffy, “‘The western world’s tower of honour and dignity’”: the career of Muirchertach Ua Briain in context’ in Damian Bracken and Dagmar Ó Riain-Raedel (eds), *Ireland and Europe in the twelfth century: reform and renewal* (Dublin, 2006), pp 56–73 at 72–3.

<sup>1153</sup> *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1115.3, 1115.4, 1115.5; *Ann. Tig.* 1115.2; *A.F.M.* 1115.4; *A.L.C.* 1115.8; *A.U.* 1115.8.

<sup>1154</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1115.2; *A.F.M.* 1115.6; *Ann. Inisf.* 1115.9; *A.U.* 1115.4; *A.L.C.* 1115.5; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1115.1.

Whatever limited authority this individual, Domnall mac Taidc, had during his brief reign, Úa Conchobair was ultimately unable to topple Diarmait Úa Briain after the latter triumphed over his brother. Diarmait attacked Connacht vigorously, recognising the threat Úa Conchobair posed. He advanced into Connacht in 1116 and 1117, raiding and plundering as he went. He achieved little, and even suffered a defeat in Munster after Úa Conchobair sent a retaliatory party after him in 1117, but his actions briefly helped to stave off Uí Chonchobair dominance.

When Diarmait Úa Briain died in 1118, further contentions arose. Brian Úa Briain tried to take kingship of ‘Sliocht Eoghain’, or the Eóganachta, including the Meic Cárthaig, only to be struck down.<sup>1155</sup> Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair with his supporters and clients invaded Munster on the pretext of restoring Muirchertach Úa Briain to the kingship. Once present, though, Toirdelbach presided over the Treaty of Glanmire, which saw the first partition of Munster between Thomond and Desmond. Muirchertach was not raised to kingship but instead left on the side-line, as the sons of Diarmait Úa Briain were awarded Thomond, and Tadc Mac Cárthaig was raised to kingship of Desmond.<sup>1156</sup> The era of the two Munsters was now underway.

1118 may fairly be regarded as the culmination of a process with much deeper roots. As outlined in the introduction to this chapter, given its most limited definition Desmond was one of Munster’s fifths. It was now to take a more expansive sense; Munster south of a variable boundary that allowed the Uí Briain an extended Thomond reaching eastward to the border with Osraige. It was able to develop this semantic range because of the relatively recent relocation of the dynasties of Eóganacht Chaisil, especially the Meic Cárthaig, to the region. They provided a royal line for the new semi-provincial kingdom,

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<sup>1155</sup> *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1118.1; *A.F.M.* 1118.5; *Ann. Tig.* 1118.1.

<sup>1156</sup> *A.F.M.* 1118.6; *Ann. Inisf.* 1118.8; *A.U.* 1118.6; *A.L.C.* 1118.6, 1118.7.

and the fact that Brian Úa Briain had tried to take ‘kingship of ‘Sliocht Eoghain’ in 1118 suggests that they were already a potent and rising force.<sup>1157</sup>

The very dynastic relocation that allowed Desmond to confound future Uí Briain kings was a consequence of earlier Uí Briain expansion eastward. This pressure was evident by the mid-eleventh century, when the Eóganacht Chaisil were able to resist the incursions of the resurgent Dál Cais representatives, despite internal divisions.<sup>1158</sup> As the name Eóganacht Chaisil suggests, this group occupied lands around Cashel itself and enjoyed the prestige associated with the royal site, something that doubtless attracted the Uí Briain as well.

The exact date at which the Uí Briain occupied the territory is uncertain, but Muirchertach Úa Briain had a house at Cashel by 1090/1.<sup>1159</sup> Cashel also appears in the list of Brian Bóraime’s fortresses in the *Cog. Gaedhel*, which, as noted above, was written in the early twelfth century for Muirchertach.<sup>1160</sup> In 1101, at the Synod of Cashel, Muirchertach granted the site itself to the church.<sup>1161</sup> This has been universally interpreted as an indication of the recent conquest of the site, with comparable grants of ‘sword-land’ made by Donnchad Úa Cerbaill and Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn to Mellifont and Newry Abbey.<sup>1162</sup> The existence of an Úa Briain steward of Ormond or east Munster by 1108 further attests to the successful acquisition of land in this area.<sup>1163</sup>

From this point on, the Eóganacht Chaisil begin to appear in Desmond. Close relations of the Meic Cárthaig, the Uí Chellacháin, targeted the Cenél Láegaire branch of Eóganacht

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<sup>1157</sup> *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1118.1: ‘*righi ar Slicht Eogain Moir*’, 1118.2; *A.F.M.* 1118.5; *Ann. Tig.* 1118.1.

<sup>1158</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1045.8, 1052.5, 1054.7, 1058.4

<sup>1159</sup> *A.F.M.* 1091.4; *Ann. Tig.* 1090.2.

<sup>1160</sup> *Cog. Gaedhel*, p. 141; On the dating of *Cog. Gaedhel*, see Ní Mhaonaigh ‘*Cogad Gáedel re Gallaib: some dating considerations*’ in *Peritia*, ix (1996), pp 354–77. Casey has proposed that the existing version of *Cog. Gaedhel* was written or re-worked for the descendants of Donnchad mac Briain, a line which rivalled Toirdelbach and Muirchertach. See Casey, ‘*A reconsideration of the authorship and transmission of Cogadh Gáedhel re Gallaibh*’ in *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 113 C (2013), pp 139–61.

<sup>1161</sup> *A.F.M.* 1101.5; *Ann. Tig.* 1101.8; *Chron. Scot.* 1101.1.

<sup>1162</sup> See *The Uí Néill and the North*, pp 153–4.

<sup>1163</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1108.9.



Raithlinn in 1112.<sup>1164</sup> They appear to have seized kingship of that region by 1121, when Máel Sechnaill Úa Cellacháin was styled king of Uí Echach Muman.<sup>1165</sup> MacCotter has highlighted an inscription that suggests Úa Cellacháin was a follower of Tadc Mac Cárthaig and not a rival, as well as the fact that other major families of Eóganacht Chaisil like Uí Súillebáin and Uí Rígbardáin either accompanied the Meic Cárthaig and Uí Chellacháin or followed them southward.<sup>1166</sup>

It was Tadc Mac Cárthaig who killed Brian Úa Briain, and Tadc Mac Cárthaig who was made the first king of Desmond by the Treaty of Glanmire, presided over by Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair in 1118.<sup>1167</sup> Tadc and his brother Cormac also tried to throw off Connacht's dominance almost immediately, suggesting that they were already aiming for kingship of Munster at this point. It is difficult to reconcile this strength, and that shown by the Uí Chellacháin, with the generally accepted idea that these families were expelled by the Uí Briain a little over a decade before.

Despite viewing it as a 'deliberate policy' and perhaps even 'ethnic cleansing', MacCotter himself notes that their relocation was 'not in as dramatic or final a fashion as has sometimes been believed'.<sup>1168</sup> As king of Munster, Cormac Mac Cárthaig sponsored a church at Cashel, which is still called Cormac's chapel, and was in fact styled 'King of Caiseal' in the entry reporting its consecration.<sup>1169</sup> He also kept a house at the nearby Rath Áine (Rathanny). It could well be that there was more to this resettlement therefore, but unfortunately there is little evidence either way.

Despite the metamorphosis of the province, the old political strategy was not immediately superseded. Leth Moga remained rooted in the conceptual framework of

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<sup>1164</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1112.3.

<sup>1165</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1121.3; *A.F.M.* 1121.5.

<sup>1166</sup> MacCotter, 'The rise of the Meic Cárthaig and the political geography of Desmumu' in *The Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society*, cxi (2006), pp 59–76 at 64.

<sup>1167</sup> *A.F.M.* 1118.5, 1118.6; *Ann. Tig.* 1118.1; *Ann. Inisf.* 1118.8; *A.U.* 1118.6; *A.L.C.* 1118.6, 1118.7.

<sup>1168</sup> MacCotter, 'The rise of the Meic Cárthaig', pp 64, 65.

<sup>1169</sup> *A.F.M.* 1134.13: 'rí Caisil'; *Ann. Tig.* 1134.2; *Chron. Scot.* 1134.3; *A.L.C.* 1135.9.

Munster's kings, even though the enemy who ended their dominance and divided their province came from the opposite direction. They continued to see it as the next step in the political hierarchy, and, with remarkable consistency, each new pretender moved to secure the east. The attempts by Connacht and others to isolate them from Leinster and Osraige only confirmed their belief in the efficacy of this approach. Leth Moga only faded from relevance after 1151 and, even then, it remained important to Diarmait Mac Murchada in Leinster, who saw an opportunity to emulate his ancestor Diarmait mac Máel na mBó.

Leth Moga was at the forefront of Muirchertach Úa Briain's considerations when his health recovered sufficiently for him to mount a challenge for his usurped kingship in 1115. After gathering his forces, he led them not against the chief offender, his brother Diarmait, or the external enemies who had campaigned against him, Connacht and the North, but instead towards Osraige and Leinster.<sup>1170</sup> He was supported by his son Domnall, still in situ as king of Dublin, and it was the latter who scored the greatest victory over the Laigin.<sup>1171</sup> Unfortunately for Muirchertach, this victory did little good, and when Diarmait captured Domnall later in 1115 it signalled the end for Muirchertach, as he resigned the kingship for his son's sake.<sup>1172</sup>

While Muirchertach was focusing on Leinster and Osraige, Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair was able to gain an advantage, as was already discussed. Very significantly, he established naval dominance on the Shannon, clearing it of Munster ships, and he marched to Limerick twice.<sup>1173</sup> He was more successful on water than on land, because his client king of Thomond Domnall mac Taide Uí Briain proved impossible to control,

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<sup>1170</sup> *A.F.M.* 1115.1; *Ann. Inisf.* 1115.2, 1115.3; *Ann. Tig.* 1115.1; *A.U.* 1115.1, 1115.6; *A.L.C.* 1115.2, 1115.6.

<sup>1171</sup> *A.F.M.* 1115.5; *Ann. Inisf.* 1115.8; *Ann. Tig.* 1115.4; *Chron. Scot.* 1115.6; *A.U.* 1115.4; *A.L.C.* 1115.4; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1115.2.

<sup>1172</sup> *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1115.6.

<sup>1173</sup> *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1115.3, 1115.4, 1115.5; *Ann. Tig.* 1115.2; *A.F.M.* 1115.4; *A.L.C.* 1115.8; *A.U.* 1115.8.

and, as mentioned above, Toirdelbach had him killed in the very same year he had installed him.<sup>1174</sup>

When Diarmait Úa Briain died in 1118, he was styled ‘king of Munster and of all Leath-Mhogha’, more to indicate his relatively successful resistance to Úa Conchobair than for anything he had achieved in the east.<sup>1175</sup> This identification again underlines the synonymity between kings of Munster and kings of Leth Moga at this time, and shows that it was a conceptual link that did not necessarily need to be regularly reinforced by new campaigns.

Úa Conchobair moved to isolate Munster from its wider sphere of influence after Diarmait’s death. The combined army and fleet that Úa Conchobair brought to Killaloe in 1119 included Énna Mac Murchada, king of Leinster, Donnchad Mac Gilla Phátraic, king of Osraige, ‘and the chiefs of the foreigners of Ath-cliaith’.<sup>1176</sup> This was a deliberate and pointed reversal of the traditional order. Úa Conchobair had parted Domnall mac Muirchertaigh Uí Briain from kingship of Dublin, and the inclusion of the Dublin contingent underlined the first change of suzerain for that town since Toirdelbach úa Briain.<sup>1177</sup>

This calculated separation of Munster from its logical extension met with opposition almost immediately. Tadc Mac Cárthaig established suzerainty over Osraige in 1120, taking hostages, and giving gold and horses to Mac Gilla Phátraic as a *túarastal*.<sup>1178</sup> For obvious reasons, the attempt to extend through Osraige constituted a first step towards lordship of Leth Moga, and Úa Conchobair understandably felt threatened. The Dál Cais appropriated Osraige’s hostages, possibly with Mac Gilla Phátraic, which they then sent

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<sup>1174</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1115.2; *A.F.M.* 1115.6; *Ann. Inisf.* 1115.9; *A.U.* 1115.4; *A.L.C.* 1115.5; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1115.1.

<sup>1175</sup> *A.F.M.* 1118.2: ‘*rí Mumhan & Leth Mogha archena*’; *Ann. Inisf.* 1118.2; *Chron. Scot.* 1118.1; *A.U.* 1118.2; *A.L.C.* 1118.2.

<sup>1176</sup> *A.F.M.* 1119.14: ‘& *go maithibh Gall Atha Cliath*’; *Ann. Tig.* 1119.5.

<sup>1177</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1118.5.

<sup>1178</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1120.4; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1120.2.

to Úa Conchobair, to signal to the king of Connacht that they were not party to Mac Cárthaig's rebellion.<sup>1179</sup>

It was 1121 before Úa Conchobair marched southwards. He spent the winter encamped in east Munster, raiding into Desmond but sparing Thomond from violence. Finally, he retreated after re-partitioning the province and taking hostages.<sup>1180</sup> Úa Conchobair launched another campaign against Desmond in 1123, probably with the same rationale. This time the king of Connacht went as far as Cork where he received the submission of Tadc Mac Cárthaig,<sup>1181</sup> though any lasting effect was mitigated by Mac Cárthaig's death soon afterwards.<sup>1182</sup>

Tadc's brother and successor Cormac pursued wider power with even more energy, rebelling against Connacht's overlordship almost immediately. The leaders of Bréifne, Meath, Leinster, and perhaps Osraige joined him, but despite the absence of Thomond from Cormac's army, *Ann. Tig.* refers to 'the Conmaicne and Meathmen and Mugh's Half' turning on Úa Conchobair.<sup>1183</sup> Similarly, *Ann. Inisf.* tersely records 'a hosting by Cormac and the Leth Moga to Áth Luain against Ruaidrí's son, and their hostages were put to death by the latter'.<sup>1184</sup>

The final remark was not quite accurate, as only the hostages of Desmond were executed, while 'a respite was given to the hostages of the other folk'.<sup>1185</sup> As before, Úa Conchobair was conscious of dividing Leth Moga, and Desmond would be the last rebelling kingdom he targeted in mop-up operations. He moved through Bréifne, Meath, Dublin, Leinster, and Osraige, before approaching Desmond, which he only tackled in

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<sup>1179</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1120.4; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1120.2.

<sup>1180</sup> *A.F.M.* 1121.6, 1121.7; *Ann. Tig.* 1121.6, 1121.7; *Ann. Inisf.* 1121.6, 1121.7; *A.U.* 1124.4, 1121.5; *A.L.C.* 1121.2, 1121.3; *Chron. Scot.* 1121.3, 1121.4; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1121.2.

<sup>1181</sup> *A.F.M.* 1123.9; *Ann. Inisf.* 1123.3; *Ann. Tig.* 1123.7; *Chron. Scot.* 1123.4.

<sup>1182</sup> *A.F.M.* 1124.4; *Ann. Inisf.* 1124.2; *Ann. Tig.* 1124.1; *Chron. Scot.* 1124.2; *A.U.* 1124.2; *A.L.C.* 1124.2; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1123.4.

<sup>1183</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1124.4: 'Ro imposita didiu Conmaicnigh & Midhigh & Leth Mogha fair-sium'; see also *Chron. Scot.* 1124.5.

<sup>1184</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1124.6: 'Sluged la Cormac co Leth Moga lais co Ath Luain i n-agid mc. Ruari acus ra marbuit a géllsom la mc. Ruadri'.

<sup>1185</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1124.4: 'Tucad cairdi do etirib in luchta aile'.

1127.<sup>1186</sup> The strategy of isolating Desmond from Osraige and Leinster was effective on this occasion as well, and Cormac Mac Cárthaig was deposed.<sup>1187</sup>

When the Uí Bhriain brought Cormac Mac Cárthaig out of retirement to become king of Munster later in 1127, the implication that the rest of Leth Moga would follow underlay contemporary reaction. ‘The men of Mumu and Laigin turned again on Tairdelbach úa Conchobair and they forfeited the lives of their hostages’ is the comment in some collections.<sup>1188</sup> The Leinster-men did indeed take concrete action in support of Munster’s new challenge to Connacht, expelling Conchobar Úa Conchobair from the kingship of Dublin, and they suffered retaliation first, in the shape of a raid in 1128.<sup>1189</sup>

Successful resistance to Úa Conchobair on this occasion led to the resurrection of the kingdom of Leth Moga, again effectively synonymous with Munster, even though this time it was a Mac Cárthaig, and not an Úa Briain, who led it. Three successive invasions of Connacht in 1131–3 were conducted by (first) ‘Conn’s half and Mugh’s half’,<sup>1190</sup> (second) ‘the men of Munster’,<sup>1191</sup> and (third) ‘the great army of all Leath-Mhogha’ and the ‘fleet of Leath Mhogha’.<sup>1192</sup> When terms were reached, it was that ‘peace was made by Mugh’s half with Connacht’, and when conflict erupted in the south it was understood that ‘a great war grew up in the whole of Mugh’s half through the malediction of the clerics of Ireland and Connacht’.<sup>1193</sup> It is notable that there is no explicit mention of the

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<sup>1186</sup> See Connacht, pp 49–50.

<sup>1187</sup> *A.F.M.* 1127.13; *Ann. Inisf.* 1127.3; *A.U.* 1127.1; *A.L.C.* 1127.1; *Ann. Tig.* 1127.1.

<sup>1188</sup> *A.U.* 1127.5: ‘*Fir Muman & Laigen do impodh doriisi for Thairrdhelbach H. Conchobuir & a n-geill do dhilsiuighadh doibh*’; *A.L.C.* 1127.5.

<sup>1189</sup> *A.F.M.* 1128.15; *A.U.* 1127.5, 1128.6; *A.L.C.* 1127.5, 1128.5.

<sup>1190</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1131.3: ‘*Comluighe do tabairt etir Leith Cuind & Leth Mogha*’; *Chron. Scot.* 1131.3; *A.L.C.* 1131.4.

<sup>1191</sup> *A.F.M.* 1132.9: ‘*Caislén Bona Gaillmhe do loscadh & do scaoileadh lá loinges Fer Mumhan*’, 1132.11: ‘*Ar mór ria b-Feraibh Mumhan for Chonnachtaibh*’, 1132.12: ‘*Oiléan na Beithe for Sionainn do loscadh lá Feraibh Mumhan*’.

<sup>1192</sup> *A.F.M.* 1133.20: ‘*Mór-shluaigheadh Leithe Mogha uile*’; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1132.1: ‘*coblach Leatha Modha ar muir*’.

<sup>1193</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1134.3: ‘*Sith do denom o Leth Mogha re Connachtaibh*’, 1134.5: ‘*Cocadh mór do fhass i l-Leth Mogha uile tre easgaine cleireach Erenn & Connacht*’; *Chron. Scot.* 1134.7.

Osraige or Laigin on these expeditions, which may indicate that control of the two Munsters was now enough to justify the Leth Moga title.

Internal tension in Munster throughout this period also manifested itself through the concept of Leth Moga. The king of Leinster, Diarmait Mac Murchada, upset the balance of power by establishing suzerainty over Osraige in 1134.<sup>1194</sup> Conchobar Úa Briain tried and failed to re-establish Munster's supremacy over Leinster, and conflict broke out between the two Munsters later that year.<sup>1195</sup> The immediate reasons for this are not recorded but the 'rupture of the peace', was repeated in 1135.<sup>1196</sup> In 1137, tensions escalated when Conchobar Úa Briain submitted to Diarmait Mac Murchada and left hostages with the king of Leinster for 'defending Desmond for him'.<sup>1197</sup> Mac Murchada attacked Waterford for the second time that year, taking the hostages of Donnchad Mac Cárthaig who was defending it.<sup>1198</sup> Finally, in 1138, Toirdelbach Úa Briain had Cormac Mac Cárthaig assassinated to secure kingship of Munster for his brother.<sup>1199</sup>

From 1138–51, Munster was ruled by the Uí Briain brothers: Conchobar from 1138–42, and Toirdelbach from 1142–51. During this period, achieving supremacy in Leth Moga was made more difficult by increasing Meic Cárthaig hostility and the revival of Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair in Connacht. The former party tried unsuccessfully to resist Uí Briain domination, while the latter took pains to isolate Munster from Leinster and Osraige. Eventually, Toirdelbach was forced to acknowledge the changed political environment and direct his attention elsewhere, but this too proved unsuccessful. The final downfall of the kingdom of Munster saw a combined failure of all aspects of Uí Briain policy.

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<sup>1194</sup> *A.F.M.* 1134.11, 1134.12; *Chron. Scot.* 1134.13; *A.L.C.* 1134.1134.4, 1134.5; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1134.7, 1134.8.

<sup>1195</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1134.6; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1134.6.

<sup>1196</sup> *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1134.6: 'Brieadh sidha ittir Cormac mac Mic Carrthaigh & Concubur mac Diarmada I Briain guna braithribh', 1135.2; *A.F.M.* 1135.15; *A.L.C.* 1135.6.

<sup>1197</sup> *A.F.M.* 1137.13: 'co f-fargaibh braighde ann dar cenn Desmhumhan, do chosnamh dhó'.

<sup>1198</sup> *A.F.M.* 1137.12; *A.L.C.* 1137.4.

<sup>1199</sup> *A.F.M.* 1138.5; *A.L.C.* 1138.5.

Conchobar Úa Briain was quickly reported to be ‘in the over-kingship of Munster’, after Cormac Mac Cárthaig’s death, though surprisingly little active campaigning was necessary to achieve this.<sup>1200</sup> Title to Munster may have been meant to emphasise the limits of Conchobar’s authority. Cormac Mac Cárthaig had so recently been described as ‘the attacker of the whole of Ireland and king of Leth Mogha completely’ in the same collection of annals.<sup>1201</sup> Úa Briain was worried enough about the Meic Cárthaig to avoid immediately pushing his claim to overlordship of Leth Moga. Instead, in the same year, he reached an agreement with Mac Murchada for ‘a year’s peace between the men of Munster and the Leinstermen’.<sup>1202</sup>

It was 1141 before Conchobar was on the front foot in Leinster, enforcing the submission of Dublin and raiding Uí Chennselaig.<sup>1203</sup> He died of illness in 1142 before he could follow up on this campaign, but was nonetheless described as ‘king of Tuadmumu and Desmuma and Leth Mogha’ in one chronicle and elsewhere by the more intermediate ‘supreme king of the two provinces of Munster, pillar of the valour and prowess of Leath-Mogha’.<sup>1204</sup> There is an entry in Mac Cárthaigh’s Book reporting that Conchobar went to Ardee to take the hostages of Úa Cerbaill in Airgíalla in 1140, but this is very unlikely and is not found elsewhere.<sup>1205</sup>

Toirdelbach took up where Conchobar left off. Donnchad Mac Cárthaig, once Cormac’s deputy in Waterford, was captured by the Déise while raiding their territory in 1142. The Déise quickly surrendered Donnchad to Toirdelbach.<sup>1206</sup> Donnchad was later killed, and though the Síol Muiredaig are blamed in some accounts, Úa Briain is blamed in others,

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<sup>1200</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1138.6: ‘Conchobar O Bríain a n-aird-rigi Muman’.

<sup>1201</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1138.5: ‘índsaigtheach Erenn uile & rí Leithe Moga co comlan’.

<sup>1202</sup> *A.F.M.* 1139.11: ‘Síth m-bliadhna do dhénamh itir Feraibh Mumhan & Laighniu’.

<sup>1203</sup> *A.F.M.* 1141.8, 1141.10.

<sup>1204</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1142.1: ‘rí Tuadmuman & Desmuman & Lethe Mogha’; *A.F.M.* 1142.4: ‘airdri dá chóigeadh Mumhan tuir ghaiscith & engnamha Leithe Mogha’.

<sup>1205</sup> *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1140.1.

<sup>1206</sup> *A.F.M.* 1142.5.

and it seems likely that Toirdelbach disposed of the only Mac Cárthaig dynast prestigious enough to lead a challenge.<sup>1207</sup>

Toirdelbach led an army into Leinster in 1142 as well, but his raid of the Uí Muiredaig and ‘some of the Ui-Ceinnsealaigh’ does not seem to have invested him with any additional authority.<sup>1208</sup> The predictable follow-up campaign was avoided in this instance, however, as another opportunity presented itself. Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair’s deposition of the king of Meath in favour of his son in 1143 saw the ousted Murchad Úa Máel Sechlainn join Úa Briain’s court in Munster.<sup>1209</sup>

Now foregoing expansion through Leth Moga and experimenting with an alternative approach, Toirdelbach Úa Briain launched attacks on Connacht and Meath at intervals from 1143–50. Unfortunately for him, his break with precedent was not rewarded with any major gains. He left Connacht ‘without booty or hostages’ in 1143,<sup>1210</sup> the Connacht and Meath armies ‘defeated the men of Munster and slaughtered many of them’ in 1145,<sup>1211</sup> ‘the Munstermen were routed and some of them killed’ in 1146,<sup>1212</sup> and in 1150 Úa Conchobair invaded Munster while he was in Meath.<sup>1213</sup> It is interesting to note, though, that the truce arranged between Úa Briain and some of his enemies in 1150 was nevertheless recorded as a year’s peace ‘between Leath-Chuinn and Leah-Mhogha’, disregarding Úa Briain’s neglect of his eastern frontier.<sup>1214</sup>

Úa Briain overreached with these campaigns, fighting not only Úa Conchobair, but also Úa Cerbaill, Úa Ruairc, and Mac Lochlainn. His enemies were also supported by Máel Sechlainn mac Murchada Uí Máel Sechlainn, Diarmait mac Cormaic Meic Cárthaig, and

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<sup>1207</sup> *A.F.M.* 1144.4; *Ann. Tig.* 1144.9; *Chron. Scot.* 1144.8; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1143.1

<sup>1208</sup> *A.F.M.* 1142.9.

<sup>1209</sup> *A.F.M.* 1143.13; *Ann. Tig.* 1143.4.

<sup>1210</sup> *A.F.M.* 1143.15: ‘*ro shoidhsed iarsin gan creich gan ghiallna*’; *Ann. Tig.* 1143.3.

<sup>1211</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1145.2: ‘*drem do Condachtaib, & Fir Midhe, cor’ muidh do Mumnechaib, & cor’ cuireadh a n-ar co mor, & ro imposed iarom*’; *A.F.M.* 1145.10.

<sup>1212</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1146.5: ‘*cor’ thinolsat Connachta ’na n-aghaidh, cor’ moidh for Mumnechaib, cor’ marbad dream*’.

<sup>1213</sup> *A.F.M.* 1150.18.

<sup>1214</sup> *A.F.M.* 1150.20: ‘*go n-dernsatt Goill síth m-bliadhna etir Leth Cuinn, & Leth Mogha*’.



Conchobar mac Domnaill Uí Briain, so that the support of Murchad Úa Máel Sechlainn alone did not confer any great advantage. The few minor victories Úa Briain scored on these campaigns – carrying off ‘a great spoil of cattle from Connacht’ in 1149 and enforcing his authority over Dublin in 1150 – did not prepare him for the recoil of 1151.<sup>1215</sup>

In addition to the external enemies he faced, Toirdelbach was further challenged by the rise in prominence of his brother Tadc. Toirdelbach recognised Tadc’s threat in 1145 when he made him *tánaiste*, and even more so when, at some point before 1147, he imprisoned him.<sup>1216</sup> His imprisonment is noted only upon his release in that year, but it was Tadc who kicked off the calamitous events of 1151 by seizing the kingship and submitting to Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair in the hope of defending it.<sup>1217</sup>

Every strategic problem Toirdelbach Úa Briain faced now combined to his detriment, from his brother’s rebellion to Meic Cárthaig resurgence, from Connacht aggression to his neglected eastern frontier. He was forced to take shelter in west Munster, which remained loyal to him, as Úa Conchobair led an army into Munster to legitimise Tadc’s authority. Meanwhile, the Meic Cárthaig, under Diarmait son of Cormac, rose up to reclaim Desmond. Úa Conchobair arranged for Diarmait Mac Murchada to join him, and Úa Briain was unable to prevent their forces from linking up.

With no prospective allies Úa Briain may have chosen to stay in west Munster, but when he managed to rout an invading Meic Cárthaig army he followed them back into central Desmond to score further victories.<sup>1218</sup> He raided as far as Cork, but Mac Cárthaig recouped his strength and pursued Úa Briain northward. Mac Cárthaig also sent messages to Úa Conchobair requesting urgent assistance.<sup>1219</sup> Harried by the Meic

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<sup>1215</sup> *A.F.M.* 1149.13: ‘*Rugsatt boraimhe mhór*’.

<sup>1216</sup> *Chron. Scot.* 1145.7; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1145–7.2.

<sup>1217</sup> *A.F.M.* 1151.12.

<sup>1218</sup> *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1151.3; *A.F.M.* 1151.14; *Ann. Tig.* 1151.3.

<sup>1219</sup> *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1151.3.

Cárthaig at his rear, and with reduced visibility as a result of a heavy fog, Úa Briain led his army straight into the Connacht and Leinster ambush.<sup>1220</sup>

Úa Briain lost three thousand men according to one account, and seven thousand according to another.<sup>1221</sup> The annalist writing in Tigernach commented that ‘until sand of sea and stars of heaven are numbered, no one will reckon all the sons of the kings and chiefs and great lords of the men of Munster that were killed there, so that of the three battalions of Munster that had come thither, none escaped save only one shattered battalion’.<sup>1222</sup> The corresponding account in the *Ann. Clon.* says more concisely that ‘an infinite number of the nobility of Munster were slaine’.<sup>1223</sup> With one exception, Úa Loingsech of Uaithne Tíre, the individually named nobles who fell at the battle all belonged to Dál Cais.<sup>1224</sup>

The implication is that Thomond was severely damaged by the battle, and for the purposes of Toirdelbach Úa Briain’s reign as king of Munster, fatally so. ‘Chief sway over Munster was assumed by Toirdhealbhach Ua Conchobhair on this occasion’ was the comment in the Four Masters, while Tigernach grandiosely pronounced that ‘thereafter the king of Ireland, with the hostages of Mogh Half, came home’.<sup>1225</sup> Not only could Úa Conchobair not yet reclaim that title, he was forced to give up hostages to Mac Lochlainn almost immediately.<sup>1226</sup> Any hostages he held were for Munster and not for the wider Leth Moga area either, as, separately, Mac Lochlainn took Mac Murchada’s hostages as well.<sup>1227</sup> Again, this may reflect the interchangeability of Munster and Leth Moga from certain perspectives.

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<sup>1220</sup> *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1151.3.

<sup>1221</sup> *A.F.M.* 1151.14; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1151.3.

<sup>1222</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1151.3: ‘No co n-airimther ganim mara & renda nime ni h-airimthar ar’ marbad do macaib ríg & taissech & trom-fhlatha Fer Muman andsin, cona téro dona tri cathaib tanic ri Muman acht aen-chath esbadhach amain’.

<sup>1223</sup> *Ann. Clon.* 1141.

<sup>1224</sup> Kelleher, ‘The battle of Móin Mhór, 1151’ in *Celtica*, xx (1988), pp 11–27 at 24–5.

<sup>1225</sup> *A.F.M.* 1151.14: ‘Ard-neart Mumhan do ghabháil do Thoirdhealbhach Ua Conchobhair don chur-sin’; *Ann. Tig.* 1151.3: ‘Tanic iarsin rí Erenn co mbraigdib Leth Mogha lais dia thigh’.

<sup>1226</sup> *Connacht*, pp 53–4, 61–2; Uí Néill and the North, pp 159–60.

<sup>1227</sup> Uí Néill and the North, pp 159–60.

Of course, Úa Conchobair's difficulties could only have been a minor consolation for Toirdelbach Úa Briain. With Tadc now ascendant, the Hiberno-Norse of Limerick refused Toirdelbach shelter.<sup>1228</sup> He was forced to scatter his wealth among the Síol Muiredaig and Uí Briúin Bréifne in a desperate attempt to regain some standing.<sup>1229</sup> His 1152 restoration alongside Tadc, perhaps the result of the wealth he gifted, did not last long. Before he fled to Mac Lochlainn's house in the North his only notable action was to aid his only steadfast ally, Úa Conchobair Ciarraige, against Meic Cárthaig aggression.<sup>1230</sup>

Leth Moga was clearly less important to Conchobar and Toirdelbach Ua Briain than it had been to their predecessors, and the concept approached obsolescence after the Battle of Móin Móir in 1151. At its root, the rise of Connacht was the reason for this change. The fact that Limerick was situated on the Shannon, which was now dominated by the western province, gradually forced the Uí Briain to change their strategy and order of progression. As we will see below, once Connacht's dominance was firmly established after the Battle of Móin Móir, the relationship between Uí Briain and Meic Cárthaig, and their mutual border, became the primary concern of both parties.

Modern historians have tended to emphasise enmity between the two royal families of Munster to offer a general explanation of Irish conduct. When Orpen described the Uí Briain and Meic Cárthaig as hereditary enemies, it allowed him to avoid any in-depth analysis of their politics. In reference to their reaction to the English invasion he wrote 'we might indeed have supposed that these princes would have united with all their forces against their common foe', whereas, in fact, much of their energy was directed against each other.<sup>1231</sup> The reason for this, in Orpen's view, was simply that the Meic

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<sup>1228</sup> *A.F.M.* 1151.22.

<sup>1229</sup> *A.F.M.* 1151.22.

<sup>1230</sup> *A.F.M.* 1152.9; *Ann. Tig.* 1152.3.

<sup>1231</sup> Orpen, *Normans*, ii, p. 37.

Cárthaig represented the Eóganachta tradition and the Uí Briain the Dál Cais; no further explanation was needed.

This perspective has continued to appear in more recent publications. In his biographies of William de Burgh and Donnchad Cairprech Úa Briain, Empey described Meic Cárthaig and Uí Chonchobair alike as ‘hereditary enemies’ and ‘traditional rivals’ of the Uí Briain, reiterating Orpen’s view and making little effort to assess other possible motives for their conflicts.<sup>1232</sup> Even in his important account of the political geography of Desmond, when discussing the lack of cooperation against the English, MacCotter suggested that ‘such blinkered vision must surely be put down to a complete inability on the part of both native royal dynasties in Munster to perceive the inevitable consequences of the Anglo-Norman invasion’.<sup>1233</sup>

Others have been even more dismissive. Lydon regarded the idea the Irish kings could have cooperated as inherently nationalist and suggested that ‘local particularism was the fatal weakness in the Irish body politic’.<sup>1234</sup> Martin, who quite without basis regarded the Uí Fáeláin of Déise as the equals of the Meic Cárthaig and Uí Briain, wrote that ‘Munster was in no position to present a united front to any foreign invader ... to use the phrase “an attack on Munster” is to think in unhistorical terms; there was no such political unit as Munster’.<sup>1235</sup>

The reduction of the complicated relationship between the two royal houses into simple enmity does not do justice to a half-century of political intrigue, nor does the idea that the kingdom of Munster had faded beyond memory. There is another serious implication: these presentations give an impression of permanence to these conflicts, when the

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<sup>1232</sup> Empey, ‘Burgh, William de’ in *O.D.N.B.*, accessed online (<https://doi-org.jproxy.nuim.ie/10.1093/ref:odnb/4000>) (1 July 2020); Empey, ‘Ó Briain, Donnchad Cairprech [Donogh Cairbrech O’Brien]’ *O.D.N.B.*, accessed online (<https://doi-org.jproxy.nuim.ie/10.1093/ref:odnb/20451>) (1 July 2020).

<sup>1233</sup> MacCotter, ‘The rise of the Meic Cárthaig’, p. 74.

<sup>1234</sup> Lydon, *The lordship of Ireland*, pp 64–5.

<sup>1235</sup> Martin, ‘The first Normans in Munster’ in *The Journal of the Cork Archaeological and Historical Society*, lxxvi (1971), pp 48–71 at 53.

internal border actually only replaced Leth Moga as the dominant strategic concern in the mid-twelfth century. Instead, an eventually bitter conflict grew from the seeds of mutual interests and earlier efforts to co-operate.

That there was more to Uí Briain–Meic Cárthaig relations than antagonism is quite clear. When Conchobar and Toirdelbach Úa Briain ‘clasped hands’ with Cormac Mac Cárthaig and brought him ‘back to lay life’ in 1127, they ended the retirement Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair had so recently imposed upon him.<sup>1236</sup> Conchobar Úa Briain had been a beneficiary of the partition of Munster that followed Cormac’s deposition, so his restoration of Cormac reversed his political orientation. It went still further: the Uí Briain brothers now recognised Cormac as king of Munster, and therefore as their overlord.

If we do not accept Saint Bernard of Clairvaux’s assertion that ‘God stirred up’ Conchobar Úa Briain to aid a neighbouring king, we must look elsewhere for an explanation of this conduct.<sup>1237</sup> One might be found in a description of the assassination of Cormac Mac Cárthaig a little over a decade later, which reports he ‘was treacherously killed by Toirdhealbhach Ó Briain, his father-in-law, gossip [godfather] and fosterer. He was the attacker of the whole of Ireland and king of Leth Mogha completely’.<sup>1238</sup> These important links between the two families, marriage and fosterage, are otherwise unrecorded.

Toirdelbach Úa Briain lived until 1168, so it is difficult to envision him as Mac Cárthaig’s fosterer or sponsor. The term *clíamain*, translated by Stokes as ‘father-in-law’ could mean another relationship through marriage. There is no corroborating evidence for any mid-twelfth-century marriage between the two families, either in the annals or in the *Banshenchas*, and Mac Cárthaig’s only recorded wife was Derbail ingen Uí Lorcáin,

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<sup>1236</sup> *A.F.M.* 1127.13; *Ann. Inisf.* 1127.2. 1127.3; *A.U.* 1127.1; *A.L.C.* 1127.1

<sup>1237</sup> *St. Bernard’s Life of Malachy*, ed. Lawlor, H.J., (London, 1920), p. 23.

<sup>1238</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1138.5: ‘*Cormac mac maic Carrthaig do marbad do Tairrdelbach O Briain .i. da cliamuin & da cairdes Crist & da altraind a fill .i. úndsaiitheach Erenn uile & rí Leithe Moga co comlan*’.

whose family belonged to the Uí Muiredaig in Leinster.<sup>1239</sup> Even so, despite the difficulties as regards detail, it is likely that fosterage, sponsorship, and marriage did indeed take place; the question is whether they pre-dated the 1127 restoration of Cormac and formed part of the logic behind the move, or if they constituted additional aspects of an agreement contracted at that time.

We must also consider the depiction of the relationship between the Eóganachta and Dál Cais in twelfth-century literature. The *Visio Tnugdali*, which was composed at Regensburg in 1148–9, during the abbacy of Christianus Mac Cárthaig, depicts a positive relationship between the Meic Cárthaig and Uí Briain.<sup>1240</sup> Tnugdál himself is shown as a soldier in Cormac’s army, and Cormac is among the Meic Cárthaig dynasts included in Tnugdál’s vision of paradise. Cormac’s brother Donnchad (d. 1142/3), who also appears in paradise, ‘is portrayed in amicable companionship’ with Conchobar Úa Briain.<sup>1241</sup> This heavenly companionship does not reflect Donnchad’s earthly life. Donnchad was besieged in Waterford by the forces of Diarmait Mac Murchada and Conchobar Úa Briain in 1137 and died in the custody of Toirdelbach Úa Briain just two years after Conchobar’s own death.<sup>1242</sup>

In the *Caithréim Cellacháin Chaisil*, a Mac Cárthaig-sponsored response to the *Cog. Gaedhel*, the Eóganachta and Dál Cais enjoy a symbiotic relationship. Cellachán and Cennétig cooperate to the extent that Cennétig takes the kingship in Cellachán’s absence and agrees to abdicate it upon the latter’s return.<sup>1243</sup> Cennétig is also praised by Cellachán as a worthy king of Cashel, and the Eóganachta and Dál Cais have delineated

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<sup>1239</sup> *Banshenchas* [part two], p. 192.

<sup>1240</sup> Ó Riain-Raedel, ‘Diarmaid Mac Carthaigh, king of Cork’ in *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society*, xc, no. 249 (2016), pp 26–30 at 27.

<sup>1241</sup> Ó Riain-Raedel, ‘Diarmaid Mac Carthaigh’, p. 27.

<sup>1242</sup> *A.F.M.* 1137.12; *Misc.Ir.Annals* 1137.1.

<sup>1243</sup> *Caithr. Chell. Chaisil*, §§46, 49, pp 28–9, 30, 85–6, 87–8.

spheres of influence.<sup>1244</sup> Specifically, the Uí Chonaill Gabra half of Uí Fidgeinte was ‘promised’ to Donnchuan mac Cennétig by Cellachán in return for military assistance.<sup>1245</sup>

The idea that the Eóganachta and Dál Cais had once alternated the provincial kingship, a system called *sel* or *selaidecht*, was also promoted.<sup>1246</sup> This had originally been invented and asserted by the Dál Cais in the tenth century. It appears in early Dál Cais genealogies,<sup>1247</sup> while the later *Cog. Gaedhel* asserts the rights of the Dál Cais without mention of *selaidecht*.<sup>1248</sup> The story that supported this claim was an adaption of the saga *Cath Maíge Mucrama*, which saw the mythical king of Munster Ailill Ólum demand the descendants of his sons, Eógan Mór and Cormac Cas, share the kingship.<sup>1249</sup>

Interestingly, this Dál Cais version was the one chosen by Keating for his seventeenth-century history of Ireland.<sup>1250</sup>

The *Caithr. Chell. Chaisil* resurrected the idea of an alternating provincial kingship. Describing the accession of Cennétig mac Lorcáin, the first Dál Cais king of Cashel, it said ‘for this is the arrangement of the high-kingship that was between the descendants of Eogan Mór and the descendants of Cormac Cas: the man who was the senior of the gentle clans, his was the kingship. If the high-king was of the descendants of Eogan, the tanist-ship belonged to the descendants of Cormac Cas. And if the noble king was of the descendants of Cormac, the tanist-ship went to the descendants of Eogan Mór’.<sup>1251</sup>

John Ryan argued that ‘the aim of the writer is manifestly twofold. To eulogise Ceallachán and the Eoganachta of Cashel and to shun at the same time rigidly the least

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<sup>1244</sup> *Caithr. Chell. Chaisil*, §60, pp 36–7, 94–5.

<sup>1245</sup> *Caithr. Chell. Chaisil*, §24, pp 14–15, 72.

<sup>1246</sup> D.A. Binchy, *Celtic and Anglo-Saxon kingship* (Oxford, 1970), p. 37; Byrne, *Irish kings*, p. 180.

<sup>1247</sup> O’Brien (ed.), *Corpus Genealogiarum Hiberniae*, pp 206–7.

<sup>1248</sup> *Cog. Gaedhel*, pp 83–5.

<sup>1249</sup> Byrne, *Irish kings*, p. 180; Campbell ‘Eóganachta’, p. 156.

<sup>1250</sup> Keating, *History of Ireland*, ii, pp 274–5.

<sup>1251</sup> *Caithr. Chell. Chaisil*, §5, pp 3, 59: ‘Or is e orugad airdrighi do bhi idir clainn Eogain mhoir & clainn Cormaic cais. An fer ba sine dona saerclannai b in righi dho. Damad do clainn Eogain in t-airdri in tanaistecht clainn Cormaic cais. Ocus damad do clainn Cormaic in caemri in tanaistecht do clainn Eogain mhoir’.

word or expression that might give offence to the Dál Chais'.<sup>1252</sup> For this very reason, Ryan suggested that the *Caithréim* must date from no later than 1118, since Uí Briain dominance in Munster ended at that time. He said, 'were the *Caithréim* composed between 1123 and 1138 or in the intervening period before the coming of the Normans, its attitude towards the Dál Chais would be, in my view, much more independent'.<sup>1253</sup> Ó Corráin took a different view. He remarked of the above section, 'the stress on the *bráthairse* "kinship" of the two great dynasties here and elsewhere in CCC seems to reflect the brittle compromise between Uí Briain and Meic Carthaig from 1127 to 1134'.<sup>1254</sup>

While Ó Corráin's dating of the *Caithr. Chell. Chaisil* is a better reflection of the wider context, given the more precise dating of the *Visio Tnugdali* and its similar disposition, it does not go far enough in its assessment of the implications of the *Caithr. Chell.*

*Chaisil*'s argument.<sup>1255</sup> The literature, and the *Caithr. Chell. Chaisil* in particular, reflects an attempt to consolidate a new arrangement. It must have been more significant than a 'brittle compromise', since it was the incumbents in the kingship (the Meic Cárthaig) who stressed alternation in the succession and not the Uí Briain, mere expectant *rigdamnai*. This would be further supported by the idea that a marriage link confirmed mutual rights in an alternating succession to the kingship, as outlined elsewhere in this thesis.<sup>1256</sup>

Collectively, the evidence therefore shows a growing if somewhat grudging acknowledgment of the royal status of the Meic Cárthaig. It seems likely that an initial

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<sup>1252</sup> Ryan, 'The historical content of the "Caithréim Ceallacháin Chaisil"' in *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, seventh series, xi, no. 3 (September 1941), pp 89–100 at 90.

<sup>1253</sup> Ryan, 'The historical content of the "Caithréim Ceallacháin Chaisil"', p. 91.

<sup>1254</sup> Ó Corráin, 'Caithréim Chellacháin Chaisil: history of propaganda?' in *Ériu*, xxv (1974), pp 1–69 at 8.

<sup>1255</sup> It is also worth noting that a linguistic analysis of the *Caithr. Chell. Chaisil*, in the forty-two manuscripts in which it appears, is still lacking. For some discussion of this, see Caoimhín Breatnach and Etchingham, 'Review: Ó Corráin, Donnchadh: *Clavis litterarum Hibernensium*. Medieval Irish books & texts (c. 400 – c. 1600). 3 vols' in *Zeitschrift Für Celtische Philologie*, lxxvii (2021), pp 248–81 at 267–8.

<sup>1256</sup> See Marriage and Women, pp 359–66.



attempt to make that royal status a reality in 1118 was subverted, and not helped, by Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair, when he presided over the Treaty of Glanmire. That Desmond was an inadequate reward for the burgeoning Meic Cárthaig explains both their hostility to the king of Connacht in the 1120s, and their anxious propagation of the *selaidecht* between their family and the more established Uí Briain.

It is not completely clear how or why the new political organisation of Munster collapsed in the 1130s, but Cormac Mac Cárthaig's assassination was the end, not the start, of the breakdown. In 1133, Cormac and Conchobar Úa Briain were still working together. They invaded Connacht and burned two of Úa Conchobair's fortresses, though they 'returned without hostages'.<sup>1257</sup> Conchobar Úa Briain was the commander who led the Osraige and Hiberno-Norse of Waterford against Diarmait Mac Murchada in 1134, which is likely to represent continued support of Mac Cárthaig's regime. It was 'a rupture of the peace' later the same year that saw both sides dig in their heels, and the problem gradually escalated over the next three years.<sup>1258</sup> Mac Cárthaig attacked Limerick and, in a surprise move, Conchobar Úa Briain submitted to Diarmait Mac Murchada and supported his attack on Waterford in 1137.<sup>1259</sup>

Cormac was assassinated in 1138 at Mag Tamnach (Mahoonagh) in Uí Chonaill of Uí Fidgeinte, where it is likely the king of Munster anticipated a settlement with the Uí Briain, given the *Caithr. Chell. Chaisil's* acknowledgment of Uí Briain sway in that very area. The *Visio Tnugdali* indicates that the Meic Cárthaig had a general hope of renewing terms with the Uí Briain, but there is little to show progress on this front after Mac Cárthaig's assassination.

The Uí Briain made some effort to expel the Meic Cárthaig from Munster in 1139, and this may have been partly successful, because nothing more is heard of them until

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<sup>1257</sup> *A.F.M.* 1133.9: '*Impaid iarsin gan gialla*'.

<sup>1258</sup> *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1134.6: '*Briseadh sidha*'; 1134.8; *Ann. Tig.* 1134.5, 1134.6

<sup>1259</sup> *A.F.M.* 1137.12, 1137.13; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1137.1.

Donnchad Mac Cárthaig tried to ‘defend the kingship’ in 1142.<sup>1260</sup> Donnchad’s ill-fated attempt to interrupt Uí Briain rule in Munster was the only Meic Cárthaig response until 1151, when Toirdelbach Úa Briain’s kingship of Munster collapsed under the weight of challenges from every quarter.

As outlined above, on that occasion Diarmait mac Cormaic Meic Cárthaig capitalised on these difficulties and seized kingship of Desmond for the first time. He harried Toirdelbach Úa Briain in west Munster and provoked the latter’s march to Cork. It was while retreating from Cork that Toirdelbach Úa Briain was ambushed by Úa Conchobair and Mac Murchada at Móin Móir. After the battle, Úa Conchobair re-partitioned Munster and confirmed Diarmait Mac Cárthaig as king of Desmond.<sup>1261</sup>

Antagonism and stalemate characterised the relationship between the two families for the next two decades. Toirdelbach and Tadc Úa Briain briefly cooperated against Mac Cárthaig in Uí Fidgeinte in 1152, which itself suggests increasing bitterness, but before long their conflict with one another took precedence.<sup>1262</sup> Mac Carthaigh’s book suggests that Diarmait Mac Cárthaig backed Tadc over Toirdelbach, but nowhere is the king of Desmond noted as a participant in the major battle of 1153 that decided the issue.<sup>1263</sup>

Toirdelbach immediately attacked Mac Cárthaig after reprising his kingship in 1154, provoking Meic Cárthaig retaliation.<sup>1264</sup> Diarmait Mac Cárthaig had already attacked Ciarraige in 1152, which remained outside his newly reconstituted kingdom of Desmond.<sup>1265</sup> Nothing much resulted from these actions. ‘A great war broke out between

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<sup>1260</sup> *A.F.M.* 1139.10, 1142.5; *Misc.Ir.Annals* 1142.2: ‘do cosnamh righe’.

<sup>1261</sup> *A.F.M.* 1152.9.

<sup>1262</sup> *Misc.Ir.Annals* 1152.1, 1152.2, 1152.3, 1152.4; *A.F.M.* 1152.19, 1153.12; *Ann. Tig.* 1152.3.

<sup>1263</sup> *A.F.M.* 1153.13, 1153.14, 1153.15; *Ann. Tig.* 1153.6, 1153.8; *Misc.Ir.Annals* 1153.1, 1153.2, 1153.3.

<sup>1264</sup> *A.F.M.* 1154.18; *Misc.Ir.Annals* 1154.3.

<sup>1265</sup> *Misc.Ir.Annals* 1152.1; *A.F.M.* 1152.15.

Desmond and Thomond' in 1162,<sup>1266</sup> and Toirdelbach Úa Briain raided as far as Druim Fíngéin in 1164, but these actions were similarly inconclusive.<sup>1267</sup>

Toirdelbach Úa Briain was briefly deposed by his son Muirchertach in 1165. After first retiring to the monastery at Killaloe, Toirdelbach went into exile and was received in Desmond by Mac Cárthaig. He may also have sought help from Mac Murchada in Leinster.<sup>1268</sup> Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair, accompanied by Muirchertach Úa Briain, brought his army into Desmond and received Mac Cárthaig's submission. Úa Conchobair must also have brokered an agreement between Muirchertach and Toirdelbach on this occasion, as Toirdelbach reclaimed the kingship but took no action against Muirchertach.<sup>1269</sup>

Neither party came close to securing the submission of their counterparts in the other half of Munster in this period. It is likely that if they had, they would have immediately been invaded by Connacht or the North, who now enjoyed obvious supremacy. Even the reception of Toirdelbach Úa Briain in Desmond excited Úa Conchobair in Connacht, and he made sure nothing came of it. As such, the efforts of Uí Briain and Meic Cárthaig alike redirected inwards. Securing the kingship, antagonising the other royal family, and trying to annex land along their mutual border became their driving aims.

Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair was able to take hostages from the Uí Briain and Meic Cárthaig alike in 1166, but this was no great achievement. Between 1151 and 1166, Toirdelbach and Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair and Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn had contested Munster, but with each other rather than with the native dynasties. In 1152, 1153, 1156, 1157, 1160, 1161, and 1165, at least one of the royal families of Munster submitted to an external suzerain without offering any military opposition, effectively acquiescing to the partition of Munster by so doing.

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<sup>1266</sup> *A.F.M.* 1162.21: '*Coccadh mór eitir Deasmumhain, & Tuadhmunháin*'.

<sup>1267</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1164.4.

<sup>1268</sup> *A.F.M.* 1165.6, 1165.7; *Ann. Inisf.* 1165.2; *Ann. Tig.* 1165.1, 1165.11.

<sup>1269</sup> *A.F.M.* 1165.6, 1165.7; *Ann. Inisf.* 1165.2, 1165.7; *Ann. Tig.* 1165.1, 1165.11; *A.U.* 1165.1.

A general lack of interest in the conflicts of the now stronger kingdoms is reflected in the events of 1157. After first giving hostages to Mac Lochlainn, Mac Cárthaig was then forced to give hostages to Úa Conchobair later the same year. He ‘gave hostages into his [Úa Conchobair’s] hands for a time, and who were to fall to him, unless Muircheartach Ua Lochlainn should come to defend them’.<sup>1270</sup> Diarmait Mac Cárthaig, in other words, was happy to accept whichever overlord emerged from the contest for the kingship of Ireland and conserve his strength for other battles. For now, the Uí Briain adopted a similar disposition.

In 1166, Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn was overthrown and killed, and Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair established his authority across the island. Even though Munster had been a major focus of Úa Conchobair’s military activity, it was the last province to receive his attention. Having first ensured the North was no longer a threat, he then led his forces ‘into Leinster, into Osraighe, and afterwards into Munster; and all the kings of Leath-Mhogha came into his house’.<sup>1271</sup> Again, no opposition was offered and the partition of Munster was reconfirmed.

Both Diarmait Mac Cárthaig and Muirchertach Úa Briain were among the kings awarded *túarastal* by Úa Conchobair later in 1166.<sup>1272</sup> Mac Cárthaig received seventy horses, and Úa Briain forty coloured garments.<sup>1273</sup> Both Mac Cárthaig and Úa Briain then supported Úa Conchobair in 1167, when he marched against the Cenél nEógain. While the Uí Briain had been supporters of Connacht armies on campaign before, the kings of Desmond had remained aloof up to this point. It may have been for this reason that, having secured the submission of the Cenél nEógain, ‘Ua Conchobhair escorted the lord

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<sup>1270</sup> *A.F.M.* 1157.12: ‘do-rad Diarmaid mac Corbmaic Mec Cárthaigh braighde ina urlaimh frí h-edh dia t-tuitim occa mena t-tísadh Muirchertach Ua Lachlainn dia c-cosnamh’.

<sup>1271</sup> *A.F.M.* 1166.15: ‘i l-Laighnibh, i n-Osraighibh, & i Mumhain iar t-tain, & tangattar rioghraidh Leithe Mogha uile ina theach’.

<sup>1272</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1166.20.

<sup>1273</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1166.20.

of Desmond, with his forces, southwards through Thomond as far as Cnoc-Aine with many jewels and riches'.<sup>1274</sup>

Cnoc Áine was the most northerly settlement of note in Desmond, so it is clear that Mac Cárthaig's concern was with Uí Briain aggression, rather than an objection to aiding the kings of Connacht. As it turned out, Muirchertach Úa Briain had more to fear from Diarmait Mac Cárthaig than vice versa. In 1168, Muirchertach was assassinated by Conchobar Úa Briain at Mac Cárthaig's instigation, having taken the kingship only a year before. Neither the assassination of this Conchobar Úa Briain or the *enech* fine of 720 cows imposed on the Meic Cárthaig by Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair did much to repair relations in Munster.<sup>1275</sup>

Ultimately, the animosity between the Uí Briain and Meic Cárthaig was rooted in the failed attempt to cooperate earlier in the twelfth century. The assassinations of Cormac Mac Cárthaig and Muirchertach Úa Briain were the low points of their conflict, and both damaged the prospects of an alternating kingship and even kingship of Munster in general. This hostility was not the main reason Thomond and Desmond became the effective provincial kingdoms, however; that was Connacht's dominance. Connacht repeatedly re-imposed partition until it became effective. Munster was able to survive Cormac Mac Cárthaig's assassination, for example, but the Battle of Móin Móir ended Uí Briain hopes of challenging for wider hegemony, and that was why the English encountered two provinces in Munster at the time of the invasion.

One aspect of the divided Munster of the mid-twelfth century that remains to be addressed is the internal border itself. Its route is not given in any of the descriptions of the partitions imposed on the province. These are all more concerned with the men invested with royal authority than their territorial limitations. For instance, the

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<sup>1274</sup> A.F.M. 1167.11: '*ro iodhnaic Ua Conchobhair tigherna Deasmhumhan, cona sochraide dar Tuadmhumhain fo dheas go h-Aine Cliach go sédaibh & mainibh iomdha leó*'.

<sup>1275</sup> A.F.M. 1168.8; *Ann. Inisf.* 1168.1; *Ann. Tig.* 1168.4; *A.U.* 1168.1, 1168.3.

description of the Treaty of Glanmire reports only that Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair ‘gave Desmond to Mac Carthaigh, and Thomond to the sons of Diarmaid Ua Briain, and carried off the hostages of both’.<sup>1276</sup> The second partition, in 1121, is recorded as a division ‘between the Clann Charthaigh and the Síol Briain’.<sup>1277</sup> Later divisions, in 1127 and 1151, are elaborated in much the same way.<sup>1278</sup>

The greater Desmond awarded to the Meic Cárthaig in 1118 was less politically secure than the greater Thomond awarded to the Uí Briain. The Dál Cais had been expanding into Ormond since at least the mid-eleventh century, but it was the early twelfth century before the Eóganacht Chaisil firmly established themselves at their new location. This challenged the Meic Cárthaig to extend their control over communities that were not familiar with their overlordship, something that would occupy their attention up to the English invasion and beyond. In some cases, the Uí Briain were able to take advantage of this situation, and annex territory from Desmond.

Iarmumu or west Munster was one such area. The three constituent parts of this region were Ciarraige, Eóganacht Locha Léin, and Corco Duibne. At the beginning of the twelfth century, the ruling families of the area were the Uí Chonchobair in Ciarraige, Uí Muirchertaigh in Eóganacht Locha Léin, and Uí Segda in Corcu Duibne. Their resistance to the new kingdom of Desmond was evident in 1124, when the leaders of all three dynasties were driven out of Munster by Cormac Mac Cárthaig and sought refuge in Connacht.<sup>1279</sup>

It was Úa Muirchertaigh, and not the others, who acted as Úa Conchobair’s principal agent in the region. The fleets Úa Muirchertaigh launched on the sea and on Loch Léin in 1125, 1126, and 1127, on Toirdelbach’s behalf, were meant to ensure all Iarmumu

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<sup>1276</sup> *A.F.M.* 1118.6: ‘*co t-taratt Desmhumha do Mhac Carthaigh, & Tuadhlmhumha da mhacaibh Diarmada Ui Bhriain & do-beart a n-gialla díbhlnibh*’; *Ann. Inisf.* 1118.8; *A.U.* 1118.6; *A.L.C.* 1118.6, 1118.7.

<sup>1277</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1121.6: ‘*do raind Mumain etir Clainn Carrtaigh & Sil m-Briain*’.

<sup>1278</sup> *A.F.M.* 1127.13, 1152.9; *Ann. Inisf.* 1127.3; *A.U.* 1127.1; *A.L.C.* 1127.1; *Ann. Tig.* 1127.1.

<sup>1279</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1124.4.

remained under the influence of the king of Connacht.<sup>1280</sup> In this, the Uí Muirchertaigh allied against Mac Cárthaig, who was trying to throw off Úa Conchobair's overlordship. They paid dearly for this rebelliousness. The Uí Donnchada of the western branch of Eóganacht Raithlinn, Cenél Laegaire, were supported by the Meic Cárthaig against Uí Muirchertaigh. They seized power in Eóganacht Locha Léin by 1158, when Amlaíb Mór Úa Donnchada was described as 'high king of Eóghanachta Locha Léin, usurper of West Munster'.<sup>1281</sup> His successors were alternately styled 'high-king of Cenél Laegaire and of Eóghanachta Locha Léin' in 1161, 'king of Eóghanachta' in 1163, 'king of Uí Echach and champion of Iarmumu' in 1177.<sup>1282</sup> The final entry would suggest that, by this point, they also eclipsed the Uí Mathgamna of the eastern division of Eóganacht Raithlinn, Cenél Áeda.<sup>1283</sup>

A similar situation can be reported elsewhere in west Munster. Though the Uí Chonchobair Ciarraige were initially regarded as nobles of the kingdom of Desmond, they switched their allegiance to the Uí Briain at some point between 1136 and 1138, when they assisted the Uí Briain assassination of Cormac Mac Cárthaig.<sup>1284</sup> By the same year, they had improved their position by incorporating Corco Duibne into their kingdom, perhaps with Uí Briain assistance.<sup>1285</sup> They steadfastly supported Toirdelbach Úa Briain in 1151, and were invaded and harried by Mac Cárthaig as a result.<sup>1286</sup>

Despite Úa Briain's best efforts, the Meic Cárthaig were able to re-establish control of Ciarraige after the Battle of Móin Móir, and they astutely reinstated a separate kingship of Corco Duibne.<sup>1287</sup> In 1177, Domnall Úa Briain launched an invasion of Desmond to

<sup>1280</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1125.3, 1126.13, 1127.14.

<sup>1281</sup> *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1158.7: 'airdriugh Eoganacht Locha Lein, forlamhuigh Iarmumhan'.

<sup>1282</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1161.3: 'ardri Ceneol Legari & Eoganachta Locha Lein', 1163.2: 'ri Eoganach[ta]', 1177.4: 'riugh h-Ua n-Eachach & vrlag[lt] [gt] Iarmhumha[n]'.

<sup>1283</sup> MacCotter, 'The rise of the Meic Cárthaig', p. 70.

<sup>1284</sup> *Chron. Scot.* 1123.4; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1136.4; *A.F.M.* 1138.5; *A.L.C.* 1138.5.

<sup>1285</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1138.2: 'Mathghamhain Ó Conchobhair, king of Ciarraige and of Corca Dhuibhne'.

<sup>1286</sup> *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1151.3; *A.F.M.* 1151.14; *Ann. Tig.* 1151.3.

<sup>1287</sup> *A.F.M.* 1158.9.

coincide with an English offensive. He annexed a considerable portion of territory into the kingdom of Thomond, including Ciarraige. This alienation proved lasting, as shown by Meic Cárthaig attacks on Ciarraige in 1180 and 1194, but Corco Duibne's status through these years is unclear.<sup>1288</sup>

The lands of the Uí Fidgeinte, on the Shannon estuary near Limerick, were also part of the contested border. It will be remembered that this dynasty had advanced a claim to belong to the Eóganachta in the early medieval period.<sup>1289</sup> By the twelfth century, segmentation had riven the Uí Fidgeinte into the branches of Uí Chonaill Gabra and Uí Chairpre, with the former situated to the west of the latter. Close to even the most confined definition of Thomond, both segments felt the squeeze of the internal conflict.

In Uí Chonaill, the Uí Chinn Fháelad family had come to dominate the kingship from the eleventh century, excluding their Uí Chuiléin rivals from the kingship with Uí Briain aid.<sup>1290</sup> The Uí Chinn Fháelad were among the 'nobles of Desmumu' when Toirdelbach Uá Conchobair invaded in 1123,<sup>1291</sup> and they were similarly described in an account of Cormac Mac Cárthaig's campaigns in 1135.<sup>1292</sup> The peace Uá Chinn Fháelad made with Uá Briain the following year, 1136, may represent a defection to Thomond.<sup>1293</sup> There is a passage in the *Caithr. Chell. Chaisil* where the Eóganachta offer Uí Chonaill to Dál Cais in return for aid, and this is illustrative of waning Desmumu associations.<sup>1294</sup>

The other half of Uí Fidgeinte, Uí Chairpre, had similar problems. It has been suggested that Donnubán mac Cathail's opposition to the Dál Cais in the tenth century led to the latter's sponsorship of rival families, Uí Billrín and Uí Chléirchín, in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.<sup>1295</sup> Máel Ruanaid Uá Billrín, alias Billraige, king of Uí Chairpre, was

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<sup>1288</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1180.3, 1194.2; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1180.2, 1194.1.

<sup>1289</sup> See above, p. 211.

<sup>1290</sup> MacCotter, 'The rise of the Meic Cárthaig', p. 68; *Ann. Inisf.* 1049.4 1050.8, 1053.3.

<sup>1291</sup> *Chron. Scot.* 1123.4.

<sup>1292</sup> *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1135.1.

<sup>1293</sup> MacCotter, 'The rise of the Meic Cárthaig', p. 68; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1136.2.

<sup>1294</sup> Ó Corráin, 'Caithréim Chellacháin Caisil: history or propaganda?', p. 22; *Caithr. Chell. Chaisil*, §§23–5, pp 13–6, 71–4.

<sup>1295</sup> MacCotter, 'The rise of the Meic Cárthaig', p. 68.



described as Toirdelbach Úa Briain's *oide* or 'tutor' in his obituary of 1105.<sup>1296</sup> This can be taken to indicate Toirdelbach's fosterage in Uí Chairpre.<sup>1297</sup>

Domnall Cairprech Úa Briain, who reigned as king of Thomond in the early thirteenth century, was evidently also fostered in Uí Chairpre. The Dál Cais are depicted having a closer relationship with the Uí Chairpre than the Uí Chonaill in *Caithr. Chell. Chaisil*.<sup>1298</sup> The fact that Mac Cárthaig hanged a thief at Clonbrien, County Limerick, in 1130 is questionable as evidence of Desmond influence in Uí Chairpre, since he was noted to have been delivered up by Conchobar Úa Briain and the name Cluain Briain was already in use for the area.<sup>1299</sup>

When making grants of Thomond and Desmond in 1177, Henry II adopted the (otherwise unrecorded) existing border. It was outlined in the following terms: 'the cape of St Brendan [Brandon Head] upon the sea coast, and towards Limerick and other parts and towards the river near Lismore [Blackwater], which runs between Lismore and Cork and falls into the sea'.<sup>1300</sup> From the subinfeudation that followed, we know that the lands 'towards Limerick', included portions of both Uí Chonaill and Uí Chairpre.<sup>1301</sup> It has been argued this partition reflects a pre-existing compromise between the Uí Briain and Meic Cárthaig.<sup>1302</sup> If so, under its terms, western Uí Chonaill and southern Uí Chairpre lay in Desmond, while their corresponding halves were in Thomond.

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<sup>1296</sup> *A.F.M.* 1105.10: '*Maol Ruanaidh Ua Bilraighe, tigherna Ua Cairpre, & oide Toirdhealbhagh I Briain, d'ég*'; *Ann. Inisf.* 1104.3; *A.U.* 1105.1.

<sup>1297</sup> To have survived his foster-son, who was seventy-six at the time of his death in 1086 (*A.U.* 1086.4), by nineteen years, Ua Billrín would have had to have been at least 100 years old. This is improbable, but it is also curiously similar to the case of Toirdelbach Ua Briain (d. 1168) as the foster-father of Cormac Mac Cárthaig (d. 1138), as discussed above (p. 250). This anomaly might bear further investigation.

<sup>1298</sup> *Caithr. Chell. Chaisil*, §§23–5, pp 13–16, 71–4.

<sup>1299</sup> MacCotter, 'The rise of the Meic Cárthaig', p. 68; *A.F.M.* 1130.6; *Ann. Tig.* 1130.4; *Chron. Scot.* 1130.3.

<sup>1300</sup> James Ware, *Antiquities and history of Ireland* (Dublin, 1705), pp 119–20.

<sup>1301</sup> See Empey, 'The settlement of Limerick' in Lydon (ed.), *England and Ireland in the Middle Ages* (Dublin, 1981), pp 10–13, 20 n. 20; *Rot. chart.*, pp 19a, 172a; *Cal.doc.Ire., 1171–1251*, pp 14, 51, 478, nos 92, 340, 3203; *Cal.doc.Ire., 1252–84*, pp 270–1, no. 1422; *Rot. litt. pat.*, p. 147a.

<sup>1302</sup> MacCotter, 'The rise of the Meic Cárthaig', p. 71.

Like west Munster and Ciarraige in particular, Uí Fidgeinte was swept up in the ‘great warfare between Tuadmumu and Desmumu’ in 1177.<sup>1303</sup> Just months after the border was described in writing, the peace that ‘was afterwards made by the son of Mac Carthaig and by the Uí Briain’ appears to have seen the alienation of all Uí Fidgeinte to Thomond. Some dynastic relocation followed the conquest. Donnubán’s descendants, the Uí Donnubháin, appear much further south in 1201 and similarly, the Uí Chuiléin were similarly pushed out of the newly expanded Thomond.<sup>1304</sup>

The extension of Dál Cais hegemony into eastern Munster in the eleventh century, and the capture of Cashel itself, have been discussed above, but there was one significant hold out in central Munster that interrupted the frontier. The dynasty whose territory centred on Rath Áine (Rathanny) and Cnoc Áine (Knockainey), Eóganacht Áine, defied the Uí Briain advance eastward, and their territory jutted into the border with Thomond. The leading dynasty here were the Uí Chiarmhaic, and a representative was among ‘the hostages of Desmumu’ executed by Toirdelbach Ua Conchobair in 1124.<sup>1305</sup> Cormac Mac Cárthaig had a house at Rath Áine between 1118 and 1121, and, when Ruaidrí Ua Conchobair escorted Diarmait Mac Cárthaig through Thomond in 1167, he left him in Knockainey, since this represented the most northerly location of political significance in Desmond.<sup>1306</sup>

Beyond Cashel in east Munster, Déise Muman was the last disputed polity along the border. As in Eóganacht Loch Léin and Uí Fidgeinte, segmental rivals were used as proxies. In this case, the Uí Briain supported the Uí Bric family and the Meic Cárthaig supported the Uí Fáeláin, though the region was undoubtedly part of the first kingdom of

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<sup>1303</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1177.3: ‘*Coccad mór itir Tuadamain & Desamuin in hóc anno*’; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1177.1.

<sup>1304</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1201.12.

<sup>1305</sup> *A.U.* 1123.2; *A.L.C.* 1123.2; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1124.17; *Ann. Inisf.* 1124.4; *Ann. Tig.* 1124.4; *Chron. Scot.* 1124.8.

<sup>1306</sup> MacCotter, ‘The rise of the Meic Cárthaig’, pp 66, 74–5 & notes 13, 20; *A.F.M.* 1167.11; *Ann. Tig.* 1167.4; *A.U.* 1167.2.

Desmond and both families were ‘nobles of Desmumu’.<sup>1307</sup> In 1136, Cormac Mac Cárthaig killed the Uí Bric claimant and in 1142, Donnchad Mac Cárthaig was captured by the Uí Bric and delivered to the Uí Briain, later dying in captivity.<sup>1308</sup> After the kingdom of Desmond was resurrected, the Uí Fáeláin ascended to this regional kingship once more, and it was therefore a strongly pro-Meic Cárthaig Déise Muman that felt the brunt of the first English incursions into Munster.<sup>1309</sup>

### [3.3: The impact of the English invasion]

When Giraldus Cambrensis penned his history of the conquest of Ireland, he described the components of Munster as ‘the kingdom of Limerick’, and ‘the kingdom of Cork’.<sup>1310</sup> This nomenclature is virtually unknown in the annals, at least in this sense. The kingships of Limerick and Cork are referred to, but they constitute additional honorifics. For instance, when Cormac Mac Cárthaig ‘took the kingship of Luimnech’ in 1125, it was the town itself that was intended.<sup>1311</sup> Similarly, Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn besieged Limerick and ‘took the kingship’, in 1157, it was also the town as distinct from the wider kingdom.<sup>1312</sup> An interesting amalgamation of the English and Irish usages is found in Miles de Cogan’s obituary in *A.L.C.*, which observes that he died ‘after assuming the kingship of Corcach and Des-Mumha’.<sup>1313</sup>

It was the English generally, and not just Giraldus Cambrensis, who used the capitals as metonyms of Thomond and Desmond. In *The Deeds* for example, Domnall Úa Briain is styled ‘the king of Limerick’ on one occasion.<sup>1314</sup> Henry II’s charters granted the kingdoms of Cork and Limerick to feoffees in 1177.<sup>1315</sup> A pipe roll of 1172–3 mentions ‘the king of Cork’ whose son was given up as a hostage, and this undoubtedly refers to

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<sup>1307</sup> *Chron. Scot.* 1123.4; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1123.2.

<sup>1308</sup> *A.F.M.* 1142.5, 1144.4; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1142.2; *Ann. Tig.* 1144.9; *Chron. Scot.* 1144.8.

<sup>1309</sup> *A.F.M.* 1168.8; *Ann. Inisf.* 1168.1; *Ann. Tig.* 1168.4; *A.U.* 1168.1.

<sup>1310</sup> For instance, Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 52–3, 92–3.

<sup>1311</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1125.8.

<sup>1312</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1157.6; *A.F.M.* 1157.10.

<sup>1313</sup> *A.L.C.* 1182.5; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1183.1.

<sup>1314</sup> *The Deeds*, p. 105 ll 2033, 2039.

<sup>1315</sup> Ware, *Antiquities and history of Ireland*, pp 119–20.

Mac Cárthaig.<sup>1316</sup> It was also the kingdoms and kings of Limerick and Cork that Roger of Howden wrote about in his account of Henry II's reign.<sup>1317</sup>

It is not that the English simply disregarded the Irish names for the kingdoms. Elsewhere in *The Deeds*, another passage reports that 'in Ireland kings were as numerous as earls were elsewhere, but whoever holds Meath and Leinster and Desmond and Munster and Connacht and Ulster, which the six brothers held long ago, whoever holds these are the chief kings of Ireland, according to the Irish'.<sup>1318</sup> Domnall Úa Briain is called the 'king of Munster' on other occasions,<sup>1319</sup> and Diarmait Mac Cárthaig is sometimes styled king of Desmond by Giraldus.<sup>1320</sup> There is reason to believe 'Munster' had sometimes been used for 'Thomond' before the invasion as well, in another instance of broad semantic range.<sup>1321</sup> It may have been this very ambiguity that led to the use of the metonyms.

The continental-style Latin charters issued by the Irish kings in the twelfth century make this more interesting still, because Domnall Úa Briain employed the title on several occasions. Four of Domnall Úa Briain's charters survive, including one original, and his stylisation is consistent throughout. He appears as, 'D., by grace of God king of Limerick',<sup>1322</sup> in the original, dated 1168x85,<sup>1323</sup> and in the others as 'Domnall, king of Limerick',<sup>1324</sup> 'Donaldus Obreyn, 'by the grace of God, king of Limerick',<sup>1325</sup> and 'Domnall magnus Ua Briain, by the gracious gift of God, king of Limerick'.<sup>1326</sup> Self-

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<sup>1316</sup> *Cal.doc.Ire., 1171–1251*, p. 7 no. 39; *Great Roll of the Pipe for the nineteenth year of the reign of King Henry The Second, A.D. 1172–3* (Pipe Roll Society Publications, London, 1895), pp 50–51: 'Reg' de Corch'.

<sup>1317</sup> *Gesta*, i, pp 25, 163, 172, 173.

<sup>1318</sup> *The Deeds*, p. 111 ll 2189–2196.

<sup>1319</sup> *The Deeds*, pp 98, 105, 106 ll 1756, 2048–9, 2097.

<sup>1320</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 136–7, 164–5.

<sup>1321</sup> This occurs in two separate entries of 1166. In the first, Toirdelbach Úa Briain was said to have reprised kingship of Munster (*Ann. Tig.* 1166.6; *A.U.* 1166.15) and in the second, the lists of *túarastal* given by Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair include the men of Munster and Mac Cárthaig as separate recipients (*Ann. Tig.* 1166.20).

<sup>1322</sup> Flanagan, *Irish royal charters*, pp 308–3: 'D dei gratia luimnicensis rex'.

<sup>1323</sup> Flanagan, *Irish royal charters*, p. 136.

<sup>1324</sup> Flanagan, *Irish royal charters*, pp 316–17: 'Donaldus rex Lymericensis'

<sup>1325</sup> Flanagan, *Irish royal charters*, pp 320–1: 'Donaldus Obreyn dei gratia Lymrecensis Rex'.

<sup>1326</sup> Flanagan, *Irish royal charters*, pp 326–7: 'Donaldus magnus O Brian divini muneris largitate rex Limericensis'.

identification could have played a role in the appearance of the title, but it is more likely Úa Briain adopted it from the English than vice versa. One suggestion is that Úa Briain only emphasised his link to Limerick so strongly after he won the town back from the English.<sup>1327</sup>

Limerick was not always the capital of Thomond, let alone the title of choice for its kings. In the late tenth century the Norse of the town ruled their own polity and threatened the adjacent Thomond. They were part of the coalition that toppled Mathgamain and opposed Brian, and when Brian came to power, he quickly exacted revenge. Their eclipse is to be linked to the political (though not economic) decline of all Hiberno-Norse towns in the mid- to late tenth century, which, though not exclusively to Brian's credit, is nonetheless generally associated with his career.

Historians have normally placed the Uí Briain relocation to Limerick in the mid-eleventh century; some have argued Toirdelbach himself was responsible,<sup>1328</sup> while others have credited Donnchad mac Briain.<sup>1329</sup> Others still have seen it as a consequence of Muirchertach Úa Briain's grant of Cashel to the church in 1101.<sup>1330</sup> Toirdelbach's own campaign to take the kingship (with the aid of Diarmait mac Máel na mBó) saw him target the town in 1058 and in 1063, so Donnchad mac Briain was certainly based there at that point.<sup>1331</sup> There is evidence that the relocation may have occurred even earlier. In 1015, Domnall mac Dub dá Bairenn of the Eóganacht Raithlinn led an army northward to challenge the Dál Cais supremacy in Munster. He too marched against Limerick, where Brian's sons Tadc and Donnchad mustered their own forces and defeated the invasion.<sup>1332</sup>

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<sup>1327</sup> Flanagan, *Irish royal charters*, p. 134.

<sup>1328</sup> Bracken, 'Ua Briain, Toirdelbach [Turlough O'Brien]' in the *O.D.N.B.*, accessed online (<https://doi-org.jproxy.nuim.ie/10.1093/ref:odnb/20468>) (8 July 2020).

<sup>1329</sup> Ó Corráin, *Ireland before the Normans*, p. 142.

<sup>1330</sup> Henry Alan Jefferies, *Cork: historical perspectives* (Dublin, 2004), p. 37.

<sup>1331</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1058.4; *Ann. Tig.* 1063.4.

<sup>1332</sup> *Chron. Scot.* 1015.1.

It is very unlikely that Donnchad and Tadc would have had the opportunity (in the year since Clontarf) or motivation (as inevitable rivals) to move their dynasty from its traditional centre. Therefore, responsibility for the adoption of Limerick is likely to lie with Brian himself. Unfortunately, there is no mention of Limerick in the record between 977, when Brian battled to establish his dominance over the Hiberno-Norse community of the town, and the Eóganacht Raithlinn attack of 1015, so this is not certain. Like so much, though, it seems Toirdelbach's use of the town as a base was an imitation and evolution of Brian's policies.<sup>1333</sup>

It is in Toirdelbach and Muirchertach's reigns that we see increasing evidence of Limerick as a Dál Cais headquarters. In 1080 and 1093, the kings of Meath went to Limerick to offer submission to Toirdelbach and Muirchertach respectively.<sup>1334</sup> In 1083 the king of Ulaid drowned at Limerick, while there to enter Úa Briain's service.<sup>1335</sup> Niall Úa Cétfada of Dál Cais died at Limerick in 1087, as did Máel Sechnaill Úa Conchobair of the closely linked Corcu Modruad in 1113.<sup>1336</sup> Enemies of the kings of Leth Moga also targeted the town in 1088 and 1115,<sup>1337</sup> while later, in 1157, Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn marched to Limerick to take Úa Briain's hostages.<sup>1338</sup> It was therefore no surprise that Domnall Úa Briain resided at Limerick after he became king in 1168, even if titular association with the town was a new development.

The corollary of the move to Limerick was the decline in the importance of Kincora and Killaloe as headquarters of the Dál Cais. These adjacent and closely linked sites suffered major assaults on numerous occasions, including in 1015, 1061, 1088, and 1116, with most of the attacks coming from Connacht. On the last occasion, for instance,

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<sup>1333</sup> It is also worth noting the presence a Norse official in Brian's entourage in 1013, Osli mac Dubcind mic Ímair. See *Cog. Gaedhel*, §84, pp 146–7: 'an officer of Brian', translated from the Irish '*fer grada do Briain*'.

<sup>1334</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1080.5, 1093.3.

<sup>1335</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1083.2; *Chron. Scot.* 1083.2; *A.U.* 1083.4.

<sup>1336</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1087.3, 1113.3; *A.F.M.* 1113.7; *Ann. Tig.* 1113.1; *A.L.C.* 1113.2.

<sup>1337</sup> *A.F.M.* 1088.10, 1115.4; *Ann. Tig.* 1088.3; *Chron. Scot.* 1088.1; *A.L.C.* 1115.8; *A.U.* 1115.8.

<sup>1338</sup> *A.F.M.* 1157.10; *Ann. Tig.* 1157.6.

Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair ‘burned and demolished Boromha and Ceann-coradh’, and ‘Cill-Dalua, with its church, was burned’.<sup>1339</sup> Even though these entries are recorded separately, there can be little doubt Killaloe suffered at the same hands as Kincora. On other occasions, like 1015 and 1061, the link is made explicitly.<sup>1340</sup>

In 1088, an unusually aggressive Domnall Mac Lochlainn burned Kincora.<sup>1341</sup> It was eight years later, in 1096, before ‘Ceanncoradh was re-edified by Muircheartach Ua Briain’.<sup>1342</sup> In 1118 or 1119, an even greater attack was launched. ‘The great army of Connaught, under Toirdhealbhadh Ua Conchobhair, marched to Ceann-coradh, and hurled it into the Sinainn, both stone and wood’.<sup>1343</sup> Despite plenty of opportunities, few invaders seem to have deemed it worthwhile attacking thereafter, and little is heard of Kincora for the remainder of the century. As such, it appears Kincora was of secondary importance to Limerick by 1088, since it was some time before it was repaired, and, moreover, that it had declined further by 1118/9, since it was not deemed worthy of further major works.

Killaloe did not suffer to quite the same extent as Kincora, perhaps by virtue of its status as an official diocesan centre after 1111. It was burned in 1154, and its bridge was burned in 1170, but overall, it remained more notable as an ecclesiastical settlement and especially as one in which major political figures often retired or were buried.<sup>1344</sup>

Muirchertach Úa Briain, for instance, was briefly forced into retirement at Killaloe in 1114 and was later buried there in 1119.<sup>1345</sup> Conchobar Úa Briain king of Munster died at Killaloe in 1142, and in 1159 Úa Ceinnedigh, king of Ormond, retired to the

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<sup>1339</sup> *A.F.M.* 1116.3: ‘*Ceall Da Lua cona tempall do loscadh*’, 1116.7: ‘*ur ro loiscc & gur ro mhúr Boromha & Cenn Choradh*’; *A.U.* 1116.2; *A.L.C.* 1116.2; *Ann. Tig.* 1116.1.

<sup>1340</sup> *A.F.M.* 1015.17.

<sup>1341</sup> *A.F.M.* 1088.10.

<sup>1342</sup> *A.F.M.* 1096.10: ‘*Cend Coradh do athnuadhucchadh lá Muirchertach Ua m-Briain*’.

<sup>1343</sup> *A.F.M.* 1118.9: ‘*Mórshluagh Connacht im Toirdhealbhadh Ua c-Conchobhair go Cenn Coradh, gur ro cuireadh leo h-e isin Sionainn eitir cloich & crann*’; *A.U.* 1119.1; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1119.3.

<sup>1344</sup> *A.F.M.* 1154.4, 1170.22; *Ann. Tig.* 1170.18, 1170.19.

<sup>1345</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1114.4; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1114.1; *A.F.M.* 1119.4.

monastery.<sup>1346</sup> Similarly, when Toirdelbach Úa Briain was deposed in 1165, Killaloe was intended to be his retirement home.<sup>1347</sup>

Not every important person, or even Uí Briain dynast, was interred at Killaloe in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. In 1129, for example, two obituaries (Mathgamain Úa Briain and Cellach, *comarbae* of Armagh) record burials in Lismore.<sup>1348</sup> Diarmait Úa Briain, king of Munster, died in 1118 in Cork, though whether that was also his final resting place is not known. Succession to the bishopric of Killaloe remained an issue of continued political importance though, and it was closely monitored by the Uí Briain kings long after Kincora had faded from relevance.<sup>1349</sup>

After the English captured Limerick, different locations served as effective capitals of Thomond. Caislén Uí Chonaing or Castleconnell, was the first. This location first appears in this capacity in the annals under 1175, on the occasion Domnall Úa Briain killed and blinded several important nobles.<sup>1350</sup> Situated roughly equidistant from both Limerick and Killaloe, it was still exposed, and was notably attacked by Cathal Crobderg Úa Conchobair in 1201.<sup>1351</sup> A second location, Clonroad, near Ennis, offered more security. Donnchad Cairprech Úa Briain is credited with fortifying this site *c.* 1210, but the move represents a further retreat for the Uí Briain.<sup>1352</sup>

Domnall Úa Briain's adoption of the English stylisation strikes a contrast with his contemporary and rival, Diarmait Mac Cárthaig. In his sole surviving charter, he appears as 'Diarmait, by the favour of divine clemency, king of the men of Munster',<sup>1353</sup> rather than king of Cork or even king of Desmond. Since the charter makes a favourable

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<sup>1346</sup> *A.F.M.* 1142.4, 1159.3; *Chron. Scot.* 1142.1; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1142.1; *Ann. Tig.* 1159.3.

<sup>1347</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1165.2.

<sup>1348</sup> *A.F.M.* 1129.7, 1129.13; *Ann. Inisf.* 1129.6, 1129.14; *Ann. Tig.* 1129.1; *Chron. Scot.* 1129.2; *A.U.* 1129.3; *A.L.C.* 1129.1.

<sup>1349</sup> See Ó Corráin, 'Dál Cais—church and dynasty' in *Ériu*, xxiv (1973), pp 52–63.

<sup>1350</sup> *A.F.M.* 1175.10; *Ann. Inisf.* 1175.3; *Ann. Tig.* 1175.3; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1176.5.

<sup>1351</sup> *A.F.M.* 1200.13.

<sup>1352</sup> Brian Ó Dálaigh, 'History of an O'Brien stronghold: Clonroad, *c.* 1210–1626' in *North Munster Antiquarian Journal*, xxix (1987), pp 16–31 at 16; *Caithréim Thoirdhéalbhaigh*, (ed.) S.H. O'Grady, (2 vols, *Irish Texts Society*, London, 1929), i, p. 2; ii, p. 2.

<sup>1353</sup> Flanagan, *Irish royal charters*, pp 177–8, 204–7, 334–5.



reference to Diarmait's son Cormac Liathanach, it can be no later than 1175, when Cormac rebelled.<sup>1354</sup> It therefore pre-dated the Anglo-Norman capture of Cork in 1177, and 'king of Cork' would have been a reasonable stylisation had the title been current. The claim to Munster reflected both an interest in the kingship of the whole province, which will be discussed further below, and the fact that Desmond was less centralised than Thomond.

Unlike Thomond, several settlements could be called capitals in Desmond. Cork was undoubtedly the chief among these, but the others, Waterford and Lismore, were more important in their kingdom than Killaloe was in Thomond. This could be attributed to the speed with which the dynasties of Eóganacht Chaisil went from new arrivals in Desmond to overlords of a new semi-provincial kingdom; Limerick by contrast had already been capital of Munster for at least sixty years when partition was first imposed, and naturally enjoyed pre-eminence in Thomond thereafter.

It was during the very events that led to partition that Cork first rose to provincial prominence. Diarmait Úa Briain died at Cork in 1118, and when Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair led his army into Desmond to divide Munster the same year, he went to Glanmire beside Cork.<sup>1355</sup> In 1123, Úa Conchobair's army came southwards again to receive the submission of the Munster kings, 'and [he] came as far as Corcach, and the nobles of Desmumu came into his house, including Donnchadh mac Carthaigh and Cellach ua Bric and ua Cennfaeladh and ua Conchobuir Ciarraige'.<sup>1356</sup> From the first, therefore, Cork was intended to be the principal base of the Meic Cárthaig kingdom.

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<sup>1354</sup> Flanagan, *Irish royal charters*, p. 207.

<sup>1355</sup> *A.F.M.* 1118.2, 1118.6; *Ann. Inisf.* 1118.2, 1118.8; *Ann. Tig.* 1118.1; *Chron. Scot.* 1118.2; *A.U.* 1118.2, 1118.6; *A.L.C.* 1118.2, 1118.6, 1118.7.

<sup>1356</sup> *Chron. Scot.* 1123.4: 'Morluaihedh la Tairdealbach h. Concupair for muir & for tir gur airg Ciarraige go rúacht fén Corcaigh go ttancuttur maithe Deasmumhan ina tech um Donnchadh mac Carthaigh et um Ceallach h. m-Bric & um h. Cinnfaoladh et um {h.} Concupair Ciarraige'.

By contrast with Cork, which developed from both a Viking base and a nearby monastery, Waterford originated solely as a Norse settlement. It first appears in the historical record in the mid-ninth century,<sup>1357</sup> and becomes more notable from the early tenth century, when another group of ‘foreigners arrived in Ireland, and took up at Port-Lairge’.<sup>1358</sup> Waterford was perilously close to the borders of Osraige, Leinster, and Munster. The Viking town is poorly attested by physical evidence. Even with 20 percent of the Hiberno-Norse town now excavated, constituting ‘by far the largest excavated proportion of any historic city in Europe’, nothing definitely earlier than the eleventh century has been uncovered.<sup>1359</sup>

Excavations have uncovered two pre-invasion phases of fortification at Waterford. The first can be dated with confidence to the late eleventh century, constituting a ditch enclosing an earthen rampart surmounted by a wooden palisade.<sup>1360</sup> The second phase saw the infilling of the ditch and the construction of a stone wall, and has been dated more tentatively to 1132 ±9.<sup>1361</sup> Both dates correspond with periods of violence. At Waterford in 1088, ‘Énna, son of Diarmait, and the nobles of Desmumu [were] in the fortress, and the Laigin failed to take it’.<sup>1362</sup> This obviously refers to ‘Desmond’ in its more limited sense, but it is nonetheless the first indication we have that Waterford, like Limerick and Cork, had been occupied by the Irish dynasties who surrounded it. Later, in 1137, Diarmait Mac Murchada supported Conchobar Úa Briain in a siege of Waterford,

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<sup>1357</sup> *A.F.M.* 858.6, 888.6.

<sup>1358</sup> *A.F.M.* 910.2: ‘*Guill do thecht i nd-Erinn go ro ghabhsat h-i Port Lairghe*’.

<sup>1359</sup> Barry, ‘Waterford: a historical introduction’ in Maurice F. Hurley, Orla M.B. Scully and Sarah W.J. McCutcheon (eds), *Late Viking age and medieval Waterford* (Waterford, 1997), pp 13–20 at 13.

<sup>1360</sup> Barry, ‘Waterford: a historical introduction’, p. 16.

<sup>1361</sup> Hurley, Scully, and McCutcheon, *Late Viking age and medieval Waterford* (Waterford, 1997), pp 30–1.

<sup>1362</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1088:3: ‘*Sluaged la Laigniu & la mc. n-Domnaill Remair co Port Lairge, & Enda mc. Diarmata isin dún & mathe Desmuman, & femdisset Laigin dul arin dún*’.

and succeeded in carrying off ‘the hostages of Donnchad Mac Carthaigh, of the Deisi, and of the foreigners of Port-Lairge’.<sup>1363</sup>

Lismore had a long history of prominence in Munster from the foundation of the monastery in the seventh century. Naturally, considering its fame, it was used by and associated with the Uí Briain kings of Leth Moga in the period before partition. In one instance, in 1093, Diarmait Úa Briain swore loyalty to Muirchertach at Lismore.<sup>1364</sup> When he broke this oath in 1114, it was particularly noted that the guarantee made at Lismore had been defied.<sup>1365</sup> In 1116, after Diarmait defeated him, Muirchertach himself retired to Lismore.<sup>1366</sup>

Soon after partition, in 1121, Lismore was targeted by Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair during a campaign against Desmond, while Thomond remained peaceful. On that expedition, the link between Lismore and the Desmumu is made explicit: ‘a predatory hosting by Tairdelbach, son of Ruaidrí, into Desmumu, and he did a deed which was vexatious to God and to the whole Christian Church generally, namely the plundering of Les Mór Mo-Chutu. The Desmumu, however, at the instigation of the Lord [and] for the honour of its saints, slay Ua Flaithbertaig and Ua hEidin along with other leaders, though [this] vengeance preceded the sin’.<sup>1367</sup>

This association is underlined throughout the rest of the twelfth century. In Cormac Mac Cárthaig’s obituary of 1138 it is noted that he built twelve churches at Lismore. The Úa Bric king of the Déise was captured at Lismore by Mac Cárthaig, and later put to death.<sup>1368</sup> The monastery at Lismore was also burned at times of conflict between the Uí

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<sup>1363</sup> *A.F.M.* 1137.12: ‘*Forbhais Puirt Láirge la Diarmait Mac Murchadha, lá righ Laighen, & lá Conchóbar Ua m-Briain, tigherna Dal c-Cais, & Goill Atha Cliath, & Locha Carman, for muir dá chéd long. Tucsat gialla Donnchaidh Meic Carthaigh, na n-Déisi, & Gall Puirt Láirce leó*’.

<sup>1364</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1093.11.

<sup>1365</sup> *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1116.1.

<sup>1366</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1116.5.

<sup>1367</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1121.7: ‘*Crecluaged la Tairdelbac mc. Ruadri i n-Desmumain co n-dernai gnim nathocrated do Dia & don Eclais Cristaide uli co cotcend, id est, Les Mor Mu-Chutu d’argain. Marbaid autem Desmumu Ua Flathbertaig acus Ua h-Edind cum al[i]is primatibus tri gresacht in Comded i n-aenec a naem, ciasa tusicu in t-innichath anná in peccad*’.

<sup>1368</sup> *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1151.4.

Briain and Meic Cárthaig, suggesting it was targeted for its association with the latter group, including in 1135 for example.<sup>1369</sup> When Toirdelbach Ua Briain was deposed in 1165 he ‘went to Cell Da Lua, and thence to Les Mór into the house of Cormac’s son, and there gave hostages to the latter’.<sup>1370</sup>

The origin and use of these settlements are important because the immediate experience of the English invasion in Munster was defined by the capture of the capitals, especially the Hiberno-Norse towns. In Leth Cuinn there were important centres of political authority, but only in Leth Moga did the provincial kings reside in Hiberno-Norse towns. Indeed, only in Leth Moga did such towns exist. Quite naturally, presented with fortified coastal towns which they could first assault and then potentially defend, the English quickly moved to capture them; that such action could seriously undermine the kings and kingdoms associated with those towns only increased their attraction.

Under Diarmait Mac Murchada’s stewardship Wexford was among the very first targets successfully seized by the English, and Waterford soon followed. In this case, Waterford’s ambiguous status played a role. Its association with Osraige in 1134 provided Mac Murchada with a pretext to extend his authority in that direction.<sup>1371</sup> When Mac Murchada captured the town in 1137, he had carried off the hostages of Donnchad Mac Cárthaig, the Déise, and the Hiberno-Norse of the town. When Waterford now fell to his and his English allies’ renewed assault in 1170, each of these three parties were again affected; there could be no question that entanglement in Munster on the latter occasion was accidental, therefore.

Having obtained permission from Henry II, Richard de Clare sent an advance party under the leadership of Raymond le Gros to Ireland. They put in at Dundonnolf or Baginbun,

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<sup>1369</sup> *Misc.Ir.Annals* 1135.1.

<sup>1370</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1165.2: ‘Tairdelbach do dul i Cil Da Lua & [a]s saide co l-Less Mor i tech meic Cormaic co tu braigdi do an[n] sin’.

<sup>1371</sup> *A.F.M.* 1134.11, 1134.12; *Chron. Scot.* 1134.13; *A.L.C.* 1134.4, 1134.5; *Misc.Ir.Annals* 1134.7.

not far from Waterford.<sup>1372</sup> Since they could have put in at the already captured Wexford, the decision to move against Waterford had clearly already been taken. Led by Máel Sechlainn Úa Fáeláin, king of the Déise, a remarkable fact in and of itself, the community of Waterford made a pre-emptive strike against le Gros and his men, who had made a ‘flimsy fortification’ near their landing point.<sup>1373</sup> Úa Fáeláin’s army was defeated, with a large number slain.

This victory provided the impetus for an attack on Waterford itself, which soon followed. According to Giraldus, the Anglo-Normans were ‘twice vigorously repulsed by the citizens and the survivors of the slaughter at Dundunnolf’.<sup>1374</sup> At length the resistance was overcome, and Máel Sechlainn Úa Fáeláin himself was captured in the fighting.<sup>1375</sup> ‘The two Sitrics’, leaders of the Hiberno-Norse in the town, were not so fortunate, and were killed.<sup>1376</sup> Shortly afterwards, Diarmait Mac Murchada’s daughter Aífe was famously wedded to de Clare in the town.

The fact that English attention then turned to Dublin reflected several competing concerns, but the focus on fortified urban settlements should not be overlooked. Dublin was, by this time, the largest and most significant town in Ireland; its capture prepared the ground for a showdown with Úa Conchobair. It had also functioned as the capital of the province of Leinster under Diarmait Mac Murchada, before his exile, and so like Waterford it was a justifiable target for a resurgent Leinster.

By the end of 1170, therefore, Mac Murchada and his English allies had captured Wexford, Waterford, and Dublin, beginning a pattern that would manifest itself very clearly in the conquest of large parts of Munster. It is interesting that when Úa Conchobair negotiated with de Clare during the siege of Dublin he offered the three

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<sup>1372</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 56–7.

<sup>1373</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*: pp 56–7: ‘*cespite castrum erexerunt*’.

<sup>1374</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 66–7.

<sup>1375</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 66–7.

<sup>1376</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 66–7; *A.F.M.* 1170.11.

towns to the Anglo-Norman magnate, but nothing more.<sup>1377</sup> On one level, this can be interpreted as a relatively limited offer reflecting the balance of power at the time, but it could also indicate Úa Conchobair's belief that the Anglo-Normans were most interested in the coastal urban settlements.

For the moment, Waterford remained the sole incursion into Munster territory. With Úa Fáeláin and the 'two Sitrics' reflecting the interests of the Déise and the Hiberno-Norse respectively, the third party with a stake in the town clearly had no representative present at its fall, but they soon made themselves known. Diarmait Mac Cárthaig himself led an attack against the garrison and defeated them.<sup>1378</sup> *Ann. Tig.* reports that he won three victories, but even so, he did not recapture the town and neither *The Deeds* nor Giraldus refers to these engagements.<sup>1379</sup> Indeed, de Clare sought refuge in Waterford upon his return from Dublin, while Wexford itself was in the midst of a rebellion, so he did not feel unduly threatened by Mac Cárthaig's influence or aggression.<sup>1380</sup>

He was proven quite correct in this judgment. Not only was there no further attack but, like Úa Briain, Mac Cárthaig submitted to Henry II in 1171. This submission was proffered shortly after the king of England arrived, choosing Waterford as his port of entry.<sup>1381</sup> Henry may simply have followed de Clare's example putting in at that town, but the proximity of the royal entourage was enough to convince the two provincial kings best placed to assault current English holdings that further fighting would be untimely.

On a related point, it has been argued that the submission of Mac Cárthaig and Úa Briain (as well as several other provincial kings in Leth Cuinn) constituted repudiation of their bond with Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair.<sup>1382</sup> This may exaggerate the importance of the move. Úa Briain had already tried to challenge Úa Conchobair, earlier in 1171, without success,

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<sup>1377</sup> *The Deeds*, p. 100 ll 1852–56.

<sup>1378</sup> *A.F.M.* 1171.19.

<sup>1379</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1170.9.

<sup>1380</sup> *The Deeds*, p. 105 ll 2019–32.

<sup>1381</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1171.5; *Ann. Tig.* 1171.12; *A.U.* 1171.10; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1172.1, 1172.3.

<sup>1382</sup> Flanagan, *Irish society*, pp 226–7.

while Mac Cárthaig had a long-established pattern of accepting whatever overlord was nearest. As Orpen long ago noted, submission to Henry was probably viewed as a transient gesture in Ireland and was likely to last only for the duration of the English king's stay.<sup>1383</sup>

By 1175, the Anglo-Normans had annexed a little more of Desmond. In the Treaty of Windsor of that year, Henry secured Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair's acknowledgment that Waterford was now an English possession and, furthermore, that its 'appurtenances', as far as Dungarvan, were an associated territory. In the very same passage, 'the whole of Leinster' had been described as an 'appurtenance' of Wexford.<sup>1384</sup> The forty-kilometre stretch from Waterford to Dungarvan represented an attempt to levy Waterford's status in Desmond into a clear territorial gain. It also brought English holdings within striking distance of Lismore and Cork.

Only slightly later, Waterford's 'appurtenances' in Desmond were extended. The 1177 Council of Oxford saw the land between the town and the Blackwater beyond Lismore added to create an extensive domain. Osraige was added to the service of Waterford as well, exploiting the town's pre-invasion association with that semi-provincial territory, and detaching it from the fledgling lordship of Leinster.<sup>1385</sup> Waterford therefore retained its ambiguous status at this stage of the invasion.

Cork's status in the early 1170s has also been questioned. Giraldus mentioned in passing that Cork had an Anglo-Norman governor called Richard de Londres before the Council of Oxford, but this is not mentioned elsewhere.<sup>1386</sup> If true it would mean that at an unnoticed point between 1170 and 1177, Anglo-Norman sway had been extended further into Desmond. Giraldus's evidence was accepted by Orpen and endorsed by Otway-Ruthven, but more recently Henry Alan Jefferies has rejected the idea that Giraldus was

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<sup>1383</sup> Orpen, *Normans*, i, p. 284.

<sup>1384</sup> Curtis and McDowell (eds), *Irish historical documents*, p. 23.

<sup>1385</sup> Orpen, *Normans*, ii, p. 36.

<sup>1386</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 184–5.

better informed than the contemporary annals.<sup>1387</sup> Perhaps the most important point against Giraldus is that Cork was not mentioned in the Treaty of Windsor in 1175, as it would have been if it was in English hands.

It was, then, only after the Council of Oxford that Cork fell. The council, which took place in May 1177, saw Desmond granted to Miles de Cogan and Robert fitz Stephen, and Thomond to Herbert fitz Herbert, Joel de Pomerai, and William, a brother of Reginald earl of Cornwall.<sup>1388</sup> The towns of Cork and Limerick, with their associated ‘Ostman’ districts were retained in the crown’s hand, but fitz Stephen and de Cogan were given joint governorship of Cork.<sup>1389</sup> The three named awardees of Thomond renounced their grant on the remarkable basis that the land had not yet been conquered. Henry replaced them with a single man, Philip de Braose, who accompanied the new lords of Desmond to Ireland.

It was November before they moved to take possession of their new domains, using ‘the coastal route through the southern part of Ireland’.<sup>1390</sup> They arrived first at Waterford, then moved on to Lismore, and from there onward to Cork.<sup>1391</sup> Like Cork, this is an indication that Lismore may have become an English possession at an earlier date.

Similarly, this could also be the occasion when it was first seized; Mac Cárthaigh’s Book mentions an English raid on Lismore and Cashel under 1178 which is probably the same advance.<sup>1392</sup>

Lismore certainly belonged to Mac Cárthaigh in 1173, when, in the words of *Ann. Inisf.*, it was attacked by ‘the grey foreigners’.<sup>1393</sup> The episode is described in more detail by Giraldus, who reported that Raymond le Gros attacked Lismore and ‘dislodged Diarmait

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<sup>1387</sup> Orpen, *Normans*, ii, p. 38; Otway-Ruthven, *Medieval Ireland*, p. 62; Jefferies, ‘The founding of Anglo-Norman Cork’, p. 30.

<sup>1388</sup> *Chronica*, ii, p. 134; *Gesta*, i, pp 163, 172, 173.

<sup>1389</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 184–5, 336 n. 330; *Chronica*, ii, p. 134.

<sup>1390</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 184–5.

<sup>1391</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 184–5.

<sup>1392</sup> *Misc.Ir.Annals* 1178.6.

<sup>1393</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1173.4.



prince of Desmond’, and this represents another possible date for its acquisition.<sup>1394</sup>

Whether in 1173 or 1177, its status and importance to the Meic Cárthaig have already been highlighted, and like Waterford and Cork, Lismore was quickly targeted by the English for this reason.

While these events were occurring in Desmond, Thomond was assaulted and destabilised in a similar manner. Though Úa Briain had experimented with support of the Anglo-Normans even before Henry II arrived in Ireland, as will be discussed in detail below, he recognised the threat they posed and soon pivoted against them. In Giraldus’s words, ‘Domnall prince of Limerick began to conduct himself too arrogantly and, displaying a lack of respect as well as treachery, went back on the oath of loyalty which he had taken to the king’.<sup>1395</sup>

Supported by soldiers from Connacht, Úa Briain advanced against Osraige and Leinster in 1173. The English made a tactical retreat to Waterford, abandoning Kilkenny to Úa Briain, who burned the castle and the surrounding district. When the Anglo-Normans made a retaliatory raid into Thomond in 1174, Úa Briain, again with military support from Connacht, defeated them at Thurles. The annals make much of both victories, reporting in 1173 that ‘that reduction was a grief to the foreigners of Ireland’, and in 1174 that ‘seventeen hundred of the English were slain in this battle, and only a few of them survived with the earl, who proceeded in sorrow to his house at Waterford’.<sup>1396</sup>

It was in this context that the English decided to apply to Thomond their hitherto successful strategy of striking directly at capitals. Led by Raymond le Gros, a small force marched against Limerick close to the beginning of October 1175. *Ann. Tig.* suggests

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<sup>1394</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 136–7; *Ann. Inisf.* 1173.4; *Ann. Tig.* 1173.14; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1174.2.

<sup>1395</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 148–9: ‘*Interea Limericensium princeps Duvenaldus, cum se nimis insolenter habere cepisset, et a fidelitate Anglorum regi exhibita non minus infideliter quam irreverenter resiliisset*’.

<sup>1396</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1173.10: ‘*Ba dimbaigh le Gallaib Erenn an imgabail-sin*’, 1174.9; *A.F.M.* 1174.10: ‘*& ro marbhadh secht c-céd décc do Gallaibh isin cath-sin, co nach tearna acht tioruairsi becc beo asin cath-sin do Gallaibh imon iarla. Taed sidhe fo méla dia tigh go Port Lairge*’; *A.U.* 1174.5; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1175.1.

that an invitation by Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair provided the immediate context, but Úa Conchobair was mistaken if he thought he would be able to control the expedition. Once the town was taken, the English held it against Úa Conchobair and Úa Briain alike (the latter now described as prince of Thomond, not Limerick).<sup>1397</sup>

The move against Limerick highlights the centrality of all urban settlements to early English strategy in Ireland. Limerick was not adjacent to English territory and its acquisition would not confer any immediate advantage. Indeed, quite the contrary, it would be difficult to reinforce or resupply and would inevitably suffer Irish assaults. Instead, like Waterford and Cork, and to a lesser extent Wexford and Dublin, capture of Limerick was intended to decapitate the provincial kingdom with which it had become associated.

As if to prove the English preoccupation with the Hiberno-Norse towns, immediately following his account of the capture of Limerick, Giraldus muses that Waterford, Wexford, Dublin, and Limerick were all taken on a Tuesday.<sup>1398</sup> When describing the capture of Waterford, Giraldus quoted a prophecy he ascribed to ‘Moling of Ireland’, which said ‘a great one will come, forerunner of one yet greater. He will trample on the heads of both Desmond and Leinster, and, with forces excellently well-armed, will widen the paths that have already been prepared for him’.<sup>1399</sup> Here, the ‘heads’ or ‘*capita*’, are the towns with which the kingdoms of Leth Moga had become synonymous. This also shows that Leinster as much as Desmond or Thomond, found itself conquered through its centralisation over the prior century.

Though Limerick fell to Raymond le Gros and his men, it was soon clear that they had overreached. Úa Briain and Úa Conchobair buried the hatchet, at least temporarily, and threatened the town.<sup>1400</sup> Though initially successful in repelling their aggression, the

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<sup>1397</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 160–1.

<sup>1398</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 152–3.

<sup>1399</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 64–5.

<sup>1400</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1176.2.

English decided to withdraw from Limerick in 1176, after de Clare died, fearing a widespread Irish reaction.<sup>1401</sup> Though they relinquished Limerick under terms, and particularly on the guarantee that it would be held by Úa Briain as Henry's subject, the king of Thomond burned the town's fortifications while the English were still in view.<sup>1402</sup> On hearing this, Henry reportedly commented that 'the assault on Limerick was a bold enterprise, the relief of the city even more so, but only in abandoning the place did they show any wisdom'.<sup>1403</sup> It would be after Domnall Úa Briain's death in 1194 that Limerick again fell into English hands, on another occasion when its capture signalled a major English advance in Thomond.

With the English throwing Thomond and Desmond into disarray by striking the principal royal seats, we must turn our attention to the Irish leaders in each kingdom and their reaction to these events. The Uí Briain and Meic Cárthaig spent almost the entire period between the invasion and the turn of the thirteenth century on the back foot, often dealing with more than just the English. Consequently, neither family pursued a single policy, but instead found themselves reacting to events and experimenting with different approaches. The greatest influences on all such strategies were carry-overs from the pre-invasion period, including Leth Moga, the dominance of Connacht, and the border between Thomond and Desmond.

As far as Leth Moga is concerned, at an early stage of the invasion the king of Thomond may have viewed Mac Murchada's exploits as an attempt to make himself king of Leth Moga, in imitation of Diarmait mac Máel na mBó. Perhaps looking to play Toirdelbach úa Briain's role for a time, and rise to power through Mac Murchada, Domnall married one of the king of Leinster's daughters. This is generally thought to have taken place in 1170, since Úa Briain did not become king until 1168 and did not challenge Úa

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<sup>1401</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 164–7.

<sup>1402</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 166–7; *Ann. Inisf.* 1176.6; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1176.9.

<sup>1403</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 166–7: '*Magnus fuit ausus in aggrediendo, maior in subveniando, sed sapientia solum in destituendo*'.

Conchobair until 1170. The very ‘quarrel’ between the two men mentioned by Giraldus as a cause of the first English intervention in Munster was probably the result of Úa Briain forming this link (though not necessarily alliance) with Mac Murchada.<sup>1404</sup>

For some time thereafter, Úa Briain displayed an interest in resurrecting the Uí Briain overlordship of Osraige. After aiding the Anglo-Normans in 1170, he proposed that Domnall Mac Gilla Phátraic, king of Osraige, be assassinated. Though some of the invaders supported this plan, Maurice de Prendergast ensured it was not carried through.<sup>1405</sup> When Úa Briain went on the advance against the English in 1173, the latter party retreated from Osraige to their stronghold at Waterford, and Úa Briain burned the castle at Kilkenny.<sup>1406</sup> There is no mention of his having taken hostages from Osraige on this occasion, but in 1175 Mac Gilla Phátraic’s son was in his keeping, either as a hostage or a captive, and he was blinded by Úa Briain. In retaliation, Mac Gilla Phátraic lent his support to the English march on Limerick the same year.<sup>1407</sup>

Domnall Úa Briain’s greatest objective was to establish independence from Connacht. His father, Toirdelbach, had been reduced to virtual impotence by the Uí Chonchobair and had tamely given hostages for many years before his death in 1168. As mentioned above, Domnall’s marriage to Mac Murchada’s daughter in 1170 coincided with his first challenge to the king of Ireland. Giraldus reported that Úa Briain was victorious thanks to the English aid he received on this occasion, and Úa Conchobair ‘withdrew humiliated to his own territory and completely gave up his claim to kingship’.<sup>1408</sup> Whatever help was provided, this account is demonstrably false. The annals note that ‘the hostages of Domhnall Ó Briain were taken by Ruaidhrí Ó Conchobhair’ again in 1171.<sup>1409</sup>

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<sup>1404</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 52–3.

<sup>1405</sup> *The Deeds*, pp 105–7 ll 2031–2134.

<sup>1406</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1173.10.

<sup>1407</sup> *A.F.M.* 1175.8, 1175.10; *Ann. Inisf.* 1175.3; *Ann. Tig.* 1175.3, 1175.16; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1176.5.

<sup>1408</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 52–3: ‘*Rotherico cum dedecore ad sua revertente, se ab eius dominatu omnino subtraxit*’.

<sup>1409</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1171.4(ga), 1171.5: ‘*Braighdi Domnaill h-Úi Bríain la Ruaidhrí h-Úa Conchobair*’.

On two important occasions Úa Conchobair then lent Úa Briain military support, though his personal absence from the first campaign is notable. That was in 1173, when Ruaidrí's son Conchobar Maenmaige brought a contingent of the Uí Briúin Seóla southwards to support Úa Briain's march into Osraige.<sup>1410</sup> The second instance followed soon after, in 1174, as Ruaidrí himself played a part in the Battle of Thurles, at least according to some accounts.<sup>1411</sup> Unsurprisingly, *Ann. Inisf.* attributes the victory to Úa Briain alone.<sup>1412</sup>

In another important event that has already been discussed, Úa Conchobair then tried to depose Úa Briain with Anglo-Norman assistance. He may have done so because Úa Briain was growing too powerful on the back of these victories, or because of a series of blindings and assassinations by Úa Briain early in 1175, including that of the unfortunate Mac Gilla Phátraic prince.<sup>1413</sup> Whatever the problem, the refusal of the English party to leave Limerick saw Úa Briain make peace with Úa Conchobair in 1176, and once again leave hostages with the king of Connacht.<sup>1414</sup>

We hear nothing, either of cooperation or quarrel, between Úa Briain and Úa Conchobair for most of the next decade and may therefore assume that the king of Thomond remained subordinate to the king of Connacht. In noting the dissatisfaction of the minor Irish kings with Prince John, during his visit to Ireland in 1185, Giraldus described Úa Briain, Úa Conchobair, and Mac Cárthaig as the 'three main buttresses of Ireland', and implied a degree of collaboration between them as John's ambitions were thwarted.<sup>1415</sup> In that very year, Ruaidrí sought and received Úa Briain's aid when his son Conchobar Maemaige rebelled. It was to Úa Briain that Ruaidrí first went when deposed.<sup>1416</sup>

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<sup>1410</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1173.10.

<sup>1411</sup> *A.F.M.* 1174.10; *Ann. Tig.* 1174.9; *A.U.* 1174.5; *Misc.Ir.Annals* 1175.1.

<sup>1412</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1174.3.

<sup>1413</sup> *A.F.M.* 1175.8, 1175.10; *Ann. Inisf.* 1175.3; *Ann. Tig.* 1175.3; *Misc.Ir.Annals* 1176.5.

<sup>1414</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1176.2.

<sup>1415</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 236–7: 'tres principals tunc temporis Hibernie postes'.

<sup>1416</sup> *A.U.* 1185.8; *A.L.C.* 1185.3.

Conchobar Maenmaige was successful in his war against Ruaidrí, despite Úa Briain's help. Remarkably, given Connacht's fast diminishing influence, Conchobar Maenmaige too was able to enforce suzerainty over Úa Briain and Mac Cárthaig. We know this only as a result of Conchobar's remarkable obituary of 1189, which gives a lengthy account of his political clients: 'to him the greater part of Leth-Mhogha had submitted as king. Donnell O'Brien had gone to his house at Dunlo, where he was entertained for a week; and O'Conor gave him sixty cows out of every cantred in Connaught, and ten articles ornamented with gold; but O'Brien did not accept of any of these, save one goblet, which had once been the property of Dermot O'Brien, his own grandfather [...] Mac Carthy, King of Desmond, was in his house, and O'Conor gave him a great stipend, namely, five horses out of every cantred in Connaught'.<sup>1417</sup>

The conflict between the two Munsters also endured into the post-invasion period. Diarmait Mac Cárthaig launched an expedition against Úa Briain and captured Limerick in 1171. This curiously under-reported action, which appears only in *A.F.M.*, saw 'the foreigners of Luimneach' suffer the brunt of the violence, after which Mac Cárthaig 'burned the market and half the fortress to its centre'.<sup>1418</sup> It may be recalled here that Mac Cárthaig's charter, which dated from before 1175, saw him claim kingship of all Munster. That said, the campaign of 1171 coincided with Úa Briain's conflict with Úa Conchobair. It is easy to suppose Mac Cárthaig conducted it on the latter's behalf; even if he did not, he relinquished the town before long and the claim to Munster remained aspirational.

1177 was in fact the only major war between the two royal families after the English invasion took place. There is little doubt that Úa Briain timed his advance to capitalise on

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<sup>1417</sup> *A.F.M.* 1189.8(ga), 1189.10: 'uair tuccsat urmhor Leithe Mogha a c-cennus dó ria síu ro marbhadh. Dóigh tainicc Domhnall Ua Briain dia tigh go Dun Leoda, & boi sechtmain i n-a fharradh, & tuc trí fichit bo gacha triocha céd h-i c-Connachtaibh dhó, & .x. seóid go n-ór, & ní rucc Ua Briain díbh-sin uile, acht corn Diarmata Ui Briain a shenathar fein [...] & do bai Domhnall Mag Cárthaigh tighearna Desmumhan i n-a thigh & do-rad-somh tuarustal mór dó .i. cuicc eich gacha triochait cet h-i c-Connachtaibh'.

<sup>1418</sup> *A.F.M.* 1171.19: 'ro loiscc an marccadh, & leth an dúine ar meadhón'.

the English move against Desmond. It is perhaps surprising that he was satisfied with territorial acquisitions along the border, though, making peace with Mac Cárthaig instead of pushing for kingship of Munster.<sup>1419</sup> Had he done so, it may well have provoked a major campaign by Úa Conchobair, and Úa Briain probably limited himself for that reason. He had just recently reconciled with Ruaidrí, and his inability to withstand Connacht had been proven beyond doubt on two occasions.

As such, efforts to oppose the English in Munster necessarily involved three important factions. Inevitably, they were also fitful; mistrust of one another meant the Uí Chonchobair, Uí Briain, and Meic Cárthaig were all hesitant to fully commit to a campaign against the invaders. Indeed, the possibility that the English could be harnessed and used against rival Irish parties played an important role early in early conquests. It was this interdependence that led Giraldus to describe them as ‘the three buttresses of Ireland’ when detailing their collective opposition to Prince John in 1185.<sup>1420</sup>

One remarkable fact is that in Desmond, the Meic Cárthaig were often not the principal agents of opposition. It was the lesser regional kings, including the Meic Tíre, Uí Fáeláin, and Uí Chuiléin, who were responsible for most of the important actions. In 1178, for example, after Mac Cárthaig had ceded seven cantreds and agreed to pay tribute to de Cogan and fitz Stephen for the remaining part of his kingdom, English settlement was interrupted by Úa Fáeláin, king of the Déise, who killed ‘a multitude of Englishmen’.<sup>1421</sup> While it is true that a son of Fíngin Mac Cárthaig accompanied Úa Fáeláin, this was in a junior capacity, and, furthermore, Diarmait Mac Cárthaig himself was not mentioned.

In 1182, the head of the Meic Tíre family assassinated Miles de Cogan. The Meic Tíre, who belonged to the Uí Meic Caille of Uí Liatháin, were hereto almost unheard of in the

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<sup>1419</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1177.3, 1177.4; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1177.1, 1177.3, 1177.4, 1177.5.

<sup>1420</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 236–7: ‘tres principals tunc temporis Hibernie postes’.

<sup>1421</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1178.1: ‘Sochaidhe do Saxanachaib’.

annals, and as late as 1160 a different family had ruled over Uí Meic Caille.<sup>1422</sup> Not only were the Meic Tíre minor players, but neither the Uí Meic Caille nor the Uí Liatháin as a whole had made many appearances in the twelfth century up to this point, so the ambush may appear a surprisingly bold entrance into the political limelight.

In Giraldus's description of the event, he noted that it was while they were 'sitting in the middle of some fields, waiting to have a parley with the men of Waterford' that they were attacked.<sup>1423</sup> A couple of points are important here. Despite the comment in Mac Cárthaigh's Book that the English were on the way to attack Waterford when they were ambushed at Lismore, the town was still under English control.<sup>1424</sup> The men of Waterford Giraldus referred to must therefore be the Déise and Úa Fáeláin. Both Úa Fáeláin and Mac Tíre hailed from the eastern part of Desmond now destined for immediate occupation, and this was no doubt the reason for their resistance and collaboration.

Though Giraldus reports that 'Diarmait Mac Carrthaig and almost all the Irish throughout the whole region joined Mac Tíre in throwing off their allegiance to the English and rising against fitz Stephen',<sup>1425</sup> the king of Desmond actually took no recorded military action to consolidate the successes of Mac Tíre and Úa Fáeláin. Furthermore, Giraldus also follows by saying 'this turbulent gale of adverse fortune was within a short time stilled and calmed',<sup>1426</sup> so no great campaigns followed de Cogan's death. Mac Cárthaigh's underlying motivation here was presumably the avoidance of renewed hostilities with the English. It is likely that he hoped to stabilise his position in the short term, perhaps with an eye to securing recognition from the English for his kingship or tenancy in the long term. His son's offensive in the 1190s constituted a complete reversal

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<sup>1422</sup> *A.F.M.* 1160.11; Mac Cárthaigh's Book notes a Mac Tíre dynast in the kingship of Uí Meic Caille in 1172 (*Misc.Ir.Annals* 1172.2).

<sup>1423</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 186–7.

<sup>1424</sup> *Misc.Ir.Annals* 1183.1.

<sup>1425</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 188–9.

<sup>1426</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 188–9: '*pars vero potior ad pacem revocata, tam tempestuosa sortis adverse proccella in brevi sedata conquievit*'.



of this policy, but it too ended in the hope of creating a permanent relationship with the new English lordship.

The strategy of the kings of Desmond was therefore not consistent, and they tried different approaches with little success. Their difficulties were mirrored in Thomond, where Úa Briain experimented with supporting and opposing the English at intervals. Later, the same problem would undermine Connacht itself.<sup>1427</sup> The interdependence of these provinces, which resulted from events immediately before the invasion, drove the irregularity of their respective approaches. The fitfulness of opposition to the English advance was also reflected by the very intermittence of that advance; English expansion in Munster came in waves separated by long periods of inaction and relative peace. Outright conquest can not, therefore, have seemed as inevitable as modern historians have suggested, even if the governing factor in Irish inaction was relations between the provinces.

### **[3.4: Circumscription & Conquest]**

Prince John made several grants of territory during or soon after his expedition to Ireland in 1185, attempting to reinvigorate the now stalled conquest of Munster. Among these was an award of five and a half cantreds, which was made jointly to Ranulf de Glanville and Theobald Walter. At the time, de Glanville was the justiciar of England and Walter owed his somewhat unexpected involvement to a marriage link, but it was Walter who gained prominence in Ireland and from whom descended the famous Butler family of Ormond.<sup>1428</sup>

What would effectively be his grant alone was described as the land of ‘Elikaruel’ (Éile Uí Cherbail), ‘Ewermund’ (Urmumu or Múscraige Tíre), ‘Aros and Wodene’ (Araid Tíre and Uaithne Tíre), ‘Wodeneicadelan’ (Uaithne Uí Chathaláin) and

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<sup>1427</sup> See Connacht, pp 112–19.

<sup>1428</sup> Empey, ‘Butler-Ormond’ in Duffy (ed.), *Encyclopedia*, pp 58–61.

‘Woedeneoidernan’ (Uaithne Uí hIffernáin), along with the town of Killaloe ‘and the half cantred in which that burgh is situate’,<sup>1429</sup> which was anglicised ‘Trucheked Maleth’ from Trícha Cét Úa mBlait.<sup>1430</sup> In view of the above discussion of the importance of the towns in the English plan of attack, it is also worth considering the urban status accorded to Killaloe in this grant.<sup>1431</sup> The baronies that descended from these lands are upper and lower Tullagh in modern County Clare; Clonlisk and Ballybritt in County Offaly; Eliogarty, Owey and Arra, and upper and lower Ormond in County Tipperary; and Oweybeg, Clanwilliam, and Coonagh in County Limerick.<sup>1432</sup>

As can clearly be seen, the extensive award reached as far as the Shannon in the north and the environs of Limerick further south and would circumscribe Úa Briain in an area little larger than Thomond (in the confined sense) if made effective. Nor was it the only such grant; we know that Philip of Worcester and William de Burgh received similar grants around the same time, which bridged the distance between Walter’s grant and the contemporaneous English frontier with Thomond. Modern historians have tried to reconstruct these, with some success.

De Burgh did not get a coherent territory like Theobald Walter, but instead ‘isolated cantreds scattered across the county of Munster’.<sup>1433</sup> Among these were ‘Muscry’ (Muscraige Cuirc) and ‘Iffowyn’ (Uíbh Eóghain Fhinn) in modern County Tipperary; ‘Shanid’, ‘Ardagh’ (both in Uí Chonaill of Uí Fidgeinte), and half ‘Fontymkill’ (Fonn Timchill) in modern County Limerick, along with a portion of Trícha Cét Úa mBlait on the border of modern Limerick and Clare.<sup>1434</sup> It has been suggested that his landholdings

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<sup>1429</sup> *Ormond Deeds, 1350–1413*, pp 321–2, no. 426; MacCotter, *Medieval Ireland*, pp 191, 211–18.

<sup>1430</sup> MacCotter, *Medieval Ireland*, p. 192

<sup>1431</sup> See John Bradley, ‘Killaloe: a pre-Norman Borough?’ in *Peritia*, viii (1994), pp 170–9.

<sup>1432</sup> Otway-Ruthven, *Medieval Ireland*, p. 67.

<sup>1433</sup> Empey, ‘Conquest and settlement: patterns of Anglo-Norman settlement in north Munster and south Leinster’ in *Irish Economic and Social History*, xiii (1986), pp 5–31 at 17.

<sup>1434</sup> MacCotter, *Medieval Ireland*, p. 192.

indicate that ‘his main task was to guard against the O’Briens’,<sup>1435</sup> or ‘to contain the O Brians in Thomond’.<sup>1436</sup> From his castles at Kilfeacle, Corrigogunnell, and Shanid, and the royal castle of Tibberaghny, which he soon received, he was ultimately effective in both.<sup>1437</sup>

The third major recipient of shares of Thomond in (or shortly after) 1185 was Philip of Worcester. His grant was closer to the existing border, and included the cantreds of Sleafardach (Sliab Ardachaid), Moyeuén (Mag Fémín/Múscraige Airthir Fémín), Moytalyne, and Comsey (derivation of both uncertain), all in the south of modern county Tipperary, and the adjacent Ofaíthe (Uí Fothaid Tíre) in modern County Waterford.<sup>1438</sup> It was in Ofaíthe that the royal castle of Ardfinnan was situated, and just as de Burgh received Tibberaghny from Prince John, so too did Worcester receive Ardfinnan.<sup>1439</sup>

Once the castles at Tibberaghny, Ardfinnan, and Lismore were constructed, they were immediately used as staging grounds for raids into the kingdom of Thomond. Not alone were these raiding parties defeated, but Úa Briain also advanced to the castles themselves and skirmished with the garrisons.<sup>1440</sup> Whether or not Worcester, de Burgh, and Walter were present on these occasions is not recorded, but the death of ‘the foster-brother of the son of the king of the Saxons’ is mentioned, and this is thought to be one of Ranulf de Glanville’s sons, for whom Ranulf himself may have accepted the joint grant with Walter.<sup>1441</sup>

Walter himself engaged in a parley with Diarmait Mac Cárthaig in 1185, at which the latter was set upon and killed with many of his entourage.<sup>1442</sup> From an English

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<sup>1435</sup> Beresford, ‘Burgh, William de’ in *D.I.B.*, accessed online

(<http://dib.cambridge.org/viewReadPage.do?articleId=a1146>) (8 July 2020).

<sup>1436</sup> Empey, ‘The settlement of the kingdom of Limerick’ in Lydon (ed.), *England and Ireland in the later Middle Ages*, pp 1–25 at 5.

<sup>1437</sup> Empey, ‘The settlement of the kingdom of Limerick’, p. 5 & n. 41.

<sup>1438</sup> MacCotter, *Medieval Ireland*, p. 216.

<sup>1439</sup> Empey, ‘Limerick’, p. 5 & n. 41.

<sup>1440</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 234–5; *A.F.M.* 1185.6; *A.L.C.* 1185.6, 1185.7, 1185.8.

<sup>1441</sup> *A.L.C.* 1185.7: ‘comalta mic rig Saxan’ Orpen, *Normans*, ii, pp 99–100 n. 2.

<sup>1442</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 234–5; *A.F.M.* 1185.11; *A.L.C.* 1185.14.

perspective, this might have seemed a more promising beginning to the next phase of the conquest, but there was no consolidation. Worcester and Walter remained regular attendees of John's court, involving them in frequent travel to and from Ireland, and this may have affected their ability to make progress. From the Irish perspective, there was an even more formidable backlash in Desmond than in Thomond, as the man thought to have killed Diarmait Mac Cárthaig, Geoffrey de Cogan, was captured and flayed by Diarmait's son Domnall, the new king of Desmond.<sup>1443</sup>

Domnall Úa Briain felt comfortable enough with the situation on his eastern border to involve himself in the battle for the kingship in Connacht, appearing in person in Connacht in 1185 and 1188.<sup>1444</sup> The men of Desmond, for their part, attacked the new castles directly in 1189, albeit without Mac Cárthaig. Instead, Úa Cuiléin and Úa Fáeláin collaborated in an assault on 'the castles of the whole of Déisi and of Osraige', with Tipperary and Lismore noted in particular.<sup>1445</sup> It was no doubt in retaliation that a raid was launched into Durrus, in modern west County Cork, the following year. It too was defeated, with Mac Cárthaig himself turning the Anglo-Normans homeward on this occasion.<sup>1446</sup> Instead of inaugurating an immediate return to the offensive, therefore, John's new grants fell into abeyance just as had Henry II's to de Braose.

It was 1192 before any further attempt was made to extend English power in Munster. In that year 'numerous castles [were built] by the Galls in Munster, and there were frequent forays in Thomond'.<sup>1447</sup> Two of the more important castles that now appeared were Killeacle and Knockgraffon.<sup>1448</sup> The forays meanwhile, led by 'the English of Leinster', 'passed over the plain of Killaloe', taking them quite close to Limerick and provoking a

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<sup>1443</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1206.7: 'And it was he [Domnall] who slew the speckled kerne led by Geoffrey de Cogan, the most hated kerne that ever was in Ireland, and he flayed this Geoffrey'; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1206.1; Ailbhe Mac Shamhráin, 'Cogan, Geoffrey de' on *D.I.B.*, accessed online (<https://dib-cambridge-org.jproxy.nuim.ie/viewReadPage.do?articleId=a1799>) (8 July 2020).

<sup>1444</sup> *A.L.C.* 1185.3, 1188.7; *A.U.* 1188.6; *A.F.M.* 1188.8.

<sup>1445</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1189.1, 1189.2.

<sup>1446</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1190.2.

<sup>1447</sup> *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1192.2; *Ann. Inisf.* 1192.5.

<sup>1448</sup> *A.F.M.* 1192.6.

response from Úa Briain.<sup>1449</sup> He marched against them and there was ‘a great slaughter of the foreigners by Úa Briain in the battle of Durlas Úa Fócarta [Thurles]’,<sup>1450</sup> but it is remarkable that the Four Masters, who namecheck the English of Leinster as instigators of the campaign, report that Úa Briain’s victory was over the ‘English of Osraige’.<sup>1451</sup> This may be meant to present the battle at Thurles as a victory over a lesser contingent. Whatever the extent of the victory, the following year, 1193, Úa Briain gave up hope of defeating the English outright. An entry in *Ann. Inisf.* records that ‘the castle of Brí Uis [Bruis, County Tipperary] was built by the foreigners with the consent of Úa Briain, as some say, and to injure Desmumu therefrom’.<sup>1452</sup> The qualifier ‘as some say’ gives this the quality of rumour, and this is followed in Mac Cárthaigh’s Book, which says ‘the castle of Brí Uis was built by the Galls, with the consent of Ó Briain, if the general report be true, as a check on Domhnall son of Mac Carthaigh’.<sup>1453</sup>

Bizarrely, the entry in *Ann. Inisf.* is followed by three lines of Latin in Ogham script, which can be translated ‘money is honoured, without money nobody is loved’.<sup>1454</sup> It is difficult to escape the conclusion that the comment related to the entry immediately above, and it is possible that Úa Briain is being accused by the annalist of accepting a bribe not to attack. The castle at Bruis was infinitely better placed to ‘injure’ Thomond than Desmond though, and given the grants in Thomond in pursuance of which it was obviously constructed, it seems unlikely that Úa Briain allowed its construction for any reason other than that he was unable to stop it.

One other remarkable concession on Úa Briain’s behalf was the marriage of his daughter to William de Burgh. This is recorded only in the fifteenth-century Book of Lecan,

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<sup>1449</sup> *A.F.M.* 1192.6: ‘la Gallaibh Laighen’, ‘go rangattar tré chlár Chille Da Lua’.

<sup>1450</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1192.4: ‘Ár mór la h-Úa Briain ar Gallaib a cath Durlais Ua Focarta’; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1192.1.

<sup>1451</sup> *A.F.M.* 1192.7: ‘for Ghallaibh Ossraighe’.

<sup>1452</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1193.2; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1193.1.

<sup>1453</sup> *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1193.1: ‘Caislen Bri Uis do denum la Gallaibh gu cead d[apos]Ua Briain, mas fir do cach, do cumgughadh ar Domnall mac Mec Carthaigh’.

<sup>1454</sup> MS Rawlinson B 503, folio 40v: ‘Numus honoratur, sine numo nullus amatur’.

which, though compilatory, is certainly quite late. The comment there is ‘the daughter of Domhnall Mor O’Brien was the mother of these six sons, and her sister was the mother of Feidhmidh, the son of Cathal Croibhdherg O’Conor, and another sister of theirs was the mother of Richard, son of William Finn, from whom are the Clann-Rickard’.<sup>1455</sup>

Since Richard de Burgh, the product of this union, came of age in 1214, it has been argued that it must have taken place by 1193 at the latest.<sup>1456</sup> Nonetheless, it can not have taken place too much earlier, since in 1192 Úa Briain still harboured hopes of denying the English advance into what is now County Tipperary. Therefore, it too is to be linked to the belated weakening of Úa Briain’s resolve.

In 1194, Domnall Úa Briain died. He received rather limited honorifics in his obituary, with *Ann. Inisf.* and *A.U.* stretching to ‘king of Mumu’, without any elaboration.<sup>1457</sup> He received no royal title in *A.L.C.*, simply ‘the brilliant lamp of peace and war, and kindling star of the honour of Leth-Modha and the men of Mumha’,<sup>1458</sup> while *A.F.M.* took the best aspects of both, arriving at ‘king of Munster, a beaming lamp in peace and war, and the brilliant star of the hospitality and valour of the Momonians, and of all Leth-Mogha’.<sup>1459</sup> Mac Cárthaigh’s Book, never too generous to the Uí Briain, recorded only that ‘Domhnall Mór son of Toirdhealbhadh son of Diarmaid son of Toirdhealbhadh son of Tadhg son of Brian Bóramha died this year’.<sup>1460</sup> While these obituaries may seem quite normal, they are short on praise compared to the other major kings of the era and it is particularly remarkable that they do not note his many victories against the English.

Domnall’s death provided the catalyst for a major English push to make good the grants of 1185. A son, called Muirchertach, who had taken the kingship upon his father’s death, was immediately captured and blinded by the English.<sup>1461</sup> Another Muirchertach mac

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<sup>1455</sup> O’Donovan (ed.), *The tribes and customs of Hy-Many*, pp 44–5.

<sup>1456</sup> Orpen, *Normans*, ii, p. 148; *Rot. litt. pat.*, p. 118 b.

<sup>1457</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1194.3; *A.U.* 1194.1.

<sup>1458</sup> *A.L.C.* 1193.1.

<sup>1459</sup> *A.F.M.* 1194.2.

<sup>1460</sup> *Misc.Ir.Annals* 1194.2.

<sup>1461</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1194.4; *Misc.Ir.Annals* 1194.3.

Domnaill went on to play a prominent role in the subsequent years, but this is not an error. Domnall definitely had two sons called Muirchertach, and another two called Conchobar (distinguished by their sobriquets ‘Ruad’ and ‘Guasanach’).<sup>1462</sup> Two sons of the same name was not unusual among the Irish nobility.

Muirchertach, probably the one who was blinded, had recently had a rival Úa Briain dynast killed, so it is possible the observing English spotted an opportunity to provoke a succession crisis.<sup>1463</sup> Two other events the same year show it began a concerted campaign. In the first, ‘the son of Conchobhar, son of Domhnall Gerrlamhach O’Briain, was blinded and emasculated by Foreigners’,<sup>1464</sup> while in the second ‘Tadc, son of Mathgamain Úa Briain, was put to death by the foreigners in Caisel, despite the protection of the legate and Patrick’.<sup>1465</sup>

The English were undoubtedly successful in sowing division among the Uí Briain, but initially this was more a hindrance than a help. It provoked Cathal Crobderg Úa Conchobair, king of Connacht, to invade Munster. As elaborated in detail elsewhere, Úa Conchobair did this to preserve his own strategic interest.<sup>1466</sup> Nonetheless, when he brought ‘the army of Connacht’, supported by mercenaries including ‘some of the English and Irish of Meath’, he struck a fierce blow against the new English settlements in Munster.<sup>1467</sup> He went as far as Emly and Cashel, ‘burned four large castles and some small ones’, and ‘returned safely’.<sup>1468</sup>

The same year, and probably as a result of these events, John de Courcy and Hugh de Lacy launched a hosting ‘to assume power over the foreigners of Laighen and

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<sup>1462</sup> Tadhg Ó Donnchadha (ed.), *An Leabhar Muimhneach* (Dublin, 1940), p. 325.

<sup>1463</sup> *A.F.M.* 1194.10.

<sup>1464</sup> *A.L.C.* 1194.4: ‘*Mac Conchobair mic Domnaill gherlámhaigh .H. Briain do dhallad & do spochad lá Galloibh*’; *A.U.* 1194.4.

<sup>1465</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1194.5: ‘*Tadg mc. Mathgamna Ú Bríain do marbad do Gallaib i Caissiul ar enech in légáit & Phátraic*’; *Misc.Ir.Annals* 1194.4.

<sup>1466</sup> See Connacht, pp 97–8.

<sup>1467</sup> *A.L.C.* 1195.4: ‘*co socraitte Connacht*’; *A.F.M.* 1195.8: ‘*go n-dreim do Ghallaibh, & do Ghaoidhealaibh na Midhe*’.

<sup>1468</sup> *A.F.M.* 1195.8: ‘*go ro loisceadh cethre mor-chaislein leo & araile do mhion-chaislenaibh*’; *A.L.C.* 1195.4: ‘*& tangadar imshlán*’.

Mumha'.<sup>1469</sup> The event is not recorded in any English sources, but it has been speculated that their aim was to 'control operations in Munster'.<sup>1470</sup> They also convened a meeting with Cathal Crodberg at Athlone, and there is reason to believe Cathal was induced not to interfere in Munster in return for recognition in Connacht.<sup>1471</sup> The outcome of this politicking was that Cathal Crodberg did not return to Munster in 1196. This greatly upset the Munster annalist who recorded 1195 retrospectively and said of Cathal Crodberg that 'everyone expected that he would destroy all the foreigners on that expedition, and he arranged to come again, but he did not come'.<sup>1472</sup>

This change of policy left Domnall Mac Cárthaig out on a limb, as the king of Desmond had joined Cathal Crodberg in 1195.<sup>1473</sup> Perhaps unaware of the change of plan and anticipating another invasion of Connacht, Mac Cárthaig seized Limerick from the English at the outset of a renewed campaign in 1196.<sup>1474</sup> This is the first notice we have that that the English were again in possession of the capital of Thomond, which they must have occupied very soon after Domnall Úa Briain's death.<sup>1475</sup> From Limerick, Mac Cárthaig launched his army to Kilfeacle, where he attacked the castle, and then further eastward still, where he 'demolished the castles of Uí Meic Caille'.<sup>1476</sup>

While Mac Cárthaig was out of Irish Desmond the English of Cork raided his territory. They were defeated by a defending force but inflicted several notable casualties on the men of Desmond. Partly in response, and partly as an extension of the ongoing campaign, 'the Desmumu themselves made a great muster for the purpose of destroying Corcach', which was joined by Mac Cárthaig with his forces.<sup>1477</sup> Cathal Crodberg Úa

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<sup>1469</sup> *A.L.C.* 1195.3: 'Sloiged la h-Eóan na Cúirte, & la mac Ugá de Lací, do ghabáil neirt for ghalluib Laigen & Muman'; *A.F.M.* 1195.7.

<sup>1470</sup> Orpen, *Normans*, ii, p. 155.

<sup>1471</sup> Orpen, *Normans*, ii, pp 155–6.

<sup>1472</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1195.2.

<sup>1473</sup> *A.L.C.* 1195.15.

<sup>1474</sup> *A.F.M.* 1196.5; *A.U.* 1196.5.

<sup>1475</sup> *A.F.M.* 1196.5; *A.U.* 1196.5; see also Orpen, *Normans*, ii, pp 156–7 & n. 1.

<sup>1476</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1196.5: 'Íar sein ra díscailit leis casleain Ú Mc. Calli'; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1196.3.

<sup>1477</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1196.5, 1196.6: '& darónsat Desmumu fein mórthilon du díscail Chorcaighi'; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1196.3, 1196.4, 1196.5.



Conchobair, who may well have been impressed by Mac Cárthaig's progress from a safe distance in Connacht, now sent 'a company of bowmen' to support the king of Desmond.<sup>1478</sup>

This proved to be too little, too late. After surveying the situation, Domnall Mac Cárthaig decided to pull back from Cork without attacking. This conclusion dismayed the annalist in Inisfallen, who suggested he was 'dissuaded by bad counsel'.<sup>1479</sup> It is difficult to criticise Mac Cárthaig's decision, though, since Úa Conchobair's absence clearly indicated that the king of Desmond would have to fight the English alone not only in 1196, but for the foreseeable future if he wanted to hold a recaptured Munster. Instead, he retreated from Cork, and from Limerick, and ended what was the last attempt to reconquer Munster.

The corollary of not contesting the English advance was the mutual retreat of the Uí Briain and Meic Cárthaig alike into their small core territories, still known as the kingdoms of Thomond and Desmond respectively, which were then dominated with relative ease by the English, now firmly ensconced in the old capitals of Cork and Limerick. For the Uí Briain, who made no notable contribution to the efforts of 1195–6, this process was already well underway, while Mac Cárthaig's show of strength ensured that Desmond would remain the more challenging region well into the thirteenth century.

After Muirchertach mac Domnaill Uí Briain was blinded by the English in 1194, a succession crisis ensued. The initial victor appears to have been a namesake, Muirchertach Finn. The other major players were his brothers Conchobar Ruad and Donnchad Cairprech. There seems to be little to support the assertion that the three brothers initially 'stood together and picked off the challenges of their cousins one by one'.<sup>1480</sup> In fact, the first we hear of Donnchad Cairprech is his attempt to create an

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<sup>1478</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1196.6: '*rúta sersenach*'.

<sup>1479</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1196.6: '*nír léic Domnald arna saibad duloch la du rochcomairli*'.

<sup>1480</sup> Emmet O'Byrne, 'O'Brien (Ó Briain), Donnchad Cairprech' in *D.I.B.*, accessed online (<https://dib-cambridge-org.jproxy.nuim.ie/quicksearch.do>) (9 July 2020).

alliance with Fíngin mac Domnaill Meic Cárthaig in 1196, and for his troubles being captured and imprisoned by Conchobar Ruad.<sup>1481</sup>

Inevitably, the English were able to reap dividends as the brothers jockeyed for position. Conchobar Ruad made his play for the kingship of Thomond by securing their support in 1197.<sup>1482</sup> And, whatever concessions he had to make for that aid, he was able to drive Muirchertach from the province by 1198.<sup>1483</sup> Muirchertach was then captured by the English in 1199, but released rather than harmed.<sup>1484</sup> His existence, and Donnchad Cairpech's, meant that Conchobar Ruad could not easily renege on his commitments. The underlying tension led Conchobar Ruad to attack Muirchertach in 1202, but he was killed in the action.<sup>1485</sup> Muirchertach succeeded Conchobar, but as if to prove their power, the English deposed him in favour of Donnchad Cairpech in 1209, once again leaving him alive as a check on the new incumbent.<sup>1486</sup>

Donnchad Cairpech Úa Briain proved very much to their liking as king of Thomond, however, and he remained in situ until his death in 1241. He enjoyed their confidence because, far from challenging their dominance, he enthusiastically supported them. When King John returned to Ireland in 1210, Donnchad Cairpech marched with him against Hugh de Lacy, and later the same year he aided John against Cathal Crobderg. For so doing he was knighted by John, and Donnchad thereafter held his land for an annual rent.<sup>1487</sup> He was granted custody of William de Burgh's castle at Carrigogunnell, reflecting the close relationship with de Burgh that had been reconfirmed by a second marriage, this time of Donnchad Cairpech and de Burgh's daughter.<sup>1488</sup>

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<sup>1481</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1196.2; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1196.1, 1196.2.

<sup>1482</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1197.3; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1197.1.

<sup>1483</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1198.4; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1198.3.

<sup>1484</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1199.7.

<sup>1485</sup> *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1202.2.

<sup>1486</sup> *A.F.M.* 1208.8.

<sup>1487</sup> *Pipe roll Ire., 1211–12*, pp 68–9.

<sup>1488</sup> Empey, 'Ó Briain, Donnchad Cairpech [Donogh Cairbrech O'Brien]' in *O.D.N.B.*, accessed online (<https://doi-org.jproxy.nuim.ie/10.1093/ref:odnb/20451>) (9 July 2020); *Pipe roll Ire., 1211–12*, p. 70, n. 263; *A.F.M.*, iii, p. 163 n. s.

He also played an important role in the English drive into Connacht. Of course, powerful kings of Munster and later Thomond had always tried to influence affairs in Connacht. As recently as 1185 and 1188, Domnall Úa Briain had been called upon to aid first Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair and then Conchobar Maenmaige.<sup>1489</sup> In Donnchad Cairprech's reign, two major rounds of civil war erupted in Connacht, and ousted contestants again sought aid in Munster. Now though, it was not Úa Briain to whom their entreaties were principally directed.

In 1200, Cathal Carrach sent messages to Limerick requesting the aid of William de Burgh. The army de Burgh assembled included 'the two O'Briens' – Muirchertach Finn and Conchobar Ruad – but that was beside the point.<sup>1490</sup> In 1202, as well, Cathal Crobderg 'went into Munster, to the son of Mac Carthy and William Burke to solicit their aid'.<sup>1491</sup> Again, when de Burgh answered this call he brought the Uí Briain brothers.<sup>1492</sup> He had already conducted a campaign in Desmond in that very year, so the fact that Fíngin Mac Cárthaig also accompanied the expedition into Connacht reflects Desmond's weakness rather than its strength.<sup>1493</sup>

When the next round of Connacht's internal conflict broke out two decades later, the Uí Briain were still regarded as secondary players in Munster. They had not taken advantage of William de Burgh's difficulties with the justiciary and the crown in 1203, though the latter's attempt to imprison Donnchad Cairprech suggests he anticipated something of the kind.<sup>1494</sup> In any case, in 1225, when Áed mac Cathail Crobdeirg brought 'as many of the Foreigners of Erin as he thought sufficient' into Connacht, Donnchad Cairprech came with them.<sup>1495</sup> The king of Thomond was also a supporter of the campaigns of 1230 and

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<sup>1489</sup> *A.U.* 1185.8, 1188.6; *A.F.M.* 1188.8; *A.L.C.* 1188.7.

<sup>1490</sup> *A.L.C.* 1200.3.

<sup>1491</sup> *A.F.M.* 1200.7: '*Cathal Croibhdearg do dol isin Mumhain do shaighidh mic Mec Carthaigh & Uilliam Burc*'.

<sup>1492</sup> *A.L.C.* 1200.3.

<sup>1493</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1202.2.

<sup>1494</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1203.2.

<sup>1495</sup> *Ann. Conn.* 1225.7: '*Tuc-som leis tra in Iustis & Goill Erenn in neoch roba lor leis dib*'; *A.L.C.* 1225.9; *A.F.M.* 1225.8.

1235 that contributed to the conquest of Connacht.<sup>1496</sup> On the former occasion it was described as ‘a great hosting in Connachta by MacWilliam [Richard de Burgh] and the majority of the foreigners of Ireland, and also Ó Briain and Cormac Mac Carthaig’.<sup>1497</sup>

Desmond’s precarious political independence came under even greater pressure after the fall of Thomond. Domnall’s retreat from Cork in 1196 signalled the beginning of a more cautious policy. He even had Úa Longáin of Uí Meic Caille killed at the request of Richard de Carew in 1198, perhaps hoping to win some friends among the English.<sup>1498</sup> But, in 1201 and 1202, William de Burgh launched campaigns into Desmond (also supported by the Uí Briain) that forced Mac Cárthaig to come to terms. This was not conquest, and Mac Cárthaig must have withheld tribute in 1204 because in that year he had to fend off a large invading English army.<sup>1499</sup>

Domnall Mac Cárthaig died in 1206. He received a glowing obituary in *Ann. Inisf.*, which was particularly complimentary of his opposition to the English. It reported that ‘during the twenty years he held the kingship, he never submitted to a foreigner; and though an army of foreigners and Gaedil often came against him, he gave them at times no more than was due, while at other times he gave them nothing ... By him nine justiciars were slain and twenty-one battles fought in Mumu’.<sup>1500</sup> Despite these obviously exaggerated claims, none of his successors would be able to match his track record of resistance, much less to go on the offensive against the English.

Just as in Thomond, the succession to the kingship provided the ideal opportunity for such manoeuvring. Fíngin Mac Cárthaig, a brother of Domnall, succeeded, but a son of Domnall’s, called Domnall Cluasach, opposed him. Following Fíngin’s death in 1209, Domnall Cluasach became king. In 1211 the English captured and held him until another

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<sup>1496</sup> *Ann. Conn.* 1235.9; *A.L.C.* 1235.6; *A.F.M.* 1235.6.

<sup>1497</sup> *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1230.1.

<sup>1498</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1198.5.

<sup>1499</sup> *A.L.C.* 1204.4; *A.F.M.* 1203.7; *Ann. Inisf.* 1204.4; *A.U.* 1204.6; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1203.4.

<sup>1500</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1206.7: ‘(& is leis do) marbadh nae n-giustisi, & is les (tuca)dh cath er f(h)ichit i m-Mumhain, & is é daringni mór do comramib eli’.

man, Cormac Óc, established himself as king. Domnall Cluasach was then released, provoking a war of succession in which various English parties backed both sides.<sup>1501</sup> It is difficult to point to a conclusion of this conflict, and both men appear to have retained bases of power, but there is no doubt that Desmond was effectively controlled by the English in their time, as it was not in Domnall's. In 1224 Diarmait Cluasach supported the justiciary against Hugh de Lacy, just as did Donnchad Cairprech Úa Briain.

Like his brothers, Donnchad Cairprech Úa Briain's regular support of the English campaigns in Connacht and Desmond has been painted as the prosecution of 'traditional' or 'hereditary' rivalries with new allies.<sup>1502</sup> On the contrary, it did not represent continuity with the past but rather a change of policy, and a decision, which would later be emulated by other important kings, to collaborate with the powerful English parties who threatened him in the hope of securing his position and recognition from the king of England.

So it was that their efforts were not confined to the attacks on Desmond of 1201 and 1214, or those on Connacht of 1200, 1202, 1210, 1225, and 1230. Instead, they extended to actions across the island. For example, Donnchad Cairprech supported John's march against de Lacy in 1210 and was present in the army of the justiciar when the latter was defeated by Cormac Úa Máel Sechlainn in 1212.<sup>1503</sup> In 1224 as well, Donnchad Cairprech supported the justiciary far from home, as he fought first de Lacy and then Áed Méith Úa Néill.<sup>1504</sup>

This policy had limited success. Though Donnchad Cairprech held his land for an annual rent and was regarded as a tenant-chief, John did not recognise him as a king.<sup>1505</sup> John also made grants in Úa Briain's remaining territory, effectively modern County Clare, to

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<sup>1501</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1211.2, 1212.5; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1211.2, 1212.1.

<sup>1502</sup> See above, p. 248.

<sup>1503</sup> *Ann. Clon.* 1212; *A.F.M.* 1212.6.

<sup>1504</sup> *A.L.C.* 1224.10; *Ann. Conn.* 1224.13.

<sup>1505</sup> *Cal.doc.Ire., 1171–1251*, pp 153–4, no. 1001.

English barons. Three cantreds of Thomond, now back to its most limited definition, were granted to John de Gray, who in turn granted them to Thomas fitz Adam and Reginald of Finegal.<sup>1506</sup> As such, Donnchad Cairprech was kept on a tight leash and made aware of the penalties of deviating from compliance.

### **[3.5: Conclusion]**

Munster began the twelfth century as the most powerful kingdom in Ireland and ended it almost wholly conquered and colonised. It began the century as a single province with one dominant royal family and ended it divided, with two royal families pursuing different aims in separate territories sundered from each other by the English conquests. Perhaps most remarkably of all, in 1100 the leaders of Munster pursued a political strategy that had existed since at least the eighth century, while their successors in 1200 scrambled to meet the challenges of their own times with a variety of inconsistent approaches.

The concept that had defined Munster's approach to national politics was that of Leth Moga and Leth Cuinn. This scheme originated in Leth Cuinn, the northern half of the island, but was soon enough accepted in Leth Moga, where it came to mean the descendants of the imaginary Mug Nuadat. It was used, more specifically, to endorse the right to kingship of a sub-group who defined themselves as the 'Eóganachta', descendants of the equally imaginary Eógan Mór. As a result, the lands beyond Munster encompassed by Leth Moga, Osraige and Leinster, would become the principal targets for expansionary kings of Munster.

When the Dál Cais rose to power in Munster in the tenth century, they replaced the Eóganachta and changed the locus of power, but they enthusiastically adopted the scheme, grafting their own genealogy onto the wider pedigree as an agnate of their defeated rivals. They also followed the established pattern of looking eastward after the

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<sup>1506</sup> *Cal.doc.Ire., 1171–1251*, pp 94, 97, 102, nos. 607, 629, 669.

kingship of Munster had been secured. In this they were best represented by Brian Bóraime, after his brother Mathgamain fell afoul of rivals within Munster. It was Brian who extended Cashel's power beyond Leth Moga for the first time in centuries, even challenging the Southern Uí Néill kings of Tara.

At the end of the eleventh century, Brian's grandson Toirdelbach and great-grandson Muirchertach propelled Munster to the top of the political hierarchy once more by emulating Brian's strategy. This meant taking the provincial kingship of Munster, then securing Osraige and Leinster to earn title to Leth Moga. Advances into the midlands were then made with the help of the Shannon, which allowed Connacht and Meath to be targeted simultaneously. Finally, once these kingdoms were subdued, expeditions were launched northwards, imitating Brian's trips to Dundalk and Assaroe. And, though the northern kings held out in Toirdelbach and Muirchertach's era, they enjoyed considerable success and were undoubtedly the dominant kings of their respective generations.

Success on that scale was always going to prove difficult to sustain, and with Muirchertach's sickness in 1114 the edifice collapsed. Connacht and the Northern Uí Néill both took advantage of the crisis, but it was the former who derived the greatest benefit. After a crisis period in which numerous claims for the kingship appeared, Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair of Connacht imposed the first partition of Munster in 1118, with the Uí Briain now reduced to the northern half of the kingdom. The southern half was awarded to the Meic Cárthaig, who proved to be anything but puppets of Connacht in the period that immediately followed.

The Meic Cárthaig, as well as other families like the Uí Chellacháin, belonged to the Eóganacht Chaisil, and their association with 'Desmond' or the southern half of Munster was not longstanding. From the limited existing evidence, it seems their move southwards from the lands around Cashel itself was provoked by the Uí Briain annexation of Eóganacht Chaisil in the late eleventh century. They quickly established

themselves in Desmond however, and their ascent to semi-provincial kingship may well have been a consolation prize for the real goal of kingship of Munster in 1118.

Though many historians have characterised the relationship between the Uí Briain and Meic Cárthaig as bitterly antagonistic, this interpretation avoids certain facts. Among these are the fosterage and marriage links alluded to in Cormac Mac Cárthaig's obituary of 1138, and the depiction of amicable relations in the *Visio Tnugdali*. The very fact that Cormac depended on Conchobar and Toirdelbach Uí Briain to take the kingship of Munster suggests a degree of cooperation and dependence, as does the involvement of Brian Uí Briain with the Meic Cárthaig uprising in 1118. Just as notably, the Meic Cárthaig-sponsored *Caithr. Chell. Chaisil* suggests that the Dál Cais and Eóganachta alternated the kingship of Cashel, which may be taken as a proposition for future relations rather than a historical fact.

Just as it was gradually that Meic Cárthaig–Uí Briain relations soured, so too was it gradually that Leth Moga was eclipsed as the primary strategic consideration of both parties. In fact, Leth Moga continued to resonate well into the twelfth century. For example, when Muirchertach Uí Briain attempted to recover the kingship in 1115, he gave Leinster and Osraige greater priority than Munster itself. Similarly, when Cormac Mac Cárthaig tried to establish control over Leinster in 1120, he immediately provoked a campaign by Uí Conchobair of Connacht, who correctly judged this to be a precursor to much wider ambitions. Again, when Mac Murchada challenged Munster's hegemony in Osraige in 1134, it was considered a major threat.

In the years immediately before the key date of 1151, the constant invasions from Connacht eventually persuaded the Uí Briain, again in the kingship of Munster, to change tack. Unfortunately, this resulted in disaster as Connacht and Leinster invaded the province together to support a Mac Cárthaig uprising. The partition that followed the Battle of Móin Móir in 1151 was similar to 1118, but this one would endure. Twenty-six years later, in 1177, Domnall Uí Briain used the English invasion of Desmond to capture



territory from the Meic Cárthaig, confirming that in the interim the kingships of Munster and Leth Moga had receded in importance compared to the border between Thomond and Desmond.

Munster's experience of the English invasion was defined by the loss of its urban settlements. Unlike Leth Cuinn, Leth Moga had been the centre of Viking town-building in the ninth century, with Dublin, Wexford, Waterford, Limerick, and Cork, all arising as factors in the physical and political environments. Their demise as independent political units was a development of Brian Bóraime's era, but it was hardly the result of his career alone, as the Uí Briain propagandists would have had us believe.

The provincial kingdoms acquired the Viking towns, and they gradually took the character of capitals as the eleventh and twelfth centuries progressed. This was particularly true in Munster, where Limerick superseded Killaloe and Kincora by the mid-eleventh century. Munster was partitioned in 1118 at Glanmire near Cork, and Cork would become the effective capital of Desmond. This obviously represented a reduction in prominence for Limerick, but it was correspondingly beneficial for Cork, which had been, up to this point, only a local centre of power.

Perhaps because of its late start, or because of the circumstances in which Desmond became a political unit, Cork was forced to share the stage with other important settlements to a greater extent than Limerick. Whereas Killaloe and Kincora faded from the record, even as targets of invading armies, Lismore and particularly Waterford had a great deal of political clout in Desmond. Waterford was situated on the border with Osraige, and for a period influenced affairs in that region, and the Meic Cárthaig, Uí Fáeláin of Déise, and Hiberno-Norse of the town itself, all saw it as a key possession.

When the English arrived in Ireland, the Hiberno-Norse towns were their principal strategic objectives, and they pursued their capture to the exclusion and neglect of other matters. Though this fact is curiously unremarked upon in today's historiography, it

defined Munster's experience of the invasion. First Waterford, then Limerick, then Cork fell to advancing armies, and all before the end of the 1170s. And, though Domnall Úa Briain recaptured Limerick and held it until his death, both halves of Munster were destabilised by their decapitation. Indeed, Giraldus refers to it in those very terms, recording a prophecy where the 'heads' or '*capita*' of Leinster and Desmond were essential to their respective conquests.

The second phase of the English advance arose from Prince John's visit to Ireland in 1185 and was characterised by castle building and attempted colonisation rather than by attacks on the one remaining capital. Three major grants in Munster saw Theobald Walter, William de Burgh, and Philip of Worcester join the ranks of chief tenants of the English crown in Ireland. Walter was involved in the assassination of Diarmait Mac Cárthaig in 1185, soon before or after his grant, but like the others he would have to wait until the 1190s before he was able to settle his new lands.

Domnall Úa Briain strenuously opposed the English settlement, at least up to a point, but there are indications that in his final years he began to give way. He reportedly consented to the construction of an English castle to attack Mac Cárthaig and endorsed the creation of a marriage link with William de Burgh. If so, his power must have been waning, since he was effectively accepting de Burgh's right to occupy extensive lands in his kingdom. He may not have been in a position to oppose de Burgh's marriage proposal or the construction of the new castle, and it is quite likely that he softened his line to avoid outright conquest.

Attempts to oppose the English were fitful and disconnected throughout the period from the invasion to the turn of the thirteenth century, whether led by the Uí Briain or Meic Cárthaig. Úa Briain experimented with support of the English and attacking Desmond as well as leading occasional charges against the newcomers. Diarmait Mac Cárthaig cautiously accepted a settlement with de Cogan and fitz Stephen that saw him cede seven cantreds and pay tribute for the remainder, and he did little to consolidate his position

when the little-noted Mac Tíre assassinated de Cogan in 1182. Diarmait's son and successor Domnall had an opportunity to recapture Cork in 1196, supported by Cathal Crobderg Úa Conchobair, but was 'dissuaded by bad counsel'.<sup>1507</sup>

It was in that very period, the mid- to late 1190s, that English control was extended over most of the province. The territorial claims in mid-Munster and east Munster were made effective, and Limerick was occupied once again. Numerous Uí Briain contenders were imprisoned, maimed, or killed, and the eventual settlement saw Thomond become a client kingdom of the English of Limerick, led by Donnchad Cairprech Úa Briain and his brothers Conchobar Ruad and Muirchertach Finn. Their only military campaigns of note in the subsequent decades were as allies of the English. Most notably they hosted into Connacht, where they had the effect of helping to extend English power.

Desmond did not fare much better. Domnall Mac Cárthaig fended off an English raiding party in 1190 and a larger invading force in 1204, but his death in 1206 saw a succession crisis not unlike Thomond in 1194. Once again, the English derived an advantage from this situation and helped stoke the division, first imprisoning Diarmait Cluasach Mac Cárthaig and then releasing and helping him to take the kingship from Cormac Óc in 1214. Despite successfully seizing two Butler castles 1218–19, Diarmait Cluasach was very much in the English sphere of influence, and he received a letter from Henry III in 1221 requesting his obedience to the new justiciar.

The key reason Munster was subdued and largely conquered in the way outlined above was the speed with which the English assaulted its key settlements. Munster was unusually centralised compared to the other Irish kingdoms, partly because it had a greater number of Viking-age settlements and partly as a consequence of the careers of Toirdelbach and Muirchertach Úa Briain. Waterford itself had formerly been claimed by Diarmait Mac Murchada and when he unsurprisingly tried to reclaim it in 1170, Munster

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<sup>1507</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1196.6: 'nír léic Domnald arna saibad duloch la du rochcomairli'.

was immediately at the forefront of Irish responses to the invasion. The hope that the new arrivals might be used to throw off Connacht's domination proved false, and the English entrenched so quickly the Uí Briain and Meic Cárthaig shied away from campaigns to oust them.

## Leinster

### [4.0: Introduction]

Laigin, the population name from which ‘Leinster’ derives, was once understood as an ethnic term. The eighth-century saga of Fergus mac Léiti opens with the memorable line ‘*Batar trí príomcheinéla i nHéire, .i. Féini 7 Ulaith 7 Gáilni .i. Laigin*’, or ‘There were three principal races in Ireland: the Féini, the Ulaid and the Gáilni, i.e., the Laigin’.<sup>1508</sup>

Byrne, who recognised the importance of this line, remarked that it reflected an Uí Néill perspective; that is to say, it was not that there were three races in Ireland but rather that the Féini (usually meaning Irish but in this case standing for the ancestors of the Uí Néill) were inveterate opponents of the Ulaid and the Laigin.<sup>1509</sup>

So indeed they were, though it is possible that the ethnic characterisation of the name also preserved some truth. O’Rahilly regarded the Laigin as a Brythonic-speaking people who had been dominant in Ireland before the Goidelic invasion, and whose traces were to be found well beyond the province that eventually took their name. He counted the Uí Maine of Connacht among their descendants, as well as (more tentatively) the widely dispersed Conmaicne and Gailenga.<sup>1510</sup> Indeed, O’Rahilly argued that, outside Leinster, the Laigin had been strongest in Connacht. This met with general agreement, though Byrne felt that the evidence for the identification of the Gailenga as Laigin was ‘extremely obscure’.<sup>1511</sup>

The British origin of the Laigin is also usually accepted, though at least one writer found O’Rahilly’s argument ‘unconvincing’.<sup>1512</sup> It must be conceded that there are complicating factors on this point. For example, the names ‘Gáileóin’ and ‘Domnainn’ were used interchangeably with ‘Laigin’ at one time, and this may well indicate the diverse origins of what subsequently became a coherent collective. These names fell out of use as

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<sup>1508</sup> D.A. Binchy (ed.), ‘The saga of Fergus Mac Léiti’, in *Ériu*, xvi (1952), pp 33–48 at 36, 37, 39.

<sup>1509</sup> Byrne, *Irish kings*, pp 106–7; in many early sources, ‘Féini’ can be interpreted to mean the Uí Néill, Eóganachta, and Connachta.

<sup>1510</sup> O’Rahilly, *Early Irish history and mythology*, pp 95–9, 141–6.

<sup>1511</sup> Byrne, *Irish kings*, p. 133.

<sup>1512</sup> James MacKillop, *A Dictionary of Celtic Mythology* (Oxford, 1998), p. 291.

genealogists began to use them to denote inferior status.<sup>1513</sup> The origin legend of the Laigin also pointed to a link with Gaul, rather than Britain. This tale, *Orgain Denna Ríg*, makes its hero Labraid Loingsech return from an exile in Gaul, and it is plausible that this represents a reconstruction of an invasion from this direction.

If we must speculate to a degree about the composition of the Laigin and about the location from which their constituent parts first migrated to Ireland, the idea of a west British origin is supported by extensive connections across the Irish Sea in the Roman period. Famously, the late second-century geographer Claudius Ptolemaeus placed the Brigantes, a well-known British group, in the south-eastern corner of Ireland.<sup>1514</sup>

Archaeologists have also uncovered burials on Lambay island that appear to represent a group of Brigantian exiles.<sup>1515</sup>

O’Rahilly suggested that the Uí Bairrche of the early medieval period were the Gaelicised descendants of the Brigantes.<sup>1516</sup> He further argued that the Domnainn or Fir Domnann were a branch of the Dumnonii of Devon and south-western Scotland.<sup>1517</sup> In both cases his positions were accepted by others.<sup>1518</sup> Linguistically, there are good grounds for these identifications, and we may therefore suppose that he was at least partially correct as regards the origin of the ‘Laigin’, though, equally, the emphasis on their unity of composition and place of origin seems overstated.

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<sup>1513</sup> O’Rahilly, *Early Irish history and mythology*, pp 92–3.

<sup>1514</sup> See Gregory Toner, ‘Identifying Ptolemy’s Irish place and tribes’ in David N. Parsons and Patrick Sims-Williams (eds), *Ptolemy: towards a linguistic atlas of the earliest Celtic place-names of Europe* (Aberystwyth, 2000), pp 73–82.

<sup>1515</sup> See Barry Raftery, *Pagan Celtic Ireland: the enigma of the Irish Iron Age* (London, 1994), pp 200–1; idem, ‘Iron-age Ireland’ in Ó Cróinín (ed.), *N.H.I. I – prehistoric and early Ireland*, pp 134–81, at 175.

<sup>1516</sup> O’Rahilly, *Early Irish history and mythology*, p. 37.

<sup>1517</sup> O’Rahilly, *Early Irish history and mythology*, pp 93–4; John Ryan, ‘The early history of Leinster’, in *The Past: Organ of the Uí Cinnsealaig Historical Society*, no. 4 (1948), pp 13–37 at 17.

<sup>1518</sup> Byrne, *Irish kings*, pp 132–3, 155; Gregory Toner, ‘Invasion myth’, in Duffy (ed.), *Encyclopedia*, pp 232–5; Donnchadh Ó Corráin, ‘Irish origin legends and genealogy: recurrent aetiologies’, in Tore Nyberg, Iørn Piø Preben, Meulengracht Sørensen, and Aage Trommer (eds.), *History and heroic tale: a symposium* (Oxford, 1983), pp 51–96 at 90 n. 20.

Indeed, we may consider the traditional view of the ‘English’ arrival of Britain as analogous: they were said to be made up of Angles, Jutes, and Saxons. Similarly, the words of Marjorie Chibnall regarding the Normans are relevant: ‘The Norman people were the product, not of blood, but of history. This is true to some extent of all “peoples”; ethnic purity is largely an illusion’.<sup>1519</sup>

Guy Halsall has discussed this process in general terms for the post-imperial Roman west, and some of his comments may be useful in considering the development of ‘Laigin’ as a coherent identity. He wrote, ‘Ethnic change involved taking another layer of ethnicity and, over time, reordering the importance which particular layers were accorded until an adopted identity became the principal one. Children might then be raised to regard this as their most important ethnicity. Ethnic change was thus a more subtle process than is sometimes imagined by those supporting the idea of mutable ethnicity, or than it is painted as being by those who retain old ideas of more fixed ethnic identity. It also took about a generation—at least—to work through’.<sup>1520</sup>

The Irish Sea was a veritable highway for migration throughout the early centuries AD. As the Roman Empire weakened, its territory in Britain (and elsewhere) was increasingly targeted by the ‘barbarian’ peoples who surrounded it. Fourth-century historian Ammianus Marcellinus identified the Irish as one of the groups whose threat increased substantially in the 360s.<sup>1521</sup> Interestingly, he also refers to a broken treaty with the Irish in 360; well before the major attack of 367–8 or 368–9.<sup>1522</sup> Charles-Edwards commented that ‘Ammianus, whose account has high authority, since he was a contemporary and also someone who had served as an officer in the army, clearly implies that there had

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<sup>1519</sup> Marjorie Chibnall, *The Normans* (Oxford, 2000), p. 3.

<sup>1520</sup> Guy Halsall, *Worlds of Arthur: facts and fictions of the Dark Ages* (Oxford, 2013), p. 259.

<sup>1521</sup> Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, ed. W. Seyfarth, 2 vols (Leipzig, 1978), XX.II.

<sup>1522</sup> For varying views, see Roger Tomlin, ‘The date of the “Barbarian Conspiracy”’, in *Britannia*, v (1974), pp 303–9; R.C. Blockley, ‘The date of the “Barbarian Conspiracy”’, in *Britannia*, xi (1980), pp 223–5.

previously been some kind of peace treaty. The Roman authorities were not ignorant of affairs in Ireland but were in diplomatic contact with the Scotti [Irish]'.<sup>1523</sup>

Similarly, Elva Johnston recognised aspects of Patrick's life and writings as supporting evidence of this contact. She wrote, 'Military and economic elements are also attested in the fifth-century writings of Patrick. He was a victim of Irish slave-raiding in western Britain, and his escape was possible because of the transport connections joining the two islands. Incidentally, the existence of these connections demonstrates that Irish raiding co-existed with trading networks; they did not supersede them. In fact, they probably merged, one into the other. Moreover, Patrick claims that large numbers of his fellow Romano-Britons were enslaved in Ireland. This, along with Ammianus' comments, strongly implies that Irish raiding activities were seriously disruptive from the latter half of the fourth century, marking a break in previously successful strategies of frontier management'.<sup>1524</sup>

The evidence of Irish colonisation on the west coast of Britain in this era is widespread, and perhaps best attested by the many Ogham stones which still survive. O'Rahilly went as far as identifying the name of the Llyn peninsula in Wales with the Laigin, and this argument was accepted by Ryan and Smyth, among others.<sup>1525</sup> It has even been suggested that Ogham itself was a product of an Irish colony in southern Britain in the fourth century, reflecting contact with Latin learning.<sup>1526</sup>

Ogham also informs us about the territorial extent of the Laigin in Ireland in the fifth century. A stone located in the barony of Duleek Lower, County Meath commemorates 'MAQI CAIRATINI AVI INEQAGLASI', who has been identified with a 'Mac-Cáirthinn' king of Uí Enechglais and Leinster mentioned in the Leinster poem *Ní dú dír*

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<sup>1523</sup> Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 157.

<sup>1524</sup> Elva Johnston, 'Religious change and frontier management', in *Eolas*, xi (2018), pp 104–19, at 110.

<sup>1525</sup> O'Rahilly, *Early Irish history and mythology*, p. 113 n. 5; Smyth, *Celtic Leinster* (Dublin, 1982), p. 9.

<sup>1526</sup> Kenneth Jackson, *Language and history in early Britain* (Edinburgh, 1953), pp 154–7.



*do dermait*. The Mac-Cáirthinn mac Cóelbath who fell in the Battle of Mag Femen in 446 may well be the man intended.<sup>1527</sup> By the time we can locate Irish dynasties more securely, the Uí Enechglais are on the Wicklow coast near Arklow, indicating a substantial southward retreat.

It is widely accepted that the Laigin were the kings of Tara before their displacement by the Uí Néill. Indeed, the poem that was just mentioned, *Nidu dír dermait*, implored the Laigin to remember they had once ruled from Tara.<sup>1528</sup> Smyth took this a step further, suggesting that the famous and probably mythical king of Tara Cormac mac Airt belonged not to the Uí Néill, with whom he was associated and for whom he represented a paragon of kingly virtue, but rather to the Laigin.<sup>1529</sup>

This conception of Laiginian control carries implications. We must, for example, consider finds of Roman material at Tara and Newgrange as likely to be associated with the Laigin.<sup>1530</sup> Similarly, the controversial site of Drumanagh, in northern County Dublin, through which Roman merchants probably traded with Irish groups, was squarely within their sphere.<sup>1531</sup> Profits derived from contact with Roman Britain, whether from trading or raiding, are likely to have benefited the Laigin as much as any group on the island.

The Laigin were, then, a group with at least some roots in Britain, who for centuries controlled much of the east coast of Ireland, engaged in activities across the Irish Sea, and whose raiding threat was sufficient to (briefly) trouble the fourth-century Roman Empire. The Laigin we encounter in the early medieval Irish historical record are, by

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<sup>1527</sup> Damian McManus, *A guide to Ogam* (Maynooth, 1991), p. 53.

<sup>1528</sup> M.A. O'Brien, *Corpus Genealogiarum Hiberniae*, pp 8–9; Edel Bhreathnach, *Tara: a select bibliography* (Dublin, 1995), p. 19.

<sup>1529</sup> Smyth, *Celtic Leinster*, pp 17–18.

<sup>1530</sup> See J.D. Bateson, 'Roman material from Ireland: a reconsideration' in *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, lxxiii C (1971), pp 21–97 at 71–2; Edel Bhreathnach, *Tara: a select bibliography* (Dublin, 1995), p. 28; Ian Armit, 'Objects and ideas: Roman influences at Tara and beyond', in Muiris O'Sullivan, Christopher Scarre, Maureen Doyle, and Eoin Grogan (eds), *Tara: from the past to the future: towards a new research agenda* (Dublin, 2013), pp 288–94.

<sup>1531</sup> See Barry Raftery, 'Drumanagh and Roman Ireland', in *Archaeology Ireland*, x, no. 1 (Spring, 1996), pp 17–19; Christine Baker, 'Digging Drumanagh', in *Archaeology Ireland*, xxx, no. 1 (Spring, 2019), pp 26–9.

comparison, a pale shadow. After being chased from the midlands, they spent centuries in retreat; they were also continually harassed by the Uí Néill, now ensconced at Tara, who repeatedly forced their submission. Famously, an onerous cattle-tribute called the *bórama* was paid by the Laigin to the Uí Néill and, while many of the traditions surrounding it are apocryphal, it certainly was paid before the eighth century.

Territorially, the Laigin became restricted to what has been described as ‘a well-defined unit centred on the basins of the rivers Liffey, Barrow and Slaney, cut off from the midlands by the vast bogs of Offaly and by a zone of forest north of the Liffey, and from Munster by the uplands of Osraige rising west of the Barrow’.<sup>1532</sup> Osraige acted as a buffer between Munster and Leinster for a time, while maintaining associations with both, but in our period it was an appendage of the kingdom of Leinster, and its leading dynasty harboured ambitions to that kingship. Beyond this, the province was, in general, territorially stable until the contentions that will be outlined in this chapter.<sup>1533</sup>

In terms of internal politics, Leinster was divided on a north–south axis. For most of the early medieval period provincial authority was centred on the northern dynasties, but the southern contingent was sufficiently distinct that a man who established his power over both might be termed ‘rí Diabul-Laigin’, or ‘king of double Laigin’. In our period, the two halves of Leinster were best represented by the dynasties of Uí Dúnlainge and Uí Chennselaig. These great branches recognised a common ancestor: Fiacha ba h-Aicid. Their rise to prominence is reflected in the seventh- or eighth-century tale *Timna Cathaír Máir*, where Fiacha’s eligibility for the kingship is endorsed by his father, Cathaír Máir.<sup>1534</sup>

The Uí Dúnlainge dynasty were paramount in the north from the eighth century onwards, having supplanted, among others, the Uí Garrchon and Uí Enechglais, who retreated

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<sup>1532</sup> Byrne, *Irish kings*, p. 130; for more on Leinster’s borders see Nicholls, K.W., ‘The land of the Leinstermen’, in *Peritia* iii (1984), pp 535–58.

<sup>1533</sup> See below, pp 337–40.

<sup>1534</sup> Jaski, *Early Irish kingship and succession*, pp 131–3.

across the Wicklow mountains from their earlier base around the plains of Kildare and Dún Ailinne. This became a theme in the history of Leinster as the Uí Dúnlainge themselves would one day follow suit, having lost their lands to the English invaders.<sup>1535</sup>

This group, Uí Dúnlainge, developed three principal branches, descendants of three eighth-century brothers who reigned in turn as kings of Leinster. They were Dúnchad, Fáelán, and Muiredach, sons of Muchad mac Brain (d. 727), from whom descended the Uí Dúnchada, situated between the lower Liffey and Wicklow mountains, the Uí Fáeláin, located around Naas, and the Uí Muiredaig, who were based at Maistiú or Mullaghmast, County Kildare.<sup>1536</sup> The kingship of Leinster effectively rotated between these dynasties until the eleventh century, when two exceptional individuals interrupted their *selaidecht* and moved the locus of power southward.

The Uí Chennselaig, based at Ferns, County Wexford, were the leading dynasty of southern Leinster. They claimed to be descendants of Énna Cennselach, only two generations removed from a common ancestor with Uí Dúnlainge. Both dynasties were relative newcomers, therefore, as compared with the Uí Enechglass or Dál Cairpri, for example. Indeed, both seem to have started from a similar location, with the Uí Chennselaig, once based at Rathvilly (Ráith Bile) in north Carlow, eventually forced to migrate southwards after losing out to the Uí Dúnlainge.<sup>1537</sup>

The Osraige were next in importance to the Uí Dúnlainge and Uí Chennselaig in Leinster, and occasionally they rivalled both. As noted elsewhere, Osraige's lands constituted a buffer between Munster and Leinster, and their ambiguous status allowed for continuing links with their larger neighbours through the Middle Ages. The origins of the group are obscure, but we can at least say that they appear to have lain in Munster; early genealogical and hagiographical traditions linked them with the Corcu Loígde.<sup>1538</sup>

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<sup>1535</sup> Byrne, *Irish kings*, p. 130.

<sup>1536</sup> Mark Zumbuhl, 'Uí Dúnlainge', in Duffy (ed.), *Encyclopedia*, pp 487–8 at 487.

<sup>1537</sup> Byrne, *Irish kings*, p. 131.

<sup>1538</sup> Pádraig Ó Néill, 'Osraige', in Duffy (ed.), *Encyclopedia*, p. 358

The ninth century saw Osraige rise to unprecedented heights in the political hierarchy. Cerball mac Dúngaile used the Norse incursions to launch a bid for the kingship of Leinster and, though he was ultimately thwarted by the Uí Néill king of Ireland, Máel Sechlainn mac Máele Ruanaid, it was an ambition that his successors in Osraige would share. The idea that Osraige was ‘alienated’ to Leth Cuinn by a formal treaty in 859 has been overemphasised, since that remark simply reflected the alignments of the time (rather than a permanent re-orientation of the kingdom).<sup>1539</sup> All the same, it was kingship of Leinster and not kingship of Munster that attracted Osraige’s kings, and their eventual success in the eleventh century confirmed the primacy of that alignment.

The leading dynasty of Osraige in the twelfth century were the Meic Gilla Phátraic, who belonged to a segment known as Dál Birn. A rival group, in the north of the kingdom, Uí Duach, have been identified as a survival of the Corcu Loígde claims over Osraige which prospered in the early seventh century.<sup>1540</sup> Another important group, also in the north of Osraige, were the Uí Chaellaide, whose territory was referred to as ‘na Clandaibh’.<sup>1541</sup> It was among this group that Diarmait Mac Murchada was fostered.

There were several less powerful dynasties who nevertheless influenced the political trajectory of the province in the twelfth century. Among this collection were the Uí Failge, a group whose name was given (somewhat inaccurately) to the modern county of Offaly. Like several other marginal groups that have already been mentioned (Uí Enechglass, Uí Bairrche), the Uí Failge were a power in the earliest documented period. Their golden age is similarly difficult to reconstruct, but it seems that they occupied lands in south-western Meath before the Uí Néill conquests.

Their eponym, Ros Failge, also known as Failge Rot, was the man defeated in the Battle of Druim Derge in 516, after which ‘the plain of Mide was taken away from the

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<sup>1539</sup> See *The Two Munsters*, pp 208–9.

<sup>1540</sup> MacCotter, *Medieval Ireland*, p. 182.

<sup>1541</sup> MacCotter, *Medieval Ireland*, p. 183.

Laigin'.<sup>1542</sup> Mide, in this sense, meant a specific geographic area; only with the rise of the Clann Cholmáin did it come to apply to the Southern Uí Néill province, elsewhere described as the lands 'from the Shannon to the sea'. In fact, it meant here a plain immediately south of Uisnech, where, it would seem, the Uí Failge had ruled and perhaps also claimed kingship of Leinster.<sup>1543</sup>

Despite this, the Uí Failge retained control of a relatively large area on the new Uí Néill–Laigin border and were frequently referred to in the annals. Their leading dynasty in the period with which we are concerned were the Uí Chonchobair Failge, descendants of Conchobar (d. 891). Other important families included the Uí Riacáin and, later, Uí Díummasaig, who would give Uí Failge their last king. In fact, in the early years of the twelfth century, the Uí Failge would have a universally recognised king of Leinster, who reigned alongside an Uí Chennselaig claimant.<sup>1544</sup>

Among the subject peoples of note in medieval Leinster were the Loígis and the Fothairt. The latter of these did not control a contiguous territory; one branch was located around Naas, at least until the early tenth century, and another endured for longer close to Wexford.<sup>1545</sup> Other branches were more in evidence in the historical record in the early medieval period.<sup>1546</sup> It was a point of pride with the Fothairt that Brigit, founder-saint of Kildare, was one of their number.

The Loígis were of greater political importance in the twelfth century, under their Uí Mórda kings. As with the Uí Failge, the county to which their name was subsequently applied is considerably larger than their territory ever was. Nonetheless, they were an assertive force at times, and are particularly notable for fending off efforts by the Osraige to enforce their submission.

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<sup>1542</sup> A.U. 516.1: '*Deinde Campus Midhe a Lagenis sublatus est*'.

<sup>1543</sup> See Smyth, 'The hUí Néill and the Leinstermen in the Annals of Ulster, 431–516 A.D.', in *Etudes Celtique*, xiv, no. 1 (1974), pp 121–43 at 139–40.

<sup>1544</sup> See below, pp 323–4.

<sup>1545</sup> MacCotter, *Medieval Ireland*, pp 176, 250–1.

<sup>1546</sup> Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 534 n. 41.

Leinster is of interest because of its king's role in instigating the invasion, as well as for his belated effort to take the kingship of Ireland. This is all the more intriguing because it was not a major kingdom throughout the twelfth century. Its kings did not claim the ultimate kingship by attempting to take the hostages of other competitors until after the English invasion. The belated change of policy by Diarmait Mac Murchada once he realised the military efficacy of his English supporters might show his relative weakness beforehand, but it also shows that it was a prize on his horizon.

Histories that use Diarmait Mac Murchada as a bridge between pre- and post-invasion Ireland implicitly emphasise his and Leinster's importance. The purpose of such an approach is to set the scene for the post-invasion era, and as such Mac Murchada and Leinster occupy a more prominent place than their relatively modest status ought to allow. This chapter aims to give a clearer picture of Leinster's true role in Irish politics. The true dynamics underlying the political hierarchy will be outlined in our comparative analysis; points of intersection between the national kingship and Leinster will be addressed in this chapter.<sup>1547</sup>

Historians who have been impressed by Leinster's standing in this era are certainly influenced by its seizure of Dublin in the mid-eleventh century. Orpen, for example, remarked that 'Though inhabited and directly ruled by foreigners, and not the seat of the *ard-ri*, it had gradually come to be regarded as in some sort the capital of Ireland'.<sup>1548</sup> Duffy endorsed this view throughout his publications and Byrne thought that 'The eastern seaboard received no real importance until it was opened up by the Norse settlements at Dublin, Wicklow, Arklow and Wexford'.<sup>1549</sup>

Whatever about the increasing importance of Dublin and its role as a capital – and there are indeed some very good reasons to characterise it as such – it is a mistake to assume

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<sup>1547</sup> See below, 341–59; Comparative Analysis, pp 432–74.

<sup>1548</sup> Orpen, *Normans*, i, p. 208.

<sup>1549</sup> Byrne, *Irish kings*, p. 130; see also Duffy, 'Ireland's Hastings: the Anglo-Norman conquest of Dublin', pp 6–85; idem, *Ireland in the Middle Ages*, p. 69.

that any such status or economic advantages consistently transferred across to the kingdom of Leinster.<sup>1550</sup> Leinster's hold on Dublin was sporadic (as to a lesser extent was its control of Wexford), as we will see.

There are no dedicated annals for Leinster in the twelfth century, something that also distinguishes the province from the others included in this study. However, there is a stratum of Leinster material in *A.F.M.*, often thought to derive from a now-lost set of Leinster-based annals, and this is important for an overall narrative of Leinster affairs.<sup>1551</sup> Similarly, there are many entries concerning Leinster in *Ann. Tig.* and *Chron. Scot.* Different theories have been advanced for this, but current thinking is that this material reflects the interest of Clonard, in southern County Meath, as a centre of recording.<sup>1552</sup>

There is another factor that differentiates Leinster from our other case studies. Unlike Connacht, the North, and Munster, Leinster was conquered outright at a very early stage, leaving only isolated enclaves under the control of Gaelic dynasties. These enclaves made a minimal impact on the annalistic record, and indeed little is known of their affairs except at sporadic intervals over subsequent centuries.

Consequently, the history of the late twelfth and thirteenth century in Leinster, so far as it can be reconstructed, is the history conquest, settlement, and a fledgling lordship. Such topics have been treated extensively by others; indeed, as outlined in the introduction, few subjects in twelfth- and thirteenth century Ireland have attracted quite so much attention. For the present purpose, the establishment of political trajectory and strategic interests in the Gaelic kingdoms, Leinster is of interest up to the point of conquest.

This chapter is concerned with Leinster's principal internal and external issues. Its position within Leth Moga, usually subordinate to Munster, will be examined; this also bears upon consideration of Munster in the relevant chapter. The relatively equal status

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<sup>1550</sup> For more on Dublin, see *Comparative Analysis*, pp 463–66.

<sup>1551</sup> Evans, *Present and past in medieval Irish chronicles*, p. 7 n. 47.

<sup>1552</sup> Evans, *Present and past in medieval Irish chronicles*, pp 81–7.

of several leading dynasties in Leinster also undermined the province; this was exploited by neighbours, particularly the kingdom of Meath, as will be argued. It is worth noting here too that the abnormal marriage practice in Leinster, which is discussed in detail elsewhere, is intimately related to such dynastic relationships and shows that Leinster's internal politics offer much of interest as a case study.<sup>1553</sup>

It is also worthwhile considering the anomalous relationship between Leinster and the national kingship. Diarmait Mac Murchada's conception of the position was based on a largely imagined vision of his ancestor, Diarmait mac Máel na mBó, and his achievements. Similarly, the tale of Labraidh Loingsech and his exile from Ireland may have played into Mac Murchada's self-perception when he sought the aid of Henry II. Mac Murchada's exile and the new departure constituted by his change of approach in 1170 are of enduring importance for any explanation of the course of the English invasion.

#### **[4.1: Internal conflicts]**

The eleventh century saw power in Leinster pivot from north to south. Byrne read this shift as a consequence of Uí Dúnlainge failures. He wrote of the Uí Chennselaig, 'they were to issue forth in the eleventh century when the Uí Dúnlainge had been weakened by centuries of humiliating defeats at the hands of the Uí Neill and the Dublin Norse as well as by internal feuds, and had finally fallen a prey to the ambitions of Osraige, whose kings had long since shaken off the hegemony of Cashel and aspired to become lords of Leinster'.<sup>1554</sup>

This neat summary encapsulates the effect of two extraordinary careers: that of Gilla Phátraic mac Donnchada of Osraige, and that of Diarmait mac Máel na mBó of Uí Chennselaig. Both men were probably inspired to some degree by Brian Bóraime, but the

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<sup>1553</sup> See *Women and Marriage*, pp 424–7.

<sup>1554</sup> Byrne, *Irish kings*, p. 131.



former must also have looked to his Dál Birn ancestor, Cerball mac Dúngaile, who was mentioned above.

Donnchad was a contemporary of Brian Bóraime, and first appears in the historical record under 1003.<sup>1555</sup> There was little hope for an ambitious leader of Osraige coming to power at that time, especially considering the primacy of Leth Moga in Brian's political philosophy.<sup>1556</sup> Donnchad wisely refrained from building his position until after his suzerain's death at Clontarf in 1014; therefore the idea that the kings of Osraige had 'long since shaken off the hegemony of Cashel' is a bit misleading.

In terms of campaigns for supremacy outside Osraige, his career was limited to 1016–39. His early battles saw him target the Uí Muiredaig in the north of the province: he was on the front foot there in 1016 and 1026. He coupled this with an attack on Waterford in 1022, no doubt recognising the advantage afforded by its proximity to his kingdom, as well as remembering the successes of his ancestor, Cerball.<sup>1557</sup>

Donnchad is accorded a three-year reign as king of Leinster in the king-lists.<sup>1558</sup> Since he died in 1039, this brings us back to 1036, when he had a prominent dynast of Uí Muiredaig, described in some sources as king of Leinster, blinded.<sup>1559</sup> He had certainly claimed the kingship for longer than this, having celebrated the associated *Óenach Carmain* in 1033.<sup>1560</sup> His campaigns of the 1020s, which clearly corresponded to the same goal, were hamstrung by the activity of Donnchad mac Briain, who regarded himself as Donnchad's natural overlord.

His eventual success in forcing the other important dynasties to accept his claim to the kingship of the province was an important moment in Leinster's history. It did not usher

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<sup>1555</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1003.2.

<sup>1556</sup> See *The Two Munsters*, pp 216–33.

<sup>1557</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1022.2; *Chron. Scot.* 1022.1.

<sup>1558</sup> R.I. Best, Osborn Bergin, O'Brien, and Anne O'Sullivan (eds). *The Book of Leinster, formerly Leabar na Núachongbála* (6 vols., Dublin, 1954–83), i, p. 183.

<sup>1559</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1036.1; *Chron. Scot.* 1036.1.

<sup>1560</sup> Ailbhe Mac Shamhráin, 'Donnchad' in *D.I.B.*, accessed online (<https://www.dib.ie/biography/donnchad-a2693>) (31 March 2022).

in an era in which Osraige was dominant, though it did underline the eastward orientation of that region. It was the Uí Chennselaig and not the Osraige who would ultimately capitalise on the weakness shown by the northern dynasties in the shape of Diarmait mac Máel na mBó, though it is also likely that continued difficulty in controlling the Osraige stemmed from their maintenance of a claim to overall kingship of the province.

Diarmait mac Máel na mBó, whose importance in Leth Moga was also discussed in the chapter on Munster, came to prominence in the late 1030s.<sup>1561</sup> There was, as such, a brief overlap between his career and that of Donnchad mac Gilla Phátraic. Like Donnchad, and perhaps partly in imitation of him, Diarmait attacked Waterford in 1037, and may have won a degree of influence over the town at that time.<sup>1562</sup> More significantly and more famously, he captured Dublin in 1052, establishing, for the first time, Leinster's dominance over the settlement.<sup>1563</sup>

In keeping with the pattern that defined Brian Bóraime's career and would persist well into the twelfth century, pre-eminence in Leth Moga concerned both Donnchad mac Gilla Phátraic and Diarmait mac Máel na mBó. The latter's alliance with Toirdelbach mac Taidc in opposition to Donnchad mac Briain proved mutually beneficial, and the Uí Chennselaig dynast proved to be the first man capable of reversing Leinster's subjection to the Munster kings.<sup>1564</sup>

We will examine Diarmait mac Máel na mBó's credentials for the national kingship below, so it will suffice here to make some observations about his approach to climbing

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<sup>1561</sup> *A.U.* 1036.6; *A.L.C.* 1036.8; *A.F.M.* 1036.12; ; for a full account of his career and achievements, see Ó Corráin, 'The career of Diarmait mac Máel na mBó, king of Leinster, Part I', in *The Journal of the Old Wexford Society*, iii (1970–1), pp 27–35 esp. 34–5; idem, 'The career of Diarmait mac Máel na mBó, Part II', in *The Journal of the Old Wexford Society*, iv (1972), pp 17–24, esp. 17–20; for the political context that preceded his rise, see Denis Casey, 'A man of no mean standing: the career and legacy of Donnchad mac Briain (d. 1064)', in *Peritia* xxxi (2020), pp 29–57.

<sup>1562</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1037.2; *Ann. Inisf.* 1037.3.

<sup>1563</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1052.2; *Chron. Scot.* 1052.1; see also Duffy, 'Irishmen and Islesmen in the kingdoms of Dublin and Man, 1052–1171', in *Ériu*, xliii (1992), pp 93–133 esp. 94–101; see Ó Corráin, 'The career of Diarmait mac Máel na mBó, Pt. II', p. 19.

<sup>1564</sup> Benjamin T. Hudson, 'Diarmait mac Máel na mBó' in *O.D.N.B.*, accessed online (<https://doi-org.jproxy.nuim.ie/10.1093/ref:odnb/50102>) (1 April 2022).

the political hierarchy.<sup>1565</sup> He prioritised Leth Moga, and only once his position in this regard was secure did he attempt to expand farther afield. When he did so, it was against Meath that he moved. He was killed in this effort in 1072 and, in the aftermath his gains in Leth Moga were rapidly rolled back.

At the beginning of the twelfth century, Leinster was, in fact, in a remarkably weak position. Despite having so recently exercised suzerainty over the Uí Briain and Munster, it now found itself under their thumb once more. Toirdelbach úa Briain himself, who had relied upon the support of Diarmait mac Máel na mBó to win and hold his kingship, wasted no time in turning the tables upon the latter's death. Not only did he establish his supremacy over the Laigin, but he also stripped them of Dublin with its economic importance and international network.

In the absence of a well-established dynamic, plausible candidates for the provincial kingship faced the difficulty of establishing their authority firmly within the province. The Uí Dúnlainge monopoly, which was itself shakier than the kinglists suggest, had collapsed; no new monopoly or *selaidecht* had arisen to take its place. As such, the rival dynasties of Uí Dúnlainge, Uí Chennselaig, and Osraige ignored each other's claims, even where they did not fight each other directly.

Munster was the beneficiary of Leinster's disunity, of course. The success enjoyed by Diarmait mac Máel na mBó served the Uí Briain as a warning against complacency where their eastern neighbour was concerned, and the importance of Leth Moga to their overall political outlook only underlined the point.<sup>1566</sup> It would take the successive collapses of Uí Briain and Uí Chonchobair dominance before there was a realistic opportunity to revive Leinster as an effective kingdom.

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<sup>1565</sup> See below, pp 341–7; for some broader context on his career, see Benjamin Hudson, 'William the Conqueror and Ireland', in *Irish Historical Studies*, xxix, no. 114 (November, 1994), pp 145–58.

<sup>1566</sup> See the Two Munsters, pp 216–33.

Leinster's transition from leading to subordinate province occurred as soon as Diarmait mac Máel na mBó died in 1072. His erstwhile client in Munster, Toirdelbach úa Briain, 'went to Osraige and Laigin, burned Uí Cheinnselaig and brought away much booty and cows, and took hostages from it as well as from Laigin. And the foreigners gave him the kingship of Áth Cliath, and he made prisoner the sons of Domnall, son of Mael na mBó, in Áth Cliath, and brought back the hostages of Osraige on that occasion'.<sup>1567</sup>

This comprehensive reversal of the political hierarchy allowed úa Briain to incorporate the Laigin into his armies for campaigns further afield. In 1075, for example, there was 'A hosting of the Meathmen, Connaughtmen, the foreigners, the Leinstermen, the Osraighi, and the Munstermen, was made by Toirdhealbhach Ua Briain; and they marched to Ath-Fhirdia, to demand hostages from the Oirghialla and the Ulidians'.<sup>1568</sup>

The same year, as mentioned, Dublin was detached from Leinster. Its Hiberno-Norse king, Gofraid mac Amlaíb meic Ragnaill, was expelled by Toirdelbach úa Briain, and he died overseas while assembling a fleet to aid his return.<sup>1569</sup> A descendant of mac Máel na mBó was imposed on Dublin by Toirdelbach, but he died shortly afterwards.<sup>1570</sup>

Thereafter, kingship of Dublin was given to Muirchertach, Toirdelbach's son.<sup>1571</sup>

Toirdelbach may not have placed much importance on the separation of Dublin from Leinster at this point, since he was prepared to countenance Uí Chennselaig control of the town, but the novelty of making his own son governor of the town would be imitated in subsequent years.

The Laigin and Osraige continued to support their new suzerains in Munster; indeed, as discussed elsewhere, the Uí Briain were characterised as kings of Leth Moga through the

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<sup>1567</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1072.4.

<sup>1568</sup> *A.F.M.* 1075.10: '*Slóichcedh lá Toirdhealbhach ua m-Briain co f-Feraibh Mídhe co Connachtaibh, co n-Gallaibh, Laighnibh, Osraighibh, 7 Muimhneachaibh imme co rángattar co h-Ath Fhir Diadh do chuingidh giall for Oirghiallaibh, 7 for Ultaibh*'.

<sup>1569</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1075.2; *Ann. Tig.* 1075.2; *Chron. Scot.* 1075; *A.U.* 1075.1; *A.L.C.* 1075.1.

<sup>1570</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1075.3; *A.U.* 1075.4; *A.L.C.* 1075.4.

<sup>1571</sup> *A.F.M.* 1075.11; *Ann. Inisf.* 1075.4; *Chron. Scot.* 1075.

period of their supremacy.<sup>1572</sup> Such campaigns included in 1084, against Donnchad Úa Ruairc and, under Muirchertach, in the almost annual campaigns to the North that took place around the turn of the twelfth century.<sup>1573</sup>

The campaign of 1103 illustrates the dangers associated with such enterprises. On that occasion, Úa Briain divided his forces, leaving the Laigin and Osraige, along with some of the Munstermen, in his main camp while he set out on a raid. His rival took advantage of his absence: ‘Domhnall Ua Lochlainn, with the Clanna-Neill of the North, proceeded to Magh-Cobha, to attack the camp of the Leinstermen; and the Leinstermen, the Osraighi, and the Munstermen, assembled together all the forces they had, and fought a spirited battle in Magh-Cobha, on Tuesday, the Nones of August, on the eighth day after their coming into that plain. The people of Leath-Mhogha were, however, defeated, and slaughter made of them, viz. the slaughter of the Leinstermen’.<sup>1574</sup>

At the same time, there were occasional attempts on the part of the Laigin to re-assert themselves. In 1088, for example, there was ‘a hosting by the Laigin and by the son of Domnall Remar to Port Láirge. Énna, son of Diarmait, and the nobles of Desmumu [were] in the fortress, and the Laigin failed to take it, and Domnall's son was defeated at Inis Teimle, and a slaughter inflicted upon him’.<sup>1575</sup> Full revenge for the disturbance had to wait until 1089, when ‘Muirchertach Ua Briain went on a foray to Mide and encamped at Loch Aininn. He came thence into Laigin and slew Domnall's son, took the kingship of Laigin and Áth Cliath, and imprisoned Énna, son of Diarmait’.<sup>1576</sup>

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<sup>1572</sup> See the Two Munsters, pp 216–33.

<sup>1573</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1084.2; see The Uí Néill and the North, pp 138–46.

<sup>1574</sup> *A.F.M.* 1103.10: ‘Do-luidh Domhnall Ua Lochlainn co c-Clandaibh Néill an Tuaisceirt i Maigh Cobha for amus longpuirt Laighen. Tionóilitt imorro Laighin, 7 Osraighe, 7 Fir Mumhan, 7 Gaill an líon ro bháttar, 7 feraítt cath cródha for Maigh Cobha dia Cédaoin in Nóin Auguist isin ochtmhadh ló iar t-tocht don Mhacha. Ro meabhaidh tra for Leth Mhodha, 7 ro ládh a n-ár .i. ar Laighen’.

<sup>1575</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1088.3: ‘Sluaged la Laigniu 7 la mc. n-Domnaill Remair co Port Lairge, 7 Enda mc. Diarmata isin dún 7 mathe Desmuman, 7 femdisset Laigin dul arin dún, 7 maidis for mc. n-Domnaill oc Inis Temle 7 ár fair’.

<sup>1576</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1089.2: ‘Murchertach h-Ua Briain do dul ar creich h-i Mide co ragaib lóingphort oc Loch Annind, 7 co tanic 7 as saide i l-Laighniu corro marbad mc. Domnaill lais, 7 co ragaib rige Laigen 7 Átha Cliath 7 coró chumrig Enda mc. n-Diarmata’.

Whether it was as a supporting contingent in the armies of a suzerain or during efforts to throw those same overlords off, the Laigin were undermined throughout this period by the lack of a single dominant dynasty. It is usually assumed that the Uí Chennselaig occupied this role, but that impression has been created by a veneer of medieval revisionism. Indeed, unlike most (if not all) of the provincial kingdoms in the twelfth century, accession to the provincial kingship of Leinster remained open to multiple dynasties with far-flung loci of power.

This was, no doubt, because before Diarmait mac Máel na mBó, the Uí Chennselaig had not held the kingship for several centuries. His reign, like that of Donnchad mac Gilla Phátraic of Osraige, was a symptom of the breakup of an old order and this was not immediately followed by new political stability. Instead, the Uí Chennselaig, still the most powerful of Leinster's leading lights, worked hard to eclipse other contenders without absolute success.

The Book of Leinster, which, if not necessarily written for Diarmait Mac Murchada, at least bears evidence of considerable Uí Chennselaig influence, promotes the idea of Uí Chennselaig dominance from Diarmait mac Máel na mBó onwards. Even here, though, recognition is given to Conchobar Úa Conchobair Failge, who is described as having 'joint sovereignty' with Donnchad mac Murchada for two years.<sup>1577</sup>

Both died in battle in 1115, so the two years may refer to the Muirchertach Úa Briain's illness, which began in 1114. It was to a resurgent Úa Briain, with his son Donnchad, that they would lose their lives.<sup>1578</sup> In *A.F.M.*, *A.U.*, and *A.L.C.* descriptions of that event, both men are given their regional titles (i.e., king of Uí Chennselaig and king of Uí Failge). In *Ann. Tig.*, however, Donnchad mac Murchada is 'king of Leinster' and Conchobar Úa Conchobair Failge merely 'king of Offaly'.<sup>1579</sup>

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<sup>1577</sup> Best *et. al.* (eds), *The Book of Leinster*, i, p. 184: '*i comflathius*'.

<sup>1578</sup> *A.U.* 1115.4, 1115.6.

<sup>1579</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1115.4: '*rí Laigen*', '*ri h-Úa Failghí*'.

The *Banshenchas* refers to a Túathal ‘rí Laigen’ whose identity is unclear but who presumably belonged to the Uí Muiredaig and flourished in the late eleventh and early twelfth century, since his half-brother was one of the Meic Cárthaigh of Desmond.<sup>1580</sup> In a similar vein, the ‘king of Loígis’ who died in 1042 is given the provincial title in the *Banshenchas*, but not elsewhere.<sup>1581</sup>

During the 1103 defeat discussed above, Muirchertach Mac Gilla mo Cholmóg was referred to as ‘king of Leinster’ in *A.F.M.*, a stylisation apparently adopted from *Ann. Tig.*<sup>1582</sup> The Meic Gilla mo Cholmóg were the leading branch of Uí Dúinchada, it will be remembered. His authority in Leinster was not universally recognised, though, and elsewhere he is simply listed as one of the casualties of the attack.<sup>1583</sup> This is all the more remarkable considering the otherwise close similarities of the entries in these sources.

These represent examples of kings of Leinster or challengers to Uí Chennselaig hegemony; there are also a number of examples of dynasts from elsewhere in Leinster designated as ‘*rígdamnai*’ or potential successors to the kingship. These are equally reflective of a delicate balance of power, since such a title recognised the sensibilities of ousted dynasties and was, furthermore, a concession on behalf of the ruling line that others might replace them in the future.

In mac Máel na mBó’s own time, for example, Fáelán son of Murchad is described as such, even as he supported the former’s military campaigns.<sup>1584</sup> The Gilla Caemgein son of Gilla Comgaill, who is described as ‘*ridomna Laigen*’ in his obituary of 1059, was of Uí Muiredaig as, likewise, was the similarly styled úa Lorcaín dynast killed by the Cenél

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<sup>1580</sup> *Banshenchas* [part two], p. 193; Ailbhe Mac Shamhráin was unable to identify this individual – see idem, *Church and polity in pre-Norman Ireland: the case of Glendalough* (Maynooth, 1996), p. 96; idem, ‘The Uí Muiredaig and the abbacy of Glendalough in the eleventh to thirteenth centuries’, in *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies*, xxv (1993), pp 55–75 at 59.

<sup>1581</sup> *Banshenchas* [part two], p. 233; *A.F.M.* 1042.9.

<sup>1582</sup> *A.F.M.* 1103.10: ‘*ri Laighean*’; *Ann. Tig.* 1103.4.

<sup>1583</sup> *A.U.* 1103.5.

<sup>1584</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1063.4.

nEogain in 1064.<sup>1585</sup> Such designations may reflect the concern with a resurgent Uí Chennselaig permanently eclipsing the old order.

The twelfth century certainly saw this tension perpetuated. Among those styled ‘*rigdamna Laigen*’ in this era were Domnall Úa Fáeláin in 1124, Donnchad Mac Gilla mo Cholmóg in 1133, Ugaire Úa Tuathail in 1134, and Máel Mórda Úa Fáeláin in 1177.<sup>1586</sup> We may be justified in noting the concentration of these entries before Diarmait Mac Murchada established himself firmly in the provincial kingship.

The Uí Chennselaig also had to deal with internal difficulties. Ó Corráin drew attention to the fact that Diarmait Mac Murchada had a rival as late as 1133, when Máel Sechlainn mac Diarmata Meic Murchada was killed by Ugaire Úa Tuathail; Úa Tuathail would himself be killed the next year, apparently supporting Diarmait Mac Murchada once more.<sup>1587</sup> As Ó Corráin argued, this undermines suggestions (based on the Book of Leinster) that the latter reigned as provincial king from 1126–7. In fact, he only attained that position in 1132.<sup>1588</sup>

Our discussion of marriage practice in the twelfth century will show how the Uí Chennselaig acknowledged the royal status of rival dynasties in other parts of the province. This situation was quite anomalous, and did not have parallels in Connacht, Meath, or the North, for example. Munster is analogous only insofar as the Meic Cárthaigh and Uí Briain recognised each other’s royal status; in Leinster this franchise or right of succession was far more extensive.<sup>1589</sup>

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<sup>1585</sup> *A.U.* 1059.5, 1064.6.

<sup>1586</sup> *A.F.M.* 1124.11, 1133.6, 1134.11; *Ann. Tig.* 1133.6, 1133.7, 1177.12.

<sup>1587</sup> *A.F.M.* 1134.11.

<sup>1588</sup> Donnchadh Ó Corráin, ‘The education of Diarmait Mac Murchada’, in *Ériu*, xxviii (1977), pp 71–81, at 71–2; see also idem, ‘The Uí Chennselaig Kingship of Leinster 1072–1126, Part I’, in *The Journal of the Old Wexford Society*, v (1974–5), pp 26–31; idem, ‘The Uí Chennselaig Kingship of Leinster 1072–1126, Part II’, in *The Journal of the Old Wexford Society*, vi (1976–7), pp 45–53; idem, ‘The Uí Chennselaig Kingship of Leinster 1072–1126, Part III’, in *The Journal of the Old Wexford Society*, vii (1978–9), pp 46–9; Flanagan, ‘Mac Dalbaig, a Leinster chieftain’, in *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, cxi (1981), pp 5–13 at 5–6.

<sup>1588</sup> See *Women and Marriage*, pp 424–7.

<sup>1589</sup> See *Women and Marriage*, pp 424–7.



We must consider what followed in the light of these facts. In an event that is usually described as his *crech rí*g, or inaugural military act as king, Diarmait Mac Murchada led his forces into north Leinster in 1132. He targeted Leinster's principal ecclesiastical foundation, Kildare. It was famously founded by Brigit, and as such the community was headed by an abbess; the abbess at this time was Mór of the Uí Failge. She had been installed some years previously at the expense of the Uí Fáeláin, whom Mac Murchada now courted by marrying one of their number. When he attacked Kildare, therefore, he did so partly to avenge his allies in north Leinster, and partly to announce his aim to lead the province as a whole.

On this occasion he displayed some of the ruthlessness for which he would later be famous, as 'the successor of Brigit was betrayed and carried off by Diarmait son of Murchad and forced to submit to him and seven score killed in Cell Dara and most of it burned'.<sup>1590</sup> The efficacy of sexual violence must have appealed to him, since he would, exactly twenty years later, act similarly in the abduction of Derbforgaill, wife of Tigernán Ua Ruairc.<sup>1591</sup> It was also an unusually violent act for an internal affair, and one without contemporary parallels elsewhere in Ireland.

Mac Murchada would continue to set his own precedents thereafter. Under 1141, *A.F.M.* reports that 'Diarmaid Mac Murchadha, King of Leinster, acted treacherously towards the chieftains of Leinster, namely, towards Domhnall, lord of Uí-Faelain, and royal heir of Leinster, and towards Ua Tuathail, i.e. Murchadh, both of whom he killed; and also towards Muircheartach Mac Gillamochoilmog, lord of Feara-Cualann, who was blinded by him. This deed caused great weakness in Leinster, for seventeen of the nobility of

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<sup>1590</sup> *A.L.C.* 1132.1: '*Teach n-abadh Cille Dara do ghabháil d-Ibh g-Ceinnselaigh for chomarba m-Bríghdi, 7 a losgad, 7 bladhd mhór don chill, 7 sochaide do marbad ann, 7 an caillech féin do breith a m-broid, 7 a tabairt a leabaidh fir*'.

<sup>1591</sup> See *Women and Marriage*, pp 374–8.

Leinster, and many others of inferior rank along with them, were killed or blinded by him at that time'.<sup>1592</sup>

There can be no doubt that Mac Murchada was motivated by the precariousness of his dynasty's hold on the provincial kingship. It is not known whether his actions in 1141 were in response to a direct threat, but it seems he was conditioned to feel any such danger keenly. His victims, unsurprisingly, were the leading men among the dynasties of north Leinster, with their supporters.

When describing the king of Leinster, Giraldus Cambrensis said: 'From his earliest youth and his first taking the kingship he oppressed his nobles, and raged against the chief men of his kingdom with a tyranny grievous and impossible to bear [...] He preferred to be feared by all rather than loved. He treated his nobles harshly and brought to prominence men of humble rank'.<sup>1593</sup>

His depiction of Mac Murchada strikes a contrast with the favourable view presented in *The Deeds*, and is sometimes dismissed as a result, but the Irish sources bear out the idea that Mac Murchada was fiercely suspicious of his most powerful subordinates. Indeed, the nature of their relationship with him is, to some degree, borne out by the description of his flight from Ireland in *The Deeds*.

There it is reported that his subjects had a major role in his downfall, with Úa Brain and Mac Turcaill castigated in particular. In two passages, it is first reported that Diarmait 'saw that he was abandoned by foster kindred, cousins and friends', and later that 'King Diarmait saw then that he was betrayed, that his own men had failed him, and that he was

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<sup>1592</sup> A.F.M. 1141.4: 'Diarmaid Mac Murchadha, ri Laighen, do dhéanamh feille for mhaithibh Laighen .i. for Domhnall tigherna Ua f-Faoláin 7 riogh-dhamhna Laighen, 7 for Ua t-Tuathail .i. Murchadh 7 a marbhadh lais diblinibh, 7 Muirchertach Mac Giolla Mo Cholmóg, tigherna Ferg-Cualann do dhalladh lais bheós. Enerte mór i Laighnibh don ghníomh-sin, uair ro marbhadh 7 ro dalladh seacht f-fir dhécc do saor-chlandaibh Laighen co sochaidhibh oile immaille friu an tan-sin'.

<sup>1593</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 24–5, 40–1: 'Qui ab ineunte etate regnique sui novitate nobilitatis oppressor existens, in terre sue magnates gravi et intolerabili tyrannide desevebat [...] timeri a cunctis quam diligere malens; nobilium oppressor, humilium erector'.

thus betrayed and that they wanted to capture him, to hand him over and sell him to Ua Ruairc ... His own men have driven out King Diarmait by main force. They have taken all the kingdom from him and driven him from Ireland'.<sup>1594</sup>

We will discuss the external factors that led to this crisis below, but here it suffices to say that the evidence of the annals bears out this reading of Leinster's internal politics in 1166. Since Mac Murchada's aim was not national supremacy at this point (see below), we must also consider what he hoped to achieve when he solicited mercenary support for his return. Certainly, his attention must have been partly directed at his external enemies, but equally, he clearly hoped to secure his position in Leinster itself.

Charles-Edwards argued that Mac Murchada intended to secure his own (and his dynasty's) hold on Leinster by having the early English invaders take land holdings in the territory of his rivals within Leinster, and perhaps also in the Hiberno-Norse settlements; he did not intend for Richard de Clare to succeed him as lord of Leinster.<sup>1595</sup> Thus it was that the lands of the Uí Fáeláin were to be given to Maurice fitz Gerald; the lands of Gilla Comgaill Úa Tuathail were split between Walter de Ridelisford and Robert fitz Richard; the territory of Uí Dróna to Raymond le Gros; that of the Uí Brain to Robert de Quency; and some of Osraige's land was apportioned to John de Clahull.<sup>1596</sup>

Greater weight must therefore be placed on Mac Murchada's conduct and initial campaigns when he returned to Ireland. From 1167–70 his intention was to reprise his province and re-order it along favourable lines. This, of course, meant his province in as wide a definition as possible, encompassing not just Osraige, but also the towns of Dublin and Waterford, to which he had a claim, as well.

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<sup>1594</sup> *The Deeds*, p. 56, ll 148–9; p. 58 ll 204–227: 'Tute sa gent li sunt faillie De Leynestere e de Osserie. Quant ço vit Dermot li reis Que traï esteit a cele feis, Sa gent demeine lui sun failliz, Ent el maere iert traiz E que voleint [le] prendre, A O Roric liverer e vendre [...] Tollét lui unt tut la reingné E de Yrland li unt chacé. Quant fut li reis exulé. A Korkeran [fut] eschippé. Quant li reis esteir waivés, A Korkeran est eschippés. A Corkeran en mer entra; Awlef O Kinad od sei mena, O sei mena li riche reis, E plus de seisante treis'.

<sup>1595</sup> Charles-Edwards, 'Ireland and its invaders, 1166–1186', pp 1–34.

<sup>1596</sup> Charles-Edwards, 'Ireland and its invaders, 1166–1186', pp 10–11.

It is perhaps for this reason that both Giraldus and *The Deeds* go into such detail about these early campaigns. Giraldus explained that ‘among all those who had rebelled against Diarmait, Donnall prince of Osraige had always been the most hostile. He had actually blinded Diarmait’s oldest son, whom he had long held prisoner, out of jealous hatred. This crowning injustice was the most severe of all Diarmait’s misfortunes’.<sup>1597</sup> The blinding of Énna Mac Murchada appears in the annals under 1168, and was, no doubt, a response to the renewed threat posed by Diarmait rather than a product of ‘jealous hatred’.<sup>1598</sup>

After a victory over the Osraige, Giraldus reported that Mac Murchada had the heads of his enemies laid at his feet: ‘When he had turned each one over and recognised it, out of an excess of joy he jumped three times in the air with arms clasped over his head, and joyfully gave thanks to the Supreme Creator as he loudly revelled in his triumph. He lifted up to his mouth the head of one he particularly loathed, and taking it by the ears and hair, gnawed at the nose and cheeks – a cruel and most inhuman act’.<sup>1599</sup>

Martin suggested that too much credence had been given to this and other similar comments by Giraldus, which he deemed to be anti-Irish rhetoric, and which certainly was at odds with the positive image of Mac Murchada presented in *The Deeds*.<sup>1600</sup>

Despite the discrepancy in their portrayal of the king of Leinster, the two sources agree in the importance of these campaigns.

For Mac Murchada, victory justified his recourse to foreign aid; whether he actually chewed the faces of his decapitated enemies is less important than the fact that victory

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<sup>1597</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 34–7: ‘Fuerat autem Ossirie princeps Duvenaldus inter universos suorum rebelles Dermatio semper inimicissius. Qui etiam filium eiusdem primogenitum, olim in vinculis tentum, ad amplissimum tam iniuriarum cumulum quam malorum incommodum, zelotypie causa exoculaverat’.

<sup>1598</sup> *A.F.M.* 1168.11; *Ann. Tig.* 1168.2.

<sup>1599</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 36–7: ‘Quibus singulatim revolutis et agnitis, pre nimio gaudii motu ter iunctis minibus in altum prosiliens, in gaciarum accione summon Creatori voce letabunda canorus exultat. Unius etiam, quem magis inter ceteros exosum habuerat, capite per aures et comas ad os erecto, crudedi morsu et valde inhumano nares et labra dente corrosit’.

<sup>1600</sup> Martin, ‘Diarmait Mac Murchada’, pp 46–7.

over them was one of his principal objectives. He had not yet raised his goals to the national kingship, and so the subjugation of Osraige constituted a major step towards what he then regarded as ultimate success. That he had an emotional reaction to this need not be a surprise, especially when we consider that he had been fostered among the Uí Chaellaide of Osraige, rivals of the Meic Gilla Phátraic.

In fact, it was only after the capture of Dublin that Mac Murchada began to believe that greater things were possible, as Giraldus pointed out: ‘Mac Murchada now raised his sights to higher things and, now that he had recovered his entire inheritance, he aspired to his ancestral and long-standing rights, and determined, by the use of his armed might, to bring under his control Connacht, together with the kingship of all Ireland’.<sup>1601</sup>

Even now, with Dublin under his control, old grievances still motivated Mac Murchada keenly. *The Deeds* describes how ‘While the noble king Diarmait was staying in the city, his enemies, who had utterly betrayed him, came to him from all the countryside around to beg for his mercy. And because of the fear they felt of the Englishmen who were with him, they sent many hostages to King Diarmait, who was so fierce; and they gladly made peace for fear of the English. Most of Leinster came to make peace in this way. Mac Donnchada, the king of Osraige, did not come, nor did the traitor Mac Fáeláin, who was king of Uí Fáeláin, nor the traitor Mac Turcaill, who was lord of Dublin [...] He [Mac Murchada] decided to attack Mac Fáeláin, to shame and disgrace him’.<sup>1602</sup>

The annals bear out these descriptions. Before the capture of Dublin, for example, we are told that ‘Ossory was ravaged, both church and district, by Mac Murchadha with

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<sup>1601</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 52–3: ‘Murchardides autem se ad ulteriora iam erigens, toto sibi patrimonio ad manus iam reverso, ad avita et antiqua iura conspirans, Connacciam sibi cum universa Hibernie monarchia potenti manu subicere proponit’.

<sup>1602</sup> *The Deeds*, p. 74, ll 824–43, 848–9: ‘Sicum le gentilz reis Dermod En la cite sorjornout, [D]’environ tu[t] le país A li vindrent ses enemis Pur crer al rei merci, Qui einz l’urent tut trahi. E pur la dute qu’il aveint Des Engleis que od lui esteint, Ostages asez firent livrer Al rei Dermod que tant fu fer; E mult bien vindrent a pes Pur la dute des Engleis. Tut le plus de Leynistere A pes vindrent en cel manere. Mac Donthid ne vint mie, Que reis esteit de Osserie; Ne le traïtur Mac Kelan Ke reis esteir de O Felan, Ne Mac Torkil le traïtur [...] Sur Mac Kelan volt aler Pur lui honir e vergunder’.

Foreigners'.<sup>1603</sup> After the capture of Dublin, the annals concentrate on raids into the territory of Meath and Bréifne, but they also mention that 'The son of Mac Fhaelain and the son of Donnchadh Mac Gillaphadraig were banished by Mac Murchadha'.<sup>1604</sup> This language reflects an attack by Mac Murchada on their territories.<sup>1605</sup>

There are even supporting remarks with regards to his internal difficulties in 1166. For example, while *A.U.* tells us that 'Domnall Mac Gilla-Mocholmoic was killed by the Lagenians themselves', we learn from *Ann. Tig.* That this was done 'by the sons of Mac Braenáin, at the instigation of Mac Murchadha'.<sup>1606</sup> Subsequent entries in *Ann. Tig.* read like a sequence of events. First, 'Leinstermen and Foreigners revolted against Mac Murchadha for his own crimes'; then, 'Hostages of the Uí Faeláin and Uí Failghe were taken by Diarmaid Ó Maelseachlainn'; and finally 'The hostages of Ossory and Uí Faeláin, including the son of Mac Faeláin, were killed by Mac Murchadha'.<sup>1607</sup> Clearly, what we have here is an annalistic representation of the events set down with more dramatic effect by Giraldus Cambrensis and the anonymous author of *The Deeds*.

Mac Murchada, then, from his accession to the final campaigns of his life, was deeply concerned with his supremacy over the leading dynasties of his province. He clearly hoped to establish the kind of monopoly achieved elsewhere by his enemies, the Uí Chonchobair, Uí Ruairc, and Uí Máel Sechlainn, among others. He also needed to concern himself with efforts by others to detach particular regions from Leinster altogether.<sup>1608</sup> This explains his conduct towards his leading nobles and shows that he

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<sup>1603</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1169.6.

<sup>1604</sup> *A.F.M.* 1170.19: 'Mac Mic Faoláin, 7 mac Donnchaidh Mic Giolla Phátraicc do ionarbadh lá Mac Murchadha'.

<sup>1605</sup> See below, pp 349–58.

<sup>1606</sup> *A.U.* 1166.1: 'Domnall Mac Gille Mo Cholmoc do marbadh do Laighnibh fein'; *Ann. Tig.* 1166.7: 'Mac Gilla Mo Colmóg, rí h-Úa n-Dunchadha, do marbad do macaib Maic Braenain a mebail, tre furail Maic Murchadha'.

<sup>1607</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1166.8, 1166.9, 1166.11: 'Laigin 7 Goill do impodh for Mac Murchadha 'na chintaib fein', 'Braithdi h-Úa Faelan 7 Ua Failghi la Diarmuid h-Úa Mael Sechlainn', 'Braithde Osraigi 7 h-Úa Faelan, im mac Meic Faelan, do marbad do Mac Murchadha'.

<sup>1608</sup> See *Connacht*, pp 70–1.

was not a typical provincial king of his age; for him, the prospect of deposition by his own men was a far more pressing concern.

#### [4.2: External conflicts]

In Connacht, Muirchertach Úa Briain's illness allowed the Uí Chonchobair to reverse their province's relationship with Munster and build a powerbase of their own. Naturally, this was a feat that Leinster's leading dynasties, especially the Uí Chennselaig, would like to have emulated. Their sustained efforts in this regard met with little success until the rise of Diarmait Mac Murchada, c. 1132, and even then, gains were sporadic and limited.

The first setback came in 1115, when the combined efforts of Donnchadh mac Murchada and Conchobar Úa Failge to take advantage of Úa Briain's illness came to nought. The Hiberno-Norse of Dublin sided with the Munstermen, despite an earlier association with Leinster, and the joint kings fell at their hands.<sup>1609</sup> It was later reported that Donnchadh mac Murchada was buried with a dead dog by the Dubliners, an insult which his son Diarmait would be eager to avenge in 1170.<sup>1610</sup> All the same, Muirchertach Úa Briain and his son Domnall were ultimately unsuccessful in Munster, and it is perhaps for this reason that Dublin was reincorporated into Leinster: 'Diarmaid, son of Enda, King of Leinster, died at Ath-cliaith' in 1117.<sup>1611</sup>

The death of three leading dynasts in as many years did nothing to aid Leinster's stability, and Dublin remained on the radar of the major powers. Connacht now led the way, and in 1118 'Another army was led by him [Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair] to Athcliaith; and he carried away the son of the King of Teamhair, i.e. Domhnall, son of

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<sup>1609</sup> *A.F.M.* 1115.5; *A.U.* 1115.4; *A.L.C.* 1115.4; *Ann. Tig.* 1115.4; *Chron. Scot.* 1115.6.

<sup>1610</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 66–7.

<sup>1611</sup> *A.F.M.* 1117.13; *Ann. Tig.* 1117.4.

Murchadh Ua Maeleachlainn, who was in the hands of the foreigners, and the hostages of the foreigners themselves, as well as those of Osraige and Leinster.<sup>1612</sup>

Domnall's presence as a hostage in Dublin probably related to ongoing friction between that party and Meath, which will be outlined below, rather than an attempt by a Leinster dynast to levy Dublin's position into a new sphere of influence, but it is clear that both Dublin and Leinster were curtailed by Toirdelbach's actions. The very next year, 1119, Úa Conchobair brought a fleet on the Shannon to confirm his supremacy over the Dál Cais. To illustrate the new order in Leth Moga, he brought with him 'the King of Leinster, i.e. Enna Mac Murchadha, and with the King of Osraige, i.e. Donnchadh Mac Gillaphadraig, and the chiefs of the foreigners of Ath-cliath'.<sup>1613</sup>

We have discussed elsewhere why this was a pointed demonstration of Munster's lowered standing, but it is also worth noting that it also diminished Leinster's position within the national hierarchy. Not only was the province now subject to Connacht, but the references to the kings of Osraige and Dublin as separate components undermined its unity and the claims of the Uí Chennselaig to overall authority.

For most of the next decade, subservience to Connacht was the status quo. Énna Mac Murchada formally submitted again in 1122, before becoming embroiled in the Meic Cárthaigh rebellion of 1124.<sup>1614</sup> This failed, and Leinster suffered the consequences; just as in the era of Toirdelbach and Muirchertach Úa Briain, Leinster's efforts to throw off a suzerain were fitful and disorganised.

Énna Mac Murchada died in 1126. He had not been a particularly effective ruler, but he was at least generally acknowledged as king of Leinster. It is interesting that Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair took this opportunity to install his own son, Conchobar, as king of Dublin

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<sup>1612</sup> *A.F.M.* 1118.6: 'Slóighedh oile lais co h-Ath Cliath, co t-tuc mac righ Temhrach .i. Domhnall mac Murchadha Uí Maileachlainn, bai i l-laimh Ghall, 7 gialla Gall fadhéin, 7 Osraige, 7 Laighean'; *A.U.* 1118.6; *Ann. Tig.* 1118.4.

<sup>1613</sup> *A.F.M.* 1119.14: 'go rí Laighen .i. Enda Mac Murchadha, 7 go rí n-Osraige .i. Donnchadh Mac Giolla Phattraicc 7 go maithibh Gall Atha Cliath'; *Ann. Tig.* 1119.5.

<sup>1614</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1124.4.



and Leinster.<sup>1615</sup> This was an extension of the Uí Briain policy of providing governors for Dublin, but it also acknowledged a link between the province and town.

In any event, this novelty was unsuccessful. Conchobar was deposed within a year as another rebellion was launched against Connacht. In both cases, 1124 and 1127, the Laigin took advantage of Cormac Mac Cárthaig's rebellions; they would certainly not have been able to withstand Úa Conchobair on their own. Even with Mac Cárthaig's aid the attempt was unsuccessful: 'The men of Mumu and Laigin turned again on Tairdelbach ua Conchobuir and they forfeited the lives of their hostages, and his son was deposed by the Laigin and the foreigners; for he set another king over them, i.e. Domnall grandson of Faelán [Domnall Úa Fáeláin]'.<sup>1616</sup> Having discussed internal affairs in Leinster, we now know that this was a deliberate attempt to stoke division among the Laigin by ignoring Uí Chennselaig claimants.

Some indication that this arrangement failed is supplied very shortly thereafter, as Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair led a raiding expedition into Leinster that was considered notable for the extent of its depredations.<sup>1617</sup> This can be interpreted as an indication that a young Diarmait Mac Murchada was either resisting the new Úa Fáeláin king of Leinster or attempting to advance his own claim to that position, but it must be emphasised that such readings are speculative; we know almost nothing of Diarmait until he attacked Kildare and announced himself on the national stage in 1132.

In the early years of his reign Mac Murchada prioritised the south, both within his own kingdom and beyond its borders. He attacked the Osraige in 1134, for example.<sup>1618</sup> The fact that they were supported by the Hiberno-Norse of Waterford was a good thing from the king of Leinster's perspective, since it provided him with an opportunity to bring that

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<sup>1615</sup> *A.F.M.* 1126.10.

<sup>1616</sup> *A.U.* 1127.5: '*Fir Muman 7 Laigen do impodh doriisi for Thairrdhelbach H. Conchobuir 7 a n-geill do dhilsiuighadh doibh 7 a mac d'aithrighadh do Laighnibh 7 do Ghallaibh; araide do-ratsum ri aile forro .i. Domnall m. m. Fhaelain*'.

<sup>1617</sup> *A.F.M.* 1128.15; *A.U.* 1128.6; *Ann. Tig.* 1128.1.

<sup>1618</sup> *A.F.M.* 1134.11.

town into his sphere of influence. The campaign of 1137 did that and more; capitalising on tension in the shaky Uí Briain–Meic Cárthaigh alliance, Mac Murchada took the hostages of important figures in both dynasties.<sup>1619</sup>

This was the high point of his career, and he can only have been frustrated by his failure to advance any further. Cormac Mac Cárthaig’s assassination in 1138 did not help, for in 1139 there is notice that ‘A year’s peace was made between the men of Munster and the Leinstermen, by the successor of Patrick, and the staff of Jesus’.<sup>1620</sup> As we have demonstrated elsewhere, such formulations are indicative of negotiated truces.<sup>1621</sup> By 1141, the Uí Briain were able to raid Leinster extensively, targeting Loígis and Uí Chennselaig in particular.<sup>1622</sup> They even recaptured Dublin.<sup>1623</sup>

Far from establishing Leinster as one of the major powers of his day, Mac Murchada was forced to acknowledge all three contenders as his superiors at one time or another. He is not reported to have formally submitted to the Uí Briain, but he could make no answer to their invasions of Leinster in 1141, 1144, 1146, and 1150.<sup>1624</sup> Indeed, he is not even reported to have defended his province against these incursions.

Mac Murchada would have his revenge over the Uí Briain through his presence at the Battle of Móin Móir in 1151 but, even then, it was as a supporter of another major power: Úa Conchobair and Connacht. Úa Conchobair had lost control of Leinster in the late 1120s, but courted the province once more in 1144, awarding Mac Murchada a share in the province of Meath.<sup>1625</sup> This acknowledged Mac Murchada’s existing interests.<sup>1626</sup>

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<sup>1619</sup> *A.F.M.* 1137.12, 1137.13.

<sup>1620</sup> *A.F.M.* 1139.11: ‘*Síth m-bliadhna do dhénamh ittir Feraibh Mumhan 7 Laighniu lá comharba Phattraicc 7 la Bachaill Iosa*’.

<sup>1621</sup> See *The Uí Néill and the North*, pp 138–46.

<sup>1622</sup> *A.F.M.* 1141.8, 1141.9.

<sup>1623</sup> *A.F.M.* 1141.8.

<sup>1624</sup> *A.F.M.* 1141.8, 1141.9, 1144.11, 1146.7, 1150.19.

<sup>1625</sup> *A.F.M.* 1144.7; see *Connacht*, pp 57–8.

<sup>1626</sup> See below, 337–40.

At this time, both Úa Conchobair and Mac Murchada had to acknowledge Mac Lochlainn's overall supremacy, though the former certainly had designs of his own. That Mac Murchada was a part of these plans is evidenced by the Leinster king's presence with Úa Conchobair in campaigns of 1151 and '52. Both proved infamous; the former for the destruction of Uí Briain power, at the Battle of Móin Móir, and the latter for the abduction of Derbforgaill. Both are discussed in detail elsewhere in this thesis.<sup>1627</sup>

For the present purpose, the key point is that Mac Lochlainn confirmed his suzerainty over Úa Conchobair and Mac Murchada alike in the wake of the Battle of Móin Móir. Even though he had submitted to Mac Lochlainn as recently as 1149, Mac Murchada sent new hostages to the king of the North.<sup>1628</sup> Of course, this underlines the fact that everyone recognised the implications of the battle.

For his part, Mac Murchada clearly hoped to derive greater benefit from it: later in the year, it is recorded that 'Conchobhar, son of Domhnall Ua Briain, lord of East Munster, and the grandson of Donnchadh, grandson of Gillaphadraig, lord of half Osraighe, were taken prisoners by Diarmaid, son of Mac Murchadha, King of Leinster, through treachery and guile'.<sup>1629</sup> From this, we may deduce that the hostages of Dal Cais had been taken by Úa Conchobair after the battle, and also, that Mac Murchada hoped to make gains of his own.

He would be unsuccessful largely because the intensification of his rivalry with Tigernán Úa Ruairc after 1152 gradually superseded and encompassed all other conflicts. It has often been argued that Diarmait Mac Murchada's career is best understood as a tug-of-war with Úa Ruairc over the province of Meath, which lay between their kingdoms.

There is much to recommend this view, and we will see the direct clashes that made the

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<sup>1627</sup> See Connacht, pp 53–4; The Two Munsters, pp 245–7; The Uí Néill and the North, pp 158–9; Women and Marriage, p. 376–7.

<sup>1628</sup> A.F.M. 1149.12, 1151.16; *Ann. Tig.* 1151.5.

<sup>1629</sup> A.F.M. 1151.19: 'Conchobhar, mac Domhnaill Uí Bhriain, tigherna Airthir Mumhan, 7 mac mic Donnchadha uí Ghiolla Phattraicc, tigherna leithe Osraighe, do erghabhail lá Diarmait mac Mec Murchadha lá righ Laighen tré fhéill 7 meabhail'.

two bitter enemies. At the same time, this conflict was more nuanced than is usually remembered, and a close reading of the annals shows that Mac Murchada was more concerned with preserving his own territory than extending it.

Perhaps the first point of importance in relation to this subject is the fact that there was tension between Meath and Dublin for some time before Diarmait Mac Murchada came to power. We have already seen how Domnall mac Murchada Uí Máel Sechlainn was in custody in Dublin in 1118, though it is not clear how this happened.<sup>1630</sup> Later, in 1136, the same man made a raid on the north Leinster dynasty of Uí Dúinchada; it may have been during a similar raid that he was captured in or before 1118.<sup>1631</sup>

In the interim, low-level violence and raiding continued. In 1121, for example, ‘Cugaileang Mac Gillaseachnaill, lord of South Breagha, was slain by the foreigners of Ath-cliaith’.<sup>1632</sup> Another son of Murchad Ua Máel Sechlainn, Conchobar, was killed by the Uí Dúinchada in 1133; the same dynasty his brother would attack in 1136.<sup>1633</sup> Conchobar’s death ignited further violence. His killer, Donnchadh Mac Gilla mo Cholmóg ‘was killed by the men of Meath, i.e. by the people of Aedh Ua hAedha, at the end of a month, in revenge of Conchobhar’.<sup>1634</sup> Furthermore, ‘Lusca, with its church full of people and relics, was burned upon the Fine Gall by the same party, in revenge of the son of Murchadh, i.e. Conchobhar’.<sup>1635</sup> His raids included both territory under control of Dublin, and other parts of east Leinster.<sup>1636</sup>

It is worth considering that Dublin retained a separate political identity throughout the eleventh and twelfth centuries, even as it fell under the control of the provincial kingdoms. This is made obvious in the large payments of *túarastal* made by Mac

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<sup>1630</sup> *A.F.M.* 1118.6; *A.U.* 1118.6; *Ann. Tig.* 1118.4.

<sup>1631</sup> *A.F.M.* 1136.19.

<sup>1632</sup> *A.F.M.* 1121.8: ‘*Cu Gaileng Mac Giolla Seachnaill, tigherna Deisceirt Bregh do mharbhadh la Gallaibh Atha Cliath*’.

<sup>1633</sup> *A.F.M.* 1133.6; *Ann. Tig.* 1133.6, 1133.7.

<sup>1634</sup> *A.F.M.* 1133.6.

<sup>1635</sup> *A.F.M.* 1133.7: ‘*Lusca cona tēmpal lán do dhaoineibh, 7 taisccēdhaibh do losccadh for Fine n-Gall don lucht chédna a n-díoghail meic Murchadha .i. Chonchobhair*’; *Ann. Tig.* 1133.8.

<sup>1636</sup> *A.F.M.* 1133.8.

Lochlainn and Úa Conchobair, but also in events of 1162. In that year Mac Lochlainn attacked Dublin but retreated without much success. *A.F.M.* notes that ‘He left, however, the Leinstermen and Meathmen at war with the foreigners’.<sup>1637</sup>

Only after that was there ‘Pillaging of the Foreigners of Ath-cliath by Diarmait Mac Murchadha and great sway was obtained [by him] over them, such as was not obtained before for a long time’.<sup>1638</sup> Since the relationship between Leinster and Dublin remained in flux, we must be careful about attributing broad significance to ongoing tension with Meath, even if it also involved the Uí Dúinchada.

Indeed, it seems that, at this point, the early twelfth century, activity on the northern border was of regional, rather than provincial, concern. Mac Murchada, who was preoccupied with affairs in south Leinster and Munster in the early years of his career, may well have been thankful to have somebody putting pressure on his rivals in the northern half of the province.

At any rate, raids on his province did not prevent him from lending support to Murchad Úa Máel Sechlainn, king of Meath, in 1138, as the latter came under intense pressure from Tigernán Úa Ruairc.<sup>1639</sup> The Annals of Clonmacnoise suggest that Mac Murchada originally intended to attack the Uí Máel Sechlainn but offered his support to the king of Meath after seeing the influence of Úa Ruairc in the area.<sup>1640</sup>

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<sup>1637</sup> *A.F.M.* 1162.11: ‘*Ro fhágaibh dna, Laighnigh 7 Midhigh i c-coccadh for Ghallaibh*’; for more on the navies and trade that underpinned this independence, see Poul Holm, ‘The slave trade of Dublin, ninth to twelfth centuries’, in *Peritia* v (1986), pp 317–45; idem, ‘The naval power of Norse Dublin’, in Purcell, Emer, Paul MacCotter, Julianne Nyhan & John Sheehan (eds), *Clerics, kings and vikings: essays in honour of Donnchadh Ó Corráin* (Dublin, 2015), pp 67–78; Etchingham, ‘Skuldelev 2 and viking-age ships and fleets in Ireland’, in Purcell, MacCotter, Nyhan and Sheehan (eds), *Clerics, kings and vikings: essays in honour of Donnchadh Ó Corráin*, pp 79–90. For the ways in which Irish kings benefited from such economic functions, with particular relevance to Leinster, see Catherine Swift, ‘Follow the money: the financial resources of Diarmait Mac Murchada’, in Purcell, MacCotter, Nyhan and Sheehan (eds), *Clerics, kings and vikings*, pp 91–102.

<sup>1638</sup> *A.U.* 1162.5: ‘*Argain Gall Atha Cliath la Diarmait Mac Murchadha 7 nert mór do ghabail forro, amail na ro gabhadh reimhe o cein mhóir*’.

<sup>1639</sup> *A.F.M.* 1138.10.

<sup>1640</sup> *Ann. Clon.* 1136.

The cross-border raiding was, perhaps, more significant from the opposite perspective. In his obituary of 1153, Murchad Úa Máel Sechlainn was styled ‘King of Teamhair and Meath, with its dependent districts, of Airgialla, and, for a time, of the greater part of Leinster’.<sup>1641</sup> Upon his death, his son and successor Máel Sechlainn took the hostages of Uí Fáeláin and Uí Failge.<sup>1642</sup> This is the first indication we have that the kings of Meath were making an attempt to annex these territories from Leinster, but their efforts would intensify in subsequent years.

Murchad’s title and the immediacy of Máel Sechlainn’s action upon his ascension to the kingship both suggest that a precedent had already been set, even though there is no explicit mention of it before 1153. Máel Sechlainn himself died just two years later, and he was similarly styled ‘King of Meath and of the greater part of Leinster’, further indicating that it was these border regions that were coveted by the Meath kings.<sup>1643</sup>

There can be little doubt that pressure from Úa Ruairc’s Bréifne led the Uí Máel Sechlainn to seek to compensate themselves at Leinster’s expense. By the 1150s, Úa Ruairc’s control extended well into Meath and encompassed several of its sub-kingdoms. This pattern has a parallel in the eastward push of the Airgialla in the same period; as they lost territory to the Northern Uí Néill, they recompensed themselves with lands seized from the Ulaid and from Meath.<sup>1644</sup>

This conflict intensified dramatically when Diarmait Mac Murchada abducted Derbforgaill during an attack on Meath in 1152. The circumstances are described elsewhere, so here it suffices to say that Mac Murchada, with the connivance of Máel Sechlainn Úa Máel Sechlainn, brought Úa Ruairc’s wife back to Ferns with him, and

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<sup>1641</sup> *A.F.M.* 1153.5: ‘*rí Temhra 7 Midhe cona forthuathaibh, Airgiall 7 ermhór Laighen frí ré*’; *Ann. Tig.* 1153.1.

<sup>1642</sup> *A.F.M.* 1153.16: ‘*Braighde Ua b-Failghe, 7 Ua b-Faoláin do ghabháil lá Maoil Seachlainn mac Murchadha, rí Midhe*’.

<sup>1643</sup> *A.F.M.* 1155.6: ‘*rí Midhe 7 urmhóir Laighean*’; *Ann. Tig.* 1155.1.

<sup>1644</sup> See *The Uí Néill and the North*, pp 148–62.

almost certainly raped her as well.<sup>1645</sup> His action embittered Úa Ruairc, who, with his allies, would in the future help Meath to infringe upon Mac Murchada's territory; this principally concerned the north Leinster territories of Uí Fáeláin and Uí Failge, but later also Dublin as well.<sup>1646</sup>

The allegiance of Uí Fáeláin and Uí Failge, along with some other regions of Leinster, remained disputed from the 1150s onwards. In 1157, Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn brought an army to Leinster with the intention of confirming Mac Murchada, by then a close ally, in his position. On this occasion, 'The people of Laeighis, Ui-Failghe, and of the half of Osraighe, then fled into Connaught'.<sup>1647</sup> The very next year, 'An army was led by Ruaidhri Ua Conchobhair as far as Leithghlinn, and he took the hostages of Osraighe and Laeighis; and he fettered Macraith Ua Mordha, lord of Laeighis'.<sup>1648</sup> As will be remembered from previous chapters, Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair was Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn's main rival and also, from 1159 onwards, Tigernán Úa Ruairc's principal supporter.

These events were followed by another major effort in 1161. Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair brought an army 'into Meath and Leinster, and he left a king over the Uí Faoláin and a king over Uí Failghe, and took away their hostages thereafter'.<sup>1649</sup> This was at a time when Úa Conchobair was attempting to establish a sphere of influence beyond Connacht, which could rival Mac Lochlainn's domain. Mac Lochlainn's response was to muster his own forces and, after negotiation, to preside over a new arrangement with Úa Conchobair. All of Leinster was restored to Mac Murchada on this occasion.<sup>1650</sup>

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<sup>1645</sup> See *Women and Marriage*, pp 374–7.

<sup>1646</sup> For the addition of Dublin, see *Connacht*, pp 70–1.

<sup>1647</sup> *A.F.M.* 1157.10: '*Do-lóttar dna, Laighis, 7 Ui bh-Failghe, 7 leth Osraighe h-i c-Connachtaibh for teicheadh*'; *Ann. Tig.* 1157.6.

<sup>1648</sup> *A.F.M.* 1158.13: '*Slóicheadh lá Ruaidhri Ua c-Conchobhair co ráinicc Léithghlind, 7 ro ghabh braighde Osraighe, 7 Laoighisi, 7 do-rat geimheal for Mac Raith Ua Mordha, tigherna Laoighise*'.

<sup>1649</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1161.3: '*Sluaiged la Ruaidhri h-Úa Concobair a Midhi 7 a Laigniu, cor' facaib rígar Uib Faelain 7 rígar Uib Failghe, 7 tuc a m-braighdi lais iarsin*'.

<sup>1650</sup> *A.F.M.* 1161.9; *A.U.* 1161.4; *Ann. Tig.* 1161.6.

The collapse of Mac Lochlainn's authority in 1166 carried major implications for Mac Murchada and Leinster, as we have discussed in a number of places. One of these was a renewed attempt to annex Uí Fáeláin and Uí Failge into Meath. Their kings received a considerable *túarastal* from Úa Conchobair, in recognition of this change, as did the Hiberno-Norse of Dublin. It is therefore not without significance that Diarmait Úa Máel Sechlainn, when he died in 1169, was termed 'King of Meath, of the foreigners of Athcliath, of Ui-Failghe, and Ui-Faelain' in *A.F.M.*<sup>1651</sup> His title in *Ann. Tig.*, 'king of Meath and most of Leinster' is the same as that given to his predecessors, Máel Sechlainn and Murchad, showing that Domnall's advance was an extension of earlier developments.<sup>1652</sup>

This situation offers further explanation for Mac Murchada's concern with the intentions and loyalty of his subordinates. He had reason to distrust certain parties in his kingdom based on historic tensions, including the Osraige and Loígis, but also the northern parties who had active claims on the provincial kingship. It may well have been through frustrated ambition that the leaders of Uí Fáeláin and Uí Failge allowed themselves to become associated with Meath; this had a parallel in the eastward expansion of the Uí Ruairc as their claim to kingship of Connacht faltered. Leinster was further dismembered by the addition of Dublin to the confiscated territories. Had Mac Murchada not taken drastic action, he would have presided over the greatest loss of territory since the fifth century; unfortunately for him, his efforts led only to the outright conquest of his province.

It is here that a dedicated narrative of Gaelic Leinster falters. The record of this province's affairs, never very extensive in the 1100s, peters out. In describing this development, Frame wrote 'Diarmaid's lineage sank into virtual oblivion. His surviving son, the illegitimate Domhnall Caomhánach, was killed in 1175 after serving Strongbow. With the death in 1193 of his nephew, Muirchertach, who had retained a minor royal

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<sup>1651</sup> *A.F.M.* 1169.4: 'rí Midhe 7 Gall Atha Cliath, Ua Failghe, 7 Ua f-Faoláin'.

<sup>1652</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1169.5: 'rí Midhi 7 urmóir Laigen'.



status in the patrimony of Uí Cheinnsealaigh in north Wexford, the MicMhurchadha dropped below the horizons of annals and charters'.<sup>1653</sup> Regrettably, we find it difficult to establish their exact relationship with the lordship of Leinster in the thirteenth century, and it is only in the fourteenth century that they re-emerge. It is notable, however, that Frame and Emmet O'Byrne have made sustained efforts to bridge this gap.<sup>1654</sup>

#### **[4.3: Leinster and the national kingship]**

There are several points of intersection between the theme of national kingship and the kingdom of Leinster. These are worth considering collectively because it was the king of Leinster who solicited overseas aid and understanding of the English invasion can be improved by assessing how that action related to reception of the kingship of Ireland in Leinster. It is also important because of the typical approach of modern historians, in which this aspect of the story looms large.

Diarmait Mac Murchada's career was based on the template of Diarmait mac Máel na mBó (d. 1072). The latter was an important figure whose career, in relation to Leinster itself, was briefly discussed above. His significance was threefold: his resurrection of the Uí Chennselaig claim to the kingship of Leinster; his enforcement, for the first time, of Leinster's supremacy over Munster; and, apocryphally, his claim to the kingship of Ireland; it is the final point which we will now consider.

As Orpen noted, Diarmait mac Máel na mBó's career is used, in the *Ann. Clon.*, to define 'the criterion of an *ardri co fressabhra*'.<sup>1655</sup> Under 1041, that collection reports that 'The kings or cheefe monarchyes of Ireland were reputed to be absolute monarchyes in this

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<sup>1653</sup> Frame, 'Two kings in Leinster: The Crown and the MicMhurchadha in the fourteenth century', in Barry, Frame, and Simms (eds), *Colony and frontier in Medieval Ireland*, pp 155–76 at 155.

<sup>1654</sup> Frame, 'Two kings in Leinster: The Crown and the MicMhurchadha in the fourteenth century', in Emmet O'Byrne, 'The MacMurroughs and the marches of Leinster, 1170–1340', in Linda Doran and James Lyttleton (eds), *Lordship in medieval Ireland: image and reality* (Dublin, 2007); for another perspective, see Ailbhe Mac Shamhráin, 'Ailbe Ua Máel Muaid, Uí Chennselaig and the Vitae Sanctorum', in Dufy (ed.), *Princes, prelates and poets in medieval Ireland: essays in honour of Katharine Simms*, pp 309–338.

<sup>1655</sup> Orpen, *Normans*, i, p. 37 n. 1.

manner: If he were of Leah Conn or Cons halfe in Deale, & had one province of Leahmoye or Moah's halfe in Deale at his command, hee was counted to be of sufficient power to be king of Taragh or Ireland, but if the party were of Leahmoye if hee could not command all Leah moye and Taragh and with the loppe thereunto belong-ing and the province of Ulster or Connaught (if not both) he would not be sufficient to be king of all. Dermott mcMoylemoe could command Leahmoye, Meath, Connaught, and Ulster, therefore by the judgement of all hee was reputed sufficient monarch of the whole'.<sup>1656</sup>

This passage is certain to be a later interpolation, since a collection of annals at Clonmacnoise in the eleventh century would never endorse the claim of a Leinster king to overlordship of Meath. It is, furthermore, lifted from the Book of Leinster, which can supply us with a close equivalent for the missing Irish of the above quote: '*Rapa rí Herend co fressabra Diarmait mac Mael na mBó. Is amlaidse áirmiter i rréim rígráide na ríge co fressabra .i. Mad do Leith Chuind in rí & Leth Cuind uile & oenchoiced a lLeith Moga ace. is rí Temra & Herend co fressabra in fersain. Mad a lLeith Moga im bes ní eberthar rí Herend friss co raib Leth Moga uili & Temair cona Túathaib & indara cuiced a lLeith Chuind chucu. Rabo rí Herend amlaidsin mac Mael na mBó uair ra boí Leth Moga uile & Connachta & Fir Mide & Ulaid & Airgialla*'.<sup>1657</sup>

Mageoghan is known to have borrowed other passages from the Book of Leinster for his edition of the *Ann. Clon.* Byrne, who also disregarded the reliability of the above entry as original annalistic material, highlighted a passage that tried to explain the interregnum after 1022, as an example.<sup>1658</sup> This ran 'After the death of king Moylseaghlin this kingdome was without a king for the space of twenty years: Dureing which time the Realme was gouerned by two learned men, the one called Cwan o'Lochan, a well learned temporall man and cheefe poet of Ireland, the other Corcrann Cleireagh a devout & holy

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<sup>1656</sup> *Ann. Clon.* 1041.

<sup>1657</sup> Best *et. al.* (eds), *The Book of Leinster*, i, p. 98; T.C.D. MS 1339, folio 26 column a.

<sup>1658</sup> Byrne, 'Ireland and her neighbours, c.1014–c.1072', in Ó Cróinín (ed.), *N.H.I. I*, pp 862–98 at 869–70.

man, that was anchorite of all Ireland, whose most abiding was at Lismore. The land was Governed like free state, & not like a monarchy by them'.<sup>1659</sup>

Byrne regarded this as supporting evidence for his interpretation of the kingship of Ireland. He commented 'The term *rí Érenn co fressabra*, a staple of the history books from the twelfth century to the twentieth, was most likely an invention of Áed's [Mac Crimthainn], who was abbot of Terryglass and court historian (*fer léigind* – an ecclesiastical term now pressed into royal service) to Diarmait Mac Murchada. It was taken up by later versions of the "Lebor Gabála" and also by some legal commentaries. For Áed it justified the claims both of Diarmait and of his great-grandfather and namesake'. He added, 'It could be argued that the "high-kings with opposition" met with opposition precisely because they tried to become kings of Ireland in a real sense. They were not less successful than their predecessors, but only seemed so in the light of the teaching of the schools'.<sup>1660</sup>

This is very important, because, as we will see in our comparative analysis, a great deal of weight has been placed on the idea of 'kings of Ireland with opposition' and 'kings of Ireland without opposition' in modern analysis. It has been regarded as illustrative of the altered nature of the office in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and as evidence that contemporaries drew a distinction between the ancient kings of Tara and their imperfect successors. The idea that there was an era of 'kings with opposition' leading into the English invasion is deeply rooted.

If such a reading is not entirely erroneous, it is at least an exaggeration. Far from characterising an entire era, the term is found only in a small number of cases and is used primarily in obituaries to show a king's standing. It is, furthermore, quite late. We have already seen that its appearance in the *Ann. Clon.* under 1041 does not reflect an original usage, but rather the interpolation of a later editor. When we look at other collections of

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<sup>1659</sup> *Ann. Clon.* 1022.

<sup>1660</sup> Byrne, 'Ireland and her neighbours, c.1014–1072', pp 869–70.

annals that are usually regarded as good sources of contemporary information for the twelfth century, we find the terms strangely absent. They are altogether unknown in *Ann. Inisf.*, *Ann. Tig.*, *A.U.*, *A.L.C.*, and *Chron. Scot.*

By contrast they are found most commonly in *A.F.M.* There, Toirdelbach úa Briain is described as such in his obituary under 1086, and Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair similarly under 1156. Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn is styled ‘King of Ireland (i.e. with opposition)’ in a description of the donations made to Mellifont in 1157. An explanation was subsequently given, under 1161, for his elevation to unqualified kingship of Ireland: ‘Ruaidhri Ua Conchobhair gave him four hostages for Ui-Briuin, Conmhaicne, the half of Munster and Meath; and Ua Lochlainn gave him his entire province of Connaught. He also gave the entire province of Leinster to Diarmaid Mac Murchadha. Muirheartach Ua Lochlainn was therefore, on this occasion, King of Ireland without opposition’.<sup>1661</sup> While the Four Masters certainly had access to now-lost sources, this also reads like later commentary.

Byrne’s theory that the concept was invented by Áed Mac Crimthainn for Diarmait Mac Murchada is doubtful at best. For one thing, the use of these expressions in the Book of Leinster is not limited to twelfth-century representatives. Feidlimid mac Crimthainn, the famous ninth-century king of Munster, was also described there as ‘*ríg cid hErend co fressabra*’.<sup>1662</sup> And, as has been referred to here in numerous places, the terms appear in two legal commentaries concerned with establishing a basis in law for the applicability of the titles to a king in Leth Moga and another in the North, probably Muirchertach Úa

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<sup>1661</sup> *A.F.M.* 1161.9: ‘*Do-rad Ruaidhri Ua Conchobhair ceithre braighde dhó dar cenn Ua m-Briuin & Conmhaicne, leithe Mumhan & Midhe, & tuc Ua Lachlainn a chóicceadh comhlán do-somh. Do-rad dna, coighedh Laighen uile do Dhiarmaid Mac Murchadha. Rí Ereann dna cen fressabhra Muirchertach Ua Lachlainn don chur-sin*’.

<sup>1662</sup> Best *et. al.* (eds), *The Book of Leinster*, i, p. 97.

Briain and Domnall Mac Lochlainn respectively. At least one and perhaps both date from the late eleventh century.<sup>1663</sup>

The Book of Leinster itself is generally assigned a date of compilation in the range 1148x60, based on marginal notes written by ‘Bishop Finn’.<sup>1664</sup> Finn Úa Gormáin was consecrated bishop of Kildare in 1148 and died in 1160.<sup>1665</sup> One of his marginal notes addressed Áed Mac Crimthainn, who is described as ‘learned man of the king of Leth Moga’.<sup>1666</sup> Others have assigned the bulk of the work to another hand working at a slightly later date, in the 1180s.<sup>1667</sup> While it therefore may not have been commissioned for Diarmait Mac Murchada, it nonetheless contained material current in his lifetime and favourable to his dynasty. We must therefore accept its presentation of Diarmait mac Máel na mBó had a bearing on Diarmait Mac Murchada’s self-image.

The idea of Mac Murchada as ‘king of Leth Moga’ had a deep resonance in this regard. This was the most exalted Irish title awarded to mac Máel na mBó by contemporary annals, and it was also one to which Mac Murchada could reasonably aspire. He had, after all, captured Waterford in 1137, and he was also a victor at the Battle of Móin Móir in 1151, even if as a junior player. The other elements of mac Máel na mBó’s domain, as represented by the Book of Leinster, are a much greater stretch; it will be remembered they included Connacht, Meath, Ulaid, and Airgíalla.

While mac Máel na mBó had raided Meath on several occasions, it was also the location in which he had been defeated and killed in 1072.<sup>1668</sup> Beyond that, there is no record of

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<sup>1663</sup> The Uí Néill and the North, pp 145–6; Simms, ‘The Contents of Later Commentaries on the Brehon Law Tracts’, pp 32–4.

<sup>1664</sup> See for example, Eugene O’Curry, *Lectures on the manuscript materials of ancient Irish history* (Dublin, 1861), pp 186–8; Brian O’Looney, ‘On the Book of Leinster and its contents’, in the *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy. Polite Literature and Antiquities*, i (1879), pp 367–78.

<sup>1665</sup> T.C.D. MS 1339, p. 32: ‘*Find epscop cilli dara hic addidit*’.

<sup>1666</sup> T.C.D. MS 1339, p. 288: ‘*do fhir leigind aird righ lethi mogha*’; ‘*fer léigin*’ indicates a specialist in Latin learning.

<sup>1667</sup> William O’Sullivan, ‘Notes on the principal scripts and make up of the Book of Leinster’ in *Celtica* vii (1966), pp 1–31; Ó Corráin, ‘The education of Diarmait Mac Murchada’, esp. 74–6.

<sup>1668</sup> *A.F.M.* 1072.3; *Ann. Tig.* 1072.1; *Chron. Scot.* 1072.1; *A.U.* 1072.4; *A.L.C.* 1072.1; *Ann. Inisf.* 1072.2.

the eleventh-century king of Leinster showing any interest in Connacht, Airgíalla, or Ulaid. Indeed, he was more associated with the Irish Sea region, and *Ann. Tig.* described him as ‘king of Britons [Welsh] and the Hebrides and Dublin’ as well as of Leth Moga in his obituary of 1072.<sup>1669</sup> It would seem, therefore, that Mac Murchada wished to see a different presentation of his predecessor, however far removed from reality, that would reflect well in the politics of his own day.

Nowhere could that be more obvious than in the inclusion of Connacht, which was not an important region in mac Máel na mBó’s time. It is all the more notable when we consider Mac Murchada’s response to Úa Conchobair’s demands in 1171, as reported by Giraldus Cambrensis: ‘Diarmait gave a haughty response to this, and added that he would not be deflected from his purpose until he had brought under his control Connacht, which belonged to him by ancestral right, together with the kingship of all Ireland’.<sup>1670</sup> Giraldus also had Diarmait say this on another occasion.<sup>1671</sup>

The title awarded to mac Máel na mBó in *The Book of Leinster* can be compared with those in the legal commentaries; for instance, the description that stipulated possession of the three ‘estuaries’ was one for the kingship of Ireland ‘without opposition’ rather than ‘with opposition’.<sup>1672</sup> This means that, even though he did not have control of the whole island, Muirchertach Úa Briain regarded himself as king without opposition. By contrast, the definition that originated in the North promoted the idea that Mac Lochlainn was king of Ireland with opposition. Its criteria for this were possession of one province and a successful campaign or circuit through others.<sup>1673</sup> It also suggested that attaining and then losing control of an area reduced a king of Ireland without opposition to a king of Ireland

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<sup>1669</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1072.1.

<sup>1670</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 68–9: ‘Cum autem Dermotus ad hec superbe respondisset, adiciens quoque se a proposito non destitutum donec sibi Connacciam avito iure competentem cum totius Hibernie monarchia subiugaverit’.

<sup>1671</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 46–7.

<sup>1672</sup> The Uí Néill and the North, pp 145–6; Simms, ‘The Contents of Later Commentaries on the Brehon Law Tracts’, pp 32–4.

<sup>1673</sup> The Uí Néill and the North, pp 145–6; Simms, ‘The Contents of Later Commentaries on the Brehon Law Tracts’, pp 32–4.

with opposition; presumably, if our dating is correct, the point of this was to equate Úa Briain's kingship of Ireland with that of Mac Lochlainn.

The concept of kings of Ireland 'with opposition' and 'without opposition' was therefore multifaceted. For those claiming kingship 'with opposition', it was as much about the prestige associated with fending off a would-be king of Ireland as extending authority oneself. This, at least, was the case for Domnall Mac Lochlainn in the North. It was also true of the Book of Leinster in its reference to the ninth-century king of Cashel as king of Ireland 'with opposition'. The Leinster claim was different because contemporary annals record both Muirchertach Úa Briain and Domnall Mac Lochlainn as kings of Ireland. Their obituaries, in 1119 and 1121 respectively, were close enough to emphasise this contemporary perception.<sup>1674</sup> The same can not be said for Diarmait mac Máel na mBó, whose claim was advanced on his behalf at a later date, perhaps in consideration of the very development of the terminology in the late eleventh century.

The stress laid on an era of 'kings with opposition' in modern historiography is altogether unjustified. Its few annalistic appearances are limited to the Four Masters, and at least one of these appears to be a later interpolation. Its appearances in the legal commentaries show both an offensive and a defensive position characteristic of one particular contest in the late eleventh century, and its use in The Book of Leinster was an anachronistic application for contemporary political gain. Their application was far from common, much less universal, and throughout the period the unqualified 'king of Ireland' was the dominant contemporary title.

One change the new terms do reflect is the semantic rift between kingship of Tara and kingship of Ireland; the former became synonymous with its provincial kingship, Meath, at the same time 'king of Ireland with opposition' came into use. Perhaps the most remarkable thing is that, from the late eleventh century, the title *rí Temro* could be

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<sup>1674</sup> *A.F.M.* 1119.4, 1121.2; *Ann. Inisf.* 1119.2; *Ann. Tig.* 1119.1, 1121.1; *Chron. Scot.* 1119.1, 1121.1; *A.U.* 1119.2, 1121.2; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1119.4, 1121.1; *A.L.C.* 1121.1.

employed without implying the king of Meath had any claim to wider overlordship.<sup>1675</sup>

This would hardly have been possible had Meath not weakened to a remarkable degree, and it is notable that the title *rí Temro* virtually disappeared in the mid-eleventh century before being resurrected as a provincial honorific.

Byrne's assertion that the kings with opposition faced opposition precisely because they tried to be 'real' kings is groundless; the expansionist kings like Muirchertach Úa Briain represented themselves as kings 'without opposition', and those presented as kings 'with opposition' were usually from, at the time, relatively weaker areas. This is to say nothing of the general fallacy surrounding Byrne's use of 'real' kingship, as discussed in detail in our comparative analysis.<sup>1676</sup>

As for Diarmait Mac Murchada, his only campaign to be king of Ireland was launched in 1170–1, before which he showed no interest in areas beyond those in which mac Máel na mBó had in fact been active. His address as 'king of Leth Moga' in the Book of Leinster is itself evidence of this.<sup>1677</sup> Still, the presentation of his ancestor indicates an interest in the campaigns of the greater kingdoms and displays an understanding of the fact that legitimacy rested on precedent so far as wider suzerainty was concerned. Mac Murchada, therefore, consciously or unconsciously, was influenced by the same ideas expressed in The Book of Leinster.

As strange as it may seem even the famous catalyst for the invasion, Mac Murchada's application for help to Henry II, was based on longstanding political custom and precedents. And, despite some striking similarities, this was not because of Labraid Loingsech, mythical ancestor of the Laigin. The saga *Orgain Denda Ríg* has Labraid, temporarily exiled from Ireland, returning with foreign aid conquering successfully.

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<sup>1675</sup> See for example, *A.F.M.* 1087.1, 1089.1, 1094.2, 1109.6, 1118.6, 1123.10, 1130.10; *Ann. Tig.* 1073.1, 1087.1, 1091.6, 1094.1, 1094.6, 1109.1; *A.U.* 1072.4, 1073.2, 1076.3, 1077.2, 1087.4, 1090.4, 1094.2, 1118.6, 1123.1, 1124.3.

<sup>1676</sup> See Comparative Analysis, pp 443–5.

<sup>1677</sup> T.C.D. MS 1339, p. 288.



Historians have pointed to the comparability of Labraid's invasion and that of the 'Normans' in the twelfth century; O'Rahilly argued that 'When, in 1166, Diarmait, hard pressed by his Irish enemies, fled across the sea to England, and thence to France, to seek the help of Henry II, it must have occurred to him that he was but following in the footsteps of his renowned ancestor, Labraid Loingsech'.<sup>1678</sup> Byrne took this slightly further, suggesting that 'Diarmait Mac Murchada in the twelfth century may have been inspired by the example of his mythical ancestor'.<sup>1679</sup>

There were much more recent and more relevant precedents for Mac Murchada's situation in 1166. The theme of 'banishment' or 'exile' runs throughout the annalistic record, with numerous twelfth-century kings as victims. The only thing exceptional about Diarmait Mac Murchada in this regard is that he went outside Ireland for assistance, whereas others before and after him looked to powerful Irish kings for help. The tale of Labraid Loingsech may have played a role, but there was also another and contemporary context for Diarmait Mac Murchada's actions.

These events are little remarked upon and even less studied. Unfortunately, the original descriptions were themselves vague. The Irish verbs used, *díchor*, *ad-cuirethar*, and especially *ind-árban*, are open to a degree of interpretation. This flexibility comes through in the standard English editions used by modern historians, where a variety of English terms are used as translations, including 'banish', 'drive out', and 'expel'. As a result, it is easy to mistake both the intention of the aggressor and the agency of the victim and, as we will see, a comparison shows that the latter was as important in certain respects.

We are fortunate that this point can be illustrated with an example from the early eighth century. An entry, composed in Latin rather than Irish, reported succinctly that

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<sup>1678</sup> O'Rahilly, *Early Irish history and mythology*, p. 117; See also Carney, 'Language and literature to 1169', in Cosgrave (ed.), *N.H.I. II*, pp 480–1.

<sup>1679</sup> Byrne, *Irish kings*, pp 11, 272–3.

‘Fogartach grandson of Cernach was expelled from the kingship. He went to Britain’.<sup>1680</sup> Here, a distinction is drawn between the act of ‘expulsion’, in this case synonymous with deposition from the kingship, and the subsequent action of the deposed man. This is the very line blurred by later Irish accounts, which ought, by their greater extent, to provide more detail not less.

Instead, the flexibility of the Irish verbs can be demonstrated by the variety of prepositions that became attached to them. There are many examples of individuals ‘expelled’ from a place (to adopt one of the standard translations), for instance. Domnall úa Néill ‘was driven from Meath’ (*do ionnarbhadh a Midhe*) in 969;<sup>1681</sup> Sitric mac Amlaíb was ‘expelled’ from Dublin in 993 (*do innarba a h-Ath Cliath*),<sup>1682</sup> and Eochaid Mac Dúinn Sléibe was ‘banished’ from Ulaid in 1165 (& *ro h-ionnarbadh Eocha, mac Duinn Slebbe a h-Ultoibh*).<sup>1683</sup> This formulation covered position as well as place, and was arguably favoured for this purpose. Domnall mac Muirchertaig was ‘expelled’ from kingship of Meath in 971 (*do innarbadh a righe Midhe*);<sup>1684</sup> Tigernán Úa Ruairc was ‘expelled’ from his ‘chieftainship’ in 1140 (*Tighernán Ua Ruairc do athcur a flaithes*);<sup>1685</sup> Domnall Úa Gairmledaig was ‘banished’ ‘from his chieftainship’ in 1145 (*ro ionnarbsat Domhnall Ua Gairmleadhaigh as a fhlaithes*);<sup>1686</sup> and Úa Cerbaill was ‘expelled’ ‘from the chieftainship of Oirghialla’ in 1152 (*ro athchuir Ua Cearbhaill a cendus Oirghiall*).<sup>1687</sup>

Importantly, it was possible to give the destination of the ‘expelled’ individual or individuals with the same verb. One strange entry reported that ‘The kingdom of Meath was seized by Mael-Sechlainn, and the Stammerer was expelled upon Lough Ree’ (*Rigi*

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<sup>1680</sup> *A.U.* 714.4: ‘Fogartach h. Cernaigh de regno expulsus est; in Brittanniam iuit’.

<sup>1681</sup> *A.F.M.* 965.17.

<sup>1682</sup> *A.U.* 994.6; *A.F.M.* 993.8.

<sup>1683</sup> *A.F.M.* 1165.4; *Ann. Tig.* 1165.3; *A.U.* 1165.5; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1164.3.

<sup>1684</sup> *Chron. Scot.* 971.2.

<sup>1685</sup> *A.F.M.* 1140.8

<sup>1686</sup> *A.F.M.* 1145.6.

<sup>1687</sup> *A.F.M.* 1152.7.

*Midhi do gabail do Mael Sechlainn & in Got do indarba for Loch Rí*.<sup>1688</sup> Wherever on Lough Ree he went, the more usual preposition in this pattern was ‘i’ for ‘in’ or ‘into’. In 1092, ‘Diarmaid Ua Briain was expelled into Ulster’ (*Diarmaid Ua Briain d’ionnabhadh i n-Ultaibh*);<sup>1689</sup> in 1114 ‘Toirdhealbhach Ua Conchobhair banished Domhnall Ua Conchobhair, his brother, into Munster’ (*Toirdhealbhach Ua Conchobhair do indarbadh Domhnaill Uí Conchobhair, a dherbhrathar, isin Mumhain*);<sup>1690</sup> and in 1148 ‘Ua Goirmleadhaigh, i.e. Domhnall, who had been lord of Cinel-Eoghain for a time, was banished into Connaught by O’Lochlainn’ (*tigherna Chenel Eoghain re h-eadh d’ionnabhadh i c-Connachtaibh la h-Ua Lochlainn*).<sup>1691</sup>

Now, it is easy to assume from such language that it was the aggressor who stipulated the destination to which the victim went, but this was not so. Instead, the destinations were usually home to powerful opponents of the aggressor. They represented a force for restoration or reinstatement, and were places to which the ousted men fled, rather than were sent. Take, for example, Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair ‘banishing’ or ‘expelling’ Murchad Úa Máel Sechlainn in 1120: the latter went to the North, where Domnall Mac Lochlainn received him.<sup>1692</sup> By comparison, when Úa Conchobair again ‘expelled’ Úa Máel Sechlainn in 1125, the ousted king of Meath went to Munster.<sup>1693</sup> In the interim Domnall Mac Lochlainn had died, making the North a less suitable location while, at the time of his expulsion in 1125, Desmond remained in rebellion against Úa Conchobair.<sup>1694</sup>

Something similar can be said of the contrasting descriptions of Diarmait mac Máel na mBó’s acquisition of Dublin. In *A. U.* it was reported that ‘Echmarcach son of Ragnall, king of the foreigners, was banished by the king of Laigin, i.e. Diarmait son of Mael na

<sup>1688</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1030.8; *A.F.M.* 1030.15.

<sup>1689</sup> *A.F.M.* 1092.14.

<sup>1690</sup> *A.F.M.* 1114.11; *Ann. Tig.* 1114.4; *Chron. Scot.* 1114.2; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1114.5.

<sup>1691</sup> *A.F.M.* 1148.13.

<sup>1692</sup> *A.F.M.* 1120.1; *Ann. Tig.* 1120.4; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1120.3.

<sup>1693</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1125.5.

<sup>1694</sup> See *Connacht*, pp 49–50.

mBó, and the latter himself took the kingship as a result'.<sup>1695</sup> This contrasts with the description in *Ann. Tig.*, where mac Máel na mBó is given no such agency: 'A raid by the son of Maol na mBó into Fingal and he burned the country from Dublin to the Delvin river, but he overtook no cows, so that he and the Foreigners fought great skirmishes round the fortress of Dublin, wherein fell many on both sides, and Echmarcach son of Ragnall, the king of the Foreigners, went overseas, and the son of Maol na mBó assumed the kingship after him'.<sup>1696</sup>

Some years later, in 1127, Donnchad Mac Cárthaig was 'expelled into Connaught, with two thousand along with him, by Cormac Mac Carthaigh'.<sup>1697</sup> In this case, Cormac Mac Cárthaig was returning from an imposed 'pilgrimage' or exile at Lismore, having been deposed by Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair. His restoration (by the Uí Briain) was an act of rebellion against Úa Conchobair, and Donnchad Mac Cárthaig's recourse to Connacht (along with his supporters) anticipated an invasion of Munster from that direction.

Cormac Mac Cárthaig is very unlikely to have wanted a large number of men leaving his kingdom to support a rival; whether he even wanted Donnchad Mac Cárthaig to leave the province is open to doubt. It may simply have been that Cormac's return led Donnchad to take the initiative.

The ambiguity is also apparent in other entries referring to large numbers. Under 1093, Muirchertach Úa Briain was reported to have 'expelled' the Síol Muiredaig 'into Tir-Eoghain'.<sup>1698</sup> Again, the destination was a location beyond the aggressor's control, and in Úa Briain's case the North was the only such area. Once more, in this case, the lack of

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<sup>1695</sup> *A.U.* 1052.8: 'Ri Gall Et- Echmarcach mc. Ragnaill arna innarba o ri Laighan, .i. Diarmuid mc. Mail na m-Bo & in righe do fein de sin'.

<sup>1696</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1052.2: 'Crech la mac Mail na m-Bó a Fini Gall, cor' loisc in tír o Ath Cliath co h-Ailbine, acht noch tarraidh bú, co n-dersat scandracha móra imon Dun, du a torchair ile ille & anund, co n-dechaidh rí Gall tar muir .i. Eachmarcach mac Ragnaill, & ro gab mac Mail na m-Bo ríge Gall da eissi'; *A.F.M.* 1052.8.

<sup>1697</sup> *A.F.M.* 1127.14: 'Donnchadh, mac Mic Carthaigh, do ionnarbadh iaramh i c-Connachtaibh co fichit céd imaille fris lá Corbmac Mág Carthaigh'; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1126.11.

<sup>1698</sup> *A.F.M.* 1093.12: 'Muirchertach Ua Briain d'orgain & d'ionnarbadh Sil Muiredhaigh uile h-i Tír n-Eoghain'; *Ann. Tig.* 1093.6; *Chron. Scot.* 1093.3; *A.U.* 1093.3; *A.L.C.* 1093.3.

clarity is compounded by the fact that the expulsion of the Síl Muiredaig would have been an impossibly large task, even for Muirchertach Úa Briain. It is not made any clearer by a subsequent entry reporting ‘The Sil-Muireadhaigh returned again to Connaught without permission’.<sup>1699</sup>

There was a similar event in 1139. On that occasion, ‘The Clann-Cárthaigh were expelled from Munster by the race of Brian’.<sup>1700</sup> On the grounds of size alone the removal of the Meic Cárthaig was just as unlikely, so exactly who left and under what circumstances is uncertain. It would be fair to assume that in such cases only the leading royals were intended by this description, and that any others who did leave went in the entourage of these figures, just like the army who went to Connacht with Donnchad Mac Cárthaig in 1127.

We also learn about ‘expulsion’ as a wider pattern of Irish political behaviour from the different source types concerned with Mac Murchada in particular. As Mac Murchada re-established himself in Leinster, he led campaigns against the Uí Fáeláin and Meic Gilla Phátraic – as elaborated in Giraldus’s *Expugnatio* and *The Deeds*.<sup>1701</sup> His capture of Dublin in 1170 is also expounded in the same sources.<sup>1702</sup> The annals, on the other hand, characteristically describe how ‘he destroyed the country and banished its king, Faelán, and also banished Domhnall Mac Giolla Pádraig, king of Ossory, into Connacht’.<sup>1703</sup> Again, Connacht was simply the province from which they anticipated a reaction. The capture of Dublin is similarly noted to have seen the ‘expulsion’ of the Hiberno-Norse ‘foreigners’ – by which their leadership is undoubtedly meant.<sup>1704</sup>

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<sup>1699</sup> A.F.M. 1093.13; A.U. 1093.6; A.L.C. 1093.7.

<sup>1700</sup> A.F.M. 1139.10: ‘Cland Cárthaigh do ionnrbadh a Mumhain lá Síol m-Briain’.

<sup>1701</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 34–9; *The Deeds*, pp 66–76 ll 524–917.

<sup>1702</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 66–9; *The Deeds*, pp 93–7 ll 1554–1717.

<sup>1703</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1170.11: ‘cor’ mill in tír & cor’ indarb a rí .i. Faelan & ro indarb didiu Domnall Mac Gilla Padraic rí Osraigi a Connachtaib’; A.F.M. 1170.19.

<sup>1704</sup> A.U. 1170.3: ‘& ro innarb na Galla’; A.F.M. 1170.13; *Ann. Tig.* 1170.10; A.L.C. 1170.4; *Ann. Inisf.* 1170.4.

How then, are the events of 1166 to be understood? Some accounts conflate two separate campaigns into Leinster; as noted elsewhere in this thesis, it was not the first campaign, led by Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair, that ‘expelled’ Mac Murchada, but the second, led by Úa Ruairc. Leaving that point aside, the descriptions of Mac Murchada’s ‘expulsion’ bear a marked resemblance to the other entries highlighted above. In *A.U.*, Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair ‘went safe to his house after that, after expelling Diarmait Mac Murchadha, king of Leinster, over sea’ (*co n-dechaidh slan iar sin dia thigh, iar n-innarba Diarmata Mic Murchadha, righ Laighen, dar muir*),<sup>1705</sup> and a similar description appeared in Mac Cárthaigh’s Book.<sup>1706</sup>

*Ann. Tig.*, which provides the most accurate chronological account of the tumultuous events of 1166, contains the following description: ‘A hosting by Tighearnán Ó Ruairc and by Diarmaid Ó Maelseachlainn and the Foreigners of Dublin with them, against Mac Murchadha to take revenge for Ó Ruairc’s wife. And they demolished the stone-house which Mac Murchadha had at Ferns, and they burned the camp and banished him overseas to England’ (*Sluáighedh la Tigernán h-Úa Ruairc & la Diarmaid Ua Mael Sechlainn, & Gaill Atha Cliath leo, ar amus Maic Murchadha do dighail mna h-Úi Ruairc fair, cor’ scailsed an teach cloiche do bai a Ferna ac Mac Murchadha, & ro loiscsed in longport, & ro indarbsad Mac Murchadha dar muir co riacht a Saxanaib*).<sup>1707</sup>

This was also adopted by the Four Masters with the remark ‘and Diarmaid Mac Murchadha was banished over sea’ (*& ro h-ionnarbadh leo Diarmaid Mac Murchadha dar muir*).<sup>1708</sup>

It is wise to compare this with Anglo-Norman accounts before reaching any firm conclusions. Giraldus, who telescoped the abduction of Derbforgaill and Úa Ruairc’s campaign for revenge into a single sequence of events, emphasised the abandonment of

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<sup>1705</sup> *A.U.* 1166.9.

<sup>1706</sup> *Misc.Ir.Annals* 1165.4.

<sup>1707</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1166.13.

<sup>1708</sup> *A.F.M.* 1166.16.

Diarmait by the men of Leinster. He said ‘The men of Leinster, seeing their prince was now in a difficult position and surrounded on all sides by his enemies’ forces, sought to pay him back, and recalled to mind injustices which they had long concealed and stored deep in their hearts. They made common cause with his enemies, and the men of rank among this people deserted Mac Murchada along with his good fortune. He saw that his forces were melting away on all sides and that he was now in desperate straits, for Fate had completely withdrawn her favour. So after many fierce clashes with the enemy in which the odds were stacked against him, he finally trusted his life to the sea in flight, and so to speak had recourse to this last hope of saving himself’.<sup>1709</sup>

*The Deeds* highlighted many of the same points: among them the abandonment of Diarmait by his own people. This was quoted above, but bears repeating in relation to the present subject. It accosted Mac Murchada’s subordinates, saying ‘All his men from Leinster and from Osraige have abandoned him. When King Diarmait saw then that he was betrayed, that his own men had failed him, and that he was thus betrayed and that they wanted to capture him, to hand him over and sell him to Ua Ruairc, and that moreover the king of Connacht would inflict great destruction on him – but why should I prolong our chronicle in any way? His own men have driven out King Diarmait by force. They have taken the kingdom from him and driven him from Ireland. When the king was sent into exile, he embarked at Corcoran. At Corcoran he put to sea; he took Awlef O Kinad with him. The mighty king took him with him and more than sixty-three [others]’.<sup>1710</sup>

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<sup>1709</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 24–7: ‘*Considerantes autem Lagenienses principem suum in arto iam positum et hostium cuneis omni ex latere circumseptum, dissimulates diu iniurias altaque mente repostas vindicem ad animum revocantes cum hostibus unanimes effecti, Murchardi filium maiores in hac gente simul cum fortuna reliquerunt. Videns taque Dermitus se viribus undique destitui et, aversa penitus factorum facie fortuneque favore, iam desperanter affligi, post multos et graves impari certamine cum hoste conflictus, tanquam ad ultimum confugiens salutis remedium, tandem tamen fuge presidium navigio destinavit*’.

<sup>1710</sup> *The Deeds*, p. 58 ll 204–227: ‘*Tute sa gent li sunt faillie De Leynestere e de Osserie. Quant ço vit Dermot li reis Que traï esteit a cele feis, Sa gent demeine lui sun failliz, Ent el maere iert traiz E que voleint [le] prendre, A O Roric liverer e vendre, Si li ff[e]ist mult grant essart De Connoth li*

Diarmait Mac Murchada, then, fled from Leinster in the face of an enemy attack he could not hope to defeat. The number sixty-three may be intended to mean he brought a large entourage abroad with him but, if so, more major nobles would surely have been named. A formulation as vague as ‘Uí Chennselaig’ could have been employed by the annalists, just as Uí Muiredaig was in 1093, and Clann Cárthaigh in 1139. We do not know who ‘Awlef O Kinad’ was, and the idea that Mac Murchada was deserted by his principal subordinates carries more weight.

As Flanagan argued, prior contact with Henry II probably influenced Diarmait in 1166.<sup>1711</sup> Only the previous year, the Dublin fleet had assisted the English king’s campaign in Wales. Diarmait, as the overlord of Dublin, is likely to have given his consent to this operation. As such, Henry was a powerful friend, and his court would have appeared an attractive destination. Flanagan suggested that the fact that Diarmait’s first destination was Bristol indicates pre-existing links, which were also probably formed through Dublin.

In theory, Diarmait had other options. It was also only a year since Toirdelbach Ua Briain had come to Leinster under similar circumstances. On that occasion he had been deposed by his own son Muirchertach ‘and expelled into Leinster’,<sup>1712</sup> though Desmond is given as his destination in some sources.<sup>1713</sup> We know that later, after the invasion, Ua Briain had a marriage link with Mac Murchada, and this could date from 1165. If so, Ua Briain’s court in Thomond (to which he was restored by 1166) represented a more likely place for Mac Murchada to seek shelter.

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*reis d’autre part- Kev us irrai purloingnant De nostre geste tant ne quant? Le reis Dermot en unt geté Sa gent par vive poësté. Tollét lui unt tut la reingné E de Yrland li unt chacé. Quant fut li reis exulé. A Korkeran [fut] eschippé. Quant li reis esteir waivés, A Korkeran est eschippés. A Corkeran en mer entra; Awlef O Kinad od sei mena, O sei mena li riche reis, E plus de seisante treis’.*

<sup>1711</sup> Flanagan, *Irish society*, pp 56–76, esp.75–6.

<sup>1712</sup> *A.F.M.* 1165.6: ‘& a ionnarbadh i Laighnibh’.

<sup>1713</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1165.2; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1164.1; see *The Two Munsters*, p. 255.



The fact that Diarmait did not go to Thomond and instead took the unprecedented step of going abroad for the same sort of shelter and prospective aid may well reflect the extent of Úa Conchobair's power. If Diarmait believed (and the Anglo-Norman sources seem to reflect this belief) that the king of Connacht was involved in the second expedition to Leinster in 1166, then he also had to consider the fact that Úa Briain's Thomond was under Úa Conchobair's suzerainty. Nor was there anywhere else in Ireland he could turn; his erstwhile ally Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn was dead and, as we have seen, Connacht's dominance was felt throughout the island.

In the other examples of 'expulsion' or 'banishment' highlighted above, it was frequently the case that the destination of the victim represented the home of an individual whose animosity towards the aggressor could be counted upon. It is possible, though by no means certain, that Diarmait Mac Murchada's recourse to Henry II in 1166 reflects knowledge of Henry's earlier abandoned scheme to invade Ireland. If so, he was again following an established pattern of Irish political behaviour by going to an area whose king might well have an existing reason to act.<sup>1714</sup>

In another important way, Diarmait deviated from the established pattern. This is something we have already dealt with from another angle: that he, Diarmait, refused to accept his restoration on Úa Conchobair's terms. Such was the regularity with which these 'expulsions' had occurred over the previous centuries, there was a degree of predictability about their eventual outcome: restoration. We can take as our example here the career of Murchad Úa Máel Sechlainn, the victim of numerous similar 'expulsions', including in 1120, 1125, and 1143, at Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair's hands, in 1150 by Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn, and in 1127 by his own people.<sup>1715</sup> Murchad was by no

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<sup>1714</sup> It may be worth considering here the fact that the papal bull 'Laudabiliter' is copied onto a flyleaf in the Book of Leinster. This is generally considered a thirteenth-century insertion, but it is possible that Diarmait Mac Murchada was aware of the bull, which was issued in 1155, before he set off for Henry's court. If so, his conduct would accord with Irish kings more generally. See T.C.D. MS 1339, p. 342.

<sup>1715</sup> *A.F.M.* 1120.1, 1125.6, 1127.17, 1143.13, 1150.15; *A.U.* 1125.3; *A.L.C.* 1125.3; *Chron. Scot.* 1125.3, 1143.5; *Ann. Inisf.* 1125.9 *Ann. Tig.* 1120.4, 1153.4; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1120.3, 1125.2.

means guaranteed to return to kingship after each of these setbacks, but by seeking powerful help and biding his time he stayed the course and ended up being restored each time.

This is why Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair expected to come to terms with Diarmait Mac Murchada. Other kings who had been expelled from their patrimony in similar circumstances had gratefully accepted the chance to be re-incorporated into the hierarchy. Mac Murchada on the other hand, perhaps in the light of the impressive martial abilities of his new English supporters, raised his ambitions beyond the provincial kingship of Leinster, and sought to involve himself in the contest for the kingship of Ireland.<sup>1716</sup> A half-imagined vision of Diarmait mac Máel na mBó having such ambitions undoubtedly contributed, as, less certainly, did the distant legend of Labraid Loingsech. It may have taken Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair too long to realise what was happening, but that was because it broke so violently with precedent.

If this is the case and the extent of Úa Conchobair's power did have an important role, it goes some way towards justifying the idea that the English invasion was 'an accident waiting to happen'.<sup>1717</sup> Even if (and perhaps especially because) Mac Murchada did not set out to become king of Ireland in 1166, the circumstances that led to his campaign of 1170–1 were a natural sequence; the traditional practice of 'expelling' or forcing out rivals, the reduced options in Ireland for an ousted king under a dominant kingship of Ireland, and the proximity of the vastly powerful Angevin court, were all contributing factors.

Still, there was no guarantee that kings of Ireland after Ruaidrí would be as powerful as he was. Nor was it inevitable that the hierarchy would be rejected in the manner it was. If

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<sup>1716</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 52–3: 'Mac Murchada now raised his sights to higher things and, now that he had recovered his entire inheritance, he aspired to his ancestral and long-standing rights, and determined, by the use of his armed might, to bring under his control Connacht, together with the kingship of all Ireland'.

<sup>1717</sup> Duffy, *The concise history of Ireland*, pp 61–80.

anything, the break should have come from an ousted king of Munster or the Northern Uí Néill, the two major kingdoms that could seriously hope to contend with Connacht for the kingship of Ireland. The fact that it was a minor provincial king prompted Ruaidrí's determined efforts to re-incorporate him into the hierarchy, and consequently gave the English the space they needed to gain a foothold in Ireland.

#### **[4.4: Conclusion]**

Leinster's period of greatest prosperity came at the dawn of the historical period in Ireland and can only be reconstructed with difficulty. Even the origin of the groups who constituted the Laigin, and who may well have come to Ireland from different locations, is open to interpretation. It seems that there were several separate links to groups in west Britain, as well as a possible invasion from the continent. We may say, however, that in the early centuries AD they enjoyed the benefits of an east-coast location, given the contact this brought with Roman Britain. This brought wealth from trade and, when the strength of the empire waned, from raiding as well.

The loss of the midlands (later known as Meath), seemingly in the fifth century, inaugurated centuries of retreat for the Laigin. The beneficiaries of their fall, the Uí Néill, took control of Tara and any broader honour or significance this may have held – though of course, this may have developed significantly under their stewardship. The borders between the two solidified along natural boundaries and remained relatively stable until the twelfth century, when the Southern Uí Néill were in their turn being pushed southward by the Uí Briúin Bréifne.

Throughout most of the historic period, it was the dynasties of northern Leinster who exercised control. In this respect, our period marks a significant break with the past since first the Osraige and then, in a more sustained fashion, the Uí Chennselaig, wrested the kingship from the north and moved the locus of power southwards. Their royal dynasty, the Meic Murchada, laboured to turn this situation into a monopoly on the kingship.

The fact that they were unsuccessful in this regard owes as much to the course of the English invasion itself than it does to successful resistance by the northern parties. In 1166, Mac Murchada still feared internal resistance and treachery as much as his external enemies. It is quite possible that his paranoia in this regard brought on the rebellion that helped force him from Ireland, for he had a number of men killed in the same year and executed the hostages of some of the groups who deserted him.

Like the leaders of other minor provinces, Mac Murchada found himself the subject of a tug-of-war between those competing for outright supremacy. He was forced to submit to Connacht, Munster, and the Northern Uí Néill in turn, as those parties sought to outmanoeuvre one another. While he may have hoped to propel his kingdom into that competition, he lacked either the material or the skill to do this.

It was, in part, frustration with his own impotence that drove Mac Murchada's escalation of conflict in the 1150s. Despite being present at the Battle of Móin Móir, on the winning side, and helping to destroy the power of the kingdom which had so recently dominated the island, he was unable to levy any significant political advantage from it. It seems that Munster's hostages were taken by Úa Conchobair, while both he and Mac Murchada were immediately forced to recognise Mac Lochlainn's supremacy.

The expansion of Tigernán Úa Ruairc into Meath had led to encroachment on Leinster's borders; possibly with Úa Ruairc's connivance. While Mac Murchada had focussed on establishing himself in Leth Moga, as his famous ancestor Diarmait mac Máel na mBó had done, Úa Ruairc had taken full advantage. With the Uí Briain eliminated, Mac Murchada turned his attention to Bréifne. The abduction of Derbforgaill embittered the king of Bréifne, and thereafter conflict accelerated dramatically. It culminated in the events described in several places throughout this thesis: the expulsion of Mac Murchada from Ireland, and his invitation to Henry II to invade.

This chapter considered the nature of that expulsion, judging that, like many other similarly described events, it represented Mac Murchada's flight from overwhelming odds. The fact that he did not have recourse to another powerful kingdom in Ireland is illustrative of Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair's power in Ireland; the only place that could harbour Mac Murchada safely was Henry II's Angevin Empire. It also coincided with a rebellion against his rule in Leinster, something with which he was deeply concerned, and which is also often overlooked.

Ultimately, Mac Murchada may have hoped to project his kingdom into the competition for national supremacy throughout his career, but until 1170 he was never in a position to do so. His realistic targets were far more limited: achieving a monopoly on the kingship for his dynasty, ensuring Osraige remained under his control, and preventing the kingdom of Meath from annexing Uí Failge, Uí Fáeláin, and later Dublin, into their domain. He has been misunderstood to an enormous degree, not because he was a better man or more sophisticated planner than is depicted in nationalist literature, but rather because his kingdom was a minor one in the scheme of national politics.

## **Women and Marriage**

### **[5.0: Introduction]**

With the history of the three major kingdoms from the late eleventh to mid-thirteenth centuries now elaborated, it is appropriate to look at certain themes more generally. In this chapter, issues that concern women and that are related through women will be discussed. The topics that will be treated here are women in politics and political violence against women, women and wealth, and marriage practice and prosopography. Drawing these elements together has the advantage of highlighting connections that have previously been overlooked.

The behaviours and patterns that will now be discussed are not isolated to the high-medieval period but are instead deeply rooted, with comparable examples throughout the Middle Ages. As such, while the temporal focus is the same, most elements of this study require reference to earlier and later periods to illustrate the longevity of these practices – as well as the changes that occurred to them and the way in which they were recorded. The broadening of the period considered for this chapter is intended to provide greater contextualisation for the events of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

In this examination, there will be a balance between general discussion with a view to establishing wider patterns, and discussion of particular case studies. The latter is required because the significance of certain famous incidents has been amplified by modern scholarship; all concern Derbforgaill, daughter of Murchad Úa Máel Sechlainn and wife of Tigernán Úa Ruairc, whose name has already been mentioned several times in this thesis. Discussion of the general pattern of events is disturbed by implausible arguments surrounding these famous incidents, and they also demand consideration because of their significance with regard to the English invasion.

The degree to which ostensibly unrelated or tangential issues are intertwined with those concerning women and marriage is remarkable. This is true of hostage-taking, for example, as well as the operation of royal entourages, the honour-prices of different

grades of kings, patterns of donation, the aims of the church ‘reformers’, and the difference between *rigdamnai* in Leinster and elsewhere; all of these points will be discussed in turn.

### [5.1: Violence and Women in Political Life]

In what is certainly a reflex of our sources and the interests of the annalists in particular, assassination is the most frequently recorded form of violence against women. In general, such women were caught up in actions directed against their husbands. It will first be shown how this occurred, and then how the involvement of women in political activity was related. This assessment will also consider abduction and hostage-taking.

Coverage of violence against women in the historical record improves in the eleventh century, though it also appears in much earlier records.<sup>1718</sup> Beginning with its emergence as a distinct pattern, several examples stand out. In 1041, Cailleoc, wife of Úa Dunlaing, king of Laegais (a regional kingdom in Leinster), was killed alongside her husband,<sup>1719</sup> and in 1042, when the king of Uí Bairrche (another regional kingdom in Leinster) was killed, his wife was slain with him.<sup>1720</sup> In 1066, Orlaidh, wife of the king of Bréifne Gilla Braite Úa Ruairc, was killed alongside her husband,<sup>1721</sup> and the wife of Conchobar Úa Briain of Thomond suffered a similar fate in 1078.<sup>1722</sup>

Events such as these continued to occur in the twelfth century. In 1110 alone at least two women met their fate in this way.<sup>1723</sup> In 1134, a daughter of Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair and her husband, Murchad Úa hEagra, were killed by a relation of his, Taiclech Úa hEagra.<sup>1724</sup> In 1161, Muirchertach Úa Cellaig, king of north Brega, was assassinated and Inderb, his wife, was killed on the same occasion.<sup>1725</sup> Similarly, in 1177, Úa Coinnecen,

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<sup>1718</sup> See for example, *A.U.* 795.1.

<sup>1719</sup> *A.F.M.* 1041.13; *Ann. Tig.* 1041.4.

<sup>1720</sup> *A.F.M.* 1042.10; *Ann. Tig.* 1042.4.

<sup>1721</sup> *A.F.M.* 1066.6; *Ann. Clon.* 1065.

<sup>1722</sup> *A.U.* 1078.3.

<sup>1723</sup> *A.F.M.* 1110.7; *Ann. Tig.* 1110.1; *Chron. Scot.* 1110.1; *Ann. Inisf.* 1110.4.

<sup>1724</sup> *A.F.M.* 1134.19; *Ann. Tig.* 1134.12; *Ann. Clon.* 1135; *Chron. Scot.* 1134.4

<sup>1725</sup> *A.F.M.* 1161.14.

*ard-ollam* of the North, was killed by the Cenél Conaill. His wife and some of his people were killed with him.<sup>1726</sup> Fewer political murders of women are recorded for the thirteenth century but there are some examples, including that of Sadb, wife of Séfráid Úa Donnchada, who was killed alongside her husband, their sons, and her husband's brothers, in 1254.<sup>1727</sup>

The evidence suggests a simple and regular approach to political assassination. When the target of an attack was in a house with his entourage, his attackers would storm the house or block the exits and set the roof alight. The victims would either be burned alive or slaughtered in a confined space. Some entries describe this more clearly than others. One under 1103 reports that 'a house was burned over Ua Flainn Arda, and many fell therein, including his wife and the master of that house'.<sup>1728</sup> This is why, when recording the escape of Úa Máel Sechlainn from such an attack in 1123, *A.U.* notes that he escaped 'neither killed nor burned'.<sup>1729</sup>

The two variants often amounted to the same thing as prospective victims tried to escape. For instance, Niall Úa Gailmredaigh, king of Cenél Moain, was killed by Donnchad Úa Cairrelláin in the doorway of a house that had been set alight in 1177.<sup>1730</sup> On another occasion, Muirchertach mac Néill Uí Ruairc was allowed leave a house that was besieged by the Uí Ragallaig 'on parole' – that is, with his safety guaranteed.<sup>1731</sup> He was subsequently executed anyway.<sup>1732</sup>

In some cases, women are included in the report of an assassination in one collection of annals and excluded in another. Under 1161, an *A.F.M.* entry reports that 'a house was forcibly taken by Cathal Ua Raghallaigh, i.e. the son of Godfrey, against Maelseachlainn

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<sup>1726</sup> *A.U.* 1177.4; *A.L.C.* 1177.8.

<sup>1727</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1254.2; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1254.1.

<sup>1728</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1103.8: '*Tech do loscud for Ua Flainn Ardda in qua ceciderunt multi, & mulier eius & princeps illius domus*'.

<sup>1729</sup> *A.U.* 1123.1: '*cen marbadh cen loscadh*'.

<sup>1730</sup> *A.U.* 1177.6.

<sup>1731</sup> *A.L.C.* 1239.4: '*ar breithir*'.

<sup>1732</sup> *A.L.C.* 1239.4.



Ua Ruairc, in the middle of Slaine; and there were killed therein Muircheartach Ua Ceallaigh, lord of Breagha, and his wife, i.e. Indearbh, daughter of Ua Caindealbhain. Maelseachlainn, however, made his escape on this occasion'.<sup>1733</sup> The assassination is also recorded in *A.U.* with no mention of Inderb.<sup>1734</sup>

With the assassination of Úa Baíggelláin in 1119, his wife is included as a victim in *Ann. Inisf.* but not in *A.L.C.*, which refers only to his family and guests in general terms.<sup>1735</sup>

With the death of Gilla Braite Úa Ruairc in 1066, the death of his wife Orlaith, daughter of Conchobar úa Máel Sechlainn, is recorded only in *A.F.M.* In *A.U.*, *A.L.C.*, *Ann. Tig.*, and *Chron. Scot.* his death appears without reference to Orlaith or any other victims.<sup>1736</sup>

The examples that include mention of wives are a small percentage of all entries reporting political assassination, but examples that do not mention women can also be used to illustrate the practice. When the above-mentioned Úa Baíggelláin was killed in 1119, we know from another source that more than thirty-five others were killed along with him.<sup>1737</sup> This was not the largest number recorded to have been killed on the same occasion in one house. In 972, seventy fell when the house of Dubchrón úa Longacháin was burned, and in 1029, more than eighty were killed in a house captured from Áed Úa Ruairc.<sup>1738</sup> This figure was given alternatively as sixty and forty elsewhere.<sup>1739</sup> More still were killed in 970, when a remarkable 350 people were burned in one house by Domnall úa Néill, king of Ireland.<sup>1740</sup>

Large numbers were not necessarily especially characteristic of the phenomenon. Just seven were killed in 1123 when a house was taken against Cerball Úa Ciarmaic, for

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<sup>1733</sup> *A.F.M.* 1161.14: 'Teach do ghabháil do Chathal Ua Raghallaigh, .i. mac Gofradha, for Maol Sechlainn Ua Ruairc for lár Sláine, & ro marbhadh ann Muirchertach Ua Ceallaigh, tigherna Breghe, & a bhen .i. Indearbh, inghen Uí Caindealbhain. Terna imorro Maol Seachlainn as don chur-sin'.

<sup>1734</sup> *A.U.* 1161.5.

<sup>1735</sup> *A.L.C.* 1119.3.

<sup>1736</sup> *A.F.M.* 1066.6; *A.U.* 1066.2; *A.L.C.* 1066.2; *Ann. Tig.* 1066.2; *Chron. Scot.* 1066.2.

<sup>1737</sup> *A.U.* 1119.3.

<sup>1738</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1029.2.

<sup>1739</sup> *A.F.M.* 1029.5; *A.U.* 1029.4; *Ann. Tig.* 1029.2.

<sup>1740</sup> *A.U.* 970.6.

example, and in general the deaths of secondary individuals are treated as incidental.<sup>1741</sup>

Carthach, the king of Cashel and ancestor of the Meic Cárthaig, was killed in 1045, and it is recorded merely that he ‘was burned with many nobles’, when the house in which he was staying was set alight.<sup>1742</sup> To take an example discussed above, when, in 1123, the Gailenga attacked Murchad Úa Máel Sechlainn, they reportedly stormed or burned eighty houses as well as the one in which Úa Máel Sechlainn was to be found, ‘and killed many of his followers’.<sup>1743</sup> From the perspective of the annalist, the fact that Úa Máel Sechlainn escaped was more important than the number or names of these victims.

Faelán Úa Duibdara, king of Fir Manach, was assassinated in similar circumstances by the Cenél Moen branch of Cenél nEógain in 1128. It is recorded that ‘a number of the nobles of the Fir Manach’ fell with him, but nothing more.<sup>1744</sup> In most cases it is characteristic of the sources to record the death of the leading male, with perhaps one or two prominent followers. In an entry under 1129, we are merely told that ‘Gilla Críst ua Uidhrén, chief of Cenél Feradaigh, was burned in his fosterfather’s house in Tír Manach by treachery’.<sup>1745</sup>

When Úa hEochada was captured in a house by Úa Mathgamna and Úa Máel Ruanaid in 1108, the annals record that ‘he was beheaded by them’, with no mention of whether others were also killed.<sup>1746</sup> Under 1242, it was similarly reported that a grandson of Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair was burned in a house ‘together with three O’Sechnasaighs’, the only other names listed.<sup>1747</sup> Tellingly, in a very rare instance of a woman killed in the

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<sup>1741</sup> A.U. 1123.2.

<sup>1742</sup> A.U. 1045.5: ‘*Carrthach m. Soerbrethaig, ri Eoganachta Caisil, do loscad i tigh theined do h-u Longarcán m. Duinn Cuan cum multis nobilibus ustis*’.

<sup>1743</sup> A.U. 1123.1.

<sup>1744</sup> A.U. 1128.2: ‘*a thuitim leó & sochaidhe do mhaitibh Fer Manach ime*’.

<sup>1745</sup> A.U. 1129.6: ‘*Gilla Críst m. m. Uidhrin toisech Ceniul Feradhaigh do loscadh a tigh a altrann h-i Tir Manach i mebhail*’.

<sup>1746</sup> A.U. 1108.6: ‘*a dichennadh leo*’.

<sup>1747</sup> A.L.C. 1242.12: ‘*& tri h. Sechnusaig i nd-aentig*’.

assassination of her father rather than her husband, the comment was made that ‘many more women and men, who are not enumerated here, were slain along with them’.<sup>1748</sup>

A curious case, recorded under 1088, merits inclusion here as a possible example of violence against women. Dub Coblaid, daughter of the king of Connacht Áed in Gaí Bernaig and wife of either Toirdelbach (d. 1086) or Muirchertach Úa Briain (she is described as ‘wife of the King of Munster’) died.<sup>1749</sup> The same year, Mór, daughter of Toirdelbach úa Briain and ‘wife of the King of Connaught’ – i.e. Áed Úa Conchobair – also died.<sup>1750</sup> Following the deaths of these women, whose marriages clearly were clearly politically motivated,<sup>1751</sup> war broke out between Connacht and Munster.<sup>1752</sup> Given the ease with which wives could be discarded, it seems unlikely that these women suffered violent deaths, but the fact that both died the same year is a curious coincidence.

Leaving aside assassination, which is generally easy to recognise, distinguishing between abduction and the use of women as hostages is more complex. In theory the two were very different phenomena, which ought not to be easily confused, but, as we shall see, recent research has proposed that the use of women as hostages was more widespread than is generally believed. Because of this, and a similarity of description between these different actions in various chronicles, there are now certain cases that occasion debate.

A close examination can go some way towards dispelling such confusion. In the Irish context, abduction and hostage-taking must both be defined with reference to the law-texts. There, abduction, ‘*fochsal*’ or ‘*foxal*’, followed by intercourse, was deemed a form of marriage, ‘*lánamnas foxail*’, and not rape, if consented to by the woman.<sup>1753</sup> It was

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<sup>1748</sup> A.F.M. 1268.3; Ann. Conn. 1268.2; A.L.C. 1268.1: ‘*et alii multi, do marbad maille friú do mhnaibh & dferaihb nach áirimhter sunn*’.

<sup>1749</sup> A.F.M. 1088.5: ‘*ben rí Mumhan*’; Ann. Tig. 1088.4; Chron. Scot. 1088.4; Ann. Clon. 1086.

<sup>1750</sup> A.F.M. 1088.6: ‘*ben rí Connacht*’; Ann. Tig. 1088.5; Chron. Scot. 1088.3; Ann. Clon. 1086.

<sup>1751</sup> For a full discussion of the various rationales behind marriage, see below, pp 403–27.

<sup>1752</sup> A.F.M. 1088.7; Ann. Tig. 1088.1, 1088.2.

<sup>1753</sup> Kelly, *Guide to early Irish law* (Dublin, 1988), pp 70–1; C.I.H. 442.8–9.

stipulated that such a union was formed with the consent of the woman but in defiance of her father or kin.

This definition makes it clear that it was a single woman, unmarried or divorced, who was under consideration. Here, however, the normative law-texts are at odds with the political history of the annals. There, it is the married woman who is almost invariably the victim of abduction. The purpose of these abductions can be inferred on most occasions to be the humiliation of her husband. One law text, *Uraicecht na Ríar*, does show the married woman as a victim of abduction, and it supports this interpretation. ‘For abducting his wife in disregard of him’, an aggressor would incur the largest possible penalty payable to an *ollam*.<sup>1754</sup>

In 1162, a time when Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn was king of Ireland, *Ann. Tig.* records that there was ‘a hosting by the son of Mac Lochlainn together with the men of Ireland to the Foreigners of Dublin to avenge his wife and her violation by them, but they separated without peace without battle’.<sup>1755</sup> The circumstances under which the violation of Mac Lochlainn’s wife had occurred are not recorded, and this is the only entry in any surviving collection that alludes to it. On this basis it is also reasonable to suppose, especially given the importance of Mac Lochlainn, that the record of many other such abductions has been lost over time, or that they went unrecorded in the first place.

A similar abduction recorded in the annals took place in 1231, when Úa Domnaill brought away Cathal Úa Ragallaig’s wife as part of a general raid of the territory of east Bréifne.<sup>1756</sup> Examples of abduction as a political stratagem also appear in the fourteenth-century record. For instance, in 1315 Máel Ruanaid Mac Diarmata and Gilbert Mac

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<sup>1754</sup> Breatnach (ed.), *Uraicecht na Ríar* (Dublin, 1987), §3, pp 102–3: ‘*ar thlenamain dia chuinn a chétmuintire*’.

<sup>1755</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1162.1: ‘*Sluaighedh la mac Maic Lochlainn dochum Gall, co Feraib Erenn lais, do dighail a mna & a saraighthe forro, cor’ dedhladar cen t-sith, cen cath*’.

<sup>1756</sup> *A.F.M.* 1231.11; *A.U.* 1231.4; *A.L.C.* 1231.7; *Ann. Conn.* 1231.8; *Ann. Clon.* 1231.

Goisdelb abducted the wife of a rival, Diarmait Mac Diarmata, as a part of a general raid of Mag Luirg in Connacht.<sup>1757</sup>

Hostage-taking, by contrast, is a phenomenon with countless examples and one chiefly concerned with men rather than women. We should therefore be very cautious about attributing this categorisation to women on any given occasion. As pointed out by Lahney Preston-Matto, hostages were legally distinct from captives across Europe generally in the Middle-Ages,<sup>1758</sup> and this was also the case under Irish law.<sup>1759</sup> In fact, different types of hostage were recognised in Ireland. Hostage may be a translation from ‘*gíall*’, ‘*aitire*’, or ‘*brága*’, depending on the context. In the inter-provincial political arena, a hostage was (almost always) a person given in guarantee of submission who could be killed, blinded, or ransomed if that submission was breached.<sup>1760</sup>

Some thought has been given to the legal distinction between ‘*géill*’ and ‘*aitiri*’, and it has been argued that the original meaning of *aitire* was a representative of high rank who did not signify submission or loss of status for the king or people for whom they acted.<sup>1761</sup> By contrast, the yielding of *géill* by one lord to another did denote the submission of the giver. Nonetheless, it has also been acknowledged that whatever their semantic differences originally, these terms were becoming interchangeable by the tenth century.<sup>1762</sup>

If *gíall* was technically the correct term for a hostage rendered by subordinates in submission to overlords, *aitire* also appears in this sense. In 1048, Úa Máel Sechlainn took seven *aitiri* from Brega, enforcing his authority over them.<sup>1763</sup> Felimid mac

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<sup>1757</sup> A.L.C. 1315.13; *Ann. Conn.* 1315.13; *Ann. Clon.* 1315.

<sup>1758</sup> Lahney Preston-Matto, ‘Queens as political hostages in pre-Norman Ireland: Derbforgaill and the three Gormlaiths’ in *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, cix no. 2 (April 2010), pp 141–61, at 143.

<sup>1759</sup> This may be what is meant by Preston-Matto, but none of her subsequent examples refer to Ireland: Preston-Matto, ‘Queens as political hostages in pre-Norman Ireland’, pp 143–4.

<sup>1760</sup> Kelly, *Guide to early Irish law*, p. 174.

<sup>1761</sup> Robin Stacey Chapman, *The road to judgement: from custom to court in medieval Ireland and Wales* (Philadelphia, 1996), pp 109–10.

<sup>1762</sup> Stacey Chapman, *The road to judgement*, pp 109–110.

<sup>1763</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1048.12.

Cremthainn, king of Munster, was described as someone who could take the ‘*eitrige* of Connacht without battle’, in an entry for 840.<sup>1764</sup> In 880, Flann mac Máel Sechlainn attacked the Laigin and took their *aitiri*,<sup>1765</sup> and in 1111 the Ulaid gave *aitiri* to Domnall Mac Lochlainn for his tribute.<sup>1766</sup> It is clear that in these entries the *aitiri* named had the same function as *géill*. Remarkably, *géill* can also be found where *aitiri* might be expected. In 984, the sons of Aralt mac Gothbrith, who belonged to the Norse of the Hebrides and the Isle of Man, made an agreement with Brian Bóraime to attack Dublin. They exchanged *géill*, rather than *aitiri*, as security of their mutual commitment to the attack.<sup>1767</sup>

There are references to hostages being given to the *comarbae* of Armagh as guarantors of peace agreements between important kings, and, importantly, these were recorded as *aitiri*. Examples can be found under 893, when Máel Brigte mac Tornáin took *aitiri* from the Ulaid and Cenél nEógain, and in 1102 when Domnall mac Amalgada, successor of Patrick, took *aitiri* from both Domnall Mac Lochlainn and Muirchertach Úa Briain to guarantee their commitment to peace. As was noted in the appropriate chapter, he had also been used as a peacemaker in 1097 and 1099, and would be again in 1105.<sup>1768</sup> No mention is made of *aitiri* being taken on these other occasions, though it may well have happened. Here, *aitire* has a semantic difference from *gíall* that was remembered by the annalists even in the early twelfth century.

Some memory of the function of an *aitire* as distinct from *gíall* is also preserved in an entry of 1090, where it is recorded that Muirchertach Úa Briain gave two *aitiri* to Domnall Mac Lochlainn for ‘protection’, as he marched from Brega in Meath westwards.<sup>1769</sup> These were given as guarantors of Úa Briain’s own good conduct towards

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<sup>1764</sup> *A.U.* 840.4: ‘*eitrige Connacht cen cath*’.

<sup>1765</sup> *Chron. Scot.* 880.5.

<sup>1766</sup> *A.U.* 1111.10.

<sup>1767</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 984.2; see *The Two Munsters*, pp 218–19.

<sup>1768</sup> *A.U.* 1097.6; 1099.7; 1105.3; see *The Uí Néill and the North*, pp 138–46.

<sup>1769</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1090.6; *A.F.M.* 1090.11.

the Northern Uí Néill, not in submission to Mac Lochlainn, as the term ‘*anacol*’, translated as ‘protection’ but which can also mean ‘quarter’, surely indicates. On another occasion, in 1144, the use of *aitire* seems to suggest a different meaning to *gíall*. Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair imprisoned his son Ruaidrí and some of the other nobles of Connacht in 1143, before being persuaded to release them by the clergy. Their release came the following year, when it is reported that ‘they were set free for their hostages (*a n-etire*) and their oath and for the honour of the clerics’.<sup>1770</sup>

These were exceptional cases, and there are many other instances supporting the contention that the two terms were used interchangeably in the twelfth century. In 1075, Toirdelbach úa Briain led an army to Ardee, ‘to demand *gíall* from the Airgialla and the Ulaid’.<sup>1771</sup> He may have gone to demand *gíall*, but it is also noted that he returned ‘without *gíall*, without *aitire*’.<sup>1772</sup> In 1101, Muirchertach Úa Briain led an army against the Northern Uí Néill and gave ‘neither *gíall* nor *aitire*’,<sup>1773</sup> as he travelled around Ireland. In these and other similar cases, standard editions of these texts offer ‘hostages or pledges’ as a translation, but the two terms seem to have been given originally as part of a phrase or for emphasis. ‘Without battle, without *gíall*’ and ‘without *géill*, without peace’ also appear.<sup>1774</sup>

The third term, ‘*brága*’ (plural ‘*braighde*’) is also used for hostages in this period. It derives from a term for the neck or throat.<sup>1775</sup> For this reason, it has been suggested that its increasing frequency reflects a growing trend towards the mistreatment of political hostages, but the usage of this term in the annals does not support such a claim.<sup>1776</sup> *Brága* appears in the sense of hostage as early as 882 in *Chron. Scot.* and 1059 in *Ann. Tig.*,

<sup>1770</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1144.7: ‘*ro foslaiced dib ar cind a n-etire 7 a luighe, 7 ar cenn enigh na cleirech*’.

<sup>1771</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1075.3: ‘*gíall for Oirgiallaib & for Ulltaib*’.

<sup>1772</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1075.3: ‘*cen giallo, cen etire*’.

<sup>1773</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1101.2: ‘*ni thard giallu na h-eteri*’.

<sup>1774</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1133.2: ‘*gan geill cen t-sith*’, 1159.11: ‘*cen cath, cen gíall*’.

<sup>1775</sup> O’Rahilly, ‘Some instances of vowel-shortening in Modern Irish’ in *Ériu*, xiii (1942), pp 128–34 at 129–30 & n. 4.

<sup>1776</sup> Brown, *Hugh de Lacy*, p. 61.

though, of course, this may be due to the influence of later copyists.<sup>1777</sup> It occurs under 1113 and 1120, and then becomes the dominant term for hostage from the mid-twelfth century.<sup>1778</sup>

In the period when its usage was mingled with the other terms discussed above, there is nothing to suggest that those recorded as *braighde* were treated especially harshly. An entry of 1120 in *Ann. Inisf.* speaks both of *géill* being taken from Osraige by Tadc Mac Cárthaig and *braighde* of Osraige being sent by the Uí Briain to Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair.<sup>1779</sup> When Úa Conchobair executed the hostages of Desmond in 1124, the term used in *Ann. Inisf.* was *géill*.<sup>1780</sup> In other collections recording the same event, it was reported that Úa Conchobair executed the *géill* of Desmond, but respite was given to the *aitiri (do etirib)* of the other kingdoms.<sup>1781</sup>

When Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair executed the hostages of Leinster in 1170, they were indeed called *braighde*.<sup>1782</sup> Among them was Conchobar Mac Murchada, a son of the king of Leinster and a very high-status hostage. When Úa Conchobair took Conchobar Mac Murchada the previous year, he was called a *gíall*.<sup>1783</sup> As with the other evidence, this simply reflects interchangeability.

It seems that *brága* was a more general term than either *gíall* or *aitire*. Unlike *gíall* and *aitire*, *brága* had no legal connotations, and as we have seen, even though *gíall* and *aitire* had become interchangeable in general, there were still occasions when a different meaning was remembered and intended by the use of *aitire*. Whereas the term ‘neither *gíall* nor *aitire*’, was commonly used in reference to the campaigns of the major kings, *brága* was almost always a standalone term.<sup>1784</sup> Its growth in use also coincides with a

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<sup>1777</sup> *Chron. Scot.* 882.4; *Ann. Tig.* 1059.11.

<sup>1778</sup> *Chron. Scot.* 1113.6; *Ann. Inisf.* 1120.4.

<sup>1779</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1120.4.

<sup>1780</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1124.6; see Connacht, p. 49.

<sup>1781</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1124.4.

<sup>1782</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1170.14.

<sup>1783</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1169.2. ‘*a n-gellsine*’, or ‘in hostageship’; see Introduction, pp 1–3, Connacht, pp 73–5.

<sup>1784</sup> For an exception see *Ann. Inisf.* 1311.5, for example.



virtual end to the use of *aitire* as an independent term – though it still occasionally appeared in the phrases discussed above. There are, as such, no connotations to *brága* as a term that ought to be borne in mind for the discussion of hostages other than this.

Only one woman was explicitly called a hostage in the annals. That was the daughter of Eochaid Mac Dúinn Sléibe, who was taken as a hostage by Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn in 1165.<sup>1785</sup> She was recorded to have been a *brága*,<sup>1786</sup> (*a ingin féin i m-braightechus*) but elsewhere in the same entry she and other hostages are called *géill*, again suggesting interchangeability.<sup>1787</sup> The circumstances of her surrender to Mac Lochlainn were somewhat exceptional, and have already been discussed in the chapter on the North.<sup>1788</sup> Donnchad Uá Cerbaill induced Mac Lochlainn to accept the return of Mac Dúinn Sléibe as king of Ulaid, the latter having only recently been ousted by Mac Lochlainn. To accept this unsatisfactory arrangement, Mac Lochlainn demanded a son from every regional king in Ulaid and Mac Dúinn Sléibe's daughter. In other words, the demand of a daughter as a hostage was exceptional, just as was the demand for a hostage from every regional king.

In 2006, Anthony Candon argued that the 1053 capture of Mór ingen Uí Chonchobair Failge from Gilla Phátraic, king of Osraige, by Conchobar úa Máel Sechlainn, was another occasion where a female hostage was concerned, and not an abduction.<sup>1789</sup> This argument provoked a reinterpretation of other cases of apparent abduction. Preston-Matto subsequently contended that the so-called three Gormlaihth and Derbforgaill ingen Uí Máel Sechlainn all represented hostages in their respective contexts.<sup>1790</sup> There are no obvious grounds, however, for the comparison between these women.

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<sup>1785</sup> A.U. 1165.10.

<sup>1786</sup> A.U. 1165.10.

<sup>1787</sup> A.U. 1165.10.

<sup>1788</sup> The Uí Néill and the North, p. 157.

<sup>1789</sup> Anthony Candon, 'Power, politics and polygamy: women and marriage in late pre-Norman Ireland', in Bracken and Ó Riain-Raedel (eds), *Ireland and Europe in the twelfth century*, pp 106–27 at 123–25.

<sup>1790</sup> Preston-Matto, 'Queens as political hostages', pp 141–61.

There is good reason to accept the idea that Mór was indeed a hostage, though she was not referred to by any of the three relevant terms when she was captured in 1053.<sup>1791</sup> She was taken by Conchobar úa Máel Sechlainn, a man known to have been her husband some time before, from Gilla Phátraic, king of Osraige. There is no record of how she came into Gilla Phátraic's custody, and so it is impossible to say for certain that she was not his wife by this time.<sup>1792</sup> Her status as a hostage is based on two points. The first is that she was a person of demonstrable political influence in her husband's circle before this incident.<sup>1793</sup> The second is that her recorded children were all by Conchobar úa Máel Sechlainn, reducing the likelihood of a second marriage.<sup>1794</sup>

The analogy between Mór and Derbforgaill does not hold up to scrutiny. The idea that Meath was in 'complete disarray' after Máel Sechlainn Úa Máel Sechlainn's death in 1155 justified Preston-Matto in suggesting that Derbforgaill could be characterised as the 'main legitimate representative of the kingdom of Temair' at that time.<sup>1795</sup> She further inferred that Derbforgaill had major standing before his death, including at the time of her abduction in 1152.

The exact dynamic at play in Meath will be discussed below so far as it relates to Derbforgaill's substantial donations, but here it suffices to say that Mór's hypothesised importance was not to her natal family, the Uí Chonchobair Failge, but rather to her first (and possibly only) husband Conchobar úa Máel Sechlainn.<sup>1796</sup> The case being made for Derbforgaill is therefore quite different. It is also somewhat confused between her importance to her natal family and her importance to her husband.<sup>1797</sup>

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<sup>1791</sup> *A.F.M.* 1053.12.

<sup>1792</sup> For the theme of aristocratic re-marriages, see below, pp 403–27.

<sup>1793</sup> She had witnessed a land grant of his that has been dated 1033x49: Mac Niocaill, 'The Irish "charters"', pp 157–8.

<sup>1794</sup> *Banshenchas* [part two], p. 190.

<sup>1795</sup> Preston-Matto, 'Queens as political hostages', p. 158.

<sup>1796</sup> Candon, 'Power, politics and polygamy', pp 123–5.

<sup>1797</sup> See below, pp 325–6; Preston-Matto, 'Derbforgaill's literary heritage: can you blame her?' in J.F. Eska (ed.), *Law, literature and society: CSANA yearbook 7* (Dublin, 2008), pp 77–92 at 89.

The appeal by another historian that ‘Derbforgaill is mentioned far more often in contemporary accounts than her mediocre importance as wife of Tigernán Úa Ruairc, a minor provincial king, should entitle her to’ is a misreading of her relationship with her husband.<sup>1798</sup> That relationship was not antagonistic, nor, it should be added, was Úa Ruairc a minor provincial king.<sup>1799</sup> The vision of the two in opposition probably owes something to a throwaway comment made by Ó Corráin, who wrote that ‘Mac Murrough added insult to injury by abducting Tigernán’s wife, Dervorgilla, who according to some of the annals was more than a willing victim, for Tigernán was as difficult in love as he was in politics’.<sup>1800</sup>

Ó Corráin’s reading was undoubtedly based on the *Ann. Clon.*, which report of Derbforgaill’s capture that ‘shee was procured and enduced thereunto by her unadvised brother Melaghlin for some abuses of her husband Tyernan don before’, but the expression, ‘for abuses don before’ is not a reference to abuse of Derbforgaill.<sup>1801</sup> It is a description of military action against the Uí Máel Sechlainn that had antagonised Derbforgaill’s male relations, especially Máel Sechlainn Úa Máel Sechlainn, but not Derbforgaill herself. The expression is used in this way elsewhere in *Ann. Clon.*<sup>1802</sup>

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<sup>1798</sup> Ní Ghrádaigh, “‘But what exactly did she give?’: Derbforgaill and the nuns’ church at Clonmacnoise’, in Heather King (ed.), *Clonmacnoise studies II* (Dublin, 2003), pp 175–207 at 177.

<sup>1799</sup> More recently, Ní Ghrádaigh criticised two other historians for exaggerating Derbforgaill’s importance at the expense of her husband, suggesting that here perhaps ‘an underlying feminism distorts the picture’: Ní Ghrádaigh, ‘Review: *Law, Literature, and Society: CSANA yearbook 7*. Edited by J.F. Eska’, in *Classics Ireland*, xv (2008), pp 100–3 at 102; On Úa Ruairc’s importance, see for example, Veach, ‘Henry II’s grant of Meath to Hugh de Lacy’, in *Ríocht na Midhe*, xviii (2007), pp 67–94 at 77: ‘Tigernán Ua Ruairc was as great a threat as there could be found in Ireland’.

<sup>1800</sup> Ó Corráin, *Ireland before the Normans*, p. 161.

<sup>1801</sup> *Ann. Clon.* 1152.

<sup>1802</sup> *Ann. Clon.* p. 19: ‘Then Aaron the High Priest of the Jewes told him that they were Jewes, and how his Brother Moyses by the Helpe of God Brought diuers pleagues on the Egyptians for their abuses’; *Ann. Clon.* sub anno 1136: ‘Dermott mcMorrogh king of Leinster accompanied with all the forces of the Danes came to Westmeath to be revenged of the o’Melaghlin for their abuses don to him before’; As noted in the introduction of this thesis, the Annals of Clonmacnoise survives only in a seventeenth-century English translation and the use of this expression seems to have been characteristic either of the original set of annals or of its translator, Conell Mageoghagan, because it does not appear in other collections.

Derbforgaill also returned to Úa Ruairc after this episode, in 1153, even though divorce was easily obtainable.

There are other points that tell against the interpretation of Derbforgaill as a hostage.

Diarmait Mac Murchada's English-supported campaign of 1170–1 has created the false impression that he was a king who regularly battled for national supremacy and took the hostages of other provincial rulers.<sup>1803</sup> In fact, on the contrary, throughout his career he was more narrowly confined and, before 1170, had never campaigned to be king of Ireland.<sup>1804</sup> This is relevant because his march against Tigernán Úa Ruairc has been presented as a logical extension of his authority. On no prior occasion, though, had Mac Murchada invaded Bréifne or attempted to take Úa Ruairc's hostages. When the two had clashed in the past it had been in Meath,<sup>1805</sup> where Mac Murchada had generally been bested by Úa Ruairc, or possibly also in Leinster, where Úa Ruairc had done a great deal of damage as a deputy of Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair.<sup>1806</sup>

Mac Murchada's presence in Bréifne is to be explained with reference to a recent association with the king of Connacht Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair, which involved him in affairs outside of his typical orbit, and not as an independent campaign against Úa Ruairc. In 1151, Diarmait Mac Murchada accompanied Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair as he marched against the Uí Briain, and so was present at the Battle of Móin Mór.<sup>1807</sup> After the defeat of the Uí Briain in that battle, suzerainty of Munster fell to Úa Conchobair and

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<sup>1803</sup> See for example, Flanagan, 'High-kings with opposition, 1072–1166', pp 932–3.

<sup>1804</sup> See Leinster, pp 341–59.

<sup>1805</sup> See for instance, *Ann. Clon.* 1136.

<sup>1806</sup> *A.L.C.* 1128.5, 1128.6; *A.U.* 1128.6: 'A raid was made by Tairdelbach ua Conchobuir into Laigin, and he plundered Loch Garman; thence he passed around Laigin to Áth Cliath, and destroyed many cattle along that way; from Áth Cliath he went to his house again. The disrepute of that expedition lies on Tigernán ua Ruairc', from the Irish '*Creach-sluagadh la Tairrdelbach H. Concobuir i l-Laighnibh co roacht Loch Carman aisseig timcell Laigen co h-Ath Cliath 7 do-roine bo-dhibadh mór in chonair-sin. O Ath Cliath da thigh doriisi. Atá tra michlu an t-shluaghaidh-sin for Thigernan H. Ruairc*'.

<sup>1807</sup> *A.F.M.* 1151.14; *Ann. Tig.* 1151.3; *Ann. Clon.* 1141; see Connacht, p. 53; *The Two Munsters*, pp 245–6.

not to Mac Murchada.<sup>1808</sup> Custody of hostages would presumably have gone along with this.

The move against Úa Ruairc in 1152 was primarily conducted by Úa Conchobair and Mac Lochlainn, with Mac Murchada again providing auxiliary support.<sup>1809</sup> Much as in the case of the Uí Briain, Úa Ruairc's hostages were taken by Úa Conchobair. He conducted them to Athlone, a base of the kingdom of Connacht, and Derbforgaill was not among them.<sup>1810</sup> That the capture of Derbforgaill was not part of the plan is suggested by the facts that it was Mac Murchada who took her, not Úa Conchobair, that Úa Conchobair marched to Leinster to secure her release the following year, and the subsequent lack of cooperation between Úa Conchobair and Mac Murchada.<sup>1811</sup>

If Mac Murchada did not have form where the capture of hostages in Bréifne was concerned, he did for abduction and rape. In 1132, asserting his claim to the provincial kingship for the first time, he raided Kildare, the most important monastic community in Leinster. Its abbess, Mór, had been installed by Úa Conchobair Failge in 1127 at the expense of a daughter of Cerball Úa Fáeláin, king of Uí Fáeláin. Mac Murchada married Sadb, another daughter of Úa Fáeláin, around 1132, linking his provincial ambitions to that sector of north Leinster.<sup>1812</sup> Now, during his attack, Mac Murchada had Mór 'carried off a prisoner, and put into a man's bed'.<sup>1813</sup> If the complementary account in *Chronicon Scotorum* is to be believed, it was Mac Murchada's own bed. It reported that 'the successor of Brigit was betrayed and carried off by Diarmait son of Murchad and forced to submit

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<sup>1808</sup> *A.F.M.* 1151.14, 1151.22, 1152.9; *Ann. Tig.* 1151.3; *Ann. Clon.* 1141; see Connacht, pp 53–4.

<sup>1809</sup> *A.F.M.* 1152.10; *Ann. Tig.* 1152.6.

<sup>1810</sup> *A.F.M.* 1152.11; see Connacht, pp 58–9; Comparative Analysis, pp 488–9.

<sup>1811</sup> *A.F.M.* 1153.11.

<sup>1812</sup> Flanagan, 'Mac Murchada, Diarmait [Dermot MacMurrough; called Diarmait na nGall]' in *O.D.N.B.*, accessed online (<https://doi-org.jproxy.nuim.ie/10.1093/ref:odnb/17697>) (19 March 2019).

<sup>1813</sup> *A.L.C.* 1132.1: 'an caillech féin do breith a m-broid, & a tabairt a leabaidh fir'.

to him'.<sup>1814</sup> It is clear something similar occurred in 1152, despite (or perhaps especially because of) Derbforgaill's importance to her husband.<sup>1815</sup>

Abduction was essentially characterised by rape of the captured woman, usually implied but sometimes explicitly reported, and the consequent humiliation of an important male relation. Though the type of abduction discussed in the law-texts envisions this individual as a father, in political circumstances it was almost exclusively a husband.

Hostage-taking, by comparison, was intended to provide security for a future relationship. Different types of hostage satisfied different requirements in Gaelic Ireland, though some simplification led to a degree of interchangeability between the terms.

There is only one certain case of a woman being employed as a hostage, and the circumstances of that were themselves exceptional. There is merit to the argument that Mór ingen Uí Chonchobair Failge was also a hostage, but there is very little to support the idea that many women were used in this role and even less for the idea that Derbforgaill was among them.

Derbforgaill's status as an abductee is all but confirmed by her husband's conduct in 1166–7, as shown in the chapter on Connacht. Úa Ruairc was instrumental in forcing Mac Murchada to flee from Ireland, leading two expeditions into Leinster: the first as an ally of Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair, and the second, after Úa Conchobair had returned home to Connacht, which was specifically intended 'to take revenge for Ó Ruairc's wife'.<sup>1816</sup> As Úa Ruairc approached, many of Mac Murchada's nobles rebelled and when he saw that 'they wanted to capture him, to hand him over and sell him to Ua Ruairc', he fled from Ireland.<sup>1817</sup> He returned in 1167, but the first wave of foreign mercenaries proved

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<sup>1814</sup> *Chron. Scot.* 1132.9: '*Comarba Brigde do brath co ruccadh do Diarmait mac Murchadha et a thabairt dia riar ar egin*'; Etchingham, 'Kildare before the Normans: "an episcopal and conventual see"', in *Journal of the County Kildare Archaeological Society*, xix (2000/01), pp 7–26, at 21.

<sup>1815</sup> See below, p. 377.

<sup>1816</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1166.13: '*do dighail mna h-Úi Ruairc fair*'; see Introduction, pp 1–3, Connacht, pp 57, 72–3.

<sup>1817</sup> *The Deeds*, p. 58 ll 210–11: '*E que voleint [le] prendre, A O Roric liverer e vendre*'.

insufficient to resist Úa Conchobair, Úa Ruairc, and Diarmait Úa Máel Sechlainn. Confronted with their army, Mac Murchada paid Úa Ruairc 100 ounces of gold ‘in compensation for his wife’.<sup>1818</sup> It is perhaps needless to add that these events are inconsistent with the hypothesis that Derbforgaill had been a hostage.

The political power wielded by women is only visible occasionally, but there are plenty of indications that it existed. The life of Gormlaith (d. 1030), who was associated with three major kings, and probably married to all, in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries, is often regarded as a notable example of female political influence. Gormlaith, like other women of the same name from the ninth and tenth centuries, was turned into a literary character after her own time. Caution is certainly needed when discussing such figures and making inferences about the political importance of women in general in medieval Ireland.

To take perhaps the most important story about her from literary sources, she is depicted antagonising her brother Máel Morda and inciting him to rebel against her husband Brian Bóraime in *Cog. Gaedhel*.<sup>1819</sup> It has been pointed out that the conclusion that this was the cause of the subsequent rebellion is one made by historians rather than in the original literature, but the implication was always present.<sup>1820</sup> As Duffy remarked, we are in no position to say how the historical Gormlaith relates to the literary character, and whether she really had as important and active a role as is depicted, but there is good reason to disbelieve her role in inciting the rebellion.<sup>1821</sup>

Despite this difficulty, the fact of the growth of a literary tradition around Gormlaith and her known associations with three different important kings, including both Brian Bóraime and Máel Sechnaill Mór mac Domnaill, is enough to support the view that she

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<sup>1818</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1167.5: ‘i l-lógh a mna’.

<sup>1819</sup> *Cog. Gaedhel*, pp 142–5.

<sup>1820</sup> Ní Mhaonaigh, ‘Tales of three Gormlaiths in medieval Irish literature’ in *Ériu*, lii (2002), pp 1–24 at 20–21.

<sup>1821</sup> Irish Times, 10 April 2014; Duffy, *Brian Boru and the battle of Clontarf*, pp 170–1.

was of importance and held some influence in her own right. The same may be said of other women, even those with a smaller footprint in the historical and literary records. Indeed, it appears that wives were regularly members of their husbands' entourages. There is no indication that it was considered a dishonourable or shameful practice, and this alone may well underlie its prevalence.

A woman discussed above in relation to hostage taking, Mór ingen Chonchobair Failge, wife of Conchobar úa Máel Sechlainn, witnessed a land grant by her husband in the eleventh century.<sup>1822</sup> It is this fact that supports the idea that she was politically active, and consequently the argument that she was later used as a hostage. In the murder of Amalgaid Mac Áeda in 1103, an active role is attributed to his own mother as well as other members of his family. They carried this out in retaliation for the murder of a foster-brother, one of the Uí Chonchobair, by Amalgaid.<sup>1823</sup> In 1153, when the ship of Flaithbertach Úa Canannáin, king of Cenél Conaill, foundered off the west coast, both he and his wife, Dub Coblaid, a daughter of Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair, were drowned.<sup>1824</sup>

Another apparently influential woman followed in Cenél Conaill soon after:

Flaithbertach Úa Máel Doraid's wife was assassinated by the sons of Úa Cairelláin in 1176. Remarkably, she was the sole recorded victim of this attack.<sup>1825</sup>

In 1210, when King John was in Ireland, the king of Connacht, Cathal Crobderg Úa Conchobair, offered to bring his son Áed to a meeting, and John expressed an interest in this proposal. When Cathal returned home, however, he took counsel from his wife, Mór ingen Uí Briain, and his people. They advised Cathal not to bring Áed to the meeting, fearing John might seize Áed as a hostage. Cathal followed their advice, and John took umbrage at the breach of agreement. Their counsel was described as bad in *A.L.C.*, because of John's reaction, and it may well be wondered whether Mór's part was noted

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<sup>1822</sup> Mac Niocaill, "The Irish "charters"", pp 157–8.

<sup>1823</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1103.6.

<sup>1824</sup> *A.F.M.* 1153.6; *Ann. Tig.* 1153.3.

<sup>1825</sup> *A.F.M.* 1176.4.



as an implied criticism. The wording, however, suggests the collective adoption of the position, and not an attack on Mór in particular.<sup>1826</sup>

In 1224, a daughter of Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair, who had married Henry de Blund after the death of her first husband, Hugh de Lacy (d. 1186), was captured when Cathal Úa Ragallaig took Cloughoughter Castle.<sup>1827</sup> Cathal Úa Ragallaig used English support to take the castle, which lay on an island, and the prisoners taken in the assault came into English custody. At the same time Áed mac Cathail Crobdeirg had just taken sole authority in Connacht and attacked English castles.<sup>1828</sup> The English made an envoy of Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair's daughter, charging her to bring her nephew back to peace or face her own continued imprisonment.<sup>1829</sup> Even though the primary rivalry among the Uí Chonchobair in this period was between descendants of Cathal Crobdeirg and descendants of Ruaidrí, her diplomatic mission appears to have been a success.

In 1232, Domnall Cairprech Mac Cárthaig committed the 'unneighbourly' acts of murder and raiding against Úa Mathgamna and his sons at the instigation of Magnus Úa Cobthaig and Úa Muirchertaigh's daughter, the latter presumably the wife of Úa Cobthaig.<sup>1830</sup> The same Domnall Cairprech was killed on 29 August 1253, and another woman played a part on that occasion. Sadb ingen Uí Briain, wife of Séfraid Úa

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<sup>1826</sup> A.L.C. 1210.11: 'When O'Conchobhair arrived at his own place, the counsel which he, and his wife, and his people adopted was, not to take the son to the king, although this was the worst counsel. However, when O'Conchobhair went to the king of the Saxons, and did not take his son with him, Diarmaid, son of Conchobhar Mac Diarmada, king of Magh-Luirg, and Conchobhar O'hEghra, king of Luighne of Connacht, and Find O'Carmacan, a man of trust to O'Conchobhair, and Toirberd, son of a Gall-Gaeidhel, one of O'Conchobhair's stewards, were apprehended by the king of the Saxons', translated from the Irish '*O ranic .H. Conchobhair ina ionadh féin, issí comairle do roine féin 7 a bhen 7 a mhuinntir, gan an mac do bhreth a g-cenn an rí, ger bhí sin comairle ba messa. Acht chena, ó ranic .H. Conchobhair dochum rí Saxan, 7 nach ruc a mac leis, ro gabad le rí Saxan Diarmaid mac Conchobhair mic Diarmada, rí Mhuighe Luirg, 7 Conchobar .H. h-Eghra, rí Luighne Connacht, 7 Find .H. Carmacan, fer grádha d' U Conchobhair, 7 Toirberd mac Gall Ghoeidhil, reachtaire do reachtairibh h-I Conchobhair*'; see also Connacht, pp 105–7.

<sup>1827</sup> *Cal.doc.Ire., 1171–1251*, pp 182–4 nos 1203, 1204; Walter Waddington Shirley (ed.), *Royal and other historical letters illustrative of the reign of Henry III* (2 vols, London, 1862–6), i, pp 500–3 no. 833; A.L.C. 1225.4, 1226.9; *Ann. Conn.* 1226.13.

<sup>1828</sup> A.L.C. 1224.11; *Ann. Conn.* 1224.14.

<sup>1829</sup> *Cal.doc.Ire., 1171–1251*, pp 182–3 no. 1203; Shirley (ed.), *Royal and other historical letters*, pp 500–3: no. 833; Connacht, p. 112.

<sup>1830</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1232.2: '*micomarsanachta*'.

Donnchada, was rumoured to have had a hand in the affair.<sup>1831</sup> The story was certainly believed by Fíngen Mac Cárthaig, son of Domnall Cairprech. He assassinated Séfraid and Sadb the very next year through the by-now familiar method of burning the roof of their house.<sup>1832</sup> A daughter of Mac Cárthaig, perhaps of Domnall or Fíngen, was notable for murdering her husband some years later, in 1266.<sup>1833</sup>

These scattered references to the influence of women from the west and the south are mirrored by later occurrences in the north. There, record survives of remarkable events connected with Derbforgaill ingen Magnusa Uí Chonchobair, wife of Áed Úa Domnaill, king of Tír Conaill. Derbforgaill counselled her husband to attack Cairpre Dromma Cliab in 1315, while she herself employed *Gall Óglaig*, Gallowglass mercenaries, to attack at the same time.<sup>1834</sup> And though Áed Úa Domnaill made peace with Ruaidrí mac Domnaill Uí Chonchobair the following year, 1316, Derbforgaill retained her mercenaries. Despite the peace agreement made by her husband, she arranged the assassination of Áa Conchobair in 1316.<sup>1835</sup> Derbforgaill herself also died in 1316, though whether this related to her military actions is not clear.<sup>1836</sup>

The other Derbforgaill discussed above is also notable for her demonstrable importance to her husband. The monk Gilla Mo Dutu Úa Caiside, associated with the monasteries at Ardbraccan in Meath and later Daminis (Devinish island on Lough Erne), was the author of several poetical compositions relevant to the present discussion; one referencing both Tigernán Úa Ruairc and Derbforgaill (the metrical *Banshenchas*, a genealogical record of prominent women and their sons, which we will meet below), and another referencing Úa Ruairc only (*Éri óg inis na náem*).<sup>1837</sup>

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<sup>1831</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1253.1.

<sup>1832</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1254.2; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1254.1.

<sup>1833</sup> *A.F.M.* 1266.7; *A.L.C.* 1266.2; *Ann. Conn.* 1266.3; *Ann. Clon.* 1266; *Ann. Inisf.* 1267.2.

<sup>1834</sup> *A.L.C.* 1315.21; *Ann. Conn.* 1315.20; *Ann. Clon.* 1315.

<sup>1835</sup> *A.L.C.* 1316.1; *Ann. Conn.* 1316.2; *Ann. Clon.* 1316.

<sup>1836</sup> *A.F.M.* 1316.5; *A.L.C.* 1316.6; *Ann. Conn.* 1316.9; *Ann. Clon.* 1316; *A.U.* 1313.4.

<sup>1837</sup> See Muireann Ní Bhrolcháin, *An Banshenchas Filíochta*, (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, University College Galway, 1977), §§265–6; R.A. Stewart MacAlister (ed.) *Lebor Gabála Erenn* (5 vols., Dublin, 1938–56), §77, pp 562–3.

Modern consensus opinion is that Tigernán and Derbforgaill were dual patrons of Gilla Mo Dutu, and further, that *Éri Óg inis na náem* and the metrical *Banshenchas* were respectively dedicated companion pieces.<sup>1838</sup> The focus on kings in one and noble women in the other, and praise of both Tigernán and Derbforgaill in the metrical *Banshenchas* is suggestive of this idea. On the basis that there is evidence of Úa Ruairc producing anti-Uí Máel Sechlainn propaganda, it may be further supposed that praise of Derbforgaill's parents, which also appears, was decidedly for her appreciation over her husband's.<sup>1839</sup> Gilla Mo Dutu's Meath origins should not be overlooked here either, however.

As such, as regards both violence against women and female influence in political life, there is more information to work with than might reasonably be expected at the outset of such an enquiry. Over the course of the entire medieval period, different forms of violence against women were recorded, including abduction and hostage-taking, but most commonly assassination.

On the face of it, it seems reasonable to suppose that most women killed were simply collateral damage; victims of the methods used to kill their husbands. There is no significant difference between the entries recording women as victims of assassinations alongside the principal target, and entries making no mention of women. Indeed, as we have seen, on occasion female victims are recorded in one chronicle and excluded in another recording the same event.

On the other hand, as has also been shown, only names of importance were ever recorded for these events. There is one recorded instance of a woman being targeted on her own, and another of a woman wielding military power in her own right. In the former case, it may have been a result of her own political influence, or perhaps, like an abduction, to

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<sup>1838</sup> Ní Bhrolchain, 'The manuscript tradition of the *Banshenchas*', in *Ériu*, xxxiii (1982), pp 109–35 at 110; Murray, 'Gilla Mo Dutu Úa Caiside', in Carey, Máire Herbert, and Murray (eds), *Cín Chille Cúile: texts, saints and places. Essays in honour of Pádraig Ó Riain* (Aberystwyth, 2004), pp 150–62 at 155.

<sup>1839</sup> Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Bréifne bias in Cogad Gáedel re Gallaib', in *Ériu*, xliii (1992), pp 135–58.

humiliate her husband. It would not be a complete surprise, though, if it did reflect her own authority. There are plenty of examples throughout the centuries to indicate that wives were regularly members of their husbands' entourages and councils. It seems that the appearance of women in the records of assassinations corresponds with this role in some cases.

Contrary to the interpretations of some modern historians, both the trends of violence against women and the accounts of women's participation in political life clearly show that supporting their husbands was the governing aim of women's political and general lives. When a woman was killed, abducted, or even taken hostage, the action was almost always directed against her husband. Only very occasionally do we find an action taken against a woman that is ostensibly against herself alone, or even against her father. When women wielded political power, it was also through their husbands' entourages and in advancement of their husbands' careers.

## [5.2: Women and Wealth]

While, as far as women were concerned, legal capacity was limited, and wealth strictly controlled, there is evidence to show patronage of the church was always an outlet for its use.<sup>1840</sup> In the very earliest Irish historical documents there are references to women disposing of their own movable wealth. In his confession, Patrick tells how he felt obliged to return the gifts left by pious women on the altar because he did not wish to give anyone reason to criticise his ministry.<sup>1841</sup>

There are other records of women donating to the church in early Christian Ireland, many of which are to be found in hagiographies. For instance, the *Bethu Brigte* records a cow

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<sup>1840</sup> Binchy, 'The legal capacity of women in regard to contracts', in Rudolf Thurneysen, Nancy Power and Dillon (eds), *Studies in Early Irish Law* (Dublin, 1936), pp 2017–34 at 225, quoted in Bitel, 'Women's donations to the churches in early Ireland' in the *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, cxiv (1983), pp 5–23 at 9–10; see also *C.I.H.* 2103.35–6; Binchy, *Companion to the Corpus Iuris Hibernici* (Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 2005), pp 85, 306–7; Fergus Kelly, *Guide to early Irish law*, p. 121.

<sup>1841</sup> Ludwig Bieler (ed.), *Clavis Patricii II: Libri epistolarum Sancti Patricii episcopi*, (R.I.A., Dublin, 1952), §49, p. 85.

gifted to Brigit by a woman, and of apples and sloes given to Brigit by two nuns.<sup>1842</sup> In a life of Finian of Clonard, translated by Stokes from the Book of Lismore, Brigit gave Finian a gold ring as he was leaving Kildare. This ring was of value, and Finian refused it to demonstrate his lack of interest in worldly possessions, but Brigit counselled him that though he refused it, he would need it.<sup>1843</sup>

A life of Brigit from the same collection mentions the donation of a silver chain to Brigit by the queen of Crimthann mac Énna Cennselaig, king of Leinster.<sup>1844</sup> Similar donations are found in poetry and an expectation of such gifts from women also appears in the promulgated law-tract *Cáin Adamnáin*. It demanded that all women, from the wife of a lord (*bantóisech*) to an unfree woman (*bandoíre*), regularly donate according to their ability.<sup>1845</sup> The amount expected from the wife of a lord was even specified: a scruple, or one twenty-fourth of an ounce, of gold.<sup>1846</sup>

Bitel's collection of references to female donations to the church also includes women's surrender of themselves as persons to the church, a factor which is arguably just as relevant, but the examples above have been selected to show material rather than personal endowments.<sup>1847</sup> Such material contributions were minor, being for the most part ornaments, food and drink, an animal or a small number of animals, and small amounts of gold. The few relevant annal entries excluded from Bitel's analysis also correspond to this pattern. For instance, a cup of silver engraved by the daughter of Ruaidrí na Saide Buide Úa Conchobair was given to Clonmacnoise in 1129,<sup>1848</sup> and in

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<sup>1842</sup> Donncha Ó hAodha (ed.), *Bethu Brigte* (Dublin, 1978), §32, pp 12, 29.

<sup>1843</sup> Stokes (ed.), *Lives of saints from the Book of Lismore* (Oxford, 1890), pp 78, 225 ll 2613–16.

<sup>1844</sup> Stokes, *Lives of Saints*, pp 48, 195 ll 1595–6.

<sup>1845</sup> Gilbert Márkus (ed. & trans.), *Adomnán's 'Law of the Innocents' – Cáin Adomnáin: a seventh century law for the protection of non-combatants* (Glasgow, 1997), §24, p. 13; Kuno Meyer (ed.), *Cáin Adamnáin* (Oxford, 1905), §24, pp 13–15.

<sup>1846</sup> Meyer (ed.), *Cáin Adamnáin*, p. 14: 'screpald óir'.

<sup>1847</sup> Bitel, 'Women's donations', pp 18–22.

<sup>1848</sup> *A.F.M.* 1129.12; *Ann. Clon.* 1108.

1153 Mac Duinn Sléibe's wife gave an offering of a single ounce of gold to Flaithbertach Úa Brolcháin, successor of Colm Cille.<sup>1849</sup>

Even gifts such as these had value relative to the wealth women could expect to hold in medieval Ireland. A woman's personal holdings were always small compared to male contemporaries of the same class and derived primarily from her marriage. Categories of marriage were distinguished according to the wealth contributed by each participant, and legal capacity also depended on this factor; a man or woman who did not contribute equally to their marriage was subject to limitations on legal competence.<sup>1850</sup> For most of the medieval period, though, a marriage of joint authority (*lánamnas comthinchuir*), resulting from joint contribution, was the most common type, at least among the nobility.

Describing the marriage practices of medieval Ireland in this way exaggerates the independence of women, however. As Jaski argued, 'the property she brought into the marriage did not come from her own assets – a woman usually had little or no private possessions which she could control freely – but from *coibche* given to her by her husband, which in an earlier period was given to her father'.<sup>1851</sup> Jaski elsewhere conceded that 'it may also be that the family made this contribution or dowry of their own accord, called *tinchor* or *tinól* in the legal texts'.<sup>1852</sup> The '*coibche*' was a 'bride-price', later 'bride-gift', or payment associated with formal marriage. Though its value is nowhere recorded in the original laws, according to later legal commentators it equalled

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<sup>1849</sup> *A.F.M.* 1153.4.

<sup>1850</sup> See Kelly, *Guide to early Irish law*, pp 70–3.

<sup>1851</sup> Jaski, *Early Irish kingship and succession*, p. 144.

<sup>1852</sup> Jaski, 'Marriage laws in the early Middle Ages', in C.E. Meek and Simms (eds), *The fragility of her sex? – medieval Irish women in their European context* (Dublin, 1996), pp 24–5; *C.I.H.* 1948.7–11, 1949.8–12. Presumably a *tinchor* or *tinól* that took the place of a *coibche* would be equal in value.

the bride's honour-price, which was half that of her father.<sup>1853</sup> Following marriage, a woman had half the honour-price of her husband.<sup>1854</sup>

The link between *coibche* and a woman's honour-price, calculated as a fraction of her father's, must have impacted the wealth held by noble women of the highest class in subsequent centuries, because, as we shall now see, the honour price of provincial kings inflated considerably between the codification of the law-texts and the twelfth century. The law tract *Uraicecht Bec*, dating to the ninth or early tenth century,<sup>1855</sup> reported that the king of Munster had an honour-price of fourteen *cumala*,<sup>1856</sup> a value which was elsewhere attributed to provincial kings in general.<sup>1857</sup> An earlier law tract, *Bretha Nemed toísech*, from the eighth century,<sup>1858</sup> gave twenty-one *cumala* for a supreme king,<sup>1859</sup> though this does not necessarily equate with a provincial king since yet another legal tract, *Míadshlechta*, perhaps eighth century in date,<sup>1860</sup> provided a further increment for a king of Ireland, called a *tríath*, whose honour-price was placed at five *cumala* of red gold.<sup>1861</sup> A *cumal* was a unit of value, originally meaning a female slave. Allowing for variance and change over time, it has been estimated to equate roughly to somewhere

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<sup>1853</sup> Ó Corráin, 'Marriage in early Ireland', in Art Cosgrove (ed.), *Marriage in Ireland* (Dublin, 1985), pp 5–24 at 16.

<sup>1854</sup> *C.I.H.* 427; Ó Corráin, 'Women and the law in early Ireland', in Mary O'Dowd and Sabine Wichert (eds) *Chattel, servant or citizen: women's status in church, state and society* (Belfast, 1995), pp 45–57 at 50.

<sup>1855</sup> Breatnach, 'Law' in McCone and Simms (eds), *Progress in Medieval Irish Studies*, p. 119.

<sup>1856</sup> Kelly, *Guide to early Irish law*, p. 17; *C.I.H.* 1617.33.

<sup>1857</sup> Kelly, *Guide to early Irish law*, p. 17; *C.I.H.* 568.26, 2307.34.

<sup>1858</sup> Breatnach, 'Canon Law and Secular Law in Early Ireland: The Significance of Bretha Nemed', in *Peritia*, iii (1984), pp 439–59; Fangzhe Qiu, 'Manuscript contexts of early Irish law tracts: a case study on Uraicecht Becc', in *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium*, xxxv (2015), pp 150–71 at 160.

<sup>1859</sup> Kelly, *Guide to early Irish law*, p. 18 n. 6; *C.I.H.* 2212.37.

<sup>1860</sup> MacNeill, 'Ancient Irish law. The law of status or franchise' in *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, xxxvi C (1923), pp 265–316 at 311.

<sup>1861</sup> Kelly, *Guide to early Irish law*, p. 18 n. 10; *C.I.H.* 583.7–12.

between two and four cows, or three ounces of silver.<sup>1862</sup> It may also have had a land value of roughly thirty-five statute acres.<sup>1863</sup>

The law-texts reflect Irish society when they were recorded – i.e., excluding glosses and commentaries, usually before 900. By the twelfth century, there is evidence to suggest that the honour price of provincial kings had increased. Tigernán Úa Ruairc demanded 100 ounces of gold from Mac Murchada as his ‘*eineach*’ or honour-price in 1167.<sup>1864</sup> In 1168, the murderers of Murchad Úa Finnalláin, king of Delbna, paid either 700 or 800 cows as ‘*eneclann*’, or compensation for the violation of *eineach*, to the guarantors of Úa Finnalláin’s life.<sup>1865</sup> This payment was quite separate from the ‘*eraic*’ fine incurred by the murder itself. The right to have *eneclann* calculated in precious metals was sometimes deemed to be a prerogative of certain kindreds only, which may explain the payment in gold on one occasion and the payment in cattle on another, but gold may also simply appear in the record as a unit of account.<sup>1866</sup> A similar payment was made by the murderers of Muirchertach Úa Briain, also in 1168, amounting to 720 cows.<sup>1867</sup> This was *eneclann* as well, though it has been mistakenly rendered as *eraic* in the English translation of the standard edition.<sup>1868</sup>

There is some ambiguity here since roughly the same payment (700–800 cows) was made to Úa Conchobair alone in one case (for Úa Briain’s assassination) and to Úa Conchobair and Úa Cerbaill together in the other (for Úa Finnalláin’s). Furthermore, going by the exchange rates offered in a Middle Irish legal commentary, the 100 ounces

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<sup>1862</sup> Marilyn Gerriets, ‘Money in early Christian Ireland according to the Irish laws’, in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, xxvii, no. 2 (April 1985), pp 323–39 at 337; see also Breatnach, ‘Forms of payment in the early Irish law tracts’, in *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*, lxviii (Winter 2014), pp 1–20.

<sup>1863</sup> Simms, ‘The contents of later commentaries’, pp 26–7; Mac Niocaill, ‘Tír Cumaile’, in *Ériu*, xxii (1971), pp 81–6 at 84 n. 10.

<sup>1864</sup> *A.F.M.* 1167.13; *Ann. Tig.* 1167.5.

<sup>1865</sup> *A.F.M.* 1168.12; *Ann. Tig.* 1168.1.

<sup>1866</sup> Kuno Meyer (ed.), *Rawlinson B 502: a collection of pieces in prose and verse in the Irish language, compiled during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, now published in facsimile from the original manuscript in the Bodleian Library, with an introduction and indexes* (Oxford, 1909), pp 118b39, 121a40 quoted on eD.I.L. (<http://www.dil.ie/20074>) (12 March 2019).

<sup>1867</sup> *A.F.M.* 1168.8, 1168.18.

<sup>1868</sup> *A.F.M.* 1168.18.



of gold given to Úa Ruairc in 1167 would be far in excess of even 800 cows.<sup>1869</sup> There is no reason to believe Úa Ruairc's *eineach* would be greater than Úa Conchobair's, but at the least it must be acknowledged that a fourteen or twenty-one cow honour-price had been set aside in favour of larger payments, though undoubtedly the law-texts still provided the underlying rationale.<sup>1870</sup> This may also have happened in earlier eras, but it is the first evidence of it in the annals.

With an increase in honour-price must have come a corresponding increase in the wealth held by daughters of the major provincial kings. On this evidence we can suggest that, for females of royal status, the *coibche* payment in the twelfth century was somewhere between six hundred cows (equal to fifty ounces of gold according to the exchange rates typically used in legal commentaries) and three hundred cows.<sup>1871</sup> As such, these women brought a relatively large sum into their marriages. It must also be allowed that these women were probably also gifted additional wealth by their own families. Though inexact, we can by these means approximate the movable wealth of women who donated to the church in the twelfth century.

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<sup>1869</sup> See note 1871 below for more detail. See also *C.I.H.* 149.1; Kelly, *Early Irish farming* (Dublin, 1997), p. 594; Kelly, *Guide to early Irish law*, pp 112–6.

<sup>1870</sup> The *forbach flatha* or 'lord's portion' was the share of compensation legally due a lord for injuries against his client and usually amounted to one third (see Flanagan, *Irish society*, pp 238–40; Binchy (ed.), *Críth Gablach* (Dublin, 1941), p. 30; Binchy, 'Irish History and Irish Law: II', in *Studia Hibernica*, xvi (1976), pp 7–45 at 23). Muirchertach Úa Briain imposed a fine of fifty cows in 1093, as *forbach flatha* for the murder of Áed Úa Conchobair in 1092 (*Ann. Inisf.* 1092.3, 1093.8), which gives an idea of the degree to which Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair and Donnchad Úa Cerbaill's fees exceeded the limits of the legal principle that probably inspired them.

<sup>1871</sup> Kelly, *Guide to early Irish law*, p. 116: 'The later glossators generally took the equation to be 1 milch cow = 1 ounce of silver = 2 sets = 1/3 *cumal*'. For the value of silver in particular, see Kelly, *Early Irish farming*, p. 594); *C.I.H.* 149.1: '*uinge dergor ar da buaibh decc*', or 'an ounce of red gold for twelve cows'. On this basis, we can roughly estimate that a provincial king's law-text honour-price (14 *cumala* = 3.5 ounces of gold = 42 ounces of silver = 42 milch cows or 21 *cumala* = 5.25 ounces of gold = 63 ounces of silver = 63 milch cows) was out of date by the twelfth century. Úa Ruairc's claim of 100 ounces of gold as *eineach* in 1167 would equate to 1200 ounces of silver/1200 cows/400 *cumala*. Úa Conchobair's claim of 720 cows (for Úa Briain's death) in 1168 would equate to 720 ounces of silver/60 ounces of gold/240 *cumala*. Divided evenly, Úa Conchobair and Úa Cerbaill's jointly prosecuted claim for either 700 or 800 cows (*A.F.M.* 1168.12; *Ann. Tig.* 1168.1) would equate to either 350 ounces of silver/350 cows/29 ounces of gold each or 400 ounces of silver/400 cows/33 ounces of gold each. No faith should be placed in statistical precision here, but there is a wide enough chasm between these figures and the older values to postulate that *eineach* had inflated considerably. As a result, female honour-price, calculated as a fraction of her father's and then her husband's, and on which her principal endowment, the *coibche* was based, must also have increased by the same proportion.

Therefore, though donations to churches have been described as ‘frequent and substantial’, they are almost all minor and in keeping with expectable wealth for a woman in the period.<sup>1872</sup> That is apart from the donations of Derbforgaill in the mid-twelfth century. Derbforgaill gave sixty ounces of gold to the new Cistercian foundation at Mellifont in 1157,<sup>1873</sup> and she ‘completed’ the nuns’ church at Clonmacnoise in 1167.<sup>1874</sup> The question is not whether Derbforgaill’s donations were exceptional, because by comparison with other donations by women they clearly were, but rather how she was able to make them, and why she did so.

Along with generally increased wealth of noble women by the twelfth century, demonstrated above, there is reason to regard Derbforgaill as an especially wealthy woman. When she was abducted by Diarmait Mac Murchada in 1152, it is noted particularly that she was taken ‘with her wealth,’<sup>1875</sup> ‘with her cattle’,<sup>1876</sup> or ‘with her cattle and furniture’.<sup>1877</sup> Two different accounts of her return exist. In one, it is simply reported that ‘the daughter of Murchadh Ó Maelseachnaill came again to Ó Ruairc by flight from Leinster’.<sup>1878</sup> According to the other however, Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair invaded Leinster ‘and took away the daughter of Ua Maeleachlainn, with her cattle’.<sup>1879</sup> It seems evident that her personal wealth was considerable to warrant such attention, not only from the kings of Leinster and Connacht, but also from the annalists who recorded these events.

One other significant point raised by Bitel is the idea that ‘every gift was given in response to and/or in the expectation of some sort of return’.<sup>1880</sup> The returns considered

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<sup>1872</sup> Bitel, ‘Women’s donations to the churches in early Ireland’, p. 12.

<sup>1873</sup> *A.F.M.* 1157.9; *Ann. Tig.* 1157.3.

<sup>1874</sup> *A.F.M.* 1167.16: ‘*do forbadh*’.

<sup>1875</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1152.6: ‘*cona maithius*’.

<sup>1876</sup> *Ann. Clon.* 1152.

<sup>1877</sup> *A.F.M.* 1152.10: ‘*cona crodh, & cona h-airilledh*’.

<sup>1878</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1153.5: ‘*Ingen Murchadha h-Úi Mael Sechlainn do techt dochum h-Úi Ruairc arís a n-elódh o Laignib*’.

<sup>1879</sup> *A.F.M.* 1153.11: ‘*tuc inghen Uí Mhaoileachlainn cona crodh uadha*’.

<sup>1880</sup> Bitel, ‘Women’s donations’, p. 14.

by Bitel were primarily prospective religious ones, such as the intercession of the saints or a place in heaven,<sup>1881</sup> or very minor material returns.<sup>1882</sup> What she did not consider, however, were the potential political returns and implications of gifts and donations. As great a donation as Derbforgaill gave to Mellifont, or even to Clonmacnoise, could only take place in a political context. This political context is to be discovered in the operation of her husband's kingdom, and that of its neighbours.

Tigernán Úa Ruairc's long career was defined by intervention in Meath, and even his marriage to Derbforgaill was an outcome of that interest. He dominated the kings of Meath as much as possible to extend his authority and protect his territorial gains at their expense. For many years, the de jure king of Meath was Murchad Úa Máel Sechlainn, Derbforgaill's father. A brother of Derbforgaill, Máel Sechlainn Úa Máel Sechlainn, was the architect of the Derbforgaill's abduction in 1152 and when Murchad died in 1153 he acceded to the kingship.<sup>1883</sup> That Úa Ruairc could not prevent this is evidence of diminished power in Meath after the events of 1152. However, in 1155 Máel Sechlainn Úa Máel Sechlainn was poisoned at Durrow, and the recovering king of Bréifne was probably responsible.<sup>1884</sup>

The kingship of Meath was then contested by two Uí Máel Sechlainn half-brothers, Donnchad and Diarmait. Each received support from different quarters, as Meath's neighbours sought to take advantage. Donnchad was endorsed by Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn, claimant of the kingship of Ireland, who imposed him as king.<sup>1885</sup>

Unfortunately for Donnchad he was quickly deposed,<sup>1886</sup> and left for Leinster to seek the help of Diarmait Mac Murchada.<sup>1887</sup> Mac Murchada took advantage of the opportunity to attack Tigernán Úa Ruairc's holdings in Meath under the guise of supporting

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<sup>1881</sup> Bitel, 'Women's donations', p. 14.

<sup>1882</sup> Bitel, 'Women's donations', p. 16.

<sup>1883</sup> *Ann. Clon.* 1152; *A.F.M.* 1152.10.

<sup>1884</sup> *A.F.M.* 1155.6; *Ann. Clon.* 1155.

<sup>1885</sup> *A.F.M.* 1155.11.

<sup>1886</sup> *A.F.M.* 1155.18.

<sup>1887</sup> *A.F.M.* 1156.18, 1156.19.

Donnchad.<sup>1888</sup> Úa Ruairc naturally backed the claim of Diarmait Úa Máel Sechlainn in opposition, though Mac Murchada won the battle when their forces met in 1156.<sup>1889</sup>

After gaining this victory and recovering the kingship, Donnchad had one of the regional kings of east Meath killed. Cú Ulad Úa Caindelbáin of Laegaire was firmly in Úa Ruairc's sphere, which probably prompted his assassination at Donnchad's hands.<sup>1890</sup> Úa Ruairc invaded Meath in response, but once again was unsuccessful.<sup>1891</sup> It was in precisely this political climate that the consecration of a church at Mellifont, and the great donation of Derbforgaill, took place. She gave sixty ounces of gold, which was the equal of Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn's contribution of gold (he also gave cows and land), and of Úa Cerbaill's entire contribution, which was also sixty ounces of gold. Derbforgaill also gave a chalice of gold and cloths for the nine altars.<sup>1892</sup>

What then, were the political implications and returns of Derbforgaill's donation? Úa Ruairc's presence, and the donation of his wife, certainly constituted a previously lacking acceptance of Mac Lochlainn's overkingship. The synod was convened under the auspices of the king of the North, who made the largest donation: 140 cows, sixty ounces of gold, and a grant of land.<sup>1893</sup> In return for Úa Ruairc's acknowledgment of his authority, Mac Lochlainn acquiesced to the excommunication of his former client, Donnchad Úa Máel Sechlainn. Donnchad was also removed from the kingship of Meath at this time in favour of Diarmait.<sup>1894</sup> Cú Ulad Úa Caindelbáin's assassination was the pretext for the volte-face, but Úa Ruairc's acknowledgment of Mac Lochlainn was the real reason Mac Lochlainn abandoned Donnchad.<sup>1895</sup> That this settlement subsequently broke down, and the kingship of Meath was contested again in subsequent years, does

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<sup>1888</sup> *A.F.M.* 1156.19.

<sup>1889</sup> *A.F.M.* 1156.20.

<sup>1890</sup> Ó Hoireabhárd, 'The assassination of Tigernán Ua Ruairc', pp 116–7.

<sup>1891</sup> *A.F.M.* 1157.8.

<sup>1892</sup> *A.F.M.* 1157.9.

<sup>1893</sup> *A.F.M.* 1157.9; *Ann. Tig.* 1157.3.

<sup>1894</sup> *A.F.M.* 1157.9; *Ann. Tig.* 1157.4.

<sup>1895</sup> *A.F.M.* 1157.9.

not make it any less of a settlement; the excommunication and deposition of Donnchad Úa Máel Sechlainn in 1157 was a *quid pro quo* for the substantial donation made by Derbforgaill.

As for the substance of the donation itself, there remains a question of exactly whose wealth was being donated. On the one hand, as we have seen, the wealth enjoyed by women derived largely from what was settled on them by their husbands at marriage. This left limited scope for independent action, and donations by women were typically minor. On the other hand, Derbforgaill's wealth warranted mention in the annals when she was abducted, suggesting she was particularly wealthy. Further, the link between *coibche* and honour-price implies increased prospects for women by the twelfth century.

Nevertheless, unless Derbforgaill was the richest woman in Irish history up to her own time, sixty ounces of gold (or its equivalent in silver or cattle) would have constituted an overwhelming portion of her own wealth. Considering the political advantage that accrued to Úa Ruairc through it, it seems reasonable to suppose that the donation was made at least partly with his support. Records of the donation are unequivocal that it was Derbforgaill who made the contribution, but contrary to the arguments and interpretations of modern historians, there is no reason to suppose that Derbforgaill acted independently, or that she would not have supported her husband.<sup>1896</sup> Instead, Derbforgaill's donation at Mellifont should be regarded as uxorial support of Úa Ruairc's policies.

If the uxorial link and not the natal is key to understanding Derbforgaill's patronage, we must re-assess the connection to Clonmacnoise as well. The case for Derbforgaill's patronage of the nuns' church at Clonmacnoise as a protraction of Uí Máel Sechlainn benefaction at the monastery has been boosted by, and indeed largely based on, the idea

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<sup>1896</sup> See especially Karen Eileen Overby, 'Female trouble: ambivalence and anxiety at the Nuns' church', in Eska (ed.), *Law, literature and society*, pp 93–112, and Ní Ghrádaigh, "'But what exactly did she give'", pp 175–207.

that Murchad Úa Máel Sechlainn granted the church of the nuns at Clonmacnoise to Arrouasian nuns at Clonard in 1144. This appears in numerous works but is in fact groundless.<sup>1897</sup>

The work of Ragnall Ó Floinn,<sup>1898</sup> cited as supporting the theory of continued Uí Máel Sechlainn interest in Clonmacnoise,<sup>1899</sup> makes no claim about either continued interest or an 1144 grant. Similarly, the work of John Brady,<sup>1900</sup> cited in support of the 1144 grant,<sup>1901</sup> contains no such commentary or evidence.<sup>1902</sup> This factoid derives rather from Annette Kehnel's expansion on an earlier claim by others in her 1997 work, *Clonmacnois – the church and lands of St Ciarán*. Drawing on Gwynn and Richard Neville Hadcock's *Medieval religious houses: Ireland*, and William Dugdale's *Monasticon Anglicanum*, a seventeenth-century catalogue of religious houses and their dependencies, Kehnel made the stated claim. It was then accepted by others and used, directly or indirectly, to support the idea that Derbforgaill's 1167 patronage was an extension of her father's in 1144.<sup>1903</sup>

A transcript of a papal confirmation from February 1196 is extant, recognising the nuns' church at Clonmacnoise as a dependency of the house at Clonard, but with no allusion to an earlier grant.<sup>1904</sup> The claim of an earlier Úa Máel Sechlainn grant appears rather to

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<sup>1897</sup> See for example, Jennifer Borland, 'Audience and spatial experience in the nuns' church at Clonmacnoise' in *Different Visions: a journal of new perspectives on medieval art*, no. 3 (September 2011), pp 1–45 at 21; Ní Ghrádaigh, "'But what exactly did she give'", p. 178; Overby, 'Female trouble', p. 98; Dianne Hall, *Women and the church in medieval Ireland, c. 1140–1540* (Dublin, 2003), p. 71; Tadhg O'Keefe, *Romanesque Ireland* (Dublin, 2003), p. 262.

<sup>1898</sup> Ragnall Ó Floinn, 'Clonmacnoise: art and patronage in the early medieval period', in H.A. King (ed.), *Clonmacnoise studies I* (Dublin, 1998), pp 87–100.

<sup>1899</sup> Ní Ghrádaigh, "'But what exactly did she give'", p. 178.

<sup>1900</sup> John Brady, 'The nunnery of Clonard', in *Ríocht na Midhe*, ii no. 2 (1960), pp 4–7.

<sup>1901</sup> Ní Ghrádaigh, "'But what exactly did she give'", p. 178.

<sup>1902</sup> Brady's substantive argument, endorsed by Flanagan, that Clonard was the mother house of the Arrouaisian canonesses in Ireland in the twelfth century, is not being challenged here; it is rather a question of the supposed origin of the grant in 1144. See also Flanagan, 'St. Mary's Abbey, Louth, and the Introduction of the Arrouaisian Observance into Ireland' in *Clogher Record*, x, no. 2 (1980), pp 223–34 at 231–2.

<sup>1903</sup> Annette Kehnel, *Clonmacnois – the church and lands of St Ciarán* (Münster, 1997), p. 155.

<sup>1904</sup> Maurice P. Sheehy (ed.), *Pontificia Hibernica* (2 vols, Dublin, 1962–5), i, no. 29, pp 83–6 at 84; William Dugdale and Roger Dodsworth, *Monasticon Anglicanum* (London, 1661), ii, pp 1043–4; William Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum* (6 vols., London, 1846), vi part ii, pp 1144–5.

derive from Gwynn and Hadcock, who made several relevant comments on the subject. They stated that Murchad Úa Máel Sechlainn ‘almost certainly’ founded the house at Clonard in 1144,<sup>1905</sup> and further, that ‘The O’Melaghlinns were also closely connected’ with Clonmacnoise.<sup>1906</sup> Their justification for claiming that Murchad Úa Máel Sechlainn founded a house of nuns at Clonard in 1144 was that, according to themselves, in *Visio Tnugdali*, St Malachy is said to have established houses of Irish nuns in 1144, and Clonard subsequently enjoyed pre-eminence among these.<sup>1907</sup> Subsequent inferences by Gwynn and Hadcock, and later historians, originated from this point.

Gwynn and Hadcock’s commentary is irredeemably flawed on this question, however, for numerous reasons, and the conclusions drawn by others on its strength are undermined as a result. The first and most basic problem is that they appear to have mistranslated *Visio Tnugdali*, which recorded the number of houses of monks and nuns founded by Malachy rather than the year in which they were founded. Most editions of this text record this number as fifty-four houses,<sup>1908</sup> but the French translation used by the historians in question stated that Malachy founded forty-four in total.<sup>1909</sup> Judging by their

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<sup>1905</sup> Gwynn and R. Neville Hadcock, *Medieval religious houses: Ireland* (Dublin, 1970), p. 163

<sup>1906</sup> Gwynn and Hadcock, *Medieval religious houses: Ireland*, p. 165.

<sup>1907</sup> Gwynn and Hadcock, *Medieval religious houses: Ireland*, p. 150.

<sup>1908</sup> Jean-Michel Picard (trans.) and Yolande de Pontfarcy (ed.), *The vision of Tnugdali* (Dublin, 1989), p. 155: ‘The latter [Malachy] came to Rome at the time of Pope Innocent and was established by him as legate and archbishop; he distributed everything he had to holy monasteries and to the poor; he was the builder of fifty-four congregations of monks, canons and nuns to whom he provided all the necessities of life and kept nothing at all for himself’; Emil Peters, *Die vision des Tnugdali* (Berlin, 1895), p. 30: ‘Dieser wurde, als er zur Zeit des Papstes Innocenz nach Rom gekommen war, von ihm selbst zum Legaten und Erzbischof eingesetzt. Er verteilte alles, was er besaß, unter die heiligen Klöster und die Armen und wurde der Gründer von vierundfünfzig Kongregationen von Mönchen, Kanonikern, Nonnen, denen er alles Notwendige verschaffte, ohne etwas für sich zurückzubehalten’; Brigitte Pfeil (ed.), *Die ‘Vision Des Tnugdali’ Albers Von Windberg: Literatur- und Froemmigkeitsgeschichte im ausgehenden 12. Jahrhundert. Mit einer Edition der Lateinischen ‘Visio Tnugdali’ aus CLM 22254* (Frankfurt, 1999), p.\*55: ‘et Malachiam. qui predicto viro successit in archiepiscopatu. qui Romam tempore Innocentii pape veniens. ab episcopo legatus. et archiepiscopus constitutus est; qui omnia quecumque habere poterat sanctis cenobiis et pauperibus dividebat. Hic constructor extitit. quinquaginta quattuor. congregationum. monachorum. canonicorum. sanctimonialium. quibus omnia necessaria providebat. et nichil omnino sibi retinebat’.

<sup>1909</sup> V.H. Friedel and Meyer (eds), *La Vision de Tondale* (Paris, 1907), p. 55: ‘S. Malachies qui fu apres lui vint a Rome au temps pape Inocent et le fist celi pape liegat et arceuescque, li queis S. Malachies donnoit en son viuant as poures ce qu’il auoit pour nostre signour Jhesu Crist et fonda en se temps .xliiii. abeis de moines, de chanoines et de nonnains et les pourueoit de tout cou que mestiers leur estoit et pour li riens n’en retenoit’.

own citation, this passage Gwynn and Hadcock interpreted this to mean Malachy had founded houses of nuns in Ireland in 1144.<sup>1910</sup>

Kehnel's claim, mentioned above, that 'in the year 1144 the church of the nuns in Clonmacnois was granted by Murchad Ua Maelsechlainn to the Arrouaisian nuns in Clonard', is a further departure from the historical record.<sup>1911</sup> It is not supported in any cited authority and is rather an extension of the supposition made by Gwynn and Hadcock. Whereas the latter two surmised that Úa Máel Sechlainn oversaw the establishment of an Arrouaisian nuns' convent at Clonard in 1144, their summary of the record of the convent of nuns at Clonmacnoise in the passage referred to by Kehnel makes no positive reference to a Meath influence at Clonmacnoise in the same year.<sup>1912</sup> Clonard's associations with the Uí Máel Sechlainn in the twelfth century are easy to verify and, even though the reference to 1144 is groundless, the Arrouaisian observance is still likely to have been introduced there between 1142 (when Malachy established his first foundation in Ireland) and 1148 (when he died). On the other hand, as we will see, Uí Máel Sechlainn links with Clonmacnoise are much more elusive.

The contemporary political situation in Meath provides further grounds for challenging the supposition of Murchad Úa Máel Sechlainn's involvement at Clonmacnoise, at least in 1144. This is partly because 1143–4 was a particularly tumultuous time in Meath. In 1143, the king of Connacht Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair deposed the incumbent king of Meath, Murchad Úa Máel Sechlainn, imposing his own son Conchobar in Murchad's place.<sup>1913</sup> Conchobar was murdered within the year because he was not from Meath.<sup>1914</sup> Toirdelbach invaded Meath once again in 1144, in revenge of his son.<sup>1915</sup> He then

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<sup>1910</sup> Gwynn and Hadcock, *Medieval religious houses: Ireland*, p. 150; Friedel and Meyer (eds), *La Vision de Tondale*, p. 55.

<sup>1911</sup> Kehnel, *Clonmacnois*, p. 155.

<sup>1912</sup> Kehnel, *Clonmacnois*, p. 155 & n. 90; Gwynn and Hadcock, *Medieval religious houses: Ireland*, pp 314–16 esp. p. 315.

<sup>1913</sup> *A.F.M.* 1143.13; *Ann. Tig.* 1143.4.

<sup>1914</sup> *A.F.M.* 1144.7; *Ann. Tig.* 1144.1.

<sup>1915</sup> *A.F.M.* 1144.7, 1144.10; *Ann. Tig.* 1144.5.



enforced a new political arrangement in Meath, and in fact two different arrangements, which may or may not be mutually exclusive, are recorded.

In both, he partitioned Meath. The first saw Donnchad son of Muirchertach Úa Máel Sechlainn given the west, and the east was further divided between Tigernán Úa Ruairc and Diarmait Mac Murchada.<sup>1916</sup> In the other, Toirdelbach restored Murchad Úa Máel Sechlainn to east Meath alone and an unnamed son of Muirchertach Úa Máel Sechlainn was given the west.<sup>1917</sup> On the evidence of the annals, then, 1144 would be an especially unlikely time for Murchad Úa Máel Sechlainn to intervene at Clonmacnoise. James Ware, also cited by Gwynn and Hadcock on the question,<sup>1918</sup> reports only that Murchad Úa Máel Sechlainn founded the nunnery at Clonard before the arrival of the English.<sup>1919</sup>

There is a better reason why Murchad Úa Máel Sechlainn's influence at Clonmacnoise should be doubted: unlike Clonard, Clonmacnoise in the mid-twelfth century was dominated by the kings of Connacht rather than those of Meath. Clonmacnoise had once received most patronage from Meath, but its associations with that kingdom declined sharply after Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair came to power in Connacht in 1114.<sup>1920</sup>

Therefore, though it has been asserted that Derbforgaill 'was also very clearly stating her independence from her husband by giving resources to a church in her own family's circle', this was not so.<sup>1921</sup> There is only limited evidence to support the notion of a continuous Uí Máel Sechlainn interest in Clonmacnoise in the twelfth century, and, other than this imagined grant by Murchad Úa Máel Sechlainn in 1144, all the evidence comes from the 1160s. This is, to wit, a grant of land by Diarmait Úa Máel Sechlainn to Clonmacnoise in 1161,<sup>1922</sup> the freeing of two small churches from 'cess and press for

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<sup>1916</sup> *A.F.M.* 1144.7.

<sup>1917</sup> *A.F.M.* 1144.10.

<sup>1918</sup> Gwynn and Hadcock, *Medieval religious houses: Ireland*, p. 314.

<sup>1919</sup> James Ware, *De Hibernia & Antiquitatibus ejus* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., London, 1658), pp 192–3: '*Moniales Ord S. Augustini. O-Melaghlin Midiae regulus dotavit ante Anglorum adventum. Coelestinus 3 confirmavit possessiones an. Dom. 1195*'.

<sup>1920</sup> For a detailed discussion of this, see *Comparative Analysis*, pp 490–2.

<sup>1921</sup> Ní Grádaigh, "But what exactly did she give", p. 178.

<sup>1922</sup> *A.F.M.* 1161.10; *Ann. Clon.* 1163.

ever in honour of God and St Queran',<sup>1923</sup> also by Diarmait, in 1162, Derbforgaill's completion of the nuns' church in 1167, and the death of Derbhaile, daughter of Donnchad Úa Máel Sechlainn, at Clonmacnoise, also in 1167.<sup>1924</sup>

The explanation for these events lies in the political climate that existed when they took place. They represent an alliance with, or rather, dependence on Connacht, not an independent resurrection of Uí Máel Sechlainn influence at Clonmacnoise. In fact, the events were an immediate sequel to the circumstances behind the donation at Mellifont. As discussed above, at that time Donnchad Úa Máel Sechlainn was excommunicated and deposed. Now, Mac Lochlainn went back on his deal with Úa Ruairc and, in 1159, placed Donnchad Úa Máel Sechlainn in the kingship of Meath.<sup>1925</sup>

During his exile, Donnchad had sought protection first in Leinster, and later in Connacht.<sup>1926</sup> In 1159, however, Diarmait's champion Tigernán Úa Ruairc formed an alliance with Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair.<sup>1927</sup> As a result, Diarmait immediately became the choice of the king of Connacht, Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair, for kingship in Meath, and Donnchad became Ruaidrí's enemy.<sup>1928</sup> The alignment thus shifted to Úa Conchobair and Úa Ruairc supporting Diarmait, and Mac Lochlainn supporting Donnchad, who remained in power.

This came to an end in 1160, when Donnchad Úa Máel Sechlainn was assassinated.<sup>1929</sup> At once, Úa Conchobair marched into Meath and placed Diarmait Úa Máel Sechlainn in the kingship.<sup>1930</sup> Furthermore, when Mac Lochlainn marched south to remove Diarmait later the same year, Úa Ruairc and Úa Conchobair supported the latter, and he retained power.<sup>1931</sup> In 1161, Mac Lochlainn conceded the point and recognised Diarmait as the

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<sup>1923</sup> *Ann. Clon.* 1164; *A.F.M.* 1162.12.

<sup>1924</sup> *A.F.M.* 1167.14; *Ann. Tig.* 1167.1.

<sup>1925</sup> *A.F.M.* 1159.9; *Ann. Tig.* 1159.5.

<sup>1926</sup> *A.F.M.* 1158.17.

<sup>1927</sup> *A.F.M.* 1159.10.

<sup>1928</sup> *A.F.M.* 1159.11, 1159.12; *Ann. Tig.* 1159.12, 1159.15.

<sup>1929</sup> *A.F.M.* 1160.7; *Ann. Tig.* 1160.1.

<sup>1930</sup> *A.F.M.* 1160.20; *Ann. Tig.* 1160.3.

<sup>1931</sup> *A.F.M.* 1160.22.

holder of east Meath, and Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair as the holder of west Meath.<sup>1932</sup>

Immediately following this, Diarmait granted Beann Artghaile, a now unknown site, ‘to God and St Ciaran’ – that is, to Clonmacnoise.<sup>1933</sup> Clearly, it was made in recognition of support from the king of Connacht.

Similarly, when, in 1162, Diarmait freed Cill Úa Nilucain and Ros Mide from tax ‘for God and Ciaran [Clonmacnoise]’,<sup>1934</sup> it was just after he had also made a payment of 100 ounces of gold to Úa Conchobair for west Meath.<sup>1935</sup> It may have been part of the deal, or it may have been further confirmation of good relations, but it certainly took place in the same context. When, in 1163, Diarmait was deposed once more, a rent was paid to Mac Lochlainn by his successors, rather than to Úa Conchobair.<sup>1936</sup> The donations to Clonmacnoise could also reflect Uí Máel Sechlainn desire to re-establish their connection with that site, but their lack of strength in this period means that it was not an independent assertion of influence.

How, then, did Derbforgaill’s patronage of the nuns’ church at Clonmacnoise correspond with this situation? After the fall of Mac Lochlainn in 1166, Úa Conchobair established control over all Ireland, aided by Diarmait Úa Máel Sechlainn and especially by Úa Ruairc. Great conventions held at Athlone in 1166, Tlachta in 1167, and Faughan Hill in 1168 emphasised the continued robustness of the Connacht–Bréifne–Meath alliance that had brought Úa Conchobair to power, as did the military manoeuvres of these and subsequent years.<sup>1937</sup> Indeed, it was at this time that Úa Máel Sechlainn and Úa Ruairc were described as nobles of Connacht.<sup>1938</sup>

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<sup>1932</sup> *A.F.M.* 1161.9.

<sup>1933</sup> *A.F.M.* 1161.10.

<sup>1934</sup> *A.F.M.* 1162.12: ‘*do Dhia & do Chiarán*’; *Ann. Clon.* 1164.

<sup>1935</sup> *A.F.M.* 1162.11, 1162.12.

<sup>1936</sup> *A.F.M.* 1163.12.

<sup>1937</sup> See *Connacht*, pp 70–1.

<sup>1938</sup> See *Connacht*, p. 70; *Ann. Tig.* 1166.1.

Derbforgaill's completion of the nuns' church at Clonmacnoise underscored the good relations between Úa Conchobair and Úa Ruairc. It was not made to win favour, since this was well established; instead, it was an additional endorsement of the alliance. Furthermore, it was not the only construction at Clonmacnoise that year: 'a church was erected at Cluain-mic-Nois, in the place of the Dearthach, by Conchobhar Ua Ceallaigh and the Ui-Maine' around the same time.<sup>1939</sup> This again emphasises the continued influence of the western province at the site. The authority of Clonard over the nuns at Clonmacnoise is much more likely to date from this point, as an inclusion of Meath, and Diarmait Úa Máel Sechlainn, in the acts of good will.

As for Dearbhaile, who died in 1167, she was married to Ragnall Mac Cochláin, king of Delbna Ethra, the territory of Meath in which Clonmacnoise was situated.<sup>1940</sup> Her burial might well have taken place in Clonmacnoise for that reason alone, but it was certainly even more appropriate in the political climate of the time. She was a daughter of Donnchad Úa Máel Sechlainn, onetime enemy of Úa Ruairc, great-granddaughter of Murchad Úa Máel Sechlainn and therefore grandniece of Derbforgaill, but these relationships are unlikely to have made any difference either way since, as we have seen, the dominant relationship of the period was marital and not natal.<sup>1941</sup>

The donations of Derbforgaill are the last examples of church patronage by a female in the pre-invasion period, and the last for quite some time afterwards as well. The next, in fact, is an entry reporting that Lasairfina, daughter of Cathal Crobderg Úa Conchobair, 'gave a half townland of her marriage-estate' to the community of Canons on Trinity Island on Lough Key in 1239.<sup>1942</sup> This is elsewhere less accurately translated as

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<sup>1939</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1167.19: 'Teampall do dénam i c-Cluain Mic Nóis i n-ionadh an dearthaighe lá Conchobhar Ua c-Ceallaigh, & lá h-Uíbh Maine'.

<sup>1940</sup> *Ann. Clon.* 1180.

<sup>1941</sup> For a discussion of Uí Máel Sechlainn pedigrees, see Walsh, 'The Ua Maelechlainn kings of Meath' in *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, lvii (1941), pp 165–83.

<sup>1942</sup> *Ann. Conn.* 1239.6: 'do thabairt lethbhaile do ferand phusta'.

‘marriage dowry’, but it should be noted that ‘townland’ as a translation of ‘*baile*’ is also misleading.<sup>1943</sup>

Even a cautious interpretation of this case must acknowledge a possible change from pre-invasion norms. In the first place, it is a reference to a woman openly holding land, and she alone was responsible for its alienation. This land had been settled on her at her marriage. Whether this was done in the traditional manner, with *coibche*, is not stated. There is little other evidence of land being given as *coibche*, and the legal stability of such an arrangement was shakier than a *coibche* of movable goods.<sup>1944</sup> It is also interesting that the terminology used was new. Dowry as distinct from *coibche* was certainly paid in 1259, when the king of the Hebrides sent 160 gallowglass soldiers with his daughter when she married Áed Úa Conchobair.<sup>1945</sup>

*Coibche* survived as the dominant marriage payment among the Gaelic Irish, but it now, in the post-invasion period, existed alongside the incompatible system of dowry. Here the influence of the English in Ireland must have played a strong role. Early inter-cultural marriages, like, for instance, that of Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair’s daughter to Hugh de Lacy (c. 1180), presumably required one or other payment to be made. The remarkable evidence of Roger of Howden, who said that Hugh de Lacy married her without licence and ‘according to the custom of that country’ strongly suggests that de Lacy paid *coibche*, and if so, Henry II’s suspicions of his motives were undoubtedly justified.<sup>1946</sup>

Unfortunately, this is as far as the evidence goes, and as Simms expressed it, ‘dowry contributed by the father is not well-documented before the sixteenth century’.<sup>1947</sup> All the

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<sup>1943</sup> A.L.C. 1239.6.

<sup>1944</sup> C.I.H. i, 247.21; Charlene M. Eska, ‘Recholl Breth: why it is a “shroud of judgements”’, in Matthieu Boyd (ed.), *Ollam: studies in Gaelic and related traditions in honour of Tomás Ó Cathasaigh* (Madison, 2016), pp 173–84 at 180: ‘In the law tract *Di Thúaslucud Rudrud*, “On the Dissolution of Prescriptions”, we also find the giving of land as *coibche* to a questionable woman listed as one of the three types of contracts that are not immune from legal process’.

<sup>1945</sup> A.L.C. 1259.3.

<sup>1946</sup> *Gesta*, i, p. 270: ‘*secundem morem patriae illius*’.

<sup>1947</sup> Simms, ‘The legal position of Irishwomen in the later Middle Ages’, in *Irish Jurist*, x (N.S.) (1975), pp 96–111 at 110.

same, when discussing a slightly later period elsewhere Simms also suggested that ‘only women with a dowry in the form of troops or ships appear to have had political significance in the Gaelic world’.<sup>1948</sup> In the early modern period, an undercurrent of dowry payments among the Gaelic Irish led commentators on the laws to reconcile tradition with current practice and call contributions made by the father of the bride *coibche*.<sup>1949</sup> In contemporary reality, however, *coibche* and dowry remained different systems.<sup>1950</sup>

Other late examples of women donating or otherwise using wealth are few and far between. There is Sláine, daughter of Úa Briain, abbess of Cell Éoin, who is described as the ‘most charitable woman of all Munster’ in her obituary of 1260,<sup>1951</sup> and Christina, daughter of Úa Nechtain and wife of Diarmait Midech Mac Diarmada, who was noted to have contributed ‘much alms’, to the order of Grey Friars.<sup>1952</sup> There is then the case of Derbforgaill ingen Magnusa Uí Chonchobair, wife of Áed Úa Domnaill, discussed above in relation to political violence.<sup>1953</sup> Her employment of mercenaries is also of significance to the use of wealth by women.

As the number of women recorded to have contributed to the church was never great for any period, an apparent fall-off in contributions may reflect no more than generally reduced wealth among the Gaelic nobility, fewer links with prominent churches due to English conquests, or perhaps only inferior coverage. Whether by *coibche* or dowry, after the invasion a woman’s wealth continued to be governed by the payments settled on her or brought with her at her marriage. Unlike dowry, there is no evidence for ships or troops being given as *coibche*. If, as has been suggested, political power went along with

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<sup>1948</sup> Simms, ‘Women in Gaelic society during the age of transition’ in MacCurtain & O’Dowd (eds), *Women in early modern Ireland* (Edinburgh, 1991), p. 38.

<sup>1949</sup> R. Thurneysen, ‘Cáin Lánamna’, in Thurneysen, Power, and Dillon (eds), *Studies in Early Irish Law*, pp 1–80 at 79–80, quoted in Simms, ‘The contents of later commentaries’, pp 24–25.

<sup>1950</sup> Simms, ‘The contents of later commentaries’, pp 25–6.

<sup>1951</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1260.5.

<sup>1952</sup> *A.F.M.* 1270.10: ‘do-rad almsana iomda’.

<sup>1953</sup> See above, p. 325; *A.L.C.* 1315.21, 1316.1; *Ann. Conn.* 1315.20, 1316.2; *Ann. Clon.* 1315, 1316.

these gifts, there may be a contrary point to be made on wealth. Fewer donations by women in the later period may be a consequence of less material wealth being given to women under the newer system – but this depends on the degree to which dowry was adopted by the Irish, and we are in no position to answer that question.

As for what can be ascertained by this investigation, there is evidence of the limited control of wealth by women in the early medieval period having developed substantially by the twelfth century. This amelioration was based on a few interlinked factors: the development of *coibche* from a payment made to the father of the bride to a payment made to the bride herself, the links between a daughter's honour price and her father's honour price, the calculation of *coibche* as a fraction of honour price, and the inflation of honour price (at least for the highest grade of king) by the twelfth century. Despite this, the donations made by women to church settlements remained typically small.

The relatively massive payments made by Derbforgaill in the mid-twelfth century have been shown to have been made in support of her husband's political aims. This discovery is harmonious with the findings made above, in relation to the exercise of political power by women and the support they offered to their husbands, and it may well reflect a wider trend where donations are concerned. After the invasion, women continued to be active contributors to the church, but the influence of the newly introduced dowry system complicates assessment of their wealth and means.

### **[5.3: Marriage Practice and Prosopography]**

Irish marriage law was not as stringent as that of some other European kingdoms. A wide variety of unions were recognised, and divorce was easy to obtain. Consequently, Irish kings often practiced serial monogyny, marrying, divorcing, and re-marrying different women.<sup>1954</sup> Ireland came to the attention of European ecclesiastical authorities from the late eleventh century onwards for these practices, which were openly criticised.

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<sup>1954</sup> See Kelly, *Guide to early Irish law*, pp 70–9; Candon, 'Power, politics and polygamy', pp 106–27.

Pope Gregory VII's letter to Toirdelbach úa Briain may represent an early example of such criticism, albeit quite a subtle one. Gregory addressed Toirdelbach as 'the illustrious king of Ireland', and in very vague and general terms exhorted the latter to be loyal to the church's teachings: 'to St. Peter and his vicars ... the whole world owes obedience and likewise reverence: these things you should remember to show the holy Roman church with a faithful mind'.<sup>1955</sup> He similarly offered general terms of friendship: 'Should any matters of business arise among you which seem to call for our aid, be sure straightway to have recourse to us, and whatever you rightly ask you will with God's help obtain'.<sup>1956</sup>

H.E.J. Cowdrey, the editor and translator of the letter in question, offered only a broad dating of 1074x84, but considering the communications of Lanfranc, Archbishop of Canterbury, both with Toirdelbach and Gregory, an early date in that range is likely. Lanfranc was more specific in his criticisms, and he also seems to have hoped to establish Canterbury's authority over the Irish church. Gregory did not sanction this, but the fact that Ireland was on his radar may reflect Lanfranc's interest.

Lanfranc wrote to Toirdelbach úa Briain in 1074 to complain about marriage practices in Ireland. He also oversaw the ordination of the bishop of Dublin in that year, and Canterbury's primacy was accepted among the Hiberno-Norse towns from at least that point until 1140.<sup>1957</sup> Six and perhaps seven Hiberno-Norse bishops were consecrated at Canterbury in that period, hailing from Limerick and Waterford as well as from Dublin.<sup>1958</sup> These towns were central to the affairs of the great provincial kings in the eleventh century, especially the Uí Briain kings of Munster, and it is therefore not surprising that Lanfranc contacted Toirdelbach.

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<sup>1955</sup> *The epistolae vagantes of Pope Gregory VII*, ed. H.E.J. Cowdrey (Oxford, 1972), pp 138–41 at 138–9: '*Terdeluacho inclito regi Hiberniae*', '*Beato igitur Petro eiusque uicariis ... orbis uniuersus obedientiam similiter et teuerentiam debet, quam mente deuota sanctae Romanae aecclesiae exhibere reminiscimini*'.

<sup>1956</sup> *The epistolae vagantes of Pope Gregory VII*, pp 138–41: '*Siqua uero negotia penes uos emererint quae nostro Digna uideantur auxilio, incunctanter ad nos dirigere studete, et quod iuste postulauritis Deo auxiliante impetrabitis*'.

<sup>1957</sup> Watt, *The church and the two nations*, p. 7.

<sup>1958</sup> Watt, *The church and the two nations*, p. 7



Though Canterbury's claims remained speculative, he admonished the king of Ireland, saying 'in your kingdom a man abandons at his own discretion and without any grounds in canon law the wife who is lawfully married to him, not hesitating to form a criminal alliance – by the law of marriage or rather by the law of fornication – with any other woman he pleases, either a relative of his own or his deserted wife or a woman whom somebody else has abandoned in an equally disgraceful way'.<sup>1959</sup>

Lanfranc's letter to Toirdelbach is regarded as a companion to one he sent to Gofraid mac Amlaíb, king of Dublin. In that epistle, Lanfranc made essentially the same complaint: 'there are said to be men in your kingdom who take wives from either their own kindred or that of their deceased wives; others who by their own will and authority abandon the wives who are legally married to them; some who give their own wives to others and by an abominable exchange receive the wives of other men instead'.<sup>1960</sup>

A generation later, Anselm, successor of Lanfranc in Canterbury, sought to exert the same influence in Ireland. Anselm wrote to Muirchertach Úa Briain c. 1106, reiterating his predecessor's complaints: 'We have heard that in your kingdom marriages are being dissolved and altered without any grounds; that those related to each other do not fear to live together openly without reproof despite canonical prohibition'.<sup>1961</sup> In what is either another version of this letter or a separate missive, Anselm put the case even more forcefully, saying he had been informed that in Ireland 'husbands freely and publicly exchange their wives for the wives of others, as if they were exchanging one horse for another'.<sup>1962</sup>

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<sup>1959</sup> Helen Clover and Margaret Gibson (eds and trans.), *The letters of Lanfranc archbishop of Canterbury* (Oxford, 1979), pp 70–1: '*uidelicet quod in regno uestro quisque pro arbitrio suo legitime sibi copulatam uxorem nulla canonical causa uxori consanguinitate propinquam siue quam alius simili intemeritate coniungit*'.

<sup>1960</sup> Clover and Gibson (eds and trans.), *The letters of Lanfranc archbishop of Canterbury*, pp 68–9: '*In regno uestro perhibentur homines seu de propria seu de mortuarum uxorum parentela coniuges ducere, alii legitime sibi dare et aliorum infanda commutation recipere*'.

<sup>1961</sup> *The letters of Saint Anselm of Canterbury* ed. and trans. Walter Frölich (4 vols, Kalamazoo, 1990–4), iii, p. 203.

<sup>1962</sup> *The letters of Saint Anselm of Canterbury*, iii, p. 215.

There is no doubt that the ‘reforming’ faction in Ireland regarded marriage as one of their principal targets. Even so, it was an area in which they had limited success. Take, for instance, the case of Cormac Mac Cárthaig. The king of Munster was considered a major ally of reform, through his association with Máel Máedoc Úa Morgair and his subsequent sponsorship of new foundations and buildings, notably Cormac’s chapel at Cashel, which is perhaps the most famous example of Romanesque architecture in Ireland.<sup>1963</sup>

Nonetheless, Cormac’s own marital affairs were considered less than satisfactory. In the *Visio Tnugdali* he is depicted enduring the penance of standing in fire up to his waist with his upper body in a hairshirt for three hours each day, since ‘he had sullied the sacrament of lawful marriage’.<sup>1964</sup> This comment is particularly interesting because, from other sources, we know of only one of Mac Cárthaig’s marriages: to Derbail ingen Uí Lorcáin of Uí Muiredaig in Leinster.<sup>1965</sup>

From the reforming perspective, there were far more egregious cases than Mac Cárthaig. We know of six of Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair’s wives, for instance, and it is likely there were more still whose names have been forgotten. Five of these women have obituaries in the annals: Arlaith ingen Uí Máel Sechlainn in 1115,<sup>1966</sup> Mór ingen Meic Lochlainn in 1122,<sup>1967</sup> Tailtin ingen Uí Máel Sechlainn in 1127 or 1128,<sup>1968</sup> Derbforgaill ingen Meic Lochlainn in 1151,<sup>1969</sup> and Dub Coblaid ingen Uí Máel Ruanaid in 1168.<sup>1970</sup> The other, Cailech Dé ingen Uí hEidin, is attested in the *Banshenchas*.<sup>1971</sup> Between them, these

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<sup>1963</sup> See O’Keeffe, *Romanesque Ireland*, especially pp 123–65.

<sup>1964</sup> Picard (trans.) and de Pontarcy (ed.), *The vision of Tnugdali*, pp 144–6; Flanagan, *The transformation of the Irish church*, p. 171.

<sup>1965</sup> *Banshenchas* [part two], pp 192, 234; for another possible marriage, see *The Two Munsters*, pp 249–50.

<sup>1966</sup> *Chron. Scot.* 1115.4.

<sup>1967</sup> *A.U.* 1122.4; *A.L.C.* 1122.4; *Ann. Inisf.* 1122.9.

<sup>1968</sup> *A.F.M.* 1128.17; *A.U.* 1127.7; *A.L.C.* 1127.7; *Ann. Clon.* 1108.

<sup>1969</sup> *A.F.M.* 1151.7.

<sup>1970</sup> *A.F.M.* 1168.22.

<sup>1971</sup> *Banshenchas* [part two], pp 191, 233.

women produced at least twenty-two sons<sup>1972</sup> and three daughters.<sup>1973</sup> As with wives, it is probable that there were others, especially daughters, who went unnoticed in the record.

Among the many sons it appears Áed was the oldest and most senior; certainly, it was either he or Máel Ísa who subsequently became *comarbae* of the monastery of Roscommon.<sup>1974</sup> The *Banshenchas* states that Derbforgaill ingen Meic Lochlainn was mother of Domnall, Áed, and Cathal; a statement which was copied into her obituary in *A.F.M.*<sup>1975</sup> In the genealogies, a similar notice recorded that Ruaidrí, Domnall ‘Mór’, and Cathal Crobderg were the three sons of Toirdelbach’s wife, the daughter of Mac Diarmata.<sup>1976</sup> Ryan read this statement to mean that Dub Coblaid ingen Uí Máel Ruanaid (alias Mac Diarmata) was Toirdelbach’s first wife.<sup>1977</sup>

The two claims are not necessarily incompatible, with Toirdelbach having two sons named Cathal and two sons named Domnall, but it is probable that both of these documents claim at least the same ‘Domnall’ (i.e. Domnall Midech d. 1176), and if so, there is a contradiction. There is every indication that the version recorded in the *Banshenchas*, undoubtedly more contemporary, is to be relied upon over that in the genealogies. It is also practically certain that Dub Coblaid ingen Uí Máel Ruanaid was

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<sup>1972</sup> *Mac Fhirbhisigh’s Book*, i, pp 486–7 §219.16: Ruaidrí, Cathal Crobderg, Domnall Mór, Máel Ísa, Áed Dall, Tadc Álainn, Brian Brefnach, Brian Luigneach, Magnus, Lochlann, Muirchertach Muimnech, Donnchad, Máel Sechlainn, Tadc Fidnachta, Cathal Míguran, two sons named Conchobar, Diarmait, Domnall, Muirghes, Tadc of Dairéan, & Murchad Fionn. This list is chosen in preference to a less comprehensive one found in the Ua Clerigh Book of Genealogies (Prender (ed.), ‘The O Clery book of genealogies’, §894, p. 102), which says Toirdelbach had seventeen sons and proceeds to list nineteen.

<sup>1973</sup> *Banshenchas* [part two], p. 234.

<sup>1974</sup> There are alternative readings of a line in the genealogies here. Lists of Toirdelbach’s sons include the line, ‘Máel Ísa comorba Comain sindser a cloindi & a oigri [&?] Áed dall’, which can be read either as ‘Máel Ísa combara of Comain the eldest of his family and his [Toirdelbach’s] heir, and Áed dall’, as in *Mac Fhirbhisigh’s Book*, i, §219.16, pp 486–7; or alternatively, ‘Máel Ísa comarba Comain, and the eldest of his family and his [Toirdelbach’s] heir Áed dall’, as in Jaski, *Early Irish kingship and succession*, p. 139. See also R.I.A. MS 23 P 2, folio 63 verso.

<sup>1975</sup> *A.F.M.* 1151.7.

<sup>1976</sup> Prender (ed.), ‘The O Clery book of genealogies’, §894, p. 102: ‘Ruaidrí rí Erenn et Cathal Croibhderg rí Connacht, ocus Domhnall Mór tanaisde na h-Erenn as do tucadh an toradh cétach fa dheoidh; a trí mic lia a mnaí posda insin .i. ingen mac Diarmada’; *Mac Fhirbhisigh’s Book*, i, §219.16, pp 486–7: ‘Ruaidhrí, rí Érenn bheós, Cathal Croibhdhearg, rí Connacht, Domhnall Mór, tanaisde Connacht (as dó tugadh an toradh ceudach fa dheóigh): a thrí mec re (a) mnaoi posda’.

<sup>1977</sup> Ryan, *Toirdelbach O Conchubair: king of Connacht, king of Ireland co fresabra* (Dublin, 1966), p. 6.

not Toirdelbach's first wife, a supposition which must surely be incompatible with her being mother to Cathal Crobderg, Toirdelbach's youngest son. These discrepancies go to show the prestige women enjoyed by having sons who went on to enjoy lordship; only with a distance of time would it have been clear who was most creditable in this regard.

It is worth noting that non-canonical marriage practice could assist political strategy.

Two of Toirdelbach's wives were drawn from Meath, a further two from the North, and two from his own province, developing significant internal and external relationships.

The nicknames by which some of his sons were distinguished reveal the areas in which they were fostered (an important practice in Gaelic Ireland), and they also indicate the development of internal and external relationships. Brian Breifnech, then, was fostered in Breifne, Brian Luignech in Luigne, and Muirchertach Muimnech in Munster.

It was perhaps for these benefits that Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair followed his father's lead and ignored the reformers' zeal. Under the year 1233, recording the fall of Ruaidrí's sons from power for the final time, *Ann. Conn.* pointedly attributed their demise to Ruaidrí's moral failings: 'Here ends the rule of the children of Ruaidri O Conchobair, King of Ireland. For the Pope offered him the title to (the kingship of) Ireland for himself and his seed for ever, and likewise six wives, if he would renounce the sin of adultery henceforth; and since he would not accept these terms God took the rule and sovranity [sic] from his seed for ever, in punishment for his sin'.<sup>1978</sup>

This comment suggests a contrast, in the mind of the author, with those who seized power at the expense of Ruaidrí's sons, i.e. Cathal Crobderg's sons. No doubt it was the same annalist who penned Cathal Crobderg's obituary of 1224, praising him as 'the king who was most chaste of all the kings of Ireland; the king who kept himself to one consort

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<sup>1978</sup> *Ann. Conn.* 1233.3: 'Deod flaithesa claimni Ruaidri h.Conchobair Rig Erenn ann sin. Uair tarcaid in Papa cert ar Erim do fein & da sil 'na diaid co brath & seser do mnaib posta & scur do peacad na mban o sin amach, & o nar gab Ruaidri sin do ben dia rigi & flaithius dia sil co brath a ndigaltus pecaid na mban'. See also *A.L.C.* 1233.2, 1233.3, 1233.4.

and practised continence before God from her death till his own'.<sup>1979</sup> Cathal Crobderg's only wife, Mór, daughter of Domnall Úa Briain, had died in 1218.<sup>1980</sup>

The comment in *Ann. Conn.* that Ruaidrí had at least six wives has been dismissed as an anachronism that more properly applied to Toirdelbach.<sup>1981</sup> Though it is true that only one wife of Ruaidrí's is known by name, Tigernán Úa Ruairc's daughter Dub Coblaid (d. 1181), there is plenty of evidence to suggest the annalist's complaint was substantive.<sup>1982</sup>

The genealogies give an incomplete list of Ruaidrí's sons, comprising seven individuals.<sup>1983</sup> With reference to the annals we can increase this to at least fourteen sons,<sup>1984</sup> and at least eight daughters.<sup>1985</sup> Some of these are mentioned on one occasion only, purely incidentally, indicating that many more probably went unrecorded. Like Toirdelbach, Ruaidrí used his children to forge bonds inside and outside his province, so it is likely that if he had more than one wife, they offered the same opportunity; certainly, his one recorded marriage, to Úa Ruairc's daughter, was politically important.<sup>1986</sup>

Úa Ruairc's own case was different: Derbforgaill appears to have been his only wife. He had only two recorded sons, both of whom predeceased him: Máel Sechlainn (d. 1162)

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<sup>1979</sup> *Ann. Conn.* 1224.2; *A.L.C.* 1224.2; *A.F.M.* 1224.7.

<sup>1980</sup> *A.L.C.* 1218.6; *A.U.* 1218.5; *Ann. Inisf.* 1218.2; *A.F.M.* 1217.3.

<sup>1981</sup> Flanagan, 'Ua Conchobair, Ruaidrí [Rory O'Connor] (c. 1116–1198), high-king of Ireland' in *O.D.N.B.* (<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-20522>) (12 June 2018).

<sup>1982</sup> *Ann. Clon.* 1181.

<sup>1983</sup> *Mac Fhirbhisigh's Book*, i, §220.9, p. 488: Áed, Tadc, Conchobar, Muiredach, Toirdelbach, Murchad, Diarmait.

<sup>1984</sup> These are Áed (d. 1159), Murchad (blinded 1177, died 1216), Conchobar Maenmaige (d. 1189), Conchobar Úa nDiarmata (d. 1189), Donnchad Uaithnech (d. 1200), Diarmait (d. 1221), Murgius Canonach (d. 1224), Áed Muimnech (d. 1233), Muiredach (d. 1207), Toirdelbach (d. 1239), Áed (d. 1233), Domnall Murach (d. unknown), Ruaidrí (d. 1211), Gilla na Naem (d. 1228), and possibly also Donnchad Mór (d. 1233). Donnchad Mór is recorded as a son of Ruaidrí in *Ann. Clon.* 1233, but elsewhere as a grandson through Diarmait (*Ann. Conn.* 1233.2; *A.L.C.* 1233.1; *A.F.M.* 1233.4). This list is at variance with a similar list by Jaski on the following points: Jaski considers Murchad (blinded 1177) and Murchad or, in his version, Murchertach (d. 1216) to be separate individuals; and he excludes both Gilla na Naem (d. 1228) and Donnchad Mór (d. 1233), the latter of whom he includes as a son of Diarmait mac Ruaidrí, following *Ann. Conn.*, *A.L.C.*, and *A.F.M.*

<sup>1985</sup> An unnamed daughter married to Úa Máel Doraid (d. 1176), Nualad, wife of Mac Dúinn Shléibe (d. 1226), Duibhessa, wife of Cathal Mac Diarmata (d. 1230), an unnamed daughter married to Hugh de Lacy (d. unknown), Finnghuala (d. 1247), Raghnaid (d. 1211), Caillech Dé (d. 1211), and Éacht (d. 1206).

<sup>1986</sup> See below, pp 409–10.

and Áed Manach (d. 1171). The former's name was no doubt an acknowledgement of Derbforgaill's family, a common way by which forenames were introduced into families, while the latter was named for Tigernán's father, Áed in Gilla Srónmael (d. 1122).

A comparison of the Uí Chonchobair and Uí Ruairc in this period shows the impact such divergent marriage practices had on dynastic development. Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair's productivity effectively accelerated the process of segmentation in his dynasty; there were no subsequent kings of Connacht who did not descend directly from him. Other existing segments, even those descended from Toirdelbach's father Ruaidrí na Saide Buide or his grandfather, Áed in Gaí Bernaig, were therefore excluded from the kingship. In the 1220s and 1230s, Ruaidrí's sons, referred to generally as the 'meic Ruaidrí', contested the kingship with Cathal Crobderg's sons. Had they been successful, it is possible that 'Meic Ruaidrí' would have eclipsed 'Uí Chonchobair' as the surname of the royal dynasty, just as 'Meic Dúinn Sléibe' replaced Uí hEochada in Ulaid.

A relatively ancient dynastic segmentation prevailed among the Uí Ruairc. Two sons of Ualgarg Úa Ruairc (d. 1057), Tigernán and Domnall, gave rise to the 'Meic Tigernáin' and 'Meic Domnaill' lines respectively. Áed in Gilla Srónmáel (d. 1122) and Tigernán Úa Ruairc (d. 1172) belonged to the Meic Domnaill line, but this group did not monopolise the kingship of Uí Briúin Bréifne. The Meic Tigernáin candidates of Donnchad in Gilla Braite (d. 1124) and his son Áed (d. 1184) interrupted their rule at intervals. This was certainly the case after Áed in Gilla Srónmáel's death in 1122, when Donnchad in Gilla Braite took over, and also in 1152, when Tigernán was temporarily deposed. Tigernán had already suffered a deposition in 1140, and this may also have been in favour of Áed mac Donnchada in Gilla Braite. When Tigernán died in 1172, with his sons all dead before him, the Meic Tigernáin line took the kingship again.

Traditionally, Úa Ruairc has not been considered a 'reforming' king, as have Mac Cárthaig, Donnchad Úa Cerbaill, Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn, and Diarmait Mac Murchada, for example. As we have seen, such a categorisation tells us nothing about the

marriage practices of such men anyway (like Mac Cárthaig, Mac Murchada had multiple unions), but since Úa Ruairc's wife has been regarded as an ally of reform, and since we have now established the fact that her patronage was offered in concert with her husband, and not in opposition to him, it may well be that theirs is an example of 'reformed' marriage practice taking root in Ireland. Cathal Crobderg Úa Conchobair is more notable in this regard because the annalists emphasised the point, but this was surely to create a contrast with Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair as well. If this was so, Mac Murchada's abduction of Derbforgaill appears all the more calculated.

If female wealth control was related to marriage, the links formed between Irish families through marriage were even more important. On rare occasions marriages themselves are recorded, but this was not typical; we are instead dependent on chance references and obituaries to build a picture of these connections from the annals.<sup>1987</sup> Fortunately, we also have the *Banshenchas*, mentioned above, which was a twelfth-century genealogical record of the sons (and sometimes the daughters) produced by prominent aristocratic women. Though the origins of some named individuals are obscure, many more links are illuminated than could be by reliance on the annals alone.

Modern commentary has hitherto argued in general terms for the use of women as 'political pawns' in Gaelic Ireland, and for the existence of an alliance system comparable to continental Europe.<sup>1988</sup> This is not a fanciful suggestion: there are cases where marriage links clearly coincided with important military and political alignments. Perhaps the most obvious example in the twelfth century is that of Tigernán Úa Ruairc and Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair: a long-lasting alliance, the beginning of which is recorded in the annals,<sup>1989</sup> and in support of which there was a marriage.<sup>1990</sup> An earlier example may be found in Ragnailt ingen Amlaíb, whose father may be identified as Amlaíb Cúarán of

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<sup>1987</sup> See for instance, *A.F.M.* 1159.5; *Ann. Conn.* 1259.6; *A.U.* 1263.22.

<sup>1988</sup> Ní Bhrolchain, 'The Banshenchas revisited', in O'Dowd & Wichert (eds), *Chattel, servant or citizen*, pp 70–81 at 72; Flanagan, *The transformation of the Irish church*, p. 185.

<sup>1989</sup> *A.F.M.* 1159.10.

<sup>1990</sup> *Ann. Clon.* 1181.

Dublin. She was mother of Muirchertach úa Congalaigh,<sup>1991</sup> who died in 995,<sup>1992</sup> reflecting the alliance between the Norse of Dublin and Domnall mac Congalaig of SílnÁedo Sláine c. 970, ill-fated though it ultimately was.<sup>1993</sup>

The relationship reflected by marriage between major families was often not alliance but suzerainty. The marriage of Cathal Crobderg to Mór, daughter of Domnall Úa Briain, a figure over whom Úa Conchobair tried to establish his authority, was one such. This had even more significance because it was Cathal Crobderg's only marriage.<sup>1994</sup> Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair's repeated marriages to the daughters of Murchad Úa Máel Sechlainn, at a time when overkingship of Meath was contested by Connacht and the Northern Uí Néill, also corresponds with this rationale for marriage.<sup>1995</sup> It is clear, too, that when Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair offered his daughter in marriage to Diarmait Mac Murchada it was the confirmation of his authority over Mac Murchada, not the creation of a future alliance.<sup>1996</sup> Another daughter of Ruaidrí's had been given to Mac Dúinn Sléibe in the same way.<sup>1997</sup>

Neither political alliance or overlordship explain all or even most recorded aristocratic marriages. Marriages between families of geographical proximity constitute a significant portion of the total recorded specimens, whether between families of regional, local, or provincial influence, or inter-marriages between the same. They frequently took place across provincial boundaries. If the Uí Briain Ratha transcribed by Margaret E. Dobbs should read Uí Briúin Ratha, Ruaidrí na Saide Buide Úa Conchobair's marriage to Úa

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<sup>1991</sup> *Banshenchas* [part two], p. 188.

<sup>1992</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 995.4.

<sup>1993</sup> On this alliance see Benjamin T. Hudson, 'Óláf Sihtricson [Óláfr Sigtryggsson, Amlaíb Cúarán] (c. 926–981), king of Dublin and of Northumbria', in *O.D.N.B.*, accessed online (<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-20671>.) (4 Apr. 2019)

<sup>1994</sup> See above, pp 408–9.

<sup>1995</sup> *Chron. Scot.* 1115.4; *A.F.M.* 1128.17; *A.U.* 1127.7; *A.L.C.* 1127.7; *Ann. Clon.* 1108.

<sup>1996</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, 50–51; see Connacht, pp 73–4.

<sup>1997</sup> *A.F.M.* 1226.6; *A.L.C.* 1226.6; *Ann. Conn.* 1226.6.



Conaing's daughter, producing Domnall mac Ruaidrí Uí Chonchobair (d. 1118), was one such example.<sup>1998</sup>

Aillend ingen Uí Baigellain of Fir Manach, whose father was a figure of only regional importance, was mother of two provincial kings in different provinces: Tigernán Uí Ruairc of Bréifne and Donnchad Uí Cerbaill of Airgialla. She therefore had at least two local marriages, one intra-provincial (to the Fernmag) and one inter-provincial (to the Uí Briúin Bréifne).<sup>1999</sup> Similarly, the Uí hEagra family of north Connacht are recorded to have had multiple marriages with the Uí Chonchobair. Etain, mother of Cathal Uí Conchobair (d. 1082) was a daughter of Uí hEagra,<sup>2000</sup> Dub Coblaid ingen Toirdelbaig Uí Chonchobair and wife of Uí hEagra died in 1131,<sup>2001</sup> and the wife of Murchad Uí hEagra who died in 1134 was also a daughter of Toirdelbach Uí Conchobair, though it is possible that these entries refer to the same person.<sup>2002</sup>

In the same category, Caillech Caimgein ingen Ocain Uí Fallamain, a minor family of Síl Muiredaig, was the mother of Ruaidrí na Saide Buide Uí Conchobair.<sup>2003</sup> Mór ingen Conchobair Failge married Conchobar úa Máel Sechlainn; they were mentioned above in relation to women exercising political power and the theory that Mór may have been used as a hostage.

Another wife of Conchobar úa Máel Sechlainn's, if Dobbs' identification is accepted, was Sadb ingen Uí hAnradain,<sup>2004</sup> perhaps the family of that name from Corca Raoidhe in Meath discussed by Patrick Woulfe.<sup>2005</sup> The origin of Conchobar's own mother, Cacht

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<sup>1998</sup> *Banshenchas* [part two], p. 191.

<sup>1999</sup> *Banshenchas* [part two], p. 191.

<sup>2000</sup> *Banshenchas* [part two], p. 191.

<sup>2001</sup> *A.F.M.* 1131.2.

<sup>2002</sup> *A.F.M.* 1134.19; *Ann. Tig.* 1134.12; *Ann. Clon.* 1135; *Chron. Scot.* 1134.4.

<sup>2003</sup> *Banshenchas* [part two], p. 190.

<sup>2004</sup> *Banshenchas* [part two], p. 196.

<sup>2005</sup> Patrick Woulfe, *Irish names and surnames* (Dublin, 1923), pp 555–6; Another daughter of the Uí hAnradain is noted to have been mother of Muirchertach mac Taidc Uí Briain in the *Banshenchas* (*Banshenchas* [part two], p. 197), and the entries are located beside one another, suggesting they refer to the same family. There was a family, usually rendered 'Uí hAnracháin', among the Dal gCais, as well as the family of Meath mentioned above – one or perhaps both of these marriages were local links, then.

ingen Briain Uí Bicin of Síl Baithin, is unclear, but certainly it was a minor and probably a local family.<sup>2006</sup> Gormlaith ingen Uí Donnacáin, king of Arad Tíre in Thomond, was the mother of the Murchad Úa Briain who died in 1068.<sup>2007</sup>

Such marriages may reflect political concerns, and they may not. There are other examples that certainly do not. For instance, Caintigern (or Caindeach) ingen Guairi Uí Lachtnain of east Tethba was a wife of Flann mac Máel Sechlainn and mother of two of his sons whose obituaries appear in the annals, Murchad (d. 1076) and Domnall (d. 1094).<sup>2008</sup> Guaire Úa Lachtnain was described as the ‘learned man of Clonmacnoise’ in the *Banshenchas* entry containing his daughter’s marriage to Úa Máel Sechlainn, highlighting his non-political status.<sup>2009</sup> Then there is the unnamed ingen Dearsada Uí Diumai, wife of one Donnchad, perhaps of Osraige, and mother of Gilla Phátraic mac Donnchada. Her father is reported to have been the ‘royal jester of Leinster’.<sup>2010</sup> There can be no doubt that these marriages fall outside the realm of political activity.

Marriages of no apparent political importance were formed by even the most prominent families. Mór, daughter of Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill (d. 1022), was the mother of Cenn Fáelad Úa Dúngalaigh, the king of Múscraige Tíre in Munster who died in 1078.<sup>2011</sup> It seems probable that this figure was the Cenn Fáelad mac Fhind of the genealogies, and if so the person to whom Mór was married of little significance.<sup>2012</sup> The mother of Toirdelbach úa Briain, king of Ireland (d. 1086), was Mór ingen Gilla Bríde Úa Máel Muaid, the king of Fir Cell, a regional kingdom in Meath.<sup>2013</sup> The mother of Diarmait Mac Murchada was Orlaith ingen Gilla Michil of the Síl Brain, a minor dynasty

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<sup>2006</sup> *Banshenchas* [part two], p. 190.

<sup>2007</sup> *Banshenchas* [part two], p. 190.

<sup>2008</sup> *Banshenchas* [part two], pp 190, 226.

<sup>2009</sup> *Banshenchas* [part two], p. 190: ‘*fear-leigind Cluana Meic Nois*’.

<sup>2010</sup> *Banshenchas* [part two], p. 228: ‘*rig-druth Laigen*’.

<sup>2011</sup> *A.F.M.* 1078.11.

<sup>2012</sup> O’Brien (ed.), *Corpus Genealogiarum Hiberniae*, p. 367.

<sup>2013</sup> *Banshenchas* [part two], p. 228.

in the south of modern County Wexford; their proximity to the Uí Chennselaig may reflect a local link, like others listed above.<sup>2014</sup>

An analysis of early Irish literature by Philip O’Leary has shown that women’s honour was defined with reference to their husbands. Women are depicted boasting about the adherence of their husbands to the honour-code, and their honour has been described as a ‘function’ of their husbands’ status and actions.<sup>2015</sup> Women are also depicted inducing and inciting their husbands and sons to action, and this was no doubt a consequence of how inaction reflected upon them personally.<sup>2016</sup> The opposite does not apply, however. Men were not apparently negatively affected socially by taking a wife of a minor dynasty, whether from close-by or far away. As such, they were relatively free to choose partners for more aesthetic or amorous reasons.

If the literary depiction reflected reality, it may also indicate the agency of women in the selection of husbands. There are examples of women who married on multiple occasions, and for whose natal families at least one of the connections appears to be non-political. Etain ingen Uí hEagra, mother first of Cathal mac Áeda Uí Chonchobair, and later of Briain mac Murchada Uí Briain, is one example.<sup>2017</sup> Sadb ingen Domnall Meic Gilla Pádraig married into the Uí Máel Sechlainn, the Uí Chonchobair Failge, and the Uí hUidir of Airgíalla, with no obvious political reason for the final pairing. Gormlaith ingen Máel Sechlainn Úa Máel Sechlainn was mother of Cú Ulad Úa Caindelbáin of Laegaire, which was a regional kingdom in Meath, of Congalach Úa Conchobair Failge, from a regional kingdom in Leinster on the Meath border, and of Ruaidrí Úa Flaithbertaig of Uí Briúin Seóla in west Connacht.<sup>2018</sup> Again, no advantage could accrue to Gormlaith’s natal family by the establishment of at least one of her marriages.

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<sup>2014</sup> *Banshenchas* [part two], pp 198, 231.

<sup>2015</sup> Philip O’Leary, ‘The honour of women in early Irish literature’ in *Ériu*, xxxviii (1987), pp 27–44 at 28–29.

<sup>2016</sup> O’Leary, ‘The honour of women’, pp 27 n. 1, 29–30; *Cog. Gaedhel*, pp 142–5.

<sup>2017</sup> *Banshenchas* [part two], p. 191.

<sup>2018</sup> *Banshenchas* [part two], p. 194; Ní Bhrolchain, ‘The Banshenchas revisited’, p. 77.

We can now turn our attention to another previously unnoticed pattern of aristocratic marriage. In provinces where kingship alternated between two or more distinct lines, in a system called *sel* or *selaidecht*, marriages between those same lines were regularly constituted. This took place regardless of similarly regular animosity, which was characteristic of competition for a common kingship. But, when the kingship became dominated by one group and the other segment was edged out, or the common kingship otherwise collapsed, marriage links between these formerly associated lines ceased to be formed. It therefore appears that among certain groups, marriage could be deemed a recognition of royal status.

In Ulaid, the Dál Fiatach and Dál nAraide represent an example of this practice. A granddaughter of the ninth-century Dál nAraide king of Ulaid Bécc,<sup>2019</sup> Ablach ingen Domnall mac Béicce, married Áed mac Madagáin of Dal Fiatach, and produced Eocagáin mac Áeda, himself described as ‘half-king of Ulaid’ in the *Banshenchas*, and ‘king of Ulaid’ in the annals.<sup>2020</sup> Aillind daughter of Ainbith mac Áeda meic Madagáin married back into the Dál nAraide, albeit as her second marriage, producing Cellach mac Béicce, who died in 941 and was named as king of Dál nAraide.<sup>2021</sup>

Barrdub ingen Lethlobair, the Dál nAraide king of Ulaid who died in 873, married Áed mac Eocagáin, the Dal Fiatach king of Ulaid who died in 919.<sup>2022</sup> Another manuscript version of the *Banshenchas* records Barrdub ingen Lethlobar to have married Bécc Bairche, also of Dal Fiatach, and produced Áed Róin, the king of Ulaid who died in 734.<sup>2023</sup> It is possible that two different women are in question as Dál nAraide men named Lethlobar lived in both periods, but it seems more likely that the manuscript

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<sup>2019</sup> *A.F.M.* 889.6.

<sup>2020</sup> *Banshenchas* [part two], p. 226: ‘leith-rig Ulad’; *A.F.M.* 882.12: ‘rí Uladh’.

<sup>2021</sup> *Banshenchas* [part two], p. 187; *A.F.M.* 941.10.

<sup>2022</sup> *Banshenchas* [part two], p. 226; *Chron. Scot.* 919.2.

<sup>2023</sup> *Banshenchas* [part two], p. 187.

traditions have diverged in their record of the same person. Nevertheless, it is still of significance that both record the intermarriage of Dál nAraide and Dál Fiatach.

The Uí Néill also practiced *selaidecht*, but the pattern was complicated by a second common kingship. Both northern and southern branches had their own kingships, and also recognised the possibility of extending authority over the other branch. Marriage links between the segments of the northern and the southern branches are therefore also relevant. Within this dynamic the Cenél nEógain (of the north) and Síl nÁedo Sláine (of the south) are the pairing with the greatest number of recorded marriages.

A daughter of Niall Caille of Cenél nEógain married Conaing mac Floinn of Síl nÁedo Sláine and produced Flann mac Conaing, the king of Brega who died in 868.<sup>2024</sup> Eithne ingen Áed Findléith of Cenél nEógain married Flannacán mac Cellaigh of Síl nÁedo Sláine, and was mother to Máel Mithig, the king of Brega who died in 918 or 919.<sup>2025</sup> Another Eithne, Eithne ingen Fergaile meic Domnaill meic Áeda Findléith of Cenél nEógain, also married into the Síl nÁedo Sláine. She married Congalach mac Máel Mithig and produced Muirchertach mac Congalaig, who died in 964.<sup>2026</sup> There was also a marriage between Derbail ingen Máel Dúine meic Áed Ordnige of Cenél nEógain and the Síl nÁedo Sláine. The *Banshenchas* itself is unclear on whether she married Cellach mac Flannacáin or his father Flannacán mac Cellaig, but it was nevertheless another marriage between the Síl nÁedo Sláine and Cenél nEógain.<sup>2027</sup>

By comparison, other north–south marriage links in the Uí Néill are less well attested. In this category we find Dunlaith ingen Muirchertaigh meic Néill Glúnduib of Cenél nEógain, who married Domnall Donn mac Donnchada of Clann Cholmáin and was the mother of Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill, the famous king of Ireland, ancestor of the Uí

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<sup>2024</sup> *Banshenchas* [part two], p. 186; *A.U.* 868.4.

<sup>2025</sup> *Banshenchas* [part two], p. 226; *A.U.* 918.7; *Ann. Inisf.* 919.3.

<sup>2026</sup> *Banshenchas* [part two], p. 226; *Chron. Scot.* 964.6.

<sup>2027</sup> *Banshenchas* [part two], p. 225.

Máel Sechlainn, and rival of Brian Bóraime.<sup>2028</sup> There may also be an example of Clann Cholmáin and Cenél Conaill intermarriage in the case of Caindech ingen Canannáin, who is named as the third wife of Donnchad mac Floinn of Clann Cholmáin.<sup>2029</sup> This was the case if her father was the Canannán from who the Uí Chananáin of Cenél Conaill descended.

Within the Southern Uí Néill the pattern can again be found, and the fact that it occurs to a lesser extent than in Ulaid may reflect the fact that the kingship was less evenly contested. The Clann Cholmáin and Síl nÁedo Sláine dynasties occasionally married into each other, notably during rare periods of prominence for the weaker Síl nÁedo Sláine branch. Gormlaith ingen Floinn meic Conaig of Síl nÁedo Sláine married Flann mac Máel Sechlainn of Clann Cholmáin and was mother of Donnchad mac Floinn, who died in 942 and was called king of Tara in the *Banshenchas* and king of Ireland in the annals.<sup>2030</sup> Another child of Flann mac Máel Sechlainn, Ligeach, a daughter not of Gormlaith but of a different woman, married back into the Síl nÁedo Sláine. She married Máel Mithig mac Flannacáin, and was mother of Congalach mac Máel Mithig, king of Ireland and the last Síl nÁedo Sláine king of the Southern Uí Néill.<sup>2031</sup>

The example of the Northern Uí Néill underscores the relationship between this pattern of inter-marriage and the status of each branch within the kin-group. The marriage of the unnamed ingen Earnaine of Cenél Conaill to Fergal mac Máel Dúin, the king of Cenél nEógain and Ireland who died in 722, is the latest example of a marriage between these dynasties in the *Banshenchas*.<sup>2032</sup> Apart from the anomalous Ruaidrí ua Cannanáin (d. 950),<sup>2033</sup> Domnall mac Áeda Muindeirg, who died in 804, was the last Cenél Conaill

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<sup>2028</sup> *Banshenchas* [part two], p. 188.

<sup>2029</sup> *Banshenchas* [part two], p. 187.

<sup>2030</sup> *Banshenchas* [part two], p. 226; *A.F.M.* 942.13.

<sup>2031</sup> *Banshenchas* [part two], p. 226.

<sup>2032</sup> *Banshenchas* [part two], p. 186.

<sup>2033</sup> See *The Uí Néill and the North*, p. 125. Even though the growing importance of Ruaidrí ua Cannanáin's family in the mid-tenth century does not seem to have been recognised by a marriage with Cenél nEógain, it was acknowledged in this way by the Clann Cholmáin: Cainnech, a

‘king of the North’<sup>2034</sup> until Flaithbertach Úa Máel Doraid, who was styled (more ambiguously) king of Cenél Conaill and Cenél nEógain in his obituary of 1196.<sup>2035</sup>

Evidently the dominance of the Cenél nEógain in the common overkingship precluded the perpetuation of marriage links between the two dynasties.

Fourteen Uí Néill kings of Tara appear in the *Banshenchas* with no named mother or wife.<sup>2036</sup> Most of these men were from the Síl nÁedo Sláine or Cenél Conaill; that is to say, from the weaker branches of their respective dynasties.<sup>2037</sup> It is therefore likely that there were more marriages of this type for which the record is defective. Anne Connon, who also held the traditional view of marriage as a confirmation of an alliance, suggested that the compiler of the main source for the ‘Tara framework’ of the *Banshenchas* did not have access to a good-quality record for these groups.<sup>2038</sup> This is possible, but it may also be that such matches were diplomatically sensitive at the time the *Banshenchas* itself was compiled; that is, in the twelfth century when the Cenél nEógain and Clann Cholmáin were dominant.

The key point here is that such marriages were abandoned after monopolisation. In Ulaid, the successor segments of Dál Fiatach, which were Úa Mathgamna, Úa hEochada, and later Mac Dúinn Sléibe, had no marriages with the successor segments of Dál nAraide, Úa Lethlobair and Úa Loinsigh. The last Dál nAraide king of Ulaid was Áed mac Loinsigh (d. 972), and the latest recorded marriages between the two branches concern tenth-century figures.<sup>2039</sup>

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daughter of Canannán, was married to Donnchad Donn mac Flainn, king of Ireland (*A.F.M.* 927.16 (recté 929)).

<sup>2034</sup> *A.U.* 804.1: ‘*rex Aquilonis*’.

<sup>2035</sup> *A.L.C.* 1196.20; *A.F.M.* 1197.3; *Misc.Ir.Annals* 1197.4.

<sup>2036</sup> Connon, ‘The “Banshenchas” and the Uí Néill queens of Tara’, in Smyth (ed.), *Seanchas: studies in early and medieval Irish archaeology, history and literature in honour of Francis J. Byrne* (Dublin, 2000), pp 98–108 at 106.

<sup>2037</sup> Connon, ‘The “Banshenchas”’, p. 106.

<sup>2038</sup> Connon, ‘The “Banshenchas”’, p. 106.

<sup>2039</sup> *Banshenchas* [part two], pp 186, 226.

Among the Southern Uí Néill, the Uí Máel Sechlainn, successors of the Clann Cholmáin line, had no recorded marriages with the Meic Gilla Sechnaill, Uí Chellaig, Uí Chongalaig, Uí hAirt, or other successors of the Síl nÁedo Sláine dynasty in east Meath. The last Síl nÁedo Sláine king of the Southern Uí Néill was Congalach mac Máel Mithig (d. 956),<sup>2040</sup> and the latest marriages between Clann Cholmáin and Síl nÁedo Sláine also concerned tenth-century individuals.<sup>2041</sup> Regarding the Uí Néill generally, the common kingship that broke down in the late tenth or early eleventh century, is also reflected by marriage practice: The mother of Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill (d. 1022), the last claimant to such an authority, was of Cenél nEógain, and hers is one of the latest recorded marriages between Cenél nEógain and Clann Cholmáin.<sup>2042</sup>

The latest is that of Ben Mide (d. 1137) ingen Conchobar Uí Máel Sechlainn (d. 1073) who was the mother of Niall Mac Lochlainn, but there is some uncertainty with this example. The only record of the pairing is the *Banshenchas*, which reports that Ben Mide was ‘*mathair Neill m. Mail Eachlaind mic-meicLochlaind*’, which rendered literally, is ‘mother of Niall son of Máel Sechlainn son of Ua Lochlainn’.<sup>2043</sup> This individual was identified by Dobbs as Niall mac Máel Sechlainn (d. 1061); the Máel Sechlainn in question also being the father of Lochlann from whom the Meic Lochlainn descend. As the obituary for this Máel Sechlainn is under 997, he and Ben Mide were not contemporaries, however.<sup>2044</sup>

More recently, this Niall has been identified by Flanagan as Niall mac Domnaill Meic Lochlainn (d. 1119).<sup>2045</sup> In this latter case he would have the pedigree of son of Domnall, son of Ardgar, son of Lochlainn (a quo Meic Lochlainn), son of Máel Sechlainn (d. 997). While Domnall Mac Lochlainn and Ben Mide ingen Conchobair Uí Máel Sechlainn were

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<sup>2040</sup> A.U. 956.3.

<sup>2041</sup> *Banshenchas* [part two], pp 188, 226.

<sup>2042</sup> *Banshenchas* [part two], p. 188.

<sup>2043</sup> *Banshenchas* [part two], p. 190.

<sup>2044</sup> A.U. 997.2.

<sup>2045</sup> Flanagan, ‘Ua Lochlainn, Domnall [Domhnall O’Lochlainn] (1048–1121)’, in *O.D.N.B.*, accessed online (<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/20744>) (10 May 2019).



contemporaries, his is clearly not the name given in the *Banshenchas*. The significance of the point is that, if Flanagan's identification is correct, the twenty-eight-year-old Niall mac Domnaill Meic Lochlainn killed in 1119 puts the Clann Cholmáin–Cenél nEógain pairing in 1090–1 and thus a slight anomaly to the pattern being discussed, whereas if it was at a date closer to the mid-eleventh century it would not be as incongruous.<sup>2046</sup>

It is likely of relevance that the common kingship of the Uí Néill did not become dominated by one dynasty like the provincial kingships, but rather it fell out of use. As such, this very late example can provide evidence of an ambition to perpetuate the office, whether in a mid-or-late eleventh-century context. This also serves to underline the innovation shown by Domnall Mac Lochlainn in abandoning it.

One fact that should be noted here is that there were marriages between the Uí Chathasaig and Uí Máel Sechlainn, and the Uí Chathasaig of Saithne were also descendants of the Síl nÁedo Sláine. Tailte ingen Chonchobair Uí Máel Sechlainn was wife of Ímar Úa Cathasaig of Saithne,<sup>2047</sup> and an unnamed daughter of Úa Cathasaig was mother of Conchobar Dall Úa Máel Sechlainn.<sup>2048</sup> Both examples come from the mid-to-late twelfth century, however, by which time this area, Saithne, was under the control of Dublin not of the Southern Uí Néill.<sup>2049</sup> This interesting behavioural modification emphasises the overtly political nature of such matches: the transfer of one group into another kingdom evidently relieved the prohibition on the creation of marriage links.

Unfortunately, we lack enough examples to include Munster in this discussion. Similarly, in Connacht there was no longstanding alternation for the provincial kingship, which was largely the preserve of the Uí Briúin Aí, and later their successor segment Síl Muiredaig. The Uí Ruairc of Uí Briúin Bréifne, itself a questionable genealogy, only latterly

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<sup>2046</sup> *A.F.M.* 1119.5; *A.U.* 1119.8; *A.L.C.* 1119.6; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1119.1; *Ann. Tig.* 1120.1; *Ann. Inisf.* 1120.3.

<sup>2047</sup> *A.F.M.* 1171.6.

<sup>2048</sup> *Banshenchas* [part two], p. 192.

<sup>2049</sup> MacCotter, *Medieval Ireland*, pp 165–6.

competed for kingship but there are almost no recorded marriages between the two dynasties.<sup>2050</sup> The marriage of Tigernán Úa Ruairc's daughter to Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair may here be discounted, as it clearly corresponded with an alliance and occurred at a time when the Uí Ruairc were no longer challenging to be kings of Connacht. One such marriage may be pointed to: that of Fergal Úa Ruairc to Be Bind ingen Taidc in Eich Gil Uí Chonchobair.<sup>2051</sup> After Fergal was killed by Domnall mac Congalaigh of Síl nÁedo Sláine, Be Bind became the wife of Domnall. Recorded marriages concerning the Uí Ruairc overwhelmingly point to marriages into Meath and the Southern Uí Néill, not back into Connacht. This may well reflect the concern of the author of the *Banshenchas*, Gilla Mo Dutu Úa Caiside, with emphasising this particular link.

In all provinces where *selaidocht* existed, the dominant line (the one that held the kingship most frequently) is also recorded to have had a greater number of external marriage links. The leading lines of the Northern Uí Néill and Ulaid, the Cenél nEógain and Dál Fiatach, married into each other while also pursuing the type of intra-provincial marriage outlined above. The marriage of Dunlaith ingen Domnaill meic Áeda mac Néill of Cenél nEógain to Áed mac Eochagáin of Dál Fiatach is one of many such examples.<sup>2052</sup> The Cenel nEógain also formed marriage links with the Connachta,<sup>2053</sup> the Airgialla,<sup>2054</sup> and even the Eoganachta Durlais (alias Eóganacht Airthir Cliach) in Munster.<sup>2055</sup> The Clann Cholmáin contracted a number of marriages with Osraige<sup>2056</sup> and with the Connachta.<sup>2057</sup> They also had marriages with the Dál Fiatach, in the case of Be

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<sup>2050</sup> Eoghan Ó Mordha, 'The Uí Briúin Bréifni genealogies and the origins of Bréifne' in *Peritia*, xvi (2002), pp 444–50.

<sup>2051</sup> *Banshenchas* [part two], p. 188.

<sup>2052</sup> *Banshenchas* [part two], p. 226.

<sup>2053</sup> *Banshenchas* [part two], p. 188.

<sup>2054</sup> *Banshenchas* [part two], p. 186.

<sup>2055</sup> *Banshenchas* [part two], p. 186.

<sup>2056</sup> *Banshenchas* [part two], p. 187.

<sup>2057</sup> *Banshenchas* [part two], p. 187.

Bail ingen Cathail ‘rí Ulad’, married to Donnchad mac Domnaill Midi.<sup>2058</sup> Such wider links can only occasionally be shown to exist for the subordinate or weaker dynasties.

International marriages were also the preserve of the most important dynasties. Notably, Máel Muire ingen Cináeda meic Ailpin king of Scotland married into both the Cenél nEógain and the Clann Cholmáin, producing Niall Glunduib and Domnall mac Floinn meic Máel Sechlainn for those dynasties respectively.<sup>2059</sup> Muirchertach Úa Briain gave a daughter to the son of the king of Norway, Magnus Barefoot Ólafsson, in 1101.<sup>2060</sup> The marriage of Áed Úa Conchobair to ingen Dubhghaill meic Ruaidhrí, of Clann Shomharlaidhe in the Hebrides in 1259 is another example.<sup>2061</sup>

There were few Anglo-Gaelic marriages in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. Hugh de Lacy’s marriage to Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair’s daughter (c. 1180) has already been mentioned; it is notable because it was undertaken without Henry II’s licence and according to Irish custom, by which the payment of *coibche* is probably indicated.<sup>2062</sup> William Gorm de Lacy, a fascinating character in both Irish and Angevin domains, was the result of this marriage.<sup>2063</sup>

There was also Richard de Clare’s marriage to Aífe ingen Diarmata Meic Murchada, of course, through which Giraldus Cambrensis suggested de Clare was entitled to the kingship of Leinster. Cambrensis also wrote that Mac Murchada had offered Aífe to Robert fitz Stephen, while in England, but that fitz Stephen had refused because he was already married; the veracity of these statements is doubted.<sup>2064</sup>

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<sup>2058</sup> *Banshenchas* [part two], p. 186.

<sup>2059</sup> *Banshenchas* [part two], pp 188, 225.

<sup>2060</sup> *A.F.M.* 1102.11.

<sup>2061</sup> *A.F.M.* 1259.5; *Ann. Conn.* 1259.6.

<sup>2062</sup> See above, p. 401.

<sup>2063</sup> See Veach and Verstraten Veach, ‘William Gorm de Lacy: “chiefest champion in these parts of Europe”’, pp 63–84.

<sup>2064</sup> Flanagan, ‘Aífe (Aoife, Eva)’, in *D.I.B.*, accessed online (<https://www.dib.ie/biography/aife-aoife-eva-a0069>) (29 July 2021); Beresford, ‘fitz Stephen, Robert’, in *D.I.B.* (<https://www.dib.ie/biography/fitz-stephen-robert-a3123>) (29 July 2021).

John de Courcy married Affrica, daughter of Gofraid (d. 1187), king of Man and the Isles, c. 1180. While this was not a marriage into Gaelic Ireland, the Norse rulers of the Isles had been active in Irish politics for centuries; Gofraid himself had also married Fionnghuala, a granddaughter of Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn.<sup>2065</sup> There is the case of William de Burgh as well; while the source we rely on for this is very late, it seems that he married a daughter of Domnall Úa Briain's (d. 1194) shortly before the latter's death, and Richard de Burgh, future conqueror of Connacht, was a product of the union.<sup>2066</sup>

It seems evident that the rarity of such marriages and their cessation after the English became firmly established reflects the decline in status for the leading dynasties of Gaelic Ireland. Only they had the status to command relationships of this kind and, as a rule, the successors of Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair and Domnall Úa Briain were not powerful enough to attract English interest. As the Irish kingdoms retreated the English lordships advanced, and naturally English magnates found it expedient to contract marriages with the families of each other instead. The only real surprise is that the lords of Ulaid, de Courcy and Hugh de Lacy (d. 1242) did not contract marriages with the Uí Néill Glúnduib or Meic Lochlainn of the North, a policy which might have helped them advance westwards – as it had William de Burgh.

The situation in Leinster may now be juxtaposed with these kingdoms to show how this practice is relevant to the course of events in the twelfth century. Here, kingship was contested by the Uí Fáeláin, Uí Dúinchada, and Uí Muiredaig for much of the medieval period, as was discussed in the previous chapter. The claim of the Uí Chennselaig was resurrected by Diarmait mac Máel na mBó in the mid-eleventh century, after a period of dormancy since the eighth century. His successors claimed the same provincial authority,

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<sup>2065</sup> Etchingham, Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, Ní Mhaonaigh, and Elizabeth Ashman Rowe, *Norse–Gaelic contacts in a viking world* (Turnhout, 2019), pp 165–6; George Broderick (ed.), *Cronica regum Mannie & Insularum: Chronicles of the kings of Man and the Isles BL Cotton Julius A viii* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Douglas, 1995), folio 37 recto.

<sup>2066</sup> See *The Two Munsters*, pp 289–90, 294 for this and a possible marriage link between Donnchad Cairprech Ua Briain and a daughter of William de Burgh.

with success, though on occasion, even in the twelfth century, they were only recognised with the lesser title ‘king of Uí Chennselaig’, while other dynasties also advanced a claim.<sup>2067</sup>

Marriages continued to occur between all of the dynasties with royal aspirations in Leinster.<sup>2068</sup> For instance, Caillech ingen Dunlaing of the Uí Muiredaig branch of Uí Dunlainge married Máel Mórda of the Uí Fáeláin and was mother of Braen mac Máel Mórda, the king of Leinster who was blinded and died of his wounds in Dublin in 1018.<sup>2069</sup> Cacht ingen Uí Fáeláin married Loísech mac Aimergin of the Laígis and was mother to Cú Cocriche mac Láisig, styled king of Leinster in the *Banshenchas* but merely king of Loígis in the annals on his death in 1042.<sup>2070</sup> Sadb ingen Máel Mórda Uí Domnaill, the king of Uí Chennselaig who died in 1024, was mother of Gilla Chomgaill Uá Tuathail.<sup>2071</sup> Gormlaith ingen Éanna Mac Murchada of Uí Chennselaig, the king of Leinster who died in 1126, married into the Uí Mórda.<sup>2072</sup>

Diarmait Mac Murchada’s first marriage was with Sadb ingen Cerbaill mac Fáeláin of Uí Fáeláin.<sup>2073</sup> His last marriage was to Mór ingen Muirchertaigh Uí Thuathail, a daughter of the king of Uí Muiredaig.<sup>2074</sup> Both were to families that had held the kingship of Leinster, and, in keeping with the pattern discussed above, both therefore recognised the royal status of those families. Had the Uí Chennselaig monopolised the kingship, they would not have acknowledged the Uí Fáeláin or Uí Thuathail in this way.

Further evidence may be found in the 1177 obituary of Máel Mórda Uá Fáeláin, killed by the Uí Thuathail, described as ‘the best crownprince [*rigdamna*] in Leinster’, as well as

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<sup>2067</sup> *A.F.M.* 1089.5, 1092.9, 1115.5; *A.L.C.* 1115.4; *A.U.* 1115.4.

<sup>2068</sup> It is worth noting that the *Banshenchas* contains a strong stratum of Leinster material, and we therefore have a better chance of observing such unions than we do for some other provinces, particularly Munster and Connacht, for which such detailed material is lacking.

<sup>2069</sup> *Banshenchas* [part two], p. 228; *A.U.* 1018.2; *Ann. Inisf.* 1018.4; *A.F.M.* 1017.5.

<sup>2070</sup> *Banshenchas* [part two], p. 233; *A.F.M.* 1042.9.

<sup>2071</sup> *Banshenchas* [part two], p. 195.

<sup>2072</sup> *Banshenchas* [part two], p. 233.

<sup>2073</sup> *Banshenchas* [part two], p. 233.

<sup>2074</sup> *Banshenchas* [part two], p. 232.

in the other similar references to *rigdamnai* which were discussed in the Leinster chapter.<sup>2075</sup> The exact meaning of the term ‘*rigdamna*’ has been debated, but it may be taken to mean the leader of a segment currently excluded from kingship who had a prospect of reclaiming it for his dynasty.<sup>2076</sup> It was also this term that was applied to Éanna Mac Murchada, son of Diarmait, in the same collection of annals, only nine years before, when he was blinded by the king of Osraige.<sup>2077</sup> Furthermore, under 1103 there is a reference to a ‘Muirchertach Mac Gilla mo Cholmóg, king of Leinster’, in both *A.F.M.* and *Ann. Tig.*<sup>2078</sup> The Meic Gilla mo Cholmóg belonged to the Uí Dúinchada. Later, Diarmait Mac Murchada’s own daughter was married to Domnall Mac Gilla mo Cholmóg (d. 1185).<sup>2079</sup>

This discovery has profound implications for understanding of Leinster in the twelfth century. Giraldus Cambrensis wrote of Diarmait Mac Murchada that ‘From his earliest youth and his first taking the kingship he oppressed his nobles, and raged against the chief men of his kingdom with a tyranny grievous and impossible to bear ... He preferred to be feared by all rather than loved. He treated his nobles harshly and brought to prominence men of humble rank’.<sup>2080</sup> Having discussed Leinster’s internal politics, we have good reason to accept this characterisation, even if some earlier historians rejected it.<sup>2081</sup>

In the light of what we now know about marriage practice in Leinster, particularly the fact that dynasties other than the Uí Chennselaig had live claims on the kingship, this

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<sup>2075</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1177.12: ‘*rigdamna rob fherr do Laignib*’; see Leinster, p. 324.

<sup>2076</sup> See Ó Corráin, ‘Irish regnal succession: a reappraisal’ p. 35: ‘I suggest, then, with some hesitation, that the *rigdamna* is usually the head of the main segment out of the kingship and that his office is what Goody calls, a pledge to the segment that it would have the next bite of the cherry. And the degree to which the dynasty is segmented together with the power (or weakness) of the king in office determines whether the *rigdamna* is nearly or distantly related to the king’.

<sup>2077</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1168.2: ‘*Enda Mac Murchadha, rigdamna Laigen, do dallad la Donnchadh Mac Gilla Padraic la ríg Osraigi*’.

<sup>2078</sup> *A.F.M.* 1103.10; *Ann. Tig.* 1103.4. Note also that Muirchertach Mac Gilla mo Cholmóg is mentioned in similar entries in *A.L.C.*, *A.U.*, and *Ann. Inisf.*, but without the provincial title (*A.L.C.* 1103.3, 1103.4; *A.U.* 1103.5; *Ann. Inisf.* 1103.4).

<sup>2079</sup> John T. Gilbert (ed.) *Chartulary St Mary’s Dublin* (2 vols., London, 1884), i, pp 31–2.

<sup>2080</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 25–6, 40–1.

<sup>2081</sup> Martin, ‘Diarmait Mac Murchada’, pp 46–7; see Leinster, p. 326.

needs to be re-assessed. Those who suffered at Mac Murchada's hands represented rival claims to the provincial kingship.

Charles-Edwards's argument that Mac Murchada intended to secure his own (and his dynasty's) hold on Leinster by having the early English invaders take land holdings in the territory of his rivals within Leinster is further supported by Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair's offer of Dublin, Waterford and Wexford to de Clare during the siege of 1171, and it is entirely harmonious with the present interpretation.<sup>2082</sup> Mac Murchada clearly hoped to establish the kind of monopoly achieved elsewhere by the Uí Chonchobair and Uí Máel Sechlainn, among others. He also needed to concern himself with efforts to detach Uí Fáeláin and Uí Failge from Leinster altogether, as outlined elsewhere.<sup>2083</sup> This explains his conduct towards and affirms the analysis made in the Leinster chapter.<sup>2084</sup>

#### **[5.4: Conclusion]**

Three major aspects of the roles and status of women in medieval Gaelic Ireland have been analysed above, and each discussion sheds new light on the society. When women were the victims of political assassination, their deaths coincided with attacks on their husbands on almost every occasion. Furthermore, women are found to have wielded political power and influence on certain occasions, and this was through their husbands' entourages and in advancement of their husbands' careers.

Attacks on political figures encompassed their entourages deliberately, and not purely by coincidence, though, as has been shown, it was normal to record only a small number of prominent victims of such an attack. The way in which women were recorded as victims is the same as the way in which other prominent members of an entourage were recorded as victims. Given that it is demonstrable that women could be included in their husbands'

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<sup>2082</sup> Charles-Edwards, 'Ireland and its invaders, 1166–1186', pp 1–34; see Connacht, pp 76–7, The Two Munsters pp 273–4; *The Deeds*, p. 100 ll 1852–56.

<sup>2083</sup> See Connacht, pp 70–1; Leinster, pp 338–40.

<sup>2084</sup> See Leinster, pp 317–31.

councils and even witness grants of land, their inclusion in the record of victims of an attack suggests such influence was more widespread than is explicitly recorded.

As far as other forms of violence against women are concerned, recent historical work has revealed a possibility that women were used as hostages by major kings. This hypothesis has been taken up by other historians, discussed above, and applied to the cases of some of the more famous women of medieval Ireland. This analysis has shown that women were only very occasionally used in this capacity, and the circumstances of both known cases were clearly exceptional. The additional cases to which the idea has been applied do not reflect such situations, and, on the contrary, correspond to another pattern: that of abduction.

The abduction of women was carried out to humiliate important male relations. Unlike the situation alluded to by marriage law, it was the husband, not the father, who was almost exclusively the target of such an action. Abduction was characteristically different from hostage-taking both in the non-consent of the related male figure in the taking of the woman concerned, and in the rape of the woman herself. When discussed with reference to the political background that gave rise to the specific examples discussed above, it is clear that they correspond with abduction and not with hostage-taking. Consequently, there can be no implication that political authority was manifested in the capturer by his action.

Women were regular contributors to the church in medieval Ireland. This is seen in even the very earliest documents in Irish history, despite an apparent prohibition, in the earliest (customary) law, on the alienation of wealth by women. Contrary to existing commentary, these contributions were almost exclusively small. They were, furthermore, in keeping with the total wealth a woman could expect to hold. In fact, their holdings were based almost entirely on *coibche*, the marriage-payment made to a woman by a prospective husband, which, in an earlier period, had been given to her father.



Interestingly, the fact that *coibche* was linked to honour-price can be used to demonstrate the increased prospects of women of the highest class in the twelfth century. This increase would not be sufficient to comfortably make donations equal to those of male contemporaries. A fall-off in recorded donations by women to the church in the post-invasion period is difficult to account for with certainty. There is a possibility that the adoption of the dowry system over *coibche*, albeit temporary or localised, impacted the wealth held by women around this period. Unfortunately, the evidence is not adequate to say to what degree dowry was adopted by the Gaelic Irish. It may be that fewer links to major churches in a territorially and financially diminished society was the relevant factor, or even simply reduced coverage.

In the existing historiography, discussion of what is here termed ‘marriage prosopography’ has found only that women were used as political pawns by their families in a situation comparable to continental Europe. Such a description has served to blur distinctions between the several different rationales for the creation of marriage links. Marriages were indeed formed to mark important alliances, as elsewhere in Europe. They were also formed to mark the lordship of one king over another, and because of local ties, including across provincial boundaries.

This analysis has revealed another pattern of marriage practice. This is that in kingdoms where kingship alternated between two or more distinct lines of descent, these lines regularly contracted marriages with one another, regardless of continuing conflict. When the kingship was no longer shared, marriages ceased to be contracted by these lines and their successor segments. There are also marriages that clearly do not correspond to political motives. Considering the literary depiction of women’s honour and how it related to their husbands, there are grounds to believe that these marriages could reflect female agency in the selection of partners. Men, on the other hand, were relatively free to be motivated by personal attraction because their wife’s status did not reflect on them.

Throughout this chapter, general discussion of trends and patterns has been combined with more detailed examination of particular incidents and examples from the high medieval period, considering especially how new information might reflect upon these important events. When evaluating the case of Derbforgaill ingen Murchada Uí Máel Sechlainn, the surrounding circumstances make it clear that she was abducted, not taken as a hostage, in 1152. As regards the donations by the same woman, in 1157 and 1167, the evidence shows that they were made in support of her husband Tigernán Uí Ruairc and his policies. The case for the donations as independent action or support of her natal family are based on a grant that never took place, and which is in fact the product of numerous mistakes and misreadings by modern historians. As such, Derbforgaill's actions agree with the proposed role of women in political life.

Finally, the newly discovered marriage pattern that principally concerns the early medieval period can be shown to have had a major influence in the twelfth century because it was still a living practice in Leinster. It provides a key rationale for the actions of Diarmait Mac Murchada throughout his career, including his hostility towards his subordinates, likely indicating an attempt to establish the sole authority of his line to the kingship. This was nothing short of essential to the course of the English invasion.

## **Comparative Analysis**

### **[6.0: Introduction]**

We may now turn our attention to other important themes, having addressed those related to women and marriage. This chapter has two purposes. First, it will examine the kingship of Ireland, which was the most powerful position in Ireland both as an ideal and as reality. It was also the central and governing aim of the three major provincial kingdoms and, latterly, Leinster as well. They had in common the ambition to win it, and their efforts to do so constituted the cause of their ongoing conflicts. Its character has been the subject of extensive historical commentary, but none based on a systematic analysis of the provinces that held it.

The second aim in this chapter is to offer a comparative analysis of the three major kingdoms to determine how their experiences of the English invasion compared and, where appropriate, why they varied. Again, it is possible to do this because we have already examined each kingdom, in turn, on this question. Unlike the kingship of Ireland, assessment of the relative experience of the English invasion in the Irish provincial kingdoms is altogether lacking in current historiography.

As a consequence, a slightly different approach is required in each section. The kingship of Ireland will be addressed first by a consideration of the existing secondary literature. Notwithstanding a certain disconnect between that literature and the primary sources of our era, only then will the kingship of Ireland as it functioned in the twelfth century be discussed. The findings in this chapter will follow on from those in previous kingdom-centred chapters and be informed by them; the fact that the focus in this study has been the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries means that some points raised by other historians are beyond its scope. This applies in particular to the ongoing debate about the origins and nature of the kingship of Tara in the early medieval period.

## **[6.1: The kingship of Ireland]**

The kingship of Ireland is arguably the single most controversial topic in medieval Irish history. It is controversial because it is related to identity, nationality, and political organisation; these are not just provocative in and of themselves, but also because of their centrality in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Irish politics. It was in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries that medieval Irish history first flourished as an academic subject, and it was in the context of Irish nationalism, unionism, and violent campaigns that the medieval historians living in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries formulated their opinions on the position. Unsurprisingly, this had a telling effect.

Treatment of the subject here will be divided between a review of the literature and an analysis of the position as it functioned in the period covered by this thesis. In the literature review we will see how divergent opinions gave way to consensus, and how this position has remained influential even though the evidence against it mounted. It will also be apparent that, for all the attention the kingship of Ireland has received, nothing approaching a systematic investigation has ever been undertaken. Many of the conclusions proffered in existing work are impressionistic and random, rather than the outcomes of close research.

Naturally, if such is the case, it is appropriate to offer a corrective with some conclusions based on the material in earlier chapters. This does mean that the findings of this analysis will be of limited value to early medievalists whose concerns, including the origin of the kingship of Tara, form an important aspect of the overall debate on the kingship of Ireland. Instead, it is the kingship of Ireland in the period when it was no longer an Uí Néill prerogative that will be considered. As a result, some of the points raised in the literature review will not be discussed further; this does not mean they are being endorsed, but simply that they are beyond the scope of the present study.

As outlined elsewhere, the history of the English invasion of Ireland as it exists today has been moulded by Orpen's *Ireland under the Normans*. His work, especially the first two volumes published in 1911, challenged the concept of a hierarchy of provincial kings ruled over by a monarch called an '*ard-ri*' or 'high-king' (terms to which we will return below). Orpen, who was an Irish unionist, was himself reacting to prevailing nationalist views. His argument emphasised the 'anarchy' prevalent in Irish politics and proposed that the invasion created a contrasting '*pax Normannica*'.

The works of Patrick Weston Joyce and Alice Stopford Green are examples of the perspective Orpen hoped to counter.<sup>2085</sup> Whereas Joyce and Stopford Green (among others) saw a 'theoretical arrangement' that, however imperfectly enforced, had the king of Ireland atop a 'heptarchy' of provincial kings,<sup>2086</sup> in a system that pre-dated Christianity, Orpen saw the effective political units of Ireland as 'about 185 tribes, of which some were grouped together in comparative permanence, and some were generally subordinate to the principal groups'.<sup>2087</sup>

Orpen believed that 'Ireland, even in the latter half of the twelfth century, remained in the tribal state, with one tribe or shifting combination of tribes incessantly at war with other tribes and combinations, while Europe generally was settling down into strong centralized monarchies'.<sup>2088</sup> It is not that Orpen denied the existence of the kingship of Ireland, but rather that he did not regard the holders of that position as comparable with other 'national' kings in Europe.<sup>2089</sup> For him, 'if the authority of the provincial kings was frequently defied, that of the *ard-ri* or supreme king of Ireland if acknowledged at all was little more than nominal'.<sup>2090</sup> He further commented 'The Irishman's country was the

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<sup>2085</sup> See P.W. Joyce, *A short history of Ireland* (London, 1893); Joyce, *A social history of Ireland* (2 vols., London, 1903); Joyce, *The story of ancient Irish civilisation* (London, 1907); Alice Stopford Green, *The making of Ireland and its undoing 1200–1600* (London, 1909); Stopford Green, *Irish nationality* (London, 1911).

<sup>2086</sup> Joyce, *Social History*, i, p. 67.

<sup>2087</sup> Orpen, *Normans*, i, p. 25.

<sup>2088</sup> Orpen, *Normans*, i, p. 25.

<sup>2089</sup> For a discussion of the use of the term 'national' here, see below, pp 437–9.

<sup>2090</sup> Orpen, *Normans*, i, pp 23–4.

*tuath* or territory belonging to his tribe ... the clansman, while ready to lay down his life for his chief, felt no enthusiasm for a national cause'.<sup>2091</sup>

His references to 'tribes' were particularly controversial. They provoked a response from MacNeill, a prominent nationalist historian and an equally colossal figure in the historiography of medieval Ireland. In reference to the final remark, MacNeill said 'The fact is that, while the statement is true in a limited sense about Ireland, it is not especially and peculiarly true, as its writer would have himself believe, about Ireland, and it is less true about Ireland than about any country in western Europe at that period—the twelfth century'.<sup>2092</sup> He went on to criticise Orpen's use of the term 'tribe' on the grounds that he employed it as a catch-all for every collective beneath the provincial level.<sup>2093</sup>

In his introduction to the 1981 reprint of MacNeill's *Celtic Ireland*, Ó Corráin argued that for MacNeill, 'tribalism entailed communal ownership of land and common descent', a simple definition Ó Corráin thought useful but too restrictive.<sup>2094</sup> Perhaps more important than its exact definition, MacNeill was convinced that 'tribal' was pejorative, and, in Elva Johnston's words, was 'aligned with barbarism, anarchy and savagery'.<sup>2095</sup> She suggested that MacNeill's concern arose from the fact that he 'believed it to be the underpinning of a discourse that denied the Irish the right to political self-determination'.<sup>2096</sup> The strength of MacNeill's emotional reaction can certainly be measured by some of the personal invectives he launched against Orpen.<sup>2097</sup>

MacNeill is regarded as the founder of early medieval Irish history as an academic subject, and he limited himself to the early period in his analyses; he avoided any in-

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<sup>2091</sup> Orpen, *Normans*, i, pp 20, 35.

<sup>2092</sup> MacNeill, *Phases of Irish history* (Dublin, 1920), pp 245–6.

<sup>2093</sup> MacNeill, *Phases of Irish history*, pp 292–4.

<sup>2094</sup> Ó Corráin, 'Introduction to 1981 edition' in MacNeill, *Celtic Ireland* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Dublin, 1981), vii.

<sup>2095</sup> Elva Johnston, 'Eoin MacNeill's early medieval Ireland: a scholarship for politics or a politics of scholarship?' in Chris Jones, Conor Kostick, and Klaus Oschema (eds), *Making the medieval relevant: how medieval studies contribute to improving our understanding of the present* (Berlin, 2019), pp 211–24, at 216.

<sup>2096</sup> Elva Johnston, 'Eoin MacNeill's early medieval Ireland', p. 216.

<sup>2097</sup> See for example, MacNeill, *Early Irish laws and institutions* (Dublin [1935]), p. 6.

depth consideration of the English or ‘Norman’ impact on existing Irish structures. He had less to say on the vexed question of the kingship of Ireland in the twelfth century than Orpen as well, and simply conceded that its transference across multiple provinces in that century was ‘an irregular hegemony, without even the semblance of an institution’.<sup>2098</sup> Evidently, for MacNeill the twelfth century was a period of relative weakness in the kingship of Ireland.

As far as that kingship was concerned, Orpen and MacNeill were superseded in the middle of the twentieth century by Daniel Binchy and Byrne, whose central points largely agreed with one another. Binchy’s focus was early Irish legal material, which, though supplemented by later glosses and commentaries, almost all dates from the eighth century and before. Writing in 1954, Binchy argued that, for the period in which they were composed, the laws were evidence against the existence of the kingship of Ireland. He reported that the king of a province was the highest class of king known to the laws and said ‘This shows that the claim of the king of Tara to be supreme king over Ireland can only have been formulated at a relatively late period, too late at all events to receive recognition in the law tracts’.<sup>2099</sup>

Binchy’s work on the *Óenach Tailten* and *Feis Temro* some years later echoed this argument. In that paper, he reported that ‘The results of this examination serve, I think, to reinforce the general conclusion I have reached on other evidence: that while the king of Tara as head of the far-flung confederation of Uí Néill dynasties was normally the most powerful monarch in Ireland, his “sovereignty” over the other provincial kings is a fiction invented by the synthetic historians’.<sup>2100</sup> He concluded with the same sentiments, adding only that ‘The fact that both [*Óenach Tailten* and *Feis Temro*] now figure among the “national institutions” of medieval Ireland is a signal tribute to the ingenuity of our

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<sup>2098</sup> MacNeill, *Phases of Irish history*, p. 273.

<sup>2099</sup> Binchy, ‘Secular Institutions’, in Dillon (ed.), *Early Irish society* (Dublin, 1954), pp 52–65 at 54–5.

<sup>2100</sup> Binchy, ‘The fair of Tailtiu and the feast of Tara’, in *Ériu*, xvii (1958), pp 113–38 at 113.

pseudo-historians of the tenth, eleventh and twelfth centuries who created the myth of the “high-kingship” as an apex of the imaginary Irish *politeia*’.<sup>2101</sup>

Byrne, whose *Irish kings and high-kings* was published in 1973, was sympathetic to Binchy’s perspective, and he followed many of his approaches and conclusions. One example of this is their mutual rehabilitation of ‘tribes’ and ‘tribal’. Binchy commented ‘With all respect to his [MacNeill’s] memory I know of no better translation’, and ‘Whatever about the earlier connotations of the word “tribe”, its modern use given in the Oxford Dictionary as “a primary aggregate of people under a headman or chief” conveys exactly the sense of the Irish word’.<sup>2102</sup>

Byrne, for his part, was happy to endorse this perspective with some qualifications. He wrote, ‘That the roots of Irish kingship were tribal is undeniable. The law too was tribal in that no man, with the important exception of the men of learning, had legal standing outside his own *tuath*. But insofar as tribalism may imply difference of language and custom, it is an inappropriate and inadequate description of Irish society’.<sup>2103</sup> Byrne used the terms throughout his book and his many other publications.

Byrne’s views on the kingship of Ireland also harmonised with Binchy’s. He wrote ‘In the course of the ninth century the consolidation of Uí Neill power proceeded apace, culminating in the general acceptance of the kings of Tara as high-kings of Ireland’.<sup>2104</sup> He followed by saying, ‘The Uí Néill concept of high-kingship was first converted into political reality by Máelsechnaill mac Máele Ruanaid, styled *rí Éirenn uile* “king of all Ireland” at his obituary in 862’.<sup>2105</sup> This accorded neatly with Binchy, who wrote that the Vikings found Ireland ‘a congeries of tribal states tenuously linked together in five larger groups. Two of these groups, the Uí Néill and Eoghanacht dynasties, were of outstanding

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<sup>2101</sup> Binchy, ‘The fair of Tailtiu and the feast of Tara’, p. 138.

<sup>2102</sup> Binchy, *Secular institutions*, p. 54.

<sup>2103</sup> Byrne, *Irish kings*, p. 39; For a fuller exposition of his views on the terms, see Byrne, ‘Tribes and tribalism’ in *Ériu*, xxii (1971), pp 128–66.

<sup>2104</sup> Byrne, *Irish kings*, p. 254.

<sup>2105</sup> Byrne, *Irish kings*, p. 257.



importance, the head of the former usually being the most powerful monarch in the whole country’ and later in the same paper, where he argued that the Viking invasions provoked ‘if not a modern sense of nationalism, at least a feeling of “otherness” among peoples whose only loyalty had hitherto been to their local kings’.<sup>2106</sup>

The most interesting immediate response to Binchy and Byrne came from Ó Corráin, in the shape of his paper ‘Nationality and kingship in pre-Norman Ireland’, published in 1978.<sup>2107</sup> Ó Corráin set out to show that a common Irish identity existed at an early date, along with an assessment of the powers evinced by the major kings. It will be apparent from the inclusion of the second element that the question of the effective political unit remained tied to the question of common identity.

In fact, Ó Corráin found it relatively easy to prove common Irish identity pre-dated the Anglo-Normans, and indeed, the Vikings. One of the first pieces of evidence he highlighted was a poem, composed *c.* 630, which traced the descent of the royal house of Leinster back to Míl and from him to Noah and Adam. Ó Corráin commented, ‘The main genealogical corpus, much of which is extremely old, is based on this same origin-legend and it is interesting to note that the later the text the more prominent the legend. Behind this self-conscious antiquarianism is the doctrine that all the people of Ireland derive from one common source (however far removed) and form one *natio*. As the Franks, the Saxons, the Lombards, the Goths, the Greeks are *nationes*, so also are the Irish’.<sup>2108</sup>

Ó Corráin presented evidence from the law that indicated that jurists had island-wide custom in mind and suggested that the paschal controversy of the seventh century is likely to have deepened Irish identity. He further showed that the Uí Néill had ambitions to convert this collective identity into political control, also as early as the seventh

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<sup>2106</sup> Binchy, ‘The Passing of the old order’ in B. Ó Cuív (ed.), *The impact of the Scandinavian invasions on the Celtic-speaking peoples* (Dublin, 1959), pp 119–32 at 126.

<sup>2107</sup> Ó Corráin, ‘Nationality and kingship in pre-Norman Ireland’, in T.W. Moody (ed.) *Historical Studies XI: Nationality and the pursuit of national independence, papers read before the conference held at Trinity College, Dublin, 26–31 May 1975* (Belfast, 1978), pp 1–35.

<sup>2108</sup> Ó Corráin, ‘Nationality and kingship in pre-Norman Ireland’, p. 6.

century.<sup>2109</sup> All-island control may not have existed at that time, but Uí Néill ambition reflected a desire to turn Irish identity to their political advantage. This meant it would have pre-dated some, if not all, of the legal material to which Binchy referred.

Ó Corráin also demonstrated that the ‘extreme political fragmentation’ envisioned by Orpen did not exist.<sup>2110</sup> He called Orpen’s ‘185 tribes’ the ‘children of misunderstanding’, arguing that there were ‘no more than a dozen overkingdoms of any political significance in the tenth century and these were drastically reduced in number by the mid-twelfth century’.<sup>2111</sup> We may not know for sure how many existed in the seventh century, when the Uí Néill first advanced a claim to all-island control, but it is certain that Orpen confused *trícha cét*, a unit of assessment, with the *túath*.

It may be somewhat surprising, therefore, that Ó Corráin himself also used ‘tribes and ‘tribal’ in relation to the *túath*. In fact, in most respects, he agreed with Byrne’s presentation of medieval Irish history and, as has been pointed out, he ‘elaborated Byrne’s case’ for the progression of Irish political organisation from ‘tribal’ to ‘dynastic’ to ‘feudal’, in a series of publications in the late 1960s and 1970s.<sup>2112</sup> As such, his commentary on nationality placed ‘tribalism’ in a much earlier phase of Irish history (or prehistory), but otherwise accepted the now orthodox views of Irish political development.

Nonetheless, by showing Irish identity existed at an early date, Ó Corráin disentangled nationality from the kingship of Ireland. For, now, whether effective or aspirational, the island-wide kingship could be referred to as a national kingship. Further, whereas the idea that comprehensive dominance of 185 kingdoms or *túatha* was achievable strained credulity, control of ten or fewer effective polities (or designs thereon) was clearly possible and would have appeared so to Ireland’s medieval kings.

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<sup>2109</sup> Ó Corráin, ‘Nationality and kingship’, p. 4.

<sup>2110</sup> Ó Corráin, ‘Nationality and kingship’, p. 11.

<sup>2111</sup> Ó Corráin, ‘Nationality and kingship’, p. 11.

<sup>2112</sup> Etchingham, ‘Early medieval Irish history’, p. 133.

In 1986, Liam Breatnach pointed out a passage in the eighth-century law-tract *Míadshleхта* that constituted a major blow to the new orthodox position. He translated it as follows (with his interpolations): ‘A *tríath*, i.e a king, as [the following] states: the mighty *tríath*, he goes through the kingdoms of Ireland from wave to wave [i.e. from sea to sea] ... The five provinces of Ireland, goes through all their submissions, as has been sung concerning Conchobar: the exalted son of a king, the great son of Nes, he secured the lands of the Irish’.<sup>2113</sup> A further line, not included by Breatnach on that occasion, but which has since been widely recognised as pertinent, runs ‘he encompasses [i.e. goes outside] measurement so that [his due] is measured according to his fist’.<sup>2114</sup>

Breatnach raised this legal reference to a king of Ireland while addressing another issue with Binchy’s analysis of the same question. Binchy had said, in agreement with Byrne, that the linguistic compound *ardrí*, meaning ‘high-king’, was ‘not very old’, by which he meant not old enough to appear in the laws.<sup>2115</sup> Binchy said that ‘had it been known to the classical jurists as a technical name for a more exalted “grade” of monarch than *ruirí* (<ro-rí), it would have been a similar “close” compound, \**airdri*, gen. \**airdrech* (like *ruirech*)’. He added, ‘Besides, as I have often pointed out, in Irish literature down to the seventeenth century *ard-rí* is used indiscriminately of any ruler above the rank of a primary tribal king (*rí tuaithe*), hence not merely of a provincial king but of any of the numerous “mesne” kings who intervened between him and the basic tribal kings; it was simply *rí* with an honorific adjective prefixed to it’.<sup>2116</sup>

Breatnach showed that the form imagined by Binchy for *ard-rí* as an early compound (*airdrí*, genitive *airdrech*) was in fact attested in the laws. He cited two examples, one from the *Cáin Fhuithirbe* and another from the *Senchas Már*, and argued that it had fallen out of use and been replaced by the more familiar *ardrí* with genitive *ardríg* at an

<sup>2113</sup> Breatnach, ‘Varia VI’ in *Ériu*, xxxvii (1986), pp 191–3 at 193.

<sup>2114</sup> See Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, pp 519–20.

<sup>2115</sup> Binchy, ‘Irish history and Irish law: II’, in *Studia Hibernica*, xvi (1976), pp 7–45 at 18–19.

<sup>2116</sup> Binchy, ‘Irish History and Irish law II’, pp 18–19.

early date.<sup>2117</sup> This did not undermine Binchy's assertion that *ard-rí* was an honorific, but combined with the reference to the *tríath* in the *Míadshlechta* it cast further doubt on his theory that the king of Ireland was unknown in the laws.

Much later, in a review of Duffy's biography of Brian Bóraime, Colmán Etchingham made the case for the abandonment of '*ard-rí*' as a semantic equivalent for 'king of Ireland'. He wrote "'High-king" as synonym for king of Ireland and the "institution" of the "high-kingship", however, are modern scholarly conceits, starting with Keating. *Ardri* first occurs in annals only in the 10th century, defining no particular office, but describing supreme kings of Leinster (917), Cenél Conaill of Donegal (950), Ailech (the north of Ireland, 974), Dublin (980), Leinster and Osraige (1039), Munster (1064), Connacht (1092, 1095) and Scotland (1093). *Ardri Érenn* "supreme king of Ireland" designates only one predecessor of Brian's (in 980), elsewhere entitled *rí Érenn* "king of Ireland" and *rí Temrach* "king of Tara" (965, 970, 971)—the usual annalists' titles for leading kings in Ireland. Brian himself is once *ardri Gaidhel Érenn ocus Gall ocus Bretan* "supreme king of the Gaels of Ireland, Foreigners and Welsh" (1014), but in the same annal simply *rí Érenn*. Mael Sechnaill II, both predecessor and successor to Brian, is *airdri Érenn* (1022), but elsewhere *rí Érenn* or *rí Temrach* (980, 997, 1014)'.<sup>2118</sup>

As far as the laws were concerned, more evidence against Binchy's thesis was still to come. Jaski, who addressed the legal evidence for a kingship of Ireland in his *Early Irish kingship and succession* (2000), argued that the *ollam rig* in the law-tract *Uraicecht Becc* also represented a king of higher status than a provincial king, equating it with a similar scheme in another tract, *Bretha Nemed Toísech*.<sup>2119</sup> In the latter text, the *rí ruirech*, which is generally recognised as the legal equivalent of a provincial king, had a lower honour-price than the *ollam rig*.<sup>2120</sup>

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<sup>2117</sup> Breatnach, 'Varia VI', pp 192–3.

<sup>2118</sup> Etchingham, 'His finest hour', in *Irish Literary Supplement*, xxxiv no. 2 (2015), pp 3–4 at 4.

<sup>2119</sup> Jaski, *Early Irish kingship and succession*, pp 99–102.

<sup>2120</sup> Jaski, *Early Irish kingship and succession*, pp 99–102.

Acceptance of the validity and applicability of ‘tribes’ and ‘tribalism’ was also less than universal. In a paper published in 1973, the same year as Byrne’s *Irish kings and high-kings*, the archaeologist B.G. Scott argued that one of MacNeill’s objections to the term ‘tribe’, that it was insufficiently defined, was not yet answered.<sup>2121</sup> This criticism was raised again by Etchingham in an important paper addressing ‘progress in medieval Irish history’ (1995). He suggested that ‘this objection has not been met in the only truly convincing way, this is by the formulation of a satisfactory definition of what the term might mean in the context of early medieval Ireland’.<sup>2122</sup>

Etchingham’s paper also challenged Binchy’s conception of the origins of the kingship of Tara, from which the kingship of Ireland ultimately developed. The interchangeability of those terms can pose interpretive challenges; Catherine Swift’s entry ‘high-kingship’, in *The Oxford Companion to Irish History*, for example, took cognisance of these issues by dividing its treatment according to three terms: *ard-rí* (high-king), *rí Éirenn* (king of Ireland), and *rí Temro* (king of Tara). Notwithstanding overlap, Swift’s approach allowed her to disaggregate some of the often-conflated issues. Swift described Byrne and Binchy’s interpretation of the kingship of Tara as an ‘archaic religious monarchy’ ‘ruled by a priest-king’, which was subsequently transformed with the rise of ‘dynastic’ (as opposed to ‘tribal’) political alignments; in particular, the Uí Néill.<sup>2123</sup>

One of the supporting pillars of this theory was the idea that the *Feis Temro* was a ‘primitive fertility rite’, the disappearance of which in the mid-sixth century constituted a marker of Christianisation (and therefore a change of character in the kingship of Tara), according to Binchy.<sup>2124</sup> Etchingham pointed out a legal reference to the *Feis Temro* that undermined Binchy’s position by virtue of its eighth-century date; it also suggested that

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<sup>2121</sup> B.G. Scott, “‘Tribes’ and ‘tribalism’ in early Ireland’ in *Ogam*, xxii–xxv (1970–3), pp 197–208.

<sup>2122</sup> Etchingham, ‘Early medieval Irish history’, p. 130.

<sup>2123</sup> Catherine Swift, ‘High-kingship’, in Connolly (ed.) *The Oxford Companion to Irish History*, pp 252–3.

<sup>2124</sup> Binchy, ‘The fair of Tailtiu and Feast of Tara’, p. 127.

the *Feis* and consequently the kingship of Tara were theoretically open to contenders from elsewhere in Ireland, including Munster. It was therefore a marker of ‘supreme kingship’, and, whatever that might mean in practice, it implied island-wide ascendancy.<sup>2125</sup>

Collectively, these corrections might be supposed to have provided the impetus for a thorough re-examination of the views put forward by Binchy and Byrne. In fact, perhaps out of a sense of deference, criticism has generally been guarded and tame. Take, for example, Charles-Edwards’s discussion of the *tríath*, where he concluded that ‘The *tríath*, then, is an ambiguous figure and it may be unwise to draw any firm conclusions on his relevance to the kingship of Tara’.<sup>2126</sup> Something similar can be said of Swift, who cautiously reported that the *tríath* in *Míadshlechta* ‘may cast doubt on Binchy’s contention that a kingship of Ireland was unknown in the early law tracts’.<sup>2127</sup>

Jaski, who accepted the *tríath* and argued for an additional legal reference to a supreme king of Ireland, also qualified his remarks. He said ‘The *ollam* in *Bretha Nemed* and the *tríath* in *Míadshlechta* refer to an overking who is higher in status than the *rí ruirech*, who is usually equated with the king of a province (*rí cóicid*). Other law-tracts seem to recognize the king of a province as the highest grade of kings, as does the *Collectio Canonum Hibernesis*, where this person is called *rex maximus provinciae*. In later texts and glosses to the above texts the grades of *rí Érenn co fresasbra* (king of Ireland with opposition) and *rí Érenn cen fhreasabra* (king of Ireland without opposition) are frequently mentioned. This reflects the scheme of the eleventh and twelfth centuries when the king of Tara was no longer dominant in Ireland and several kings competed for the kingship of Ireland’.<sup>2128</sup>

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<sup>2125</sup> Etchingham, ‘Early medieval Irish history’, pp 131–2.

<sup>2126</sup> Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 520.

<sup>2127</sup> Swift, ‘High-kingship’, in Connolly (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Irish History*, p. 252.

<sup>2128</sup> Jaski, *Early Irish kingship and succession*, p. 102.

He further concluded, ‘The difference between the various texts, the titles they use, the number of grades they recognise and the honour-prices they assign indicate that this matter was open to interpretation at the time the law-tracts were composed – similar to the question [of] if Armagh should [have] ecclesiastical primacy in Ireland ... The fact that a king of Ireland of Ireland was recognized in *Bretha Nemed* and *Míadshlechta* has no bearing on the political recognition of a king of Ireland, let alone on the existence of a regular kingship of Ireland. The various grades of overkings named in the law-tracts are indications of personal achievement rather than suggesting that a *rí ruirech*, *ollam rig* or *tríath* always existed in a given time and place’.<sup>2129</sup>

In his *Guide to early Irish law* of 1988, Fergus Kelly had gone much further than Jaski. He said ‘The king of Ireland (*rí Érenn*), who figures so prominently in the sagas, is rarely mentioned in the law-texts. Though the idea of a kingship of the whole island had already gained currency by the 7th century, no Irish king ever managed to make it a reality, and most law-texts do not even provide for such a possibility’.<sup>2130</sup> Kelly’s interpretation is reminiscent of Binchy and may even have been intended to re-frame the latter’s argument, but the claim that no king made it a ‘reality’ failed to take sources other than the law-texts into account.

It does reflect a stratum of interpretation within the wider historiography, however. References to ‘real kingship’ and efforts to ‘make the kingship a reality’ are common where the kingship of Ireland is concerned. Binchy, for example, insisted that the Uí Néill and Eóganachta rivalled each other to be ‘the most powerful king in Ireland’, which he asserted was ‘a very different thing from being “king of Ireland”’.<sup>2131</sup> Byrne argued that ‘The Uí Néill concept of high-kingship was first converted into political reality by Máelsechnaill mac Máele Ruanaid, styled *rí Érenn uile* “king of all Ireland” at his

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<sup>2129</sup> Jaski, *Early Irish kingship and succession*, p. 102.

<sup>2130</sup> Kelly, *Guide to early Irish law*, p. 18.

<sup>2131</sup> Binchy, ‘The fair of Tailtiu and Feast of Tara’, p. 121.

obituary in 862'.<sup>2132</sup> He also believed Mac Murchada's attack on the Uí Dúnlainge signalled his desire 'to be a real king of Leinster rather than a *primus inter pares*',<sup>2133</sup> though elsewhere he remarked that focus on the kingship of Ireland blinded historians to the extent to which provincial kings had become masters of their provinces.<sup>2134</sup> These views are echoes of Orpen, who had remarked that 'Brian [Bóraime] laid the foundations of a real monarchy in Ireland'.<sup>2135</sup>

The same can be said of Duffy's remarks in *Brian Boru and the Battle of Clontarf* (2013). There, though acknowledging fifty 'high-kings' reigning from the dawn of history 'until the institution went into abeyance in the aftermath of the English invasion' in his introduction, Duffy was elsewhere reluctant to accord these kings 'real' powers.<sup>2136</sup> He too made Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill 'an extraordinary man who came closer than any of his predecessors to instituting a high-kingship of Ireland',<sup>2137</sup> before characterising Brian in similar terms: 'he realised the potential of the high-kingship more effectively than his predecessors and having gained a position of ascendancy, was more committed to and more proficient at exploiting it to the full'.<sup>2138</sup>

These comments are themselves adverts to a widely held belief among all schools of thought on early and high medieval Ireland. This is that Ireland was 'feudalising' in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. If Orpen believed this, so too did MacNeill. He thought that 'a strong influx of feudal ideas from the continent' was already visible in eleventh-century Ireland.<sup>2139</sup> In his view, feudalism was represented by 'an evident tendency towards a centralised autocracy on the part of the chief kings' and the imposition of rulers on subordinate territories by greater kings.<sup>2140</sup>

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<sup>2132</sup> Byrne, *Irish kings*, p. 287.

<sup>2133</sup> Byrne, *Irish kings*, pp 271, 301.

<sup>2134</sup> Byrne, *Irish kings*, p. 271.

<sup>2135</sup> Orpen, *Normans*, i, p. 32.

<sup>2136</sup> Duffy, *Brian Boru and the battle of Clontarf*, xiv.

<sup>2137</sup> Duffy, *Brian Boru and the battle of Clontarf*, pp 43–4.

<sup>2138</sup> Duffy, *Brian Boru and the battle of Clontarf*, p. 156.

<sup>2139</sup> MacNeill, *Early Irish laws and institutions*, p. 24.

<sup>2140</sup> MacNeill, *Early Irish laws and institutions*, pp 129–32.



Ó Corráin also endorsed this perspective. He commented that ‘The type of society that was emerging in Ireland in the eleventh and twelfth centuries was one that was moving rapidly in the direction of feudalism, and indeed bears some striking resemblance – in conservatism as well as in innovation – to European society in the first age of feudalism’.<sup>2141</sup> This is undoubtedly what Byrne meant by ‘real’ kingship and his assertion that Diarmait Mac Murchada had more imagination than Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair.<sup>2142</sup> He also supposed that the English invasion cut short this process, ‘though in different circumstances such an event might have brought it to fruition’.<sup>2143</sup>

The discourse in the historiography of medieval Ireland is somewhat out of sync with the historiography of medieval Europe on this point. In the latter, the terms ‘feudal’ and ‘feudalism’ have long been criticised for their imprecision and consequent semantic malleability.<sup>2144</sup> In her landmark paper of 1974, Elizabeth A.R. Brown dissected the many inadequacies of the construct, and pointed to earlier critiques, like that of F.W. Maitland in the early twentieth century, as evidence that it had never been satisfactory.<sup>2145</sup>

Not unlike MacNeill’s objection to ‘tribalism’, one of Brown’s principal issues with ‘feudalism’ was its essential meaninglessness. Her frustration was compounded by the fact that while this was recognised by many leading historians of medieval Europe, they continued to use it. She opined that ‘Maitland’s tolerance for unresolved contradictions was high, and other historians have demonstrated a similarly striking capacity for living with inconsistency’.<sup>2146</sup>

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<sup>2141</sup> Ó Corráin, ‘Nationality and kingship’, p. 32.

<sup>2142</sup> Byrne, *Irish kings*, p. 303.

<sup>2143</sup> Byrne, *Irish kings*, p. 269.

<sup>2144</sup> Elizabeth A. R. Brown, ‘The tyranny of a construct: feudalism and the historians of medieval Europe’ in *The American Historical Review*, lxxix no. 4 (Oct. 1974) pp 1063–88.

<sup>2145</sup> Frederick William Maitland, *The constitutional history of England*, ed. H.A.L. Fisher (Cambridge, 1908; rpr. 1931), p. 143: ‘The phrase [feudal system] has thus become for us so large and vague that it is quite possible to maintain that of all countries England was the most, or for the matter of that the least, feudalized; that William the Conqueror introduced, or for the matter of that suppressed, the feudal system’.

<sup>2146</sup> Brown, ‘The tyranny of a construct: feudalism and historians of medieval Europe’, p. 1066.

Brown's argument is still considered very important, though it received mixed responses. Those who saw the advantages of the term continued to use and defend it. For instance, David Carpenter and P.R. Cross wrote 'Demands for the deposition of the "tyrant feudalism", however, have been around for some time. So far at least they have been resisted, for although considerable differences of emphasis persist, feudalism remains a useful tool both to signify a particular type of social formation and as a vehicle for comparative history'.<sup>2147</sup> Others, like Susan Reynolds, have agreed with Brown. Of 'feudal' and 'feudalism', she argued that 'insofar as they are definable and comprehensible they are not helpful'.<sup>2148</sup>

Some of Brown's observations are particularly pertinent to the use and general applicability of feudalism in an Irish context. Importantly, she remarked that 'Appraising in terms of an ideal standard need not involve making value judgments, but such assessments are ordinarily expressed in value-loaded terms. To say that a person or a group is attempting to live up to or realize a standard certainly suggests virtuous dedication on the part of the people in question. To declare that a country which is not feudalized is lagging behind is to indicate that the area is in some sense backward'.<sup>2149</sup>

Here, we arrive at the crux of why the kingship of Ireland is treated the way that it is. Instead of a detailed and systematic consideration of the individuals who claimed the title, modern historians have preferred to theorise in general terms and then apply their hypotheses to particular cases. In every case, those theories, as outlined above, have been aimed at locating Ireland in relation to European norms. For the nationalist school, the aim was to present the kingship of Ireland as the functional equivalent of other European monarchies. For other schools it was generally the opposite, though often with the proviso that Ireland was moving in this direction.

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<sup>2147</sup> David Carpenter and P.R. Cross, 'Debate: Bastard Feudalism revised', in *Past and Present*, no. 125 (Nov. 1989), pp 27–64 at 39.

<sup>2148</sup> Susan Reynolds, *Fiefs and vassals: the medieval evidence reinterpreted* (Oxford, 1994), p. 2.

<sup>2149</sup> Brown, 'The tyranny of a construct', p. 1077.

In the absence of such a systematic approach, theories about the nature of the position are premature. Legal, poetic, and other literary descriptions of the kingship of Ireland, and other kingships, on which modern historians are obviously dependant, can only have been formulated in relation to real examples, whether exaggerated or not. Actual wars, invasions, battles, and other events must have functionally delimited not only particular kings, but also the wider precedents within which they operated.

Failure to address the topic in this way makes more sense when we observe that the kingship of Ireland has, on these terms, satisfied nobody. It was neither strong nor centralised enough to prove the nationalist case, nor weak or imaginary enough for those who redressed the nationalists. Its boundaries and development have been of less interest to modern observers than its apparent failure to measure up to European or, perhaps especially, English comparisons. Since the English monarchy in the late twelfth century was arguably the most centralised authority in Europe, the kingship of Ireland was never likely to impress on this rubric, and consequently the comparison has always been implicit rather than explicit.

The waters have been muddied further by the entanglement of nationality and the effective political unit in the discussion. This is undoubtedly a consequence of the way the subject has been approached, since it is at least as much a reflection of the political interests of modern writers as the functions of Ireland's supreme kingship. This is not just true of Orpen and MacNeill, whose interests in the matter were and are obvious, but also of the writers in the middle of the century.

Take, for instance, Binchy, whose writings on this subject were both a reaction and a challenge to the prevailing nationalist view, especially its dominance on the standard primary and secondary level curricula. Tellingly, he remarked of the laws that 'The *Ard-Rí*, of whom our history books are full, is conspicuous by his absence'.<sup>2150</sup> Later he

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<sup>2150</sup> Binchy, 'Secular Institutions', p. 55.

complained that ‘I underestimated the tenacity with which a “national epic” – more particularly a politico-religious epic – can withstand all attempts to question its historical truth. We must therefore be resigned to seeing the story of the paschal fire side by side with the myth of the “national monarchy” in our standard textbooks. Even though an objective study may show both of them to be fictitious, this will not affect their popular appeal’.<sup>2151</sup>

The studies discussed above, especially those by Ó Corráin, Breatnach, Etchingham, and Jaski, offer correctives that allow the conversation to move past much of the dogma that characterises such analyses. Since then, however, no single dedicated study has attempted to flesh out a new interpretation of the kingship of Ireland by incorporating them and, consequently, older ideas have been slow to leave academic discourse. We can see this in the cautious criticism highlighted above, even by those seeking to re-define the terms by which the kingship of Ireland is understood. We can also see it in more general terms in relatively recent publications.

Duffy and Flanagan, today’s leading historians of twelfth-century Ireland, have been noticeably conservative when dealing with the kingship of Ireland. They have frequently echoed the old orthodoxy, even while acknowledging newer ideas or offering their own important revisions. Both have determinedly used the term ‘high-kingship’ as an equivalent for kingship of Ireland, for example, despite the criticisms of this term outlined above.

In a relatively recent publication, Flanagan acknowledged the continued difficulty posed by the construct of ‘feudalism’ for the historiography of twelfth-century Irish politics. She commented ‘There has been a near consensus view that the pace of political change in Ireland quickened as a result of Brian’s reign and mostly in ways that have been given

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<sup>2151</sup> Binchy, ‘A pre-Christian survival in mediaeval Irish hagiography’, in Dorothy Whitelock, Rosamund McKitterick, and Dumville (eds.), *Ireland in early medieval Europe: studies in memory of Kathleen Hughes* (Cambridge, 1982), pp 165–178 at 167.

a dynamic and positive spin with a particular emphasis on feudalization'.<sup>2152</sup> For Flanagan, such descriptions were 'intended in a general way to convey the strengthening of controls over political subordinates and enhancement of regnal infrastructures'.<sup>2153</sup> She criticised this approach on similar grounds to those raised above, saying 'it must be emphasised that no sustained definition of what these scholars understand by "feudal" has been offered. This is the more regrettable in light of the fact that historians of so-called feudal societies for some time now have questioned the utility of "feudalism" as a meaningful analytical tool'.<sup>2154</sup>

Even having recognised this deficiency in the historiography, Flanagan's reaction was to suggest ways in which this narrative could be preserved or reconstructed rather than superseded. She argued for prosopographical analysis, commenting for instance that 'No attempt has yet been made to collate evidence for the regular associates of Tairdelbach and Ruaidrí Ua Conchobair, a necessary component in evaluating their bid for the high-kingship and for drawing comparisons between pre-Invasion and post-Invasion Ireland'.<sup>2155</sup> She said 'the data in the annals has not been fully marshalled' to this effect, and rightly insisted that attention should be given 'to what extent regional variations can be discerned'.<sup>2156</sup> However, as much as these assertions agree with the methodology adopted in this thesis, her hope that this approach 'would also have the merit of enabling more meaningful comparisons with so-called feudal societies', reflects an attempt to sustain the old approach rather than to challenge it.<sup>2157</sup>

This disposition is also reflected in Flanagan's preference for certain source types. Take for example, the very prosopographical analysis offered in the same paper. It was based on the list of Úa Conchobair's associates in *The Deeds*, with the annals used to flesh out

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<sup>2152</sup> Flanagan, 'After Brian Bóraime: the high-kingship and the kings of Connacht', in Duffy (ed.) *Medieval Dublin XVI*, pp 218–59 at 224.

<sup>2153</sup> Flanagan, 'After Brian Bóraime: the high-kingship and the kings of Connacht', p. 225.

<sup>2154</sup> Flanagan, 'After Brian Bóraime', p. 243.

<sup>2155</sup> Flanagan, 'After Brian Bóraime', p. 246.

<sup>2156</sup> Flanagan, 'After Brian Bóraime', pp 248, 225.

<sup>2157</sup> Flanagan, 'After Brian Bóraime', p. 244.

the picture. Something similar could also be said of her monograph, *Irish royal charters: texts and contexts* (2005), notwithstanding its importance and outstanding quality. There, again, the annals are used to fill in the gaps left by the charters. Despite Flanagan's insistence that Latin charters issued by Irish kings need not be regarded as feudalisation, the focus on such sources again reflects a desire to assess Irish kingship by comparison with European norms.<sup>2158</sup>

Considering this inclination, it is not surprising that the strategic basis of kingship of Ireland has been ignored. Another of Flanagan's publications on this topic, 'High-kings with opposition, 1072–1166', published in the *N.H.I.* series in 2005, lacked the general analysis of the position that might be expected from such a title. The commentary it offered was strangely reminiscent of older works as well. One example of this was the argument that Toirdelbach Uí Conchobair's kingship of Ireland was fatally undermined by the territorial expansion of Airgíalla and Bréifne because it cut off his access into the North.<sup>2159</sup>

This idea is very similar to one advanced by Byrne, who wrote in the second volume of the same series (published 1987) that 'Bréifne, "the rough third of Connacht" (*garbthrian Connacht*), with its drumlins and difficult terrain, had always been a natural barrier between the north and the rest of Ireland, but it had now become a formidable political power that rendered it well-nigh impossible for any ruler from north or south to unify the country. Only Ua Conchobair from Connacht could hope to do so, and Ua Ruairc would only support him on his own terms'.<sup>2160</sup> It is not clear how Byrne arrived at this opinion, nor why Flanagan saw fit to reverse the implication for the Uí Chonchobair. However, it does show how a lack of attention to provincial politics has limited our understanding of the kingship of Ireland.

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<sup>2158</sup> Flanagan, 'After Brian Bóraime', p. 244.

<sup>2159</sup> Flanagan, 'High-kings with opposition, 1072–1166', p. 922.

<sup>2160</sup> Byrne 'The trembling sod: Ireland in 1169' in Cosgrave (ed.), *N.H.I. II*, pp 1–42 at 20.

Older influences are also perceptible in Duffy's publications. As far as the early period was concerned, he described the kingship of Tara in the following terms in his *Ireland in the Middle Ages* (1997): 'The high-king over all the Uí Néill, Northern and Southern, was entitled to call himself *rí Temrach*, king of Tara. There is considerable debate among historians as to what precisely the kingship of Tara implied. The title itself was very ancient and it was certainly not a normal tribal kingship. While it is not true to say that to be king of Tara was to be high-king of Ireland, there was undoubtedly some special prestige attached to it, and the Uí Néill did their best to convince people that by virtue of the fact that they were kings of Tara they were *ipso facto* high-kings of Ireland'.<sup>2161</sup> In relation to the laws, echoing Binchy and Kelly, Duffy said 'The annals and sagas frequently accord individuals the title king of Ireland, but in the law tracts a king of Ireland, while not unheard of, is an extremely rare bird'.<sup>2162</sup>

If this was hardly an endorsement of the importance of the position, Duffy appears to have regarded the eleventh and twelfth centuries as even poorer examples of a functioning kingship of Ireland. He reported that 'Brian [Bóraime] had ended the Uí Néill monopoly of the high-kingship. In a sense, he ended the very concept of the high-kingship as it had evolved under them, since, though Máel Sechnaill recovered it after Brian's death, the title remained in abeyance for a full half-century after the latter's demise in 1022. When attempts were made to revive the office, what emerged was the quite hollow concept of a "king of Ireland with opposition"'.<sup>2163</sup> Of the last king of Ireland, Duffy remarked that 'Ruaidrí Ua Conchobair was very much king of Connacht first and high-king of Ireland second, a very poor second'.<sup>2164</sup> While Duffy was willing to characterise Brian as 'reigning supreme', he did not extend this description to any of the other kings of Ireland.<sup>2165</sup>

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<sup>2161</sup> Duffy, *Ireland in the Middle Ages*, p. 32.

<sup>2162</sup> Duffy, *Ireland in the Middle Ages*, p. 16.

<sup>2163</sup> Duffy, *The concise history of Ireland* (Dublin, 2000), p. 59.

<sup>2164</sup> Duffy, *Ireland in the Middle Ages*, p. 90.

<sup>2165</sup> Duffy, *Ireland in the Middle Ages*, p. 35.

We have already addressed the origin of the idea of kings of Ireland with opposition in the Leinster chapter, but here we must note the continuity between this and earlier commentary.<sup>2166</sup> Duffy, for instance, referred to the kingship of Tara not being a regular ‘tribal’ kingship. He made clear that, like Orpen, Binchy, Byrne, and Ó Corráin, it was the *túath* that he considered to be the ‘tribal’ kingdom, and again, in keeping with their interpretations (excluding Orpen), that by the eleventh and twelfth centuries, this ‘tribal’ organisation had been replaced.<sup>2167</sup>

Duffy subsequently abandoned the terms ‘tribe’ and ‘tribal’, if not the broader idea of progression towards ‘dynasticism’ and ‘feudalism’. In his biography of Brian Bóraime (2013), he wrote that ‘the *túath* might have many strangers living within it, and it was therefore not a tribe. What makes it appear tribal is the complex Irish system of naming *túatha* and other territories after an apical ancestor-figure, which gives the impression that everyone within that political lordship was linked by common descent to the ancestor celebrated in its name’.<sup>2168</sup>

In the same work, Duffy also qualified his views on the legal appearances of the kingship of Ireland. He described the hierarchical structure of kingship and society offered in the laws and said ‘What this pyramid of kingship, conjured up in the law tracts, did not allow for was a king operating at a higher level than a province-king, i.e. a high-king of Ireland. But this does not mean that no such notion existed: it occurs occasionally in legal texts and is commonplace in historical texts and literature’.<sup>2169</sup> One would be forgiven for thinking there was a substantive difference between the ‘law tracts’ and ‘legal texts’ where the kingship of Ireland is alternately absent and present; just as with his re-assessment of ‘tribe’, this seems to reflect Duffy’s desire to reconcile the older narrative with later corrections.

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<sup>2166</sup> See Leinster, pp 341–59.

<sup>2167</sup> Duffy, *Ireland in the Middle Ages*, p. 16.

<sup>2168</sup> Duffy, *Brian Boru and the battle of Clontarf*, p. 7.

<sup>2169</sup> Duffy, *Brian Boru and the battle of Clontarf*, p. 9.



The fixation on European equivalents as a basis for understanding the kingship of Ireland is perhaps best exemplified by the excitement surrounding Brian Bóraime's use of the title *imperator scotorum* or 'emperor of the Irish'. Gwynn suggested this title was used in imitation of Otto III of the Holy Roman Empire,<sup>2170</sup> a view often endorsed by others.<sup>2171</sup> Flanagan did not dismiss the Ottonian comparison but suggested that the title was 'equally redolent of the high-flown contemporary titles used of the West Saxon Royal house'.<sup>2172</sup>

Duffy agreed with this idea, and suggested the title was intended for reception outside Ireland, saying 'Brian intended all to know, both at home and abroad, that among the many kings of Ireland he was supreme'.<sup>2173</sup> Jaski interpreted the title as a reference to Brian's control of the Scandinavians in Ireland and, more tentatively, his standing among the Goídil of Scotland.<sup>2174</sup> Ní Mhaonaigh also referred to Brian's 'imperial ambition' in her biography of the Dál Cais king of Ireland.<sup>2175</sup> More conservatively, Denis Casey sought to equate *imperator scotorum* with the *imperator barbarorum* ('emperor of the barbarians') used by Muirchú to describe Lóegaire mac Néill.<sup>2176</sup>

In the most recent treatment of this stylisation, Ronan Mulhaire enlarged it and other unusual titles applied to kings of Ireland (at the expense of the more usual) to argue for the 'imperial' development of the position.<sup>2177</sup> While some of his observations were

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<sup>2170</sup> Gwynn, 'Brian in Armagh (1005)', in *Seanchas Ardmhacha: Journal of the Armagh Diocesan Historical Society*, ix no. 1 (1978), pp 35–50 at 45.

<sup>2171</sup> See for example, Ailbhe Mac Shamhráin, 'Brian Bóruma, Armagh and High Kingship', in *Seanchas Ardmhacha: Journal of the Armagh Diocesan Historical Society*, xx, no. 2 (2005), pp 1–21 at 17; Patrick Wadden, 'Brian Bóraime, the insular Viking world, and the battle of Clontarf' in Duffy (ed.) *Medieval Dublin XVI*, pp 144–69 at 159; Patrick R. McCoy, Katheryn O'Neill, and Patrick Wadden, 'The past and the present in twelfth-century Armagh' in *North American Journal of Celtic Studies*, iv, no. 1 (Spring, 2020), pp 1–47 at 27–8; Duffy, *Brian Boru and the battle of Clontarf*, p. 143.

<sup>2172</sup> Flanagan, *Irish society*, p. 179.

<sup>2173</sup> Duffy, *Brian Boru and the battle of Clontarf*, p. 143.

<sup>2174</sup> Jaski, 'Brian Boru (926[?]-1014)' in Duffy (ed.), *Encyclopedia*, pp 45–7 at 46.

<sup>2175</sup> Ní Mhaonaigh, *Brian Boru: Ireland's greatest king?* (Stroud, 2007), pp 134–5.

<sup>2176</sup> Casey, 'Brian Boru, the Book of Armagh and the Irish church in the tenth and eleventh centuries', in Duffy (ed.) *Medieval Dublin XVI*, pp 103–21 at 120–1.

<sup>2177</sup> Ronan Joseph Mulhaire, *Kingship, lordship, and resistance: a study of power in eleventh- and twelfth-century Ireland* (Unpublished PhD thesis, T.C.D., 2020), pp 118–47.

certainly valid, the need to see Irish kingship in these comparative terms is as likely to create a false equivalence between different political systems as it is to clarify the characteristics and functions of Irish national kingship.<sup>2178</sup>

In this thesis, three provincial kingdoms were defined as ‘major’ by successful advance of a claim to the kingship of Ireland in the twelfth century. One of the most important points for understanding the kingship of Ireland in our period is that the character of the kingship of Ireland, as claimed, varied from province to province. Remarkably, notwithstanding the relatively voluminous literature on this topic, this is rarely even alluded to. Therefore, one area on which the present project can inform our understanding, with regard to the kingship of Ireland, is by a direct comparison of the three kingdoms on this front. Because our period also encompassed the English invasion, we can also offer analysis of the behaviour and performance of the kingship of Ireland versus an external threat, its decline and eclipse, and, to a lesser extent, its likely trajectory had the English invasion not occurred.

Leaving aside the strategic basis of provincial strength, which is one of the subjects of the comparative analysis below, each province still emphasised different features and roles of the national kingship. Munster’s kingships of Ireland saw a greater openness to the world outside Ireland, and communication with it. Connacht’s kingships of Ireland derived legitimacy from a conscious and deliberate focus on the royal symbology of Meath. The character of the kingship of Ireland in the North was more nebulous because its two representatives, Domnall and Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn, were relatively weak, but one of its most important features was a break with tradition, as we will see.

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<sup>2178</sup> It has been suggested that Middle-Irish literature displays an increasing interest in ‘empire’ as a concept in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and that this may be explained by the newfound power of provincial kingdoms over the Hiberno-Norse settlements. It is unlikely to reflect a change in the exercise of royal power. See Boyle, *History and salvation in medieval Ireland* (London, 2021), pp 124–33.

Toirdelbach and Muirchertach Úa Briain both showed an interest in cultural and political life outside Ireland that distinguished Munster's kingships of Ireland. As early as 1074, Archbishop Lanfranc of Canterbury wrote to Toirdelbach Úa Briain to express his concern about marriage practices in Ireland.<sup>2179</sup> Toirdelbach also received a letter of encouragement from Pope Gregory VII that addressed him as 'king of Ireland and all the Irish'.<sup>2180</sup> While no reply is extant, the positive tone has convinced historians that Toirdelbach held a council along the lines proposed by Lanfranc.<sup>2181</sup>

Muirchertach was, if anything, even more notable in this regard. He followed the precedent set by his father in supporting the Gregorian Reform movement, and he presided over the synods of Cashel in 1101 and Ráith Bressail in 1111. He gifted Cashel to the church and took an active role in ecclesiastical appointments, where he promoted noted reformers to important positions.<sup>2182</sup> He also exchanged letters with Lanfranc's successor in the archbishopric of Canterbury, Anselm, and on one occasion thanked him for interceding with Henry I on his and his son-in-law's behalf.<sup>2183</sup>

Muirchertach had run into trouble with Henry for overstepping the mark elsewhere in international politics. The king of Leth Moga involved himself in Welsh affairs and on occasion offered refuge to members of Welsh royal dynasties. Subsequently, he agreed to an alliance with some of the Anglo-Normans operating on the Welsh March. These men, led by Robert de Bellême, earl of Shrewsbury, and his brother Arnulf de Montgomery, launched a rebellion against Henry, and it was towards this effort that they recruited Muirchertach. Muirchertach married his daughter to Arnulf, and Henry directed a trade

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<sup>2179</sup> Clover and Gibson (eds and trans), *The letters of Lanfranc Archbishop of Canterbury*, pp 70–1.

<sup>2180</sup> *The epistolae vagantes of Pope Gregory VII*, pp 138–41.

<sup>2181</sup> Watt, *The church and the two nations*, pp 5–9; Clover and Gibson (eds and trans), *The letters of Lanfranc Archbishop of Canterbury*, p. 73 n. 4.

<sup>2182</sup> Bracken, 'Ua Briain, Muirchertach [Murtagh O'Brien] (c. 1050–1119), king of Munster and high-king of Ireland' in *O.D.N.B.*, accessed online (<https://doi-org.jproxy.nuim.ie/10.1093/ref:odnb/20464>) (19 February 2021).

<sup>2183</sup> *The letters of Saint Anselm of Canterbury*, iii, p. 201.

blockade against Ireland in response. The rebellion failed, and it was therefore on his own behalf as well as on Arnulf's that Muirchertach had Anselm intercede with Henry.

Muirchertach had other more successful forays into international politics. For instance, in 1095 he provided a king for (the Isle of) Man in the shape of his nephew, Domnall mac Taidc, after an invitation from the nobles of that island.<sup>2184</sup> Much more seriously, he dealt with the aggressive and ambitious Magnus 'Barelegs' of Norway, who landed in Ireland twice: in 1098 and 1102. Utilising the same technique that would later provoke Henry, Muirchertach married a daughter to one of Magnus's sons.<sup>2185</sup> The Norwegian king then turned his attention northwards and was subsequently killed by the Ulaid in 1103.<sup>2186</sup>

If the development of the Gregorian Reform movement in Ireland can be said to indicate ongoing receptibility to outside ideas, the case for Munster is further bolstered by Cormac Mac Cárthaig, whose disposition was similar to Toirdelbach and Muirchertach Uí Briain's. Cormac had met the reformer Máel Máedoc Uí Morgair in Lismore on two occasions before he became king, and after he acceded, he sponsored Máel Máedoc's foundation of a new monastery. He also sponsored the construction of a Romanesque chapel at Cashel in 1127, consecrated in 1134, which still bears his name.<sup>2187</sup>

We also have the evidence of the *Schottenklöster* for Munster's interests in continental Europe. As was noted in the chapter on Munster, both the Uí Briain and Meic Cárthaig were involved in their patronage, and the Regensburg monastery, under the stewardship of Christianus Mac Cárthaig, promoted good relations between Munster's two royal

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<sup>2184</sup> Duffy, *Ireland in the Middle Ages*, pp 42–3; Bracken, 'Ua Briain, Muirchertach [Murtagh O'Brien] (c. 1050–1119), king of Munster and high-king of Ireland' in *O.D.N.B.*, accessed online (<https://doi-org.jproxy.nuim.ie/10.1093/ref:odnb/20464>) (19 February 2021).

<sup>2185</sup> Duffy, *Ireland in the Middle Ages*, pp 43–4; Bracken, 'Ua Briain, Muirchertach [Murtagh O'Brien] (c. 1050–1119), king of Munster and high-king of Ireland' in *O.D.N.B.*, accessed online (<https://doi-org.jproxy.nuim.ie/10.1093/ref:odnb/20464>) (19 February 2021).

<sup>2186</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1103.5; *A.F.M.* 1103.11; *Ann. Tig.* 1103.5; *Chron. Scot.* 1103.3; *A.U.* 1103.6; *A.L.C.* 1103.5.

<sup>2187</sup> *The Two Munsters*, p. 237; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1126.5; *A.F.M.* 1134.13; *Ann. Tig.* 1134.2; *Chron. Scot.* 1134.3; *A.L.C.* 1135.9.

families. The *Visio Tnugdali*, composed at Regensburg during his abbacy, depicted a friendly relationship between Conchobar Úa Briain and Donnchad Mac Cárthaig.<sup>2188</sup>

On this evidence, it is fair to assume that had Munster advanced another successful claimant to the national kingship in the twelfth century, he too would have fostered these international links. It is clear too that the towns played an important role in Munster's outward focus. The royal dynasties had recently made the coastal Norse settlements their capitals, linking them by sea with a wider European community. It was also through their control of Dublin that the Uí Briain took a direct interest in Irish Sea politics. There were no similar settlements in Leth Cuinn, and its kings were therefore at a greater remove from western Europe – but not from northern Europe, as has been demonstrated.<sup>2189</sup>

Connacht, at the greatest remove of all, had different priorities during its ascendancy. Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair set the trend for his successors by using Meath's associations with the kingship of Ireland to legitimise his own claim. His establishment of control over Meath in 1120 could be interpreted as a simple effort to restrict Domnall Mac Lochlainn to the North, but by celebrating the *Óenach Tailten* Toirdelbach showed there was more to it.<sup>2190</sup> From the first, therefore, Connacht's claim to the kingship of Ireland was to be linked to the royal sites and traditions of Meath.

Ruaidrí developed his father's policy still further in this regard. As soon as he became king of Ireland, he began using great conventions to affirm his authority. His first was at Athlone in 1166, a property of Connacht certainly, but on the Meath border.<sup>2191</sup> This was followed by a meeting at Tlachta (Hill of Ward) in 1167, and another at Ochainn (Faughan Hill), the reputed burial place of Niall Noígíallach, in 1168.<sup>2192</sup> Ruaidrí also

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<sup>2188</sup> The Two Munsters, p. 250.

<sup>2189</sup> See Etchingham, Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, Ní Mhaonaigh, and Ashman Rowe, *Norse–Gaelic contacts*.

<sup>2190</sup> Connacht, p. 60; *A.F.M.* 1120.8; *Ann. Tig.* 1120.2; *Chron. Scot.* 1120.1; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1120.3.

<sup>2191</sup> See below, pp 488–9; *Ann. Tig.* 1166.20

<sup>2192</sup> Connacht, pp 70–1; *A.F.M.* 1167.10, 1168.12, 1168.13; *Ann. Tig.* 1168.1, 1168.3; Walsh, 'Irish Ocha, Ochann', in *Eriú*, viii (1916), pp 75–6; Henry Morris, 'The battle of Ocha and the

celebrated the *Óenach Tailten* on the latter occasion.<sup>2193</sup> In 1169 he led an army to Tara, where he summoned *Úa Cerbaill* and *Úa hEochada* to meet him.<sup>2194</sup> In each year, therefore, he underlined the legitimacy of his authority with reference to the traditional symbols and institutions of the kingship of Ireland. Not even his father had emphasised this so strongly and if the English invasion had not occurred, Ruaidrí would have continued to foster the connection to Meath.

Connacht's fixation on Meath, and especially Tara, survived Ruaidrí. At least two poems addressed to Cathal Crobderg refer to Tara. One of these, *Táirnic in sel-sa ac Síil Néill* (*Síil Néill's era has come to an end*), highlighted by Brian Ó Cuív, is thought to date from early in that king's reign.<sup>2195</sup> As can be seen from the first line, which by convention gives us the modern title, this poem claimed that the era of *Uí Néill* dominance was ended. It argued that ascendancy had passed to the descendants of Bríon, Niall's brother. These were, of course, the *Uí Briúin*, from whom descended the *Síil Muiredaig* and the *Uí Chonchobair*.

For the present purpose the important point is that dominance throughout Ireland in the shape of the kingship of Ireland was still (*c.* 1190) considered the ultimate aim of the king of Connacht. We may also recall here that Cathal Crobderg's immediate predecessor, Conchobar Maenmaige, had retained suzerainty over several other provinces. This kingship of Ireland was also still considered to be linked to Meath and Tara and its traditional 'institutions'. Of these, the *Feis Temro* is mentioned explicitly in *Táirnic in sel-sa ac Síil Néill* and is presented as a stream from which the rulers of Ireland drink. Tara itself is also mentioned numerous times in the poem.<sup>2196</sup>

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burial place of Niall of the nine hostages' in *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, Sixth Series, xvi, no. 1 (June 1926), pp 29–42.

<sup>2193</sup> *A.F.M.* 1168.13; *Ann. Tig.* 1168.3.

<sup>2194</sup> *A.F.M.* 1169.10.

<sup>2195</sup> Ó Cuív, 'A poem composed for Cathal Croibhdhearg Ó Conchubhair', in *Ériu*, xxxiv (1983), pp 157–74 at 159–60.

<sup>2196</sup> Ó Cuív, 'A poem composed for Cathal Croibhdhearg Ó Conchubhair', pp 159, 161, 165, 168.

The other poem, *Tabhrum an Cháisg ar Chathal* (Let us spend Easter with Cathal), elaborates a similar theme. One passage runs ‘With good omen was the king of the Moy, Toirrdhealbhadh’s son, brought to Tara: no herdsman watches a cow in the time of the descendant of Tuathal Teachtmhar. Pleasant was the vision that appeared to me last night of the battalions of Cruacha, how he went forth into Meath and each stone building became a blazing bush. Sparks of fire I seemed to see throughout its markets; the sparks – ’tis a well-founded judgement – were O’Connor’s raiding bands. I see the green wave of the wild sea coming over them yonder: the wild green wave of the sea is the bright redhanded thin-lipped prince. It is the Redhand that will drive eastwards the foreigners who have seized Tara: it were no grief to me that he should banish them all from Ireland’.<sup>2197</sup>

This poem, which is thought to date 1213x24, is somewhat later than the other and comes from a time when Cathal Crobderg had settled into a policy of passive co-existence with the English.<sup>2198</sup> Even so, it is more aggressive in tone, undoubtedly because of the great success and stability enjoyed by the English at that time. The fact that Meath was a secure English possession underlies the description of Cathal’s invasion of Meath, real or imagined, and the certainly imagined picture of Cathal driving the English back across the sea. Meath’s alienation to the English was evidently particularly painful because of its association with the kingship of Ireland, and this was represented above all else by Tara.

In the early fourteenth century, long after the conquest of Connacht, Aodh Ó Chonchobhair received a similar composition which also alluded to Tara. In reference to

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<sup>2197</sup> Osborn Bergin (ed. and trans.), *Irish bardic poetry: texts and translations* (Dublin, 1970; rpr. 2003), pp 104–7, 259–63: ‘Maith sén tugadh go Teamhraigh rí Muaidhe, mac Toirrdhealbhaigh: noch sill buachail ar bhoin re linn uí Thuathail Teachtmhuir. Suaric an taidhbhisi tárfas damh ar éir do chathuibh Cruachan, a dhul amach san Midhe, gach clach ’na tur theinntidhe. Crithre teineadh tárfas damh d’fhaicsin ar fhud a margadh: as í an chrithre, as breath bhunaidh, sirthi creach Uí Chonchobair. Do-chiú glastonn mara mir amuigh ag toidhiocht tairrsibh: as í an ghlastonn mhear mhara an geal basdonn béltana. As é an Croibhdhearg chuirfios soir na Gulla do ghabh Theamhraigh: an duine ní diombáidh linn ’ga ttiomáin uile a hÉirinn’.

<sup>2198</sup> Bergin (ed.), *Irish bardic poetry: texts and translations*, p. 104.

his recently built house at Cloonfree, the poet wrote ‘Is it thou once more, Rath of Tara? thou hast changed thy various shape; thou hast found favour in thy old guise, though thou art descended from ancient hosts [...] thou hast appeared in Cloonfree above the verdant slope of the fair-smooth sward, rath of Conn of the fourfold ridge, spaciouly palatial, smooth, with round pinnacles’.<sup>2199</sup>

It may be of relevance that the Old Norse text *Konungs Skuggsjá* or ‘The King’s Mirror’, which contains an account of ‘the wonders of Ireland’, includes a ‘Tara motif’. This text is thought to have been composed for Hákon IV Hákonarson, king of Norway from 1217 to ’63, and probably towards the end of his reign.<sup>2200</sup> Hákon considered invading Ireland at the invitation of unnamed Gaelic lords, and it has been suggested that Áodh Ó Conchobhair (d. 1275) of Connacht was chief among them.<sup>2201</sup> It is possible that the Tara material in *Konungs Skuggsjá* reflects Connacht’s continued interest.

It is perhaps needless to add that the use of Tara as a symbol of sovereignty in these cases has little to do with the politics during and immediately after the English invasion. Since Tara itself was clearly beyond recovery it no longer represented any real power, only historical legitimacy, and it was even used in a poem addressing a Munster lord in the fourteenth century.<sup>2202</sup> To some extent this was its role for Toirdelbach, Ruaidrí, and Cathal Crobderg, but the difference is that Toirdelbach and particularly Ruaidrí succeeded in establishing the power that conceptually went with kingship of Tara. They

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<sup>2199</sup> Edel Bhreathnach, *Tara: a select bibliography* (Dublin, 1995), pp 16–17: ‘An tú arís, a ráith Teamhrach? Do chláochlais cruth ildhealbhach; fúarais gnáoi ’san ríocht roimhe, gé ’táoi ar sliocht na seanchuire [...] Do-thógbhais ceann a gClúain Fráioich ar leirg uaine an fheóir fhionnmháoi, a ráith cheathardhruimneach Chuinn leathan-bhruighneach bhláith bheandchruinn’; Ó Corráin, ‘Historical need and literary narrative’, in D. Ellis Evans, J. G. Griffith, and E. M. Jope (eds) *Proceedings of the 7<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Celtic Studies, Oxford, 1983* (Oxford, 1986), pp 141–58 at 146.

<sup>2200</sup> Etchingham, Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, Ní Mhaonaigh, and Ashman Rowe, *Norse–Gaelic contacts in a viking world*, pp 43–121; Sverre Bagge, *The political thought of ‘The king’s mirror’* (Odense, 1987), pp 12–13.

<sup>2201</sup> Duffy, ‘The Bruce brothers and the Irish Sea, 1306–29’ in *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies*, xxi (1991), pp 55–86 at 70.

<sup>2202</sup> See also Bhreathnach, *Tara*, pp 16–17; E.C. Quiggin, ‘O’Connor’s house at Cloonfree’, in E.C. Quiggin (ed.), *Essays and studies presented to William Ridgeway* (Cambridge, 1913), pp 333–52 at 336–7.



resurrected its political importance, at least in the eyes of contemporaries, by using it to legitimise their rule.

It is less immediately obvious what the kings of the North tried to bring to (or perhaps to take from) the position of king of Ireland, because even at their peak neither Domnall nor Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn enjoyed the same dominance as the Connacht and Munster leaders named above. They contrasted most noticeably with their opposite numbers in Connacht because of their studious avoidance of Meath and Tara. Domnall Mac Lochlainn had opportunities to establish suzerainty over a wider area, and the events of 1120 show that his sway was recognised in Meath for a time after Úa Briain's illness.<sup>2203</sup> This means that he was in a position to claim the common kingship of the Uí Néill; in other words, the kingship of Tara with all its historical associations.

In such an event, he would certainly have celebrated the *Feis Temro* or the *Óenach Tailten*, or made it clear in some other way that this was the nature of his claim. That he did not do so and did not even react to Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair's celebration of the *Óenach Tailten* shows that his ambitions lay elsewhere. From the examination of his kingdom in this thesis, it is clear that this ambition was the integration of the three northern kingdoms (Uí Néill, Airgíalla, Ulaid) into a coherent sphere of control known as 'the North'.<sup>2204</sup> Even the fact that the Uí Néill argued that he satisfied the conditions of a king of Ireland with opposition on the grounds that he had brought an army through Ireland and returned safely, while also defending his province against invasions, shows that his claim to national kingship had an entirely different basis to any Uí Néill predecessor.<sup>2205</sup>

That the North replaced, and was intended to replace, the common Uí Néill overkingship as the primary extension of control for the Cenél nEógain, is itself further evidence that

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<sup>2203</sup> Connacht, pp 59–60; The Uí Néill and the North, p. 147.

<sup>2204</sup> The Uí Néill and the North, pp 124–5.

<sup>2205</sup> The Uí Néill and the North, pp 145–6; Simms, 'The contents of later commentaries', pp 23–40 at 33–4.

the definition of kingship of Ireland was more open to interpretation than it had been, and that a greater semantic difference had opened between it and the kingship of Tara.<sup>2206</sup> We do not know why Domnall Mac Lochlainn chose to limit himself, rather than using the newly constituted North to support his own resurrection of the kingship of Tara, but the fact remains he did.

Neither Domnall nor his immediate successors showed any interest in using the ecclesiastical reform movement to bolster their authority either. On the contrary in fact, the reformer Máel Máedhoc Úa Morgair, who was mentioned above for his relationship with Cormac Mac Cárthaig, had difficulty establishing himself in the North. Before Cellach, archbishop of Armagh, died in 1129, he nominated Máel Máedhoc to be his successor. When he died, however, the Cenél nEógain had one of their own, Máel Brígte Úa Brolcháin, installed in the vacant see. They also supported Muirchertach Mac Domnaill's election to the position of *comarbae*, and his candidacy represented the hereditary holders of the office, Clann Sínaig. It was exactly this practice, hereditary control of ecclesiastical offices, that Máel Máedhoc hoped to eliminate as part of his reforming agenda. He might never have achieved this had Donnchad Úa Cerbaill, king of Airgíalla, not lent his support to the reform movement and influenced Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn to do the same.<sup>2207</sup>

Muirchertach made substantial donations and awards to representatives of the reform movement throughout his career, most notably at Mellifont and Newry, where the sites chosen were within Úa Cerbaill's kingdom. As was argued in 'The Uí Néill and the North', joint sponsorship of reform was just one element of a wider collaboration between these two northern kings.<sup>2208</sup> As such, it represented prioritisation of the North

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<sup>2206</sup> See Leinster, pp 347–8.

<sup>2207</sup> The Uí Néill and the North, pp 153–4.

<sup>2208</sup> The Uí Néill and the North, pp 152–8.

rather than an attempt to foster international relationships, as it had been for Toirdelbach and Muirchertach Úa Briain.

Muirchertach showed no greater interest than Domnall in establishing himself as a traditional *rí Temro*. His control of Meath was never secure, and his efforts to expel Úa Ruairc and Úa Conchobair from that kingdom were fitful. Even though Mac Lochlainn had defeated Úa Conchobair and Úa Ruairc in battle at Ardee in 1159, by 1161 he openly recognised Úa Conchobair's suzerainty in Meath.<sup>2209</sup> An effort to curb Úa Ruairc's influence in the kingdom was similarly unsuccessful.<sup>2210</sup> Had Muirchertach intended to present himself as a king of Tara, he would undoubtedly have diverted more of his resources into controlling Meath; nor would unstable control have prevented him from celebrating the *Feis Temro* or *Óenach Tailten* if such was his intention. Instead, we must presume the kingship of Ireland as led from the North was still developing in terms of its character, and through a break with tradition rather than as an extension of it.

There were points of convergence as well as divergence in the variously centred kingships of Ireland. The most important of these in the twelfth century was a focus on Dublin. Like so much else, the observation that it was growing in importance in the twelfth century, generally accepted by modern historians, originated with Orpen. For him, the events of that period showed that Dublin 'Though inhabited and directly ruled by foreigners, and not the seat of the *ard-ri*, [...] had gradually come to be regarded as in some sort the capital of Ireland'.<sup>2211</sup>

This position has been enthusiastically championed by more recent writers, especially Duffy, and there is therefore little reason to place stress on it.<sup>2212</sup> On the other hand, it is worthwhile noting the reasons for which it was a point of intersection between the

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<sup>2209</sup> Connacht, pp 66–7; The Uí Néill and the North, pp 160–1; *A.F.M.* 1161.9.

<sup>2210</sup> Connacht, p. 66; The Uí Néill and the North, pp 160–1.

<sup>2211</sup> Orpen, *Normans*, i, p. 208.

<sup>2212</sup> See Duffy, 'Pre-Norman Dublin: capital of Ireland?', in *History Ireland*, i, no. 4 (Winter, 1993), pp 13–8; Duffy, 'Ireland's Hastings: the Anglo-Norman conquest of Dublin', pp 69–85.

different kingships of Ireland. Dublin's status as an independent polity was fatally damaged by its defeats to Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill and Brian Bóraime. Like Limerick, Dublin found itself incorporated into an adjacent province early in the eleventh century. The town, which might have re-invigorated the kingship of Tara had the kings of Meath emulated their counterparts in Munster, was brought into the Leinster fold by Diarmait mac Máel na mBó in 1052.<sup>2213</sup>

Toirdelbach úa Briain installed his son Muirchertach as king of Dublin in 1075, and this was arguably an even greater turning point.<sup>2214</sup> Dublin was now a part of a broader overlordship and treated as an important element in it. It may not be surprising that this happened under a Munster king, since their associations with the Hiberno-Norse settlements were already established by 1075. We may note too, the definition of kingship of Ireland advanced by Muirchertach was one that emphasised the 'three estuaries', meaning Limerick, Waterford, and Dublin.<sup>2215</sup> We have also seen how it was through Dublin that Muirchertach himself became acquainted with Anglo-Norman, Cambro-Norman, and Norse politics; spheres in which he would involve himself when he became king of Munster and Leth Moga. Muirchertach in turn made his son Domnall king of Dublin, but he would be the last Munster dynast to hold the title.<sup>2216</sup>

Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair took up the slack, making his son Conchobar king of Dublin and Leinster in 1126.<sup>2217</sup> This recognition of Dublin's link to Leinster was an interesting development, and it shows the extent to which that connection was established before Munster's overlordship altered the status quo. Since inclusion of Dublin obviously improved Leinster's standing, acceptance of their association may have been intended to

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<sup>2213</sup> *A.F.M.* 1052.8: 'the lord of the foreigners, Eachmarcach, son of Ragnall, went over seas, and the son of Mael-na-mbo assumed the kingship of the foreigners after him'.

<sup>2214</sup> *A.F.M.* 1075.11; *Ann. Inisf.* 1075.2; *Ann. Tig.* 1075.2; *Chron. Scot.* 1075.2; *A.U.* 1075.1; *A.L.C.* 1075.1.

<sup>2215</sup> The *Uí Néill* and the North, pp 145–6; Simms, 'The contents of later commentaries', pp 32–3.

<sup>2216</sup> See *The Two Munsters*, p. 238.

<sup>2217</sup> *Connacht*, p. 50; *A.F.M.* 1126.10; *A.U.* 1126.2; *Ann. Tig.* 1126.2; *A.L.C.* 1126.2; *Chron. Scot.* 1126.2; *Ann. Inisf.* 1126.8; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1126.2.

bolster Conchobar Úa Conchobair rather than Leinster per se, but Conchobar was deprived of his new kingdom by its natives within a year and derived no benefit.<sup>2218</sup>

Unlike their competitors, the kings of the North do not seem to have wished to impose their own representatives on Dublin; that is to say, there is arguably indirect evidence that they did so, but no direct evidence. Muirchertach led a campaign through Connacht and Meath in 1155, and one entry says that his army ‘went through Connacht past Áth Liag eastwards, and from thence to Dublin, the kingship of which they took’.<sup>2219</sup> Since a dynast by the name of Diarmait mac Magnusa Meic Lochlainn ‘was killed by the Leinstermen and the Galls of Dublin’ in 1149 it is possible that these entries represent Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn trying to effect a scheme similar to that tried by the Uí Briain and Uí Chonchobair.<sup>2220</sup> We must also note that there was a hosting by ‘the son of Mac Lochlainn’ against Dublin ‘to avenge his wife and her violation by them’ in 1162.<sup>2221</sup>

On the whole though, these entries would appear to be better evidence of indirect overlordship of Dublin than the imposition of a direct ruler. The reference to the ‘son of Mac Lochlainn’ does not necessarily mean a son of Muirchertach’s: it could just as easily be referring to Muirchertach himself. We can also note an entry of 1160, referring to ‘Muirchertach son of Niall Ó Lochlainn’ leading an army that included ‘the north of Ireland, the men of Midhe, the Leinstermen, and the Galls of Dublin’.<sup>2222</sup> This supports the idea that Muirchertach himself enjoyed direct supremacy over Dublin on two counts: no subordinate is named and Muirchertach is referred to as ‘son of Niall’. It is also worth noting that Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn prevented Gofraid mac Amlaíb, king of Man

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<sup>2218</sup> Connacht, p. 50; *A.L.C.* 1127.5.

<sup>2219</sup> *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1154.5; *A.F.M.* 1155.11; *Ann. Tig.* 1155.2.

<sup>2220</sup> *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1149.1.

<sup>2221</sup> *Women and Marriage*, p. 368; *Ann. Tig.* 1162.1.

<sup>2222</sup> *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1160.1.

and the Isles, from taking control of Dublin sometime in the 1150s, according to the Manx chronicle; later, Gofraid would marry a granddaughter of Mac Lochlainn's.<sup>2223</sup>

There are a couple of other points that have led to this general agreement on Dublin's importance. Two very large payments of *túarastal* were made to its Hiberno-Norse community shortly before the English invasion, confirming its centrality in the considerations of the kings of Ireland. The fact that one, made by Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn in 1154, was 1,200 cows, and the other, made by Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair in 1166, was 4,000 cows, is generally understood to indicate the magnitude of Dublin's importance; the increase offered by Ruaidrí should also be understood in the context of a wider group of generous *túarastal*.<sup>2224</sup> Dublin's importance is also underlined by the fact that the siege and battle of Dublin in 1171 determined whether the English invasion would be a success.<sup>2225</sup>

It is impossible to know how the kingship of Ireland would have developed without an English invasion. Nonetheless, we can make observations on underlying trends on the eve of the invasion that can help suggest likely eventualities. It is important to do this because so many unsupported assertions have been made, not least those already highlighted in this chapter. By pointing out the limited conjectures that can reasonably be made, we can sidestep the less useful theories and create a basis for future study.

One theme that runs throughout the present study is the changing nature of provincial politics during the period, though these are not necessarily the changes commonly described by historians today. Contrary to popular belief, the kingship of Ireland in the eleventh and twelfth centuries was not decided by a free-for-all. There were, in that two-hundred-year period, claims advanced in five different provinces: Meath, Leinster,

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<sup>2223</sup> Etchingham, Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, Ní Mhaonaigh, and Ashman Rowe, *Norse–Gaelic contacts in a viking world*, pp 165–6; Broderick (ed.), *Cronica regum Mannie & Insularum*, folio 37 recto.

<sup>2224</sup> Connacht, pp 67–71; *A.F.M.* 1154.12, 1154.13; 1166.13; *A.U.* 1166.9; *Ann. Tig.* 1166.1.

<sup>2225</sup> Introduction, pp 1–6; Connacht, pp 76–7.

Munster, Connacht, and the Northern Uí Néill. The Meath claim died in 1022 with Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill, and in any case represented the older *rí Temro* archetype. The Leinster claim, which was dealt with in detail in a dedicated chapter, was anomalous. There were, therefore, just three effective competitors for the vast majority of those two hundred years; the three major kingdoms considered in this thesis.

Provinces, for want of a better word, were not static entities. By medieval convention, there were five Irish provinces, though it has never been clear to modern experts exactly which provinces were intended by this, because there were always more in the historical period. Early medievalists in particular have wrestled with the hypothesised provincial structure disrupted by the rise of the Uí Néill, wondering if there were indeed five before that time. The theory that the Ulaid may have controlled the entire territory of modern Ulster may help to explain this discrepancy.

In our period, we could name nine or ten provinces. We could just as easily talk of two or three, however, since throughout the period there were that many super-provincial kingdoms. In other words, the minor provincial kings always gave (or were expected to give) submission to an overlord from a major provincial kingdom, and occasionally major kings offered submission to one another. The contest for the kingship of Ireland was a contest first for natural areas of extension, and second for supremacy over the other major kingdoms.

It is obvious that the minor kings knew their place in this hierarchy. As a rule, even the most powerful among them did not accept formal submission from other minor kings because to do so would inevitably have provoked a greater king with whom they could not contend.<sup>2226</sup> Take, for example, Tigernán Úa Ruairc in Meath: Diarmait Úa Máel Sechlainn was his man in that province, but it was still Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair to whom

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<sup>2226</sup> There are a small number of anomalous exceptions to this rule. We may note Donn Sléibe Úa hEochada of the Ulaid paying *túarastal* to Donnchad Úa Ruairc in Bréifne in 1084 for example (*A.F.M.* 1084.7; *A.U.* 1084.4; *A.L.C.* 1084.4) and also the strange case of Murchad Úa Máel Sechlainn taking the hostages of Síol Muiredaig (but not Connacht) in 1135 (*A.F.M.* 1135.21).

they both owed submission. Similarly, when Úa Ruairc invaded Leinster on his own in 1166, he ‘carried off their hostages, and then gave them to Ruaidhrí Ó Conchobhair’.<sup>2227</sup>

We can also see the importance of holding hostages through Diarmait Mac Murchada and Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair’s attack on Úa Ruairc in 1152: the hostages went with the king of Connacht rather than the king of Leinster.<sup>2228</sup> This is why Byrne was wrong to say Donnchad Úa Cerbaill’s non-advancement of a claim ‘gives the game away’ in terms of the ineligibility of Airgíalla’s kings for national supremacy; it was part of a much wider dynamic.<sup>2229</sup> Indeed, Úa Cerbaill’s demeanour towards the Ulaid provoked Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn in 1166 because it contravened exactly this precedent. The major kings enforced an effective monopoly on the possession of the hostages of provincial kings.

The fact that this was the governing dynamic makes the rise of Connacht as a power all the more remarkable. The Northern Uí Néill had longstanding national importance and so too did Munster, even if, in the latter case, the Dál Cais leadership did not have an equally prestigious heritage. It was the proximity of Síl Muiredaig and Dál Cais that gave the former party a strategic opportunity as the latter declined, and it was one Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair used to full advantage.<sup>2230</sup> To some extent, Connacht had the same natural advantages as Meath, especially its location in the midlands, and Meath’s decline also provided an opportunity. That said, the rise of a province from minor to major status is otherwise unknown in our period.

The efforts of these major kingdoms to find logical primary territorial extensions were complicated by the fact that Connacht’s involvement was a novelty. It meant that the old scheme of Leth Cuinn and Leth Moga had to be consigned to the past, and Munster in

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<sup>2227</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1166.13: ‘& tucsat a m-braighdi léo & do-radsad do Ruaidhrí h-Úa Choncobair íat iarom’.

<sup>2228</sup> *Women and Marriage*, p. 377; *Connacht*, p. 57; *A.F.M.* 1152.10; *Ann. Tig.* 1152.6.

<sup>2229</sup> Byrne, *Irish kings*, p. 73.

<sup>2230</sup> *Connacht*, pp 43–54.



particular struggled with this.<sup>2231</sup> While the fortunes of the three provinces varied, the general trajectory of Munster's relative power was downward, and it suffered a knockout blow at Móin Mór in 1151. This meant there were only two remaining contenders for the kingship of Ireland, with minor kings across the island awaiting the outcome of their inevitable clash. This explains the ease with which Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair established himself as king of Ireland when Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn collapsed in 1166; that the defeat of the one implied the other's victory was generally accepted. This was not the case some generations earlier, when Muirchertach Úa Briain's illness in 1114 did not lead to a general submission to Domnall Mac Lochlainn.

It is important to note that the province remained the effective polity in Ireland at this stage and may well have done so indefinitely without an English invasion. That depended on the long-term viability of Connacht's dominance and the likelihood of innovation by the individual holding the kingship of Ireland. Both questions are open to enough doubt to render further speculation on this point unwise, but we can also say with confidence that Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair was in an unusually powerful position as king of Ireland, and that momentum was on his side.

And here we circle back to agreement with Orpen, who, by contrast with the nationalist historians, held a (relatively) high opinion of Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair's kingship. Arguing against their interpretation, he said 'Modern writers usually characterize him as a weak and irresolute prince, and regard it as the crowning misfortune of his country that he should have been *ard-ri* at the time of the English invasion. But the records in the Irish annals show that just before the coming of the English Rory O'Conor came more nearly to forcing his rule over the length and breadth of Ireland than any provincial king had succeeded in doing since the days of Brian. There is no reason to suppose that any one else would have fared better'.<sup>2232</sup>

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<sup>2231</sup> The Two Munsters, pp 233–63.

<sup>2232</sup> Orpen, *Normans*, ii, pp 181–2.

It is quite true to say Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair was the most powerful king of Ireland since Brian Bóraime. In the interim, no king from outside the North had managed to force hostages from the Cenél nEógain and Cenél Conaill, for example. More completely put, no king in the interim could argue that the entire island was within their jurisdiction. They had instead put forward different interpretations of what it meant to be king of Ireland; for Brian and Ruaidrí alike, no such careful formulation was necessary.

Still, Orpen did not argue that Úa Conchobair managed the invasion well. He believed it was managed disastrously on the Irish side, but that this was a function of the Irish political structure and the weakness inherent in the office of king of Ireland, rather than the personal failures of Ruaidrí. Yet, despite the fact that the reaction to the invasion by the Irish kings is universally interpreted as inadequate, not to say calamitous, there have been few attempts to understand what Ruaidrí was trying to achieve from 1167–71.

Naturally his policies and actions will never be regarded as a success, but this does not mean they were necessarily bad or inadequate.

Ruaidrí's aim was quite clearly to solidify his own position by re-incorporating Diarmait Mac Murchada into the hierarchy. He acted as the arbiter between the Uí Briain and Meic Cárthaig in 1168, and this had been his intention in 1167 as well, when he forced Mac Murchada to pay Úa Ruairc 100 ounces of gold.<sup>2233</sup> That payment was 'in compensation for his [Úa Ruairc's] wife', just as the military expedition against Mac Murchada the previous year was 'to take revenge for Ua Ruairc's wife'.<sup>2234</sup> Úa Conchobair had already accepted Mac Murchada's submission before that campaign, and he did not participate.<sup>2235</sup> It upset his arrangements and negatively impacted his position, but such was Úa Ruairc's importance that Úa Conchobair had to accommodate him.

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<sup>2233</sup> *A.F.M.* 1168.18; *A.U.* 1168.3; *Ann. Tig.* 1166.13, 1167.5; *Connacht*, p. 73.

<sup>2234</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1167.5: '*i l-lógh a mna*', 1166.13: '*do dighail mna h-Úi Ruairc fair*'; *A.F.M.* 1168.18; *A.U.* 1168.3; *Connacht*, pp 72–3.

<sup>2235</sup> *A.F.M.* 1166.14; *Ann. Tig.* 1166.1.

For Úa Conchobair, Mac Murchada's few Anglo-Norman mercenaries in 1167 were very much a secondary consideration. In *The Deeds*, they were described in the following terms: 'But Diarmait, the noble king, did not bring back any Englishmen along with his own warriors on this occasion according to what my informant says; except a certain Richard, as I have heard said, a knight from Pembrokeshire: Richard fitz Godibert, a knight of good birth; [also] knights, archers and men-at-arms, but I do not know how many, for these men did not stay long in Ireland because they could achieve hardly anything for the king in his country as they were few in number, those who had crossed over in haste'.<sup>2236</sup>

*A.F.M.* includes a comment that 'the son of the King of Britain, who was the battle-prop of the island of Britain' was among the casualties on Mac Murchada's side in 1167.<sup>2237</sup> This is generally thought to represent a brother or son of Rhys ap Gruffydd, king of Deheubarth in south Wales. It seems, therefore, that there may have been a greater contingent than the author of *The Deeds* cared to admit, though certainly not on the scale of the subsequent arrivals. Their presence was less important than the fact that Mac Murchada was accepted back into Ireland and given control of Uí Chennselaig (but not Leinster).

To Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair, the situation in 1169 must have seemed very similar to 1167. Mac Murchada again had foreign assistance, and he was again using it to strengthen his position. Consequently, Úa Conchobair adopted the same approach. He marched into Uí Chennselaig, demonstrated his overwhelming military superiority, and then offered Mac Murchada terms. This time Mac Murchada was allowed the province of Leinster, but in other ways the conditions were stricter. He had to give up his son Conchobar as a

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<sup>2236</sup> *The Deeds*, p. 63 ll 404–419: 'Mes Dermot, li gentil reis, Od ses guerrers gent englés Ne menad a icel tur, Solum le dist de mun cuntur, Ne mes un Ricard, cum l'oi dire, Un chevalier de Penbrocsire: Le fiz Godoberd, Ricard, Chevaler iert de bone part; Chevalers, archers e serjanz Mes jo ne sai desque a quanz, Ker pas ne ierunt longement En Yrland icele gent, Kar ne porent profite fere Al rei gueres en sat ere Pur ço que poi erent de gent Que passerent hastivement'.

<sup>2237</sup> *A.F.M.* 1167.13: 'im mac rígh Bretan, & bá h-esidhe tuir chatha Insi Bretan'.

hostage. He was also promised that, following good behaviour, he would receive a daughter of Ruaidrí's in marriage.<sup>2238</sup>

Again, the foreign support was a distraction rather than a priority. While Giraldus quite naturally put that contingent at the centre of the story and made Ruaidrí fearfully demand that Mac Murchada send them home, no such description appears in the annals. Indeed, on this occasion *A.F.M.* remarked that Ruaidrí 'set nothing by the Flemings', with 'Flemings' representing what was undoubtedly an eclectic following.<sup>2239</sup> He may well have demanded their departure, but this was less important than Diarmait's restoration and incorporation into the wider political structure.

Diarmait received further and much more significant foreign support in 1170, and immediately put it to use. He (or rather they) took Waterford and then turned on Dublin. Ruaidrí attempted to block the capture of the latter, but half-heartedly.<sup>2240</sup> It certainly appears that he considered Mac Murchada's manoeuvres justified since he was establishing himself inside his traditional area; even Waterford could be characterised as such, considering the events of 1137.<sup>2241</sup> This also goes some way towards explaining Úa Conchobair's willingness to make concessions in 1169: in 1167, Mac Murchada had only been allowed to take up leadership of Uí Chennselaig, so his campaign to re-take Leinster was a natural and limited extension.

This comes through in the letter Giraldus attributed to Ruaidrí in 1171. In it Ruaidrí addressed Diarmait, saying 'Contrary to the conditions of our treaty you have invited to this island a large number of foreigners. Yet we put up with this with a good grace while you confined yourself within your province of Leinster. But now, since you are unmindful of your oath and without feelings of pity for the hostage you have given, and have arrogantly trespassed beyond the stipulated limits and your ancestral boundaries,

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<sup>2238</sup> Connacht p. 73; *A.F.M.* 1169.11; *Ann. Tig.* 1169.2; Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 50–1.

<sup>2239</sup> *A.F.M.* 1169.11: '*ro chuirset for nemhthní na Flemendaigh*'.

<sup>2240</sup> Connacht, pp 74–5.

<sup>2241</sup> The Two Munsters, pp 270–2; Leinster, pp 333–4; *A.F.M.* 1137.12, 1137.13; *A.L.C.* 1137.4.

you must either restrain the forays of your foreign troops for the future, or else we will send you without fail the severed head of your son'.<sup>2242</sup>

Again, we may doubt the legitimacy of Giraldus's insistence on the importance of the foreign troops, and the letter is in any case a complete fiction. It does reveal something of Úa Conchobair's mindset, however, which is supported by the present reading. That is that the re-integration of Mac Murchada into the hierarchy was Úa Conchobair's aim. He only abandoned it when Mac Murchada went beyond even the most generous definition of his province, and even then, only reluctantly. And this interpretation is one that is supported by the Irish sources: after Mac Murchada and his men had gone beyond Dublin into Meath, Bréifne, and Airgíalla, *Ann. Tig.* reports that 'At the instigation of Tighearnán Ó Ruairc, the hostages of Leinster and of MacMurchadha were killed by Ruaidhrí Ó Conchobhair in consequence of those wrongs. For Ó Ruairc had pledged his conscience that Ruaidhrí would not be king of Ireland unless they were put to death'.<sup>2243</sup> This is to say that Ruaidrí still hoped for an amicable solution, but was persuaded that the king of Leinster had, at this point, gone too far.

Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair and Tigernán Úa Ruairc evidently believed, just as Diarmait Mac Murchada himself did, that he, Mac Murchada, was in control of these developments. They would not have expected the execution of Conchobar Mac Murchada to worry the Anglo-Norman mercenaries, nor did it. Hope in the efficacy of that measure was its punitive effect on the king of Leinster, and his consequent good behaviour. It was, then, only with Diarmait Mac Murchada's death in 1171 that Úa Conchobair and Úa Ruairc found that his conquests did not also die but lived on under the mercenaries who had been their driving force. The subsequent sieges of Dublin in 1171 (one by Úa Conchobair

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<sup>2242</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 68–9: 'Contra pacis formam exterorum multitudinem in insulam advocasti. Dum tamen intra Lageniam tuam te contituisti, equanimiter sustinuimus. Nunc autem, quoniam nec sacramenti memor, nec obsidis dati misertus, metas positas patriosque fines insolenter excessisti, aut exterorum tuorum de cetero compescas excursus, aut precisum tibi filii tui caput proculdubio remitemus'.

<sup>2243</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1170.14: 'uair tuc Ua Ruairc a chubais na budh rí Ereann Ruaidhri muna marbad íat'; Introduction, pp 1–3.

with an army drawn from across the island, and one by Úa Ruairc alone) were alarmed responses to this development, but the offer of the towns to Richard de Clare on the former occasion suggests Ruaidrí still underestimated the problem.<sup>2244</sup> The second siege, by Úa Ruairc alone, indicates that he at least understood the risk of continued English control of Dublin.<sup>2245</sup>

As stated above, none of this will be sufficient for any reader to deem that Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair's management of the invasion was a success, but the problem is a question of framing; Úa Conchobair did not believe he was managing the prelude to an invasion, or to Henry II's own arrival in Ireland. On the contrary, he thought that his task was to arbitrate between two of his subordinates and to find a way for both to be honourably admitted into the hierarchy. He was lenient towards Mac Murchada when the latter transgressed in 1169 and 1170 because his dependence on Úa Ruairc had meant he did not prevent the campaign that led to Mac Murchada's flight in 1166. He probably resisted Úa Ruairc's push for a harsher response because the king of Bréifne had exacerbated the problem. Such a push is not attested directly anywhere, but Úa Ruairc's insistence that Úa Conchobair 'would not be king of Ireland' if he did not execute the hostages in 1171 hints at earlier ignored advice. All the while, those mercenaries won great victories and established themselves. Most importantly, they put Ruaidrí to flight at the Battle of Dublin in 1171, and with that dealt an enormous and in some sense fatal blow to the kingship of Ireland.

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<sup>2244</sup> Connacht, pp 75–6; *The Two Munsters*, pp 273–4; *The Deeds*, p. 100 ll 1831–56.

<sup>2245</sup> Connacht, pp 76–7; *Ann. Tig.* 1171.10; Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 90–1.

## **[6.2: Experience of the English invasion: a comparative analysis]**

Experience of the English invasion in the major kingdoms had three determining factors: changing political dynamics, possession of military approaches, and the actions of important individuals. To this may be added the point in time at which the English first attacked, but this is easily dealt with. Munster was invaded first, in 1171, while the North and Connacht suffered their first invasions in 1176 and 1177 respectively. It is therefore fair to say that Munster was at an early disadvantage, but the same key issues still applied.

What is referred to here as a ‘change of dynamic’ was the way in which the English invasion interrupted the assumptions and concepts that informed the strategies of the Irish kingdoms, and therefore made it difficult for the kings of the post-invasion era to emulate their predecessors. The ‘dynamics’ themselves have been elaborated in detail in the relevant chapters. They were, in short, recognised orders of progression beyond provincial kingship, or steps on the ladder towards kingship of Ireland. The key impact of the English invasion here was that all three major kingdoms were on the west coast, and their dynamics demanded eastward expansion. This would prove impossible once the English became established.

By ‘military approaches’, what is meant here are the vital strategic paths, and locations on them, which could allow an attacking army to gain access to a province. Their conquest allowed the English to make wider territorial gains and, conversely, their successful defence denied the English that opportunity. Of the three factors highlighted here, the military approaches were undoubtedly the most directly important. What happened to them in each province constituted the principal difference between survival and conquest.

The ‘actions of important individuals’ will reflect on the policies pursued by leading figures in each theatre of the English advance. To a large extent, this will link in with

their management of the two other factors; whether they could come to terms with a changing political arena, and what approach they adopted when the English made plays for the important locations, defined the particular actions they took. The real question here is whether they were aggressive or passive on the back foot, and to what extent that affected the outcome of English advances.

The pre-invasion dynamic in the North was defined by its development into a coherent political bloc that could contest the kingship of Ireland. The very name of 'the North' was formerly the common appellation of the Northern Uí Néill (that is, the Cenél nEógain and Cenél Conaill), and it came to apply to other provincial kingdoms in this area through an extension of Uí Néill, more precisely Cenél nEógain, dominance in the period considered. Just as the North as formerly constituted had been dominated by the Cenél nEógain, the newly created version was also moulded by their influence. The Cenél Conaill had one successful pretender to overall leadership at the end of the twelfth century but the other kingdoms, Airgíalla and especially Ulaid, were lesser partners in the conglomeration.

Whereas the Airgíalla recognised origin myths and ties of kinship with the Uí Néill that, however fictional, bound them together, the Ulaid were longstanding enemies of the Uí Néill, particularly the Cenél nEógain. They may even have lost their once-dominant position because of Uí Néill expansion in the early medieval period. Their enmity was the chief obstacle facing Domnall Mac Lochlainn as he tried to make the three kingdoms an accepted sphere of influence.

Of the three major kingdoms, the political dynamic in Munster was the most firmly rooted in the past. Even though Brian Bóraime was the first to upset the status quo of early medieval politics, he secured his position by adopting the political philosophy of the Eóganachta dynasties he supplanted. The concept of Leth Cuinn and, in this case more specifically Leth Moga, was an early medieval articulation of spheres of influence



dominated by the Uí Néill and Eóganachta respectively, but it suited Brian and his Dál Cais dynasty equally well.

Leth Moga encompassed Osraige and Leinster as well as Munster, and it therefore oriented ambitious kings of Munster eastward. Leinster's brief flirtation with relevance in the shape of Diarmait mac Máel na mBó in the mid-eleventh century did not see the repudiation of the scheme. On the contrary, in fact, even a century later Diarmait Mac Murchada wished to see himself as a representative and defender of Leth Moga. It seems likely that this self-identification either started with, or was strongly boosted by, Diarmait mac Máel na mBó.

As was shown in detail, Leth Moga was also the foundational concept of the rejuvenated kingdom of Munster under Toirdelbach and Muirchertach Úa Briain. The commonly held view that it no longer had relevance in their time is not borne out. Each man followed precedent and secured his eastern flank before proceeding against the midlands. More importantly still, the titles applied to them in the annals show that Leth Moga was regarded by contemporaries as their primary sphere of control. The references to Leth Moga in *Cog. Gaedhel* are as reflective of the late eleventh century as they are of the era they purport to describe.

Connacht's meteoric rise in the twelfth century was a major shock to the status quo. It is difficult to separate it from the similarly unexpected advance of Dál Cais under Brian Bóraime more than a century before, both because of the geographical immediacy of Dál Cais and Síol Muiredaig and because of the undoubted inspiration Brian provided. But, whereas the Dál Cais had a framework they could adopt from the Eóganachta dynasties they replaced, the Síol Muiredaig had no such precedent to follow; no Connacht dynast had ever before scaled the heights surmounted by Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair.

One of the consequences of this situation was that while the Cenél nEógain had 'the North', and the Dál Cais had 'Leth Moga' as established extra-provincial extensions, the

Síl Muiredaig had no expression to articulate the development of their power beyond Connacht. That is not to say their manoeuvres had no definite pattern in this regard, on the contrary they followed a formula that drew on their negative historic experiences and strategic interests, but they had no intermediate step between provincial kingship and a claim to kingship of Ireland.

The primary objective of the Síil Muiredaig (and therefore also of Connacht under them) was to achieve and maintain dominance over the Dál Cais. This was a reversal of the prevailing dynamic of the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries. Ruaidrí na Saide Buide Úa Conchobair had tried to resist Muirchertach Úa Briain's advances in his time, and his son Toirdelbach acquiesced to Úa Briain's suzerainty until the latter fell ill. There would be no return to Dál Cais dominance in Connacht thereafter, as the Síil Muiredaig focused their efforts on controlling Munster and, even when on the defensive, at least resisting submission.

Aside from the numerous military campaigns discussed in extensive detail in the relevant chapters, one of the best illustrations of this priority is Toirdelbach's diversion of the River Suck in 1139. On that occasion, 'the Suca river was dug by Toirdhealbhach Ó Conchobair so that it came into the marsh of the south of the plain and the marsh of Aedh, making large lakes of them, and it went into the river of Ednech and into Loch Rí, and there was a muster of Connachtmen doing that work'.<sup>2246</sup> The authors of a paper on the work pointed to the relationship with Munster as a key reason for the exploit, though they did not conduct a thorough investigation of the political background.<sup>2247</sup>

The second major interest of the Síil Muiredaig kings of Connacht was Meath. Their aims here were twofold: as we will see, west Meath was a direct line of approach to their

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<sup>2246</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1139.4: 'In t-Suca do tochairt la Tairrdelbach O Choncobair co tanic i Turloch Desceirt in Muighe & Turlach Aeda, co n-derna locha mora dib & co n-deachaidh a n-Abaind na h-Eidhnighe & a Loch Rí, & ro báí tínol Connachtach ac denom an gnima-sin'.

<sup>2247</sup> Cannon & Shanahan, 'Creating borders in twelfth-century Ireland? Toirdelbach Ua Conchobair's diversion of the River Suck', pp 139–69 at 164–7.

province, but the traditional links between certain places in east Meath and the kingship of Ireland also constituted a driving factor. Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair took his own provincial kingship in 1114, and by 1120 he was celebrating the *Óenach Tailten*.<sup>2248</sup> To do this he had to extend his power into Meath at the expense of an existing arrangement with Domnall Mac Lochlainn. The parallel with Ruaidrí is obvious as well: he held conventions at Tlachta, Faughan Hill, and Tara in the years immediately following his seizure of the kingship of Ireland.<sup>2249</sup>

Raids across west Meath were a regular feature of Toirdelbach's career, and indeed Ruaidrí's too. Examples include entries under 1146, 1148, 1153, and 1155. In describing a bridge built by Toirdelbach in 1140, an entry in the *Ann. Clon.* highlighted Toirdelbach's purpose: 'that hee might at his pleasure have access to take the spoyles of Westmeath'.<sup>2250</sup> The situation developed further in Ruaidrí's time, as the new king of Connacht was able to prosecute a claim to direct overlordship. Diarmait Úa Máel Sechlainn paid Ruaidrí 100 ounces of gold for west Meath in 1162,<sup>2251</sup> and, when Diarmait was killed in 1169, Ruaidrí partitioned Meath and made himself overlord of the western half.<sup>2252</sup>

When Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair died in 1156 he was alternatively styled 'King of Connaught, Meath, Breifne, and Munster, and of all Ireland with opposition', 'king of all Ireland', and 'archking of Connacht'.<sup>2253</sup> This underlines the point that, for kings of Connacht, there was no clear intermediate position between provincial and national kingship. Toirdelbach could be presented as the holder of one or the other, but there was no easy way to articulate the areas in which his extra-provincial power was strongest;

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<sup>2248</sup> *A.F.M.* 1120.8; *Ann. Tig.* 1120.3; *Chron. Scot.* 1120.1; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1120.3.

<sup>2249</sup> See Connacht, pp 70–2.

<sup>2250</sup> *Ann. Clon.* 1132.

<sup>2251</sup> *A.F.M.* 1162.11.

<sup>2252</sup> *A.F.M.* 1169.5.

<sup>2253</sup> *A.F.M.* 1156.9: 'Toirdhealbhach Ua Conchobhair, rí Connacht, Midhe, Breifne, Mumhan, & Ereann uile co freasabhra'; *Ann. Tig.* 1156.4: 'rí Erenn uile'; *A.U.* 1156.1: 'airdrí Connacht'.

they had to be listed instead. Later, Bréifne and Meath began to be seen as this core extension.<sup>2254</sup>

In addition to being complex, Connacht's primary extra-provincial orbit was extensive. And, because in practice control of Thomond led naturally to control of all Leth Moga, it encompassed all of Ireland beyond the North. It may be surprising that some formulation along these lines was not employed, like, for instance, the Ireland 'south of Slíab Fuait' referred to on one of Brian Bóraime's campaigns.<sup>2255</sup> It seems that Toirdelbach was eager to prosecute a claim to the kingship of Ireland, and the immediacy with which he pursued this inhibited the development of such a stylisation. His speedy celebration of the *Óenach Tailten* may be noted again, as can his commission of the Cross of Cong, c. 1123, which referred to him as king of Ireland.

If the extent and complexity of Connacht's direct strategic interests stemmed in part from its location in the middle of the island, this factor also contributed to Connacht's success. There were immediate strategic concerns in every direction, and so, if powerful enough, a king of Connacht could extend in whatever direction he chose. Toirdelbach created a precedent for Connacht's dominance over most of the island, especially east and south. It was, therefore, easier for Ruaidrí than it was for Toirdelbach to establish control of that same area. This in turn facilitated Ruaidrí's eventual addition of areas formerly beyond his father's control.

Though these wider blocs undoubtedly existed and supported the most ambitious kings, we should not underestimate the difficulties the same men had in creating and maintaining them. There were three notable invasions of Cenél nEógain by the Ulaid during Domnall Mac Lochlainn's reign, including an especially disastrous one for the latter party in 1091, when Donn Sléibe Úa hEochada was killed.<sup>2256</sup> Even though an

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<sup>2254</sup> See Connacht, p. 70; *Ann. Tig.* 1166.1.

<sup>2255</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1005.3.

<sup>2256</sup> *A.U.* 1091.3; *A.L.C.* 1091.3; *Ann. Tig.* 1091.9; *Ann. Inisf.* 1091.3; *Chron. Scot.* 1091.2.

enduring settlement proved elusive, Mac Lochlainn's ability to persuade the Ulaid to join him against the Uí Briain and Leth Moga in 1093 'by reason of a common hostility' reflects his attempt to integrate these old enemies into the new bloc.<sup>2257</sup> It also shows that there were at least some among the Ulaid who felt this was an appropriate disposition for them to adopt.

Nonetheless, as reported in detail earlier, this did not endure. In 1099 Mac Lochlainn invaded Ulaid and cut down the tree at which the kings of Ulaid were inaugurated. In 1111, the Ulaid returned the compliment, cutting down the trees at Tulach Óc.<sup>2258</sup> The problem persisted into the mid-twelfth century, with the Ulaid attacking Cenél nEógain during periods of weakness, including in 1139 for example.<sup>2259</sup> When Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn mistreated (to say the least) the king of Ulaid and his retainers in 1166, it provided the pretext for the rebellion that led to his overthrow.<sup>2260</sup> Again, this underlines the point that the prevailing internal focus was on integration of the eastern components.

The problem in Leth Moga was not so much that Leinster was able to oppose Munster effectively, though there were occasions when it did, like the siege of Waterford in 1137, but rather the fact that the concept became obsolete in the twelfth century.<sup>2261</sup> After 1114, the Shannon, once the path of choice for Munster's kings as they extended beyond Leth Moga into the midlands, brought enemy fleets to Killaloe and Limerick. All the same, it took a long time for Munster's leading men to realise that Connacht was their main problem. Muirchertach himself, along with his challengers and successors, retained a steadfast belief in Leth Moga as a primary power base and, even as Connacht continuously invaded, they tried to establish themselves in Leth Moga before tackling the Uí Chonchobair.<sup>2262</sup> This proved impossible because the latter party rightly judged that

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<sup>2257</sup> The Uí Néill and the North, p. 135; *Ann. Inisf.* 1093.4: '*tre chombaig i n-agid*'.

<sup>2258</sup> The Uí Néill and the North p. 136; *A.F.M.* 1111.4; *A.U.* 1111.6; *A.L.C.* 1111.3, 1111.4; *Ann. Inisf.* 1111.6.

<sup>2259</sup> The Uí Néill and the North, p. 152; *A.F.M.* 1139.3.

<sup>2260</sup> The Uí Néill and the North, pp 157–8.

<sup>2261</sup> The Two Munsters, pp 233–63; *A.F.M.* 1137.12; *A.L.C.* 1137.4.

<sup>2262</sup> The Two Munsters, pp 233–63.

the Uí Briain needed to be isolated from the rest of Leth Moga as a precursor to stable control.

One of the ways they achieved this was by dividing Munster in two and elevating the Meic Cárthaig to semi-provincial kingship. The Meic Cárthaig appear to have had ambitions to lead all Munster, and not just the newly created Desmond, so they were less than grateful to Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair for kingmaking.<sup>2263</sup> As intended, the division had the effect of making Leth Moga a larger and more complex area for its native dynasties to control. When the efforts of the two leading families to cooperate collapsed, along with their aspirations for an alternating kingship or *selaidecht*, it was the Uí Chonchobair and Connacht who reaped the principal benefit.<sup>2264</sup>

The final nail in the coffin of Leth Moga as an active political dynamic came when Conchobar and Toirdelbach Úa Briain, the successors of Cormac Mac Cárthaig (and as it would prove, the last kings of Munster), tried expanding in different directions. All they achieved was to antagonise major kings across the island.<sup>2265</sup> When Toirdelbach's brother Diarmait then rebelled against him, Connacht and Leinster were both waiting to strike. The Battle of Móin Móir might have been something of a fluke in terms of its destructiveness, but it was poor strategy that brought the Uí Briain into that pass.

Connacht's difficulties were extensive, perhaps by virtue of the size of its extra-provincial extension. While Toirdelbach ascended to the kingship of Ireland remarkably quickly, he found the position impossible to maintain. A series of rebellions forced him to campaign continuously throughout the 1120s, and when the Uí Briain and Meic Cárthaig joined forces to reunify Munster the edifice collapsed.<sup>2266</sup> While, for Connacht, Meath was the natural equivalent to Ulaid in the North or Leinster in Leth Moga, the Uí

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<sup>2263</sup> The Two Munsters, pp 252–3.

<sup>2264</sup> The Two Munsters, pp 233–63.

<sup>2265</sup> The Two Munsters, pp 244–5.

<sup>2266</sup> Connacht p. 50; The Two Munsters, p. 249; *Ann. Inisf.* 1127.2; *Ann. Tig.* 1127.2; *Misc.Ir.Annals* 1126.11.

Máel Sechlainn did not prove capable of defending their kingdom to the same extent. Their rare attempts to defy the Uí Chonchobair invariably ended in disaster, as in 1124 and 1143 for example.<sup>2267</sup>

Toirdelbach experienced greater difficulty with Uí Briúin Bréifne than he did with Meath. This kingdom was traditionally considered a part of Connacht, which probably explains Toirdelbach's aggression and numerous conflicts with Tigernán Úa Ruairc.<sup>2268</sup> Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair, on the other hand, preferred to incorporate Úa Ruairc into his core bloc as an ally. This was a much more pragmatic and effective strategy, and Úa Ruairc's value to Úa Conchobair has been noted in several places.<sup>2269</sup>

Connacht's effect on existing dynamics was not only the indirect result of its transformation into a great power, it was also the direct result of its policies. In both Munster and the North, the partitions Connacht imposed deliberately disrupted the unity of the greater polity. Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair, who partitioned Munster in 1118, borrowed this idea rather than inventing it. He would deploy the tactic again and again, with varying degrees of success, until his death in 1156.

Both the North and Munster suffered reversals on this front immediately before the invasion. Connacht had been driven from overlordship of Munster in 1127 through the combined efforts of the Uí Briain and Meic Cárthaig, who abandoned Thomond and Desmond in favour of a united Munster. When their alliance collapsed, it created a renewed opportunity for Connacht. Sure enough, Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair capitalised in 1151, defeating the Uí Briain and partitioning Munster once more.<sup>2270</sup> This time the

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<sup>2267</sup> Connacht, pp 51, 57–8; *A.F.M.* 1125.6, 1143.13; *Ann. Tig.* 1143.4; *A.U.* 1125.3; *A.L.C.* 1125.3; *Chron. Scot.* 1125.3, 1143.5; *Ann. Inisf.* 1125.9; *Misc.Ir.Annals* 1125.2.

<sup>2268</sup> Connacht, pp 54–8.

<sup>2269</sup> Connacht, pp 70, 75; *Women and Marriage*, pp 409–10.

<sup>2270</sup> Connacht, pp 53–4; *The Two Munsters*, pp 245–6; *A.F.M.* 1151.14; *Ann. Tig.* 1151.3; *Misc.Ir.Annals* 1151.3.

division would endure, and, even at the height of his conflict with Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn, Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair insisted on his prerogatives in Munster.<sup>2271</sup>

Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn's claim to kingship of Ireland naturally rested on the structural integrity of the North as his effective province. When the Ulaid and Airgíalla both turned on him in 1166 (not without justification) his fall was inevitable. Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair capitalised here as his father had in Munster, disaggregating the political structure that could contest the kingship of Ireland. He even divided Cenél nEógain internally, as an extra security against their possible recovery.<sup>2272</sup>

By coincidence, therefore, on the eve of the English invasion two of the three major powers of the eleventh and twelfth century, the Uí Néill and Munster, no longer existed as units. Their effective dynamics, principally protection of their eastern extensions, which gave them alter egos known as The North and Leth Moga respectively, were interrupted by the advent of a powerful Connacht which could invade at will. Only Connacht, whose dynamic first arose with Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair, maintained the pattern of an earlier period. The English invasion, then, was a secondary disruption in two of the three provinces, hot on the heels of the first. It should not be surprising, as such, to find certain disenfranchised parties hoped to use it to regain lost ground.

Had Connacht's supremacy not already upset the dynamic, the Uí Briain or Meic Cárthaig, as kings of Munster, would probably have been disposed to regard the English arrival in Leinster as an intrusion into their sphere of control. As it was, the possibility of using the English to reverse their subjection to Connacht was immediately obvious. Even the few forlorn attempts to present a strong opposition to the invaders took the shape of self-advancement on the part of the Uí Briain and Meic Cárthaig, and not cooperation, as had once worked so well against Connacht. It would also be fair to say that the Uí Briain

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<sup>2271</sup> Connacht, pp 66–7; The Uí Néill and the North, pp 160–1.

<sup>2272</sup> Connacht, p. 69; The Uí Néill and the North, pp 161, 179; *Ann. Tig.* 1166.3, 1167.4; *A.F.M.* 1166.11, 1166.12, 1167.11.



were concerned with securing Thomond, while the Meic Cárthaig showed a greater interest, at intervals, in re-uniting Munster.<sup>2273</sup> Leinster, and to a lesser extent Osraige, were beyond the scope of the ambitions of either family, and Leth Moga therefore remained defunct.

Ulaid had always been the least integrated element of the North as a political bloc, and the invasion by John de Courcy in 1177 further challenged its status. With the Cenél nEógain recovering but still in a weak position, there was a question over whether it would be Airgíalla or Cenél nEógain who led the Irish opposition to de Courcy. As it happened, de Courcy would have to overcome both parties, to say nothing of the Meic Dúinn Sléibe, in order to entrench successfully. Whatever his difficulties, the fact that he did so was a great achievement and one of its consequences was the semantic restriction of 'the North' to the Northern Uí Néill and Airgíalla. Exclusion from the North after de Courcy's conquests mirrored perception of Ulaid in some quarters long before the invasion, but there can be no doubt he contributed to its alienation.

Meath was among the early victims of the English invasion, and it was conquered so easily partly because of the damage done by Connacht, Bréifne, and other Irish kingdoms in their efforts to dominate it. The fact that its fall to the English was imminent after Hugh de Lacy assassinated Tigernán Úa Ruairc in 1172 had implications for Connacht directly, as well as for the Uí Chonchobair kingship of Ireland. The point was hammered home by the invasion of Connacht in 1177 and the attack on Clonmacnoise in 1178.<sup>2274</sup> While Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair experimented with continuing the pre-invasion raids on Meath around 1174, leading an attack that succeeded in burning de Lacy's caput at Trim,

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<sup>2273</sup> The Two Munsters, pp 282, 291–3.

<sup>2274</sup> Connacht, p. 85; *A.F.M.* 1177.5, 1178.8; *Ann. Tig.* 1177.14, 1177.15, 1178.3; *A.U.* 1177.2; *Ann. Inisf.* 1177.3, 1177.4, 1177.5; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1178.3.

the subsequent marriage of his daughter to Hugh de Lacy c. 1180 represented recognition of the fact that the greater power now lay on the east side of the Shannon.<sup>2275</sup>

Much the same could be said of Connacht's interest in Thomond, though on a delayed timeline compared to Meath. Whereas Meath was effectively sacrificed through inaction in the 1170s and 1180s, it was 1195 before the kings of Connacht abandoned their claims to overlordship in Munster. When they did so, it was in the hope of securing their position against an ostensibly irresistible English advance. William de Burgh was the beneficiary of a grant to Connacht the same year, and it was this grant that created a new dynamic in Connacht.<sup>2276</sup> It is no coincidence that it was English entrenchment in Thomond that caused such a fundamental change and, indeed, such alarm; it is essentially reflective of pre-invasion politics. From then until Connacht's eventual conquest in the 1230s, the Uí Chonchobair and de Burghs petitioned the English crown for tenure and seisin respectively.

The second factor that defined experience of the English invasion was the military accessibility of the province. For each province, the military approaches were functions of the physical geography; in Connacht's case, the key locations all occurred along the Shannon. Athlone and Clonmacnoise were the points of significance on the border with Meath, while Ballyleague and Collooney marked the border with Uí Briúin Bréifne. Only 40 kilometres north of Collooney was Uí Briúin Bréifne's own border with Cenél Conaill, and since Bréifne itself was an offshoot of Connacht, the intervening space was the subject of three competing interests. In the south, prehistoric population movements created a gap between Connacht's southern border and the Shannon Estuary; this left a wedge of Munster inside the natural frontier.<sup>2277</sup> This made certain possessions of

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<sup>2275</sup> Connacht, p. 89; Women and Marriage, p. 401; *The Deeds*, pp 136–7 ll 3236–3301; *Gesta*, i, p. 270.

<sup>2276</sup> Connacht, pp 92–119; *The Two Munsters*, pp 289–96.

<sup>2277</sup> *The Two Munsters*, p. 214.

Munster, including Killaloe and Limerick, equally important locations in the approach to Connacht.

The fact that ‘the North’ as a political bloc was composed of three separate provincial kingdoms complicated its border and, unlike Connacht, there was no one natural feature to tie them together. The River Erne protected the west and centre of the conglomeration, areas which were also more mountainous than the east. The Bluestack, Derryveagh, and Sperrin ranges made Uí Néill territory particularly challenging for any aggressor. In the east, the Mourne Mountains and the Bann and Newry rivers cordoned the Ulaid from the other kingdoms.

Gaining access into the western part of the North meant crossing the Erne at Assaroe or sailing around the challenging topography by sea. In the eastern half, the gap between the River Erne and Mourne Mountains was not entirely suitable for an advancing army either, due to the wetlands and lakes that still characterise modern County Cavan in particular. Instead, a corridor of drier, flatter land immediately west of Slieve Gullion provided a favourable route. It was also close to Ireland’s chief ecclesiastical centre at Armagh, which proved useful on more than one occasion.

The two routes for an attacking army were, therefore, across Assaroe into Cenél Conaill in the west, and through modern County Louth towards Armagh in the east. The locations cited in the latter area were numerous, but all proximate. As we will see, they included Mag Conaille, Fid Conaille, Slíab Fuait, Armagh, Uí Echach Cobo (Iveagh, County Down), Dundalk, and Ardee. We may infer from their frequent employment that these were the only paths considered appropriate for an attacking army. Neither Munster nor Connacht seem to have used any other route in our period, and on at least one occasion both were exploited simultaneously.

In Connacht and the North, holding the key strategic locations meant access to the province at large could be cut off; the corollaries being that their capture allowed

attacking armies to advance, and that the pattern of warfare remained largely predictable across the period. In Munster the situation was quite different, since natural features did not force attacking armies to adopt one or two routes above all others. Instead, those same attacking armies were drawn towards loci of power from different directions, and the tendency towards centralisation of power in Munster was the factor that led them to the same places.

The Hiberno-Norse settlements were not geographically central to Munster, or to its derivatives Thomond and Desmond. On the contrary, they were coastal and peripheral. It was the tendency for provincial royal dynasties and other prominent parties to relocate into them from the eleventh century onwards that made them strategically important. From the perspective of the former party, the Norse settlements had attained a level of economic importance and general prestige that demanded close control, but they were also fortifiable locations situated along major rivers. The construction of walls at Waterford and Limerick reflects this change in effective ownership, and the anticipation that enemies would be drawn to their environs. The example of Britain and the Continent, where this type of warfare was the norm, is likely to have influenced this development.

Connacht's seizure of settlements straddling the Shannon corresponds with its ascent in the national hierarchy, and the accompanying decline of Meath. Athlone was arguably the most important of these. In 1120 Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair constructed a bridge at Athlone and used it to invade Meath.<sup>2278</sup> Its importance as a crossing point may have been suggested to him by the events of 1114, during which Domnall Mac Lochlainn used it to cross from Meath into Connacht.<sup>2279</sup> Nor is it the case that Athlone had always been

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<sup>2278</sup> Connacht, p. 59; *A.F.M.* 1120.7; *Ann. Tig.* 1120.3; *Chron. Scot.* 1120.2, 1120.3; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1120.5.

<sup>2279</sup> *A.F.M.* 1114.10; *A.U.* 1114.3; *Ann. Tig.* 1114.5; *A.L.C.* 1114.3, 1114.4; *Chron. Scot.* 1114.3; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1114.1; indeed, Toirdelbach himself crossed into west Meath later in 1114 (*Chron. Scot.* 1114.5).

under Uí Chonchobair control: there is direct evidence that the Uí Máel Sechlainn held it as late as 1089.<sup>2280</sup>

If it was peripheral for Meath's royal dynasty it had the potential to be central in a broad Uí Chonchobair overlordship, and it quickly acquired prominence under its new owners. It was, for example, the location at which Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair was based in 1124, when Cormac Mac Cárthaig led a force against him.<sup>2281</sup> It was also fortified by Toirdelbach in 1129, and bridges were constructed at intervals including in 1120, 1129, 1140, and 1155.<sup>2282</sup> It was where Toirdelbach brought the hostages of Bréifne in 1152, after the infamous campaign against Tigernán Úa Ruairc (during which Mac Murchada abducted Derbforgaill).<sup>2283</sup> Ruaidrí took up where Toirdelbach left off, constructing a bridge at Athlone in 1159.<sup>2284</sup> He received the submission of the Cenél nEógain at Athlone in 1168, and it was also at Athlone that Diarmait Mac Murchada's hostages were executed by Ruaidrí in 1170.<sup>2285</sup>

The nearby location 'Ath-Croich', which is thought to represent Shannon harbour, County Offaly, was also the site of a new bridge in 1120.<sup>2286</sup> It is not mentioned again, but its construction emphasises the centrality of the Shannon to Connacht strategy. Later, in 1140, Toirdelbach built a bridge at Ath-Liag or Ballyleague, with the possible aim of incorporating Conmaicne Réin into the kingdom of Connacht.<sup>2287</sup> In 1153, the bridge at Ath-Liag was rebuilt.<sup>2288</sup> In this case it was the Uí Briúin Bréifne and not the Southern Uí Néill who suffered the effects of Connacht projection, but control of the east bank of the Shannon remained the priority.

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<sup>2280</sup> *A.F.M.* 1089.8.

<sup>2281</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1124.6.

<sup>2282</sup> *Connacht*, p. 59; *A.F.M.* 1120.7, 1129.11, 1140.5, 1140.6; *Ann. Tig.* 1120.3; *Chron. Scot.* 1120.2; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1120.5; *A.U.* 1129.5; *A.L.C.* 1129.4.

<sup>2283</sup> *Women and Marriage*, p. 377; *A.F.M.* 1152.10; *Ann. Tig.* 1152.6.

<sup>2284</sup> *A.F.M.* 1159.11; *Ann. Clon.* 1159; *Ann. Tig.* 1159.6.

<sup>2285</sup> *Connacht*, p. 75; *A.F.M.* 1168.23, 1170.16; *A.U.* 1170.4; 1170.14.

<sup>2286</sup> *Connacht*, p. 59. *A.F.M.* 1120.7; *Ann. Tig.* 1120.3; *Chron. Scot.* 1120.2; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1120.5.

<sup>2287</sup> *A.F.M.* 1140.4.

<sup>2288</sup> *A.F.M.* 1153.19.

In between Athlone and Ath-Croich sat the monastery of Clonmacnoise. It had been firmly associated with the Clann Cholmáin kings of Meath for centuries, and eclipsed Durrow and Clonard as the burial place of those kings in the ninth century.<sup>2289</sup> It has even been suggested that it was promoted by Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill as a rival to Armagh in the early eleventh century.<sup>2290</sup> It too fell under Connacht's influence as that province grew more powerful.

As Kehnel remarked, 'Donations, building activities in the monastery, as well as military support, were the characteristic features of Ua Máelsechlainn patronage over Clonmacnois during the tenth and early eleventh century. All three domains were taken over by the Ua Conchobair kings of Connacht from the later eleventh century'.<sup>2291</sup> The donations included jewels offered in 1115, and a belfry built in 1124.<sup>2292</sup> The defence of the monastery included action against the English, as in 1178 when 'Hugo de Lacy came with a great and strong battalion to plunder Clonmacnois. But the Connachtmen did not let them sleep that night and early on the morrow he was carried off for fear of Ruaidhrí Ó Conchobhair and the Síol Muireadhaigh overtaking them in Cumang Cluana'.<sup>2293</sup>

The switch of political orientation at Clonmacnoise is underlined by the list of items stolen from the community in 1129. They included some given by patrons on both sides of the Shannon, but what is notable is the age of the items. The model of Solomon's Temple, given by Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill (d. 1022), and the chalice given by Donnchad mac Flainn (d. 944), were the noted items of Meath origin, striking a contrast with the much more recent items given by Úa Conchobair.<sup>2294</sup>

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<sup>2289</sup> Ó Floinn, 'Clonmacnoise: art and patronage in the early medieval period', p. 91.

<sup>2290</sup> Ó Floinn, 'Clonmacnoise', p. 95.

<sup>2291</sup> Kehnel, *Clonmacnois*, p. 128.

<sup>2292</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1115.7; *Chron. Scot.* 1124.3.

<sup>2293</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1178.3: '*tanic Uga de Laithi ruadh-chath romór do argain Cluana Maic Nóis, & nir' leicset Connachta codladh na h-aidchi-sin doib, & ro h-imcuiredh co moch arnamarach é ar eglá Ruaidhrí h-Úi Chonchobair & Sila Muredhaigh do breith orro a Cumang Cluana*'.

<sup>2294</sup> Ó Floinn, 'Clonmacnoise', p. 97.

The appearances of Connacht families in positions of leadership at Clonmacnoise also increased dramatically in the twelfth century. The Uí Máeleoin appear as *comarbai* or abbots of Clonmacnoise from 1109 onwards and, though their origins are obscure, Kehnel highlighted a passage in a little-known eighteenth-century manuscript in which the author described them as an offshoot of the Uí Chonchobair.<sup>2295</sup> More reliably, the Uí Neachtain of Uí Maine in Connacht appear as heads of the Céilí Dé community at Clonmacnoise and the Uí Dubthaig archbishops of Connacht also had associations with Clonmacnoise.<sup>2296</sup>

Furthermore, the kings of Connacht, and many other nobles of the province besides, were buried at Clonmacnoise in the twelfth century. This could be said of Ruaidrí na Saide Buide Úa Conchobair in 1118, Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair in 1156, and Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair in 1198, as well as Gilla na Naem Úa hEidin (onetime usurping king of Sí Muiredaig) in 1100.<sup>2297</sup> As for the many slain in the battle between Connacht and the Cenél Conaill in 1181, ‘the bodies of those nobles were conveyed, after their deaths, to Cluain-mic-Nois, and interred in the sepulchre of the nobles of their ancestors’, which suggests the prevalence of the practice.<sup>2298</sup> Meanwhile, the kings of Meath and their spouses, whose predecessors had once done the same, were interred at Durrow.<sup>2299</sup>

Remarkably, a mint was also established by the Uí Chonchobair at Clonmacnoise in the twelfth century.<sup>2300</sup> Under 1170, but probably correctly 1179, the *Ann. Clon.* reports that

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<sup>2295</sup> Kehnel, *Clonmacnois*, p. 151; R.I.A. MS 14 B4.

<sup>2296</sup> Kehnel, *Clonmacnois*, pp 149–53; *A.F.M.* 1132.4, 1136.2, 1170.3, 1200.2; *Ann. Tig.* 1136.4, 1170.4; *Chron. Scot.* 1132.7.

<sup>2297</sup> *A.F.M.* 1100.10, 1118.1, 1156.9; *Ann. Tig.* 1100.4, 1118.7, 1156.4; *Chron. Scot.* 1100.1, 1118.4; *A.U.* 1118.9, 1156.1; *A.L.C.* 1118.11; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1118.5, 1156.2; *Ann. Clon.* 1153.

<sup>2298</sup> *A.L.C.* 1181.1, 1181.2: ‘*rucad cuirp na rigraide sin iar ná n-oiged co Cluain Mic Nóis, a n-othar lighe rigraidhe a sinnser*’.

<sup>2299</sup> *A.F.M.* 1137.11, 1153.5. See also the assassinations of Máel Sechlainn Úa Máel Sechlainn and Domnall Bregach Úa Máel Sechlainn at Durrow, in 1155 and 1173 respectively (*Ann. Tig.* 1155.1, 1173.7). In the absence of any mention of removals elsewhere, they may also be presumed to have joined Murchad Úa Máel Sechlainn and his wife Mór among the dead at Durrow. See also Ó Floinn, ‘Clonmacnoise’, p. 97.

<sup>2300</sup> See also Flanagan, ‘After Brian Bóraime’, pp 235–236 & notes 94–98; John Lynch, *Cambrensis eversus*, ed. Matthew Kelly (3 vols., Dublin, 1850), ii, pp 60–61.

‘there was money coined in Clonvickenos this year’.<sup>2301</sup> In the eighteenth century, antiquarian Charles O’Conor attributed the construction of the mint to Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair, who died in 1156, and therefore much earlier than our evidence allows. Flanagan argued that this suggestion came originally from John Lynch, a writer in the seventeenth century who had access to a now-lost set of annals.<sup>2302</sup> Clonmacnoise fell under Toirdelbach’s influence early in his reign, so his creation of a mint there is quite possible.<sup>2303</sup>

Further up the Shannon, Connacht was guarded by the castle of Collooney, constructed by Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair in 1124.<sup>2304</sup> At the time of its construction, it was situated along the border with Uí Briúin Bréifne. Later, Cairpre Dromma Cliab would be conquered by Cenél Conaill, making the threat from this position even greater. The nearby Ballysadare was frequently noted as the point of entry into Cenél Conaill in the thirteenth-century annals. The old entry point was at Assaroe, and the English castles at the adjacent Cael-Uisce in the early thirteenth century were meant to circumscribe Cenél Conaill within that traditional boundary.

The Shannon as a frontier was essential to the course of the English invasion, and the conquest of Connacht was forestalled in part by its maintenance against English attacks. In their very first invasion of Connacht, in 1177, the English were guided into the province by a son of Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair. Their first port of call was Roscommon, which suggests they crossed the Shannon at Athlone or the closer Ballyleague.<sup>2305</sup>

Ballyleague is further indicated by their subsequent hurried escape from Connacht across

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<sup>2301</sup> *Ann. Clon.* 1170.

<sup>2302</sup> Flanagan, ‘After Brian Bóraime’, pp 235–236 & notes 94–98 Lynch, *Cambrensis eversus*, ed. Kelly, ii, pp 60–1.

<sup>2303</sup> See Connacht, pp 54–5.

<sup>2304</sup> *A.F.M.* 1124.15; *Ann. Tig.* 1124.3; *Chron. Scot.* 1124.4.

<sup>2305</sup> Connacht, p. 85; *A.F.M.* 1177.5; *A.U.* 1177.2; *Ann. Tig.* 1177.14, 1177.15; *Ann. Inisf.* 1177.3, 1177.4, 1177.5; *Misc.Ir.Annals* 1178.3; Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 182–3.



that ford.<sup>2306</sup> Hugh de Lacy, who had lent support to this invasion,<sup>2307</sup> was on the front foot again in 1178 as he attacked Clonmacnoise.<sup>2308</sup>

It was ten years before the English next campaigned in Connacht, though again their point of entry was unrecorded. This time, in 1188, led by John de Courcy, they raided Connacht and ‘made no delay until they reached Eas-dara (Ballysadare), with the intention of passing into Tirconnell’.<sup>2309</sup> When Flaithbertach Úa Máel Doraid heard this, he cut off the pass into the north.<sup>2310</sup> The English were forced to turn back, suffering an attack by Conchobar Maenmaige Úa Conchobair. The survivors of this ‘retreated with difficulty from the country’ through an unnamed exit, but the fact that they had passed the Curlew Mountains at the time of the attack shows that they again aimed to leave through Ballyleague.<sup>2311</sup> Had the Shannon offered a suitable crossing point further north the English would certainly have taken it, as the evidence suggests they suffered considerable casualties in the retreat.<sup>2312</sup>

It was the 1210s before Connacht’s grasp on the middle of the Shannon was forcibly loosened. By that time, Thomond had been effectively conquered and Limerick was in English hands. As we have seen, the leading magnate in that area, William de Burgh (d. 1205), was the recipient of a grant of Connacht, which would naturally see him use his bases in Thomond and the Shannon to advance. The threat from this direction had been mitigated only through the Irish justiciary, acting against de Burgh because of King John’s concerns. Cathal Crobderg Úa Conchobair adopted a conciliatory posture towards

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<sup>2306</sup> Connacht, pp 89–90; *A.F.M.* 1177.5; *A.U.* 1177.2; *Ann. Tig.* 1177.14, 1177.15; *Ann. Inisf.* 1177.3, 1177.4, 1177.5; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1178.3; Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 182–3.

<sup>2307</sup> ‘The Foreigners of Dublin and Tulach Aird’ were led into Connacht by Miles de Cogan on that occasion (*Ann. Tig.* 1177.14), with ‘Tulach Aird’, once a metonym for the Uí Cháindegáin kingdom of Laegaire in Meath, now referring to de Lacy’s caput at the adjacent Trim.

<sup>2308</sup> *A.F.M.* 1178.8; *Ann. Tig.* 1178.3.

<sup>2309</sup> *A.L.C.* 1188.7: ‘*na Gaill tar a nais a h-iarthur Connacht co rangadur Ess Dara, do dul a tír Conaill*’; *A.F.M.* 1188.8, 1188.9; *A.U.* 1188.6.

<sup>2310</sup> *A.L.C.* 1188.7; *A.F.M.* 1188.8, 1188.9; *A.U.* 1188.6.

<sup>2311</sup> *A.F.M.* 1188.8 (ga), 1188.9: ‘*Fáccbhaid na Goill an tír ar eccin*’.

<sup>2312</sup> *A.U.* 1188.6.

the English because of this dynamic, and they would now use this against him to seize the strategic points further up the Shannon.

When Cathal Crobderg refused to bring his son Áed to meet King John in 1210, the latter instructed the justiciar to build three castles in Connacht. The primary target was Athlone. The justiciar led his forces to the area, and ‘a bridge was constructed by him across Ath-Luain, and a castle instead of O’Conchobhair’s castle’.<sup>2313</sup> The coinciding invasion from Munster underlined the precariousness of Connacht’s position, and Cathal made peace before more territory was seized. The invaders were guaranteed safe passage out of Connacht through Athlone, confirming its cession.<sup>2314</sup>

Clonmacnoise was sacrificed as well. The English built a castle at Clonmacnoise in 1214, during conflict with the Uí Máel Sechlainn, and this is the earliest notice that the monastic site was also beyond Connacht’s influence.<sup>2315</sup> When Cathal Crobderg died in 1224, he was buried in Abbeyknockmoy, where he had established a Cistercian community.<sup>2316</sup> Despite the relevance of his own link with the new site, the loss of Clonmacnoise was the main reason he was not buried with his predecessors.

English control of the Shannon now extended quite some distance, but it did not reach as far as the next point of significance at Ballyleague. This might not seem particularly important since the river as a frontier was compromised, but access into the North and Uí Briúin Bréifne allowed ousted candidates for the kingship of Connacht to escape during wars of succession. Since the English encouraged these conflicts and played a decisive role in determining their outcomes, the northern course of the Shannon also commanded their attention.

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<sup>2313</sup> *A.L.C.* 1210.13: ‘*co n-dernadh droichet tar Áth Luain lais, & caislén a n-ionad caisléin i Conchobhair*’.

<sup>2314</sup> The English already had a foothold in Athlone in 1199, but this was probably on the east bank only. (See *Connacht*, pp 99–100).

<sup>2315</sup> *A.L.C.* 1214.14.

<sup>2316</sup> *Ann. Conn.* 1224.2; *A.L.C.* 1224.2; *A.F.M.* 1224.7.

The appearance of English castles in the approaches to these points threatened them and tightened the noose still further. The motte of Newcastle near Ballymahon, County Longford, is mentioned under 1221.<sup>2317</sup> Another, ‘Manybreki’, referenced in the Irish Pipe Roll of 1211–12, has been interpreted as ‘Moybrachry’, now Street, County Westmeath, or perhaps Moybrawne, in Shrulce, County Longford.<sup>2318</sup> The castle at Lissardowlan, which may have been built before 1215,<sup>2319</sup> was attacked by Áed mac Cathail Chrobdeirg upon his accession in 1224. His men ‘prevailed against it, burning and slaying every Gall and Gael they found therein’.<sup>2320</sup> Collectively, these castles bridged the distance between more secure English holdings in the east, and the locations along the Shannon critical to further expansion, a fact which was clear to the kings of Connacht.

The English moved against Ballyleague itself in 1221. On that occasion, ‘the castle of Ath-Liag was attempted to be made by Walter de Laci and all the forces of Midhe’, but Cathal Crobdeirg immediately brought his army into Conmaicne ‘and the castle was abandoned to them, through force, and on conditions of peace’.<sup>2321</sup> During the decade of widespread destructive violence that followed Cathal Crobdeirg’s death, Walter de Lacy took advantage and, in 1227, possibly with the assistance of Geoffrey de Marisco, built the castle at Ballyleague that he had formerly abandoned.<sup>2322</sup>

With the English in command of the Shannon as far north as Ballyleague, if not further, the stage was set for the armies that devastated it in the 1220s and 1230s. We hear of the construction of a castle at Rindown, County Roscommon, on the banks of Lough Ree

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<sup>2317</sup> *A.L.C.* 1221.2; Orpen, *Normans*, iii, p. 36.

<sup>2318</sup> *Pipe roll Ire., 1211–12*, pp 22–3 & n. 102, 40–1.

<sup>2319</sup> Otway-Ruthven, ‘The partition of the de Verdon lands in Ireland in 1332’, in *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy: Archaeology, Culture, History, Literature*, lxvi (1967/1968), pp 401–45, 447–455 at 414.

<sup>2320</sup> *Ann. Conn.* 1224.14; *A.L.C.* 1224.11.

<sup>2321</sup> *Connacht*, pp 107–8; *A.L.C.* 1221.4: ‘*Caislen Atha Liag do fhuabairt do dhenum do Ualdra de Laci & do sluagh na Midhe ule*’; *A.F.M.* 1220.55.

<sup>2322</sup> *Ann. Clon.* 1227; *Ann. Conn.* 1227.15; *A.F.M.* 1227.14.

directly opposite Newcastle and Shrulc in Westmeath, in 1227.<sup>2323</sup> It was built with the connivance of Áed mac Cathail and later attacked by Felim mac Cathail, in 1229.<sup>2324</sup> In 1232, the castle of Galway and the castle of Dunamon were constructed by Richard de Burgh and Adam Staunton respectively; their ally on that occasion was Áed mac Ruaidrí.<sup>2325</sup> Galway had also been the site of an earlier move in 1230 by the same parties.<sup>2326</sup> These were among the castles attacked and destroyed by Felim in 1233, as he took the kingship and attempted to roll back English progress.<sup>2327</sup>

Collectively, these fortifications had the effect of moving the frontier beyond the Shannon, setting the scene for outright conquest of Connacht. They endured attacks from Irish parties who recognised the threat they posed and helped make Connacht's strategic position hopeless by the mid-1230s. After a final failed effort to repel the invaders, Felim Uí Conchobair made terms with the English crown in 1237, and 'the Irish Barons came into Connacht and began the building of castles therein'.<sup>2328</sup> These castles were successors both to those built during the conquest, and to those on the east bank of the Shannon which allowed easy access into the province.

Referring to the area controlled by the Ulaid before the advent of literacy and history in Ireland, the essential defensibility of 'Ulster' against outside invasion has been observed.<sup>2329</sup> Its physical features offered its leaders a great advantage, in that they forced attackers to march over two well-known routes, and through certain passes. This remained the case even when, in a later era, three important kingdoms occupied the same territory. In our era the Uí Néill, in the shape of Domnall Mac Lochlainn, attempted to

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<sup>2323</sup> *Ann. Conn.* 1227.9; *A.L.C.* 1227.7; *A.F.M.* 1227.10.

<sup>2324</sup> *A.L.C.* 1229.2.

<sup>2325</sup> *Ann. Conn.* 1232.5; *A.L.C.* 1232.4; *A.U.* 1232.3; *A.F.M.* 1232.9.

<sup>2326</sup> *A.L.C.* 1229.2.

<sup>2327</sup> *Ann. Conn.* 1233.4; *A.L.C.* 1233.5; *A.U.* 1233.2; *A.F.M.* 1233.4.

<sup>2328</sup> *Ann. Conn.* 1237.5: 'Baruin na hErenn do thocht a Connachtaib & tinscedal caislen do denam doib inti'; *A.L.C.* 1237.4; *A.F.M.* 1237.12.

<sup>2329</sup> Simms, *Gaelic Ulster in the Middle Ages: history, culture and society* (Dublin, 2020), pp 33–4.

re-forged its cohesion against outsiders, and this made the military approaches even more important.

The path into the North through the west is best defined by *Cog. Gaedhel*'s description of Brian Bóraime's 1005 campaign: 'his route was through Ireland, the middle of Connacht, and into Magh-n-Ai [of Uí Briúin Aí], over the Coirr Shliabh [Curlew Mountains], and into Tir Ailella [of Uí Ailella]; and into the country of Cairpre [Cairpre Dromma Cliab], and beyond Sligech [Sligo], and keeping his left hand to the sea, and his right hand to the land and to Beinn Gulban [Benbulbin], over Dubh [Duff River] and over Drobhaois [River Drowes], and into Magh-n-Eine [perhaps Magh-Cedne in Cenél Conaill, also mentioned in 1011],<sup>2330</sup> and over Ath Seanaigh [Ballyshannon] at Easruaidh [Assaroe]; and into Tir Aedha [Cenél nÁeda of Cenél Conaill], and over Bearnas Mor [Barnesmore], and over Fearsad [unidentified], and into Tir Eoghain, and into Dal Riada, and into Dal Araidhe, and into Ulaidh, until about Lammás [1 August] he halted at Belach Duin [Castlekieran]'.<sup>2331</sup>

While at least some of this was meant to link Brian to the *Slige Midluachra*, an ancient road associated with the kings of Ireland, the path through Connacht into Cenél Conaill is undoubtedly described accurately. It was probably the same in 1011, when there was 'a great hosting by Brian to Cenél Conaill both by land and sea'.<sup>2332</sup> Brian's was the precedent followed by Muirchertach Úa Briain in 1100 and 1101, when he too had fleets support his personally-led armies.

We have no such detailed description of the route into the North through the east, but since it was evidently preferred to the western route it can be reconstructed with

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<sup>2330</sup> *A.F.M.* 1011.8.

<sup>2331</sup> *Cog. Gaedhel*, pp 134–5: 'Ised do cóidh tré lár Connacht, agus hi Mag nAí isin Coirrsliabh, agus hi tír Ailella, agus hi ccrích Cairpre, agus tar Slicceach, agus lám clé le muir, agus lám des le tír, agus le Beinn Gulban, tar duib, agus tar drobhaois, agus i Maigh nEine, agus tar At Senaig ag Eassruaid agus i tír nAeda, agus tar Bearnas Mór, agus tar Fersaid, agus i tír Eogain, agus i nDail Riada, agus i nDail Araide, agus i nUltaib gur gabastair fo lughnasadh i mBealach Dúin'; *A.F.M.* 1005.8.

<sup>2332</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1011.5.

reference to the many campaigns in which it was used. One possible reason for this is the narrowness of the pass in the west; Brian brought his army through a gap less than ten kilometres wide in 1005, and in other circumstances this might have been an ideal location for an ambush.

When it comes to important landmarks along the way, we can point to a string of locations along the east coast. Moving northward these include Dublin, Ardee, Dundalk, Fid Conaille, Slíab Fuait, and Armagh. That is not to say that campaigns led into the North through the east are invariably noted arriving at each location; instead, it is the case that they recurred at different times and give us a general indication of the procedure of attacking armies.

In 1075, having installed his son Muirchertach as king of Dublin, Toirdelbach úa Briain marched from there ‘to Ardee, accompanied by the choice of the men of Ireland, to demand hostages from the Airgialla and the Ulaid’.<sup>2333</sup> In 1105, too, the *comarbae* of Armagh died at Dublin after travelling there to arrange the terms of peace between Muirchertach Úa Briain and Domnall Mac Lochlainn.<sup>2334</sup> Muirchertach also used the close-by Greenogue in modern County Meath as a staging point for a march on Armagh in 1113.<sup>2335</sup>

Like Brian’s foray to Dundalk in 1002, Ardee was a relatively cautious destination for Toirdelbach in 1075. It was regarded as something like a port of entry to the North, as it was there that the Ulaid and Airgíalla were escorted by the Connachta in 1131, following their unsuccessful invasion.<sup>2336</sup> It is remarkable too that Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair and Tigernán Úa Ruairc brought their armies to Ardee to challenge Mac Lochlainn in 1159, rather than using the western route.<sup>2337</sup> In 1166, though, Úa Conchobair went across

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<sup>2333</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1075.3: ‘*co h-Ath Fir Dhiadh, co forгла fer n-Ereenn uime, do chuindcidh giall for Oirgiallaib & for Ulltaib*’; *A.F.M.* 1075.11; *Ann. Inisf.* 1075.4; *Chron. Scot.* 1075.2.

<sup>2334</sup> *A.F.M.* 1105.14; *Ann. Inisf.* 1105.6; *Chron. Scot.* 1105.3; *A.U.* 1105.3; *A.L.C.* 1105.2.

<sup>2335</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1113.2; *A.U.* 1113.8; *A.L.C.* 1113.8, 1113.9

<sup>2336</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1131.3; *Chron. Scot.* 1131.3; *A.L.C.* 1131.4.

<sup>2337</sup> *A.F.M.* 1159.13; *Ann. Tig.* 1159.6; *A.U.* 1159.3.

Assaroe into Cenél Conaill while Úa Ruairc went into Cenél nEógain, and the latter, a frequent companion of Úa Conchobair, probably entered the North with the king of Connacht.<sup>2338</sup>

Dundalk is sometimes mentioned as a destination of invading armies; one occasion, Brian Bóraime in 1002, has already been mentioned. Other (surviving) entries, one under 1104 and another under 1224, indicate that it was considered the centre of Mag Muirtheimne (alias Mag Conaille). In 1104, ‘an army was led by Muircheartach Ua Briain to Magh-Muirtheimhne, and they destroyed the tillage and corn of the plain; and on this expedition Cu-uladh Ua Caindealbhain, lord of Loeghaire, was thrown from his horse at Dun-Dealgan, of the effects of which he died a month afterwards’.<sup>2339</sup> The 1224 entry records that the forces of most of Ireland, English and Irish, when marching against Hugh de Lacy and his Uí Néill allies, ‘assembled to proceed against them, until they reached Muirthemhne and Dun-Delgan’.<sup>2340</sup>

Even if Dundalk was not always the destination of campaigns led into Conaille Muirtheimne, they were certainly conducted in its environs, and mentions of the general area are much more frequent than mentions of Dundalk itself. Examples include the campaigns of Muirchertach Úa Briain in 1097, 1102, 1104 and 1105, Domnall Úa Máel Sechlainn in 1089, 1091 and 1101, and Tigernán Úa Ruairc in 1128. Fid Conaille or the ‘forest of Conaille’ was some distance north of Dundalk, equating to Upper Fews in modern County Armagh. It is noted as the place where Domnall Mac Lochlainn entrenched against Muirchertach Úa Briain in 1097.<sup>2341</sup>

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<sup>2338</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1166.2, 1166.3.

<sup>2339</sup> *A.F.M.* 1104.10: ‘*Slóighedh la Muirchertach Ua m-Briain co Moigh Muirtheimhne, & ro mhillset treabhaire & arbhar an mhaighe, & as foran sluaighedh-sin ro h-esscradh Cú Uladh Ua Caindealbháin, tigherna Loeghaire h-i t-Traighbhaile, & at-bail de iaramh a c-cind mhís*’; *A.U.* 1104.5; *A.L.C.* 1104.3.

<sup>2340</sup> *A.L.C.* 1224.10: ‘*co riachtadar Murtemne & Dun Delgan*’; *Ann. Conn.* 1224.13.

<sup>2341</sup> *A.F.M.* 1097.6; *A.U.* 1097.6; *A.L.C.* 1097.2, 1097.3.

The Slíab Fuait referenced so frequently in descriptions of the same campaigns represents the mountainous region of modern County Armagh beside Newtownhamilton, the highest peak of which is Carrigatuke.<sup>2342</sup> It too could be regarded as a point of entry into the North, since Brian Bóraime's army in 1005 was described as 'the men of Ireland, both foreigners and Gaedil south of Sliab Fuait'.<sup>2343</sup> Muirchertach went to Slíab Fuait himself in 1098 and 1099, and he sent the Leinstermen that far in 1100.<sup>2344</sup> Domnall Mac Lochlainn brought his army to the same location in 1109 to block any further progress by the advancing Muirchertach.<sup>2345</sup> This was the final point of significance before the adjacent sites of Emain Macha and Armagh, which were as far north as most invading armies ever got.

Brian Bóraime famously courted the favour of Armagh with his donation at the altar in 1005, an action mimicked by Muirchertach in 1103, after first visiting Emain Macha itself.<sup>2346</sup> As shown in the course of this thesis, the *comarbai* of Armagh were functionaries through whom the kings of the North and Munster negotiated rather than partisans of one or other; the desire to be close to Armagh was no doubt partly motivated by their inevitable role in any renewal of terms.<sup>2347</sup> Armagh's relevance survived this function, and Ruaidrí Ua Conchobair spent three nights camped at Armagh in 1167, waiting for the Cenél Conaill to join his forces for an attack on the Cenél nEógain.<sup>2348</sup>

Just as Connacht's protection of the Shannon frontier characterised both its pre-invasion strategy and its experience of the invasion, so too did access into the North have similar trans-invasion significance. The very first English incursion in 1176 constituted an initial raid on Sliabh Mudhorn (near Ballybay, county Monaghan), somewhat further west than

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<sup>2342</sup> Logainm.ie (<https://www.logainm.ie/124033.aspx>) (24 August 2020); *A.F.M.*, i, p. 7 n. t.

<sup>2343</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1005.3: '*Comthinol fer n-Erend eter Gullu & Goedelu óthá Sliab Fúait fades la Brian mc. Cennetich*'.

<sup>2344</sup> *A.F.M.* 1098.13, 1099.6, 1100.16; *Ann. Tig.* 1100.3; *A.U.* 1099.7; *A.L.C.* 1099.4.

<sup>2345</sup> *A.F.M.* 1109.5; *A.U.* 1109.5; *A.L.C.* 1109.3.

<sup>2346</sup> See *The Two Munsters*, p. 229.

<sup>2347</sup> See *The Uí Néill and the North*, pp 138–46.

<sup>2348</sup> *A.U.* 1167.2.



typical, was followed by ‘another foray by them to the north of Sliabh Fuaid, where they did much plundering’.<sup>2349</sup> Familiarity with the route does not seem to have been matched by an appreciation of the dangers, since ‘the men of Fearnmhagh attacked them at Fiodh Conaille’, a place they ought to have expected opposition, ‘and killed a large number of them’.<sup>2350</sup>

When John de Courcy marched northwards in late January 1177, ‘he completed the three day journey through Meath and Airgíalla, and early on the fourth day, about the kalends of February, he entered the city of Down, without coming up against any defence, a totally unexpected visitor – and enemy’.<sup>2351</sup> The lack of defence applied to the Uí Néill and Airgíalla as well as the Meic Dúinn Sléibe in Ulaid; all were apparently caught flat-footed by the early campaign. This may have been because they had invaded Meath late in 1176 and expected the English in Meath and Dublin to be intimidated. At any rate, the path northward through Meath and Airgíalla mentioned by Giraldus was certainly the same as that taken by the kings of Munster and Leth Moga in earlier generations.

The fact that John turned east and headed for Down instead of following the typical path to Armagh is further evidence that his intention was to set up an independent lordship; there could be no easy retreat from Down and his presence would inevitably aggravate the Uí Néill and Airgíalla as well as the Ulaid. This entrenchment would be confusing were it not for the relatively recent research by Duffy linking de Courcy to Cumbria, which could be used to resupply a fledgling lordship in Ulaid with men and materials, making a secure path to Dublin by land unnecessary.<sup>2352</sup>

That de Courcy’s campaign broke with precedent was recognised quickly by the Irish. The annalists reported that ‘an army was led by John De Courcy and the knights into

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<sup>2349</sup> *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1176.13

<sup>2350</sup> *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1176.14; *Ann. Tig.* 1176.7.

<sup>2351</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 174–5: ‘*Trium itaque dierum per Mediam et terram Uriensem emenso itinere, quarto die mane Dunensem civitatem citra defensionis obstaculum circa kalendas Februarii hospes et hostis inopinatus intravit*’.

<sup>2352</sup> Duffy, ‘The first Ulster plantation’, pp 1–28.

Dalaradia and to Dun da leathghlas’, two locations that do not appear in descriptions of earlier expeditions.<sup>2353</sup> Of Down, it was further noted that ‘a castle was erected by them there’, a development that would have appeared ominous even in 1177.<sup>2354</sup> Despite numerous efforts and some success, the kingdoms of the North failed to expel de Courcy from his new lordship, something implicitly recognised by references to ‘the foreigners of Downpatrick’.<sup>2355</sup>

There were two major efforts to conquer or circumscribe the North thereafter, one led by de Courcy from 1196 to ’99, and another led by the justiciar in the 1210s.<sup>2356</sup> The approaches to the North for these campaigns had two aspects. On the one hand, for the justiciary based in Dublin, the old access routes were the viable options, while on the other, for the securely entrenched de Courcy, the patterns of earlier conflicts between the Ulaid and Cenél nEógain provided a more appropriate precedent than invasions by Connacht or Munster.

Coleraine was one of the important points on the border between Ulaid and Cenél nEógain. It may well have been where Brian Bóraime crossed from Tír Eoghain into Dál Riata, in the terms of *Cog. Gaedhel*; it was certainly on Muirchertach’s path through the North in 1101 and in general he followed Brian’s example.<sup>2357</sup> Though the monastery was on the east side of the Bann, it was evidently associated with Cenél nEógain. Muirchertach burned it when passing through and later, in 1170, it was attacked by Magnus Mac Dúinn Sléibe only to be defended by Úa Catháin of Cenél nEógain.<sup>2358</sup> Earlier entries also place the Uí Chatháin in the territory around Coleraine, once the holding of native Airgíalla dynasties.<sup>2359</sup>

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<sup>2353</sup> *A.F.M.* 1177.3: ‘*Sluaicchedh la Iohn Do Cuirt & lasna ridirdhibh i n-Dal Araidhe & co Dun Da Lethghlass*’; *A.L.C.* 1177.1; *A.U.* 1177.1.

<sup>2354</sup> *A.F.M.* 1177.3: ‘*Do-ronadh dona caislen leó ann*’.

<sup>2355</sup> The Uí Néill and the North, p. 189; *Ann. Tig.* 1177.16, 1178.17.

<sup>2356</sup> The Uí Néill and the North, pp 195–206.

<sup>2357</sup> *A.L.C.* 1101.2; *A.U.* 1101.4; *Ann. Inisf.* 1101.2.

<sup>2358</sup> *A.F.M.* 1101.6, 1171.11; *A.U.* 1101.4, 1171.5; *A.L.C.* 1101.2, 1171.9; *Ann. Tig.* 1101.2, 1171.8; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1172.3; *Ann. Inisf.* 1101.2; *Chron. Scot.* 1101.2.

<sup>2359</sup> *A.F.M.* 1138.6.

Now, in the post-invasion environment, it became a target of John de Courcy. He burned the church at Coleraine as early as 1177, though his wide-ranging campaigns of that year might suggest it was incidental.<sup>2360</sup> Once he was secure in Ulaid and capable of challenging the Uí Néill in their own territory, Coleraine again drew his attention. In late 1196 or early 1197, de Courcy fortified a site at Mount Sandel adjacent to Coleraine, which would be used as a staging point for invasions of Cenél nEógain and Cenél Conaill.<sup>2361</sup> De Courcy also made a grant of land here to Duncan, earl of Carrick, his wife's cousin. This was the first major campaign in the area and the land must therefore have been granted speculatively, despite Roger of Howden's assertion that it had already been subjugated.<sup>2362</sup>

De Courcy left a subordinate in situ at Mount Sandel, only for this individual to be killed while attacking Cenél Conaill.<sup>2363</sup> When the king of Cenél Conaill Flaithbertach Úa Máel Doraid died of illness soon afterwards, de Courcy again marched into the North. This time he went across Toome (Tuaim), another important location in the pre-invasion period.<sup>2364</sup> Examples of its appearances include in 1099, when the Cenél nEógain under Domnall Mac Lochlainn had invaded Ulaid across Toome, and a similar campaign in 1148 under Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn.<sup>2365</sup> Úa Catháin had also led his forces across Toome in a raid of Uí Thuirtre and Fir Lí in 1181.<sup>2366</sup>

De Courcy's army invaded the North again in 1198, doing great damage at Derry, Ardstraw, and Raphoe, but their point of entry is not known.<sup>2367</sup> The follow-up campaign in 1199 saw three consecutive raids by the English of Ulaid, but again, no point of entry

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<sup>2360</sup> The Uí Néill and the North, p. 170; *A.F.M.* 1172.2, 1177.3; *A.L.C.* 1177.1, 1177.5, 1177.6, 1177.9; *A.U.* 1177.1, 1177.3, 1177.5; *Ann. Tig.* 1177.3, 1177.7, 1177.16; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1178.7.

<sup>2361</sup> The Uí Néill and the North, p. 196; *A.L.C.* 1196.14, 1197.15; *A.U.* 1197.1; *A.F.M.* 1197.1.

<sup>2362</sup> *Chronica*, iv, p. 25.

<sup>2363</sup> The Uí Néill and the North, p. 196; *A.L.C.* 1196.16, 1196.17; *A.U.* 1197.1; *A.F.M.* 1197.1; Lodge, *The peerage of Ireland*, ed. Archdall, vi, p. 140.

<sup>2364</sup> *A.L.C.* 1196.20; *A.U.* 1197.4; *A.F.M.* 1197.3, 1197.4.

<sup>2365</sup> *A.F.M.* 1099.7, 1148.10; *A.U.* 1099.8; *A.L.C.* 1099.5.

<sup>2366</sup> *A.F.M.* 1181.7; *A.U.* 1181.4.

<sup>2367</sup> *A.L.C.* 1198.5; *A.F.M.* 1198.5.

was recorded.<sup>2368</sup> The final effort was directed against Donaghmore in the modern barony of Dungannon, a location some ten kilometres south-west of Tullyhogue and twenty-five north-west of Armagh. It could be that de Courcy's forces reached this location by marching south of Lough Neagh, but when they themselves were attacked they retreated across Toome.<sup>2369</sup>

The second major English campaign followed Áed Úa Néill's failure to give hostages to King John in 1210. Because it was led by the justiciar, it approached the North from the south and was concerned with the same locations that had occupied Connacht and Munster. It began with the construction of a castle in 1211 at a location called Cael-Uisce on Lough Erne, under a commander called Little Henry, or perhaps Henry the younger.<sup>2370</sup> He was killed soon afterwards as Úa Néill and Mac Mathgamna captured and destroyed the castle, perhaps while it was still being built.<sup>2371</sup> Importantly, Cael-Uisce, or 'Narrow-Water', thought to be near Castle Caldwell, was adjacent to the pass at Assaroe and Ballyshannon.<sup>2372</sup>

Gilbert de Angulo (alias Mac Costello), who had been based in Connacht for years and associated closely with Cathal Crobderg Úa Conchobair, assisted the justiciar in the re-fortification of Cael-Uisce in 1212.<sup>2373</sup> There is some evidence that de Angulo was also associated with the initial construction at Cael-Uisce in 1210, and ultimately he would suffer the same fate as Little Henry.<sup>2374</sup> Úa Néill fell upon the castle in 1213, capturing and burning it, with de Angulo killed in the engagement.<sup>2375</sup>

Clones, which also saw an English castle constructed during this advance, was a new addition as far as strategic approaches to the North were concerned. Part of the reason it

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<sup>2368</sup> *A.L.C.* 1199.7; *A.U.* 1199.3, 1200.2; *A.F.M.* 1199.3.

<sup>2369</sup> *A.L.C.* 1199.7; *A.U.* 1199.3, 1200.2; *A.F.M.* 1199.3.

<sup>2370</sup> The Uí Néill and the North, pp 199–200; *Misc.Ir.Annals* 1211.1; *A.F.M.* 1210.1, 1210.2.

<sup>2371</sup> *Misc.Ir.Annals* 1211.1; *A.F.M.* 1210.1.

<sup>2372</sup> Connacht, pp 61, 66, 93; The Uí Néill and the North, 142, 172, 177; P. Ó Gallachair, 'The Erne forts of Cael Uisce and Bellek' in *Clogher Record*, vi no. 1 (1966), pp 104–118.

<sup>2373</sup> *A.L.C.* 1212.1; *A.U.* 1212.2, 1212.5; *A.F.M.* 1211.4; Connacht, p. 95.

<sup>2374</sup> *Ann. Clon.* 1210.

<sup>2375</sup> *A.L.C.* 1213.2; *A.U.* 1213.7; *A.F.M.* 1212.3.

had not featured in earlier campaigns was because the Fernmag, to whom it belonged, had been the ruling segment of Airgíalla. The final provincial king of Airgíalla, Muirchertach Úa Cerbaill, was captured by the English and blinded in 1193.<sup>2376</sup> Airgíalla thereafter devolved into its constituent regional kingdoms, a development which created the opportunity to use Clones as a staging point for incursions further north. The castle at Clones was likewise destroyed by Úa Néill in 1213.<sup>2377</sup>

It was possession and protection of the access routes into the North that allowed Áed Úa Néill to refuse to give hostages to King John in 1210. His obituary reflected the degree to which this was considered a major achievement, and further showed the general expectation that the English would eventually overcome his opposition.<sup>2378</sup> In fact, Hugh de Lacy's qualified return to the earldom disincentivised any renewed campaign, and Áed Úa Néill ended his reign in relative peace. It is revealing that immediately after the English conquered Connacht outright, and therefore secured access to the pass at Assaroe, they made another foray into the North. The Uí Néill recognised their position and gave hostages to the English. This was in 1238, and it is the first time the Uí Néill are recorded giving hostages to the English in the annals.<sup>2379</sup>

The fact that the kings of Munster could not hope to deny enemies access to the province through protection of key points on the frontier has already been alluded to, but they did anticipate the arrival of those same enemies at their new capitals, as shown by their fortification. And, in one respect at least, the approach to these settlements could be predicted: being coastal and accessible by river, the waterways invited attacking powers to sail as well as march. It was so in 1127, for instance, when Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair marched to Cork while one of his fleets sailed around the coast to meet him there.<sup>2380</sup> Similarly, in 1137, the siege of Waterford by Diarmait Mac Murchada and

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<sup>2376</sup> The Uí Néill and the North, p. 171; *A.F.M.* 1193.9; *A.L.C.* 1193.9.

<sup>2377</sup> *A.L.C.* 1213.1; *A.U.* 1213.4; *A.F.M.* 1212.4.

<sup>2378</sup> The Uí Néill and the North, p. 203; *A.L.C.* 1230.13; *A.U.* 1230.10; *A.F.M.* 1230.6.

<sup>2379</sup> *A.F.M.* 1238.8; *A.L.C.* 1238.8; *Ann. Conn.* 1238.9.

<sup>2380</sup> *A.F.M.* 1127.13; *Ann. Tig.* 1127.1; *Ann. Inisf.* 1127.3; *A.U.* 1127.1; *A.L.C.* 1127.1.

Conchobar Úa Briain was supported by ‘the foreigners of Ath-clíath and Loch-Carman, who had two hundred ships on the sea’.<sup>2381</sup>

There is no clear example of Limerick suffering blockades of the same type, but the conflict between Connacht and Munster was a tug-of-war over the Shannon, with its implied access to the settlement. It also allowed access to Killaloe, the target of an Úa Conchobair attack in 1119.<sup>2382</sup> It is interesting to note Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair using his Shannon fleet to attack Uí Chonaill, a territory beyond Limerick on the Shannon estuary, the same year that Limerick was elsewhere reported to have been burned.<sup>2383</sup> If the unrecorded perpetrators of the burning may be presumed to have been Úa Conchobair’s men, it also suggests Limerick itself was even more prone to naval invasion than is directly evidenced. On the other hand, the fact that the Dunass Rapids temporarily impeded his progress on that occasion indicates they offered Limerick some limited protection in general.<sup>2384</sup>

After Connacht established dominance in this theatre, it often took no more than a show of naval strength to force Uí Briain submission. This can be seen in 1156, 1157, and 1160, when Connacht fleets provided security before and after Ruaidrí’s succession.<sup>2385</sup> Toirdelbach’s fleet became his son’s when he died, and Toirdelbach Úa Briain was consequently forced to give hostages to Connacht twice the same year, 1156.<sup>2386</sup> It was evidently much the same in 1157 when ‘a fleet was brought by Ruaidhri Ua Conchobhair upon the Sinainn, the like of which was not to be found at that time for numerousness, and for the number of its ships and boats’.<sup>2387</sup>

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<sup>2381</sup> *A.F.M.* 1137.12: ‘*Goill Atha Cliath, & Locha Carman, for muir dá chéd long*’.

<sup>2382</sup> *A.F.M.* 1119.14; *Ann. Tig.* 1119.5; *A.U.* 1119.1; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1119.3.

<sup>2383</sup> *A.F.M.* 1124.14; *Ann. Inisf.* 1124.3; *Ann. Tig.* 1124.2; *Chron. Scot.* 1124.1; *A.U.* 1124.4; *A.L.C.* 1124.4.

<sup>2384</sup> *A.F.M.* 1124.14.

<sup>2385</sup> *Connacht*, p. 54; *A.F.M.* 1156.7, 1156.13, 1157.14, 1160.23; *Ann. Tig.* 1156.1, 1160.12.

<sup>2386</sup> *A.F.M.* 1156.7, 1156.13; *Ann. Tig.* 1156.1.

<sup>2387</sup> *A.F.M.* 1157.14: ‘*Cobhlach mór lá Ruaidhri Ua c-Conchobhair for Sionainn da ná frith a samhail an tan-sin ar líonmhaire & iomat a long & a ethar*’.

The lack of defensible approaches was a strategic weakness, both for the united kingdom of Munster and for its two constituent parts, Thomond and Desmond. It is partly to it that we can attribute a general decline in fortunes, but specific events also highlight the problem. Take, for example, Cormac Mac Cárthaig's capture of the kingship of Limerick in 1125, which constituted a further challenge to the already beleaguered Uí Briain.<sup>2388</sup> This was not the only unexpected capture of the town: it was also taken by or besieged by Cormac once more in 1137, Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn in 1157, and Diarmait Mac Cárthaig in 1171 and 1196, with no major obstacle impeding any of the advancing armies.<sup>2389</sup>

This leaves aside the regular invasions and conquests by the Uí Chonchobair and, more importantly still, those by the English. *Ann. Inisf.* might laconically note that 'the grey foreigners attacked Luimnech' in 1175,<sup>2390</sup> but a more detailed description survives in Tigernach: 'the Foreigners of Dublin and Waterford, and Domhnall Ó Giolla Pádraig, king of Ossory, came at the invitation of the king of Ireland to Limerick without being perceived by the Dál Cais, and they plundered Limerick, and on this expedition the Connachtmen burned the greater part of Thomond'.<sup>2391</sup> The key point, of course, as it relates to the present discussion, is that they arrived at Limerick unperceived.

The English enjoyed no greater security in Limerick than the Irish. The very precariousness of their situation compelled them to surrender the town under terms to Domnall Úa Briain in 1176, only a year after they had first taken it. Nevertheless, it still commanded their attention. Philip de Breuse led a force to Limerick in 1177, after receiving a grant of Thomond. The fact that he thought better of an assault shows that Úa

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<sup>2388</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1125.8.

<sup>2389</sup> *A.F.M.* 1137.14, 1157.10, 1171.19, 1196.5; *Ann. Tig.* 1157.6; *A.U.* 1157.5, 1196.5; *A.L.C.* 1195.15.

<sup>2390</sup> *Ann. Inisf.* 1175.6: 'Gail Glassa do dul ar Lumnech'.

<sup>2391</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1175.16: 'Tancatar Gaill Atha Cliath & Puirt Lairge & Domnall h-Úa Gilla Padraic, rí Osraigi, fo thogairm rí Erenn .i. Ruaidri Hua Conchobair, co rancatar Lumnech cen rathugud do Dail Cais, cor' airgsed Lumnech, & cor' loisced Connachta urmór Tuadhman don turus-sin'.

Briain had reconstructed at least some of the defences he, Úa Briain, had burned only a year before, but the English found it easy to approach the town, just as they had in 1175. They also considered building a castle on the opposite bank of the Shannon, facing the town, before their retreat.<sup>2392</sup>

The English successfully re-captured Limerick after Úa Briain's death, and we may assume this was achieved relatively comfortably, since the details are nowhere recorded. Again, their hold was by no means secure. Indeed, when Diarmait Mac Cárthaig took the settlement in 1196, it was the English and not the Uí Briain whom he displaced.<sup>2393</sup> This remarkably late seizure highlights just how vulnerable the capitals of Munster's two semi-provincial kingdoms were, and how the difficulties facing the English often mirrored those of the Irish they had supplanted.

Like Limerick, Cork was taken with relative ease by attacking armies before the English. In 1123, for example, Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair 'plundered Kerry and he himself reached Cork, so the chiefs of Desmond submitted to him'.<sup>2394</sup> He took Cork again in 1127, despite Donnchad Mac Cárthaig's effort to defend it.<sup>2395</sup> In 1151 as well, even the weakened Toirdelbach Úa Briain had no difficulty taking Cork, where his men 'committed many outrages on the community of Barra'.<sup>2396</sup> The fact that it fell to Miles de Cogan in 1177 is therefore not a surprise, though it strikes a contrast with Diarmait Mac Cárthaig's hesitancy in 1196. As we saw, though, that was likely due to his wider strategic problems than the difficulty of surmounting Cork's defences, and there were still some who regarded it as a failure on Mac Cárthaig's part.<sup>2397</sup>

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<sup>2392</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 184–7.

<sup>2393</sup> *A.F.M.* 1196.5; *A.U.* 1196.5.

<sup>2394</sup> *Ann. Tig.* 1123.7: 'cor' airg Ciarraige, co riacht fen Corcach, co tancatar maithe Desmuman ina theach'.

<sup>2395</sup> *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1126.6; *A.F.M.* 1127.13; *Ann. Inisf.* 1127.3; *A.U.* 1127.1; *A.L.C.* 1127.1.

<sup>2396</sup> *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1151.3: 'ar n-denamh morain uilcc ar muintir Barra'.

<sup>2397</sup> *The Two Munsters*, p. 293.



Waterford is perhaps the most obvious link between the pre-invasion and post-invasion events on this front. Situated at the border between Osraige and Desmond, it was contested by Diarmait Mac Murchada in 1134 and 1137.<sup>2398</sup> It had associations with Osraige as well as Desmond, and Mac Murchada could therefore consider it a logical extension of authority. This no doubt supplied the logic for his speedy assault on Waterford in 1170, with English support. How Mac Murchada overcame the defences in 1137 is not recorded in any detail, but in 1170 Giraldus reported that ‘Raymond [...] noticed a small building which hung down from the town wall on the outside by a beam. He eagerly urged all his men to attack on all sides, and quickly sent in armed men to cut down the aforesaid beam. When it had been cut down, the building immediately collapsed, and with it a considerable part of the wall’.<sup>2399</sup> Even though Giraldus attributed this ingenuity to Raymond le Gros, it is possible Mac Murchada’s experience was a telling factor.<sup>2400</sup>

As was elaborated in detail in ‘The Two Munsters’, the experience of the invasion in that province (or those provinces) was characterised by the English focus on the Norse settlements as effective capitals.<sup>2401</sup> It is unlikely that this was a result of their vulnerability; Wexford and Dublin were also targeted, and it seems more likely that this predilection was a consequence of the contemporary style of warfare in England. Nonetheless, their actions had parallels in the pre-invasion period. The ease with which an army could approach helped the English just as it had helped Irish attackers, but once in situ the roles reversed, and the English faced the same problem. At length, after many

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<sup>2398</sup> *A.F.M.* 1137.12; *Ann. Tig.* 1134.5; *Chron. Scot.* 1134.13; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1134.8, 1137.1.

<sup>2399</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 66–7: ‘Reimundus [...] videns domunculam quondam oer oistem deforis a muro dependentem, undique ad insultum omnes acriter invitans, viros armatos ad eiusdem postis succisionem quantocius immisit. Qui succiso, statim domus illius facta ruina cum muri quoque parte non modica’.

<sup>2400</sup> The fact that Giraldus reports that Diarmait arrived at the end of the battle could be taken as evidence that he sought to downplay the Leinster king’s role. (Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 66–7).

<sup>2401</sup> *The Two Munsters*, pp 263–85.

setbacks, they were able to secure the towns through a general conquest of most of Munster and Connacht.

The third key element concerns the behaviour and conduct of the important individuals acting in each theatre. Although the extent of human control over circumstances can be overestimated in history, there were certainly times when the other factors discussed above were affected by the actions and decisions of Irish kings and other important individuals. On occasion, they either changed or were maintained through this agency, and it is therefore appropriate to now explain conquest and survival with relevance to leadership of the Irish kingdoms.

Where the English invasion was concerned, Munster had two great disadvantages compared to Connacht and the North. It was the first major kingdom to experience the invasion, and therefore its representatives had no opportunity to learn lessons from the experiences of others. It was also divided and subservient to Connacht, a condition that had calcified since 1151. Consequently, there was no one policy towards the English, either passive or aggressive. On the contrary, the two royal dynasties changed their respective approaches numerous times before their effective conquests. The English made the most rapid advances in Munster partly as a result.

Meic Cárthaig indecisiveness is apparent in the early course of the invasion. Diarmait Mac Cárthaig scored several retaliatory victories soon after the fall of Waterford but, when Henry II arrived in Ireland later the same year, he submitted in person.<sup>2402</sup> Mac Cárthaig had a well-established pattern of submitting to the most immediate claimant to overlordship and there is no reason to believe this was any different, but irresolution continued to affect Desmond in subsequent years.<sup>2403</sup>

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<sup>2402</sup> The Two Munsters, pp 274–5; *Ann. Tig.* 1170.9; *Ann. Inisf.* 1171.5; *Ann. Tig.* 1171.12; *A.U.* 1171.10.

<sup>2403</sup> The Two Munsters, pp 274–6, 283–5.

One of the most important examples occurred in 1182, when the Uí Meic Tíre of Uí Liatháin assassinated Miles de Cogan.<sup>2404</sup> This would have been a major coup if carried out by the Meic Cárthaig themselves, but, despite Giraldus's assertion that 'Diarmait Mac Carrthaig and almost all the Irish throughout the whole region joined Mac Tíre in throwing off their allegiance to the English and rising against fitz Stephen', the fact is no major action was taken.<sup>2405</sup> Diarmait Mac Cárthaig allowed the opportunity afforded by the assassination to pass him by, even after losing Lismore and Cork within the preceding decade.

After Diarmait Mac Cárthaig's assassination in 1185, the man responsible was captured and flayed by Diarmait's son and successor Domnall.<sup>2406</sup> Domnall was also the man who led Munster's last major charge in 1195–6, taking Limerick and burning several important castles. When he was denied support from Connacht, which he had been expecting, he felt he had to call off the assault on Cork.<sup>2407</sup> Had he held both Cork and Limerick, and maintained the support of Úa Conchobair, he would have posed a major threat to the English in Munster. In the event, his kingdom of Desmond was fated to lose ground to the English gradually in subsequent years.

The response in Thomond was similarly mercurial. Initially, Domnall Úa Briain interpreted the invasion as an opportunity to reverse his dynasty's subjection to the Uí Chonchobair. He offered support to Diarmait Mac Murchada and rebelled against Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair in 1170, but by 1173 he was attacking the English, having failed in his efforts to defeat the king of Connacht.<sup>2408</sup> Úa Briain's success on this front may

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<sup>2404</sup> The Two Munsters, pp 283–5; *A.L.C.* 1182.5; *Misc.Ir.Annals* 1183.1.

<sup>2405</sup> Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 186–7: '*Dermitus Macharthis et omnes fere totius terre illius Hibernici una cum Machtiro se ab Anglorum fidelitate retrahentes, contra Stephaniden*'.

<sup>2406</sup> The Two Munsters, p. 288; *Ann. Inisf.* 1206.7: 'And it was he [Domnall] who slew the speckled kerne led by Geoffrey de Cogan, the most hated kerne that ever was in Ireland, and he flayed this Geoffrey'; *Misc.Ir.Annals* 1206.1.

<sup>2407</sup> The Two Munsters, p. 293; Connacht, pp 93–4; *Ann. Inisf.* 1196.6; *Misc.Ir.Annals* 1196.4, 1196.5.

<sup>2408</sup> The Two Munsters, p. 277; *Ann. Tig.* 1173.10.

have prompted Úa Conchobair's use of the English against him in 1175; in any case, the king of Thomond was temporarily ousted from his capital at Limerick.

It has been suggested that his titular self-identification with that settlement began after its recovery, but even if that is so it also reflects other developments.<sup>2409</sup> While the towns had long since become important, the English employed the metonyms 'Limerick' and 'Cork' for Thomond and Desmond before the Irish. Úa Briain's adoption of the stylisation reveals his prioritisation of Thomond over Munster or Leth Moga. It was not so in Desmond, where Mac Cárthaig's sole surviving charter refers to him as 'king of the men of Munster'.<sup>2410</sup> To emphasise the point further, Domnall Úa Briain used the English advance in 1177 to conquer territory from his southern neighbours, despite the fact that, like Desmond, his kingdom was the subject of an English grant the same year.<sup>2411</sup>

Úa Briain's ostensibly inconsistent policies were all directed towards strengthening Thomond. He was not insensitive to the threat posed by the English, but his priority was Thomond not Munster. From his perspective therefore, the chaos caused by the English arrival could help upset existing dynamics and return Thomond to a dominant position. Perhaps he hoped this would provide a basis for further advancement, but there is little direct evidence of this.

What would become the effective grants in Thomond were made in 1185, but the grantees made no immediate progress. In 1192, Domnall Úa Briain was still successfully defending his frontiers against them. Something changed shortly before his death in 1194, however. He created a marriage link with one of the principal feoffees, William de Burgh, and 'consented' to the construction of castles in his territory; apparently on the basis that this would harm Desmond and the Meic Cárthaig.<sup>2412</sup> It must have been

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<sup>2409</sup> Flanagan, *Irish royal charters*, p. 134.

<sup>2410</sup> *The Two Munsters*, p. 268.

<sup>2411</sup> Flanagan, *Irish royal charters*, pp 177–8, 204–7, 334–5.

<sup>2412</sup> *The Two Munsters*, p. 289; *Ann. Inisf.* 1193.2; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1193.1.

apparent that Thomond would be harmed to a greater degree, and it is likely that Domnall Úa Briain assented only because he felt unable to repel the advance.<sup>2413</sup>

Domnall's sons Muirchertach Finn, Conchobar Ruad, and Donnchad Cairprech suffered the consequences of these developments. They were played off against one another and, in the end, Donnchad Cairprech secured his position by assuming a passive disposition. His severely circumscribed kingdom of Thomond became a minor supporter of English campaigns across Ireland. In effect, Thomond may be considered to have been effectively conquered in his time.<sup>2414</sup> It should be noted, though, that his passivity clearly owed much to the deterioration that took place late in his father's reign, and it is difficult to find fault with it or point to alternative options.

In Connacht, by contrast, there was a consistent policy towards the English for most of the period. As latterly became the case in Thomond, it was passivity and inertia. Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair's retreat from kingship of Ireland is reflected by the Treaty of Windsor, in which he conceded all existing English conquests.<sup>2415</sup> In return, Henry II acknowledged him as overlord of the surviving Irish provincial kingdoms, but this arrangement was upset immediately. English support, access to which was granted as a provision of the Treaty, went rogue and retained Limerick on the first occasion Ruaidrí utilised it. Even though Limerick was soon recovered, Ruaidrí thereafter adopted a more cautious line. We may note here his disinterest in the conquest of Ulaid, despite a marriage link with the Meic Dúinn Sléibe, and failure to intervene when the English seized more territory in Desmond, both in 1177.<sup>2416</sup>

Connacht retained some theoretical claim over Munster after Ruaidrí, as shown by Conchobar Maenmaige's obituary of 1189, in which he is reported to have received the submission of Úa Briain and Mac Cárthaig alike, and Cathal Crobderg's invasion of

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<sup>2413</sup> The Two Munsters, p. 289.

<sup>2414</sup> The Two Munsters, pp 285–98.

<sup>2415</sup> Connacht, pp 81–92; Curtis and McDowell (eds), *Irish historical documents*, pp 22–24.

<sup>2416</sup> Connacht, pp 85–6; The Uí Néill and the North, p. 167.

Munster in 1195.<sup>2417</sup> While the latter may rightly be noted as striking a contrast with Ruaidrí's passivity, it was the last notable act of aggression perpetrated by Connacht in Munster before the conquest of both.

Cathal Crobderg was evidently spooked by the 1195 grant of Connacht to William de Burgh and the rapid advances of the English in Thomond, shying away from further action after 1195. Later, he enlisted William's assistance and then unsuccessfully tried to have him killed, prompting William to try to make good on his grant.<sup>2418</sup> Fortunately for the king of Connacht, King John did not want to see de Burgh in possession of Connacht at that time, and the justiciary prevented him.<sup>2419</sup>

Cathal Crobderg had already refused to assist Mac Cárthaig in person in 1196, and after the near miss with de Burgh in 1203 his policy became avowedly defensive. He offered terms to the English crown and Irish justiciary repeatedly, in the hopes of gaining formal recognition of his right to the province or even part thereof.<sup>2420</sup> Later, he also wrote to request his son Áed be recognised as his successor in this regard. Furthermore, he requested Áed be recognised as king in Breifne, the provincial structure of which had collapsed early in the thirteenth century.<sup>2421</sup> In pursuance of this policy, he allowed the English to entrench in Munster unopposed and he sacrificed the middle course of the Shannon, as outlined above.

Cathal hoped to emulate Donnchad Cairprech's situation, since he clearly felt the English, and de Burgh in particular, constituted an overwhelming force. His case differs from Donnchad Cairprech in that he still had other viable options. Had he adopted a more aggressive line the conquest of Connacht may have occurred nonetheless, and

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<sup>2417</sup> The Two Munsters, pp 282, 292–3; *A.F.M.* 1189.8, 1189.9, 1189.10, 1195.8, 1195.9; *A.U.* 1189.6; *A.L.C.* 1189.6, 1195.6, 1195.8; *Ann. Inisf.* 1189.4.

<sup>2418</sup> Connacht, pp 101–2; *Ann. Inisf.* 1202.2.

<sup>2419</sup> Connacht, pp 102–3.

<sup>2420</sup> Connacht, pp 103–12; *Cal.doc.Ire., 1171–1251*, pp 31, 34, 43, nos 205, 222, 279; Walton, 'The English in Connacht', pp 38–9.

<sup>2421</sup> *Cal.doc.Ire., 1171–1251*, pp 180, 181, nos 1184, 1195.

perhaps sooner too, but he ought to have recognised before the end of his reign that his sacrifices were not improving his security. His conduct had the effect of delaying the conquest of Connacht while also denying his successors the platform to defend the province.

Not unlike Domnall Úa Briain's sons, Cathal's son and direct successor Áed suffered the consequences. There were two rebellions against him in 1225, which can be understood to represent dissatisfaction with Cathal's strategies, since Áed had been 'king in effect by the side of his father' for many years.<sup>2422</sup> Áed also attacked the English castle at Lissardowlan in 1224, despite his precarious position, perhaps because he felt the need to show teeth.<sup>2423</sup> This was more to secure his standing among the nobles in Connacht than to recapture lost ground. His attack created grounds for the English to dispossess him when it suited them, which it soon would, and Áed still had to rely on them to support him against his Irish enemies.<sup>2424</sup> Given the strategic ground now occupied by the English, as outlined above, conquest became inevitable.

By contrast with Connacht and Munster, the Irish reaction to the English invasion in the North was consistently aggressive. It is clear, furthermore, that this constitutes a key reason for their relative success. The first English forays in 1176 were ambushed at a defensible pass, Fid Conaille, by Úa Cerbaill's men.<sup>2425</sup> Whether it was Úa Cerbaill or Mac Lochlainn who led the subsequent invasion of Meath is not certain, but either way their active hostility was unmistakable. They destroyed the castle at Slane and killed its owner, Richard Fleming, as the annals reported that it was the castle 'wherefrom the Airgialla and Ui-Briuin and Fir-Midhe were being pillaged'.<sup>2426</sup>

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<sup>2422</sup> *Ann. Conn.* 1224.3: 'ba ri ar tothacht re lamaib a adur reme'.

<sup>2423</sup> *Ann. Conn.* 1224.14; *A.L.C.* 1224.11.

<sup>2424</sup> *Connacht*, pp 112–19.

<sup>2425</sup> *The Uí Néill and the North*, pp 168–9; *Misc.Ir. Annals* 1176.14; *Ann. Tig.* 1176.7.

<sup>2426</sup> *A.U.* 1176.9: 'as a rabhus ic milliudh Airgiall & h-Ua m-Briuin & Fer Mídhe'.

John de Courcy's invasion of Ulaid the next year offended the competing overlordship claims of the Uí Néill and Airgíalla, as well as constituting an outright assault on the Meic Dúinn Sléibe. The difficulty de Courcy experienced in establishing himself, which is universally attested, was a result of exactly these connections. Despite its disintegration, the recent history of the North as a political bloc led its separate kingdoms to resist the invasion of Ulaid for their own reasons. The theme of northern aggression runs throughout the early years of de Courcy's territorially limited lordship.<sup>2427</sup>

At length, the Irish kingdoms were forced to come to terms with the fact that 'the English of Downpatrick' were firmly in situ, and, as we have seen, what they regarded as 'the North' became more restricted.<sup>2428</sup> Their aggression would now manifest itself through active defence against further incursions, especially the two major English advances in subsequent years. In 1196 or 1197, Flaithbertach Úa Máel Doraíd of Cenél Conaill won a major victory over the garrison de Courcy left at Mount Sandel, for example.<sup>2429</sup> It was also in the 1190s that Áed Méith Úa Néill became a major figure. He arrested the decline of the Cenél nEógain and marshalled their forces against the English. His victories and bold counter-invasion of Ulaid did enough to deter de Courcy from his planned advance.<sup>2430</sup>

The second English attempt to conquer the North was intimately connected to their relationship with Áed Méith Úa Néill, who had, in the interim, established his position as king of the North. His refusal to give hostages to King John in 1210 prompted the campaign, which was led by the justiciary after John's departure. Even though Úa Néill agreed to pay tribute and a fine for refusing to give hostages and made good on these promises to at least some degree, he did not seek permanent terms for his tenure and the tenure of his successors.<sup>2431</sup> He also avoided English aid when faced with internal

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<sup>2427</sup> The Uí Néill and the North, pp 182–95.

<sup>2428</sup> The Uí Néill and the North, pp 163–82.

<sup>2429</sup> The Uí Néill and the North, p. 196–7.

<sup>2430</sup> The Uí Néill and the North, pp 197–8.

<sup>2431</sup> The Uí Néill and the North, p. 199; *Pipe roll Ire., 1211–12*, pp 36–7, 66–7.



challenges. Whereas the English had gained experience in Connacht through mercenary service, they were consequently denied this opportunity in the North.

The most remarkable feature of Áed Méith's conduct, especially when compared to his contemporaries in Connacht and Munster, was his reaction when the English moved against the key points of approach. Whereas Cathal Crobderg felt the need to sacrifice the approaches to Connacht to achieve a positive relationship with the English crown, Áed Méith destroyed almost every castle the English (and the Scots) built during this advance. This was done despite a wish to avoid conflict, as shown by his agreement to pay tribute. His calculated aggression, which was an extension of that shown by other northern parties since 1176, was successful. It denied the English the platform to conquer, and the North's strategic position remained sound until the conquest of Connacht in the mid-1230s.

## **Conclusion**

### **[7.0: The thesis in context]**

Progress in historical writing must come through a constantly renewed effort to offer fresh approaches and perspectives, and to correct errors by a careful examination of source material. This assumption underlies the discipline of History, and it is unlikely any professional historian would dispute it. Still, it is something of an adage that history does not repeat itself; rather, historians repeat one another.

This is exactly what has happened in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Irish history.

Orpen's approach, innovative itself at the time, was designed with a particular thesis in mind: the invasion as the beginning 'Norman' civilisation in Ireland and of 'pax Normannica' in place of 'anarchy'. It was for this reason that he used Diarmait Mac Murchada as a bridge between the 'before' of Gaelic Ireland and the 'after' of 'Ireland under the Normans'.

While few today would openly agree that peace and prosperity replaced anarchy, Orpen's framework is still regularly applied. Consequently, many of his assumptions are deeply rooted in the works of his successors. This is despite the fact that it has been recognised for some time that more needs to be done to adequately address the influence of Gaelic Irish individuals and polities on events more generally.

In part, the problem is that the Irish kingdoms have lacked a dedicated history of their own for this period. For whatever reason, other subjects and contexts have been more popular with historians. This makes it very difficult to discuss them on an equal footing with the early English lordships, or to include them in a general narrative. Lacking an understanding of Irish priorities, historians have continued to avoid any in-depth discussion and have been unable to challenge the idea that chaos governed Irish political dynamics.

Another related issue is that throwaway remarks made by earlier generations of scholars have sometimes been given unwarranted authority, as each new writer sought to find brief explanations which would help them to side-line the Irish kingdoms from their chosen narrative. The result is that the historiography contains many bizarre and contradictory analyses.

The intention here has been to offer a corrective, both to the general lack of a dedicated history and to the more questionable modern commentaries. It has been possible to see familiar events from altogether new perspectives by carefully examining patterns of political behaviour in the Irish kingdoms; by their very nature such new perspectives have implications for how we understand the English in Ireland as well as the Irish.

### **[7.1: Findings]**

The first four chapters of this thesis concentrated on individual kingdoms. Three of these had advanced a successful claim to national supremacy at some point in the twelfth century, and the fourth, Leinster, was the province through which the English invasion was precipitated. The aim of these chapters was to demonstrate that there were indeed governing strategic concerns in all provinces, for even this has been doubted by those who regard Irish politics as anarchic.

There is no need to recapitulate these strategic dynamics since they have already been examined in detail in the previous chapter, but it is worth making a few general observations. One thing that stands out immediately is the flexibility of ‘provincial’ status. Even though the Irish word for a province, ‘*cóiced*’, translates directly as ‘fifth’, this in no way reflects reality.

It is not just that there were always more than five provinces, as is well-known. It is also that provinces could be made and altered. For example, at the end of the eleventh century, Uí Briúin Bréifne was an important region of Connacht and its leading dynasty, the Uí Ruairc, had their own claim to the kingship of that province. By contrast, early in

the twelfth century it was an independent province and the Uí Ruairc no longer advanced claims in Connacht.

This flexibility underlies the character of other kingdoms as well. When powerful, the kings of Munster were often able to make themselves kings of Leth Moga. This title has generally been considered an empty honorific, but it should rather be seen as a way of expressing the expansion of the province under those kings, so that, on such occasions, their province was not Munster but Leth Moga.

The idea of Leth Moga was an old one by the twelfth century, but the idea of ‘the North’ was new. It was created by Domnall Mac Lochlainn as he disregarded his dynasty’s links to the Southern Uí Néill, and the common kingship of Tara which united them, forming a new arrangement with Airgíalla and Ulaid instead. The drive towards a common identity is underlined by the occasional self-identification of the Uí Neill with Conchobar mac Nessa, hero of the Ulaid, thereafter; this was altogether at odds with the antagonism of Northern Uí Néill and Ulaid up to this point. That ‘the North’ could be a definite province as well as a general expression has been altogether missed, as has the innovation shown by Domnall Mac Lochlainn in moulding it.

These expanded provinces, the North and Leth Moga, which in the previous chapter were described as aliases of Cenél nEógain and Munster respectively, came to exist through repetitive imitative campaigning. That is to say, there was a clearly defined order of progression in each case. They themselves represented steps on the ladder towards kingship of Ireland, which was the ultimate goal of powerful Irish kings however they chose to define it.

Imitative campaigning is also evident in the wars for accession to this supreme kingship, and this is shown nowhere more clearly than in the campaigns of Toirdelbach and Muirchertach Úa Briain, as they followed Brian Bóraime’s template for establishing island-wide control. Even when Muirchertach was clearly satisfied to renew terms of

peace with Domnall Mac Lochlainn on an almost annual basis, he still marched northwards on the same routes as Toirdelbach and Brian.

There were other places where precedents had to be created. The obsolescence of the kingship of Tara created opportunities for new conceptions of, and contenders for, the kingship of Ireland. Connacht's candidacy demanded new strategic priorities be established and maintained; Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair's achievements in this regard are difficult to overstate. He recognised the key factors and the rapidity of his success meant that, for him, there was no intermediate step between kingship of Connacht and kingship of Ireland. Later, in Ruaidrí's time, Bréifne and Meath were recognised as this core extension.

All of the major kings were thoroughly aware of this dynamic, and this can be seen in the way they dealt with defeated rivals. Witness, for instance, how Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair divided Munster internally, and worked to prevent the leaders of both halves from establishing control of Osraige or Leinster; something he rightly judged would be a precursor to broader ambitions. Similarly, Toirdelbach's son Ruaidrí divided Cenél nEógain internally after he defeated them, as well as separating them from the other constituent parts of the North.

The English invasion fundamentally changed these dynamics because it saw the establishment of lordships on the east coast that were too strong for the Irish kings to overcome militarily. As such, the major Irish kingdoms were permanently restricted, and unable to develop powerbases as they had before. Much of the early Irish reaction to the invasion comprised a scramble to find new strategies in the hope of creating a force to trouble Irish and English opponents alike.

In fact, there was a window of opportunity to nip English expansion in the bud, even after the fall of Waterford and Dublin, and that was in 1171. Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair had general control of the provincial kingdoms at that time, and he conducted a well-planned

attack on Dublin during which he greatly outnumbered the besieged English force. For various reasons he failed in this action, as did *Úa Ruairc* in a subsequent attack, and the arrival of Henry II in Ireland some months later signalled the beginning of a new reality.

As time progressed, the Irish kings increasingly tried to reach agreements with English representatives that would see some or all of their own holdings officially recognised. In Munster, the English conquests were so extensive by 1200 that there was little choice but to pursue such a policy. Connacht had greater flexibility, but *Cathal Crobderg Úa Conchobair* feared the execution of the de Burgh grant, and he too sought terms for tenure. In the North, *Áed Méith Úa Néill* remained more aloof, but even he paid tribute in recognition of English military supremacy.

The English failed to conquer Ireland outright for several reasons, not least of which was the fitful and downright slow pace of their progress. Several times grants were made and not acted upon. The original grantees of Thomond did not go to Ireland, for example, because their new lands had not been conquered. On another occasion, the justiciar prevented William de Burgh from attacking Connacht precisely because King John feared he would conquer it.

While some of these problems were self-inflicted, it is clear that the Irish kings were capable of conducting effective rear-guard actions as well. The English shied away from attacking *Úa Briain* at Limerick in 1177, for instance, deeming the settlement to be too well defended. The fact that the same king's acquiescence was sought in 1193 is also suggestive. It was the protection of the Shannon that allowed Connacht to stave off conquest for some time, and *Úa Néill's* determined attacks on the castles which had been built on the periphery of his kingdom after 1210 undoubtedly prevented its conquest.

Focus on the experience of the Irish kingdoms is therefore entirely justified even in relation to the English invasion alone; that they are worthy of study more generally is obvious. Indeed, so much of what happened necessitates a close understanding of Irish

political dynamics that it is to be wondered how a view as narrow as that advanced in the existing historiography has been sustained.

With this in mind, the three kingdom-focused chapters were followed by two thematic chapters. The first highlighted another marginalised group, women, and examined their roles at the highest societal level. Chief among these roles were certainly marriage and the production of sons, but the historical record also preserves indications that women were frequently important members of their husbands' entourages who gave advice on policy.

Since the honour-price of provincial kings seems to have greatly increased between the codification of the law-texts and the twelfth century, there is reason to believe that their daughters and wives would have seen a proportional increase in their wealth. The *coibche* payment, which was a woman's principal endowment, was made to her by her husband on the occasion of her marriage, and it equalled the woman's honour-price – i.e., half that of her father. As such, she was on average wealthier in the twelfth century than before.

As far as marriage itself is concerned, the present study has done much to restore nuance to the discussion. Marriages did not necessarily represent alliances between the contracting families; on the contrary, alliance was just one of several possible reasons for marriage. The establishment of suzerainty was one, for example, and local links were another. On other occasions there was no political rationale.

Perhaps the most important contribution of the chapter on women was to show the existence of a pattern of marriage between families contesting a common kingship. The alternation of dynasties in the kingship, called *sel* or *selaidecht*, was complemented by regular marriages. These marriages must have been conceived of as affirmations of royal status, because, with very few exceptions, the monopolisation of the kingship by one

branch meant their cessation; neither the formerly competing dynasties nor their leading successor segments contracted marriages after monopolisation.

As with provincial structures, it is again possible to show that certain individuals were capable of great imagination where this societal norm was concerned. In recognising Cormac Mac Cárthaig as king of Munster, Toirdelbach and Conchobar Úa Briain were trying to create a new *selaidecht* that would prevent the permanent partition of Munster into Thomond and Desmond; this is confirmed both by the references to such an alternation in literary sources, though it never became a reality, and by the fact that a marriage link was formed around this time.

This idea also has major implications for other events of the twelfth century, especially the policies of Diarmait Mac Murchada. Unlike virtually every other provincial kingdom in Ireland at this time, the kingship of Leinster was not monopolised by one dynasty. There is evidence to show that Leinster's other major dynasties retained their claims, even though the Uí Chennselaig held several successive kingships. Again, this is further supported by the fact that Mac Murchada's marriages included women of the Uí Fáeláin and Uí Thuathail families. This may also explain his reputation for harshness towards his subordinates, whom he had greater reason to distrust than most.

The second thematic chapter examined the kingship of Ireland and showed that the debate has failed to address the position and its holders in the proper context. It was argued here that a determination to force European comparisons or to generalise from particular theories has done no justice to the topic. Certain terms, like 'high-king' and 'king of Ireland with opposition' have been used to create misleading impressions, and the idea that different provinces had different conceptions of the national kingship has not even been touched on. Furthermore, the fact that kingship of Ireland could mean control of the whole island or a large portion thereof has confounded historians, despite the fact that 'Ireland' has a similar semantic range today.



This examination was followed by a comparative analysis of the experience of the English invasion in the three provincial kingdoms, building on the chapters dedicated to each. Approaches offering military access, the interruption of existing political dynamics, and the actions of important individuals were all recognised as key factors in the way English conquests played out. Of these, military access was by far the most important and it was as essential to this period of Irish history as it had been in previous centuries.

### **[7.2: Future directions]**

Others working in this area, whether in the immediate or more distant future, will make their own judgements about the value of this thesis. They will also be led by their own investigative skills and instincts when it comes to new methods or perspectives, so it is impossible to say where the next historiographical change of direction will take the field. It is to be hoped that a tendency towards a more nuanced representation will flourish, but it may also be that entrenched interpretations will be difficult to dislodge.

Regrettably, neglect of Gaelic Ireland is not restricted to this period. Despite the pioneering work of several historians mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, it remains an issue in current academic discussion on every period from the twelfth to the seventeenth centuries, and arguably more generally still. It is therefore an open-ended research opportunity for historians, and others, who feel that it is something that should be remedied.

It is not just neglect of Gaelic Ireland in favour of the English colony in Ireland that is to blame. There is a dearth of quality analysis in several areas for the early medieval period as well – not least political behaviour and organisation. One of the fundamental reasons for all of these problems is an underlying lack of imagination; another is a conservative tendency that has seen some historians shy away from radical interpretations of their subject.

One area where the findings of the present project can be expanded on to effect is the question of whether the early English lordships in Ireland can be regarded as successors of the Irish kingdoms in strategic terms. It seems that their adoption of Irish borders on both local and provincial levels led these lordships to mirror the Irish kingdoms they had supplanted in their fledgling state, and perhaps more generally. Only now, with a dedicated history of the Irish kingdoms having been undertaken, can justice be done to this important subject.

This thesis could also provide the groundwork for a more sustained treatment of the functionality of marriage in Gaelic Ireland. It is plain that there was more at work than a complex system of alliances, and close analysis would be likely to yield further insights into the society more generally. One way this could be done is through the development of the theme using material contained in literary sources; a useable guide to such sources would also be a welcome addition to modern literature.

The kingship of Ireland was addressed in this thesis as it related to the period under discussion. All the same, it was plain that many of the same problems affect its treatment by historians of an earlier period. Its interchangeability with the kingship of Tara can be fleshed out; whether the analyses offered by Binchy and Byrne are still valid is highly questionable, and the topic awaits a current scholar willing to tackle the longstanding orthodoxy in fuller detail. Closer to the work done here, the conceptual detachment of the kingship of Tara and kingship of Ireland in the mid-eleventh century may be worthy of further research.

If and when historians achieve a solid groundwork on the Irish kingdoms in the Irish context, it will then be appropriate to consider European comparisons. At the present time, it appears that Wales and, to a lesser extent, Scotland, have the greatest potential in this regard. While the term 'Norman' is no longer considered appropriate for Ireland's invaders, the idea of 'post-Norman' and 'post-Anglo-Norman' environments as a field of

study also seems attractive. However, it must be emphasised that this can not be achieved to any degree of success without the methodological revision suggested here.

Progress in this field is also dependent on modern editions of major sources, including but certainly not limited to the collections of annals which were discussed in the introduction to this thesis. As noted there, several collections contain problematic translations and terminology, and must be used with caution. Happily, the advent of the internet means the ever-increasing accessibility of sources, including high-quality images of manuscripts, against which transcriptions and translations can be cross-checked.

The English invasion was a critical moment in Irish history, and perhaps the most profound turning point of all. Viewed from 850 years later, its significance is obvious; so much so that it is difficult to conceive of an alternative course of history where it did not occur. To what extent that was apparent from 1169 to '71 is open to question, but gradually at least it dawned on the Irish kings that English involvement in Ireland would not be transient. As readers we would do well to be more sympathetic towards the decisions taken by all parties, cognisant of the fact that this was not inevitable.

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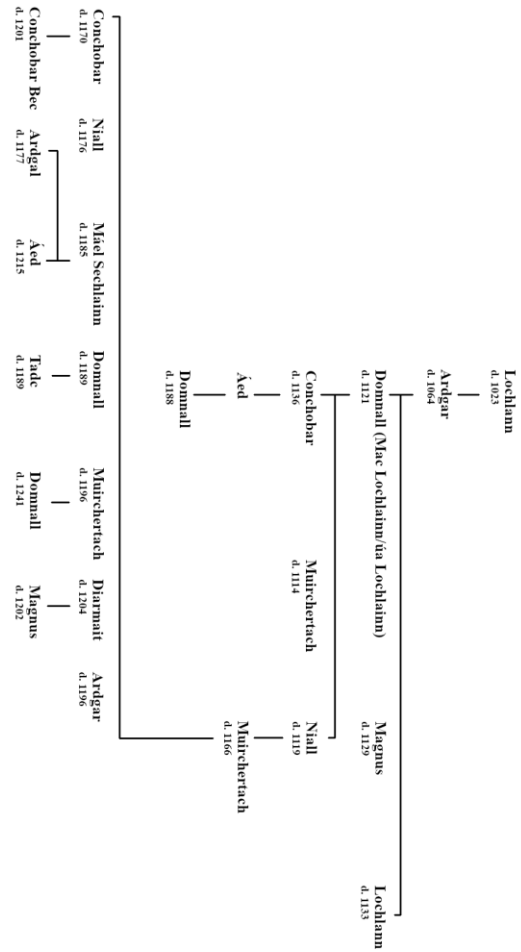
### **Note to the Appendices**

Appendix I comprises a series of genealogical tables for families of royal status in the four kingdoms. They have been composed with reliance on two principal exemplars: the tables that appear in *N.H.I.* volume IX, pages 121–76, and Bart Jaski’s genealogical tables: Jaski, *The traditional rule of succession in early Ireland* (PhD thesis, T.C.D., 1995), pp 76–188. With Jaski’s permission, the latter have been relied on most extensively.

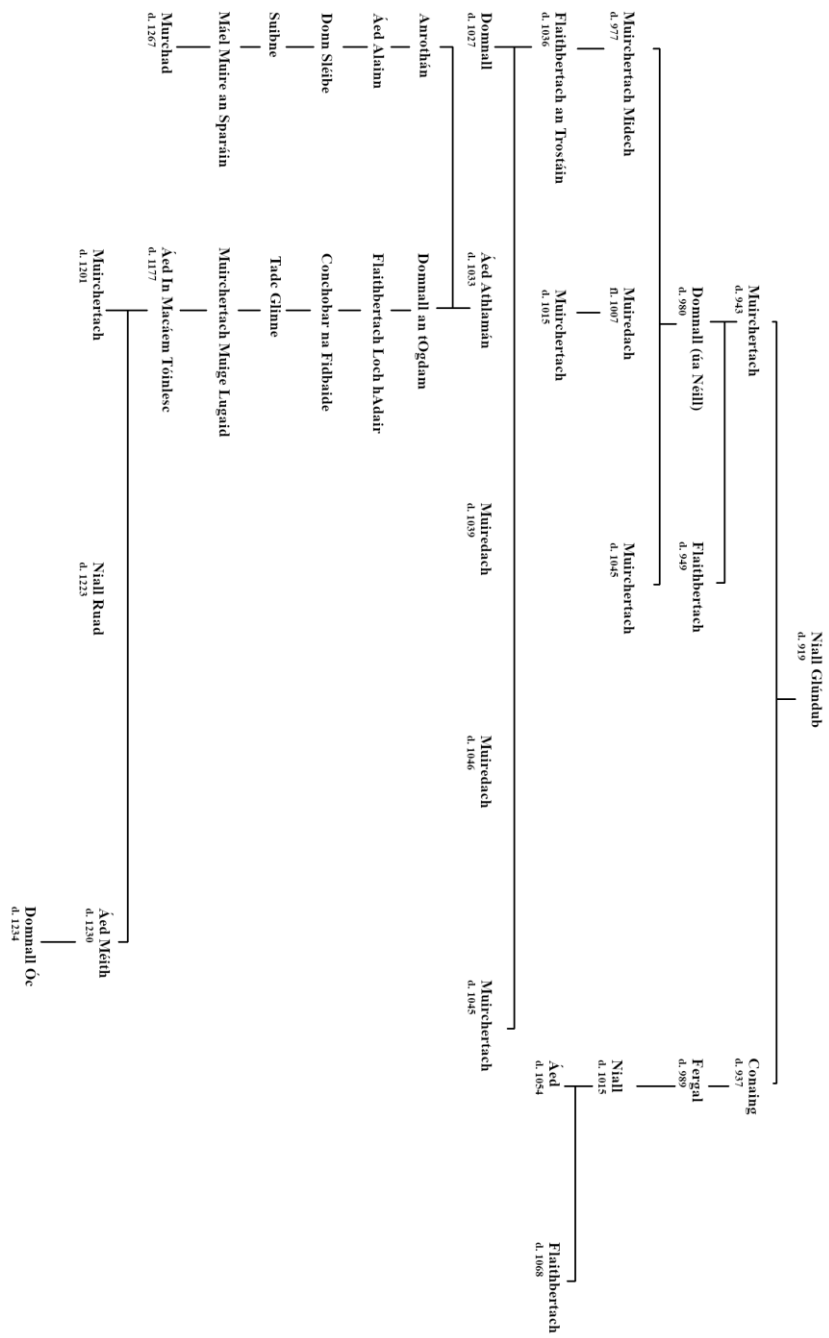
Similarly, Appendix II comprises mainly of maps of regional and provincial kingdoms based on Paul MacCotter’s atlas of twelfth-century cantreds (MacCotter, *Medieval Ireland*, pp 257–61. With MacCotter’s permission, the borders of the cantreds have been reproduced in order to locate major groupings more precisely. The depiction given is an estimate of the situation *c.* 1169.



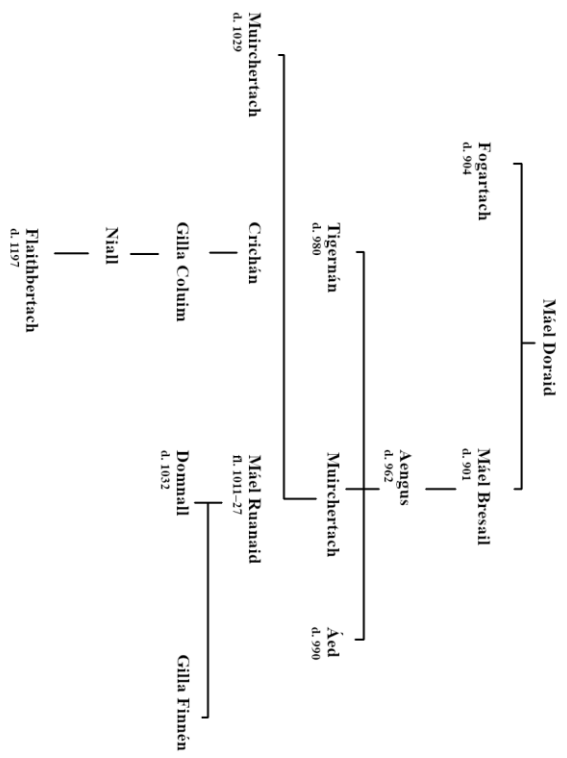
## II. The Meic Lochlainn



### III. Uí Néill Glúnduib

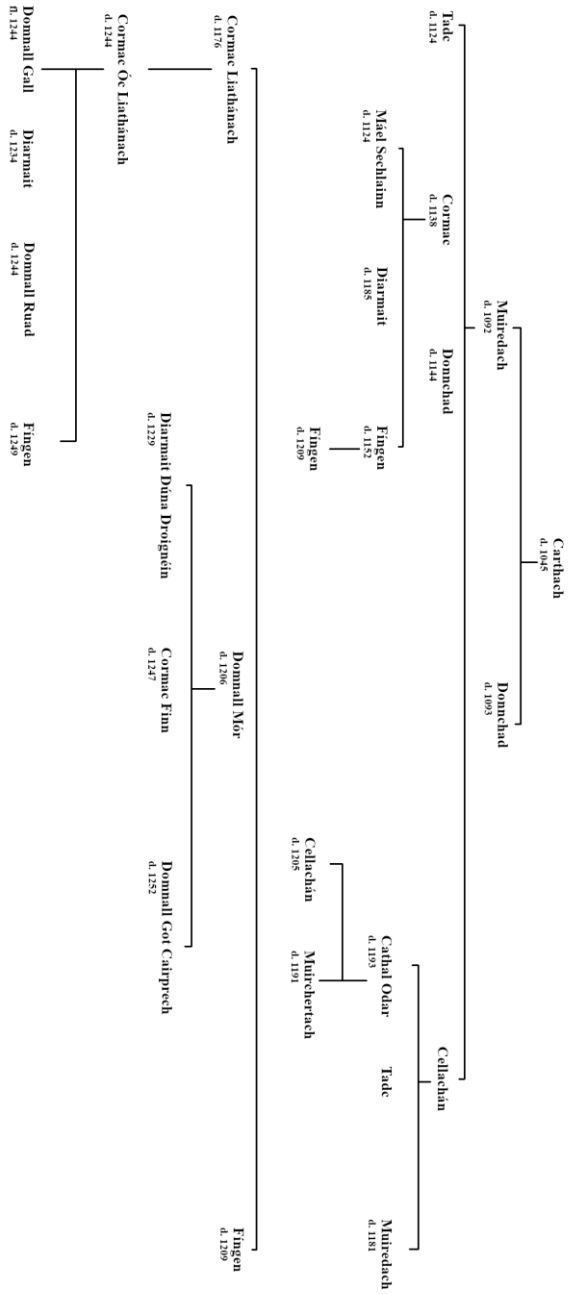


IV. Uí Máel Doraid

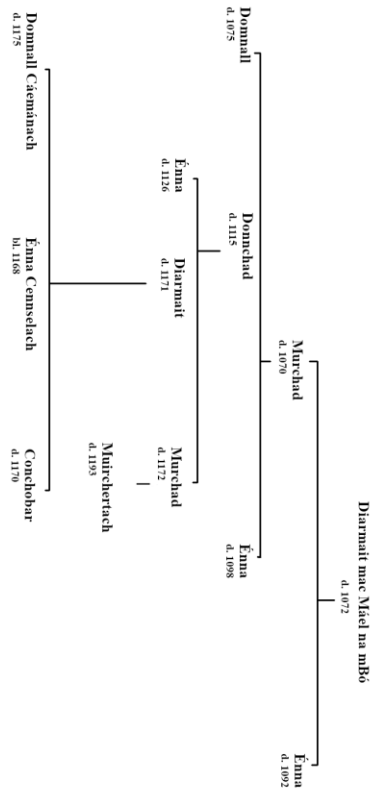




## VI. Meic Cárthaig



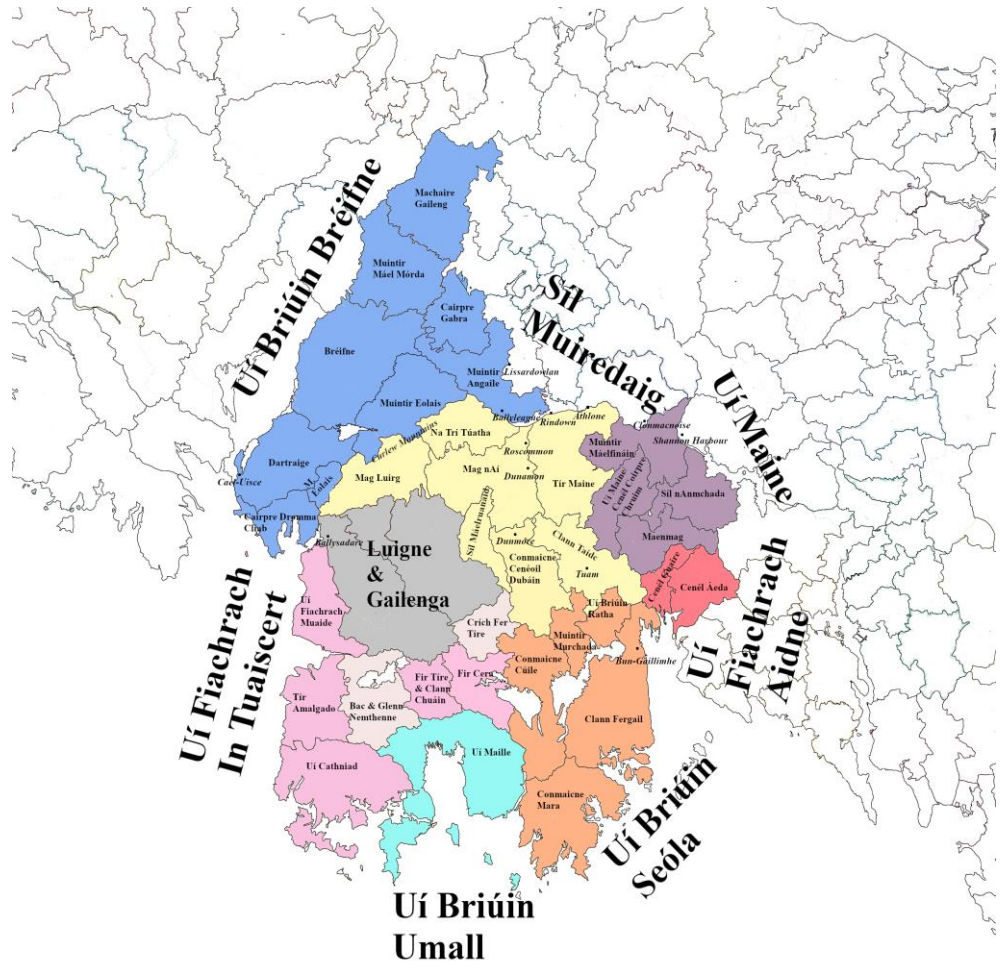
## VII. Meic Murchada



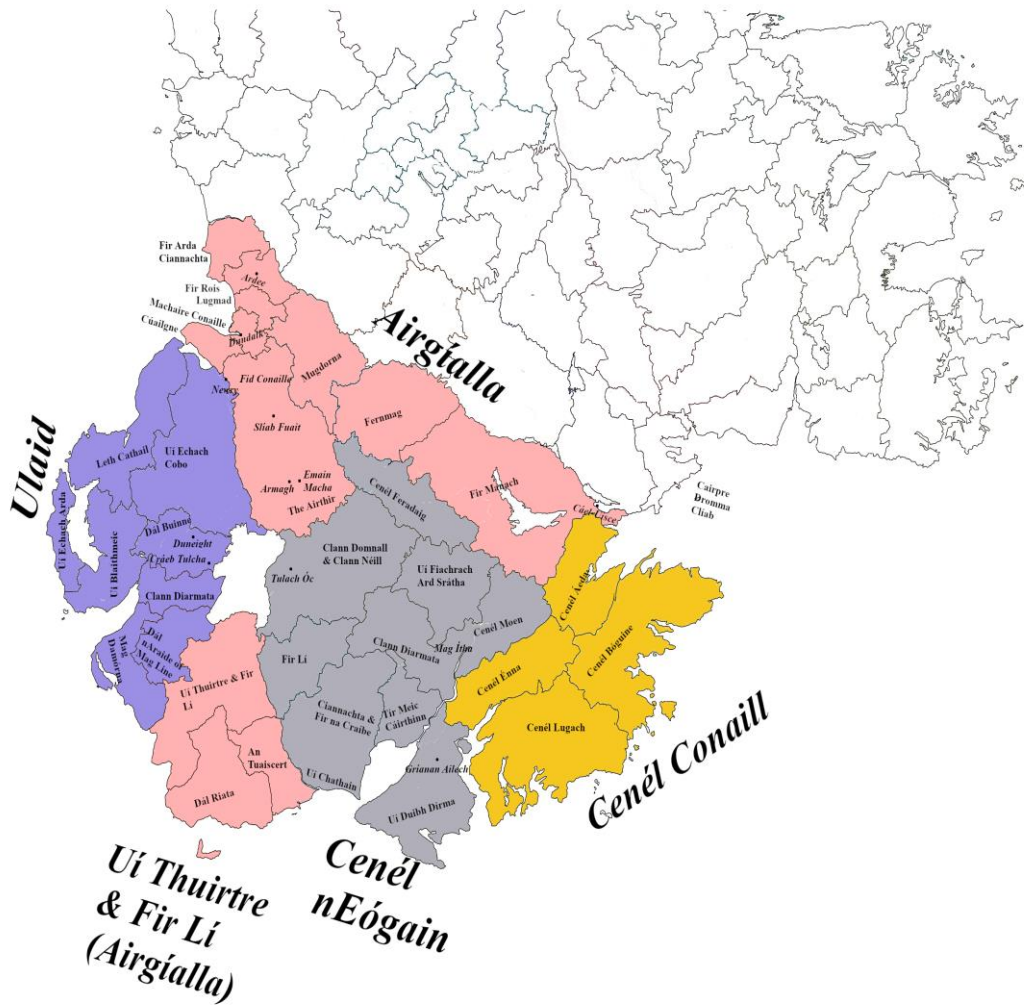


## Appendix II: Maps

### I. Connacht



II. The North





IV. Leinster

