Maynooth Research Guides for Irish Local History

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This book is one of the Maynooth Research Guides for Irish Local History series. Written by specialists in the relevant fields, these volumes are designed to provide historians, and especially those interested in local history, with practical advice regarding the consultation of specific collections of historical materials, thereby enabling them to conduct independent research in a competent and thorough manner. In each volume, a brief history of the relevant institutions is provided and the principal primary sources are identified and critically evaluated with specific reference to their usefulness to the local historian. Readers receive step by step guidance as to how to conduct their research and are alerted to some of the problems which they might encounter in working with particular collections. Possible avenues for research are suggested and relevant secondary works are also recommended.

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Medieval Gaelic Sources

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Introduction

The object of this book is to introduce readers to medieval sources in the Gaelic language, explaining the purposes for which they were originally created, their survival and their availability in published form, and how to glean usable historical information from them.

The phrase 'Gaelic Ireland' has gained currency as a kind of historian's shorthand, a convenient label to describe communities and territories in Ireland which were still ruled by Gaelic chieftains between the Norman invasion of 1169 and the sixteenth-century Tudor re-conquest. During this period two peoples occupied the same island, living under different legal systems, and were distinguished one from the other by their use of the Gaelic or English languages, although many from each community had a good knowledge of the language of the other.[1]

From the historian's point of view, another marked contrast between the two communities was the failure of the Gaelic chieftains to keep administrative records of their decrees, their financial dealings or their correspondence. Instead our knowledge of past events in the regions of medieval Ireland under their jurisdiction is heavily dependent on literary texts in the Irish language produced by the hereditary learned classes or *aos ealadhan* attached to the courts of the chieftains and trained in the bardic schools. These men (and there were no women among them) included the *seanchaidh*, a name reflected nowadays in the word for a traditional storyteller, 'shanachie', though they would have seen themselves as historians or antiquaries. They were responsible for the annals and genealogies discussed in the first two chapters below, as well as the prose tales and mythology dealt with in the fourth chapter, the material most people nowadays would associate with a 'shanachie' The *file* or professional poet produced not only formal eulogies and elegies in praise of the reigning chieftains and their families, but religious poems, love poems and other verse material, discussed here in the third chapter. The *breitheamh*, the 'brehon' or judge of customary Irish law, and the *liaigh*, physician or 'leech', produced the legal and medical tracts discussed in the fifth chapter. These can be quite technical works, and historians sometimes find as much value in the incidental remarks the scribes inserted in the margins or added as colophons at the end of their tracts as in the tracts themselves. Many of the texts composed by these different categories of professional scholars are still preserved in vellum manuscripts produced during the medieval period, others have come down to us as paper transcripts made by scribes and hedge-schoolmasters working under the patronage of Gaelic and Old English aristocrats in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. There is a very substantial body of material of this kind, with quite a large

1 See Edmund Curtis, 'The spoken languages of medieval Ireland' in *Studies*, 8 (1919), pp 234–54; Alan Bliss & Joseph Long, 'Literature in Norman French and English to 1534' in Art Cosgrove (ed.), *A new history of Ireland, ii: medieval Ireland, 1169–1534* (Oxford, 1987), pp 708–36.

proportion still remaining unpublished, especially the later collections of genealogies. Nevertheless most of the key texts principally useful to historians have long been edited with English translations. They include Irish annals, such as John O'Donovan's well-known edition of the *Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland by the Four Masters*, valuable not only for its original text but for O'Donovan's notes and commentary. Irish annals are regularly consulted round the world not only through modern reprints but in electronic form on the web. However, the wider range of published sources available may have been better-known in the past to Celtic scholars than to historians, and these deserve greater attention than they have so far received. This book is intended as a practical guide to all the main Irish language sources for the history of Gaelic Ireland in the high middle ages,[2] with particular emphasis on those for which English translations are available.

There are, of course, many other original sources casting light on Gaelic Irish communities, or on families of Gaelic origin, which were not written in the Irish language. Incidental information about Gaelic chieftains, clergy and landowners can be gleaned from the medieval English and Anglo-Norman records so clearly listed and explained by Philomena Connolly,[3] kept originally in Latin, medieval French or English by the government administration in Ireland and in England, or by the church or the Anglo-Irish nobility. This type of source is valuable because it is normally clearly dated to a particular year, even to a precise month and day. A disadvantage is the strange phonetic spelling used by Anglo-Norman clerks when recording Gaelic personal and place-names, although editors have sometimes given cross-references to the correct Gaelic versions in the index. Another problem is the haphazard nature of the references. Since the Dublin government and the Anglo-Irish nobility only kept records for the areas under their own jurisdiction, they tend to mention individual Irish chiefs, for example, only when they led invasions into the English colony. They are unconcerned to identify these Irishmen in terms of their father and grandfather, and it is sometimes difficult to place a rebellious chief mentioned in English sources into his correct dynastic context.

Further information on medieval Irish society comes from the descriptions of foreign visitors, such as the twelfth-century chronicler, Gerald of Wales (Giraldus Cambrensis),[4] or the later medieval pilgrims to St Patrick's Purgatory, Lough Derg.[5]

2 For the early medieval period, Kathleen Hughes, *Early Christian Ireland: an introduction to the sources* (London, 1972; repr. Cambridge, 1977) is still useful. More recently we have the series of 'Quiggin pamphlets on the sources of mediaeval Gaelic history' published by the Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic, University of Cambridge: (1) John Carey, *The Irish national origin-legend: synthetic pseudo-history* (1994); (2) Dauvit Broun, *The charters of Gaelic Scotland and Ireland in the early and central middle ages* (1995); (3) David N. Dumville, *Councils and synods of the Gaelic early and central middle ages* (1997); (4) Thomas M. Charles-Edwards, *The early medieval Gaelic lawyer* (1999); (5) John Hines, *Old Norse sources for Gaelic history* (2002); (6) Pádraig P. Ó Néill, *Biblical study and mediaeval Gaelic history* (2003). See also Kim McCone & Katharine Simms (eds), *Progress in medieval Irish studies* (Maynooth, 1996). 3 Philomena Connolly, *Medieval record sources* (Dublin, 2002). 4 See Robert Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales, 1146–1223* (Oxford, 1982). 5 Michal Haren & Yolande de Pontfarcy (eds), *The*

English observers in the sixteenth century are often the richest source for descriptions of the laws and customs of the Gaelic Irish and these have been discussed by David Quinn.[6] Similarly sixteenth-century English legal and administrative sources have been brilliantly utilised by Kenneth Nicholls to build a picture of Gaelic Ireland,[7] and a good example of the detailed information they can yield on the political history of a particular area is seen in the later chapters of Emmett O'Byrne's book on the Irish of Leinster.[8]

THE LANGUAGE OF THE GAELIC SOURCES

There are three main stages of development in the language of the texts preserved in medieval Irish manuscripts: Old Irish (AD 650–900), Middle Irish (AD 900–1200) and Classical Irish, sometimes known as Early Modern Irish (AD 1200–1650). Classical Irish was a standard literary version of the Irish language as it was spoken around the end of the twelfth and beginning of the thirteenth century. From AD 1200 to 1600 the written Gaelic of medieval Ireland was Classical Irish, which also served as a literary standard language for bardic compositions in Gaelic-speaking Scotland. It continued to be understood and used by educated classes well into the seventeenth century. For those who have a good command of Modern Irish, there is an excellent linguistic discussion of Classical Irish by Damian McManus in *Stair na Gaeilge*.[9] During the 1940s the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, School of Celtic Studies, was apparently convinced that anyone familiar with modern spoken Irish should be able to understand bardic poetry and prose in Classical Irish, and a number of important texts were edited at that time without either a paraphrase into modern Irish, or an English translation.[1]

It soon became obvious, however, that this assumption was unfounded. Too great a gap had developed between the school Irish of the twentieth century and Classical Irish, as a result of the movement towards the *caighdeán*, a unified standard Irish for use by schools and the civil service based on contemporary spoken dialects, together with the introduction of the Roman rather than Gaelic script (*cló Rómhánach*

medieval pilgrimage to St Patrick's Purgatory, Lough Derg (Enniskillen, 1988). **6** David B. Quinn, *The Elizabethans and the Irish* (Ithaca, NY, 1966). **7** Kenneth W Nicholls, *Gaelic and Gaelicised Ireland in the middle ages* (2nd edn, Dublin, 2003). **8** Emmett O'Byrne, *War, politics and the Irish of Leinster, 1156–1606* (Dublin, 2003). **9** Damian McManus, 'An Nua-Ghaeilge Chlasaiceach' in Kim McCone et al. (eds), *Stair na Gaeilge* (Maynooth, 1994), pp 335–445; see also idem, 'Classical modern Irish' in McCone & Simms (eds), *Progress in medieval Irish studies*, pp 165–87. **10** For example, James Carney (ed.), *Topographical poems by Seaán Mór Ó Dubhagáin and Giolla na Naomh Ó hUidhrín* (Dublin, 1943); Seán Mac Airt (ed.), *Leabhar Branach, the Book of the O'Byrnes* (Dublin, 1944); James Carney (ed.), *Poems on the Butlers* (Dublin, 1945); James Carney (ed.), *Poems on the O'Reillys* (Dublin, 1950). A similar policy of omitting all translation was followed by the Irish Manuscripts Commission (hereinafter IMC) with the publication of Tadhg Ó Donnchadha (ed.), *Leabhar Cloinne Aodha Buidhe* (Dublin, 1931), and idem (ed.), *An Leabhar Muimhneach* (Dublin [1940]).

rather than *cló Gaelach*) and a spelling reform which got rid of many 'dh's and 'gh's that were no longer pronounced.[11] With patience those fluent in modern Irish can lessen the gap between the language as they know it and its earlier stages by familiarising themselves with the font and spelling used in P.S. Dinneen's *Irish-English dictionary*, and the grammatical features summarised by Eleanor Knott in the 'Introduction' to her edition of *The bardic poems of Tadhg Dall Ó hUiginn*.[12] However, a more systematic approach to understanding untranslated medieval Irish texts will involve the student learning to make use of the Royal Irish Academy's *Dictionary of the Irish language, based mainly on Old and Middle Irish materials*,[13] and some formal instruction in the earlier stages of the language becomes inescapable.

Old Irish was developed when the church scholars first adapted the Latin alphabet to the writing of Irish in the seventh century. The Irish of that early period was in a state of transition from a more archaic stage, full of obscurities and inconsistencies, and soon moved on to develop forms closer to modern Irish grammar. Middle Irish reflects the problems experienced by the schoolmen of the tenth to twelfth centuries attempting to maintain Old Irish forms in their written texts, when they no longer used them in their spoken language.[14] Thus early Middle Irish is closer to standard Old Irish while late Middle Irish, from the late eleventh to the early thirteenth century, grew increasingly close to Classical forms and was thus still intelligible to educated readers of Irish in the seventeenth or even eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The unique feature of medieval Gaelic culture was that bardic schools teaching *seanchas* or history and brehon law trained their students to study the grammar and spelling of Old Irish to the point where they continued to read and transcribe the early texts, thus preserving for later generations a much larger collection of early medieval material than the surviving corpus of texts in Anglo-Saxon, for example.

Unfortunately these studies ended with the dispersal of the native schools in the first half of the seventeenth century. Knowledge of Old Irish died out. The gentlemen scholars of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century who founded the Royal Irish Academy and began to collect early Irish manuscripts could at best only read and understand material in Classical Irish, or late Middle Irish, or they relied on English translations by the scribes and hedge-school masters who collected and copied out the texts for them. It was not until the second half of the nineteenth century that the scientific study of historical linguistics in Germany was applied to

11 Cathal Ó hÁinle, 'Ó chaint na ndaoine go dtí an caighdeán oifigiúil' in McCone et al. (eds), *Stair na Gaeilge*, pp 745–93.   12 Eleanor Knott (ed.), *A bhfuil aguinn dár chum Tadhg Dall Ó hUiginn: the bardic poems of Tadhg Dall Ó hUiginn* (2 vols, vol. 1 text, vol. 2 trans., Irish Texts Society (hereinafter ITS), London, 1922), i, lxv–lxxxv.   13 E.G. Quin (ed.), *Dictionary of the Irish language, based mainly on Old and Middle Irish materials* (Dublin, 1983). All the head-words in this tome are spelled according to Old Irish conventions, but since its appearance in electronic form at www.dil.ie it is now possible to search the web version for words in their later Irish spelling, or by their English translation.   14 Kim McCone, 'The Würzburg and Milan glosses: our earliest sources of "Middle Irish"' in *Ériu*, 36 (1985), pp 85–106.

Old Irish, unlocking the meaning of the early texts, and increasing the accuracy with which Middle Irish texts could be translated. Many of the early editors of such texts were German or French linguists, interested at first mainly in the grammar and vocabulary for purposes of comparison with other European languages, and then drawn in by a fascination with the subject-matter to write on Early Irish law and sagas. By the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Irish linguists who had studied under these continental scholars became involved in the great task of editing and translating the rich heritage of medieval Irish texts. At first few historians underwent the necessary linguistic training, the outstanding exceptions being Eoin Mac Neill and James Hogan. Nowadays it is generally accepted that academic research into early medieval Ireland, that is, the period up to 1169, requires a knowledge of Old Irish. This does not apply with the same force to the Classical Irish texts composed from the thirteenth century onwards, but some study additional to an Honours Leaving Certificate in Irish is needed to prepare oneself to encounter the texts in their original form.

THE AVAILABILITY OF TRANSLATIONS, AND SOME PROBLEMS

Mercifully the majority of edited texts are accompanied by translations. This is particularly true of the nineteenth century, when Latin was regularly taught in secondary schools but Irish was not. The great series of official editions of medieval historical texts brought out in England by the Master of the Rolls contained no translations for Latin chronicles, but invariably gave a parallel English translation for texts in Irish.

However, there are two points to be made about nineteenth-century translations of medieval Irish sources. For the first three-quarters of the century, their accuracy depended on whether the original text was written in Classical Irish which, as discussed above, was then quite familiar to traditionally-educated Irish scholars like John O'Donovan and Eugene O'Curry,[16] or in Old (seventh to ninth century) or Early Middle (tenth and early eleventh century) Irish, which was only then beginning to be properly understood thanks chiefly to the work of the

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15 For example, William M. Hennessy (ed.), *Chronicum Scotorum: a chronicle of Irish affairs to 1135, and supplement 1141–1150* (hereinafter *Chron. Scot.*) (London, 1866); James H. Todd, *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh: the war of the Gadhil with the Gaill* (London, 1867); William M. Hennessy, *The Annals of Loch Cé* (hereinafter *ALC*) (2 vols, London, 1871; repr. IMC, Dublin, 1939). **16** See Paul Walsh, 'John O'Donovan, Irish historical scholar' in Colm Ó Lochlainn (ed.), *Irish men of learning: studies by Paul Walsh* (Dublin, 1947), pp 263–72; Patricia Byrne, *John O'Donovan: a biography* (Kilkenny, 1987); T.F. Ó Raifeartaigh (ed.), *The Royal Irish Academy: a bicentennial history* (Dublin, 1985), pp 43–6, 101–2, 112–13, 179–81. Damien Murray, *Romanticism, nationalism and Irish antiquarian societies, 1840–80* (Maynooth, 2000), pp 134–5 has a useful appendix, listing the edited texts, both translated Irish and untranslated Latin, published by the Irish Archaeological Society, the Celtic Society, the Irish Archaeological and Celtic Society and the Ossianic Society.

German linguist Johann Kaspar Zeuss (1806–56), who published the first edition of his *Grammatica Celtica* in 1853.

In the last quarter of the nineteenth and the first quarter of the twentieth centuries a new generation of university-trained linguists produced a wealth of reliable transcriptions and translations of medieval Irish texts, usually with an introduction that tried to estimate the original date of composition. From the point of view of a non-specialist enquirer, these editions have two possible drawbacks. They mostly appeared in a series of learned journals, such as the *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie*, the *Revue Celtique*, *Études Celtiques* and the Royal Irish Academy's *Ériu: founded as the Journal of the School of Irish Learning, devoted to Irish philology and literature*. This makes them somewhat difficult of access, and means that some, though by no means all, of the translations in the *Zeitschrift* or the *Revue* are into German or French rather than English. A useful book called *Ancient Irish tales*, edited by Cross and Slover, collects together many of the English translations of Old and Middle Irish saga texts from these learned journals into a single volume, and the 1969 edition of this useful work contains a revised bibliography by Charles W Dunn identifying the original scholarly edition from which each translation was taken.[18] Following up these references would in turn lead the researcher to the original Irish texts, commentary on the manuscripts in which they were found, and the editors' opinions as to the date of their composition. Similarly Jeffrey Gantz in his collection of translations from Old Irish sagas includes a preliminary list of bibliographical references to the original editions of the Old or Middle Irish texts he has used.[1]

Historians interested chiefly in the period after AD 1200 escape most of the problems posed by unreliable nineteenth-century translations of Old Irish texts, but they are confronted with the frustrating fact that the only complete translated edition of the Old Irish law tracts, the six-volume *Ancient laws of Ireland*,[20] is unreliable. The three sizes of typeface, which are designed to distinguish the sections of original Old Irish law text (large) from the Old and Middle Irish interlinear glosses (small) and the Middle Irish and Classical Irish commentaries (middling), are not always applied to the correct portions of text, while the English translation, which is heavily indebted to the preparatory work of John O'Donovan and Eugene O'Curry, is much more accurate in regard to the later passages of commentary than to the Old Irish tracts themselves. A number of individual tracts have since been re-edited with modern translations in English or German, though these are sometimes shorn of the glosses and commentary which accompanied the text in the original manuscripts. Another trap for the unwary is that Eugene O'Curry and other home-grown Irish scholars were not equipped to detect the approximate date

17 See Kim McCone, 'Prehistoric, Old and Middle Irish' in McCone & Simms (eds), *Progress in medieval Irish studies*, pp 11–15. 18 Tom Peete Cross & Clark Harris Slover (eds), *Ancient Irish tales* (1st edn, New York, 1936; repr. New York & Dublin, 1969). 19 Jeffrey Gantz, *Early Irish myths and sagas* (London, 1981), pp 28–9. 20 W Neilson Hancock et al. (eds), *Ancient laws of Ireland* (6 vols, Dublin, 1865–1901). For further discussion of the problems posed, see introduction to the section on legal material.

of composition of a medieval Irish text by its linguistic features. This meant they often treated texts they could readily understand, written in Late Middle or Early Modern Irish, as if they were authoritative contemporary or near contemporary accounts of legendary figures such as Cormac mac Airt or Niall of the Nine Hostages, who if they did exist at all, would have lived centuries before these narratives were composed. Nowadays such 'historical romances' would be seen as shedding light on political concerns in the later period when they were actually written.[21]

TEXTS AND MANUSCRIPTS, AUTHORS AND SCRIBES

This brings us to the main difference between medieval record sources and medieval Gaelic sources. Official records were composed and written in the immediate aftermath of the event they document, by clerks employed by those involved and they normally contain precise dates and names of participants, often including lists of witnesses, and/or guarantors. Even where, for example, financial records have been falsified, or omit important entries,[22] this 'cooking of the books' is contemporary with the expenditure that must be accounted for.

Medieval Gaelic sources were all produced by members of the professional learned classes.[23] While some were also clerics or belonged to hereditary church families, they had learned to read and write Irish in one or other of the bardic schools of poetry, law, history, or medicine, all of which (and perhaps also the schools of music, about which less is known) provided their pupils with a basic knowledge of *filidheacht*, involving the standard grammar and vocabulary of Classical Irish as used for literary compositions, and some knowledge of rhyme and metre for versifying, though only the schools of poetry equipped their graduates to compose *dán díreach*, the elaborate 'strict verse' of the top professional praise-poets.[24] This training was directed towards producing creative works of art, wisdom and knowledge rather than mere records. The only dated and witnessed Gaelic records are the brehon law charters, both the eleventh- and twelfth-century grants and

21 See below, section on Prose tracts, 'Sagas set in their historical context' **22** See Philomena Connolly, 'The proceedings against John de Burnham, treasurer of Ireland, 1343–9' in T. Barry, R. Frame & K. Simms (eds), *Colony and frontier in medieval Ireland* (London, 1995), pp 57–74. **23** For an introduction to the medieval learned classes in Gaelic society, see Brian Ó Cuív (ed.), *Seven centuries of Irish learning* (Dublin, 1961); Walsh, *Irish men of learning*; Thomas F. O'Rahilly, 'Irish poets, historians and judges in English documents, 1538–1615' in *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* (hereinafter *RIA Proc*), 36 (1921–4), pp 86–120 and Katharine Simms, 'Bardic schools/learned families' in Seán Duffy (ed.), *Medieval Ireland: an encyclopedia* (New York & London, 2005), pp 35–7. **24** See Brian Ó Cuív, 'The linguistic training of the medieval Irish poet' in *Celtica*, 10 (1973), pp 114–40; Damian McManus, 'The bardic poet as teacher, student and critic: a context for the grammatical tracts' in Cathal Ó Háinle & Donald Meek (eds), *Unity in diversity* (Dublin, 2004), pp 97–124; Katharine Simms, 'The brehons of later medieval Ireland' in Dáire Hogan & W.N. Osborough (eds), *Brehons, serjeants and attorneys: studies in the history of the Irish legal profession* (Dublin, 1990), pp 61–5.

arbitrations in respect of ecclesiastical property written into blank spaces in the
Book of Kells and the Book of Durrow,[25] or the mortgages, wills and agreements
about secular property drawn up between the fifteenth and the seventeenth cen-
turies, mostly surviving from the area of the Ormond and O'Brien lordships.[26]

Although bardic praise-poems were strictly contemporary with the patrons and
events they celebrated, they were not records, but manifestos on behalf of those
who commissioned and paid for them.[27] They were intended for oral performance
and it is rare to find a poem written down by the author himself, an autograph
copy.[28] However, because of the elaborate metres and rhyme schemes in which the
most prized – and most frequently preserved – poems are composed, any mistakes
or changes in the text introduced by later scribes can normally be detected. This is
important, because some interesting poems survive today only in eighteenth- or
nineteenth-century paper manuscripts, copies of copies, written by scribes and
hedge-school masters for cultivated Irish-speaking clerical patrons, or the antiquar-
ies of the Royal Irish Academy.[29]

It is not so easy to detect changes introduced into prose works when scribes
copied the text from one manuscript to another. It is often difficult for those begin-
ning research in this area to keep firmly in mind the distinction between on the
one hand the *text*, the set form of words, whether prose or verse, or a mixture of
both, which were put together by the original author to convey his message, and
on the other hand the *manuscript*, the physical sheet or book of paper, parchment
or vellum onto which at some point in time a scribe has written the text.
Obviously the date of a medieval manuscript is useful in establishing that any text
it contains can not be *later* than the time it was transcribed into it (though it some-
times happens that one finds a text inserted in modern handwriting onto what was
originally a blank space in a medieval manuscript). On the other hand, only the lin-
guistic features of the Irish and the internal evidence of the contents of the text can
tell one how much *earlier* the original author may have composed his piece before
that particular copy was made. That is one reason why it is always important for a
historian to read carefully the editor's introduction to a medieval Irish text, to glean
as much as possible from his or her comments on the language used, because this is
an additional feature of texts in Irish (or for that matter, medieval French or

25 Máire Herbert, 'Charter material from Kells' in Felicity O'Mahony (ed.), *The Book of
Kells: proceedings of a conference at Trinity College, Dublin, 6–9 September 1992* (Aldershot, 1994),
pp 60–77; Richard I. Best, 'An early monastic grant in the Book of Durrow' in *Ériu*, 10
(1928), pp 135–42. 26 See below, section on legal sources. 27 Katharine Simms, 'Bardic
poetry as a historical source' in Tom Dunne (ed.), *The writer as witness: Historical Studies XVI*
(Cork, 1987), pp 58–75. 28 Pádraig Ó Macháin, 'The early modern Irish prosodic tracts
and the editing of bardic verse' in H.L.C. Tristram (ed.), *Metrik und medienwechsel/ Metrics
and media* (Tübingen, 1991), pp 280–5 lists some autograph manuscripts of bardic poems.
29 For example, Méibhín Ní Urdail (ed.), 'Two poems attributed to Muireadhach Albanach
Ó Dálaigh' in *Ériu*, 53 (2003), pp 19–52. For a well-documented sample of the manuscript
transmission of bardic poetry see Eleanor Knott's notes on the manuscripts containing
poems by Tadhg Dall Ó hUiginn in Knott, *The bardic poems of Tadhg Dall*, i, lxxxix–xciv.

German) which does not apply to records written in the dead, virtually unchanging language of Latin.

A text as originally composed by its first author may be changed in *three* main ways, listed below. The later scribe may introduce slight changes because he has difficulty reading a particular word, or consciously or unconsciously he modernizes a spelling or grammatical form into the speech of his own day, or he incorporates into the main text a phrase or sentence that was originally a marginal or interlinear note or 'gloss' in his 'exemplar' the manuscript from which he was transcribing. Such slight *variae lectiones* (alternative readings of a word or phrase) would not provide sufficient cause to describe the copy as a separate version, or 'recension' of the text.

The second common change made by later scribes was to abbreviate the text by omitting some passages and rewording others. This very frequently occurs in the late medieval and early modern collections of the Irish annals. Since each of the annalists might choose different passages to omit, a comparison of their individual versions of the same original entry can provide more information to the historian than any one of them taken separately. (See section below on 'Annals').

The third type of alteration to an original text occurs when it is deliberately reworked by a later author to convey a new or additional message. At its simplest this might occur when a long genealogical poem listing the chiefs of a particular dynasty is given additional verses to bring the sequence of rulers up-to-date. For example, the Annals of Ireland by the Four Masters tell us that the poem 'Tug damh h'aire a Inse an Laoigh', listing the names of all the O'Brien chiefs who made their home in Ennis, was composed by Maoilín Óg Mac Bruaideadha, who died in 1602, during the time of Donnchadh Ó Briain, fourth earl of Thomond. However, the version of this poem found in the early eighteenth-century genealogical compilation known as the Leabhar Muimhneach ('the Munster Book') lists as many as seven earls of Thomond, and its authorship is attributed to the later poet, Eoghan Mac Craith,[30] who was presumably the reviser of the text. At other times changes were introduced for more subtle political or ecclesiastical motives, and this could apply not only to historical tracts on particular dynasties and the territories and tributes they could claim, but to sagas and saints' lives as well.[31] Once again it is very important to glean all the information available from the various editors' introductions to published medieval Irish texts as to the possible existence of different recensions of the same basic text, their date and provenance, and their relationship to each other, often shown in diagrammatic form as a *stemma*. Just as an archaeologist excavating a neolithic tomb should be careful not to ignore later structures built over it in medieval times,[32] so later generations of scribes might have very interesting reasons for the changes and revisions they saw fit to insert in an ancient text.

30 Ó Donnchadha (ed.), *An Leabhar Muimhneach*, pp 387–98; John O'Donovan (ed.), *Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland by the Four Masters* (7 vols, Dublin, 1851), vi, 2320–1.   31 See below, section on prose tracts.   32 See George Eogan, 'Prehistoric and early historic culture change at Brugh na Bóinne' in *RIA Proc*, 91 (1991), pp 105–26; Francis John Byrne, 'Historical note on Cnogba (Knowth)' in *RIA Proc*, 66 (1968), sect. C, no. 4, pp 383–400.

Medieval Gaelic sources are not administrative records composed as a practical aid to memory. They are scholars' compositions, designed for a purpose, willing their audience to take a particular view of people and events. If we can detect the author's purpose in writing a particular text, we can best decide what information to draw from it. The hyper-sceptical attitude a historian gains from working with these confessedly propaganda pieces can sometimes usefully be transferred to medieval and modern administrative records, which may also have been adjusted or tailored to satisfy an intended audience. Playing a battle of wits with the learned classes of Gaelic Ireland can prove useful training to encourage critical analysis of every newspaper article or public announcement encountered thereafter!

Two appendices follow my main text, in addition to a classified index to editions of the primary sources I have discussed in the course of this book, grouped according to my chapter headings, in order to facilitate readers searching the footnotes to locate the full bibliographical references. The two appendices supply samples from the Gaelic sources themselves. Appendix 1) contains extracts from annals, a genealogy and a bardic poem giving background information on a particular incident, the abduction of Ó Ceallaigh's wife by the king of Connacht in 1356, and the subsequent slaying of the king himself. Not only do the annal entries vary in the amount of information each retails, but their factual tone contrasts sharply with the bardic poem, written from the point of view of the delinquent king himself, while the genealogical information relates to the background context of a succession struggle within the royal Ó Conchobair dynasty which was to end in splitting the family into the two branches of Ó Conchobair Donn and Ó Conchobair Rúad. Appendix 2) gives an example of both an extract from a prose tract on family history, the early sixteenth-century *Craobhsgaoileadh Chlainne Suibhne*, and also contains apparent summaries of two later medieval brehon law agreements between the Ó Domhnaill chiefs of Donegal and their Mac Suibhne constables of the galloglass, the lords of the Fanad peninsula.

Annals

PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS

The first Gaelic sources that any local historian is naturally drawn to consult are the Irish annals. Almost all the main collections of annals are published with parallel English translations. Their editors have usually provided corrected dates in the margin, and furnished them with indices at the end listing all place and personal names occurring in the text. They are not only easy to use, but they provide an indispensable chronological framework, giving a sequence of events for most of the Gaelic lordships in the high middle ages. It has to be admitted, however, that their coverage is fullest for Connacht and Ulster. Munster annals have little information dealing with any period after the early fourteenth century, and no Irish annals were kept in Leinster after the twelfth century, although some useful information about Gaelic affairs in Leinster can be gleaned from the Latin texts of the Anglo-Irish annals.[1]

An excellent pamphlet by the late Professor Gearóid Mac Niocaill[2] not only describes the main sets of Irish annals and the circumstances of their compilation, but in a series of tables and appendices he lists the principal extant manuscripts containing Irish annals and the years they cover, the main Anglo-Irish annals, and a bibliography of modern scholars' studies on the various principal annal collections, though it should be noted that there have been further important publications on this subject since he wrote.[3] Nowadays it is also possible to access both the Irish text and English translations of the main annals on the internet, at www.ucc.ie/celt/

In book form the most widely accessible set of Irish annals are the Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland by the Four Masters edited and translated in seven volumes by John O'Donovan between 1851 and 1856, and reprinted many times thereafter. They contain the fullest island-wide coverage of events from prehistoric times to 1616 and are accompanied by elaborate and informative footnotes, particularly

1 See Bernadette Williams, *The annals of Ireland by Friar John Clyn* (Dublin, 2007), especially her introduction and notes. 2 Gearóid Mac Niocaill, *The medieval Irish annals* (Dublin, 1975). 3 For example, Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, 'Early Irish annals from Easter tables, a case re-stated' in *Peritia*, 2 (1983), pp 74–86; David Dumville & Kathryn Grabowski, *Chronicles and annals of mediaeval Ireland and Wales* (Suffolk, 1984); Kenneth W Nicholls, 'Introduction' to the *Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland by the Four Masters*, ed. John O'Donovan (facsimile reprint, 7 vols, Dublin, 1990); Aubrey Gwynn, *Cathal Mac Maghnusa and the Annals of Ulster*, ed. Nollaig Ó Muraíle (Enniskillen, 1998); Daniel P. MacCarthy, 'The chronology of the Irish annals' in *RIA Proc*, 98 (1998), sect. C, no. 6, pp 203–55; idem, *The Irish annals* (Dublin, 2008); Thomas M. Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland* (2 vols, Liverpool, 2006).

valuable because of the detailed information on place-names O'Donovan gleaned during his full-time work for the Ordnance Survey (1830–42). Many local historians in the past have seen little purpose in consulting other edited annal texts, all of which cover a shorter range of dates or a more restricted geographical area. The nineteenth-century pioneering scholar of medieval Gaelic history and society, Eugene O'Curry, praised the Annals of the Four Masters as 'this magnificent compilation   of the most certain and unimpeachable authority' and compared them for size and importance with the 'Great Book of Genealogies', compiled between 1650 and 1666 by Dubháltach Mac Fhirbhisigh, which he described as 'the last, the most perfect and the greatest of [the genealogical] works'.[4]

Today's historians, however, would prefer a source as close as possible to the events it described rather than opting for 'the last' account. The 'Four Masters' – the four early seventeenth-century annalists Brother Mícheál Ó Cléirigh, Cú Coigcríche Ó Cléirigh, Fearfeasa Ó Maolchonaire and Cú Coigcríche Ó Duibhgeannáin – compiled their annal collection from a large assembly of earlier texts, and laid great stress on the accuracy with which they retailed the information they found in these manuscripts,[5] but they reworded and abbreviated many of the original entries, sometimes misunderstanding what they read, sometimes censoring certain topics as detracting from the honour of the Irish nation or the Catholic church.[6] We should not judge them too harshly. In this editing of older accounts they were only supplying the final layer to a long process of copying and recopying which formed the Irish annals as we have them now.

THE COMPILATION OF THE EARLY ANNALS

Annals, unlike chronicles or histories, are not in narrative form. There is no attempt at continuity either from year to year, or even from one entry to another within the list of events for any one year. They are organised as notes of what were considered at the time to be important events taking place year by year in Ireland, with occasional references to happenings elsewhere in Europe.

They inherited this format from their early origins. Annals developed in part from marginal notes of memorable events inserted opposite particular years in the liturgical calendars or 'Easter tables' of early medieval monasteries both in Ireland and on the Continent.[7] The earliest Irish monks who used scattered notes like these

4 Eugene O'Curry, *Lectures on the manuscript materials of ancient Irish history* (Dublin, 1861; repr., 1995), pp 159, 228; see Nollaig Ó Muraíle (ed.), *The Great Book of Irish Genealogies (Leabhar Mór na nGenealach) compiled (1645–66) by Dubhaltach Mac Fhirbhisigh* (5 vols, Dublin, 2003).   5 See Paul Walsh, *The Four Masters and their work* (Dublin, 1944); Bernadette Cunningham, *O'Donnell histories: Donegal and the Annals of the Four Masters* (Rathmullan, 2007), pp 1, 63; Edel Breathnach & Bernadette Cunningham (eds), *Writing Irish history: the Four Masters and their world* (Dublin 2007).   6 Bernadette Cunningham, 'The culture and ideology of Irish Franciscan historians at Louvain, 1607–1650' in Ciarán Brady (ed.), *Ideology and the historians: Historical Studies XVII* (Dublin, 1991), pp 11–30, 223–7.   7 See, for exam-

to build up a systematic record of notable events in their area, such as the deaths of famous churchmen or kings, battles, famines and plagues, were the Columban community in Iona in the late sixth and seventh centuries, writing in Latin. Their original records are lost, but at some point between the eighth and the tenth century the 'Iona Chronicle' was combined with the contents of a number of other standard sources found in monastic libraries such as the Eusebian chronological tables, translated into Latin in AD 380 by St Jerome, the annals of the late fourth-century Roman historian Ammianus Marcellinus, the early fifth-century Chronicle of Prosper of Aquitaine, the World Chronicle of the Venerable Bede of Northumbria written in 729, and the repeatedly updated Book of the Popes (Liber Pontificalis).[8] From all these and similar sources was created an Irish version of a Christian world history, which fitted the journeyings of the Children of Israel and the life of Christ into the time-frame of the reigns of kings and emperors in the Ancient World, and inserted here and there the mythical prehistoric kings and invasions of Ireland under dates that were considered to be appropriate.

This 'Irish World Chronicle' has generated considerable controversy. Modern scholars differ in their opinions as to the precise century in which it was compiled, or the monastery in which the work was done, Iona, Bangor, Armagh, or somewhere in the Irish Midlands. Crucially there is also uncertainty about the point in the compilation at which the entries concerning Irish events cease to be largely reconstructed fictional accounts inserted at dates calculated by the monastic historian, and become, when dealing with the sixth or seventh centuries, transcripts or versions of real records of contemporary events composed by the early monks.[9] The reason for this uncertainty is that the original Latin 'Irish World Chronicle' like the 'Iona chronicle' which formed one of its sources, is now lost.[10] We can deduce that a version existed at Armagh in the tenth century, containing an amount of detailed information of contemporary Armagh interest in the Irish language added to the more Iona-centred Latin entries of earlier centuries. Either from there or from a Midlands monastic site, perhaps Clonard, the text was copied about 911 and brought to Clonmacnoise, where its contents formed the basis for the early entries in a number of surviving collections of Clonmacnoise annals, some preserving the original Latin language, some translating the entries into Irish, and one version ultimately being translated yet again into seventeenth-century English.[11] In

ple, R.L. Poole, *Chronicles and annals: a brief outline of their origin and growth* (Oxford, 1926); Ó Cróinín, 'Early Irish annals from Easter tables'; Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland,* 'Introduction' **8** Daniel P. MacCarthy has argued that the greater part of the non-Irish material used as a source for the Irish world chronicle was drawing on a lost, and indeed unrecorded, compilation *c.* AD 402–410 by Rufinus of Aquileia who, like St Jerome, had also translated the historical work of Eusebius into Latin. See 'The chronology and sources of the Early Irish annals' in *Early Medieval Europe*, 10 (2001), pp 335–41. **9** Hughes, *Early Christian Ireland: an introduction*, pp 99–159; Alfred P Smyth, 'The earliest Irish annals' in *RIA Proc*, 70 (1972), sect. C, pp 1–48; Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland*, i, 1–62. **10** Its contents have now been reconstructed as far as possible through comparison of the early entries in various extant annals by Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland.* **11** Dumville

the north an updated and somewhat abbreviated version of the Armagh recension was one very early source used by the late medieval Annals of Ulster.[12]

Fortunately historians dealing with Gaelic Ireland in the high middle ages do not have to grapple with the problems that surround the lost original annals of early Ireland. Their concern is with entries dealing with the eleventh to the seventeenth centuries, which we can be reasonably certain are derived from accounts composed within a few years of the actual events.

LATE MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN ANNALS: ULSTER

The existing manuscripts containing Irish annals mostly date between the fifteenth and the seventeenth centuries. Concentrating for its fourteenth- and fifteenth-century entries on the province of Ulster, though including news about other parts of Ireland, we have the Annals of Ulster (*AU*), (Trinity College Library, MS no. 1282, shelf ref. H. 1. 8) originally compiled by the archdeacon of Clogher, Cathal Óg Mac Maghnusa (MacManus, d. 1497/8) on the island of Senat (Belleisle in County Fermanagh), and continued up to the year 1541 in a second copy of his work (Oxford Bodleian Library, Rawlinson MS B 489). This was edited in four volumes by Hennessy and Mac Carthy with a parallel English translation and a very useful index (this and the edition of Annals of Inisfallen are the only sets of annals to index subjects as well as names and places).[13] The first volume, done by Hennessy, was criticised for its unsatisfactory editing, and a new edition of the early part was prepared by Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill (*AU2*).[14] On the other hand, Mac Carthy's editing of volumes 2 to 4 of the original edition was much praised, and the complete four-volume set by Hennessy and Mac Carthy was reprinted in 1998 with an extensive new introduction by Nollaig Ó Muraíle.[15] As might be expected of a source based in fifteenth-century Fermanagh, it contains a very full account of the acts of the Mág Uidhir (Maguire) rulers of this area, and since these were loyal vassals of the Ó Néill chieftains of Tír Eoghain for most of the fifteenth century, the Ó Néills are also fully and favourably reported on in its entries. Even more numerous are the references to Mac Maghnusa's colleagues, the other clergy and learned men of fifteenth-century Fermanagh, their wives, concubines and children, giving us a unique glimpse into the unselfconscious life-style of medieval Gaelic clerics in north-west Ulster.

& Grabowski, *Chronicles and annals*, pp 53–7, 93, 155–7, 163–4; Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland*,   58.   12 Mac Niocaill, *The medieval Irish annals*, p. 22; Tomás S. Ó Máille, *The language of the Annals of Ulster* (Manchester, 1910), p. 10.   13 William M. Hennessy & Bartholomew Mac Carthy (eds), *Annala Uladh: Annals of Ulster, otherwise Annála Senait, Annals of Senat: a chronicle of Irish affairs, 431–1131, 1155–1541* (hereinafter *AU*) (4 vols, Dublin, 1887–1901).   14 Seán MacAirt & Gearóid MacNiocaill (eds), *The Annals of Ulster (to AD 1131)* (Dublin, 1983).   15 Hennessy & Mac Carthy (eds), *Annala Uladh: Annals of Ulster*, facsimile reprint with introd. by Nollaig Ó Muraíle (4 vols, Dublin, 1998).
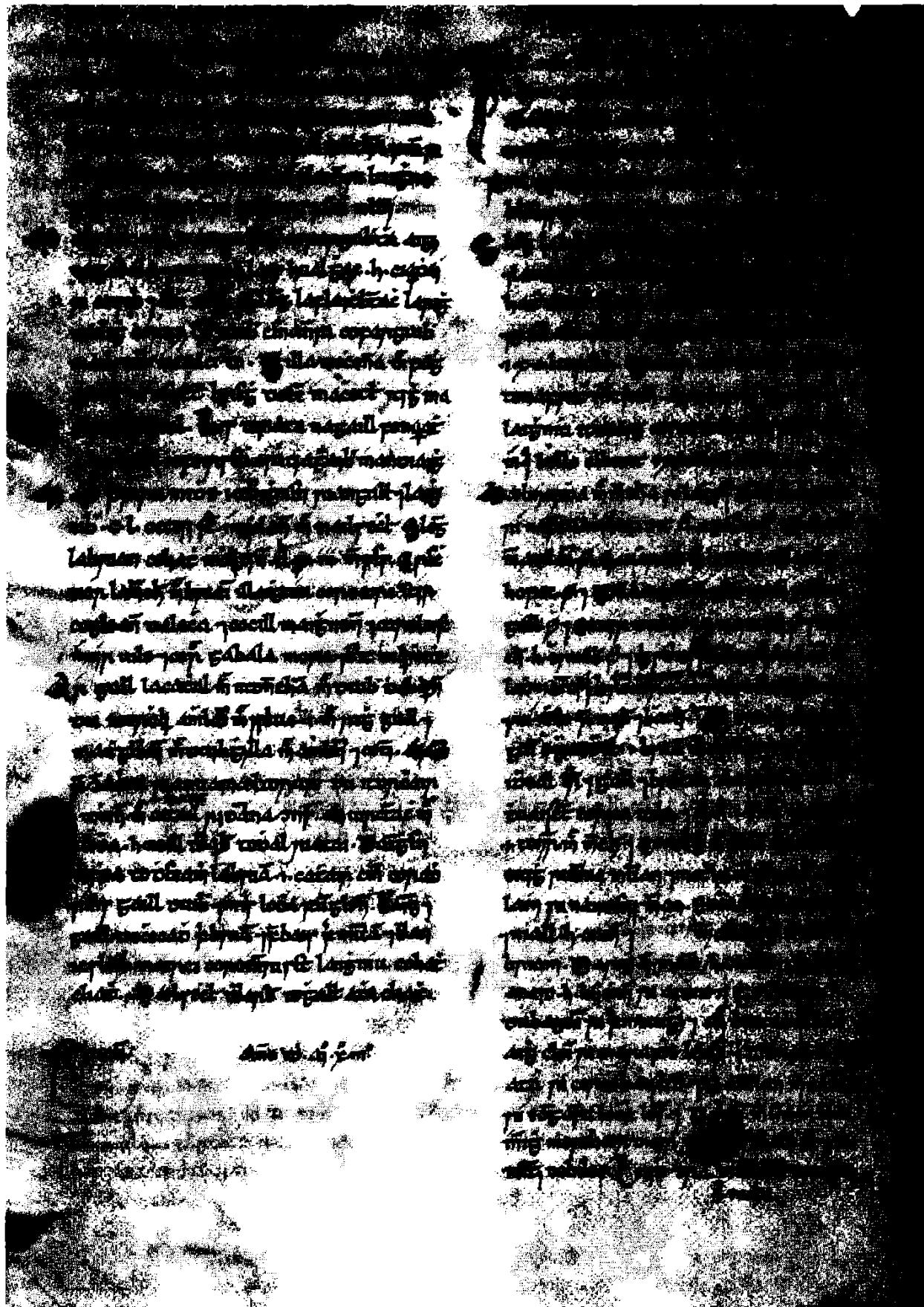
1 A page from the Annals of Ulster, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson B 489,
f. 36v. The illuminated 'K' for 'Kalens' on the top of the right-hand column marks
the importance of the year 1014, the Battle of Clontarf and the death of Brian Boruma,
king of Ireland.

Also mainly concerned with Ulster, and re-using a lot of material from Mac Maghnusa's annals, are the massive Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland by the Four Masters (*AFM*).[16] Despite the title, more than four traditionally-trained Irish historians and scribes worked by turn in this team effort, collecting information from a wide variety of earlier annalistic sources from around Ireland, but mainly from Connacht and Ulster, and editing the entries into a continuous series extending from earliest times to AD 1616. Leading the team was Brother Mícheál Ó Cléirigh, a scholar from the Irish College at Leuven.[17] His influence was very important to the work as a whole. On the one hand he was a member of the bardic family of Ó Cléirigh who supplied poets and historians to the Ó Domhnaill (O'Donnell) chieftains of Tír Conaill (the modern County Donegal), on the other he was an Observantine Franciscan friar whose time in Leuven had brought him into touch with a different attitude to history, one that called for clear identification of his sources, and treated of the history of nations rather than local chieftains. To force his annal compilation into this grander mode of history, Ó Cléirigh consistently noted the 'regnal year' of the high-king of Ireland at the beginning of each year's entry up to the Norman invasion, and almost always reworded entries about the doings of local Irish kings so as to downgrade their title to 'lord' (*tigheama*) or 'chieftain' (*taoiseach*). These cosmetic alterations served their purpose in giving many generations of later historians an exaggerated view of the extent of the influence and power of 'high-kings' over Ireland as a whole.

As well as using annals, Ó Cléirigh enlarged the earlier, legendary sections of his compilation by adding material from literary sources, principally the 'Book of Invasions' (Lebor Gabála), an ancient pseudo-history claiming to recount the various migrations into Ireland from the time of Noah's Flood onwards, which the Ó Cléirigh school had re-issued in expanded form around this time.[18] The Four Masters' compilation also drew on Lughaidh Ó Cléirigh's recent biography of Aodh Ruadh Ó Domhnaill (d. 1602) for entries covering the last years of the sixteenth century.[19] Soon after their completion the *AFM* were criticised by another traditionally-trained historian, Tuileagna Ruadh Ó Maolchonaire as being biased

16 O'Donovan's edition of *AFM* was based on transcripts of the Four Masters' work for the first section extending to AD 1171. For the second section he had access to one continuous autograph copy (RIA MSS nos 687–8 – 23/P/6–7) and a fragmentary autograph copy (TCD MS no. 1301 – H.2.11). See Paul Walsh, 'Manuscripts of the Four Masters' in *Irish Book Lover*, 24 (1936), pp 81–3 and idem, *The Four Masters and their work*, pp 10–14, 35–8; also Nollaig O Muraile, 'The manuscripts of the Annals of the Four Masters' in E. Bhreatnach & B. Cunningham (eds), *Writing Irish history: the Four Masters and their world* (Dublin, 2007), pp 61–4. 17 Brendan Jennings, *Michael O Cleirigh, chief of the Four Masters, and his associates* (Dublin & Cork, 1936); Paul Walsh, *Irish leaders and learning throughout the ages*, ed. Nollaig Ó Muraíle (Dublin, 2003), pp 350–70. 18 John Carey, *A new introduction by John Carey to Lebor Gabála Érenn: the Book of the taking of Ireland*, ed. and trans. R.A.S. Macalister (ITS, London, 1993), pp [6]–[7]; R. Mark Scowcroft, 'Leabhar Gabála: part I, the growth of the text' in *Ériu*, 38 (1987), p. 84 note 10, p. 88. 19 Paul Walsh, *Beatha Aodha Ruaidh Uí Dhomhnaill, the Life of Aodh Ruadh Ó Domhnaill* (2 vols, ITS, Dublin, 1948, 1957). See Pádraig Ó Riain (ed.), *Beatha Aodha Ruaidh: the life of Red Hugh O'Donnell, historical and literary contexts* (Dublin, 2002).

in favour of Ulster and the descendants of Niall of the Nine Hostages, and under-playing the political role in Irish history of his own patrons, the Ó Conchobhair dynasty of Connacht. Fearfeasa Ó Maolchonaire, one of the team of compilers, who was himself a Connachtman, insisted that the work had been completely accurate and unbiased,[20] but there are some signs of favouritism in these as in other annals. In the first place, the compilers used a number of lost Ó Cléirigh annals. Presumably these were the source of entries about the Ó Domhnaill chieftains, especially for the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, which are not found elsewhere, and not all of which are believable.[21] In the second place, when they are clearly using the text of Mac Maghnusa's Annals of Ulster as a source for some fifteenth-century entries, passages which are particularly favourable to the Ó Néill dynasty of Tír Eoghain, or discreditable to the Ó Domhnaill dynasty of Tír Conaill are repeatedly omitted or abbreviated,[22] and Mac Maghnusa's references to the clerical concubines of fifteenth-century Fermanagh[23] are left out altogether.

LATE MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN ANNALS:
CONNACHT AND MIDLANDS

For Connacht the two largest annal collections are known as the Annals of Connacht [*AC* or *Ann. Conn.*][24] and the Annals of Loch Cé [*ALC*].[25] The latter compilation has a large gap for the fourteenth century, where the editor William Hennessy chose to replace the missing text with extracts from the very similar *AC*. Although Hennessy puts a note in the margin of every page where he made this substitution, inexperienced – and occasionally even experienced – researchers may find themselves quoting *ALC* as their authority for an event in the mid-fourteenth century, whereas the actual Loch Cé annals have no entries at all for this period. After the end-date proper of 1590 in *ALC*, a few additional random entries have been added up to AD 1648, and similarly *AC*, although ending for practical pur-poses at AD 1543, contains further scattered notes from 1544 to 1588.

Both texts seem ultimately to derive from a lost book of annals compiled during the high middle ages by the Ó Maolchonaire school. These were traditional bardic historians or *seanchaidhe*, hereditary ollamhs to the Ó Conchobhair kings of Connacht, with their headquarters at Cluain Plocáin (Ballymulconry, County Roscommon). However, both of the extant manuscripts were worked on by members of the neighbouring Ó Duibhgeannáin *seanchaidh* school in Cell Rónáin

20 Cuthbert Mhág Craith (ed.), *Dán na mBráthar Mionúr* (2 vols, Dublin, vol. 1, text (1967), vol. 2, transl. and notes (1980)), i, 194; 78–94, 204–6. 21 See Brian Ó Cuív, 'Eachtra Mhuireadhaigh Í Dhálaigh' in *Studia Hibernica*, 1 (1961), p. 57, which comments on *AFM*, s.a. AD 1213. 22 See below, end of section on 'Influences on compilers of annals' for an example. 23 See Canice Mooney, *The Church in Gaelic Ireland: thirteenth to fifteenth centuries*; P.J. Corish (ed.), *A history of Irish Catholicism*, 2, fasc. 5 (Dublin, 1969), pp 56–60; Nicholls, *Gaelic and Gaelicised Ireland*, pp 108–10. 24 A. Martin Freeman (ed.), *Annála Connacht, the Annals of Connacht (AD 1224–1544)* (hereinafter *AC*) (Dublin, 1944). 25 See Introduction (above), n. 15.

(Kilronan, County Roscommon), hereditary historians to the Mac Diarmada chief-
tains, who were important vassals of the Ó Conchobhair kings.[26] The main body
of *ALC* was compiled in the second half of the sixteenth century for the chief
Brian Mac Diarmada (d. 1592) who took a lively interest in the work, and inserted
some entries in his own handwriting. One such note records the death of Henry
VIII in 1547 and erroneously refers to the succession not of his son Edward VI, but
of his daughter 'King Mary' ('Cing Maria').[27] *ALC* begins with a very romantic
account of the Battle of Clontarf in 1014. Its entries for the later twelfth century are
duplicates of material found in *AU* which appear to go back to records kept in the
Derry area at that period. By contrast the thirteenth-century annals have a very
strong concentration on events in Connacht, with a dramatic account of the
Anglo-Norman conquest there which appears at almost the same length in both
AC and *ALC*. For its thirteenth-century entries *AU* makes some use of this
Connacht material, although it also draws on a Derry source for the early thirteenth
century, and another from the Armagh area for the mid-thirteenth century. Some
of the late twelfth- and mid-thirteenth century entries in *ALC* are paralleled by the
earlier and sparser collection of Connacht annals compiled in the Cistercian abbey
of Boyle, County Roscommon, known as the 'Annals of Boyle', or 'Cottonian
annals' In this case we have the original thirteenth-century manuscript (British
Library, Cotton Titus MS A xxv),[28] but the annal sequence is incomplete, and ends
with AD 1257. There is also a fragment containing Connacht annals for AD 1237–
49, 1302–14 with wording related to the texts of *AC* and *ALC* preserved in a late
fourteenth- or early fifteenth-century fragment forming part of the Oxford,
Bodleian Library, Rawlinson MS no. 488 (folios 27, 28) and this has been edited
and translated as 'Fragment II' in the anthology *Miscellaneous Irish Annals* [*MIA*].[29]

The Annals of Clonmacnoise (*Ann. Clon.* or *ACl*) form another Connacht col-
lection with many entries whose contents parallel *AC* and *ALC*, but in this case it
is not possible to compare entries word for word, because the original Irish text is
lost. All that remains are late seventeenth-century copies of an English translation
made in 1627 by an educated aristocrat, Conell Mageoghagan, from an old manu-
script of Irish annals. He did this for the edification of a young kinsman, Terence
MacCoghlan, adding comments and some information from other sources as he
wrote. Since we no longer have the old and sometimes unreadable Irish language
manuscript from which Mageoghagan worked, it is not always easy to decide
which pieces of information were in the medieval Irish text, and which represent
the comments of the seventeenth-century translator.[30] There are further problems

26 Mac Niocaill, *The medieval Irish annals*, pp 32–3.   27 *ALC*, ii, 350–1, note 6.   28 A.
Martin Freeman (ed.), 'The annals in Cotton MS Titus A xxv' in *Revue Celtique*, 41 (1924),
pp 301–30; 42 (1925), pp 283–305; 43 (1926), pp 358–84; 44 (1927), pp 336–61. Discussion
of the date of the manuscript and the different scripts is in *Revue Celtique*, 44 (1927), pp 336–
7.   29 Séamas Ó hInnse (ed.), *Miscellaneous Irish annals, AD 1114–1437* (hereinafter *MIA*)
(Dublin, 1947), pp xiii–xiv, 116–43.   30 Denis Murphy (ed.), *The Annals of Clonmacnoise,
being Annals of Ireland from the earliest period to AD 1408 translated into English AD 1627 by Conell*

with Murphy's edition, which is not only based on an incomplete range of the extant manuscript copies, a drawback that also applies to *AFM*, but arbitrarily omits parts of the text that were available in the manuscript the editor used, because he considered them unedifying for the general public, for example a passage in which the Vikings are said to have practised the custom of *ius primae noctis*, by which the lord claims the right to sleep with every bride on her wedding-night, or an implausible tale involving the post-mortem castration of the high-king Niall Glúndub.[31]

Ann. Clon. ends at AD 1408. One of its merits is that it contains a little more information about the Irish of the Midlands, the Ó Maoilsheachlainn, Ó Maolmhuaidh and Mag Eochagáin chiefs of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, than can be found in the other Connacht collections. Another short set of annals which only survives in a translated form is 'The annals of Ireland, from the year 1443 to 1468, translated from the Irish by   Duald MacFirbis' (*Ann. MacFirb.* or *ADF*).[32] Duald MacFirbis, or Dubháltach Óg Mac Firbhisigh (d. 1671) was the last of a long line of hereditary *seanchaidh* historians, the Meic Fhirbhisigh of Lecan in County Sligo. In his writings he was able to draw on the many historical works collected or compiled by his family over the centuries, and originally kept at Lecan.[33] He used these family resources and his own research into other manuscripts to compile a 'Great Book of Genealogies' which will be discussed in the 'Genealogy' section below, but he was also paid by the Anglo-Irish scholar and antiquarian, Sir James Ware (1594–1666) to transcribe and translate some of the Mac Firbhisigh family's annal collections. Unfortunately Dubháltach had only just begun work on these fifteenth-century 'Annals of Ireland' when Ware died, the task of translation was abandoned, and the original Irish annals from which he was working are now lost. The wording of some fifteenth-century entries in *AFM* shows that the Four Masters had access to the Irish text that lay behind Mac Firbhisigh's translated fragment, but where the entries can be directly compared, we can see that Mac Firbhisigh's English-language version is longer and more circumstantial, whereas the Four Masters have abbreviated somewhat. *Ann. MacFirb.* is another source that pays rather more attention to the Irish of the Midlands than most Connacht annal compilations.

Like the fifteenth-century entries in *AU*, and the later sixteenth-century entries in *ALC*, the translated text of *Ann. MacFirb.* takes us back to the stage at which the

Mageoghagan (hereinafter *Ann. Clon.*) (Dublin, 1896; repr. Felinfach, 1993). **31** See BL Additional MS 4817 ff 69[72] r.–v., 80[83] r.–81[84] r., supplying gaps found in Murphy's edition of *Ann. Clon.* at pp 134, 153. I have to thank Ms Sarah Sanderlin for alerting me to the existence of these deliberate omissions in Murphy's edition. See also Sarah Sanderlin, 'The manuscripts of the Annals of Clonmacnoise' in *RIA Proc*, 82 (1982), pp 111–23. **32** O'Donovan (ed.), 'The Annals of Ireland   by   Duald MacFirbis' in *Miscellany of the Irish Archaeological Society* i, ed. John O'Donovan (Dublin, 1846), pp 198–302 (hereinafter *Ann. MacFirb.*). **33** Nollaig Ó Muraíle, *The celebrated antiquary* (Maynooth, 1996), pp 20, 42–4; O'Curry, *Lectures on the manuscript materials*, pp 124–7. However, Clann Firbhisigh's chief treasure, the late fourteenth- and early fifteenth-century historical miscellany, the Great Book of Lecan, may have passed out of family ownership by 1612 – see Walsh, *Irish leaders and learning*, ed. Ó Muraíle, p. 500.

annals were being first written in a leisurely extended style, recording events as they happened. These are the passages most valuable to the historian, in which the annalist shows his own emotional involvement with the events of his time and speculates as to how the future will turn out. A prime example of this contemporary commentary is the all-too-short fragment (AD 1397–1407) of the Annals of Saints Island, Lough Ree, principally written by Canon Aughuistín Magraidhin (d. 1405).[34] This not only gives us particularly good coverage of events in the Midlands and Breifne (the Ó Ruairc and Ó Raighilligh territories in Leitrim and Cavan respectively), but has unique discussion of Richard II's expeditions to Ireland, the submission of the Irish chiefs and the campaigns of Earl Roger Mortimer.

LATE MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN ANNALS: MUNSTER AND LEINSTER

Munster is poorly served for the high and later middle ages. For the last decades of the sixteenth century the Four Masters' use of a lost set of Mac Bruaideadha annals means that *AFM* contains a series of detailed entries dealing with the O'Brien lordship at this late period. The earliest of all the manuscripts containing annals to survive to our own day is Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson MS B 503, featuring the Annals of Inisfallen [*AI*].[35] This was a text compiled in a monastic environment under the influence of the Ó Briain kings. It was created by inserting retrospective entries of Munster interest into an abbreviated version of the 'Irish World Chronicle' as it had been received and continued in Clonmacnoise.[36] Entries genuinely based on current events in Munster began in the late tenth century and originally ended when the work was transcribed into the present manuscript about 1092, the date of the last entry in the main scribal hand. From 950 to 1065 the Munster entries are mingled with a continued use of material from the Clonmacnoise group of annals. From 1066 to 1092, when the main scribe's hand ends, the annals are a fully independent Munster account. This would indicate that the text of the annals in *AI* were probably compiled soon after 1066 by a Munster annalist who abbreviated a Clonmacnoise annalistic text and conflated it with Munster historical material, including some genuinely contemporary or near-contemporary records from c.950 onwards, and thereafter this newly-created Munster set of annals was continued independently from 1067 to 1092.[37] However, the pages following this last entry by the main scribal

34 Edited and translated as 'Fragment III' in *MIA*, pp xiv–xviii, 142–85.   35 Seán Mac Airt (ed.), *The Annals of Inisfallen* (MS Rawlinson B. 503) (hereinafter *AI*) (Dublin, 1951 and reprints). For other late collections using the title 'Annals of Inisfallen' see below, section on 'Antiquarian annal collections'   36 Richard I. Best & Eoin MacNeill (eds), *The Annals of Inisfallen reproduced in facsimile from the original manuscript (Rawlinson B 503) in the Bodleian Library* (Dublin, 1933), pp 28–9; Mac Niocaill, *The medieval Irish annals*, p. 25; Dumville & Grabowski, *Chronicles and annals*, p. 66.   37 Dumville & Grabowski, *Chronicles and annals*, p. 66.

hand had been left blank and the manuscript was subsequently updated by the addition of new annal entries from time to time using varying scripts and spellings. These can be seen in detail in the published facsimile of the actual manuscript.[38] From the contents of these additions we can see that the manuscript passed from an area of Ó Briain influence to one where the scribes' main interest was in the Mac Carthaigh family. Seán Mac Airt, the editor, has suggested the monastery of Lismore as the centre where it was being kept and updated in the early twelfth century, and that of Inisfallen in Kerry as the place where it was continued from the late twelfth century to the early fourteenth, breaking off in 1318, with only fragmentary notes, mostly death-notices, inserted thereafter.[39]

In common with the two main manuscripts of *AU*, and that of *ALC*, *AI* has a curious gap in the middle section of the twelfth century.[40] Mac Niocaill has hinted that the relevant folios from each set of annals may have been abstracted by a later antiquarian who had access to all of them.[41] Since the mid-twelfth-century gap in *AU* was not yet there when the folios of the Trinity manuscript were numbered by Sir James Ware between 1620 and 1632,[42] the 'pilfering' – as Mac Niocaill terms it – presumably took place some time after this. The later sections of *AI* show the influence of the twelfth-century reform of the Irish Church, which introduced standardised Continental rules into the monastic communities, and discouraged the study of traditional Irish secular learning in Church schools, and still more obviously demonstrate the impact of the Anglo-Norman invasion. In the mid-thirteenth century the writing changes from native Irish script to entries written in the Irish language, but using English script and phonetic English spelling (including the letters 'k' and 'y'), and later the annalists abandon Irish altogether in favour of entries in Latin. The same strange fashion of using English script to write Irish language entries phonetically is also seen in some mid-thirteenth-century entries in the Annals of Boyle,[43] so it was not due to the eccentricity of a single scribe, but reflected the fact that the classic script and spelling of the bardic scholars were no longer being taught in monastic schools. The transition of Irish annal-keeping in the mid-thirteenth century from a monastic environment to the secular bardic schools of the *seanchaidhe* is a stage that has been discussed by Barry O'Dwyer.[44]

While the Inisfallen manuscript is our main extant example of a collection of annals commenced in a pre-reform Irish monastic environment, other collections

38 Best & MacNeill (eds), *The Annals of Inisfallen*. 39 *AI*, pp xxviii–xxix. 40 Entries for the years 1115–62 are missing from the Trinity MS of *AU* and for the years 1132–55 from the Oxford MS of *AU*, for the years 1138–70 from *ALC* and for the years 1130–59 in *AI*. If there was pilfering of pages, the material thus removed presumably referred therefore to an event or events between 1138 and 1155. 41 Mac Niocaill, *The medieval Irish annals*, p. 25. 42 Daniel P McCarthy, 'The original compilation of the Annals of Ulster' in *Studia Celtica*, 38 (2004), pp 89–94. 43 Freeman, 'The annals in Cotton MS Titus A xxv', see above note 28 and Standish H O'Grady & Robin Flower, *Catalogue of Irish manuscripts in the British Museum [al. British Library]* (3 vols, London, 1926; repr. Dublin, 1992), , 5–12. 44 Barry W O'Dwyer, 'The annals of Connacht and Loch Cé, and monasteries of Boyle and Holy Trinity' in *RIA Proc*, 72 (1972), sect. C, pp 83–101.

of annals originally compiled in the tenth- to twelfth-century Church schools have come down to us through transcripts made either for the bardic schools of the high middle ages, or for the seventeenth-century antiquarians.

A parallel text to the twelfth-century entries in *AI* is contained in a late fifteenth-century manuscript known as 'Mac Carthaigh's Book' [*MacC*] which was one of the historical sources used by the imprisoned Florence MacCarthy Reagh (*c*.1562–1640) when he decided to while away his long incarceration by organising the compilation of a history of Ireland.[45] The name is also appropriate in that many of the entries concern the Mac Carthaigh chiefs and their kinsmen. What is interesting about this second set of Munster annals is that where their wording is very close to entries in *AI* they sometimes contain more details. Their editor Séamas Ó hInnse concludes that *MacC* drew from both *AI* and another lost set of Munster annals, or followed a set of Munster annals which had used *AI* as one of its sources. On the other hand there are signs in *MacC* that its compiler improved on his original annals with the help of other kinds of historical sources, including perhaps the work of the twelfth-century Cambro-Norman chronicler Gerald of Wales, particularly in the entries dealing with the Norman invasion.[46] Consequently where the same information occurs in the work of Gerald of Wales and in *MacC*, this set of Irish annals cannot be assumed to provide an independent source of information confirming Gerald's statement rather than simply quoting him.

Another originally ancient set of annals in the Clonmacnoise group, the Chronicum Scotorum [*Chron. Scot.*], only survives today in a seventeenth-century paper transcript made by An Dubháltach Óg Mac Firbhisigh (Trinity College Library, MS no. 1292, H.1.18), and later copies.[47] Sadly its last entry is at AD 1150, but for the earlier periods, while the chronology of the published edition is frequently a number of years out in its reckoning, the text is often fuller and more detailed than its closest parallel, the so-called 'Annals of Tigernach' [*Ann. Tig.*], named after one of the compilers, Tigernach Ua Brain, the 'coarb' or ecclesiastical superior of the churches of Clonmacnoise and Roscommon who died in 1088. The *Ann. Tig.*, like *Chron. Scot.*, begin with a Clonmacnoise version of the 'Irish World Chronicle' and continue with many gaps up to AD 1177. Today *Ann. Tig.* are most fully preserved in a fourteenth-century manuscript (Oxford, Bodleian Library Rawlinson MS 488).[48]

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45 *MIA*, pp vii–viii. 'Mac Carthaigh's book' is edited and translated as 'Fragment I' in *MIA*, pp 2–115. It contains a broken sequence of annals from AD 1114 to 1315, with two further long entries for 1398 and 1437, the latter listing a miscellany of events from various years in the fifteenth century. 46 Ibid., p. x. 47 *Chron. Scot.*, pp ix, xxv–xxx; Ó Muraíle, *The celebrated antiquary*, pp 97–107. 48 Eoin Mac Neill, 'The authorship and structure of the Annals of Tigernach' in *Ériu*, 7, pt i (1913), p. 39. The relationship between *Chron. Scot.* and *Ann. Tig.* is discussed in Dumville & Grabowski, *Chronicles and annals*, pp 155–205. For the text see Whitley Stokes (ed.), *The Annals of Tigernach* (hereinafter *Ann. Tig.*) (2 vols, Felinfach, 1993). The Irish Texts Society has made good the lack of an index in Stokes's edition with their separately published booklet Diarmuid Ó Murchadha, *The Annals of Tigernach: index of names* (London, 1997).

We are also indebted to An Dubháltach Óg Mac Firbhisigh for a text known as the 'Fragmentary annals', although only a seventeenth-century transcript (Brussels, Bibliothèque royale, MS 5301–5320) of Mac Firbhisigh's own copy remains. Mac Firbhisigh had transcribed the text from a 'broken book' of Giolla na Naomh Mac Aodhagáin, possibly the early fifteenth-century ollamh of that name. In their present state these annals are in five fragments, covering, with many gaps, the years AD 573–914. They are our only substantial group of annals with an interest focussed on Leinster, and their most recent editor, Joan Radner, has argued plausibly that they may represent fragments of the lost 'Annals of Clonenagh' which are cited as a source by the seventeenth-century historian Geoffrey Keating, author of a history of Ireland, Foras Feasa ar Éirinn.[49] If she is correct in this, the version or excerpts available to Keating extended over a considerably longer period, as he cites the 'book of annals of the church of Clonenagh' as his authority for proceedings at the Synod of Rath Breasail in 1111, and the Synod of Kells in 1152.[50] Similarly the 'Annals of Roscrea', an early version of the Irish world chronicle which continues only as far as AD 995, survives today in a single seventeenth-century transcript (Brussels, Bibliothèque royale, MS 5303).[51]

INFLUENCES ON THE COMPILERS OF ANNALS

The fact remains that the most bulky collections of annals available to us nowadays are the late medieval and early modern compilations which owe their existence to three characteristics of the age in which they were produced. One was obviously the increased level of education among the Irish aristocracy in the wake of the Northern European Renaissance, the invention of printing and the spread of literacy. Some patrons, for example the chief Fearghal Ó Gadhra who subsidised the work of the 'Four Masters',[52] and the antiquarian Sir James Ware who commissioned an English translation of the fifteenth-century Mac Firbhisigh annals,[53] had a university education. Another influence was the challenge to traditional Irish culture posed by the Tudor and Stuart conquest and colonisation of Ireland, provoking a desire among some of the Gaelic aristocracy, for example, Conell Mageoghagan, the translator and adapter of the Annals of Clonmacnoise, to preserve and reaffirm the glories of their heritage from the past. A third important movement which shaped people's thoughts in the early seventeenth century was the efforts of the Counter-Reformation to maintain and strengthen the Catholic faith in Ireland against the political and religious pressures exercised by the

49 Joan Radner (ed.), *Fragmentary annals of Ireland* (hereinafter *FAI*) (Dublin, 1978), pp vii–viii, xxvi note 44; David Comyn & P.S. Dinneen (eds), *Foras feasa ar Éirinn: the history of Ireland by Geoffrey Keating* (4 vols, ITS, London, 1902–14), iii, 212–13. 50 Comyn & Dinneen (eds), *Foras feasa*, iii, 298–9, 314–15. 51 Dermot Gleeson & Seán Mac Airt (eds), 'The Annals of Roscrea' in *RIA Proc*, 59 (1958), sect. C, pp 138–80. 52 Walsh, *The Four Masters and their work*, pp 25–31. 53 Ó Muraíle, *The celebrated antiquary*, pp 248–9, 271–2.

Protestant government. All these influences set the tone of newly composed annal entries dealing with current events in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries,[54] but they also helped to decide which entries from earlier centuries were going to be selected for inclusion in these later collections.

The sources that were being drawn on by the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century compilers were mostly older books of annals, created during the high middle ages to stock the libraries of hereditary schools of *seanchaidhe*, the traditional bardic antiquaries, or genealogists. These professional Gaelic scholars had two reasons for keeping a record of events as they happened, reasons which could seem almost contradictory to modern eyes. On the one hand an 'honest historian' (*seanchaidh ionraic*) was an important witness in law-suits, able to testify to the heir's correct line of descent in a dispute over land-inheritance, to certify the historical boundaries of an estate or a vassal territory, or to recite the customary payments due to a chief from his subjects.[55] Annal entries which recorded year by year the death dates of prominent aristocrats, with sufficient genealogical details to locate them correctly within their respective dynasties, and noted also the more important battles and treaties that took place between neighbouring territories helped to ensure that the 'honest historian' could testify accurately to past events.

However, the other role of a lay *seanchaidh* employed in the court of a particular king or chief was to magnify his master's prestige by perpetuating the memory of his royal ancestors' famous deeds, and to provide the raw material for the court poet's eulogies,[56] even to encourage the present ruler to practise the noble virtues of courage, generosity and justice by recalling examples of such qualities in the lives of his forefathers. The activities of the *seanchaidh* were seen as preserving that distinction between the nobility and the commoners which was fundamental to the Gaelic social order.[57] It was this propagandist side of the *seanchaidh*'s art which gave rise to eulogistic verses inserted into the prose annals when announcing the death of kings,[58] or extravagant descriptions of battle-scenes in the style of high romance, as for example:

> on that day the high-king's son showed a ruler's fury, a champion's endurance, a lion's prowess   Those who have knowledge of this great battle relate that the warriors of the host on that field could not look in the face of the high lord, for two great wide-glancing torches were flaming and flashing in his head, so that all feared to speak to him.[59]

54 See Bernadette Cunningham & Raymond Gillespie, *Stories from Gaelic Ireland: microhistories from the sixteenth-century annals* (Dublin, 2003).   55 Katharine Simms, 'Charles Lynegar, the Ó Luinín family and the study of *seanchas*' in T.C. Barnard, D. Ó Cróinín & K. Simms (eds), *A miracle of learning: studies in manuscript and Irish learning: essays in honour of William O'Sullivan* (Aldershot, 1998), pp 267–8.   56 Katharine Simms, 'Literacy and the Irish bards' in Huw Pryce (ed.), *Literacy in medieval Celtic societies* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 247.   57 Nicholas J. A. Williams (ed.), *The poems of Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe* (ITS, London, 1980), pp 211, 213.   58 O'Dwyer, 'The Annals of Connacht', p. 96.   59 *AC*, p. 117 [AD

Clearly this is designed to depict Áed son of Feidlim Ó Conchobair as a hero, and reinforces other indications that in the thirteenth century the Connacht annal entries were being composed by the Ó Maolchonaire family, court historians to the Ó Conchobair kings. Yet however hyperbolic the phraseology, the entry claims to report an impression of eyewitnesses of the battle, and quite possibly conveys a genuine recollection that the prince Áed threw himself enthusiastically into the fray on that occasion.

Loyalty to a particular dynasty could manifest itself not only in extravagant praise of its members, but in strategic omissions. For example, compare the accession of Toirdhealbhach Cairbreach Ó Domhnaill to the kingship of Tír Conaill as given in the pro-Ó Néill *AU* account:

> 1456 The sons of Ua Neill, namely, Toirdhealbhach the Red, and Ruaidhri, had gone that time a short distance from the castle. And they saw three horsemen and pursued them and Ua Domhnaill was slain by them Toirdhealbhach Cairbreach, son of Neachtain Ua Domhnaill [then] went to where Ua Neill was, and Ua Neill made him king over Tir-Conaill on that occasion. And he gave large donatives to Ua Neill and to his sons of kings and to his agents. And lordship [was] humbly [granted] to Ua Neill from that out by Ua Domhnaill[60]

with the version of the same events retailed by *AFM*, though the compilers were well aware of the *AU* text:

> 1456   the other party espied them and followed as quickly as they could until they overtook them; and then they did not shew them the rights of men, nor did they oppose to them an equal number of forces but the many rushed upon the few, so that O Donnell, Donnell the son of Niall Garv, was slain   Turlough Cairbreach the son of Naghtan [then] assumed lordship of Tirconnell.[61]

HOW TO MAKE THE BEST USE OF ANNALS

When using annals as historical sources, one should be aware as far as possible of their regional bias, and the layered process of copying and re-copying that produced them. Usually the editor's introduction to a published set of annals will give the reader some guidance on the age and provenance of the text and the stages in its compilation. The evidence of texts compiled nearer in time to the events they describe should in general be preferred to a later compilation, such as *AFM*. This is particularly true when close parallels in the phrasing of the text, and the ordering

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1256]. For a similar account see *AU*, iii, 137 [AD 1435].   60 *AU*, iii, 187–9.   61 *AFM*, iv, 996–7.

of events indicate that the later text is directly making use of an earlier text that we still have available to us today.

While as a rule of thumb the earliest source is most likely to be accurate, *AFM*'s seventeenth-century compilation made use of a number of sources that are now lost, and in so doing gave a more island-wide coverage for the high middle ages and early modern period. O'Donovan's edition of *AFM* has very easily searched indices at the back, as he gives cross-references between the English and Irish versions of both personal and place-names. Normally at the earliest occurrence of a place-name he appends a footnote to the main text which identifies its location and extent, using nineteenth-century civil parish, barony and county boundaries.[62] Most of O'Donovan's identifications have stood the test of time, though many minor corrections to his footnotes have supplied the subject-matter of notes in local history journals for the last century and a half. An additional source for the location of Irish place-names and population-groups is the monumental *Onomasticon Goedelicum*, though its use of Old Irish spelling conventions can make it somewhat off-putting for historians mainly concerned with the later middle ages. It is now accessible on the web at www.ucc.ie/locus/

Both for its comprehensive coverage and its helpful indices and footnotes, *AFM* may well be the best place to start for a researcher hoping to quarry information on a particular family or region from the annals. Once a series of informative annal entries has been located at various dates in this way, all the other available annals should be combed for parallel entries, in order to glean as many details as possible about each individual event, and to see how the treatment varies from one compilation to another – whether the different accounts of the same event are simply abbreviated in one way or another without alteration in the basic message, or whether the accounts are sufficiently diverse to stem from two or more independent records composed in the immediate aftermath of the incident. When comparing parallel versions of the same event in different annals, however, it is also important to remember that the English translations supplied by different editors can vary quite a bit, even when the actual Irish words describing an event in two compilations are identical. Researchers with little or no command of Irish are often able to look across from the editor's parallel translation to the original Irish text and identify the sentence that is of interest to them by the personal and place-names it contains, and then trace the occurrence of the same Irish sentence in another annal compilation, though they may find that it is spelled somewhat differently.

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62 Modern barony boundaries have been altered somewhat since O'Donovan's time. The maps in Samuel Lewis's *Topographical dictionary of Ireland* (2 vols & atlas, London, 1837) give the barony boundaries and approximate location of the civil parishes as O'Donovan knew them. While Lewis's publication is hard to get hold of, his county maps have been reproduced in the useful paperback Heraldic Artists' *Handbook on Irish genealogy*. For discussion on the origin of baronies and civil parishes, see William Nolan, 'Some civil and ecclesiastical territorial divisions and their geographic significance' in idem (ed.), *The shaping of Ireland: the geographical perspective* (Cork, 1986), pp 66–83; Patrick J. Duffy, 'The shape of the parish'

This exercise of comparing accounts of the same event across the range of the published annals will immediately bring to notice the uncertain dating of the annals. Some of the earlier annal collections had no AD dating inserted, relying instead on the ferial notation formerly found in Easter tables, where each year was identified by a note that the first of January fell on a particular day of the week, on a particular day in the lunar cycle, in a particular year of the nineteen-year Easter cycle and so forth. Fifteenth- or sixteenth-century lay annalists compiling from earlier sources were not always equipped to decipher this liturgical dating system, and indeed it could give trouble to some nineteenth-century editors also. Under this system each year began with a large K, standing for the Kalends or first day of January, and in the early parts of the annals, where no information was recorded for any one year or set of years, only the K, or a string of KKKKK's, was left to mark the vacant dates. This caused most confusion in relation to the earlier pre-Norman annal entries which originated in monastic schools using these liturgical dating criteria.

However, some problems can arise in the later period also. One common source of confusion was that while the traditional Roman calendar began on the first of January each year, the medieval English counted the year as beginning on Lady-Day, 25 March, which they reckoned as the first day of spring, and some Irish annals followed this convention. Consequently any eminent personage who died between 1 January and 25 March in any one year might have his death chronicled under two different years in different sets of annals. Crossing over from one system to the other in the same set of annals can cause a slippage of one or two years for a run of entries until the compiler notices and corrects the mistake. Both Paul Walsh and Daniel P. McCarthy have devised tables to correct the chronological errors in the Irish annals.[63] A problem with the later annals, such as *AFM*, where the compiler was drawing on a number of different sources, using different dating systems, is that some entries under the year heading may be perfectly correctly dated, and others taken from a different source, may be a year or two out. For example, in *AU* in the mid-thirteenth century, there is a sub-series of entries that are four or five years out of synchrony with the rest of the text. Because entries may be drawn from different and independent sources, the order of events noted under any one year cannot be assumed to be the historical order in which they occurred. Only where the annals are very close to contemporary recording, as for example the late fifteenth-century entries in *AU*, the translated fifteenth-century *Ann. MacFirb.* or the fragment containing entries compiled by Canon Aughuistín Magraidhin of Saints' Island, Loch Ree in *MIA* (Frag. III), could the sequence of entries under a

in Elizabeth FitzPatrick & Raymond Gillespie (eds), *The parish in medieval and early modern Ireland* (Dublin, 2006), pp 33–61. **63** Paul Walsh, 'The dating of the Annals of Inisfallen' in *Catholic Bulletin*, 29 (1939), pp 677–82 and 'The chronology of the early Irish annals' in *Irish Historical Studies*, 2 (1941), pp 355–75, both reprinted in Walsh, *Irish leaders and learning*, ed. Ó Muraíle, pp 477–99. McCarthy has re-visited the problem and revised Walsh's work both in his article 'The chronology and sources' (above, note 8) and on his web-site at http://www.cs.tcd.ie/Dan.McCarthy/chronology/synchronisms/annals-chron.htm.

specific year be taken to indicate the sequence of events. Sometimes, however, the annalist himself comes to our rescue, by mentioning that certain events took place 'in the Spring', 'in harvest', 'a week before Christmas' and so forth. At other times, he himself signals the existence of a problem. For example, in the following two entries in *AC*.

> 1401: The Attack of Cavan was delivered by the sons of Ó Ruairc

> 1403: War between the Muinter Raigillig and the Muinter Ruairc   And it is here that the attack of Cavan was made, as we have already related it, according to another book.[64]

The lesson to be learned is, when looking for parallel entries across the range of annals, it is wise to check the years immediately before and after the date sought. Moreover if it is important for one's purpose to know the *exact* date of an occurrence, it is best to seek confirmation of it from outside evidence, from Anglo-Irish administrative records, for example.

Having extracted the maximum information from a single annal entry by comparison between all the versions of the same event to be found in as many annal compilations as possible, the next problem to be tackled is the annals' habit of recording events as isolated notes, without making clear the historical context in which they occurred. To counter this, one should remember that although the author of the original annal entry did not set out to compose a continuous narrative, he was himself aware of the background to the events described, and familiar with the main protagonists, if only by reputation. If one starts some thirty years earlier than the annal entry of main interest, and reads through a single set of annals as if it was a historical novel, it will become clear that the annalist's interest centres round a limited cast of characters, and that a raid by one of these, for instance, normally provokes a counter-attack from his victims a year or two later. Seen in this light, a character obscurely referred to in one annal entry simply as 'Aodh', or 'the son of Mathghamhain', can be connected to his political status and family tree by reference to earlier records of his exploits in the entries of previous years. The burning of a church in a certain territory by the war-parties from some population group can be linked to an ongoing feud, and so forth. This continuous reading of long sections from a single set of annals will also enable the researcher to pick up on scattered items relevant to his/her main subject of interest that were not to be found through the Personal and Place-Names index, and did not appear as parallel entries in other sets of annals. One is gradually introduced to the annalist's own point of view, in other words, who are his villains and who his heroes, what events arouse his indignation and what his admiration, themes well discussed for the sixteenth-century annals by Cunningham and Gillespie.[65]

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64 *AC*, pp 381, 387.   65 Cunningham & Gillespie, *Stories from Gaelic Ireland*.

ANTIQUARIAN ANNAL COLLECTIONS: LATE SEVENTEENTH TO EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

Of course an annalist's contemporary viewpoint can only be gleaned if the wording of the original record has not been too heavily altered by later compilers. The Four Masters, for example, have strong views which come out in their account of the Henrician Reformation in Ireland, and these may reflect the values of their own Counter-Reformation education in the early seventeenth century, rather than the reaction of contemporaries in 1537–8.[66]

From the later seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries we have a number of paper manuscripts of annals compiled by the antiquarians of those times using the medieval and early modern annals as their sources. Normally historians make little use of these, as they assume all the information they contain is already to be found in the earlier collections. However, sometimes the eighteenth-century antiquarians had access to genuine annalistic material that has since been lost. This appears to have been the case with the Annála as Breifne or 'Annals from Breifne' text, which combines anecdotal oral tradition about the O'Reilly family with some more precise records, especially from around the year 1300 which mention battles involving Sir Geoffrey de Geneville, lord of Trim, and his followers in such detail that although there are no parallel entries on these events in the other Connacht annals, some contemporary record would appear to lie behind the existing account.[67] Another enigmatic text from the eighteenth century is the Dublin Annals of Inisfallen.[68] These were compiled in 1765 by John O'Conor, who relied for much of his information on an annal source identical with or related to the genuinely medieval manuscript of *AI*, Rawlinson B 503. However, as well as being somewhat reworded, his version contains half-sentences here and there of additional information. It is tantalisingly difficult to be sure that these little additions are simply flourishes of John O'Conor's narrative style, as frequently happened in the case of Conall Mageoghagan's translation of the Annals of Clonmacnoise, or whether he is drawing on a lost text of genuinely medieval annals, or on the slightly earlier eighteenth-century literary texts formed by amalgamating Munster annal entries with prose and verse accounts of the Battle of Clontarf.[69] We have some reason to believe that more genuine annalistic material from Munster was available in the eighteenth century than is available to us now, since historians are agreed in accepting the list of decrees passed by the First Synod of Cashel in 1101 as based on a genuine record, though our only witness to their content comes in an early eighteenth-century paper manuscript containing a genealogical tract on the O'Brien

66 *AFM*, v, 1444–49; compare with *AC*, pp 708–11; *ALC*, ii, 314–17; *AU*, iii, 624–5. 67 Éamonn De hÓir (ed.), 'Annála as Breifne' in *Breifne*, 4, no. 13 (1970), p. 65. See discussion in James Carney (ed.), *A genealogical history of the O'Reillys* ([Cavan], 1959), pp 19–20. 68 See *AI*, p. vii. 69 See *AI*, p. viii, and now Méidhbhín Ní Urdail, 'Some observations on the Dublin Annals of Inisfallen' in *Ériu*, 57 (2007), pp 133–53.

family.[70] Nevertheless, since all such eighteenth-century derivative annals were compiled in an atmosphere of nostalgia and patriotism, they should be used with extreme care, if at all, as possible sources of information on the medieval period.

70 Standish H. O'Grady (ed.), *Caithréim Thoirdhealbhaigh: the Triumphs of Turlough* (2 vols, vol. 1 text, vol. 2 trans., ITS, London, 1929), i, 174–5; ii, 185–6; Ó Donnchadha (ed.), *An Leabhar Muimhneach*, p. 341; for comment see Aubrey Gwynn, *The Irish Church in the eleventh and twelfth centuries*, ed. Gerard O'Brien (Dublin, 1992), pp 155–6.

Genealogies

PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS

Research into the genealogies of medieval Ireland has suddenly become a lot easier with the publication of Nollaig Ó Muraíle's multi-volume edition of the Great Book of Genealogies by An Dubháltach Óg Mac Firbhisigh (d. AD 1671), the first comprehensive collection of its kind to be printed with an English translation.[1] Like the Annals of the Four Masters, the Great Book of Genealogies has the advantage of very comprehensive coverage over a long period of Irish history, but the disadvantage of being a late compilation. The pedigrees have been transcribed and in many cases updated out of earlier manuscripts, and these earlier manuscripts were in turn transcribed and updated from previous genealogical compilations. This means that while the more modern sections of these pedigrees have only gone through a few copies, the strings of ancestral names found in the sections referring to the earlier medieval, protohistoric and mythological periods have been transcribed repeatedly from one collection to another over hundreds of years, and have inevitably gathered corruptions, omissions, insertions and misspellings in the process of transmission.

As in the case of the Irish annals, Irish genealogies were compiled over time in three contexts: in the Church schools of early medieval Ireland until the twelfth-century standardisation of the organisation of the Irish Church which brought a corresponding change in the curriculum of Church schools, then in the secular schools of bardic learning between the thirteenth and the sixteenth centuries, and lastly by antiquarian scribes and hedge-schoolmasters working under aristocratic patronage in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

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1 Ó Muraíle (ed.), *The Great Book of Irish Genealogies*. Before the appearance of this publication, apart from the miscellany edited by Toirdhealbhach Ó Raithbheartaigh, *Genealogical Tracts I* (IMC, Dublin, 1932), genealogical materials in translation were normally only published in relation to individual families or groups of families, some of the most significant being Appendices A–D containing tracts on the Burkes, Butlers, Geraldines and O'Briens that O'Grady added to his edition of Caithréim Thoirdhealbhaigh, the O'Donnell genealogies printed in volume 2 of Walsh, *Beatha Aodha Ruaidh*, and O'Donovan's *Tribes and customs of Hy-Many* (Dublin, 1843), *The genealogies, tribes and customs of Hy-Fiachrach* (Dublin, 1844) and 'The genealogies of the Corca Laidhe' in *Miscellany of the Irish Archaeological Society* (Dublin, 1849), pp 3–144 dealing with east Galway, Mayo/west Sligo and west Cork respectively.

THE PRE-TWELFTH-CENTURY COLLECTIONS

It is no doubt true that oral genealogies had long been recounted and memorised by Irish sages before the written learning of the Church schools was developed, but as Kenneth Nicholls has discussed, comparative studies in other non-literate cultures indicate that oral genealogies are subject to 'telescoping' by the omission of intervening less memorable generations between the recent past and the famous distant ancestor figure, together with other more politically inspired alterations.[2] Indeed politically inspired alterations and adaptations could and did also take place after the development of a written genealogical record, but at least the changes are easier to trace by comparing earlier and later written versions. Nowadays much of the work of the early Irish Church scholars in this field has been published, though not translated. O'Brien in his *Corpus Genealogiarum Hiberniae I*[3] edited the earlier and later versions of what was essentially the same basic genealogical compilation preserved in two twelfth-century manuscripts, Oxford, Bodleian Library MS, Rawlinson B 502 (*c.* AD 1120), and the 'Book of Leinster' (Dublin, Trinity College Library, MS 1339 (H.2.18) *c.* AD 1160). Another early compilation with a Munster emphasis was preserved in the fifteenth-century manuscript known as the 'Saltair of MacRichard Butler' (Oxford, Bodleian Library MS, Laud Miscellany 610), and this early genealogical collection was edited without translation by Kuno Meyer.[4] A fourth version preserved in the Connacht fourteenth- to fifteenth-century manuscript, Dublin, Trinity College Library H.   17 still remains unedited.

In contrast to the annals, which were being maintained in Latin during the seventh century, genealogies were one of the first classes of text to be recorded in Irish. The earliest known to us are some long genealogical poems on the kings of Leinster, and one on Cathal 'Cú cen máthair' or 'Motherless Hound', king of Cashel (provincial king of Munster) who reigned AD 662–665.[5] These early poems display a clear clerical agenda. They already show the long sequence of names stretching backwards from mythical kings in Irish prehistory through 'Míl', or Milesius, supposed to be the common ancestor of all the Gaels in Ireland, to biblical descendants of Noah and Adam. This same list of fictitious ancestors was to be repeated between the eighth and the twelfth centuries with ever-increasing elaborations as the core of a clerical pseudo-history of the Irish race found in the Lebor Gabála, or 'Book of Invasions'.[6] The names of pagan gods such as Lug and Nuadu

2 Nicholls, 'Genealogy', p. 156. 3 Michael A. O'Brien (ed.), *Corpus Genealogiarum Hiberniae* (Dublin, 1962; repr. 1976) (hereinafter *Corp. Gen.*). 4 Kuno Meyer (ed.),'The Laud genealogies and tribal histories' in *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie*, 8 (1912), pp 291–338. 5 *Corp. Gen.*, pp 1–9, 199–202. Donnchadh Ó Corráin has argued in some detail for a seventh-century date for the Leinster poems in his paper 'Irish origin legends and genealogy: recurrent aetiologies' in Tore Nyberg et al. (eds), *History and heroic tale* (Odense, 1983), pp 56–67, while John Carey suggests the Munster poem to Cú cen máthair may date to the early eighth century in his essay 'Lebor Gabála and the legendary history of Ireland' in Helen Fulton (ed.), *Medieval Celtic literature and society* (Dublin, 2005), pp 35–6. 6 See Carey, '*Lebor Gabála* and the legendary history of Ireland', pp 33–6; Scowcroft, '*Leabhar*

appear in the ancestry claimed for Irish kings, just as most Anglo-Saxon kings claimed descent from Woden,[7] and a prime purpose of these first written genealogies may have been to substitute a human ancestry for all the royal families of Ireland, linking them with the biblical story of Noah's flood, and tracing them back to 'Adam, son of the living God'.[8]

Very quickly, however, the fictitious pre-historical framework set up by literate churchmen began to be used to serve more political purposes.[9] Kingdoms were rated as destined to rule or to render tribute, depending on whether their inhabitants were believed to descend from the Gaelic warrior Míl, or from the earlier inhabitants of Ireland, the Fir Bolg and Gaileóin, conquered and reduced to servitude, first by the divine race of the Tuatha Dé Danann, and then by the Milesians.[10] The different sons of Míl were regarded as having founded the royal dynasties of different regions of Ireland, Éremón's descendants were supposed to include the Uí Néill and Connachta, ruling the west, north-west, and Midlands, while Éber's descendants were seen as the Eóganachta, the federation of dynasties then ruling Munster. Dynasties who had fallen from power, but were still unwilling to associate themselves with the newly dominating families, claimed descent from other sons of Míl. The Ulaid traced themselves to Ír son of Míl, and were followed in this by a number of small but would-be independent kingdoms around Ireland in Kerry, Laois and Longford regions, most of them explaining their kinship with the Ulaid through the legendary exile of the Ulster hero, Fergus mac Róig, mentioned in the Old Irish saga Táin Bó Cúailgne, 'The Cattle-raid of Cooley'.[11] The Érainn dynasties in south-west Munster, remote ancestors of the modern O'Driscolls, claimed descent from Íth, said to be either a brother or son of Míl.[12]

Not only are all these remoter genealogical claims unprovable (unless the wonders of modern genetics eventually allow us to test their plausibility),[13] they refer to a prehistoric past. The myth of the invasion of Ireland by the sons of Míl or Milesius is only relevant to the researcher of medieval history because it provides the framework within which the later genealogies were arranged. Every later *surname* was ordered under its earlier *dynastic group*, its wider *population group*, and its presumed

Gabála: part I, the growth of the text'   7 Francis J. Byrne, *Irish kings and high-kings* (London, 1973; 2nd edn, Dublin, 2001), p. 55; Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'Nationality and kingship in pre-Norman Ireland' in T.W Moody (ed.), *Nationality and the pursuit of national independence: Historical Studies XI* (Belfast, 1978), p. 5; Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Lib. 1, cap.15 (trans. Leo Sherley-Price, *Bede: a history of the English Church and people* (2nd edn, London, 1968), p. 56).   8 Charles Doherty, 'Kingship in early Ireland' in Edel Bhreathnach (ed.), *The kingship and landscape of Tara* (Dublin, 2005), pp 21–4.   9 Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'Creating the past: the early Irish genealogical tradition' in *Peritia*, 12 (1998), pp 177–208.   10 See R. Mark Scowcroft, 'Leabhar Gabhála part II: the growth of the tradition' in *Ériu*, 39 (1988), pp 41–53.   11 Ruairí Ó hUiginn, 'Fergus, Russ and Rudraige' in *Emania*, no. 11 (1993), pp 31–40.   12 O'Donovan, 'The genealogies of the Corca Laidhe'   13 See Laoise Moore, Brian McEvoy, E. Cape, Katharine Simms & Daniel G. Bradley, 'A Y-chromosome signature of hegemony in Gaelic Ireland' in *American Journal of Human Genetics*, 78 (Feb. 2006), pp 334–8.

descent from a son of Míl. For example, the Mac Mathgamna or MacMahon (*surname*) chiefs of Monaghan, together with their collateral Ó Cerbaill or O'Carroll (*surname*) kinsmen, belong to the Uí Nadslúaig *dynasty* within the Airgialla (*population group*), a federation of mid-Ulster kingdoms who claimed descent from the Three Collas, and ultimately from Éremón son of Míl.[14] Ways of locating modern surnames within these genealogical groupings will be suggested later in this chapter.

Already in genealogical compilations drawn up by the Church scholars of the twelfth century and earlier, two distinct classes of genealogy have evolved, the pedigree (*genelach*) and the family tree (*craíbscaíled*). These were intended to serve two distinct functions. The pedigree begins with the name of a contemporary king, reigning in the time of the compiler, and traces that man's genealogy back through his direct ancestors, father, grandfather, great-grandfather and so on, in order to prove that the present king is of the true blood of the historic or prehistoric hero who gave his name to the dynasty, and that that hero was himself a true descendant of the ruling Gaels of Ireland, the descendants of Míl, who in turn were descended from Japheth son of Noah, traditionally held to be the ancestor of all European peoples after the biblical Flood.

Since the purpose was to make a political statement of contemporary relevance about the 'nobility' of a particular king's blood, and not to keep a general historical record, famous earlier members of the family who did not produce famous descendants are very seldom noted in these pedigrees. In the few instances where this occurs the formula used is 'x son of y, of whom another son was z', where 'z' is the famous collateral ancestor with no recorded descendants, for example the legendary Mongán mac Fiachna, prince of the Ulaid, of whom his dynasty were extremely proud, but from whom they could not claim direct descent.[15] A reigning king might be the brother and cousin of many kings and yet have few kings as direct ancestors. In the Book of Leinster, for instance, this defect is supplemented by the prose or verse king-list, or *réim rígraid*.[16] These are based on the territory or population ruled, and list the rulers from prehistoric times in chronological order, sometimes giving their father's name and/or the length of years they ruled, an arrangement probably inspired by Church records such as the Book of the Popes, or the lists of abbots of particular Irish houses. Annals can help to attach definite dates to a number of the named rulers in these king-lists, but many of the kings are listed with too few details about their ancestry to fit them into the existing pedigrees with any certainty.

The *craíbscaíled* or 'spreading of branches', the family tree, is a more helpful form of genealogy for the historian. In contrast to the pedigree, it starts at the other end,

14 See Pádraig Ó Maolagáin, 'Uí Chremthainn and Fir Fernmaighe' in *Journal of the County Louth Archaeological Society*, 11 (1947), pp 157–63.   15 Nora White (ed.), *Compert Mongáin and three other early Mongán tales* (Maynooth, 2006), pp 46, 61–70; Kuno Meyer (ed.), *The Voyage of Bran son of Febal* (London, 1895; repr. Felinfach, 1994), pp 42–90. See Byrne, *Irish kings and high-kings*, p. 112.   16 Richard I. Best, Osborn Bergin & Michael A. O'Brien (eds), *The Book of Leinster, formerly Lebar na Núachongbála*, i (Dublin, 1954), 94–9, 180–201.

with the founding ancestor of a dynasty, whether Míl himself, or Niall of the Nine Hostages, or Brian Bóraimhe. It lists all his sons, and then all the known sons of his sons. It records sons and brothers who had no known descendants (identified as 'díbaid', 'having no male issue'), it distinguishes the ancestor through which later kings descended, 'o tát/ó bfuilit an rígraid', 'from whom are the royal line', and it also notes the king's brothers who became ancestors of local chieftainships or groups of landowners related to the main ruling dynasty (*'x o tát/o bfuilit slicht/clann x'*, 'x from whom are the sept/clan of x', '*y a quo* [Latin, 'y from whom (descend)] *slicht/clann y'*). Certain versions even include information about the mothers of the various princes. Here the problem is that in the case of branches of the family with lesser wealth and power, the tendency is simply to note the founding ancestor of their branch, normally a younger brother of a king, and then to comment that he is the link between the sub-chiefs of such-and-such a territory, and the royal line, without detailing his descendants any further. Where a *craíbscaíled* starts with Míl the first Gael, it becomes a master-plan, demonstrating how all the royal dynasties of Ireland can theoretically be traced back to a single ancestor, and noting where the rulers of each region branch off the main line (in this format the main line is taken to be the Uí Néill high-kings of Ireland), and consequently how closely or distantly they are connected to the blood of the high-kings. For example, 'Hic Cairpriu Liphechair condrecat Airgialla fri Huu Néill & Con[n]achtu',[17] 'The Airgialla join the Uí Néill and the Connachta at Cairbre Lifechair [son of Cormac mac Airt]'

These early genealogies have been published in Old and Middle Irish without a translation, but since they largely consist of lists of names, they can be studied with some profit by those having only a limited knowledge of Irish, particularly the pedigrees, which begin with the name of a reigning king and trace his ancestry back directly by listing his father, his grandfather, great-grandfather and so forth. The *craíbscaíled* which traces the branching out of lines from a single remote ancestor is more conversational, and here the safest approach may be to find the corresponding passage in the Great Book of Irish Genealogies compiled by the seventeenth-century Dubháltach Mac Firbhisigh, and now supplied with an English translation by Nollaig Ó Muraíle[18] and compare the Irish text of Mac Firbhisigh with that found in the *Corp. Gen.* to check for any corrupt readings that may have developed over centuries of copying and recopying.

However dubious the methods used by Church scholars to give their patrons pedigrees leading back to Adam, we can at least be confident that they knew the names of the kings of their own day, and probably also their immediate ancestors. After the first written pedigrees were concocted in the seventh century, they were periodically updated and added to by later scholars. This produced a long and in many cases surprisingly reliable record of successive generations of the most prominent dynasties, such as the Uí Néill and Eóganacht. Even more interesting in some

17 *Corp. Gen.*, p. 137.   18 Ó Muraíle (ed.), *The Great Book of Irish Genealogies*.

ways was the fate of families who ceased to be politically important. Their early genealogical record remained unchanged in the compilation. It was copied and re-copied by later scribes, but never updated. The latest recorded name of a ruler from a once important but ultimately unsuccessful dynasty will indicate the approximate date in which some scholar was engaged in one of the periodic revisions of the genealogies, the last revision in which this particular family was going to be noted. In this way we can tell that the earliest manuscript copies of the Irish genealogies in Rawlinson B 502 and the Book of Leinster had already been revised and updated a number of times between the seventh and the twelfth century. In fact the Book of Leinster represents an update of the collection in Rawlinson B 502. For exam-ple, the Clann Cholmáin, or royal dynasty of Meath, was recorded in Rawlinson B 502 about AD 1120 as consisting of 'Murchad & Máel-Sechnaill & Murcherdach & Diarmait, cethri meic Domnaill m[eic] Flaind m[eic] Mael-Sechnaill m[eic] Domnaill '[19] Murchad (king of Meath, 1106–53), Máel-Sechnaill (king, 1115), Muirchertach (king, deposed 1106) and Diarmait (king, 1127–30), four sons of Domnall son of Flann son of Mael-Sechnaill (high-king of Ireland, d. 1022) son of Domnall etc.' However, the Book of Leinster, about AD 1160 lists the pedigree of the king of Meath as 'Máel Sechnaill m[ac] Murchaid m[eic] Domnaill m[eic] Fhlaind m[eic] Domnaill m[eic] Máel Shechnaill m[eic] Domnaill '[20] Now we have not only got the name of King Murchad Ó Máelshechlainn's son and succes-sor, Máel Sechnaill, and lost the names of Murchad's brothers, but the Book of Leinster version correctly includes in his ancestry the name of another Domnall, the son of the high-king Máel-Sechnaill and the father of Flann, who was acci-dentally omitted from the pedigree in Rawlinson B 502.

COMPILATIONS FROM THE HIGH MIDDLE AGES

Updating the pedigree of an old-established line who continued in power was a simple matter. A greater problem for the medieval genealogists was presented in the case of a family which rose to prominence in a later period, but whose ancestors had not been recorded during the time of the earliest genealogical compilations, or when a line of chieftains lost power and were ignored for a while by the genealogists, but then came back into the limelight, and needed to have their modern pedigrees re-connected to their last recorded ancestors. The gap appears to have been filled by a mixture of oral tradition and invention. Séamus Ó Ceallaigh has discussed this state of affairs in relation to the medieval O'Neills,[21] whose line in Rawlinson B 502 and the Book of Leinster stops with Aed Craibe Telcha Ó Néill (d. 1003), but who dominated Ulster in the high middle ages, when the secular schools of the *seanchaidhe* or bardic historians had taken over the task of updating the genealogies.

19 *Corp. Gen.* p. 159. 20 Anne O'Sullivan (ed.), *The Book of Leinster, formerly Lebar na Núachongbála*, vi (Dublin, 1983), 1466. 21 Séamus Ó Ceallaigh, *Gleanings from Ulster history* (Cork, 1951; enlarged edn, Draperstown, 1994), pp 85–7. See also Simms, *From kings to war-*

A number of the earliest of these secular texts from the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century are in bardic verse, like the original seventh-century genealogical poems produced by the Church scholars. Some published examples from the fourteenth century are poems on the Ó Mórdha chieftains of Laois written into blank pages of the twelfth-century Book of Leinster,[22] and the 'Duan Catháin' a long genealogical poem by the fourteenth century *seanchaidh* Cathán Ó Duinnín, 'Éistidh re coibhneas bhur gcath',[23] on the Ó Donnabháin chiefs of west Cork. However, a more elaborate collection of verses on the chieftains of Breifne in the late thirteenth century remains unedited in a single fourteenth-century manuscript.[24] It may have been the work of the Mac Firbhisigh school of poet-historians in west Sligo, since a member of their family is credited with recording the ancestry of Brian Mág Shamhradháin (Magauran or McGovern) one of the chiefs whose genealogy occurs in these verses,[25] and an earlier member, Amhlaimh Mór Mac Firbhisigh, abbot-elect of Cong (d. 1138) was one of the last Church scholars of Irish traditional poetry and history before the reform of the Church schools.[26]

A similar family continuity between former generations of learned men trained to serve in the Church schools, and later bardic historians, applies to the Ó Dubhagáin poets and *seanchaidhe* associated with the Church settlement of Clonmacnoise. The traditional text known as the 'Registry of Clonmacnoise' which survives today only in a seventeenth-century translation,[27] tells us that the O'Dugans or Uí Dhubhagáin were both archivists to the Church of Clonmacnoise and historians to the O'Kelly (Ó Ceallaigh) chiefs of Uí Mhaine in east County Galway.[28] Seaán Mór Ó Dubhagáin (d. 1372) was ollamh or chief poet and historian to Uilliam Ó Ceallaigh, a ruler of Uí Mhaine who in 1351 celebrated the completion of his new residence by holding a great feast for all the poets, historians, brehon lawyers and other men of traditional art and learning in Ireland.[29] Seaán Mór was the author of a number of learned verse genealogies tracing the ancestry of contemporary patrons,[30] and most notably of a long poem or series of poems beginning 'Triallam timcheall na Fódla', 'Let us travel around Fódhla (Ireland)' This work takes each province in turn and lists its small regional chieftainships one by one, giving the name of the traditional ruling

lords, pp 6–7 and notes. **22** Anne O'Sullivan (ed.), 'The O'Moore poems in the Book of Leinster' in *Celtica*, 8 (1968), pp 182–6. **23** Ó Donnchadha (ed.), *An Leabhar Muimhneach*, pp 168–8. **24** RIA, MS no. 471 (23/O/4), ff 1–5. See comment by James Carney, 'The Ó Cianáin Miscellany' in *Ériu*, 21 (1969), p. 123 note 1; Simms, *From kings to warlords*, p. 6. **25** Lambert McKenna (ed.), *The Book of Magauran* (Dublin, 1947), pp 210–11, 370. See Simms, 'Literacy and the Irish bards', p. 247. **26** *Ann. Tig.* AD 1138. See Ó Muraíle, *The celebrated antiquary*, pp 2–3; Simms, 'Charles Lynegar', p. 273. **27** John O'Donovan (ed.), 'The Registry of Clonmacnoise' in *Kilkenny and the South-East of Ireland Archaeological Society Journal*, 1 (1856–7), pp 444–60. See Annette Kehnel, *Clonmacnoise: the church and lands of St Ciarán* (Münster, 1997), pp 24–5, 202–19. **28** O'Donovan (ed.), 'The Registry', p. 456. **29** Eleanor Knott (ed.), 'Filidh Éireann go haointeach' in *Ériu*, 5 (1911), pp 50–69. **30** Published but untranslated examples are 'Caiseal cathair chlann Mogha' in Ó Donnchadha (ed.), *An Leabhar Muimhneach*, pp 412–25; 'Fidbaid cobra clanna Néill' in Margaret E. Dobbs, 'Cenel Fiachach m. Neill' in *Zeitschrift für Philologie*, 21 (1968), pp 6–21.

dynasty for each territory, and including updated allusions to new Irish dynasties, where they have risen to power to replace the earlier ones in his own day, but scrupulously avoiding any mention of the families of new Anglo-Norman landlords. Ó Dubhagáin's original scheme was to provide this information for the whole of Ireland, but his own work breaks off, perhaps due to his death, after covering Connacht and Ulster, and the Munster and Leinster sections were completed by a fifteenth-century scholar Giolla na Naomh Ó hUidhrín. The whole set of poems was edited in the nineteenth century by John O'Donovan from two seventeenth-century paper manuscripts of the O'Clery family with a translation and very full topographical and historical footnotes.[31] The Irish text of the Ó Dubhagáin and Ó hUidhrín cycle of poems was re-edited using a wider range of manuscripts by James Carney in 1943, without translation or much in the way of historical (as opposed to textual and linguistic) notes. While the O'Donovan edition may in many ways be of greater assistance to the historian, Carney's edition makes a valuable distinction between the original fourteenth-century text of Ó Dubhagáin and stray verses inserted here and there by later antiquarians in the paper copies of these poems, verses containing additional information no doubt based on local tradition, but not carrying the same authority as Ó Dubhagáin's original work. The geographical and regional organisation of Ó Dubhagáin's scheme makes this cycle of poems a very suitable source for the local historian, made more so by O'Donovan's notes, equating the land-divisions and surnames as found in the nineteenth century with their medieval forerunners. Because of the small scale of the territorial divisions noted by Ó Dubhagáin, he can give the location and genealogical affinities of a number of additional surnames of minor ruling families ignored by the big genealogical collections.[32] However, he does not, of course, provide actual pedigrees in this work, still less detailed family trees.

Ó Dubhagáin supplies a link between secular bardic learning expressed in verse, and the prose texts, including genealogical texts, which the bardic classes inherited from Church schools and subsequently copied and updated in the great manuscript anthologies of the later middle ages. Some early folios forming part of the Book of Uí Mhaine (London, British Library, Egerton MS 90, ff 20–4) are written by Seaán Ó Dubhagáin himself,[33] and the earliest post-invasion compilation of prose genealogical texts, recording the pedigrees of chieftains who flourished around 1344–45, is stated by its scribe, Ádhamh Ó Cianáin (d. 1373), to have been copied in whole or in part from the book of his 'great teacher', Seaán Mór Ó Dubhagáin.[34]

31 John O'Donovan (ed.), *The topographical poems of John O'Dubhagain and Giolla na naomh O'Huidhrin* (Dublin, 1862). Nollaig Ó Muraíle has now supplied a more recent English translation of these poems as they occur in *The Great Book of Irish Genealogies*, iii, 244–321.
32 See, for example, Darren McGettigan, 'Early history of the McGettigan sept' in *Donegal Annual*, no. 42 (1990), p. 64. 33 Françoise Henry & Geneviève Marsh-Micheli, 'Manuscripts and illuminations, 1169–1603' in Cosgrove (ed.), *A new history of Ireland*, ii: *medieval Ireland, 1169–1534*, pp 792–3. 34 Neasa Ní Shéaghdha, *Catalogue of Irish manuscripts in the National Library*, fasc. 1 (Dublin, 1961), p. 16; see Carney, 'The Ó Cianáin Miscellany';

Most unfortunately, this mid-fourteenth-century manuscript, the 'Ó Cianáin Miscellany' is still unpublished. The same applies to a fifteenth-century Connacht collection of genealogies, the 'Leabhar Donn' (Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MS no. 1233, Shelf ref. 23/Q/10). We are in a slightly better situation in relation to the best-known of the manuscript anthologies, or 'Great Books' of later medieval Ireland, such as the Book of Uí Mhaine, the Book of Ballymote, and the Great Book of Lecan, because facsimiles of the actual manuscripts, lithographically reproducing their original appearance and handwriting, have been published under the auspices of the Royal Irish Academy and the Irish Manuscript Commission, accompanied by scholarly introductions and a catalogue of contents, and are available for consultation in a number of major libraries.[35] Digital images of the original manuscripts not only of the Books of Uí Mhaine, Ballymote and Lecan, but even of the unpublished Leabhar Donn have been made available on the web by the Library of the Royal Irish Academy at the ISOS (Irish Script on Screen) site at www.isos.dias.ie. Similarly the National Library of Ireland has made digital images of the complete Ó Cianáin MS (NLI, MS G 2–3) available on the same site.

The Book of Uí Mhaine and the Book of Ballymote contain genealogical collections updated to give the ancestral lines of Gaelic chiefs reigning in the late fourteenth century, and the Great Book of Lecan includes a further generation of chieftains ruling c.1416–18. Where these families constitute later generations of royal lines already documented in the twelfth-century *Corpus Genealogiarum Hiberniae I*, in his edition of the *Corpus* Michael O'Brien, has included the additional generations as variant readings from these later medieval manuscripts tucked away in footnotes below the section of printed text giving the line of their twelfth-century ancestors, indicating the location of his information as BB for the Book of Ballymote, Lec for the Great Book of Lecan, and so forth.

While this gives the reader some access to a printed version of the later medieval pedigrees, it is unsatisfactory in a number of ways. Like furniture delivered in a flat-pack, the reader has to assemble the genealogy of the fourteenth-century chieftain for him or herself by following the editor's instructions. The fourteenth-century chief may not have been directly descended from the reigning king of a dynasty in 1120 but from his brother or cousin instead, in which case O'Brien indicates that from one to three of the latest generations in the twelfth century pedigree (normally labelled from a to a), should be removed, and replaced with the seven or eight names labelled a to a in the footnote. Furthermore the scribe in the later medieval manuscript may have variant spellings or names for other generations further back in the line, so remoter ancestors in the text of the Rawlinson B 502 version (marked b to b, or c to c) should be removed and replaced with the names or spellings in the corresponding footnote, identified as BB or Lec, depending on which later manuscript version the reader wishes to reconstruct.

James Carney (ed.), *Topographical poems by Seaán Mór Ó Dubhagáin and Giolla na Naomh Ó hUidhrín* (Dublin, 1943), p. viii. 35 See [Liam de Paor (ed.)], *Great Books of Ireland* (Dublin, 1967); Henry & Marsh-Micheli, 'Manuscripts and illuminations', pp 801–3.

The disadvantages of relying on O'Brien's *Corpus* for later medieval genealogies do not end there. Where a different royal line has taken over kingship of a territory from the former dynasty, such as the Mág Uidhir or Maguire chiefs of Fermanagh who replaced the earlier Ó hÉignigh kings, they will figure in the later medieval manuscripts, but not in O'Brien's footnotes. Sometimes chieftains who flourished in the twelfth century, although they were not included in the Rawlinson B 502 or Book of Leinster collections, had their genealogies recorded in detail elsewhere, and this written record was then copied into the later medieval collections but does not appear in O'Brien's notes, for example the dynasties claiming descent from Fiachu son of Niall of the Nine Hostages, Mág Eochagáin and Ó Maolmhuaidh (Mageoghegan and O'Molloy).[36]

Moreover completely new families arrived in Ireland in the course of the middle ages, and as they gradually became integrated into the local nobility, they too asked for a place in the genealogical scheme, and places were found for them. These were eventually to include some 'Old English' families, a term used to distinguish those whose ancestors had settled in Ireland during the middle ages, as opposed to the 'New English' colonists arriving in the course of the Tudor and Stuart plantations. The Dillons and Barnewalls of Westmeath and Meath respectively were endowed with Gaelic origins in the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Other 'Old English' families were simply traced back to the first generation of invaders in the twelfth century, and still others endowed with grandiose European ancestry, such as the Burkes, who claimed descent from Sir Gawain, Roland and Charlemagne.[37] Somewhat earlier, galloglass commanders of Scottish mercenary troops received genealogical recognition when they acquired hereditary lands in Ireland in the course of the fourteenth century. The Mac Suibhne or MacSweeney constables who ended up serving the Ó Domhnaill rulers of Tír Conaill or Donegal, were rather surprisingly linked to the Ó Néill family tree,[38] but all the galloglass families descended from the twelfth-century Hebridean chieftain Somarled, principally the MacDonald or MacDonnell lords of the Isles and their relatives, were credited with an ancestry linking them to the Airgialla, originally nine mid-Ulster federated kingdoms who claimed descent from one or other of the three Colla brothers, nephews of the prehistoric high king Fiacha Sraibtine.[39]

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36 These are first listed in the Ó Cianáin MS, NLI, G 2, f. 10 r. and v. The Ó Maolmhuaidh genealogy here is implausibly short and bears almost no resemblance to the later version in the Book of Uí Mhaine, fo. 1v, col. d, whereas the Mág Eochagáin genealogy in Uí Mhaine does reproduce the Ó Cianáin version.   **37** Katharine Simms, 'Bards and barons, the Anglo-Irish aristocracy and the native culture' in Robert Bartlett & Angus Mackay (eds), *Medieval frontier societies* (Oxford, 1989), pp 193–4. See Séamus Pender (ed.), 'The O'Clery Book of Genealogies' in *Analecta Hibernica*, 18 (1951), pp 163–94, especially pp 190, 193.   **38** See Kenneth W Nicholls, 'Scottish kindreds in Ireland' in Seán Duffy (ed.), *The world of the galloglass: kings, warlords and warriors in Ireland and Scotland, 1200–1600* (Dublin, 2007), pp 91–3; Katharine Simms, 'Images of the galloglass in poems of the MacSweeneys' in ibid., pp 108–9; W. David H. Sellar, 'Family origins in Cowal and Knapdale' in *Scottish Studies*, 15 (1971), pp 21–37.   **39** This genealogy first appears in the mid-fourteenth century Ó Cianáin

In the case of the MacDonnell family, the reasoning of the Irish genealogists may be sought in a poem 'Na trí Colla clann Eathach' now only surviving in one barely legible seventeenth-century copy, but apparently well-known in its day, since its first line is quoted as a model in the Bardic Grammatical Tracts.[40] This was addressed to a Muircheartach Mac Domhnaill, king of Dartraighe Coininnse, a sub-kingdom of the Airgialla in the Monaghan area, celebrating his descent from the Three Collas, and recounting the privileges granted to the descendants of the Collas by the Uí Néill high kings. These privileges are first recorded in an Old Irish poem from before 800, and were later summarised in the eleventh-century Book of Rights. They involve a very light burden of vassalage, where no tribute is paid, and only a restricted military service is performed. The verse portion of the customs of the Airgialla in the Book of Rights even implies the overlord will pay his Airgiallan vassals for their military service.[41] The Airgiallan Mac Domhnaill chiefs of Clann Ceallaigh, who ruled the borderlands between Fermanagh and Monaghan counties, were not politically prominent after the thirteenth century[42] when this poem was probably composed. They not only shared an identical surname with the Mac Donnells of the Isles, but their home territory lay within a few miles of the estates near Ballygawley in County Tyrone granted by the O'Neills to their Mac Donnell galloglasses.[43] This geographical location, combined with the literary tradition about a pattern of vassalage to the Uí Néill which involved little more than military service under strictly agreed conditions, made descent from one of the Three Collas an ideal choice for the Mac Donnells in the eyes of the Irish genealogists. Modern Scottish research has confirmed that the names given for Somarled's immediate ancestors seem genuinely historical,[44] and these were presumably provided by Scottish oral or written tradition, so the link with an Irish mythical past only needed to be invoked when the trail of remembered ancestors tailed off. This pattern of scrupulously recording genuine ancestors as far back as they are known or traditionally remembered, and linking this shorter chain of names to the remote ancestry of a similar-sounding family with a longer pedigree was repeated many times in the later middle ages. In particular the bardic families produced previously unrecorded ancestries for themselves. In the case of the Ó Duibhgeannáin

manuscript (NLI, MS G 2, f. 26v), see Nicholls, 'Scottish kindreds', pp 97–103. 40 RIA, MS 744 (A/v/2), f. 59a. See Damian McManus, 'The Irish grammatical and syntactical tracts: a concordance of duplicated and identified citations' in Ériu, 48 (1997), p. 96; Damian McManus, 'Varia I: IGT citations and duplicate entries, further identifications' in Ériu, 54 (2004), p. 250. 41 Mary O'Daly (ed.), 'A poem on the Airgialla' in Ériu, 16 (1952), pp 179–88; see also Thomas Charles-Edwards, 'The Airgialla charter poem: the legal content' in Bhreatnach (ed.), The kingship and landscape of Tara, pp 100–23 and Edel Bhreathnach & Kevin Murray, 'The Airgialla charter poem: edition' in Bhreatnach (ed.), The kingship and landscape of Tara, pp 124–58; Myles Dillon (ed.), Lebor na Cert: the Book of Rights (Dublin, 1962), pp 73–7. 42 Seosamh Ó Dufaigh, 'Families of medieval Clones' in Clogher Record, 2 (1959), pp 385–411; Kenneth W Nicholls, 'The Register of Clogher' in Clogher Record, 7, no. 3 (1971–2), pp 413–14. 43 See Éamon Ó Doibhlin, Domhnach Mór: an outline of parish history (Omagh, 1969), pp 48–56. 44 W David H. Sellar, 'The origins and ancestry of Somerled' in Scottish Historical Review, 45 (1966), pp 123–42.

historians of Kilronan, County Roscommon, their claimed ancestor Duibgenn appears in the early compilation found in the fourteenth-century TCD MS H. 2.7, but without any reference to their family.[45]

It goes without saying that these new pedigrees are omitted from even the footnotes of O'Brien's edition of the twelfth-century genealogies. They can easily be found in the published seventeenth-century collections, either the handy one-volume 'O'Clery Book of Genealogies' edited by Séamas Pender (without translation) in *Analecta Hibernica*,[46] or the exhaustive five-volume edition of Mac Firbhisigh's 'Great Book of Genealogies' recently edited by Nollaig Ó Muraíle with parallel translations and very full indices of personal, place and population names. However, with these as with other pedigrees, the earlier sections have been copied and re-copied before they ended up in the seventeenth-century compilations, and omissions, duplications and other corruptions may have crept into the texts in the process.

PUBLISHED COMPILATIONS OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

Three of the major seventeenth-century genealogical collections are available in book form, and two of these have already been alluded to more than once. Cú Coigcríche son of Diarmaid Ó Cléirigh, otherwise known as Peregrine O'Clery, belonged to the last generation of professionally schooled *seanchaidhe* (or native anti-quarians), and was one of the 'Four Masters' team of annalists. Cú Coigcríche him-self died in 1664, but he had left spaces between the various pedigrees to allow for their updating, and a few lines have been updated subsequently.[47] Beginning with the genealogy of the Stuart kings, whom he clearly regarded as legitimate sover-eigns over Ireland, Ó Cléirigh then shows his family's loyalty to their traditional patrons, the Ó Domhnaill chiefs of Tír Conaill, by making them the leading dynasty within the Uí Néill group of surnames descended from Niall of the Nine Hostages, following their pedigrees with the rest of the Ceinéal Conaill, or sub-chiefs of Donegal related to the Ó Domhnaill dynasty. Then he gives the other main branch of the northern Uí Néill, the Ceinéal Eoghain, in the person of the Great Ó Néill of Tyrone, followed by the lesser branches of the Ó Néill family, and then the more distantly related sub-chieftains of the Ceinéal Eoghain. After this he completes the Uí Néill group with the genealogies of the Meath and Westmeath families representing the southern Uí Néill. Next come the chiefs of the province of Connacht, who are considered to descend from Niall of the Nine Hostages' elder brothers, and they are followed by the Airghialla, allegedly descended from the Three Collas, more distant cousins of the Uí Néill. The Leinster chiefs who claim descent from the prehistoric Cathaír Mór follow, since they also are traced back through Eireamhón son of Míl. Thereafter come the southern Irish descendants of Éibhear son of Míl, first the Eóghanacht, or descen-

45 Walsh, *Irish men of learning*, ed. Ó Lochlainn, p. 1.   46 Pender, 'The O'Clery Book of Genealogies'.   47 Ibid., pp xiv–xv.

dants of the prehistoric Eóghan Mór, that is the Meic Carthaigh (MacCarthys) and related branches, followed by the Dál gCais, theoretically descended from Eóghan Mór's younger brother Cormac Cas, and consisting of the Uí Bhriain (O'Briens) and their related sub-chieftains in the Thomond area of counties Clare, Tipperary and east Limerick. Then come those held to be descendants of Íor son of Míl, principally the Ulaidh or chiefains of eastern Ulster, but also isolated families from other parts of Ireland, the Ó Mordha chiefs of Laois, the Ó Fearghail chiefs of Longford, the Ó Conchobhair chiefs of Kerry and so forth. At the end Ó Cléirigh includes the genealogies of the Old English, some of whom are traced back to Continental ancestors while the Barnewall family of Meath are absurdly traced to a steward of the kings of Connacht called Íomhar Ó Beirn (d. 1271), an obviously unrelated contemporary of the family's genuine forbear, the late thirteenth-century Wolfran de Bernevall, constable of Dublin castle and sheriff of Dublin.[48] The editor, Séamus Pender, has not included any index to places or personal names other than a table of contents, listing the different sections of the genealogies by the same mixture of surnames and population names that the *seanchaidh* had originally used in his headings to the various pedigrees.

The career of An Dubháltach Óg Mac Firbhisigh has been fully traced and discussed by Nollaig Ó Muraíle.[49] Belonging like Ó Cléirigh to the last generation of formally schooled native Irish *seanchaidhe*, his Great Book of Irish Genealogies was compiled mainly in 1649–50 and added to down to 1664, followed by a shorter condensed version (only the former is extant in the author's own hand), as well as in numerous manuscript copies made by other scribes.[50] Until Ó Muraíle's 2005 edition of both the longer and the shorter recensions, Mac Firbhisigh's genealogies were constantly being quoted and referred to by local historians, but they all had to use the original manuscripts for their information, often working with eighteenth-century copies which had additions by later scribes inserted. Mac Firbhisigh's arrangement and grouping of the genealogies is very similar to that of Ó Cléirigh, except that he begins the Uí Néill section with the genealogy of the Great Ó Néill rather than Ó Domhnaill. This edition, however, is supplied not only with a full translation of the text on facing pages, but abundant indices, locating population-names, surnames, place-names, nicknames, famous people, and the personal names of all the individuals in the collection, with their immediate ancestry attached.

The third published seventeenth-century compilation is the Leabhar Muimhneach, edited by Tadhg Ó Donnchadha. Although the earliest manuscripts to contain this work today are from the early eighteenth century, a preface to the first of these, RIA MS no. 756 (23/E/26), written by Richard Tipper in 1717, states that it is drawn from the work of two early seventeenth-century Munster *seanchaidhe*, the famous poet and historian, Tadhg mac Dáire Mhic Bhruaideadha (d. 1652), and the less well-known Domhnall Ó Duinnín (fl. 1627).[51] The work

48 Ibid., p. 190. See Philomena Connolly (ed.), *Irish Exchequer payments, 1270–1446* (IMC, Dublin, 1998), pp 32, 33, 103.   49 Ó Muraíle, *The celebrated antiquary.*   50 Ó Muraíle (ed.), *The Great Book of Irish Genealogies,* , pp x, 43–57.   51 Ó Donnchadha (ed.), *An Leabhar*

falls naturally into two sections. The first traces the line of the descendants of Éibhear, son of Míl or Milesius, from Adam down to Mathgamain, elder brother of Brian Bóraimhe (d. 1014). One of its chief themes is to assure the reader that the population group to which Mathgamain and Brian belonged, the Dál Cais, who had risen to the kingship of Munster for the first time in the tenth century, were descended from Cormac Cas, younger brother of Eógan Mór son of Ailill Óluim, ancestor of the Eóganacht dynasty who had ruled Munster as provincial kings of Cashel from the sixth to the tenth century, and that the Dál Cais had therefore an equal right to the overkingship of Cashel. The second section goes back in time to the mythical Eógan, ancestor of the Eóganachta and traces the spreading out of the different dynastic branches, with pedigrees of the chieftains of the main lines, updated in many cases to the early eighteenth century. This is followed by a more mixed group of genealogies, including the 'Old English' families of Munster, and some from elsewhere, the Scottish kings, the earls of Antrim, Mág Uidhir of Fermanagh, Fitzpatrick of Upper Ossory and others. But the bulk of the information deals with Munster families, and as with all material copied and re-copied from earlier prototypes, the earlier generations should be checked against older compilations such as those in Laud Misc. 610.

HOW TO MAKE THE BEST USE OF GENEALOGIES

Almost invariably it is best to read genealogies in the earliest available copy to contain the name of the subject who interests the researcher, although it is also wise to compare different early versions, to catch the corruptions as they may occur – as in the case of the Rawlinson B 502 and Book of Leinster versions of the Ó Maelshechlainn pedigree discussed above.[52] Reading genealogies of kings who were contemporary with the compiler himself has the added advantage that, not knowing which of the king's most prominent sons is to succeed him eventually, a genealogist may record the names of more than one, and may follow up the birth of sons and grandsons in lines who were important at the time he wrote, but were omitted by later genealogists as their descendants lost power.

The problem is, of course, that none of the medieval genealogical compilations made in or near the time of chieftains who reigned between 1200 and AD 1500 have been edited, with or without a translation. The lithographic/collotype facsimiles of the Book of Uí Mhaine, the Book of Ballymote and the Great Book of Lecan,[53] by now long out of print, may be consulted in major libraries, and as mentioned above digital images of both these and other unpublished manuscripts may be examined on the web at www.isos.dias.ie. Such manuscripts are not only writ-

Muimhneach, pp xi–xv. See valuable review of this text in Walsh, *Irish men of learning*, ed. Ó Lochlainn, pp 252–62. **52** Above, notes 19, 20. **53** Robert A. Macalister, *The Book of Uí Maine* facsimile (Dublin, 1941); Robert Atkinson, *The Book of Ballymote* facsimile (Dublin, 1887); Kathleen Mulchrone, *The Book of Lecan* facsimile (Dublin, 1937).

ten in medieval Irish handwriting, but contain a number of standard scribal abbreviations.[54] The most practical way to prepare oneself when encountering these documents for the first time is to come armed with a photocopied page of the section dealing with the family group one is investigating taken from the printed pages of the seventeenth-century O'Clery or Mac Firbhisigh genealogies, or perhaps the Leabhar Muimhneach in the case of a Munster region or dynasty, and then to locate the named kin-group in the manuscript pages by consulting the editor's preface to the published facsimile, or the relevant entry in the appropriate institution's 'Catalogue of manuscripts' Once the required folio or page is open, one can then check off the lists of names in the scribal handwriting of the facsimile or digital image against the printed version from the seventeenth-century collection. This should in the first place provide practice in reading the medieval Gaelic script, since almost every name on the list will have its printed equivalent in the photocopied version. In the course of this comparison, it should become clear if some of the names in the pedigree are different, or if there are more or less generations included in a king's ancestry as between the medieval and the seventeenth-century version. If there are additional branches of the family recorded in the medieval collection that do not occur in the later recension, the previous exercise of comparing the script and print name by name where they were parallel should have trained the researcher to read off the additional names with a certain amount of ease.

An important way of familiarising oneself with the material being studied and also checking its credibility, is to lay out the lists of names acquired by reading pedigrees in a tabular form, that is, in a family-tree diagram, preferably on a large sheet of lined paper, using one line per generation. Bearing in mind that sources closest in date to the events are normally the most reliable, one could draw on the Rawlinson B 502 pedigrees for the earlier father to son generations, starting at the top perhaps with the eponymous ancestor, the one from whose Christian name the family derived their surname. The fact that each name in the list of a particular chief's ancestors will be in the *genitive* case in the Irish source – 'x son *of* y, son *of* z etc. – might not be important if making a sketch for one's own use, but should be borne in mind when preparing a family tree for publication or examination, as all personal names should be restored to their original nominative form. When the twelfth-century source runs out, further generations can be added from the next earliest genealogical compilation to contain information on the kindred, and so on. It is important to retain the distinction between the different sources used, perhaps by using a different ink colour, and noting the page or manuscript folio to contain each section of the pedigree. It will be found, since Irish regnal succession did not always proceed from father to son, that later pedigrees will trace their reigning chief backwards, not always to the last generation mentioned on the twelfth-century record, but sometimes to a common grandfather or great-grandfather a few gener-

54 See Richard I. Best & Osborn Bergin (eds), *Lebor na hUidre: Book of the Dun Cow* (Dublin, 1929), pp xxiv–xxvii; Hans P.A. Oskamp, 'The Yellow Book of Lecan Proper' in *Ériu*, 26 (1975), pp 106–8.

ations further back. Where possible, the dates at which identifiable chieftains flourished or died should be added from the annals, noting which annal has provided the information. It is at this point that the use of lined paper to space the generations evenly can serve a purpose. If two chieftains who should historically have flourished in the same period are given grotesquely different numbers of generations linking them to the same common ancestor, this would cast a reasonable doubt on the accuracy of the genealogical record and prompt further enquiry.[55]

The tabular diagram is also a good way to make sense of the *craobhscaoileadh* type of spreading family tree, where the *seanchaidh* begins with the founding ancestor, lists his known sons, and then the sons of his sons and so on. It also helps to define the relationship between a cluster of pedigrees, where the *seanchaidh* starts by tracing the reigning chief's ancestry generation by generation back to Míl or Adam, but then traces the pedigree of the leaders of cadet branches of the same dynasty only as far back as their 'node' ancestor, the point at which their line split off from the main line of the reigning chief, perhaps five or seven generations back in time. Since many men in many generations of the same dynasty commonly bore the same names, this person will probably be identified by the addition his father and grandfather's names, showing his place in the main pedigree of the reigning chief.

For those dynasties most frequently mentioned in the annals or historical tracts, such as the Uí Bhriain (O'Briens), Uí Chonchobhair Connacht (O'Connors of Connacht), Uí Dhomhnaill (O'Donnells), Uí Néill (O'Neills), or Uí Raghallaigh (O'Reillys), quite full family trees can be reconstructed from the information contained in the annals alone, and this is generally more reliable and has the advantage of coming ready supplied with dates. Such an annal-based family tree can then be usefully compared with a near-contemporary manuscript genealogy to discover the names of additional brothers of the chief, or the relationship of various sub-branches of the dynasty to the main line.

Where a chieftain's dynasty is less well recorded in the annals, the genealogies play a more important role. Kenneth Nicholls[56] has drawn attention to the countless eighteenth-century paper genealogies with details of specific families, many of them not mentioned in the big medieval collections. Most of these later genealogies remain unpublished, and there is no general index of their contents and location. Some of the manuscripts are still in private possession, but large numbers are found in the libraries of Trinity College Dublin, the Royal Irish Academy and the National Library of Ireland, together with the Genealogical Office now located within the National Library. The catalogues of manuscripts for these repositories give some guidance as to the contents of their later genealogical collections, though frequently not detailed enough to let the reader know whether the pedigrees are repetitions of those in the medieval compilations, or contain unique additional information.

55 As, for example, in the case of the Ó Maolmhuaidh pedigree in the Ó Cianáin MS mentioned above note 36.   56 Nicholls, 'Genealogy', pp 158–60.

The general rule of thumb applies that an eighteenth-century genealogy is likely to contain most accurate information about the surviving eighteenth-century descendants of old Irish families, whereas the sections dealing with the medieval period, as late copies taken from many intermediate copies, are likely to have picked up corruptions in comparison with compilations from an earlier period. However, as is sometimes the case with eighteenth-century annal collections, a late paper genealogy may preserve unique information copied directly or indirectly from a lost earlier original of medieval date. The important point is to keep information taken from different sources identifiably distinct, and to judge each case on its merits.

HOW TO LOCATE A MODERN SURNAME IN ITS MEDIEVAL GENEALOGICAL CONTEXT

If the researcher's point of departure is simply a particular modern surname, it is important in the first place to ascertain which surname is in question. The name O'Kelly, for example, merely indicates descent from an ancestor with the name 'Cellach' ('the Churchman'), and a number of unrelated dynasties in different parts of Ireland developed this surname. In west Tyrone it might signify descent from the Uí Fiachrach of Ardstraw, in east Galway descent from the Uí Mhaine, in south Armagh from the Airtheara, and so forth. The works of Edward MacLysaght and Patrick Woulfe discuss the existence of unrelated families who have the same name but are associated with different parts of Ireland.[57] It is therefore very desirable to identify the earliest known place of residence of the modern family in question, especially if it can be shown that people of this surname are clustered in a specific location. Interesting surveys of the location of family names based on electoral registers were carried out in relation to Fermanagh by Father Peadar Livingstone.[58]

It is important in this regard not to 're-invent the wheel' Nineteenth- and twentieth-century local historians may well have already published studies which link the desired surname to its medieval Gaelic dynastic and population grouping, either in books or local history society journals, and nowadays students can also obtain similar information, but of extremely variable reliability, by searching the internet. Any and all of such secondary information should then be tested by checking the dynastic and population names suggested against the primary sources, both genealogical and annalistic. A 'good' local historian (that is, one who supplies full referencing to the sources of his/her information) has normally also used seventeenth-century hearth-money rolls, plantation surveys, and so forth to verify the link between the modern surnames and the medieval dynasties.

57 Edward MacLysaght, *The surnames of Ireland* (Dublin, 1973; 6th edn, Dublin, 1985); idem, *Irish families, their names, arms and origins* (4th edn, Dublin, 1985); idem, *More Irish families* (revised edn, Dublin, 1982); idem, *Supplement to Irish families* (Dublin, 1964); Patrick Woulfe, *Sloinnte Gaedheal is Gall* (Dublin 1923 and reprints). 58 Peadar Livingstone, *The Fermanagh story* (Enniskillen, 1969), pp 418–66.

In default of such specific studies, if the Gaelic surname in question is an unusual one, or identifiably linked to a particular area of Ireland, and the early modern Irish spelling has been ascertained through the work of MacLysaght or Woulfe, or the cross-references given between Gaelic names and their Anglicised equivalents in John O'Donovan's indices to *AFM* or the *Topographical Poems*, the exhaustive indices given by Ó Muraíle in volume 4 of the *Great Book of Irish Genealogies* should locate each surname documented by Mac Firbhisigh within the traditional Irish genealogical framework. Uncertainty as to the geographical location of the wider population names within which the surnames are grouped, such as Ceinéal Fiachach, or Conmaicne, can be solved by recourse either to the Index locorum in volume 7 of *AFM*, leading the reader to O'Donovan's useful footnote discussions, or to Hogan's *Onomasticon*, now more readily searchable in its electronic form at www.ucc.ie/locus/ Where a surname is not included in Mac Firbhisigh's compilation, it may still turn up in the index to Ó Dubhagáin's Topographical Poems, in either the O'Donovan or Carney edition.

These indices by O'Donovan and Ó Muraíle are especially useful because the indices to the *Corp. Gen.* only give population and personal names since surnames were as yet in the process of developing during the twelfth century. Similarly the catalogue indices for the medieval manuscripts, like Pender's edition of the 'O'Clery Genealogies', simply give a list of contents which retail the mixture of surnames and population names given by the scribes in the original manuscript headings.

As will be seen from this rather extended discussion, the Gaelic Irish genealogical compilations take a bit of getting used to, but once the reader has become familiar with the system used by the original compilers, based on the theory that all dynasties branched out from the sons of Míl, the fact that the material is largely composed of simple lists of names, tracing a father to son descent, makes them eventually quite quick and easy to consult. Like the annals, this material reflects the dual role of the medieval *seanchaidh*, to record for legal purposes, and to enlarge his patrons' fame for political ends. As a result, their historical veracity is most to be relied on when they were recording the names and immediate ancestors of their own contemporaries, at a time when there were living witnesses to point out any falsities. They could, and did on occasion, change the genealogical links in a dynasty's remote ancestry to fit a change in their political alliances. A number of instances of this practice have been noted in modern studies.[59] In some ways such forgeries, once noticed, are of almost more interest than a man's genetic descent, since they bear witness to the aspirations of the age that produced them. One advantage of constantly collating the different recensions of the Irish genealogical corpus with each other is to enable one to trace such deliberate alterations in the record as they occur, while the other more straightforward aim is to glean the comparatively trustworthy information each compiler in his day has recorded about his own contemporaries.

59 Byrne, *Irish kings and high-kings*, pp 142–3; Ó Ceallaigh, *Gleanings*, pp 73–85; Simms, *From kings to warlords*, p. 7.

Poems

Bardic poems present a contrast to all other kinds of text produced by the learned classes of medieval Gaelic Ireland. Annals, genealogies, prose tracts, sagas and law texts all originated in the learning of the Church schools and were directed primarily at preserving and transmitting this learning to the following generations of secular scholars. Most bardic poetry was addressed to the lay nobility, it was intended to be publicly recited or even sung as entertainment during a feast, and it dealt primarily not with the immemorial past, but with the patron's present political ambitions, hopes and fears. It is thus the most valuable class of historical evidence produced by the Gaelic men of learning, with the immediacy of a letter or charter, although the evidence it provides must be interpreted with a due regard for the literary conventions within which it is composed.[1]

MISCELLANEOUS POETRY NOT WRITTEN FOR PATRONS

Not all medieval Irish poetry comes into this category of professional praise poetry publicly recited to patrons in return for a substantial payment in money or chattels. During the high middle ages, students in the four main schools of bardic learning: in poetry, history, law and medicine, together with some of the more traditional clerics, all learned to compose verse in syllabic bardic metres,[2] although only the future praise poets became masters of the most difficult form, the *dán díreach*, or 'straight verse' metres, which required full observance of the rules of syllable count, alliteration and 'perfect rime' in a wide variety of metrical patterns.[3] As a result quite a lot of verse compositions in Irish survive from the medieval period which are not the work of praise poets, or are not aimed at individual patrons.

1 Simms, 'Bardic poetry as a historical source' A debate on the historical value of bardic poetry for the early modern period is summarized in Katharine Simms, 'Literary sources for the history of Gaelic Ireland' in McCone & Simms (eds), *Progress in medieval Irish studies*, pp 211–15; and see Nicholas P Canny, 'The formation of the Irish mind: religion, politics and Gaelic Irish literature, 1580–1750' in *Past and Present*, 95 (1982), pp 91–116. For examples of the use of bardic poetry as historical evidence see Ciaran Brady, 'The O'Reillys of East Breifne and the problem of "surrender and regrant"' in *Breifne*, 6 (1985), pp 254–6; and the work of Wilson McLeod, in particular his book, *Divided Gaels: Gaelic cultural identities in Scotland and Ireland c.1200–c.1650* (Oxford, 2004); note the latter's comments on p. 13. 2 Simms, 'The brehons of later medieval Ireland', pp 61–5. 3 McManus, 'The bardic poet as teacher, student and critic'; Ó Cuív, 'The linguistic training of the medieval Irish poet'; Gerard Murphy, *Early Irish metrics* (Dublin, 1961).

The bardic poets themselves might compose courtly love poems, or casual poems on miscellaneous subjects such as the pleasures of reading, the recovery of an old brown cloak or feelings of homesickness.[4] However, these poems, addressed to a general audience rather than a particular patron, were mostly produced during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, under the influence of foreign models, such as published collections of English verse,[5] and they are often in *óglachas* mode, a simplified form of the bardic metres which an *óglach*, a lay landowner of knightly rank, could successfully use for his own compositions. Modern editors normally inform their readers whether a poem is composed in the strict *dán díreach* mode employed by the fully-trained professional praise-poet, known as a *file* or *fear dána*, or in *brúilingeacht*, a mode in which the pattern of syllable count, alliteration and metre are strictly observed, but the rhymes are not perfect. *Brúilingeacht* was a style used by less advanced professional poets,[6] and scholars educated in the bardic schools of history, law or medicine, while *óglachas*, the informal easier style was used on occasion by all ranks of the bardic profession but also employed by amateur poets, since it involved much simplified versions of the commonest metres, in which rhymes were approximate, alliteration was optional, and syllable count was frequently inexact.[7] The most prolific amateur poet of the medieval period was Earl Gerald 'the Rhymer' Fitzgerald, third (or sometimes regarded as fourth) earl of Desmond,[8] thirty of whose poems have been preserved in a fifteenth-century manuscript, the Roche family's 'Book of Fermoy' – RIA, MS no. 1134 (23/E/29), and these have been edited without translation by Gearóid MacNiocaill.[9] They are of considerable historical interest as a number of them relate to his period of captivity in Brian Ó Briain's stronghold at Ennis after his defeat at the battle of Nenagh (1360), and to his friendship with Diarmait Mór Mac Carthaigh of Muskerry and Diarmait's son

4 Anthologies of this type of verse were edited without translation by Tomás Ó Rathile, *Dánta Grádha I* (2nd edn, Cork, 1926 and reprints), and Thomas F. O'Rahilly, *Measgra Dánta* (2 vols, Dublin & Cork, 1927 and reprints). Osborn Bergin (ed.), *Irish bardic poetry*, compiled & ed. David Greene & Fergus Kelly (Dublin, 1970) is a miscellany of poems to patrons, religious poems and the kind of incidental poems referred to here, for example, nos 41, 42, 46.   5 See Mícheál Mac Craith, *Lorg na hiasachta ar na Dánta Grá* (Dublin, 1989); idem, 'Dánta Grá' in Lalor (ed.), *The encyclopedia of Ireland*, p. 269.   6 It should be pointed out that the less strict rules for precise rhyming allowed *brúilingeacht* poets to employ a wider range of more complex metres, whereas the vast majority of *dán díreach* poetry is written in the simplest metre known as *deibhidhe*, with *rannaigheacht* and *séadhna* being the next most frequent metres (see following footnote). However, there is little overlap between the named authors who employ *brúilingeacht* and those composing in *dán díreach*, so it would appear that more was at stake than a simple artistic choice for each individual poem.   7 See Eleanor Knott, *An introduction to Irish syllabic poetry of the period, 1200–1600* (2nd edn, Dublin, 1957 and reprints), pp 2–20; Cáit Ní Dhomhnaill, *Duanaireacht* (Dublin, 1975), pp 1–79.   8 After the death of his elder brother, Maurice, the second earl, an intervening idiot brother was passed over to allow Gerald to succeed directly: F.X. Martin, T.W Moody & F.J. Byrne (eds), *A new history of Ireland*, ix: *maps, genealogies, lists* (Oxford, 1984), p. 168.   9 Gearóid MacNiocaill, 'Duanaire Gearóid Iarla' in *Studia Hibernica*, 3 (1963), pp 7–59.

Cormac. Other possibly identifiable amateur poets may include King Diarmait Ó Briain (d. 1364), patron of the prose saga Caithréim Thoirdhealbhaigh and Richard Butler, brother of the fourth earl of Ormond.[10] In the sixteenth century we have the work of William Nugent, younger brother to the baron of Delvin.[11]

Professional historians or *seanchaidhe* produced genealogical poems, as mentioned in the previous chapter, or recited in verse form the tributes due to the kings of a particular area, and the boundaries of their kingdom, or listed a successive line of kings, naming the length of each one's reign and the manner of his death.[12] Medical men and lawyers wrote teaching poems to help their students memorise the ingredients of various medicines, or the rules for taking lawful distraints.[13] Talented churchmen, or professional *seanchaidhe* who had been commissioned by Churchmen, wrote versified tales of saints and their miracles, or lists of the dues owed to the shrine of their patron saint by the population of a particular catchment area.[14] Related to these more pragmatic ecclesiastical poems, and sometimes mixed in with them, are poems of prophecy attributed to various saints or simply anonymous.[15] The modernity of the language always makes it obvious that the early saint claimed as author in each case had nothing to do with the poem's composition, and

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10 Simms, 'Literacy and the Irish bards', pp 249–50; O'Grady & Flower, *Catalogue of Irish manuscripts*, ii, 496–500. 11 Gerard Murphy (ed.), 'Poems of exile by Uilliam Nuinseann mac Barúin Dealbhna' in *Éigse*, 6 (1948), pp 8–15, and see Ó Cuív, *Catalogue*, i, 281. 12 Examples in William M. Hennessy & Denis Kelly (eds), *The Book of Fenagh* (Dublin, 1875; facsimile repr. IMC, with supplementary volume of commentary by R.A.S. Macalister, 2 vols, Dublin, 1939) i, 354–9; Robert A.S. Macalister (ed.), *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, v (ITS, Dublin, 1956), 540–65. A later medieval versified regnal list, 'Éistidh a éigse Banbha, re hiomráidh na healadhna' by Donnchadh Bán/Bacach Ó Maolchonaire, on reigns of the kings of Connacht from Toirdhealbhach d. 1156 to Toirdhealbhach d. 1345 was edited and translated by Tomás Ó Raghallaigh in his very rare publication, *Filidh agus filidheacht Connacht* (suppressed publication, copies in RIA, Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies and TCD), pp 12–19; verses from this poem were inserted into *AC* under entries which announced the death of the Connacht kings – see O'Dwyer, 'The Annals of Connacht and Loch Cé', p. 96. 13 Some medical verses are given in Robin Flower, 'Popular science in medieval Ireland' in *Ériu*, 9 (1921–3), pp 61–7, although most remain unpublished, as 'A lega Banbha na mbrat' (anonymous, 23 quatrains) in RIA, MS no. 467 (23/N/29), f. 4v. Examples of legal poems are Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha, 'An address to a student of law' in Donnchadh Ó Corráin, Liam Breatnach & Kim McCone (eds), *Sages, saints and storytellers: Celtic Studies in honour of Professor James Carney* (Maynooth, 1989), pp 159–77; Daniel A. Binchy (ed.), *Corpus Iuris Hibernici* (hereinafter *CIH*) (6 vols, Dublin, 1978), iii, 871–4; Kuno Meyer (ed.), 'Mitteilungen aus irischen Handschriften – Das Wergeld des Klerus und der Laien' in *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie*, 9 (1913), pp 171–2. See Katharine Simms, 'The poetic brehon lawyers of early sixteenth-century Ireland' in *Ériu*, 57 (2007), pp 121–32. 14 See examples in Charles Plummer (ed.), *Bethada Náem nÉrenn* (2 vols, Oxford, 1922), *passim*. 15 The largest collection of these was made in Nicholas O'Kearney (ed.), *The prophecies of SS Columkille, Maeltamlacht, Ultan, Seadhna, Coireall, Bearcan, etc.* (Dublin, 1856), but this uses late paper manuscripts, and appears to include some verse prophecies concocted by the editor himself (see Seán Duffy, *Nicholas O'Kearney: the last of the bards of Louth* (Coalisland, 1989). The model edition of a poem of prophecy seen as a historical source is A. O. Anderson (ed.), 'The prophecy of Berchan' in *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie*, 18 (1929–30), pp 1–56.

the fiction of a bygone prophecy now coming to pass is usually used as a vehicle for criticising ecclesiastical and social structures of the anonymous author's own day,[16] or sometimes for claiming supernatural vindication for a particular political stance, as when the attacks of Aodh son of Feidhlim Ó Conchobhair against the territory of Ó Ruairc in the mid-thirteenth century were alleged to have been prophesied and deplored by a local saint, Caillin of Fenagh or Tigernach of Clones,[17] or when St Columba was credited with a prophecy that his kinsmen, the Cinéal Conaill of Donegal, would never be conquered.[18]

As should be seen from even this brief summary, such non-professional poetry in medieval Irish contains much interesting material shedding light on social attitudes, religious beliefs and superstitions, and even direct historical information on territorial boundaries and so forth. The main problem from a historian's point of view is that without a named author (apart from the fictitious attribution to a saint) and without a named patron, it is difficult to date most of these poems even to the nearest century. They are normally written in a loose metre, similar to that used by the Church scholars of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, with approximate rhymes and syllable count making the wording easily modernised by later scribes without disturbing the metrical pattern. As a result, it is difficult to distinguish clearly between compositions from the twelfth-century Church schools and later works of the thirteenth, fourteenth, fifteenth or even sixteenth centuries. An example of how frustrating this lack of certainty can be are the verses in the Second Life of St Kevin of Glendalough, complaining about the 'outsiders' who have taken control of the church in Glendalough and know nothing of St Kevin or his miracles. Are these verses composed in the wake of the annexation of the diocese of Glendalough by the Anglo-Norman archbishops of Dublin in the thirteenth century, or do they refer to the activities of the protestant archbishops of Dublin in the sixteenth century?[19] As with many other religious texts, the earliest manuscript to contain these verses dates to the seventeenth century, and so is no help in solving the problem. Such verses have to be considered in the context of the prose saints' lives that accompany them in most manuscripts, and these will be discussed in the next chapter.

PROFESSIONAL EULOGIES AND ELEGIES: IDENTIFICATION AND DATING

Professional praise poetry written in *dán díreach* metre is considerably easier to date. In the first place, the strict rules of *dán díreach* were not brought to perfection until

16 The twelfth-century poem 'Tréidhe nach fuilngeand rígh réil', 'Three things that a manifest king does not suffer' – Eleanor Knott, 'A poem of prophecies' in *Ériu*, 18 (1958), pp 55–84, is particularly full of Church grievances about royal billeting and taxation imposed on Church lands and so forth.   17 Hennessy & Kelly (eds), *Book of Fenagh*, pp 372–9.   18 'Olc chuimhnighim mo chumann', James G. O'Keeffe (ed.), 'Poems on the O'Donnells' in John Fraser, Paul Grosjean & J.G. O'Keeffe (eds), *Irish Texts* 1 (London, 1931), pp 87–91.   19 Plummer (ed.), *Bethada Náem nÉrenn*, i, 145–6; ii, 141; Katharine Simms, 'Frontiers in the Irish church – regional and cultural' in Barry, Frame & Simms (eds), *Colony & Frontier in medieval Ireland*, p. 197.

about the year 1200,[20] so a poem that fulfils all these requirements cannot be a product of the earlier Church schools. Since the whole object of a praise poem is to glorify and immortalise the patron, the subject's name is likely to be reiterated in various forms throughout the text, not only his or her Christian name, but references to him or her as son or daughter of one or both named parents. Normally not only the family surname will be mentioned, but the wider genealogical grouping to which the family belongs, and the historic territory with which they are associated. Famous grandparents of either sex, or more remote ancestors, are also often alluded to, making identification of the patron fairly simple in most cases to researchers familiar with genealogical material, even where the task of identification has not already been done for the reader by a modern editor. It is worth noting that poets are normally reluctant to use the unadorned 'Mac' or 'Ó' surname unless the poem addresses a reigning chief of his family, and if they call a patron 'son of Ó   (or 'son of Mac   ') the implication is usually that the man's father was, or had been, a reigning chief, not necessarily still alive at the time of the poem's composition. There are some exceptions to this convention – in cases such as 'Mac Uí Néill Buidhe' ('Son of O'Neill Buidhe') or 'Mac an tSabhaoisigh' ('Son of the Savage'), the formula 'son of' has been used to coin a new chiefly title.[21]

Logically, therefore, if a poem is directly addressed to an identifiable patron who can be found recorded in the annals, or is otherwise dateable, it was composed during that patron's lifetime, and if it is an elegy, lamenting a patron's death, it can be dated even more closely, though not necessarily to the actual year when the patron died, as some elegies mention that one or two years have passed since the death, and they were presumably composed for recitation at a banquet following a memorial mass.[22] The best known bardic poets may themselves have a recorded date of death in the annals, which can help to narrow down the period of a particular poem's composition, and sometimes the text of the poem alludes to a dateable event, such as the chief's inauguration, a marriage, or a victory in battle, and a number of elegies, particularly from the late sixteenth or seventeenth centuries actually give the date of the patron's death in the last verse or so.[2]

POEMS FOR PATRONS: THE PRINCIPAL PUBLISHED COLLECTIONS

From the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries almost all bardic poetry was preserved in manuscript anthologies or *duanairí*.[24] These were of three kinds. In the

20 Brian Ó Cuív, 'Some developments in Irish metrics' in *Éigse*, 12 (1967–8), pp 273–90; see Knott, *An introduction to Irish syllabic poetry*; idem, *Irish Classical poetry, commonly called bardic poetry* (Dublin, 1960).   21 For the O'Neill of Clannaboy, and the Savage of the Ards in County Down, respectively.   22 See Katharine Simms, 'The poet as chieftain's widow: bardic elegies', p. 401. See also Pádraig A. Breatnach, 'Ar bhás Aodha an Einigh Mhéig Uidhir' in *Éigse*, 21 (1986), p. 47.   23 An early example of internal dating comes in Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe's lament for the death of Brian Ó Néill at the battle of Down in 1260 – see Williams (ed.), *The poems of Giolla Brighde*, pp 152–3 – in the translation of verse 59 here, the first line should read 'there are lacking from twenty lasting years'.   24 Brian Ó Cuív, *The Irish bardic*

first place there were collections of poems by a single poet, or school of poets. We have references to since lost poem-books of single poets, the tenth-century Flann mac Lonáin, and the thirteenth-century Muireadhach Albanach,[25] but the extant manuscript collections based on authorship emanate from schools of hereditary poets. A collection of fifteenth-century Ó hUiginn poems is bound into the composite manuscript known as the Yellow Book of Lecan, and these have been edited and translated together with a number of other typical ceremonial bardic poems, both political and religious, in *Aithdioghluim Dána*.[26] A largely unpublished manuscript collection associated with the Ó Cobhthaigh school of poets in sixteenth-century Meath is found in NLI, MS G 992, digital images of which can now be seen on the Internet at www.isos.dias.ie. However, modern scholars have brought together and edited from scattered sources the poems of certain well-known individuals, the compositions of the thirteenth-century Ulster poet, Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe, the fourteenth-century Munster poet, Gofraidh Fionn Ó Dálagh's poems to secular patrons, the collected poems of the late sixteenth-century Sligo poet Tadhg Dall Ó hUiginn, and those of the early seventeenth-century Fermanagh poet, Brian Ó Corcráin.[27]

The second type of manuscript *duanaire* to survive was the family poem-book, in which poems addressed by different authors to members of a single family of patrons were collected and preserved by the family as nowadays one might keep a photograph album. These collections have survived in much larger numbers. They are obviously of particular interest if one is researching the family in question, or the territory they ruled over. Another point of interest is that the poems are often copied into these manuscripts very close to the time of composition, and they can show idiosyncratic spellings, betraying dialect pronunciations. Also, because interest was focussed on the patrons, and not on the high quality or otherwise of the poet, this is a source that can preserve rare examples of the work of local, less well-educated bards, with unusual surnames, composing sometimes in the less prestigious *brúilingeacht* or *óglúchas* metrical modes. The earliest of these 'family albums' is the fourteenth-century Book of Magauran, addressed to the chieftains of Teallach Eachach, or the barony of Tullyhaw in County Cavan, together with their wives. This was lovingly edited by Lambert McKenna to show both the original spelling of the manuscript, the corrected Irish text and an English translation. Other published patrons' *duanairí* are the sixteenth-century collection to Cú Chonnacht Óg Mág Uidhir (d. 1589), chief of Fermanagh,[28] the anthology for Cormac Ó hEadhra (d. 1612) chief of the barony of Leyney in County Sligo, and some of his succes-

duanaire or poem-book (Dublin, 1974). **25** Best, Bergin & O'Brien (eds), *The Book of Leinster* 1, xvi; O'Grady & Flower, *Catalogue of Irish manuscripts*, , 337. **26** McKenna (ed.), *Aithdioghluim Dána*. **27** Williams (ed.), *The poems of Giolla Brighde*; Lambert McKenna (ed.), 'Historical poems of Gofraidh Fionn Ó Dálagh (d. 1387)' in *Irish Monthly*, 47 (1919), pp 1–5, 102–7, 166–70, 224–8, 283–6, 341–4, 397–403, 455–9, 509–14, 563–9, 622–6; Knott (ed.), *The bardic poems of Tadhg Dall Ó hUiginn*; Paul Walsh, 'Dánta Bhriain Uí Chorcráin' in *Irisleabhar Mhuighe Nuadhad* (1929), pp 35–50. **28** David Greene (ed.), *Duanaire Mhéig Uidhir* (Dublin, 1972).

sors,[29] and the untranslated Leabhar Branach or series of poem-books addressed to the late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century chiefs of the Clann Raghnallach branch of the O'Byrnes in Wicklow.[30] Other untranslated editions of family anthologies are the *Poems on the O'Reillys*, *Poems on the Butlers* and *Leabhar Cloinne Aodha Buidhe*, on the Clandeboy O'Neills of Antrim.[31] There are a number of other anthologies addressed to patron families which still remain unedited; important ones among them are the poems to the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Roches of Fermoy in the Book of Fermoy, RIA, MS no. 1134 (23/E/29), and poems to the seventeenth-century family of Theobald Viscount Dillon in Mayo, in RIA, MS 744 (A/v/2).

The third and largest category of manuscript anthology was the miscellaneous collection for the leisure reading of cultivated lay patrons. Since this pre-supposed the existence of gentry who were able to read in Gaelic, these anthologies are found in paper manuscripts of the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries. The earliest, and one of the largest collections of this kind (containing 178 poems),[32] is the Scottish 'Book of the Dean of Lismore' (James Magregor, d. 1551). A poem in the book itself refers to collecting the texts of poems from strollers and pedlars, from clerics and laymen.[33] In this kind of collection the poems can be from many periods and many areas, some of them well-known classics by master poets, some by amateurs, some courtly love poems, some simply jokes or riddles. The 'Book of the Dean of Lismore' presents a particular challenge to modern scholars, because, for whatever reason, the dean and his friends decided to enter the poetry in phonetic English/Lowland Scots spelling rather than normal Gaelic orthography. This reflected their own dialect pronunciation of the words rather than standard Classical Irish, and they did not observe a consistent system of equivalent letters. As a result, the poems have to be transcribed back into standard Gaelic before they can be edited and translated, and this has not been done for the whole corpus as yet. A large section of the collection was devoted to lays of Fionn Mac Cumhaill and his Fianna warriors, a common entertainment literature in Gaelic courts of the late medieval and early modern period, and these have been edited several times.[34] Watson edited the poems from this manuscript that were addressed to Scottish patrons,[35] Bergin and others have edited individual poems from the Dean's Book from time to time,[36] and Quiggin made a literal transcript of all the unpublished

29 Lambert McKenna (ed.), *The Book of O'Hara: Leabhar Í Eadhra* (Dublin, 1951). 30 Mac Airt (ed.), *Leabhar Branach*. 31 Carney (ed.), *Poems on the Butlers*; Carney, *Poems on the O'Reillys*; Ó Donnchadha (ed.), *Leabhar Cloinne Aodha Buidhe*. 32 Thomas F. O'Rahilly, 'Indexes to the Book of the Dean of Lismore' in *Scottish Gaelic Studies*, 4, pt 1 (1934), pp 31–56. 33 William J. Watson, *Scottish verse from the Book of the Dean of Lismore* (Edinburgh, 1937), pp 2–5. 34 Thomas M'Lauchlan (ed.), *The Dean of Lismore's Book: a selection of ancient Gaelic poetry* (Edinburgh, 1862) (contains some non-Ossianic poems also); Alexander Cameron (ed.), *Reliquiae Celticae* 1 (Edinburgh, 1892); Neil Ross (ed.), *Heroic poetry from the Book of the Dean of Lismore* (Edinburgh, 1939). 35 Watson, *Scottish verse*. 36 For example, Bergin (ed.), *Irish bardic poetry*, nos 20–2; William Gillies (ed.), 'The Gaelic poems of Sir Duncan Campbell of Glenorchy' in *Scottish Gaelic Studies*, 13 (1978–81), pp 31–5, 36–41, 280–

poems in their original phonetic spelling[37] which served to show that the collection still contains other important Irish bardic poems unedited and untranslated. There are also a number of large anthologies compiled in the early to mid-seventeenth century for Irish patrons which, although they are written in quite normal and legible script, are too big and miscellaneous in character to have been edited in their entirety. Notable among these is the famous 'Book of O'Conor Don', originally compiled in Ostend in 1631 for Captain Somhairle Mac Domhnaill, though it later found its way into the library of the O'Conor Don. Even in its present fragmentary state it contains 342 poems.[38] Another large collection is the O'Gara manuscript (RIA, MS no. 2, 23/F/16), transcribed in Lille and Brussels between 1655 and 1659 by the priest Nicholas Dubh Ó Gadhra. Many of the poems from the O'Gara manuscript were copied into the nineteenth-century British Library manuscript, Egerton MS 111, and Standish Hayes O'Grady's catalogue of this late manuscript[39] gives a more detailed discussion of the content and historical background of these poems than can be found in the Royal Irish Academy's manuscript catalogue. Other similarly important but anonymous anthologies are RIA, MSS nos 5 (23/D/4) and 743 (A/iv/3), and for these the *Catalogue of Irish manuscripts in the Royal Irish Academy*[40] is the best guide. As mentioned earlier, circles of scribes in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, such as the Ó Neachtain and Ó Longáin groups, continued to pass around and copy out the texts of medieval bardic poems for their educational and literary value, and these late paper manuscripts are almost always miscellaneous anthologies. Many of the poems they contain are already available in earlier and more accurate transcriptions, but sometimes a copy of an otherwise unknown medieval poem turns up in one of these late collections.

FINDING PUBLISHED AND UNPUBLISHED POEMS — THE BARDIC DATABASE

For the last hundred years or so, scholars who were primarily interested in language or literature rather than history have been accustomed to leaf through these large

2; E.C. Quiggin, *Prolegomena to the study of the later Irish bards, 1200–1500* (London [1913]), pp 35, 40; Gerard Murphy, 'A Ughdar so Gearóid' in *Éigse*, 2 (1940), p. 64; David Greene (ed.), 'Un joc grossier in Irish and Provençal' in *Ériu*, 17 (1955), pp 7–15; idem, 'Mac Bronn' in *Éigse*, v (1947), pp 231–5; Angus Matheson, 'A Ughdar so Fearchar mac Phádraig Grannd' in *Éigse*, v (1946), pp 156–7; Brian Ó Cuív, 'Donnchadh Mór's poem on the wren' in *Éigse*, xvii (1977), pp 13–18. **37** E.C. Quiggin, *Poems from the Book of the Dean of Lismore* (Cambridge, 1937). **38** See Douglas Hyde, 'The Book of the O'Conor Don' in *Ériu*, 8 (1915), pp 78–99. The same patron sponsored a large collection of Fenian lays or medieval and early modern poems about Fionn mac Cumhaill and his Fianna (warrior bands). See Eoin MacNeill & Gerard Murphy (eds), *Duanaire Finn: the Book of the lays of Finn* (3 vols, ITS, London & Dublin, 1908, 1933, 1953). **39** O'Grady & Flower, *Catalogue of Irish manuscripts*, i, 339–498. **40** O'Rahilly, Mulchrone et al. *Catalogue*. Includes Mulchrone & Fitzpatrick (ed.), *Catalogue: index 1, First lines of verse* and Tomás Ó Concheanainn (ed.), *Catalogue of Irish manuscripts in the Royal Irish Academy: index 2, general index* (Dublin, 1970).

miscellanies of bardic verse, and select single items that appealed to them in order to edit them in one of the many journals of Celtic studies. Where they edited larger groups of poems, they tended to be drawn to verse compositions of general interest, rather than the professional praise poetry addressed to individual patrons, for example the courtly love poetry and short poems on miscellaneous subjects edited by Thomas O'Rahilly[41] and the enormous amount of religious poetry edited by Father Lambert McKenna.[42] I have personal experience of the difficulties involved in tracking down isolated editions of poems of historical interest, starting with identifying the first lines of poems addressed to named patrons by finding the patron's name in the indices at the back of the O'Grady and Flower *Catalogue of Irish manuscripts in the British Museum/Library* or Ó Concheanainn's *General index* to the *Catalogue of Irish manuscripts in the Royal Irish Academy*, and then tracking down edited versions of these poems through the first-line indices of Richard Irvine Best's *Bibliography of Irish philology and printed Irish literature to 1912*, the same author's *Bibliography of Irish philology and manuscript literature, 1913–1941*, and Rolf Baumgarten's *Bibliography of Irish linguistics and literature, 1942–71*.[43] Moreover, up to a quarter or a third of the total surviving texts of bardic poems remain unedited, and because of the predilection of former editors for poems on general or religious subjects, the unedited ones include some of the more interesting poems addressed to historically significant patrons. To make the task of future researchers easier, I identified as many surviving bardic poems as I could in the manuscript catalogues of the main collections, and then read my way through the texts, compiling an electronic index to their first-lines, their subject classification (eulogies, elegies, marriage poems, satires, religious, love poetry, political, didactic etc.), the identity and dates of any named patrons, the authors to whom they were ascribed in the manuscripts, their length and metre, any apologues or illustrative tales they contained, the principal motifs or themes in each poem (for example, praise of personal appearance, fertility of the land in the reign of a just king, keening for dead, hunting, music, agriculture, education of poets, study of science, alcoholism, forbidden love, and so on) grouped under broader themes of personal praise, kingship, war, death, religion, social information, traditional learning and miscellaneous. I also

41 Ó Rathile, *Dánta Grádha I*, and O'Rahilly, *Measgra Dánta*. 42 Lambert McKenna (ed.), *Dánta do chum Aonghus Fionn Ó Dálaigh* (Dublin, 1919); idem (ed.), *Dán Dé: the poems of Donnchadh Mór Ó Dálaigh and the religious poems in the duanaire of the Yellow Book of Lecan* (Dublin [1922]); idem (ed.), *Philip Bocht Ó hUiginn* (Dublin, 1931); idem (ed.), *Aithdioghluim dána*, poems nos. 49–100; idem [Láimhbheartach Mac Cionnaith] (ed.), *Dioghluim Dána* (Dublin, 1938 and reprints), poems nos. 1–62 (Irish text only, but many items in the latter publication were previously edited with translations as journal articles, and these can be located through the first-line index to poems found in Richard I. Best, *Bibliography of Irish philology and manuscript literature, 1913–1941* (Dublin, 1942 and reprints). 43 Richard I. Best, *Bibliography of Irish philology and printed Irish literature to 1912* (Dublin, 1913 and reprints); idem, *Bibliography of Irish philology and manuscript literature, 1913–1941*; Rolf Baumgarten, *Bibliography of Irish linguistics and literature, 1942–71* (Dublin, 1986) with web-searchable database at www.dias.ie/celt/ for the third volume and entries in preparation for the fourth.

made note of the five earliest manuscripts to contain the text in question, whether the poem was cited in the bardic grammatical tracts and whether it was published, either as Irish text only, or with an English translation. This database is now publicly available on the web either directly at http://bardic.celt.dias.ie or through the School of Celtic Studies web page at www.dias.ie and allows for searches to be made using various criteria; for example, having ensured that all other boxes were set at 'nothing' or 'anything', one might seek a list of poems associated with a particular area – Ulster, Connacht, Leinster, Munster, Meath and the Midlands, Scotland or Elsewhere (London, Leuven or the Holy Land fall into this category), and composed between certain dates. Alternatively one could look for poems to or by a named individual, ticking the appropriate box to indicate whether this was a patron to whom the poem was addressed, or the poet who composed it, or certain classes of poems, inauguration odes, or love poems, for example, written at specific periods or in specific metres, if so desired. When a group of poems answering to these criteria appears listed by their first lines, clicking on individual first-lines brings up a fuller description of the individual poem, and clicking on, for example, a motif listed as appearing in one poem will bring up a list of all poems containing that particular motif.

As the web version was adapted from an Appleworks 6.00 database, the search mechanisms are not entirely compatible with the original design of the database, causing certain problems, which should be ironed out in time. When searching for Motifs or Apologues, a short-cut can be to type in a key word (like 'fertility' or 'salmon') into the search box for the relevant field, and add an asterisk, for example, fertility* This should bring up all poems containing the key-word in that field, however the full entry has been phrased. Similarly, when searching for a patron's or poet's surname or Christian name, entering the single word involved in the appropriate field followed by an asterisk (omitting any accents) and setting the time limits within which the person in question flourished can improve the speed and accuracy of the search. More importantly, the database is due to be enlarged and become a joint venture between the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, School of Celtic Studies, under whose auspices my catalogue was begun, and the School of Irish and Celtic Studies at Trinity College Dublin, who have completed a separate project, under Professor Damian McManus with funding from the Higher Education Authority, to seek out and transcribe the texts of the unpublished bardic poems. Combining this with electronically scanned texts from published editions, it is planned to add the original Irish text of each poem to the entry on the database that describes it. Ultimately it is hoped to add the English translations of already edited poems, and to translate those texts which have not yet been edited. A disadvantage of my database in its present form is the very abbreviated nature of the bibliographical references to edited poems, but the accompanying texts, when they are added, should include full bibliographical details.
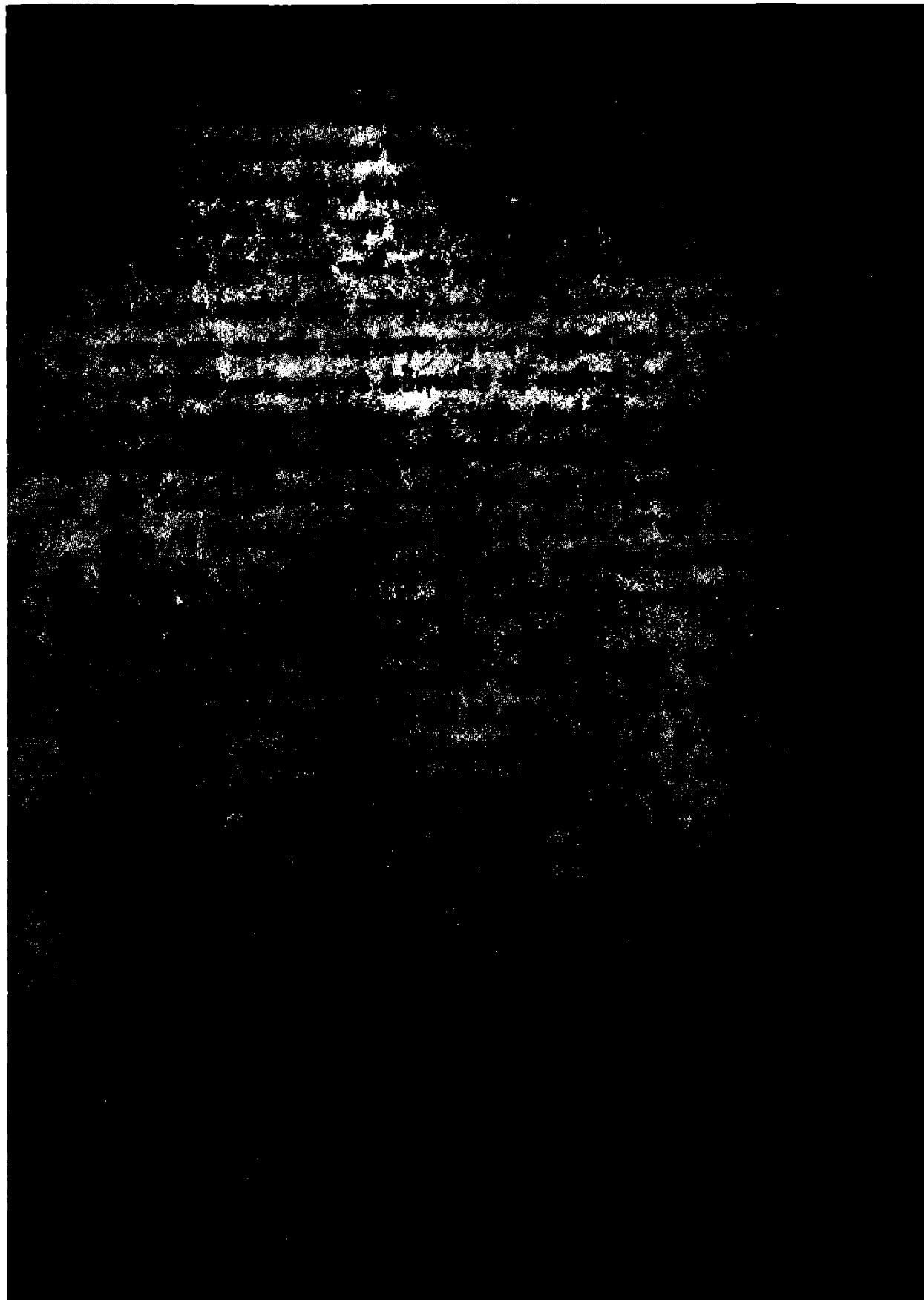
2 Bardic poem, 'Dorn idir dhán is dásacht' ('A fist in a poetic frenzy'), poem of apology to Áed Ó Conchobair, king of Connacht (d. 1309), for a blow struck by the poet Seaán Ó Clúmháin at a banquet, National Library of Ireland, MS G 992, f. 15r. (sixteenth century); digital image from ISOS (Irish Script on Screen), text edited by L. Mac Cionaith (ed.), *Dioghluim Dána*, no. 84.

WAYS TO USE POETRY AS HISTORICAL EVIDENCE

There are basically three kinds of historical information that one can extract from bardic poems: a fuller picture of the hereditary poets themselves, their education and function; historical data about a particular patron, his career and ambitions; and details about the society in which poet and patron lived, that occur incidentally in the narrative and descriptive sections.

Poems addressed by professional bardic poets or *filidhe* to aristocratic patrons were expected to fulfil a number of functions and the better they did this the better the authors were rewarded. As an artistic creation, recited, chanted or sung by a trained reciter or *reacaire* at a ceremonial banquet held by the patron for his friends and followers, the best poems should observe perfect rhyme and metre and contain witty and learned allusions to the Gaelic literary heritage of sagas, poems, genealogies and laws, sometimes in the form of actual short stories, called 'apologues', recounted within the metre of the poem.[44] The commonest metre used, because it was the easiest of the *dán díreach* metres, was *deibhidhe*, in which the first seven-syllable line in each couplet has rhyming word at the end matched with a word one syllable longer at the end of the second line. Over half of all the surviving poems are written in *deibhidhe*, but some of the other more unusual and difficult metres such as *droighneach* were more highly prized,[45] and may have been paid for at a higher price. It is worth, therefore, checking the comments of the editor of a poem to see both whether, and how scrupulously, the poet has achieved the high standards of *dán díreach* composition, and whether the poem was in *deibhidhe* metre or something more unusual. Similarly the presence of apologues, literary allusions, or redundant additional rhymes in some quatrains (known as *breacadh*)[46] are all markers of a high-status poem.

Apart from enhancing the patron's prestige as a discriminating patron of the poetic art, a qualified poet's praise of a chieftain was a kind of certificate (poets' truth, *fír filidh*) in support of the legitimacy of the patron's right to rule. In theory false praise or false satire, 'a poet's lie' could be punished by a supernatural penalty, because a statement solemnly proclaimed in rhyme was an invocation of the judgement of God (or, in times gone by, of pagan gods).[47] More practically, in the high

44 See Liam P Ó Caithnia, *Apalóga na bhfilí, 1200–1650* (Dublin, 1984).   **45** This is the implication of Ruaidhrí Óg Ó hEachaidhéin's poem for Cormac Ó Néill Buidhe, 'Dealbhfad do Chormac mo chéidghrés droighnighe', Ó Donnchadha (ed.), *Leabhar Cloinne Aodha Buidhe*, no. 19.   **46** See Tomás S. Ó Máille, *Breacadh: ornáid ar an duanaireacht* (Dublin, 1973), chapters 1–4, especially chapter 2. Note, however, that the further proposed style of ornamentation outlined by the author in chapter 5 as 'breacadh patrúin' does not find support in the teaching of the bardic tracts. See also Ní Dhomhnaill, *Duanaireacht*, pp 45–61.   **47** See in general, Byrne, *Irish kings and high-kings*, p. 15; for 'poet's truth' see Liam Breatnach (ed.), *Uraicecht na Ríar: the poetic grades in Early Irish law* (Dublin, 1987), pp 21–3, 48; for supernatural punishment of falsehood in poetry see Liam Breatnach, 'An Aoir sa Ré Luath' in Pádraig Ó Fiannachta (ed.), *Léachtaí Cholm Cille*, 18 (Maynooth, 1988), pp 13–14. For further discussion of ritual praise and satire see Breatnach, 'Satire, praise and the early

middle ages and early modern period, if a poet became known as issuing indiscriminate praise that had no relation to the real qualities of the patron it devalued his status, and potentially his ability to demand a high price for his endorsement of a magnate's rule.[48] Top-class ollamhs, or master-poets, did not compose for minor chieftains unless in exceptional circumstances[49] or for a high payment. Conversely it was apparently possible for a major inaugurated chief to refuse to accept or pay for praise-poems addressed to him by any poet under the rank of ollamh,[50] though this does not seem to have been common practice.[51] So almost any praise from a well-born, fully qualified poet promoted a chieftain's status and was worth the high price the best poets exacted in return.

The coveted summit of the profession was to become an official court poet personally attached to an individual chief by a bond of 'friendship' or 'love', often treated in the poetry as if it were a kind of marriage. A poet so favoured was given a tax-free estate of land, and a pension which could amount to twenty cows a year, in return for which he owed only one annual poem in praise of the chief, with additional payments for any further poems. A number of the surviving poems deal directly with this relationship, using the imagery of lover's quarrels, or widow's lamentations, if the patron has predeceased his poet.[52]

Where a chief did not have a permanent relationship with a really eminent poet, he could invite one for a visit (cuairt) of a few months, and in return he could expect to be immortalised by a poem of thanks and praise for his hospitality.[53] Praise of a patron's hospitality and liberality to poets is the most frequently occurring theme of all in the bardic eulogies,[54] and was no doubt intended to be a self-

Irish poet' For the ambiguous relationship between paganism and the poet's claimed powers see John Carey, 'The three things required of a poet' in Ériu, 48 (1997), pp 41–58. **48** Mac Airt (ed.), Leabhar Branach, poem no. 26, lines 2865–8 refers to excessive or false praise as constituting in effect an insult to the patron. Extravagant praise of Art MacMurrough's household as drinking from golden cups and using gold on their horses' harness (Mac Cionnaith (ed.), Dioghluim Dána, no. 100) may have earned the poet Eoghan Mac Craith the nickname 'The Gilder' **49** Williams (ed.), The poems of Giolla Brighde, poem 11 verses 4–7 shows the eminent master-poet Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe addressing a praise poem to the minor chief Ó hAnnluain to compensate him for an unjust satire perpetrated by one of his Mac Con Midhe kinsmen. Ó Máille, chief of the Owles of Mayo, unusually received a praise-poem from an anonymous but prestigious poet in compensation for the poet having wounded him in a drunken quarrel: Tomás S. Ó Máille (ed.), 'A poem to Tuathal Ó Máille' in Revue Celtique, 49 (1932), pp 166–81. **50** See Cuthbert Mhág Craith (ed.), Dán na mBrathar Mionúr (2 vols, vol. 1 text, Dublin, 1967, vol. 2, trans. & notes, 1980), no. 4. **51** See McKenna (ed.), Book of Magauran, no. 7; Mac Airt (ed.), Leabhar Branach, no. 26, lines 2957–60, 2997–3000. **52** Carney, The Irish bardic poet; Pádraig A. Breatnach, 'The chief's poet' in RIA Proc, 83 (1983), pp 3–79; Pádraig A. Breatnach, 'The poet's graveside vigil: a theme of Irish bardic elegy in the fifteenth century' in Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie, 49–50 (1997), pp 50–63; Simms, 'The poet as chieftain's widow' **53** For example, Ó Donnchadha, Leabhar Cloinne Aodha Buidhe, p. 65. **54** See Pádraig A. Breatnach, 'Moladh na féile: téama i bhfilíocht na Scol' in Pádraig Ó Fiannachta (ed.), An dán díreach (Léachtaí Cholm Cille, 24 (Maynooth, 1994)), pp 61–76; idem, 'Moladh na féile i bhfilíocht na Scol agus a Chúlra' in idem, Téamaí taighde Nua-Ghaeilge (Maynooth, 1997),

fulfilling prophecy, stimulating patrons to compete with each other for 'the palm of hospitality' 'craobh an einigh', a reputation for being the most open-handed patron in Ireland, which the poets claimed they adjudged after consulting with each other and experiencing varied treatment on their tours of visitation. Since all patrons received some praise for their generosity, one has to read quite a large number of bardic poems to notice when a particular patron is receiving an almost hysterical amount of praise for his tremendous generosity, as for instance the late sixteenth-century Domhnall Mac Suibhne, chief of Fanad in Donegal,[55] or the mid-fifteenth-century Aodh Buidhe II Ó Néill.[56] However, where this happens it is usually a sign that the patron is indeed exceptionally extravagant in his payments to poets, and this is because he is ambitious of gaining greater political recognition as against a number of rivals, whether within his own family, or in a neighbouring lordship. Two very revealing accounts of the sensitivity of a patron to the contents of poems, however formal or apparently ritual the wording, are the poem of apology from Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe to Domhnall Óg Ó Domhnaill (d. 1281), who was enraged because he had been told that Giolla Brighde had addressed a poem to Ó Néill patrons in which he encouraged them to go to war with Ó Domhnaill,[57] and the poem by Tadhg Dall Ó hUiginn describing a Christmas feast to which Toirdhealbhach Luineach Ó Néill (d. 1595) had invited all the poets of Ireland, but then had refused to allow any of their poems to be publicly performed, because none of them listed his victories.[58] These victories would have been in battles against the rival Ó Néill claimant, Hugh, Baron Dungannon (d. 1616), and to praise them would mean the poets had definitely endorsed Toirdhealbhach's candidature and rejected Hugh's.

The commonest themes or motifs found in poetry addressed to patrons are praise of the patron's personal appearance, praise of his or her hospitality and liberality to poets, praise of a male patron's prowess in war,[59] a representation of the land as the prince's spouse or lover, a description of the fertility of the land under the rule of a just prince[60] or the desolation of the land and the weather if the prince has died, or less frequently, if he is being satirised as an unjust ruler.[61] It is also very common for princes to be praised as future high-kings of Tara, however unrealistic such a goal might appear, both because of the inescapable facts of the English conquest, and the minor importance of the chief being addressed. The poet's 'truth' consisted merely in avoiding praise so ridiculous that it might be suspected as satire.

pp 97–129. 55 See Simms, 'Images of the galloglass', pp 116–17. 56 Simms, 'Bardic poetry as a historical source', pp 64–5. 57 Williams (ed.), *The poems of Giolla Brighde*, no. 10. 58 Knott (ed.), *The bardic poems of Tadhg Dall*, no. 8. 59 Katharine Simms, 'Images of warfare in bardic poetry' in *Celtica*, 21 (1990), pp 608–19. 60 Damian McManus, '"The smallest man in Ireland can reach the tops of her trees": images of the king's peace and bounty in bardic poetry' in *Memory and the Modern in Celtic literatures*, CSANA Yearbook 5, ed. Joseph Falaky Nagy (Dublin, 2006), pp 61–117; Breandán Ó Buachalla, 'Aodh Eanghach and the Irish king-hero' in Ó Corrain, Breatnach & McCone (eds), *Sages, saints & storytellers*, pp 204–6. 61 For example, Brian Ó Cuív, 'The earl of Thomond and the poets, AD 1572' in *Celtica*, 12 (1977), pp 125–45.

Thus an elderly chief might be praised for hospitality and wisdom rather than good looks and attractiveness to the opposite sex. Even this is not an invariable rule, however. David Greene has remarked on the mismatch between the middle-aged, pacific Cú Chonnacht Mág Uidhir (d. 1589) and the heroic, all-conquering image of him presented by the poets who contributed to his poem-book.[62] A reason for this incongruity may be found in the older man's need to compete for a leading role at his own court as against his ambitious and warlike son, Aodh Mág Uidhir (d. 1600), a competition referred to in one of Tadhg Dall's poems.[63] So the poems are more reliable as a guide to the image a patron wanted to present of himself and his political role than to the reality on the ground. This makes it significant, for example, if the poem speaks of a patron as a peacemaker between the English and the Gaelic Irish, or as preparing for a war of re-conquest. Another interesting theme is where the patron is described as very learned in books and reading. This would be rather insulting as praise of a patron who could not read at all, so it presumably has some relation to actual intellectual attainments and it only occurs in the later period, when the Northern Renaissance was encouraging lay aristocrats across Europe to educate themselves to a higher standard than formerly.

We are on safer ground when using the poems to collect details about a patron's genealogy, the name of his wife, the name of his chief residence, the list of battles in which he was involved, and sometimes the date and manner of his death. Making a mistake in the details of a patron's genealogy was regarded by the poets' teachers as a serious flaw in a poem.[64] Many eulogies of a living chief, or elegies for a dead one, contain a long or short *caithréim*, or list of the patron's victorious battles. These are usually given in chronological order, associated with a particular place-name, and sometimes, though not always, we are given an indication of the identity of the defeated enemy, or even one or two of the more memorable details of a campaign, the abduction of the enemy's wife or daughter, or the burning of his house, for example.[65] One caution that might be mentioned here is that a minor chief can be praised for his role in a campaign led by a kinsman or overlord, and thus several patrons can be praised in separate poems for their victories in the same battles.[66]

Details about commerce, agriculture or living conditions[67] occur most frequently as illustrative matter in religious poetry, or in the apologues or short narrative passages that ornament the poems to patrons. Particularly useful are the short

62 Greene (ed.), *Duanaire Mhéig Uidhir*, pp vii–ix. See also Bergin (ed.), *Irish bardic poetry*, pp 15–16. **63** Knott (ed.), *The bardic poems of Tadhg Dall*, no. 12. **64** Osborn Bergin (ed.), 'Irish Grammatical Tracts V: metrical faults' in *Ériu*, 17 (1955), supplement, p. 278: 'Claen seanchais' **65** Mc Airt (ed.), *Leabhar Branach*, p. 66, lines 1729–36. **66** See Anne O'Sullivan & Pádraig Ó Riain (eds), *Poems on marcher lords* (London, 1987), p. xxii; McKenna (ed.), *Aithdioghluim Dána*, nos 37, 38. **67** Katharine Simms, 'Native sources for Gaelic settlement: the house poems' in Patrick J. Duffy, David Edwards & Elizabeth FitzPatrick (eds), *Gaelic Ireland: land, lordship and settlement c.1250–c.1650* (Dublin, 2001), pp 246–67; idem, 'References to landscape and economy in Irish bardic poetry' in Howard B. Clarke, Jacinta Prunty & Mark Hennessy (eds), *Surveying Ireland's past: multidisciplinary essays in honour of Anngret Simms* (Dublin, 2004), pp 145–68.

prose passages, often comic in character, which are inserted between sections of verse eulogy in the strange compositions known as *crosántacht*.[68] These being more informal can refer to many unheroic aspects of Irish life, like the election of mayors in Irish towns, or the manufacture of whiskey.[69]

68 Alan Harrison, *An Chrosántacht* (Dublin, 1979); idem, *The Irish trickster* (Sheffield, 1989), pp 35–70. **69** Knott (ed.), *The bardic poems of Tadhg Dall*, i, 249–50, ii, 164. See Katharine Simms, 'Guesting and feasting in Gaelic Ireland' in *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* (hereinafter *RSAI Jn*), 108 (1978), p. 88; Catherine M. O'Sullivan, *Hospitality in medieval Ireland, 900–1500* (Dublin, 2004), pp 55, 66, 103–4, 232.

Prose tracts and sagas

Prose compositions in Irish from the high middle ages, excluding annals, genealo-gies and legal or medical material, fall into three main categories: a) family histories or sagas about the recent past, b) saints' lives and homilies, and c) myths and sagas, though there is often considerable overlap between the classes, as we shall see.

FAMILY HISTORIES OR SAGAS ABOUT THE RECENT PAST

The category most obviously useful as a source for historians is also the smallest. The Middle Irish saga Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh, 'The War of the Irish with the Foreigners',[1] is a long narrative centring on the career of Brian Bóruma (d. 1014), eponymous ancestor of the Ó Briain family, and his struggles against the Viking invaders, nowadays considered to date to the reign of his great-grandson, Muirchertach Ó Briain (d. 1119) in the early years of the twelfth century.[2] The sequence of events is organised chronologically with reference to incidents recorded in genuine annals of the time, some of them since lost[3] and it may have been inspired by the Leinster text, now known as the Fragmentary Annals. In this possibly earlier text, the underlying annal framework is more dominant, but it expands into romantic narrative in its account of the career of the king Cerball mac Dúnlaing (d. 888) of Osraige and his sometimes quite friendly relations with the Viking invaders. Its underlying annalistic core may have been elaborated by the addition of passages from an 'Osraige Chronicle' during the reign of Donnchad mac Gilla Pátraic (d. 1039), King of Osraige, who in 1033 celebrated the Fair of Carman to mark his claim to be provincial King of Leinster. The 'Osraige Chronicle' would then be a way of glorifying this prominent eleventh-century king by immortalising the fame of his ninth-century ancestor, King Cerball.[4] Similarly the Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh was written to glorify the high-king Muirchertach Ó Briain by immortalising the fame of his ancestor Brian Bóruma.[5] Since the nar-

1 James Todd (ed.), Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh: the war of the Gaedhil with the Gaill (London, 1867). 2 Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, 'The date of Cogad Gáedel re Gallaib' in Peritia, 9 (1995), pp 354–77; see also idem, 'Breifne bias in Cogad Gáedel re Gallaib' in Ériu, 43 (1992), pp 135–58, for some politically motivated additions made to the original text in the mid-twelfth century. 3 Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Cogad Gáedel re Gallaib and the annals: a comparison' in Ériu, 47 (1996), pp 101–26. See also Colmán Etchingham, Viking raids on Irish church set-tlements in the ninth century (Maynooth, 1996), pp 2, 32, 44, 67–70. 4 Radner (ed.), FAI, pp xxii–xxvi. 5 Anthony Candon, 'Muirchertach Ua Briain, politics and naval activity in the

ratives in both the Cogadh and the Fragmentary Annals drew on pre-existing annalistic material, not all of which is now available to us in the other compilations, it is worth taking note when they give specific information about the names of people or battle-sites that are unrecorded elsewhere, but in many cases it seems clear that the bare facts have subsequently been woven into a dramatic narrative with the help of oral tradition or simply the compiler's own imagination. There seems very little common ground between the sober account of the career of the Viking leader Turgéis or Turgesius as the annals retail it from contemporary entries,[6] and the wild narrative given in the Cogadh, in which he takes the title of Abbot of Armagh, while his wife utters oracles on the altar of Clonmacnoise.[7] However, the Cogadh is the length of a modern novel. It is full of passages of conversations between leaders retailed as direct speech, and information about battles, soldiers and fighting methods as visualised by an early twelfth-century author. It is a propaganda piece concerned to whip up admiration for its heroes and fear and hatred of its villains. It is reasonable, therefore, to draw on it for information about ideals of honour in the twelfth century, and with somewhat more caution, for evidence of political and military organisation.[8]

The Cogadh inspired two further historical narratives. The first could be regarded as a direct reply to the Cogadh, intended to reinstate the prestige of the Uí Briain family's rivals for the overlordship of Munster, the Mac Carthaig kings from the older Eóganacht dynasty. This was the Caithréim Chellacháin Chaisil, 'The Battle-career of Cellachán [d. 954] of Cashel',[9] also stemming from the early twelfth century, probably in the reign of powerful Cormac Mac Carthaig (d. 1138), the patron of 'Cormac's Chapel' on the Rock of Cashel. Donnchadh Ó Corráin has pointed out that unlike the Cogadh's composer, the author of Caithréim Cellacháin did not base his narrative of the tenth-century hero's career on information from annal entries, but on genealogies,[10] and so his historical veracity is even less trustworthy in relation to the events he describes. However, as a heroic narrative written in the first half of the twelfth century, the text is again a very interesting source for political ideals. In particular it has a description of the installation of Cellachán as King of Cashel which echoes the practice of feudal Europe, describing successive vassals placing their hands in his hand to pledge allegiance, followed by a crowning.[11] It could reflect ceremonies that accompanied Cormac Mac

Irish Sea, 1075 to 1119' in Gearóid Mac Niocaill & Patrick Wallace (eds), Keimelia: essays in memory of Tom Delaney (Galway, 1989), p. 397.   6 Mac Airt & Mac Niocaill, The Annals of Ulster, pp 288–303, and see collated annal narrative for this period (in translation only), in which contributions found only in the Clonmacnoise group are italicised, in Charles-Edwards, The Chronicle of Ireland, i, 289–302.   7 Todd (ed.), Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh, pp 8–15.   8 See Marie-Thérèse Flanagan, 'Irish and Anglo-Norman warfare in twelfth-century Ireland' in Thomas Bartlett & Keith Jeffery (eds), A military history of Ireland (Cambridge, 1996).   9 Alexander Bugge (ed.), Caithreim Cellachain Caisil: the victorious career of Cellachan of Cashel (Christiana [Oslo], 1905). The emended Irish text, but without translation, is available on the internet at www.ucc.ie/celt/   10 Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'Caithréim Chellacháin Chaisil: history or propaganda?' in Ériu, 25 (1974), pp 60–3.   11 Bugge (ed.),

Carthaig's own installation, or what is almost as interesting, the ceremonies he would like to have seen practised at his installation. An undated paragraph preserved in a genealogical miscellany in the Book of Lecan explicitly compares the election of the kings of Munster by twenty-four chief counsellors (*na ceathra hard-chomairlech fiched is ferr*) with the election of the German emperors, and this has also been associated by modern scholars with the reign of Cormac Mac Carthaig.[12]

The other prose text inspired by the Cogadh was the fourteenth-century saga Caithréim Thoirdhealbhaigh, 'The Battle-career of Toirdhealbhach Ó Briain [d. 1306]'.[13] This is a narrative of the civil war that took place in the Ó Briain kingdom of Thomond[14] in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, in the course of which Toirdhealbhach son of Tadhg Ó Briain and his descendants succeeded in ousting his uncle Brian Ruadh Ó Briain (d. 1277) and his sons from kingship, and almost incidentally defeated and killed the Anglo-Norman lord of Thomond, Richard de Clare, at the battle of Dysert O'Dea in 1318. A misreading of a colophon in one of the manuscripts containing this text originally gave rise to the misapprehension that the saga was composed quite some time after the events, in the fifteenth century, when its authority would be largely that of oral tradition. Subsequently, however, close examination of the internal evidence convinced scholars that it was written under the patronage of one of the participants in the civil war, King Diarmaid Ó Briain (d. 1364), victor of the battle of Corcumroe Abbey in 1317, and younger brother of King Muircheartach, the victor of Dysert O'Dea.[15] The prominence of the Mac Con Mara (MacNamara) vassals of the kings of Thomond within the narrative might indeed suggest that the saga was originally cast as a eulogy of the proceedings of that family during the wars, and later adapted to shed glory on King Diarmaid, which would bring the first written version even closer to the date of the events and the evidence of eye-witnesses.[16] This still leaves the modern reader a long way short of a simple factual record. There are hyperbolic descriptions of battle scenes, and accounts of symbolic supernatural visions

Caithreim Cellachain, pp 4, 61 (Section 7): 'tucsat a lamh ina laim & ro ghabhsat a mind righ uma cenn' – 'These nobles came to Cellachan and put their hands into his hand and placed the royal diadem round his head' **12** Ó Raithbheartaigh, *Genealogical Tracts I*, p. 182. See Byrne, *Irish kings and high-kings*, p. 191; Dagmar Ó Riain-Raedel, 'German influence on Munster church and kings in the twelfth century' in Alfred P Smyth (ed.), *Seanchas: studies in Early and medieval Irish archaeology, history and literature in honour of Francis J. Byrne* (Dublin, 2000), p. 329; Ó Corráin, 'Caithréim Chellacháin', p. 69. **13** O'Grady (ed.), *Caithréim Thoirdhealbhaigh*. **14** At this date an area covering County Clare and portions of south-west Tipperary and north-eastern County Limerick. **15** O'Grady, *Caithréim Thoirdhealbhaigh*, 1, xiii–xiv; T.J. Westropp, 'On the external evidences relating to the historic character of the "Wars of Turlough"' in *Transactions of the Royal Irish Academy*, 32 (1902–4), section C, pp 133–98; Leo F. MacNamara, 'An examination of the medieval Irish text Caithréim Thoirdhealbhaigh' in *North Munster Antiquarian Journal*, 8 (1958–61), no. 4, pp 182–92; Aoife Nic Giollamhaith, 'Dynastic warfare and historical writing in North Munster, 1276–1350' in *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies*, 2 (1981), pp 73–89. **16** Aoife Nic Giollamhaith, 'Kings and vassals in later medieval Ireland: the Uí Bhriain and the MicConmara in the fourteenth century' in Barry, Frame & Simms (eds), *Colony and frontier in medieval Ireland*, pp 203–8.

seen by the respective leaders.[17] Not only the resident bard, but some of the military leaders themselves break into verse exhortations at intervals, and of course there is a continual political bias in favour of the sons of Toirdhealbhach as against their dynastic or English opponents. Another distorting influence on the author's narrative is his conscious imitation of a pre-existing Irish translation of Lucan's Bellum Civile, a Latin narrative of the wars between Julius Caesar and Pompey,[18] which may have affected his description of how the various commanders laid out their troops in preparation for each battle, for example.[19] However, the author by imitating the annalistic narrative framework of the Cogadh has given the saga a coherent chronological sequence which makes it easier to check each episode against the annals and Anglo-Norman administrative records, as historians have done from Orpen onwards, and the closeness of the work's composition to the actual events and location makes the Caithréim Thoirdhealbhaigh a mine of information for local place-names and genealogical details.[2]

Another very interesting tract, though covering a longer time-span and therefore less reliable for the earlier episodes, is the Craobhsgaoileadh Chlainne Suibhne, 'the Ramifications of Clann Suibhne',[21] written between 1532 and 1544 by Tadhg mac Fithil. It purports to be a genealogical tract explaining the relationship of the various branches of the Mac Suibhne or Mac Sweeney galloglass family to each other, but in effect it is a series of biographical sketches of the successive leaders of the Mac Suibhne lords of the Fanad peninsula in Donegal. In this case the author specifically states that 'it was mainly out of his head that he set it down',[22] and he was thus heavily reliant on oral tradition. His account of the Mac Suibhne conquest of the peninsula of Fanad in the late thirteenth century, in which they are alleged to have massacred the Uí Bhreisléin (O'Breslins), the original ruling dynasty there, has no support in the annals,[23] and on more than one occasion the earlier Mac Suibhne lords are described as having encounters with fairies, but his narrative becomes gradually more detailed and credible from the mid-fourteenth century onwards. Particularly noticeable are the details he gives about a series of agreements of service reached between various Mac Suibhne lords of Fanad and their Ó

17 Leo F. McNamara, 'Traditional motifs in the Caithréim Thoirdhealbhaigh' in Kentuky Foreign Language Quarterly, 8, no. 2 (1961), pp 85–92. 18 O'Grady added a transcript of the Irish text 'In Cogadh Catharda' (Bellum Civile) with an English translation as Appendix E at the end of his edition of Caithréim Thoirdhealbhaigh. 19 Katharine Simms, 'Gaelic warfare in the middle ages' in Bartlett & Jeffrey (eds), A military history of Ireland, pp 106–7. 20 T.J. Westropp, 'The Normans in Thomond' in RSAI Jn, 21 (1890–1), pp 284–93, 381–7, 462–72; Goddard H. Orpen, Ireland under the Normans (4 vols, Oxford, 1911, 1920; repr. as single volume with intro. by Seán Duffy, Dublin, 2005), iv, 53–106. 21 Pól Breatnach [Paul Walsh], Leabhar Chlainne Suibhne: an account of the Mac Sweeney families in Ireland, with pedigrees (Dublin, 1920). This consists of an inventory and discussion of the contents of the sixteenth-century RIA, MS no. 475 (24/P/25), which include saints' lives and bardic poems to the Mac Suibhne family. On pp 2–75 of his publication Walsh supplies an edition with facing English translation of a prose text from the manuscript, Craobhsgaoileadh Chlainne Suibhne. 22 Ibid., p. 75. 23 Simms, 'Images of the galloglass', p. 108.

Domhnaill employers,[24] which may have been based on written brehon law charters, since lost.

The Mac Suibhne tract may have influenced the Leabhar Eoghanach,[25] which also gives a series of biographical sketches within a loose genealogical framework, this time of the Ó Neill rulers of Tír Eoghain. Now preserved in a late seventeenth-century manuscript compiled for the County Antrim Ó Néill lords of Clannaboy (Clann Aodha Buidhe), the internal evidence of the text itself indicates it was originally composed in the reign of Toirdhealbhach Luineach Ó Néill (d. 1595), and up-dated for Aodh Mór or Hugh the Great, earl of Tyrone, in the wake of his victory at the battle of the Yellow Ford (1598). One possible purpose of the original tract may have been to play down the role of primogeniture and direct father-to-son succession in the Ó Néill dynasty, and to elevate the role of the *tánaiste*, as Toirdhealbhach Luineach's claim to the lordship of Tír Eoghain was traced through his father Niall Conallach, who had been *tánaiste*, and the Annals of the Four Masters remark discouragingly of an earlier chief, Art (d. 1514) son of Aodh of the Fews Ó Néill, 'seldom indeed had the son of a *tánaiste* been lord of Cenél Eoghain before him' Whatever the motivation, there are some clear tamperings with the historical record in this tract, as when we are told that the *tánaiste* Henry Aimhréidh Ó Néill (d. 1392) ruled as king over Tír Eoghain for six years,[26] although he had in fact pre-deceased both his father and his elder brother. In other cases also the regnal years assigned to each chieftain are at odds with the annal record. Like the Caithréim Chellachain Chaisil tract, though in a much cruder style, it would appear the author's written sources were genealogical rather than annalistic. Its narrative should be stringently checked against other sources and accorded only the status of oral tradition or propaganda up to the passages dealing with the late sixteenth century, where it becomes a direct though not necessarily truthful witness to the burning issues of the day. At the level of oral tradition, however, this tract has an interesting reference to the employment of Mac Suibhne mercenaries by Domhnall Ó Néill (d. 1325),[27] and appears to retail a memory of a royal residence near Augher used by King Aodh Ó Néill (d. 1364) in the period before Dungannon became the Ó Néill's chief seat. It refers to a nation-wide invitation to poets held on this site a generation earlier than the feast given to poets in Eamhain Macha in 1387 by Niall Óg Ó Néill.[28]

Since the text of the Leabhar Eoghanach has come down to us only in a late seventeenth-century transcript, we do not know what the presentation copy originally devised for Toirdhealbhach Luineach would have looked like, but we do

24 Breatnach, *Leabhar Chlainne Suibhne*, pp 30–3, 42–5, 58–9. See Appendix 2. **25** Ó Donnchadha (ed.), *Leabhar Cloinne Aodha Buidhe*, pp 1–40 (Irish text only). **26** Ibid., p. 34. **27** Ibid., p. 31; Simms, 'Images of the galloglass', pp 108–9. **28** Ó Donnchadha (ed.), *Leabhar Cloinne Aodha Buidhe*, pp 32–3; Katharine Simms, 'Late medieval Tír Eoghain: the kingdom of "the Great O'Néill"' in Charles Dillon & Henry A. Jefferies (eds), *Tyrone: history and society* (Dublin, 2000), pp 146–7. Compare Katharine Simms, 'Propaganda use of the Táin in the later middle ages' in *Celtica*, 15 (1983), pp 142–9.

have the original manuscript of Senchus na mBúrcach, 'The History of the Bourkes' – Dublin, Trinity College Library, MS no. 1440 (F.4.13, 13a) – which includes decorated capital letters, two bardic poems and a series of full-page illustrations of past leaders of the Mayo Bourkes, culminating in a portrait of the manuscript's patron, Seaán mac Oileabhéarais a Búrc (d. 1580).[29] Like the Craobhsgaoileadh Chlainne Suibhne, the Bourke historical tract has elements of pure folklore, such as the statement that the family founder, William the Conqueror Bourke was buried upright 'for fear that anyone of Hy-Maine should trample upon him',[30] but also contains material of a quasi-legal nature, such as the listing of the subject territories of the Bourke lordship. Just as in the case of the Leabhar Eoghanach, the purpose behind this tract's production seems to have been to bolster the insecure claim of Seaán a Búrc to the chieftainship of his dynasty.[31]

The circumstances giving rise to the composition of three further historical tracts are more complex, but they have the advantage of being composed so close to events as to have real value as historical records, and this may be why they have attracted more comment and exposition from modern scholars. These are the Beatha Aodha Ruaidh Uí Dhomhnaill: the Life of Aodh Ruadh Ó Domnaill (d. 1602),[32] Imeacht na nIarlaidhe: the Flight of the Earls (1607–8),[33] and Cin Lae Uí Mhealláin, the journal of Ó Mealláin[34] concerning the wars that followed the 1641 rising in Ulster. Each of these tracts in turn moves somewhat further from the bombastic propaganda of the traditional seanchaidh historian and towards factual record. Lughaidh Ó Cléirigh, the author of the Life of Aodh Ruadh, was a trained seanchaidh, and the aim of his work was to immortalise the fame of the most prominent recent leader of his patron's family, but the factual contents of the tract led to its being re-used as one of the sources for the last stages of the Four Masters' Annals

29 Thomas O'Reilly (ed.), 'Seanchus na mBúrcach: Historia et Genealogia Familiae de Burgo' in *Galway Archaeological and Historical Society Journal*, 13 (1926–7), pp 50–60, 101–37; 14 (1928–9), pp 30–51, 142–66. For a transcript and translation of the prose narrative only, see O'Grady (ed.), *Caithréim Thoirdhealbhaigh*, Appendix A (as above Chapter Two, note 1). On the illustrations see Bernadette Cunningham, 'Politics and power in 16th-century Connacht' in *Irish Arts Review*, 21 no. 4 (2004) pp 117–19.   30 O'Reilly (ed.), 'Seanchus', p. 57 [recte 121].   31 Cunningham, 'Illustrations', pp 17–18.   32 Walsh (ed.), *Beatha Aodha Ruaidh*; Pádraig A. Breatnach (ed.), 'A seventeenth-century abridgement of Beatha Aodha Ruaidh Uí Dhomhnaill' in *Éigse*, 33 (2002), pp 77–172; Pádraig Ó Riain (ed.), *Beatha Aodha Ruaidh: the life of Red Hugh O'Donnell, historical and literary contexts* (Dublin, 2002).   33 Paul Walsh (ed.), *The Flight of the Earls* (Dublin, 1916); Pádraig de Barra & Tomás Ó Fiaich (eds), *Imeacht na nIarlaí* (Dublin, 1972) – a re-edition of the Irish text by de Barra, with historical commentary in Irish by Ó Fiaich; Nollaig Ó Muraíle (ed.), *From Ráth Maoláin to Rome: Turas na d'Taoiseach nUltach as Éirinn* (Rome, 2007) – Ó Cianáin's text with translation, incorporating work by Paul Walsh and Tomás Ó Fiaich.   34 [Tadhg Ó Donnchadha] (ed.), 'Cín Lae Ó Mealláin' in *Analecta Hibernica*, 3 (1931), pp 1–61; Charles Dillon (trans.), 'Cín Lae Uí Mhealláin: Friar O Meallan Journal' in Dillon & Jefferies (eds), *Tyrone: history and society*, pp 327–401. See also Diarmuid Ó Doibhlín, 'Tyrone's Gaelic literary legacy' in Dillon & Jefferies (eds), *Tyrone: history and society*, pp 414–17; Máire Nic Cathmhaoil, 'Cin Lae Uí Mhealláin' in *Seanchas Ardmhacha*, 21, no. 1 (2006), pp 35–54.

3 Portrait of Seaán mac Oileabhéaruis a Búrc (d. 1580), Dublin, Trinity College Library
MS 1440 (F.4.13, F.4.13a), f. 24r.

of the kingdom of Ireland. Tadhg Ó Cianáin was a member of the same
Fermanagh *seanchaidh* family as Ádhamh Ó Cianáin, compiler of the fourteenth-
century genealogical collection in NLI, MS G 2, but the fact that Tadhg's wife, left
behind in Tyrone, was allowed by the English government to retain the value of
her property by the intercession of Donnchadh Ó Briain, fourth earl of Thomond,
on the grounds that 'the said earl alleged that the said Teig sent him intelligence of
importance from beyond the seas',[35] raises a question over the original purpose of
his detailed narrative of the journey taken by the earls of Tyrconnell and Tyrone
from Rathmullen to Rome in 1607. The author of the third seventeenth-century
tract, Friar Toirdhealbhach Ó Mealláin, was a member of a family of erenaghs, or
hereditary stewards of Church-lands. In the case of his family, these were lands
associated with the guardianship of the Bell of St Patrick.[36] He was not, however,
a *seanchaidh* and his work is not written in the elevated, allusive style of the profes-
sional historians.

SAINTS' LIVES

The use of hagiography or saints' lives as a historical source has come back into
fashion recently. There was a time when they were studied for information about
the saints themselves, and the life of the Irish Church in the days when they flour-
ished, between the fifth and the seventh centuries of the Christian era.[37] Later it
began to be fully accepted that such texts were normally produced within the com-
munity of a church associated with the saint's name long after the historical events
of the saint's life, and that the contents were designed to bolster the church's own
position, so that the narrative was influenced to a large extent by the territorial and
political hopes and fears of the community at the time the text was originally com-
posed.[38] In many cases the basic text was then re-issued a number of times as the
centuries passed, some things were omitted and others added, so that the new ver-
sion would be tailor-made to later requirements. For example, if a different family
had taken over stewardship of the Church lands,[39] their ancestor or surname could
be added to the narrative. Maddeningly, since every saint's Life is ostensibly telling

35 De Barra & Ó Fiaich (eds), *Imeacht na nIarlaí*, pp 33–5.   **36** *AFM*, iv, 864–5; Ó Ceallaigh,
Gleanings, pp 66–72.   **37** John Ryan, *Irish monasticism, its origins and early development*
(London, 1931) is one of the more scholarly examples of this approach.   **38** See James F.
Kenney, *The sources for the early history of Ireland: ecclesiastical* (New York, 1929 and reprints),
pp 288–304; Hughes, *Early Christian Ireland*, pp 217–47; Máire Herbert, 'Hagiography' in
McCone & Simms (eds), *Progress in medieval Irish studies*, pp 79–90.   **39** A change of coar-
bial families in charge of the church at Fenagh, County Leitrim, from the thirteenth-cen-
tury Mac Céle to the fourteenth-century Ó Rodacháin dynasty may have been the motive
for re-writing the Book of Fenagh in the early sixteenth century, and certainly inspired the
claim to a mythical ancestor of the later family, who was supposed to have been installed
in the church of Fenagh in the days of St Adamnán. See Walsh, 'The Book of Fenagh', pp
50–2.

a tale about events when the saint flourished in the Early Christian period, these texts usually omit any information about when they themselves were written, and the editors have to make more or less informed guesses. These difficulties have led some to dismiss this large body of medieval material as historically useless,[40] but as techniques have been developed on the Continent and in England for making use of hagiographical material, Irish historians have returned to the task also.

The earliest Latin Lives of Patrick, Brigit, Columba and Columbanus can be given approximate dates in the seventh and eighth centuries because there are early manuscripts containing the texts, and in some cases the authors are named. Most other Latin lives of Irish saints are contained in a series of fourteenth-century manuscripts[41] and seem to stem from a single lost anthology compiled just after the twelfth-century Church reform. Possibly this included some Latin texts originally composed as early as the eighth century.[42] Other Lives forming part of this group may have been written anew in the twelfth or early thirteenth century, or translated into Latin from Lives originally composed in Irish, in order to round out a collection that could be read for devotional purposes by communities of English or French-speaking monks in the years following the Norman invasion.[43]

Most of the Irish texts of the saints' Lives seem to have originated as translations made from a Latin Life, perhaps using a version of the text that was fuller and more detailed than the versions that we now have in the fourteenth-century Latin anthologies. Apart from the exceptional 'Old Irish Life of St Brigit',[44] the language of the Irish saints' Lives would place them at earliest in the Middle Irish period, when a lot of other religious material, biblical and apocryphal, was being translated from Latin into Irish,[45] presumably for use in the increasingly secularised Church schools of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The manuscripts that contain them are of little use in establishing their original date of composition. Nine Middle Irish saints' Lives are found in the fifteenth-century Book of Lismore,[46] but most such texts have been preserved in paper manuscripts of the seventeenth century or later.[47]

There are basically three ways in which Irish saints' lives can be used as historical sources. Some scholars have taken all versions of a single saint's Life, whether in Latin or Irish, and made a comparative study of their manuscript transmission

40 Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, *Early medieval Ireland, 400–1200* (London, 1995), p. 210. 41 W W Heist (ed.), *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae ex codice olim Salmanticensi nunc Bruxellensi* (Brussels, 1965), p. xxi; Charles Plummer (ed.), *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae* (2 vols, Oxford, 1910), I, ix–xxiii, and see Richard Sharpe, *Medieval Irish Saints' Lives. An introduction to* Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae (Oxford, 1991), pp 93–119, 247–73. 42 Sharpe, *Medieval Irish Saints' Lives*, pp 320–4, 329, 384. 43 W W Heist, 'Dermot O'Donohue and Codex Salmanticensis' in *Celtica*, 5 (1960), pp 52–63; idem, 'Over the writer's shoulder: Saint Abban' in *Celtica*, 11 (1976), pp 76–84; Ó Riain, 'St Abbán'; Pádraig Ó Riain, 'Codex Salmanticensis: a provenance inter Anglos or inter Hibernos?' in Barnard, Ó Cróinín & Simms (eds), *A miracle of learning*, pp 91–100. 44 Donnchadh Ó hAodha (ed.), *Bethu Brigte* (Dublin, 1978). 45 Kenney, *The sources*, pp 10–12, 732–3. 46 Whitley Stokes (ed.), *Lives of the Saints from the Book of Lismore* (Oxford, 1890; facs. repr., Felinfach, 1995). 47 See, for example, Charles Plummer (ed.), *Bethada Náem nÉrenn* (2 vols, Oxford, 1922), I, xi–xx.

and textual changes within a framework of whatever else is known about Church centres dedicated to that saint, with a view to studying the development of the saint's cult through the centuries.[48]

Another approach is to make a broad assumption, based on linguistic features and other internal evidence of the texts, that most saints' Lives written in Irish originate roughly in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and indeed there are a number of verses which claim in their closing stanzas to be the work of the mid-twelfth-century Gilla Mochuda Ó Caiside in the late medieval Lives of M'Aedhóc and Molaisse.[49] On this basis the general corpus of Irish hagiography can be trawled for evidence of economic and social conditions in the centuries immediately prior to the Norman invasion.[50] This might be thought to be a risky procedure, given the generally acknowledged tendency for saints' Lives to be periodically re-written and updated to meet new challenges, but it is true to say that the narratives in Irish saints' Lives tend to refer to ploughing fields with ox-teams, for example, rather than horses, and to wheat and barley as the normal ingredients for bread, rather than the oat-cakes that were so typical of the Gaelic Irishman's diet in the later middle ages.[51] This might suggest that if and when saints' Lives were updated in the later medieval or even early modern period in relation to the territorial or genealogical interests of churches which benefited from the cult of a particular saint, incidental details in the anecdotes about the saints' miracles were left largely unchanged from the earlier versions.

However, it is obviously easiest for a historian to use a saint's Life as historical evidence if the actual text as it stands could be ascribed even roughly to a definite date or period. This might result from a statement by the medieval Irish author himself, or be the conclusion of a modern editor or commentator, matching details of the internal narrative, linguistic and manuscript evidence with a known political or ecclesiastical context.

The tenth-century Irish Life of St Adamnán, and the twelfth-century Irish Life of St Columba have both been edited in recent times with English translations and a full

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48 See Charles Doherty, 'The Irish hagiographer: resources, aims, results' in Tom Dunne (ed.), *The writer as witness*, pp 10–22; idem, 'The transmission of the cult of Maedhóg' in Proinséas Ní Chatháin & Michael Richter (eds), *Ireland and Europe in the early middle ages: texts and transmission* (Dublin, 2002), pp 268–83; Ailbhe Séamus Mac Shamhráin, *Church and polity in pre-Norman Ireland: the case of Glendalough* (Maynooth, 1996); idem, 'The Unity of Cóemgen and Ciarán': a covenant between Glendalough and Clonmacnois in the 10th to 11th centuries' in Ken Hannigan & William Nolan (eds), *Wicklow: history and society* (Dublin, 1994), pp 139–50; Kehnel, *Clonmacnois*, pp 14–21, 137–8. **49** Plummer (ed.), *Bethada Náem nÉrenn*, i, 247, 251, 260, 264; ii, 239, 243, 252, 256; O'Grady & Flower, *Catalogue*, ii, 462–4. **50** See Charles Doherty, 'Exchange and trade in early medieval Ireland' in *RSAI Jn*, 110 (1980), pp 67–89; idem, 'Some aspects of hagiography as a source for Irish economic and social history' in *Peritia*, 1 (1982), pp 300–28; David Herlihy, *Medieval households* (Cambridge, MA & London, 1985), pp 30–43; O'Sullivan, *Hospitality in medieval Ireland*, pp 25–6. **51** Plummer (ed.), *Bethada Náem nÉrenn*, i, 26–7, 39, 119, 186, 188, 215, 221, 230, 232–3, 294; ii, 25–6, 38–9, 115, 180, 182, 208, 214–15, 223, 225–6, 285. See Fergus Kelly, *Early Irish farming* (Dublin, 1997), pp 95–6, 119–21, 330–1; O'Sullivan, *Hospitality in medieval Ireland*, p. 229. **52** Máire Herbert &

historical commentary.[52] The Life of St Colmán mac Luacháin (St Colmán of Lynn)[53] was dated by its editor to about 1122, on the basis of a colophon immediately following the Life in the fourteenth- or fifteenth-century manuscript which contains it, and referring to the re-enshrinement of the saint's bones in 1122, which may have inspired the composition of the Life as part of the celebrations. Besides a startling passage describing the inaugurations of the kings of Tara (at that date a title referring to the provincial kings of Meath),[54] this life is a mine of Westmeath place-names.

There remain those texts which can be internally dated by the names of their medieval authors. Charles Doherty has traced the development of the Irish lives of St M'Aedhóg (or Aidan) of Ferns in Wexford and Drumlane in County Cavan from 'a text in Latin that can only have been read to the brethren during the privacy of their meals   to a text which sings the praises and curses of the saint in the vernacular for all to hear'.[55] What is known as the 'Second Irish Life of M'Aedhóg'[56] went through a twelfth-century stage when a number of poems by Gilla Mochuda Ó Caiside were composed both for this saint and for the Life of Molaisse, but it also includes a poem by the fourteenth-century scholar Síodradh Mór Ó Cuirnín (d. 1347), and a colophon and internal references in the prose parts of the text would put the compilation as we have it now as late as the second half of the fifteenth[57] or even the sixteenth century.[58]

The most clearly dated of all the later medieval saints' Lives in Irish, however, is the Book of Fenagh. Here we have the original presentation copy of the work (RIA, MS no. 479, 23/P/26) surviving, as it was compiled in 1516 by the professional *seanchaidh* Muirghius mac Páidín Uí Mhaoil Chonaire for his patron, Tadhg Ó Rodacháin or Ó Rodaighe, the 'coarb' (*comharba*, 'heir')[59] of St Caillín of Fenagh, that is the hereditary administrator of the saint's shrine with its attached church-lands, in north County Leitrim. We also have in another manuscript (BL, MS Cotton Vespasian E II) an abbreviated version of the same materials put together by Ó Maoil Chonaire about the year 1535. Even more helpfully Ó Maoil Chonaire inserted a note in his own hand into the original Book, which clearly states that all the prose passages were written by himself, while the verse was transcribed out of an older manuscript in the possession of the coarb, a manuscript which was in places damaged or unreadable, and that the older manuscript con-

Pádraig Ó Riain (eds), *Betha Adamnáin: the Life of Adamnan* (London, 1988); Máire Herbert, *Iona, Kells and Derry* (Oxford, 1988), pp 151–288. **53** Kuno Meyer (ed.), *Betha Colmáin maic Lúacháin: Life of Colmán son of Lúachán* (Dublin, 1911). The translation from this edition was re-issued with some stylistic alterations to the English and additional notes by Leo Daly (ed.), *Life of Colmán of Lynn: Betha Colmáin Lainne* (Dublin, 1999). See also Walsh, *Irish leaders and learning*, ed. Ó Muraíle, pp 263–72. **54** Meyer (ed.), *Betha Colmáin*, p. 73; O'Daly (ed.), *Life of Colmán*, pp 51–2. See Simms, *From kings to warlords*, p. 23. **55** Doherty, 'The transmission', p. 274. **56** Plummer (ed.), *Bethada Náem nÉrenn*,   190–290; ii, 177–281. **57** Doherty, 'The transmission', p. 283. **58** Raymond Gillespie, 'A sixteenth-century saint's life: the Second Irish Life of St Maedoc' in *Breifne*, 10, no. 40 (2004), pp 147–54, especially pp 151–2. **59** See St John D. Seymour, 'The coarb in the medieval Irish Church' in *RIA Proc*, 41 (1933), section C, pp 219–31; Simms, 'Frontiers in the Irish Church', p. 178.

tained nothing but verse.[60] When we examine the contents of the verses, they contain many references to events in the first half of the thirteenth century, cast in the form of 'prophecies' by St Caillín. These include the violation of the shrine of Fenagh by William Gorm de Lacy, a younger brother of Walter de Lacy, lord of Meath, who had received a speculative grant of the kingdom of Breifne in which Fenagh was situated, and the subsequent death of William Gorm as a result of a defeat in battle in 1233, which is celebrated as due to St Caillin's revenge. Also mentioned is the rise of the Ó Raighilligh (or O'Reilly) chieftains of East Breifne to extend their power temporarily over the Ó Ruairc territory of West Breifne also, before they were crushed at the battle of Magh Sléacht in 1256, although this latter battle is not mentioned, suggesting the section of verse concerning the Uí Ruairc and Uí Raighilligh was composed before that date.[61] Other sections of the verse refer to the thirteenth-century Ó Domhnaill chieftains of Tír Conaill as patrons of the shrine, including Domhnall Óg Ó Domhnaill (reigned 1258–81), but none of the verse can be associated with any date later than 1300. As a kind of appendix to the beautifully-written Book of Fenagh proper, Ó Maoil Chonaire added a number of poems dealing with eleventh- and twelfth-century territorial claims of the kings of Tír Conaill which were not directly connected to St Caillín, but had been part of the now lost 'Old Book' of Fenagh from which he was copying. These more political poems were also copied from the 'Old Book of Fenagh' into another sixteenth-century manuscript, Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson B 514, which contains a secular poem-book for the Uí Dhomhnaill chieftains up to and including Maghnus Ó Domhnaill (d. 1563), and they can be used in conjunction with other sources to retrieve information about the development of the Cenél Conaill kingship in the eleventh and twelfth-century period.[62]

The manuscript Rawlinson B 514, which contains those poems transcribed from the now lost 'Old Book of Fenagh', also includes a fine copy of Betha Colaim Cille, the Life of St Colmcille (or St Columba), written in 1532 for Maghnus Ó Domhnaill.[63] Like the Book of Fenagh, which may have given the inspiration for this work, Maghnus Ó Domhnaill's Life of Colmcille is written in sixteenth-century

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60 Hennessy & Kelly (eds), *The Book of Fenagh*, , 310–11. See O'Grady & Flower, *Catalogue*, ii, 465–8; Raymond Gillespie, 'Relics, reliquaries and hagiography in south Ulster, 1450–1550' in Moss, Ó Clabaigh & Ryan (eds), *Art and devotion in late medieval Ireland*, pp 184–201. 61 See Katharine Simms, 'The O'Reillys and the kingdom of East Breifne' in *Breifne*, 6 (1978–71), pp 305–19. 62 See for example, Tomás Ó Canann, 'Trí Saorthuatha Mhuinntire Chanannáin: a forgotten medieval place-name' in *Donegal Annual*, no. 38 (1986), pp 19–45. 63 Andrew O'Kelleher & Gertrude Schoepperle (eds), *Betha Colaim Cille: Life of Columcille compiled by Manus O'Donnell in 1532* (Chicago, 1918; repr. Dublin, 1994; revised translation by Brian Lacey, Dublin, 1998). See Brian Ó Cuív, *Catalogue*, i, 270; Pádraig Ó Fiannachta, 'Betha Choluimb Chille' in idem (ed.), *Léachtaí Cholm Cille* [15] *Ár Naomhsheanchus* (Maynooth, 1985), pp 11–33; Jan Erik Rekdal, 'A monstrance for an absent poem: the reciting of Amra Coluim Cille in the sixteenth-century Life of Colum Cille' in Michael Richter & Jean-Michel Picard (eds), *Ogma: essays in Celtic Studies in honour of Próinséas Ní Chatháin* (Dublin, 2002), pp 224–9. For later manuscript copies of this Life see Walsh, *Irish men of learning*, ed. Ó Lochlainn, pp 160–78.

prose, incorporating information from the earlier seventh-century and twelfth-century Lives of the same saint in Latin and Irish with much added traditional material. It also draws on pre-existing Middle Irish poems anachronistically ascribed to St Columba himself and his companions, a number of which are found in a manuscript of the same period, Oxford, Bodleian Library Laud 615, probably assembled as part of the preparation for writing the Betha Colaim Cille.[64] Other later medieval or early modern saints' Lives in Irish apart from those of Caillín, Columba and M'Aedóc are that of Molaisse of Devenish, which may be slightly earlier than the Book of Fenagh,[65] and that of Maighneann of Kilmainham, both to be found in O'Grady's *Silva Gadelica* miscellany[66] and the Irish Life of St Berach of Cloonbarry in County Roscommon, which seems to reflect the fourteenth-century controversy between the Church and the bardic poets.[67] The fact that its introductory exordium and its conclusion are identical to those found in the Book of Fenagh also supports a somewhat earlier date for this one, on the assumption that Ó Maol Chonaire borrowed from the Life of Berach for his own Life of Caillín, rather than vice versa.[68] When an approximate or precise date for hagiographical texts such as these has been deduced, they become of immediate interest in relation to the political and ecclesiastical aims of their compilers and patrons, while it is also possible to quarry from them more cautiously evidence for an earlier stratum of composition, particularly where they contain earlier poems with identifiable authors, or where the verse has obligingly been pointed out by the compiler to be older than the prose. The place-names occurring in the course of their financial and territorial claims on behalf of the saint in question can usefully be compared with the more conventional Latin records of the medieval church in Ireland to map an area over which the saint's cult flourished.[69]

HOMILIES AND APOCRYPHA

The other Irish prose tracts of ecclesiastical origin from this period are translated Lives of foreign saints, homilies and apocrypha. Like all the other early medieval

64 Anne O'Sullivan & Máire Herbert, 'The provenance of Laud Misc. 615' in *Celtica*, 10 (1973), pp 174–92. The first lines of these poems are listed in ibid., pp 189–92, and Máire Herbert has edited the texts in 'Duanaire Choluim Cille i Laud 615: An Téacs' (Library of NUI Galway, unpublished MA thesis, 1970). 65 Gillespie, 'Relics, reliquaries and hagiography', pp 191–3. 66 Standish H. O'Grady (ed.), *Silva Gadelica (I–XXXI): a collection of tales in Irish with extracts illustrating persons and places* (2 vols, vol. 1 texts, vol. 2 trans., London, 1892), 17–47; ii, 18–49; O'Grady's *Silva Gadelica* was reissued (Dublin, 1935 and reprints) in a single volume containing texts from vol. 1 only, with notes from vol. 2, but no translations. For a note on the Life of Maighneann, see Simms, *From kings to warlords*, p. 93. 67 Plummer (ed.), *Bethada Náem nÉrenn*, i, 21–43; ii, pp 22–43; Katharine Simms, 'An eaglais agus filí na scol' in Ó Fiannachta (ed.), *Léachtaí Choim Cille*, XXIV (1994), pp 30–1. 68 Plummer (ed.), *Bethada Náem nÉrenn*, ii, 326; MacAlister, *The Book of Fenagh (supplement)*, p. 18; Walsh, *Irish men of learning*, ed. Ó Lochlainn, pp 55–6. 69 For guidance on Latin ecclesiastical sources see Cosgrove (ed.), *A new history of Ireland*, ii: *medieval Ireland, 1169–1534*, pp 859–66 and idem, 'The medieval period' in Réamonn Ó Muirí (ed.), *Irish Church history today* (Armagh, 1990), pp 13–26.

church cultures, the Irish accepted apocryphal texts, that is, uncanonical and unau-
thoritative (sometimes quite heretical) early texts of a biblical nature as suitable
pious reading. Their use is already demonstrated in the Old Irish period in the
poems of Blathmac, for instance,[70] but at this stage the bulk of the material would
still have been in Latin. It is not until 900–1200, the last centuries of the monastic
schools, that most of these texts were translated into Irish, while the actual manu-
scripts that preserve them today chiefly belong to the fifteenth century, a period
when pious laymen sought devotional reading in their own language.[71] Since the
subject matter in these texts is quasi-biblical, they do not shed direct light on the
political history of Ireland, but they can tell us much about the ecclesiastical culture
of the era in which the translations and adaptations were made. In particular the
First Vision ascribed to St Adamnán,[72] a tenth- or eleventh-century Irish text on
heaven, hell and purgatory, which is paralleled by similar Latin visionary texts of
Irish origin more closely dated to the mid-twelfth century,[73] has been described as
a fore-runner of the work of the Italian poet Dante in terms of social comment dis-
guised as apocalyptic vision.

The more mundane sermons and homilies have not received so much attention
to date in print, but are potentially more relevant for the historian, for example the
Middle Irish treatise on kingship in the Leabhar Breac, which occurs in both Latin
and Irish, much of the Latin text closely reproducing a famous section on the just
and unjust king from a Hiberno-Latin treatise of the seventh century, De duodecim
abusivis saeculi.[74] It is not only significant that such Latin works were being trans-
lated into Irish during the tenth to twelfth centuries, but also interesting that these
tracts were still being transcribed, and presumably studied, in manuscripts of a later
date – the Leabhar Breac dates to around AD 1400. Some of the homilies in these
fifteenth-century collections are actually contemporary with the date of the man-
uscript. A tract called Riagal na Sacart, on the importance of priests remaining celi-
bate, has been printed from a late fifteenth-century manuscript in which there are
no personalised details,[75] but the same tract recurs among the unpublished contents

70 Máire Herbert & Martin McNamara (trans.), Irish biblical apocrypha: selected texts in trans-
lation (Edinburgh, 1989), pp xx–xxii. 71 Ibid., pp xxii–xxiv; Martin McNamara, The apoc-
rypha in the Irish Church (Dublin, 1975) – a catalogue of extant texts. See also Kenney, The
sources, pp 10, 732–44. 72 Translation in Herbert & McNamara (trans.), Irish biblical apoc-
rypha, pp 137–48; another translation with more extended commentary in C.S. Boswell, An
Irish precursor of Dante (London, 1908); Irish text in Best & Bergin (eds), Lebor na hUidre, pp
67–76. Extract in Kenneth H. Jackson (trans.), A Celtic miscellany (London, 1971), pp 288–
95. 73 Jean-Michel Picard & Yolande de Pontfarcy (trans.), St Patrick's Purgatory: a twelfth-
century tale of a journey to the Other World [aka 'The Vision of the Knight Owen'] (Dublin,
1985); idem (trans.), The Vision of Tnugdal (Dublin, 1989). 74 Robert Atkinson (ed.), The
passions and homilies from Leabhar Breac (Dublin, 1887), pp 151–62 (Irish text of 'Sermo ad
Reges'), 401–13 (English translation), 414–18 (Latin text, with extract from De duodecim
abusivis on pp 416–17). See Aidan Breen, 'De XII abusiuis: text and transmission' in Ireland
and Europe in the early middle ages: texts and transmission ed. Próinséas Ní Chatháin & Michael
Richter (Dublin 2002), pp 78–94 at pp 90–1. 75 Anon. (ed.), 'Riaghal na Sacart' in
Irisleabhar Muighe Nuadhad (1919), pp 73–9.

of another fifteenth-century manuscript, Liber Flavus Fergusiorum, in which it is prefaced by an appeal to Maghnus Mac Mathghamhna (d. 1441), lord of Farney in Monaghan, urging him to take direct action against priests' concubines. This version can be linked to a campaign by John Mey, the archbishop of Armagh, to use secular chieftains to discipline concubinary priests.[76] It is to be hoped that this type of source will receive more attention from scholars in future.[77]

TRANSLATIONS OF CLASSICAL OR ROMANTIC TEXTS

We have thus seen two peak periods in the translation of Latin religious material into Irish. Firstly the eleventh and twelfth centuries, when the late pre-Norman Church schools undertook such translations, perhaps because a number of their students were no longer fluent in Latin, and secondly the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, when the spread of literacy among the middle and upper classes of the laity, and later the invention of the printing press, increased the demand for pious reading matter in the language of the people. The same two periods also saw the composition of Irish versions of European romances about knights and their adventures,[78] or tales drawn

76 'Liber Flavus Fergusiorum' (RIA, MS 476 ii, 23/0/48 II), ff 14 (16) v, col. b – 17v col. b. See Katharine Simms, 'The legal position of Irishwomen in the later Middle Ages' in *Irish Jurist*, new series, 10 (1975), p. 105; idem, 'The concordat between Primate John Mey and Henry O'Neill (1455)' in *Archivium Hibernicum*, 34 (1976–7), p. 75.   77 See Caoimhín Breatnach (ed.), 'An Irish homily on the Virgin Mary' in *Ériu*, 51 (2000), pp 23–58. The same editor is currently preparing a diplomatic text of 'Liber Flavus Fergusiorum' to be published initially on the internet; a diplomatic edition of the full text of the 'Leabhar Breac' is in preparation under the direction of Liam Breatnach, also due for internet publication at www.dias.ie. On homilies see also Frederic Mac Donncha, 'Medieval Irish homilies' in Martin McNamara (ed.), *Biblical Studies: the medieval Irish contribution* (Dublin, 1976), pp 59–71; Frederic Mac Donncha, 'Na hoimilí sa Leabhar Breac, i Lebor na hUidre, i Leabhar Mhic Charthaigh Riabhaigh, agus i Vita Tripartita Sancti Patricii, a mBunús, a nÚdar, agus a nDáta' (unpublished PhD thesis, National University of Ireland, 1972). On Lives of foreign saints in Irish see Diarmaid Ó Laoghaire, 'Beathaí Naomh Iasachta I nDeireadh na Meán-Aoise' in Ó'Fiannachta (ed.), *Léachtaí Cholm Cille* [15] *Ár Naomhsheanchus*, pp 79–97. 78 See Gerard Murphy, *The Ossianic lore and romantic tales of medieval Ireland* (Dublin, 1955), pp 35–9; Robin Flower, *Ireland and medieval Europe* (London [1929]); J.E. Caerwyn Williams & Patrick K. Ford, *The Irish literary tradition* (Cardiff & Massachusetts, 1992), pp 134–45. Examples are Sheila Falconer (ed.), *Lorgaireacht an tSoidhigh Naomhtha: an Early Modern Irish translation of the Quest of the Holy Grail* (Dublin, 1953); Cecile O'Rahilly (ed.), *Eachtra Uilliam: an Irish version of William of Palerne* (Dublin, 1949); Frederick N. Robinson (ed.), 'The Irish lives of Guy of Warwick and Bevis of Hampton' in *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie*, 6 (1908), pp 9–104, 273–338, 556; Carl Marstrander (ed.), 'Sechrán na Banimpire & Oilemain a deise mac: the wandering of the empress and the rearing of her two sons' in *Ériu*, 5 (1911), pp 161–99; Whitley Stokes (ed.), 'The Irish version of Fierabras' in *Revue Celtique*, 19 (1898), pp 14–57, 118–67, 252–91, 364–93; 20 (1899), p. 212; idem (ed.), 'The Gaelic abridgment of the Book of Ser Marco Polo' in *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie*, 1 (1896–7), pp 245–73, 362–438, 603; idem (ed.), 'The Gaelic Maundeville' in *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie*, 2 (1898), pp 1–63, 226–312, 603–04; Douglas Hyde (ed.), *Gabhaltais*

from the classical literature of Greece and Rome.[79] As with the Middle Irish translations of ecclesiastical texts, the Middle Irish translations from the classics were transcribed and re-read in the later middle ages and early modern period. Since the subject matter is far from Ireland, these texts are of limited use as historical sources. They can, however, supply evidence of the availability of ideas and concepts from feudal Europe to a Gaelic-speaking audience.

MYTHS AND SAGAS

Making use of sagas for historical information is a tricky business. Like saints' Lives, the plots of the sagas are normally set in a period long before the author's time, if not in a completely mythical world of fairies. Again like saints' Lives, the same basic plot can be re-told in different centuries, sometimes updating an existing written version, as with the various recensions of the Táin Bó Cuailgne,[80] sometimes radically re-casting the whole story.[81] Before making any use of a saga text as a historical source, whether in terms of its evidence for social manners and customs, or in search of a coded message of political propaganda for a certain patron, it is essential to get some idea of the linguistic date of the particular recension under discussion.

Some saga texts are published with an English translation, but no linguistic discussion. The same tale might be found edited with a linguistic introduction but no translation in the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies 'Medieval and Modern Irish' series.[82] However, any student who gleans their translation of a text from one source, and their linguistic dating and discussion from elsewhere must make very

Shearluis Mhóir: the Conquests of Charlemagne (ITS, Dublin [1919]). **79** Examples are Charles Geisler (ed.), 'History of Alexander the Great, from the Leabhar Breac' in the *Gaelic Journal*, 2 (1884–5), pp 65–70, 116–18, 129–31, 184–5, 213–15, 247–9, 279–83, 302–4; Whitley Stokes (ed.), 'The destruction of Troy' in Whitley Stokes & Ernst Windisch (eds), *Irische Text* 1 (Leipzig, 1884), pp 1–142; idem (ed.), *An Cath Catharda: the Civil War of the Romans, an Irish version of Lucan's Pharsalia* (*Irische Texte*, 4th series, 2 (Leipzig, 1909)); Kuno Meyer (ed.), *Merugud Uilix maic Leirtis: the Irish Odyssey* (London, 1886; re-edited without trans. in 1958); George Calder (ed.), *Imtheachta Aeniasa: the Irish Aeneid* (ITS, London, 1907); idem (ed.), *Togail na Tebe: the Thebaid of Statius* (Cambridge, 1922); E.G. Quin (ed.), *Stair Ercuil ocus a bás: the life and death of Hercules* (ITS, Dublin, 1939). **80** Cecile O'Rahilly (ed.), *Táin Bó Cúailnge Recension I* (Dublin, 1976); idem (ed.), *Táin Bó Cúailnge from the Book of Leinster* (Dublin, 1967); idem (ed.), *The Stowe version of Táin Bó Cúailnge* (Dublin, 1960). See Ruairí Ó hUiginn, 'The background and development of *Táin Bó Cúailnge*' in J.P Mallory (ed.), *Aspects of the Táin* (Belfast, 1992), pp 29–67. **81** See, for example, the different versions of the 'Deirdre story' compared in Caoimhín Breatnach, 'Oideadh Chloinne Uisnigh' in *Ériu*, 45 (1994), pp 98–112; also idem, 'The transmission and structure of Immram Curaig Ua Corra' in *Ériu*, 53 (2003), pp 91–108. **82** For example, Rudolf Thurneysen (ed.), *Scéla Mucce meic Dathó* (Dublin, 1935; repr. 1969), pp i–vi (Gantz, *Early Irish myths*, 179–89); Eleanor Knott (ed.), *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* (Dublin, 1936; repr. 1963), pp x–xi (Gantz, op. cit., pp 60–106); Myles Dillon (ed.), *Serglige Con Culainn* (Dublin 1953; repr. 1975), pp xi–xvi (Gantz, op. cit., pp 153–76); David Greene (ed.), *Fingal Rónáin* (Dublin, 1955), pp 1–2 (Tom Peete Cross & Clark Harris Slover (eds), *Ancient Irish tales* (1st edn, New York, 1936;

sure that the discussion and the translation apply to the same manuscript recension, because as mentioned above, a single saga, or historical tract can exist in a number of different versions, preserved in different manuscripts, and the wording can vary quite dramatically.

SAGAS SET IN THEIR HISTORICAL CONTEXT

For those concerned with the period of the Gaelic lordships from about the twelfth to the sixteenth century the saga texts composed in Old Irish are less useful, though it is of interest to note when they have been re-copied into manuscripts of the late fourteenth century, such as the Yellow Book of Lecan, for example (TCD, MS no. 1318, H.2.16.),[83] just as Old and Middle Irish homilies were transcribed for later medieval readers. However, a number of our extant sagas were written in Late Middle Irish (twelfth or early thirteenth century)[84] or Classical Early Modern Irish (thirteenth to seventeenth centuries). These have been the subject of a number of studies.[85] Some are chiefly aimed at a literary analysis which seeks to clarify the underlying theme of the tale,[86] others use the 'message' contained in the story, together with any other clues in the personal and territorial names mentioned, to try to place the saga in a specific political context and period. For the novice historian, tales that have already been analysed in this way are the most helpful.

Two twelfth-century sagas, Fled Dúin na nGéd and Aided Muirchertaig mac Erca, have been identified by Máire Herbert as relevant to the politics of the two northern high-kings, Domnall Mac Lochlainn and his grandson, Muirchertach mac Lochlainn respectively.[87] The fifteenth-century text Cath Fionntrágha has been associated by Caoimhín Breatnach with a confrontation and subsequent truce between Ó Domhnaill and MacWilliam Bourke at Fionntráigh or Ballysadare, County Sligo in 1476,[88] and the same author has shown that three further tales, Ceasacht Inghine Guile, Sgéala Muice Meic Dhá Thó, and Oideadh Chuinn Chéadchathaigh can be linked not only by their content but by manuscript tradi-

repr. with appendix by Charles W Dunn listing editions of the original Irish texts, New York & Dublin, 1969), pp 538–45). **83** See Oskamp, 'The Yellow Book of Lecan Proper' p. 102; Richard I. Best, 'The Yellow Book of Lecan' in *Journal of Celtic Studies*, 1 (1950), pp 190–2; William O'Sullivan, 'Ciothruadh's Yellow Book of Lecan' in *Éigse*, 18, pt 2 (1981), pp 177–81. **84** See Uaitéar Mac Gearailt, 'The language of some late Middle Irish texts in the Book of Leinster' in *Studia Hibernica*, 26 (1992), pp 167–216. **85** See Caoimhín Breatnach, 'Early Modern Irish prose' in McCone & Simms (eds), *Progress in medieval Irish studies*, pp 189–206. **86** For example, Tomás Ó Cathasaigh, 'Sound and sense in Cath Almaine' in *Ériu*, 54 (2004), pp 41–7; Caoimhín Breatnach, 'The religious significance of Oideadh Chloinne Lír' in *Ériu*, 50 (1999), pp 1–40. **87** Máire Herbert, '*Fled Dúin na nGéd*: a reappraisal' in *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies*, 18 (1989), pp 75–88; idem, 'The death of Muirchertach mac Erca: a twelfth-century tale' in Folke Josephson (ed.), *Celts and Vikings: proceedings of the Fourth Symposium of Societas Celtologica Nordica* (Göteborg, 1997), pp 27–40. **88** Caoimhín Breatnach, 'The historical context of Cath Fionntrágha' in *Éigse*, 28 (1994–5), pp 138–55.

tion with the court of the Mac Domhnaill lords of the Route and Glens of Antrim in the late sixteenth century.[89] Similarly Alan Bruford has linked the tale Eachtra Chonaill Ghulban to the court of the sixteenth-century Ó Domhnaill chieftains of Tír Chonaill.[90]

From the description by the sixteenth-century Dublin writer Richard Stanihurst[91] of the entertainment at a 'coshering feast' where a Gaelic or Gaelicised lord brought his retinue to the house of a vassal to banquet at the latter's expense,[92] it is clear that tale-telling, like music or the recital of bardic poetry, was part of the court culture of Irish and Anglo-Irish lords alike. It is strongly argued by Caoimhín Breatnach, in particular,[93] that the customising of traditional material and examples taken from the adventures of mythical heroes in order to compliment a living patron, which is so much a feature of the poetic eulogies performed at such feasts, can also be found in prose tales from the later middle ages, if they are examined carefully enough. Identification of the patron for whom the prose tale was originally composed is less obvious than in the case of bardic poetry, and the prose format, unlike the elaborate *dán díreach* metres of bardic compositions, does not ensure that the same fixed text will be transmitted unchanged from one manuscript copy to the next. Very close attention to the manuscript transmission by which the text has been preserved to this day, and rigorous comparison and collation of the text as between one manuscript copy and the next becomes a very important part of the exercise.

89 Breatnach, *Patronage*. 90 Alan Bruford, *Gaelic folktales and medieval romances* (*Béaloideas* 34, special issue, Dublin, 1966), p. 88 note 2. 91 Raphael Holinshed, *Irish Chronicle 1577*, ed. Liam Miller & Eileen Power (Dublin, 1979), p. 113. 92 See Simms, 'Guesting and feasting', pp 79–82. 93 Breatnach, 'The historical context of Cath Fionntrágha', pp 138–40.

Legal and medical material, colophons and marginalia

LATER COMMENTARIES ON THE OLD IRISH BREHON LAW TRACTS

Although the actual texts of the Old Irish law tracts, commonly termed the 'Brehon laws', were originally written in an ecclesiastical context[1] between the late seventh and the ninth centuries, they have been transmitted to us in vellum manuscripts of the twelfth to the sixteenth centuries. The twelfth-century manuscript, Rawlinson B 502, which contains two law-tracts along with much other learned material, including the earliest copy of the Corpus Genealogiarum Hiberniae, is a product of the last generation of the pre-reform Church schools and dates to around AD 1120,[2] while the bulk of the manuscripts containing mainly legal material (apart from still later paper transcripts) date from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries, and were produced in order to train the 'brehons' (*breitheamhain*), or judges, who ran the courts of Irish customary law in the later middle ages.[3] Since the Irish law schools used a very similar methodology to Latin schools of civil and canon law in cathedral schools and universities elsewhere in Europe, these legal 'text-books' comprise copies of the original Old Irish tracts, often surrounded by glosses and commentary. Sometimes indeed the Old Irish text was represented simply by the initial word or phrase of a well-known section in the original tract, and the rest of the paragraph or page was taken up with a legal commentary written in Late Middle or Early Modern Irish, expounding the meaning of the Old Irish ruling, and updating its application to the practical needs of the juridical commentarist's own day. Glossing on the original tracts began as early as the eighth century, while many of the commentaries belong to the eleventh- or twelfth-century pre-reform Church schools, rather than the secular schools of the later medieval brehons.[4] Unlike the codes issued by Visigothic or Anglo-Saxon kings, even the Old Irish tracts themselves were not royal decrees but explanatory handbooks for the instruction of lawyers and judges, like the Institutes of Gaius, Paulus, or Justinian

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1 See Donnchadh Ó Corráin, Liam Breatnach & Aidan Breen, 'The laws of the Irish' in *Peritia*, 3 (1984), pp 382–438; Liam Breatnach, 'Canon law and secular law in Early Ireland: the significance of Bretha Nemed' in *Peritia*, 3 (1984), pp 439–59. 2 Ó Cuív, *Catalogue*, i, 163–200. 3 Fergus Kelly, *A guide to Early Irish law* (Dublin, 1988), pp 225–63; Simms, 'The brehons of later medieval Ireland'; Thomas M. Charles-Edwards et al. (eds), *Lawyers and laymen* (in honour of Dafydd Jenkins) (Cardiff, 1986). 4 Liam Breatnach, *A companion to the Corpus Iuris Hibernici* (Dublin, 2005), pp 338–53.

in Roman civil law. The six-volume *Ancient Laws of Ireland* produced in the second half of the nineteenth century distinguished between the original text, the glosses and the commentary by using large type, small type and medium type respectively.[5] Unfortunately the edition was brought out at such an early date that the study of Old Irish was still in its infancy. Its edition and translation of the original Old Irish tracts has been found to be very unreliable, and although the commentaries in Late Middle (eleventh century – twelfth century) and Early Modern (thirteenth century – sixteenth century) Irish presented less problems for the translators, the editors or perhaps the printers have not always applied the print sizes correctly, so that on occasion passages in Old Irish are printed in the medium-sized type meant to be reserved for the later commentary.

More modern editions of individual law tracts frequently give the Old Irish text only, with or without a translation, and omit the later glosses and commentary,[6] while the complete diplomatic text of all the major Irish legal manuscripts including texts, glosses and commentaries – the *Corpus Iuris Hibernici*[7] – was published without translation, indices, notes on the contents, or even clear identification of the individual tracts, and so was only really useful to scholars already very familiar with the material. Two subsequent publications, Fergus Kelly's *Guide to Early Irish law* and Liam Breatnach's *Companion to the Corpus Iuris*, have gone far to overcome the diplomatic edition's lack of notes and indices, but regrettably the unreliable nineteenth-century *Ancient laws of Ireland* remains the most comprehensive edition of the Old Irish law tracts to be supplied with an English translation. However, when citing the Irish text for scholarly publications, it is desirable to locate the passages in question in the more modern *Corpus Iuris Hibernici*. The labour involved in this exercise can be rewarded by finding the same original fragment of Old Irish text repeated in a number of different manuscripts, quite possibly with variations in the accompanying commentaries, something that is masked in the nineteenth-century edition.

Since the long passages of later legal commentary found in the old edition are relatively accurately translated, it is possible for the historian interested in Irish society of the eleventh to the sixteenth century, even one of modest linguistic attain-

5 W Neilson Hancock et al. (eds), *Ancient laws of Ireland* (6 vols, Dublin, 1865–1901). 6 For example, Daniel A. Binchy (ed.), *Crith Gablach* (Dublin, 1941); idem (ed.), 'Mellbretha' in *Celtica*, 8 (1968), pp 144–54; idem (ed.), 'A text on the forms of distraint' in *Celtica*, 10 (1973), pp 72–86; Liam Breatnach, 'The first third of Bretha Nemed Toísech' in *Ériu*, 40 (1989), pp 1–40; Eoin MacNeill, 'Ancient Irish law: the law of status or franchise' in *RIA Proc*, 36 (1923), section C, pp 265–316 (this last consists of translations without texts of a series of Old Irish tracts on social rank and status). However, in the case of three other tracts, Binchy's editions did include glosses and commentary: Daniel A. Binchy (ed.), 'Sick-maintenance in Irish law' in *Ériu*, 12 (1938), pp 78–134; idem (ed.), 'Irish law tracts re-edited I: Coibnes Uisci Thairidne' in *Ériu*, 17 (1955), pp 52–85 and idem (ed.), 'Bretha Déin Chécht' in *Ériu*, 20 (1966), pp 1–66. Similarly the first two volumes of the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies 'Early Irish law series' include glosses and commentary: Thomas M. Charles-Edwards and Fergus Kelly (eds), *Bechbretha* (Dublin, 1983); Breatnach (ed.), *Uraicecht na Riar: the poetic grades in early Irish law*. 7 See *CIH*.
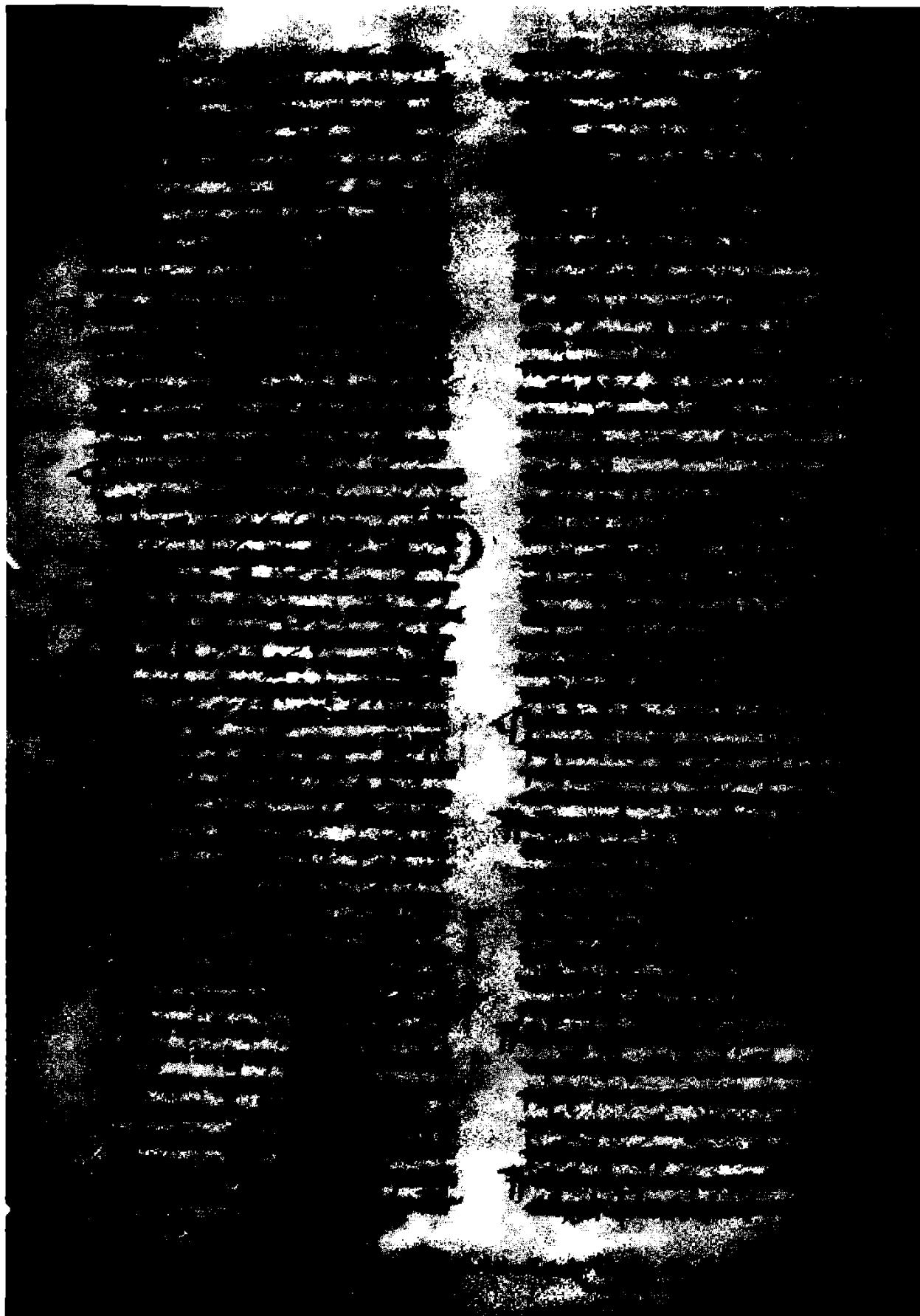
4 Fourteenth-century manuscript containing legal commentaries on Old Irish law tracts, transcribed by Seaán Ó Cianáin for his kinsman, Ádhamh Ó Cianáin (d. 1373), Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawl. B 506, f. 18v.

ments, to study such longer passages of commentary with some profit. However, in the first place one must remember, as Binchy pointed out rather negatively,[8] that the later medieval commentaries are focussed on explaining the principles of Old Irish tracts written centuries before the commentarist's own time, in a form of the Irish language that he may have found obscure, so that even later commentaries may not have direct relevance to the society of their own day, though there are quite a few signs that the object was to extrapolate principles from the old tracts that could be made to apply to more modern situations.[9] Another problem is the one we have already encountered with saint's lives and sagas, that law tracts and their commentaries are not explicitly dated like annals and poetic eulogies, and can only be approximately located in time by their linguistic forms and occasional internal references in the text to dateable circumstances. Therefore the best use for information from these legal commentaries is as confirmation and further detail on social customs that can already be substantiated from other more dateable sources,[10] bearing in mind that many of them belong to the last centuries before the Norman invasion of Ireland, while others can be assigned to a fourteenth- or fifteenth-century date.[11]

BREHON LAW CHARTERS

Less problematical in theory are the 'Brehon law charters', that is, the texts of witnessed agreements drawn up by the later medieval brehons, sometimes recording the conditions attaching to a political submission,[12] but more often dealing with private land transactions and wills.[13] In this case the document is fully contemporary with the events it describes, it is normally dated and includes the names of wit-

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8 Daniel A. Binchy, 'The linguistic and historical value of the Irish law tracts' in *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 29 (1943), pp 195–227 at 225–6 (article reprinted with same title as booklet, Oxford [1943], and in Dafydd Jenkins (ed.), *Celtic law papers* (Brussels, 1973), pp 71–107). **9** Katharine Simms, 'The contents of later commentaries on the Brehon law tracts' in *Ériu*, 49 (1998), pp 23–40. **10** Simms, 'The legal position of Irishwomen'; idem, 'Gaelic military history' **11** See Simms, *From kings to warlords*, pp 80, 130–1; idem, 'The contents of later commentaries', pp 30–4. **12** For example: Maura Carney (ed.), 'Agreement between Ó Domhnaill and Tadhg Ó Conchubhair concerning Sligo Castle (23 June 1539)' in *Irish Historical Studies*, 3 (1942–3), pp 282–96; John O'Donovan (ed.), 'Covenant between Mageoghegan and the Fox' in idem (ed.), *Miscellany of the Irish Archaeological Society*, I (Dublin, 1846), 179–97. **13** Examples are: James Hardiman (ed.), 'Ancient Irish deeds and writings chiefly relating to landed property from the twelfth to the seventeenth century' in *Transactions of the Royal Irish Academy*, 15 [Antiquities] (1825–8), pp 2–95; James H. Todd, 'An ancient Irish deed' in *RIA Proc*, 7 (1857–61), p. 248; Kenneth W. Nicholls, 'Some documents on Irish law and custom in the sixteenth century' in *Analecta Hibernica*, 26 (1972), pp 105–29; Pádraig Ó Macháin (ed.), 'Dhá théacs dlí' in John Carey, Máire Herbert & Kevin Murray (eds), *Cín Chille Cúile: texts, saints and places: essays in honour of Pádraig Ó Riain* (Aberystwyth, 2004), pp 309–15; Brian Ó Cuív, 'A seventeenth-century legal document' in *Celtica*, 5 (1960), pp 177–85.

nesses and guarantors. In the view of Irish lawyers the document itself was not so much a legal instrument as a written record, and enforcement of its terms depended less on production of the document than on the actions of the guarantors who could swear to the truth of the agreement they had witnessed, or even enforce its terms. Often, therefore, political overlords or landlords appear among the guarantors, and also ordained Churchmen, guardians of relics and poets who could excommunicate, curse or satirise defaulters respectively, can be found listed as guarantors.

Because the legal force of a contract rested with the verbal agreement itself and its pledges and guarantors,[14] the physical 'charters' are not sealed, or protected from forgery by elaborately indented edges, as happened in other medieval legal systems. Although some 'charters' bear the original signatures of the parties involved, and occasionally may have borne the intricate trade-mark which certified the work of a licensed public or papal notary, since certain brehons enjoyed this additional qualification,[15] many such texts are preserved only in transcripts, sometimes late paper ones, or sometimes entries into a venerated Gospel book, and in certain cases the only surviving written records of agreements are mere summaries.[16]

The more serious difficulty with making full use of this kind of source is the fact that there is not much detailed discussion of the customs governing later medieval Irish land-ownership, and the sale and transfer of land by way of mortgage[17] that forms the subject of so many of these documents. Gearóid Mac Niocaill, in an unpublished Ph.D. thesis, has discussed the brehon law charters, in particular the foreign loan-words for various legal terms found in them,[18] and in a series of articles utilised the Early Modern Irish summary of the legal system attributed to Giolla na Naomh mac Duinnshléibhe Mheic Aodhagáin (d. 1309) to discuss aspects of legal practice in later medieval Gaelic society.[19] Fergus Kelly has since engaged in

14 Neil McLeod, *Early Irish contract law* (Sydney [1992]), pp 14–31.   15 See Hardiman (ed.), 'Ancient Irish deeds', p. 50; Simms, *From kings to warlords*, pp 88–9.   16 See Richard I. Best, 'An early monastic grant in the Book of Durrow' in *Ériu*, 10 (1928), pp 135–42; O'Donovan, 'Irish charters in the Book of Kells' in idem (ed.), *Miscellany*, pp 127–58; Gearóid Mac Niocaill (ed.), *Notitiae as Leabhar Cheanannais 1033–1161* (Dublin, 1961). On the custom of inserting charters in gospel books see John Carey, 'The testimony of the dead' in *Éigse*, 26 (1990), pp 1–12; and on copies or summaries of legal agreements in *Seanchus na mBúrcach* and *Leabhar Chlainne Suibhne* see above, chapter on Prose tracts, notes 21 and 29. 17 See Nicholls, *Land, law and society*; idem, 'Gaelic landownership in the light of the surviving Irish deeds' in William Nolan & T.G. McGrath (eds), *Tipperary: history and society* (Dublin, 1985), pp 92–103, 441–3; Gearóid Mac Niocaill, 'Land transfer in sixteenth-century Thomond: the case of Domhnall Óg Ó Cearnaigh' in *North Munster Archaeological Journal*, 17 (1975), pp 43–50; Hiram Morgan (ed.), '"The lawes of Irelande": a tract by Sir John Davies' in the *Irish Jurist*, new series, 28–30 (1993–5), pp 307–13. 18 Gearóid Mac Niocaill, 'Cáipéisí dlí i nGaeilge, 1493–1621' (unpublished PhD thesis, National University of Ireland, 1962). 19 Gearóid Mac Niocaill, 'A propos du vocabulaire social irlandais du bas moyen âge' in *Études Celtiques*, 12 (1968–9), pp 512–46; idem, 'Irish law and the Armagh constitutions of 1297' in the *Irish Jurist*, new series, 6 (1971), pp 339–44; idem, 'The contact of Irish and common law' in *Northern Ireland Legal Quarterly*, 23 (1972), pp 16–23; idem, 'Aspects of Irish law in the late thirteenth century' in G.A. Hayes-McCoy (ed.), *Historical*

further study of Mac Aodhagáin's tract,[20] hopefully to culminate in a published edition with full translation and notes. Meanwhile the less legally qualified can still mine brehon law charters for personal and place-names, especially the names of townlands.

<div align="center">TRACTS ON RIGHTS</div>

Another class of source which seems to combine the arts of the *seanchaidh* or historian, and the *breitheamh* or judge, is that of the tracts on 'rights' of particular chieftaincies. These records have a long history. An Old Irish example, which unfortunately has not as yet been edited with a translation, is the 'Frithfholaid ríg Caisil fria thuathaib', on the reciprocal privileges of the vassal kings of Munster in relation to their lord, the over-king of Cashel.[21] The Old Irish poem on the rights of the Airgialla[22] is another instance, and no doubt a number of other such texts, now lost, went into the comprehensive eleventh-century prose and verse collection known as 'The Book of Rights' or 'Lebor na Cert'.[23] 'The Book of Rights' in its present form is an Ó Briain propaganda document,[24] stating firmly that all territories of Ireland owe tribute to the over-king of Cashel, but it seems to have been compiled from a multitude of genuine local traditions, and the different regions of Ireland continued to formulate their own statements of rights thereafter from the twelfth century to the seventeenth, with varying degrees of legal realism.

We have at least two verse statements of rights and privileges which may date from the twelfth century, the 'Dues of the kings of Assaroe' (Tír Conaill),[25] and a poem on the rights of Mac Diarmada (MacDermot, chief of Moylurg in Roscommon). This last has been edited together with a later medieval prose tract on Mac Diarmada's rights,[26] giving interesting possibilities of comparison between

Studies X (Indreabháin, 1976), pp 25–42; idem, 'The interaction of laws' in James Lydon (ed.), *The English in medieval Ireland* (Dublin, 1984), pp 105–17. See also W.N. Osborough, 'The Irish custom of Tracts' in the *Irish Jurist*, 32 (1997), pp 439–58.   **20** Fergus Kelly, 'Giolla na Naomh Mac Aodhagáin: a thirteenth-century legal innovator' in D.S. Greer & N.M. Dawson (eds), *Mysteries and solutions in Irish legal history* (Dublin, 2001), pp 1–14.   **21** James G. O'Keeffe (ed.), 'Dál Caladbuig and reciprocal services between kings of Cashel and various Munster states' in J. Fraser, P Grosjean & J.G. O'Keeffe (eds), *Irish Texts I* (London, 1931), pp 19–21; Byrne, *Irish kings and high-kings*, pp 174, 196–9; Liam Ó Buachalla, 'Contributions towards the political history of Munster, 400–800 AD' in *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society*, 56 (1951), pp 87–90; 57 (1952), pp 67–86; 59 (1954), pp 111–26; 61 (1956), pp 89–102.   **22** Mary O'Daly (ed.), 'A poem on the Airgialla' in *Ériu*, 16 (1952), pp 179–88.   **23** Myles Dillon (ed.), *Lebor na Cert: the Book of Rights* (Dublin, 1962); idem, 'On the date and authorship of the Book of Rights' in *Celtica*, 4 (1958), pp 239–49; idem, 'Three texts relating to the Book of Rights' in *Celtica*, 6 (1963), pp 184–92.   **24** Byrne, *Irish kings and high-kings*, p. 192.   **25** Hennessy & Kelly (eds), *The Book of Fenagh*, pp 354–9, also Kuno Meyer (ed.), 'Der Tribut des Königs von Ess Rúaid' in *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie*, 8 (1912), pp 115–16.   **26** Neasa Ní Shéaghdha, 'The rights of Mac Diarmada' in *Celtica*, 6 (1963), pp 156–72.

the two versions. From the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries come a series of similar prose statements, 'The customs of Uí Mhaine' (O'Kelly's country in east Galway),[27] the 'Genealogies, Tribes and Customs of the Uí Fhiachrach' (O'Dowda's country in west Sligo) edited by O'Donovan from the Great Book of Genealogies of An Dubháltach Mac Firbhisigh (d. 1671), but including the work of Giolla Íosa Mór Mac Firbhisigh (d. ante 1432).[28] Apparently of the same vintage is the tract on the vassals and household officers of Ó Flaithbheartaigh (O'Flaherty of west Galway).[29] Gearóid Mac Niocaill has discussed such medieval tracts in relation to their assertion of the king's rights to 'treasure trove' and 'flotsam and jetsam', as showing possible influence from foreign legal systems.[30]

Seventeenth-century paper manuscripts preserve the 'rights' or 'rentals' of Ó Néill,[31] Mac Mathghamhna (MacMahon of Monaghan)[32] and Ó Domhnaill.[33] We know that a similar document also once existed for Mág Uidhir (Maguire of Fermanagh). Sir John Davies, the attorney-general of Ireland, writing to the earl of Salisbury in 1607, gives a dramatic account of an encounter in Fermanagh between the lord chancellor of Ireland and an old man, Ó Breisléin, whom he described as 'a chronicler and principal brehon of that country', thus both *seanchaidh* and *breitheamh*. He was the keeper of 'an old parchment roll, which they called an indenture wherein not only the certainty of M'Guire's mensal duties did appear, but also the particular rents and other services which were answered to M'Guire out of every part of the country' In other words, it contained both a list of the

27 O'Donovan (ed.), *Tribes and Customs of Hy Many*; Paul Russell (ed.), 'Nósa Ua Maine: the customs of the Uí Mhaine' in Thomas Charles-Edwards, Morfydd E. Owen & Paul Russell (eds), *The Welsh king and his court* (Cardiff, 2000), pp 527–51. See Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Nósa Ua Maine: *fact or fiction?*' in Charles-Edwards, Owen & Russell (eds), *The Welsh king and his court*, pp 362–81. **28** O'Donovan (ed.), *Genealogies, Tribes and Customs of Hy-Fiachrach*; Ó Muraíle (ed.), *The Great Book of Irish Genealogies*, i, 566–687. For commentary on Giolla Íosa Mór and his work, see Ó Muraíle, *The celebrated antiquary*, pp 16–32; Tomás Ó Concheanainn, 'Dán Giolla Íosa Mhic Fhir Bhisigh ar Uí Fhiachrach' in Pádraig Ó Fiannachta (ed.), *An Dán Díreach: Leachtaí Cholm Cille*, XXIV (1994), pp 136–51. **29** Appendix to Roderic O'Flaherty, *A chorographical description of West or h-Iar Connaught*, ed. James Hardiman (Dublin, 1846), p. 371. **30** Gearóid Mac Niocaill, 'Jetsam, treasure-trove and the Lord's share in medieval Ireland' in the *Irish Jurist*, new series, 6 (1971), pp 103–10. **31** Éamon Ó Doibhlin (ed.), 'Ceart Uí Néill' in *Seanchas Ardmhacha*, 5 (1969–70), pp 324–58; Myles Dillon (ed.), 'Ceart Uí Néill' in *Studia Celtica*, 1 (1966), pp 1–18; also Pól Breatnach [Paul Walsh] (ed.), 'Fragmenta' in *Irisleabhar Mhuighe Nuadhad* (1930), pp 13–16; Ó Donnchadha (ed.), *Leabhar Cloinne Aodha Buidhe*, pp 41–7. **32** Seosamh Ó Dufaigh, 'Cíos Mhic Mhathghamhna' in *Clogher Record*, 4 (1957–9), pp 125–34. Other editions of this tract are: Séamus Pender (ed.), 'A tract on MacMahon's prerogatives' in *Études Celtiques*, 1 (1936), pp 248–60 and Breathnach [Walsh] (ed.), 'Fragmenta', pp 17–19. **33** Unpublished text in Cambridge Additional MS no. 2766 (20) (7); see Pádraig De Brún & Máire Herbert, *Catalogue of Irish manuscripts in Cambridge libraries* (Cambridge, 1986), pp 4–5. There is an imperfect English translation of this text in Royal Irish Academy, MS 14/B/7, pp 423–5. For comment see Katharine Simms, 'Late medieval Donegal' in William Nolan, Liam Ronayne & Máiread Dunlevy (eds), *Donegal: history and society* (Dublin, 1995), pp 88, 190, 193–4.

food-rents due from Mág Uidhir's own 'mensal' lands, the estates that were set aside to provide maintenance for the household of each successive Mág Uidhir chief, and a record of the taxes, dues and services owed to the chief from his subjects in general, all the free landowners in Fermanagh. After much prevarication, the old man revealed that he carried the document constantly about with him under his shirt, and only handed it over on promise that it would be returned to him when a copy had been made. Most unfortunately Sir John then mislaid his English translation, and now the original roll seems to be irretrievably lost, though Sir John Davies summarises the contents in his letter, commenting

> we then perceived how many vessels of butter and how many measures of meal and how many porks and other such gross duties did arise to M'Guire out of his mensal lands   And for the quantity thereof, though it were great in respect of the land out of which these provisions were taken, which being laid altogether doth not exceed four ballibetaghs,[34]   yet such commodities in those parts are of little or no value, and therefore he never made any civil use of them, but spent them wastefully in a sordid and barbarous manner among his loose and idle followers. Besides those mensals M'Guire had 240 beeves or thereabouts yearly paid unto him out of all the seven baronies, and about his Castle of Enniskillen he had almost a ballibetagh of land, which he manured with his own churls; and this was M'Guire's whole estate in certainty; for in right he had no more, and in time of peace he did exact no more; marry in time of war he made himself master of all, cutting what he listed, and imposing as many bonaghts or hired soldiers upon them as he had occasion to use'.[35]

There are many points of interest in this account of the lost roll of the 'rights' of Mág Uidhir of Fir Manach, or Fermanagh. One is of course that the rents were paid in food-stuffs and billeting-rights rather than in money, and this is a common feature of most of the tracts on 'rights', since even by the end of the sixteenth century the Gaelic lordships in the west of Ireland had not made a full transition to a coin-based rather than a barter economy, and chieftains exacted their dues in the shape of direct renders of foodstuffs, or rights to exact hospitality or billeting from their subjects.[36] Coins do make an occasional appearance in these tracts as paid for particular purposes or as the dues of particular territories. Interestingly two exceptions are the Ó Briain and Mac Con Mara tracts on rights[37] from the County Clare

34 Earlier in the same letter, Davies indicates that a 'ballibetagh' in Monaghan was a land measure approximating to 900 English acres, and that the Fermanagh 'ballibetagh' was a larger measure, so perhaps something in excess of 1,000 acres. 35 Davies, 'A Letter   to Robert Earl of Salisbury, 1607' in *Ireland under Elizabeth and James I*, ed. Henry Morley (London, 1890), pp 343–80 at pp 368–70. 36 See C. Adrian Empey & Katharine Simms, 'The ordinances of the White Earl and the problem of coign in the later middle ages' in *RIA Proc*, 75 (1975), section C, pp 161–87; Simms, 'Guesting and feasting'; idem, *From kings to warlords*, pp 129–46. 37 Hardiman (ed.), 'Ancient Irish deeds', pp 36–48. Hardiman's

region, which may have origins as early as the fourteenth century,[38] where the dues are nearly all monetary, reckoned in shillings, groats,[39] marks,[40] and ounces.[41]

Another interesting detail in Sir John Davies's account is that the native Irish freeholders referred to the brehon's record of taxation as an 'indenture' A true indenture was by definition the certified record of a legally binding agreement arrived at between two parties, copied out twice on a single sheet of parchment or paper and severed into two by an indented cut through the sheet, so that each party retained a copy of the agreement, and the indented edge when laid together with the other party's copy to re-form the original whole, served as a safeguard against subsequent forgeries by either side. Davies was quite clear that the roll, when it was finally located, was not an indenture, but the use of the term suggests the free-holders of Fermanagh saw the tract as a record of an agreement, or series of agreements reached between the ruler of Fermanagh and his subjects, as to what they were prepared to pay in recognition of his lordship. The expression used in the early seventeenth-century Mac Mathghamhna 'rental' for this payment was *comhartha tigheamuis*, 'a sign of lordship', in contrast to the *cíos cosanta*, 'protection-tribute' or 'black-rent' that MacMahon levied from his neighbours the Anglo-Irish of Louth, who were not his legal subjects.[42] In the case of the Ó Domhnaill and Ó Néill 'rentals', the wide variety of payments or services asked as between one vassal sub-chieftain, or subject district, and another would support the idea of a series of individual agreements made at different times.[43]

In the case of some tracts, notably the Ceart Uí Néill, the 'Rights of Mac Diarmada' and the 'Inauguration of Ó Conchobhair',[44] they can be seen as an accretion of claims and rights recorded over the centuries, not all of which were enforceable by the time the text was compiled in its extant form. Mac Diarmada claimed rights over west Connacht which may have been held by his ancestors in the twelfth century, and the Ó Conchobhair and Ó Néill tracts included references to the surnames of vassal chiefs no longer ruling after the late twelfth or early thirteenth century.[45] Still more unrealistic was the statement of the billeting-rights of Ó

translations, but without the original text, are given in James Frost, *The history and topography of the county of Clare* (Dublin, 1893), pp 4–7, 37–9. **38** Nic Giollamhaith, 'Kings and vassals', p. 215. **39** Irish 'bonn', coin worth 4 old pence. See Michael Dolley & Gearóid Mac Niocaill, 'Some coin-names in "Ceart Uí Néill"' in *Studia Celtica*, 2 (1967), p. 120. **40** Irish 'marg' from English word 'mark' The mark was a theoretical unit of value not represented by any coin, but reckoned as worth 13 shillings and 4 pence. **41** 'Ounces' (Irish ungae/uinge) were, like the mark, units of reckoning rather than actual coins. They are referred to as being of at least two sorts, the 'great ounce' (unga mór) which may be identical with the 'gold ounce' (uinge d'ór) and is said to be worth a 1/12 of a pound, or 20 old pence, and the 'small ounce' (unga beag) seemingly to be identified with the 'silver ounce' (unga do argut), worth a 1/16 of a mark, or 10 old pence. See O'Donovan (ed.), 'The Registry of Clonmacnoise', p. 455, and examples in Quin, *Dictionary*, p. 629 'ungae, uinge' **42** Ó Dufaigh, 'Cíos Mhic Mhathghamhna', p. 129. **43** See Simms, *From kings to warlords*, p. 142. **44** Myles Dillon (ed.), 'The inauguration of O'Conor' in J.A. Watt, J. Morrall & F.X. Martin (eds), *Medieval studies presented to Aubrey Gwynn* (Dublin, 1961), pp 186–202. **45** See Katharine Simms, 'Gabh umad a Fheidhlimidh – a fifteenth-century

Domhnaill in the sixteenth-century manuscript Bodleian Rawlinson B 514,[46] which claimed the whole province of Ulster was subject to the Donegal chieftain's exactions. Such statements fulfill the *seanchaidh*'s duty to exalt his patron's fame by the memory of past glories, and to ensure that no longer enforceable rights were still recorded against the day when it might once again be possible to claim them. Like so many other compositions of the Gaelic learned classes, the realism or otherwise of each clause has to be compared and tested against information from other sources.

MEDICAL TRACTS

Medieval Irish medical tracts, on the other hand, present a complete contrast to the rest of the writings of the Gaelic *aos ealadhan*, or men of learning. They consist of translations, adaptations and summaries of the medical, astronomical and philosophical texts that formed the Latin textbooks for medical studies in the universities of medieval Europe.[47] Consequently their use as a historical source mainly relates to the state of medical knowledge in Ireland between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries, and the identity and location of the hereditary families of physicians.[48] Some original Irish medical manuscripts may now be viewed on line,[49] and quite a number of the texts they contain have been edited, with[50] and without

inauguration ode?' in *Ériu*, 31 (1980), pp 132–45.   **46** James G. O'Keeffe, 'Quartering rights of the Uí Domhnaill over Ulster, MS Rawl. B 514, fo. 67b' in J. Fraser, P. Gosjean & J.G. O'Keeffe (eds), *Irish Texts IV* (Dublin, 1934), pp 29–30.   **47** See Aoibheann Nic Dhonnchadha, 'Early modern Irish medical writings' in the *Newsletter of the School of Celtic Studies*, 4 (Dublin, 1990), pp 35–9; Francis Shaw, 'Medicine in Ireland in medieval times' in W Doolin & O. FitzGerald (eds), *What's past is prologue* (Dublin, 1952), pp 10–14; idem, 'Irish medical men and philosophers' in Ó Cúiv (ed.), *Seven centuries of Irish learning, 1000–1700*, pp 87–101; idem, 'Medieval medico-philosophical treatises in the Irish language' in John Ryan (ed.), *Féilsgríbhinn Eoin Mhic Néill: essays and studies presented to Professor Eoin MacNeill* (Dublin, 1940; repr. 1995), pp 144–57.   **48** See Aoibheann Nic Dhonnchadha, 'The medical school of Aghmacart, Queen's County' in *Ossory, Laois and Leinster*, 2 (2006), pp 11–43; Paul Walsh, 'Notes on two Irish medical scribes' in idem, *Gleanings from Irish manuscripts* (2nd edn, Dublin, 1933), pp 123–81; idem, 'An Irish medical family [Mac an Leagha]' in Ó Lochlainn (ed.), *Irish men of learning*, pp 206–18; John Brady, 'The Irish medical family of O Sheil' in the *Irish Book Lover*, no. 3 (1947), pp 50–1; Alexander Nicholson, 'The MacBeths – hereditary physicians of the Highlands' in *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Glasgow*, 5 (1958), pp 94–112; Mairéad Dunlevy, 'The medical families of medieval Ireland' in Doolin & FitzGerald (eds), *What's past is prologue*, pp 15–22; Brian Mac Giolla Phádraig, 'Seanscoileanna leighis in Éirinn anallód' in the *Capuchin Annual* (1968), pp 260–70. Unusually, the hereditary lands and surnames of Ó Flaithbheartaigh's physicians are listed in the tract on that chieftain's officers, see O'Flaherty, *A Chorographical Description*, ed. Hardiman, p. 371.   **49** See especially the Trinity College Library medical manuscripts, which may be viewed on through the College website www.tcd.ie or through ISOS at www.isos.dias.ie. Another fine example is the Oxford, Corpus Christi College Library MS 129 see Ó Cúiv, *Catalogue*, i, frontispiece and pp 281–97.   **50** H. Cameron Gillies (ed.), *Regimen Sanitatis: the Rule of Health* (Glasgow, 1911); Winifred Wulff (ed.), *Rosa Anglica, seu Rosa Medicinae Johannis Anglici* (London, 1929); idem (ed.), 'An liaigh i n-Éirinn a n-allod. Uimh V: quotidian fever' in *Éigse*, 2 (1940), pp 47–63, 167–82, 261–6, 3 (1941), pp 108–16;
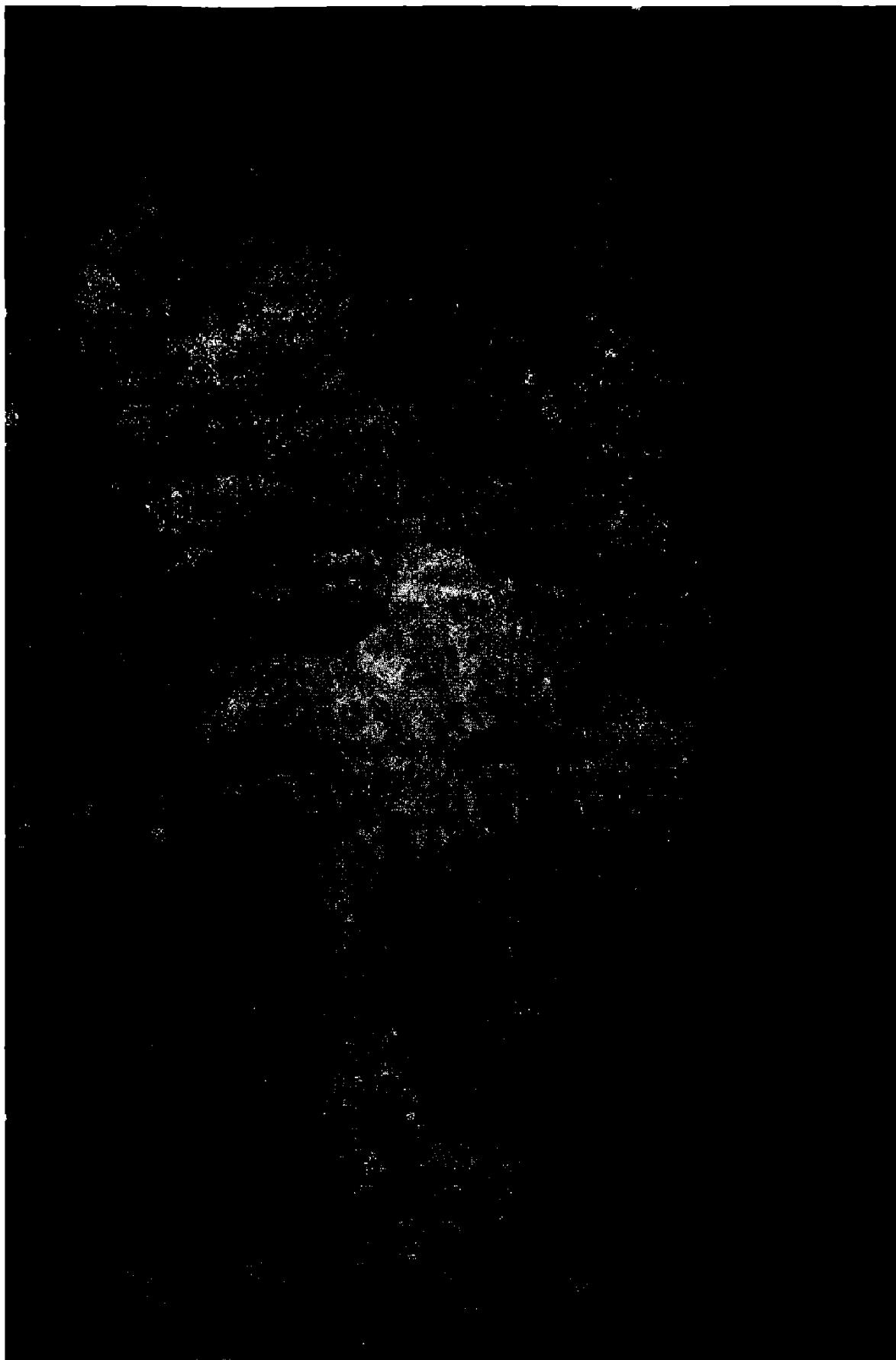
5 Bilingual diagram in medical manuscript, showing the relationship of the arts, sciences and cardinal virtues to philosophy, the mother of them all, Dublin, Trinity College Library, MS 1315, p. 14. Digital image from ISOS (Irish Script on Screen).

translations.[51] However, medieval medical textbooks, like modern ones, are quite technical,[52] and for many historians the chief interest of medical manuscripts lies in their colophons and marginalia.

COLOPHONS AND MARGINALIA SCRIBAL COMMENTS

Normally colophons and marginalia are not edited separately in their own right, but are noted in manuscript catalogues as part of the physical description of a manuscript, and are sometimes included in editors' editions of texts, either because they are considered interesting in themselves,[53] or because they throw light on the identity and date of the scribes of a particular manuscript copy of the text in question.[54] They are not part of the actual texts, rather they are short remarks added above, below or in the margin, usually by one or more of the scribes who are copying out the main text. However, and this is sometimes important to remember, they may be remarks added by the scribe of the earlier exemplar, the manuscript from which the present scribe was copying, and these earlier notes may have then been transcribed by him along with the main text into the new manuscript. Where later scholars erroneously believe the note was original to the manuscript in which it has been preserved, rather than a copy from an earlier codex, they can misdate the manuscript they are looking at. On the other hand, if they realise the note has been copied along with the text, but think it represents a note by the original author of the text, rather than simply a remark by the scribe of an earlier copy, they can misdate the text itself. This second kind of misunderstanding led the fourteenth-century historical tract Caithréim Thoirdhealbhaigh to be dismissed for years as the

idem (ed.), 'De amore hereos' in *Ériu*, 11 (1932), pp 174–81; idem (ed.), 'De coloribus urinarum' in *Irish Journal of Medical Science* (1942), pp 32–4; idem, 'Tract on the plague' in *Ériu*, 10 (1928), pp 143–54; Lilian Duncan (ed.), 'A treatise on fevers' in *Revue Celtique*, 49 (1932), pp 1–90; Brian Ó Cuív, 'Fragments of two mediaeval treatises on horses' in *Celtica*, 2 (1954), pp 30–63; Aoibheann Nic Dhonnchadha (ed.), 'Téacs ó scoil leighis Achaidh Mhic Airt' in *Ossory, Laois and Leinster*, 1 (2004), pp 50–75.   51 Whitley Stokes (ed.),'A Celtic Leechbook' in *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie*, 1 (1896), pp 17–25; Winifred Wulff (ed.), 'On the qualities, maners and kunnynge of a surgean etc' in ibid., 18 (1930), pp 249–86; idem, 'Two medical fragments' in Fraser, Grosjean & O'Keeffe (eds), *Irish Texts 1*, pp 47–51; idem (ed.), *A medieval handbook of gynaecology and midwifery (Irish Texts V*, London, 1934); idem [De Bhulbh, Úna], 'De febre efemera nó an liagh i nÉirinn i n-allod' in *Lia Fáil*, 1 (1924), pp 126–9; idem [De Bhulbh, Úna], 'An liaigh i n-Éirinn a n-ollod. Uimh. II' in ibid., 2 (1926), pp 229–34; idem [De Bhulbh, Úna], 'An liaigh i n-Éirinn n-ollod. Uimh. III' in ibid., 3 (1930), pp 115–25; idem [De Bhulbh, Úna], 'An liaigh i n-Éirinn n-ollod. Uimh. IV' in ibid., 4 (1932), pp 235–67; [James Carney], Séamus O Ceithearnaigh (ed.), *Regimen na Sláinte: Regimen Sanitatis Magnini Mediolanensis* (3 vols, Dublin, 1942–4).   52 Apart from the secondary studies listed in footnote 47 above, the introduction to Wulff's edition of Rosa Anglica can usefully convey to the novice some idea of the scope of this kind of medical literature.   53 For example Wulff (ed.), 'On the qualities', pp 250–2.   54 See *AC*, pp xi–xiv.

work of a fifteenth-century author writing about events in the early fourteenth-century, whereas now it is considered that some of its narrative may draw on eye-witness evidence.[55]

Such scribal notes in manuscripts could be categorised as consisting of three kinds, official, personal and decorative. The 'decorative' additions are usually in the form of marginal verses, which will be discussed below. The 'official' entries are deliberately inserted for the instruction of future readers of the manuscript, usually as a colophon.

'Colophon' is a late Latin word from the Greek 'kolophōn' meaning 'summit' or 'finishing touch'.[56] Rather than being a marginal note, this would normally occur as a final paragraph added to the text being copied, or at the end of the whole manuscript, and might contain a request to future readers to pray for the soul of the main scribe who has been working on the book, giving his full name, the date at which he finished his work, sometimes also the date at which he began, and the location(s) at which he had been working. Even more usefully, he might include the official title of the text itself, the name of the manuscript from which he was copying, and who owned it, something Mícheál Ó Cléirigh, the leader of the Four Masters team of annalists, constantly noted.[57] At other times the colophon concentrated on eulogising the patron of the manuscript and explaining why he had commissioned it, a particularly lengthy example of this being the praise of the coarb Tadhg Ó Rodacháin or Ó Rodaighe in the Book of Fenagh.[58]

In addition to these formal notes to the reader, or the patron of the manuscript, scribes often added incidental remarks here and there in the margins of the manu-scripts they were writing in. Charles Plummer wrote a very accessible and even humorous lecture for the British Academy[59] detailing the various topics scribes mentioned in these marginalia – they might complain about their conditions of work, that the room is cold, the ink clogged, the pen faulty, the parchment rough, they might wonder what they were getting for dinner, or accuse one of the maids of knocking over their ink-pot. They sometimes talked about the beauties of nature, a sunny day, melodious bird-song. They frequently note the fasts and feasts of the Church's year, any plagues or famines that occurred at the time of writing, even battles or other political events. One of the most interesting set of marginal entries comes on the fifteenth-century Psalter of MacRichard Butler, or Oxford Bodleian Library, Laud Miscellany MS no. 610, and these have been printed in full, with translation and commentary.[60] They provide direct evidence about the battle

55 O'Grady (ed.), *Caithréim Thoirdhealbhaigh*, , xiii–xiv; Leo F. McNamara, 'An examina-tion of the medieval Irish text Caithréim Thoirdhealbhaigh' in *North Munster Antiquarian Journal*, 8 (1958–61), no. 4, pp 182–92; Nic Giollamhaith, 'Kings and vassals', pp 203–8. 56 Onions, *The Oxford dictionary of English etymology*, p. 192. 57 Walsh, *Irish leaders and learn-ing*, ed. Ó Muraíle, pp 350–70. 58 Hennessy & Kelly (eds), *The Book of Fenagh*, pp 310–11. 59 Charles Plummer, 'On the colophons and marginalia of Irish scribes' in *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 12 (1926), pp 1–34. 60 Myles Dillon, 'Laud Misc. 610 (cont.)' in *Celtica*, 6 (1963), pp 135–55.

of Pilltown (1462), where the patron of the book, Edmund mac Richard Butler was captured, but in some ways the comments shedding light on the relationship between Edmund and his scribes is even more interesting. Similarly the Book of Leinster notes the defeat and exile of its patron, King Diarmait Mac Murchada in 1166, an incident which was to spark off the Norman invasion of Ireland.[61]

So far, only notes by the scribes who were actually writing the manuscript have been mentioned, but of course once the book had come into existence, further notes could be added by later owners or readers. In the case of Laud Misc. 610, a later note refers to war with Ó Néill and Ó Domhnaill in 1591. These notes can be useful in tracing the later ownership of manuscripts.

ATTRIBUTIONS OF AUTHORSHIP

One type of official comment addressed to the reader, whether by the scribe, or by a later owner of the manuscript, is the heading frequently found at the top of poems, less frequently in the case of prose pieces, giving the alleged name of the original author. 'Alleged' because it quite frequently happens that a poem or prose piece is attributed to an early saint, like Colm Cille or the proto-historical poet Dallán Forgaill, when the language in which it is written is too modern for this to be true,[62] and this can be the case even when the claim to authorship is included in one of the verses of the poem.[63] Attribution of authorship for prose pieces is much less common. In the case of the possibly seventh-century tract 'Apgitir Chrábaid', while the language is indeed early, many scholars have been prepared to date it as *very* early largely on the basis of its attribution in most of the manuscripts to St Colmán moccu Béognae, founder of the monastery of Lynally, who died in 611 according to *AU*. Others, who prefer to lay more emphasis on linguistic arguments, doubt the strength of this argument. The earliest extant manuscripts date from the fourteenth or fifteenth century, and one of them ascribes the work to the mid-seventh-century St Fursa instead.[64]

There is less problem with attributions of authorship in the case of poems where the date of the manuscript copy is not too far removed from the date at which the poet in question was active, for example with many of the historical poems in the Book of Leinster,[65] or the bardic eulogies in the Book of Magauran.[66]

61 Best, Bergin & O'Brien (eds), *The Book of Leinster*,   xvi–xvii.   62 For example, the poems ascribed to Colm Cille in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Laud 615, listed O'Sullivan & Herbert, 'The provenance of Laud Misc. 615', pp 189–92; Liam Breatnach, 'An edition of Amra Senan' in Ó Corráin, Breatnach & McCone (eds), *Sages, saints and storytellers*, pp 7–31.   63 For example, in poems of 'prophecy', as in Hennessy & Kelly (eds), *Book of Fenagh*, pp 372–9, see above, section on 'poetry not written for patrons'   64 See Vernam Hull (ed.), 'Apgitir Chrábaid: the Alphabet of Piety' in *Celtica*, 8 (1968), pp 44–89, pp 44–52; McCone, 'Prehistoric, Old and Middle Irish', pp 34–5. For Charles O'Conor's misleading note on the date in his copy of the 'O'Conor inauguration tract' see Simms, 'Gabh umad', pp 130–4.   65 See, for example, Edel Bhreathnach, 'Two contributors to the Book of Leinster' in Richter & Picard (eds), *Ogma*, pp 107–11.   66 McKenna (ed.), *The Book of*

Later manuscripts may then be transcribing their headings with authorial attributions from such near-contemporary copies of a poem. However, such attributions are by no means an infallible guide. For example in the Book of O'Conor Don (AD 1631), the early thirteenth-century poem 'Aisling do chonnarc ó chianaibh' has an original attribution to the early thirteenth-century poet Giolla Brighde Albanach, which a later scribe has altered to give the name of the mid-thirteenth-century Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe, increasing a general confusion about which poems were written by which of the two similarly named authors. Earlier in the same manuscript the eighteenth-century antiquarian, Charles O'Conor of Belnagare has added the name 'Flann File' as the author of a poem that was originally anonymous in the manuscript, while on other pages the poem 'Lámh dhearg Éireann Uibh Eachach', originally ascribed to 'an t-Órthóir' (that is, Eoghan Mac Craith), has a corrected heading by a later hand attributing it with perhaps greater probability to Máoilsheachlainn na nUirsgéal Ó hUiginn, and the poem 'Mairg nach dtuigeann treise ríogh', originally attributed to Cú Chonnacht Óg Mac Rithbheartaigh, has had its heading altered to read 'Conchobhar Mac Con Midhe'.[67] Such alterations imply that a reader or owner of the manuscript has seen the same poem with an alternative attribution in another manuscript anthology, but it does not necessarily imply the correction is right, especially if it has been made in an obviously more modern hand-writing.

A common cause of such divergent author attributions for the same poem in different manuscript anthologies is the scribal practice, when copying out a number of poems by the same author, to write at the top of the second and subsequent poems the phrase 'an fear céadna cecinit (or 'cc.')', meaning 'the same man sang When the scribe then passed on to a set of poems by a different author, he would write the next poet's name in full for the first of this group, and then return to the phrase 'an fear céadna cc.' for the rest. Obviously if in the passage of time the page bearing the second poet's name came loose and fell out, a later scribe copying from this manuscript might innocently assume that all the poems from the two different groups were composed by 'an fear céadna', 'the same man', that is, the first-named poet. In very late paper manuscripts of the nineteenth century some scribes in a hurry tended to write 'an fear céadna' at the top of a series of anonymous poems on the same kind of subject matter, for example, religious ones, of which only one had had an attributed author in the original, thus unwarrantably multiplying the number of religious poems attributed to the thirteenth-century Donnchadh Mór Ó Dálaigh, to the seventeenth-century Geoffrey Keating, or to SS Colm Cille or Ciarán. One result of these occasional accidental or careless slips in manuscript attribution of authorship is that the dating of patrons, poets and compositions in Edward O'Reilly's *A chronological account of nearly four hundred Irish writers*[68] is frequently wrong, as he was basing his identifications on such attributions. Writing

Magauran, p. viii. **67** Hyde, 'The Book of the O'Conor Don', pp 82, 89, 91. **68** Edward O'Reilly, *A chronological account of nearly four hundred Irish writers with a descriptive catalogue of their works* (Dublin, 1820; repr. with intro. by Gearóid Mac Eoin, Shannon, 1970).

in 1820, he could not have the linguistic knowledge necessary to notice when the modernity of a poem's language made the alleged authorship impossible, nor sufficient mastery of the historical background to avoid confusing poets or patrons of similar names who lived in different centuries. Nevertheless, this work can have a limited usefulness even nowadays, by drawing attention to the existence of poems possibly relevant to particular families or periods, and giving the first lines of these poems, which can then be checked against the first-line index in the bibliographies of Best and Baumgarten,[69] and the more recent updates on the School of Celtic Studies web-site under www.dias.ie, in order to track down modern editions of the same poems which might have more reliable details as to their date and authorship.

MARGINAL VERSES

Scribes also were in the habit of adding verses here and there on the margins of their manuscripts, as they were writing out the main text, and sometimes later owners or readers of the manuscript would add stray quatrains where they found a blank space. As is the case with the more random personal comments in prose, scribes might add these entries in the Irish language to manuscripts where the main text was in Latin, whether ecclesiastical or medical. A number of such verses, mainly from the earlier manuscripts, have been edited and sometimes translated.[70] They can consist of versified prayers or proverbs, single quatrains taken out of longer bardic poems, jokes or riddles. They can be interesting pointers to the mind-set of the scribes and their readers, and occasionally, where a verse occurs from a longer formal poem that no longer exists, or a single quatrain of political comment occurs, they can provide primary evidence for historical events of more than domestic significance. A special case concerns the verses added in the margins of the annalistic compilations. In the case of *AU*, in the A manuscript, the original late fifteenth-century compilation by Cathal Mac Maghnusa, the main scribe (variously identified by the editor as 'H' or 'H 1') has evidently been instructed to make a literal copy of an old manuscript of annals, leaving spaces at the beginning of each year's entry for the addition of corrected dates, and at the end of each year for further historical entries to be added from other compilations. However, instead of using these blank spaces for his verse insertions, H 1 adds quatrains containing historical information in the margins, in Old Irish spelling, and indicates by fine lines drawn around the quatrain and leading into the text, which entry the verse is supposed to illustrate. This suggests that the older manuscript from which he was copying also contained these verses, placed similarly in the margin rather than in the main text. Sometimes the additional

69 Best, *Bibliography   to 1912*; idem, *Bibliography   1913–1941*; Baumgarten, *Bibliography 1942–71.*   70 See, for example, David Greene & Frank O'Connor (ed.), *A golden treasury of Irish poetry, AD 600–1200* (London, 1967). For comment on one type of such verses see Donnchaidh Ó Corráin, 'Early Irish hermit poetry?' in Ó Corráin, Breatnach & McCone (eds), *Sages, saints and storytellers*, pp 256–7.

material in more modern spelling which has been inserted by the second scribe (H 2) in the blank spaces at the end of each year's entry also comes accompanied by a marginal verse, and sometimes this verse is even the same one, copied in by H 2 with slight spelling variations.[71] This tradition of inserting extracts from learned poems into annal entries was continued in the later middle ages by the *seanchaidhe* compiling the prototype of *AC* and *ALC*.[72]

Because of their obvious historical relevance, annalistic quatrains are normally incorporated by modern editors into the main text. However, in manuscript catalogues, where the incidental marginal prose remarks and comments by the scribes of a particular manuscript are often printed in full as part of the cataloguer's evidence for the date and location of its writing, the stray marginal quatrains are normally listed by first line only, so that it is difficult to judge whether they contain any interesting tit-bit of information or not. One can always check the first-line indices of verses in the Best and Baumgarten bibliographies, and the on-line bibliographical updates mentioned above,[73] in the hope of finding an edited version of any particular quatrain that looks promising.

71 See Mac Airt & Mac Niocaill (eds), *AU*, pp 62, 64, 82, 100, 102, 108, 110, 112 etc. Such verses have been collected by Alan Mac an Bhaird for metrical rather than historical purposes see Mac an Bhaird, 'Dán díreach agus ranna as na h-annála 867–1134 AD' in *Éigse*, 17, no. ii (1977–8), pp 157–68. **72** O'Dwyer, 'The Annals of Connacht and Loch Cé', p. 96. See above, section on 'Influences on the compilers of the annals'. **73** As above, note 69.

Afterword

Some of the material reviewed in the foregoing may seem rather daunting, but there are certain general guidelines to bear in mind. Perhaps the most important is to read editors' introductions to published sources attentively, learning as much as possible about their views on the date of the language of a text, the authors, the evidence of the extant manuscript 'witnesses' to the form of the original text, and any variations to it that took place over time, the identity of the scribes and the owners of the surviving manuscripts. Linguists, textualists and palaeographers are normally much better equipped to discuss these questions than the historian.

It is also important to set the Gaelic language sources in the wider context of ecclesiastical and Anglo-Norman administrative sources in Latin and English. The Gaelic learned classes tended to create a claustrophic comfort zone for themselves in which all references were to other Gaelic families,[1] and past glories of their ancestors, but they and their patrons were living in an open mixed society, influenced by current trends and current events, and the Irish language sources are only one class of evidence for what was going on in that society. Realising what were the pressing concerns in any particular period can help to interpret the evidence of the Irish language sources, especially the more strictly contemporary bardic poetry.

Thirdly, as already urged at the end of the chapter on genealogies, the work of earlier local historians should never be ignored. Nineteenth-century historians may have had difficulty in distinguishing genuinely early medieval texts in Irish from much later and more romanticised accounts, but in many cases they tended to compensate by a considerably better command of Latin than most modern historians, and sometimes they had the opportunity of reading Anglo-Norman records which have since been destroyed in the Four Courts fire of 1922. Some contributors to twentieth- and twenty-first-century local history journals have formal degrees in Celtic studies or history combined with an intimate knowledge of their own locality. Standards of contribution to such journals may vary, but irregular styles of footnoting are less important than the clear identification of all the sources of information on which the writer depended. Once such sources are identified, it has been the whole aim of this book to make it easier for intending researchers to evaluate and utilise those which were written in Irish during the high and later middle ages.

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1 For example, the listing of territories and their rulers by the fourteenth-century Seaán Mór Ó Dubhagáin without reference to the Anglo-Norman lords in Carney (ed.), *Topographical Poems*, O'Donovan (ed.), *The Topographical Poems*; or the listing of current rulers in Ireland in 1475 in the introduction to the Irish translation of the 'Travels of Sir John Mandeville', which again omitted those of Anglo-Norman descent, see Whitley Stokes (ed.), 'The Gaelic Maundeville' in *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie*, 2 (1898), pp 1–63, 226–312, 603–4, at pp 4–7.

Appendix 1: Gaelic sources for an incident in fourteenth-century Connacht

Calann Enair for Aine ₇ xxi fuirri, m° .ccc° .l.vi. Octauo anno cicli lunaris; ix anno indictionis; quarto anno cicli solạris. Embolismalis. CB Ogdoas.

   Aed mac Toirrdelbaig h. Conchobair Ri Connacht do marbad a mBaili Locha Decair le Dondchad Carrach h. Cellaig ₇ le Clainn an Baird ar forgall Mainech, a ndigaltus ingine Seoinin a Burc .i. ben h. Cellaig do breith do mac Toirrdelbaig leis ar aithed ₇ ar elod, ₇ Aed mac Feidlim h. Conchobair do gabail lanrige Connacht iarom.

[First of January on Friday and the twenty-first day of the moon, MCCCLVI [1356]. Eighth year of the Lunar Cycle; ninth year of the Indiction; fourth year of the Solar Cycle. Embolismal year. CB. Last year of the Ogdoad.

   Aed son of Toirrdelbach O Conchobair, king of Connacht, was killed in Balloughdacker by Donnchad Carrach O Cellaig and Clann an Baird, at the bidding of the Ui Maine and in revenge of his having abducted and eloped with Seoinin Burke's daughter, O Cellaig's wife. After this, Aed son of Feidlim O Conchobair assumed the full kingship of Connacht. (*AC*, pp 312–13)]

Aedh, mac Toirrdelbaigh hUi Concobuir, ri Connacht, do marbadh do macaibh hUi Cheallaigh tre ed.

[Aedh son of Toirdelbach Ua Concobuir, king of Connacht, was slain by the sons of Ua Cellaigh through jealousy. (*AU*, ii, 502–30)]

Aodh mac Toirrdealbhaigh Uí Concobhair, Rí connacht do mharbhadh i mbaile Locha deacair la donnchadh carrach ua ceallaigh, ₇ la cloinn meic an baird ar forailemh maineach i ccionaid ingheine Seóinin a burc ben uí cheallaigh do breith leis ar aitheadh, ₇ ar elódh roimhe sin.

   Aodh mac Fedhlimidh Uí Chonchobhair do ghabhail lain righe Connacht iaromh.

[Hugh, the son of Turlough O'Connor, King of Connaught, was slain at Baile-Locha-Deacair[1] by Donough Carragh O'Kelly and the sons of Mac-an-Ward, at the instigation of the Hy-Many. This was in revenge of his having some time

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1 'This is now anglicised Balloughdacker, and is the name of a townland containing a lough, in the parish of Athleague, barony of Killian, and county of Galway – see the Ordnance map of that county, sheets 20 and 33' – note by the editor of *AFM*, John O'Donovan.

before carried off privately and clandestinely the daughter of Seoinin Burke, the wife of O'Kelly.

Hugh son of Felim O'Conor, then assumed the entire government of Connaught. (*AFM*, iii, 608–11)]

B) BARDIC ELEGY

[Introductory note by the editor, Lambert McKenna]
'Aodh son of Toirdhealbhach Ó Conchobhair, Lord of Connachta, is said (FM) to have been slain in 1356 at Baile Locha Deacair (Bally Loughdacker, bar. Killian, co. Galway), by Donnchadh Carrach Ó Ceallaigh in revenge for his having run away with Donnchadh's wife. The poem appears to refer to this event, giving a version of it which would be more acceptable to the relatives of the deceased. Though the entry in F.M. at year 1356 is the only place where the name "Donnchadh Carrach" occurs, he is called in the same place "Ó Ceallaigh," and therefore may probably be identified as Donnchadh (son of Ruaidhrí na Maor son of Mathghamhain son of Eoghan son of Domhnall Mór) Ó Ceallaigh, who was Chief of Í Mhaine for four years (exact dates unknown). *Cf. Tribes and Customs of Hy-Many*, 126.[2]

About fifty years previously, Seaán Ó Clumhain (the author of this poem or perhaps his father) had written *Dom idir dhán is dásacht* [McKenna, *Dioghluim Dána*, no. 84] to the above Aodh Ó Conchobhair's grandfather.'

Seaán Ó Clumháin cct

> 1 Leasaighthear libh léine an ríogh,
> a bhantracht as bhuan imshníomh,
> léine fana cóir cumha
> ón dóigh Éire i n-aontumha.

> 2 Leasaighthear libh ar leas cháich
> sguird gheal an ghréasa neamhghnáith;
> ní fréamh dar gcumhuidh cheileas,
> léan nach cumhuin chuimhnigheas.

> 3 Léine ríogh rátha Meadhbha
> ag dúsacht mo dhoimheanma

2 In Moody, Martin & Byrne (eds), *A new history of Ireland*, ix: *maps, genealogies, lists*, p. 161, Kenneth Nicholls's tabulation of the Ó Ceallaigh family tree shows Donnchadh *Carrach* Ó Ceallaigh as lord of Clannmhaicne Eóghain, while the reigning Ó Ceallaigh of Uí Mhaine in 1356 was Uilliam *Buidhe* (d. 1381). It is not clear from the annals' account, *pace* McKenna, that the Ó Ceallaigh whose wife was abducted and the actual slayer who revenged the abduction were one and the same person.

– fa maith roimhe ar n-ádh orchra –
is crádh croidhe an comhartha.

4 Ná bíodh aguibh ar mh'aghaidh
léine chaol Í Chonchabhair;
sódh céille do chlaochládh d'fhior
léine mhaothbhán an mhíliodh.

5 Fa chumhuidh ríogh rátha Breagh
ní rigthí a leas ar laoidheadh;
is saoth ler gcroidhibh cheana
laoch Oiligh, a ingheana.

6 An léine ag brosdadh ar mbróin
tuilleadh le toirse romhóir;
níor chiall bheith ag ar mbrosdadh
eich nar iarr a n-eachlosgadh.

7 I gcruth ghabhála Gaoidheal
– le chéile ós dá gcomhmaoidheamh –
do bhí an truaillse a-tá folamh
an lá fuairse a folmhoghadh.

8 Do tairngreadh – truagh an fhís –
do mhnáibh Banbha go mbeidís
mun léinigh líon a thionóil
síol Éibhir is Éiriomhóin.

9 Mairg do fuirgheadh re a féaghain
fachain toirse a thaisbéanaidh:
"budh orchra re lá an léine,
a mhná Tolcha Toirléime."

10 Goin an taoibh dar thruaill ise
biaidh ar cuimhne im chroidheise;
an léine ní lé as cumhuin
gur bh'é a céile Ó Conchubhuir.

11 Clanna Míleadh gan mheanmuin
d'éis mharbhtha mhic Thoirrdhealbhuigh;
léine ní líontar dá dhul
d'fhéile ó íochtar go huachtur.

12 Dursan gan a dháil aige
rí forbhfhaoilidh Fánaide

an mhaoithléine chaol do chur
um thaobh gcaomhchéile Cruachun.

13 Dursan leam, a léine an ríogh,
acht gér bh'iomdha ar Aodh eissíodh
do bhí re hucht a fhoghla
an rí gan lucht leanomhna.

14 Fuair an dream – gár dhoilghe a fhios –
brath ar a bheith i n-uaignios
bró mallbhan ngeal agus ngiall
um fhear nAlmhan ar oirshliabh.

15 Ní grádh óil , ní himshníomh creach
tug a fhagháil go huaigneach;
do bhí re headh i n-othar
rí Breagh ar n-a bhaoghlochadh.

16 Uaigneas ainmheinic fhir Bhreagh
freagraid lucht [iomtha] an fhéinneadh;
fuair an dream nar fhéagh d'fholuidh
séan i gceann Í Chonchobhuir.

17 Eagruid tre fheabhas a ghníomh
um theach othuir an airdríogh
ar thuill mun mbruighin mbaoghluigh
don druing fhuiligh iolfhaobhruigh.

18 Is é [tráth] a-tá i leabhruibh
do mhosgail mac Toirrdhealbhuigh
is cearcall theineadh mun dteach
'n-a sgeimheal leathtrom luaimneach.

19 Smuainis gan cách do chabhair
nochtais colg Í Chonchabhair,
léigthear suas beoil na bruighne
fa dheoigh re chruas comhuirle.

20 Réidhighthear leis dá leaghaibh
dá ógmhnáibh dá fhileadhaibh
an chéidshlighe ón múr a-mach
an géigbhile úr uallach.

21 An dara raon do réidhigh
rí Cruachan an caithfhéinnidh

tres an bhfóir neimhnigh námhad
dá bhróin gheimhligh ghiallbhrághad.

22 An treas uair ar n-éirghe a-mach
smuainis a choin i gcumhgach
do bhuain iall gcaol dá chonuibh
do thriall Aodh an athchonuir.

23 Le a mheince ráinig reampa
'n-a sduaigh dhíomsuigh dhíleannta
níor lean éinfear dá aithle
fear na léine leasaighthe.

24 Ní cian do-chuaidh le a ghonaibh;
fearais crú Í Chonchobhair;
gur léig soin re criaidh a chneas
a ghoin na dhiaidh níor dhíleas. Leas.

25 Tugas leam i Leith Mogha
a sgín i ndiaidh Dhonnchodha
an aisgidh is mé dá mheas
a faigsin is é mh'aimhleas   Leasaightear.

Repair ye the Prince's tunic, ye ladies of lasting sorrow, the tunic which calls for tears and makes Éire like to be spouseless.

2. Repair for the benefit of all men that bright, strange-adorned tunic; it covers not now the root of our grief; it reminds us of a woe we might have forgotten.

3. The tunic of the king of Meadhbh's Fort awakes my melancholy, and its sight now aches my heart; slight was any trouble of ours till this befell.

4. Keep from my eyes Ó Conchobhair's graceful tunic; the hero's soft white tunic would make a man distraught.

5. There was no need of my chant to stir sorrow for the king of Breagha's Fort; without it our hearts grieve, O ladies, for Oileach's hero.

6. The tunic, stirring our grief, adds to a too-great sorrow; 'twere foolish to urge us, steeds that need no lashing.

7. On the day when this shrine, now empty, was despoiled, it seemed about to rule all Gaoidhil; I couple him and them in my lament.

8. 'Twas foretold to Banbha's women − sad prophecy! − that one day should gather round this tunic in full muster the race of Éibhear and Éireamhón.

9. Woe to those who have been left to see the sad fulfilment of the words: "This tunic, ye ladies of Tulach Toirléime, shall in its day mean ruin.

10. The wound in the body with it clad shall ever be present to my heart; the tunic remembers it not – but I remember! – that Ó Conchobhair was its spouse.

After Toirdhealbhach's son's death Mil's races are cast down; now he is gone, no tunic is found full (as his) of generosity.

12. Alas, that Fána's generous king, Cruacha's gentle spouse, is fated no longer to don this soft comely tunic.

13. Alas, o princely tunic, that though Aodh had many quarrels, he had no followers about him at the hour he was attacked.

14. That folk – can tale be sadder – watched till Almhain's king was alone with a crowd of fair stately ladies and hostages about him on the hill.

15. Not love of his cups or over-anxiety about booty made the Breagha's king unattended; but, after passing through (many) dangers, he was now lying sick.

16. The foes of the prince of the men of Breagha, that folk who scrupled not crime, take advantage of his unusual loneliness, and found a chance to attack Ó Conchobhair.

17. As his fighting power was so famous, they draw up around the prince's sick-house, that formidable house, all the fierce sharp-sworded folk who could find place there.

18. Toirdhealbhach's son awoke when round the house was a ring of fire, an erection ever quivering (with flame) and threatening ruin – this is the time mentioned in the books.

19. Ó Conchobhair remembered no help was near, and drew his sword; then at his brave command the portcullis of the castle is raised.

20. The proud active hero clears the way from the castle, first for his leeches and maidens and poets.

21 Cruacha's captain-king next clears the way through the foes' fierce crowd for his chained band of hostages.

22. A third time after coming out he remembers his leashed dogs, and makes the journey back again to loose their thin leashes.

23. That proud heroic prince of the oft-mended tunic, had so often charged his foes that none of them now dared follow him.

24. Not far did Ó Conchobhair advance with his wounds; he poured forth his blood; even then it was not safe to strike him till he fell prostrate to the earth.

25. After Donnchadh's death I brought his sword to Leath Mogha; the sight of that gift which I treasure makes me sad. [McKenna (ed.), *Aithdioghluim Dána*, poem no. 3].

c) GENEALOGY

Cathal Croibhdearg (airdri Connacht) mac Toirdhelbhaigh Mhóir, clann lais Aodh agus Feidhlim, da righ Connacht.

Clann Aodha .i. oighre Chathail Chroibhdherg .i. Tadhg, Conchabhar, Cathal, Ruaidhrí, agus Toirdhealbhach (do ghabh-sen righe Connacht), athair Tadhg, Ruaidhrigh, Chonchabhair, <agus> Mhaoileachloinn.

Mac don Conchabhar sin Aodh athair Aodha eile athar Conchabhair.

Ruaidhrí mac Aodha mc Cathail Croibdherg, dha mhac aige .i. Eoghan agus Mathgamhain, athair Thoirdhealbhaigh athar Thaidhg agus Conchabhair.

Eoghan mac Ruaidhrigh, a chlann .i. Toirdhelbhach (aonrogha mhac riogh Éireann ina aimsir fén), Donnchadh (athair Ruaidhrigh na fFedh, righ Connacht, o ttaid Mec Ruaidhrigh na fFedh), agus Aodh (an té rob' fhearr agus rob díorgha dhíbh chum na ríghe) athair Feidhlim; rí Connacht an tAodh sin bheos; mac do Fhedhlim Aodh.

Aodh mac Fedhlim, clann mhor aige .i. Toirdhealbhach Ruadh, rí Chonnacht, Brian Ballach, Diarmuid <agus Fedhlim> Cléreach, Conchabhar Tuillsge, Eogan Fionn, Eoghan Donn, agus Donnchadh na Clúaisi.

Toirdhelbhach Ruadh, clann lais .i. Aodh, Eoghan, Cathal Dubh, agus Tadhg.

Toirdhealbhach (mac Aodha mc Eoghain, airdrigh Connacht) da m[h]ac lais .i. Aodh, ri Connacht, agus Ruaidhri, ri Connacht, athair Cathail, Eoghain, agus Feidhlimidh.

Aodh mac Toirdhealbhaigh, da mhac les .i. Toirdhealbhach, lethri [Connacht], agus Aodh Cáoch, riodhamhna Connacht.

Cathal Croibhdhearg (high-king of Connacht) s[on of] Toirdhealbhach Mór had a family: Aodh and Feidhlim, two kings of Connacht.

The family of Aodh, the heir of Cathal Croibhdhearg: Tadhg, Conchabhar, Cathal, Ruaidhrí, and Toirdhealbhach (he held the kingship of Connacht), f[ather of] Tadhg, Ruaidhrí, Conchabhar, and Maol Eachlainn.

A son to that Conchabhar was Aodh father of another Aodh f[ather of] Conchabhar.

Ruaidhrí s[on of] Aodh s[on of] Cathal Croibhdhearg had two sons: Eóghan and Mathghamhain, f[ather of] Toirdhealbhach f[ather of] Tadhg and Conchabhar.

The family of Eoghan son of Ruaidhrí: Toirdhealbhach (the only choice of the kings' sons of Ireland in his own time), Donnchadh (f[ather of] Ruaidhrí na Feadha, king of Connacht, from whom are Meic Ruaidhrígh na bhFeadh) and Aodh (the best and most directly in line of them for the kingship) f[ather of] Feidhlim; that Aodh was also king of Connacht; a son to Feidhlim was Aodh.

Aodh son of Feidhlim had a large family: Toirdhealbhach Ruadh, king of Connacht, Brian Ballach, Diarmuid, and Feidhlim Cléireach, Conchabhar of Tuillsce, Eóghan Fionn, Eóghan Donn, and Donnchadh na Cluaise [=of the ear].

Toirdhealbhach Ruadh had family: Aodh, Eóghan, Cathal Dubh, and Tadhg.
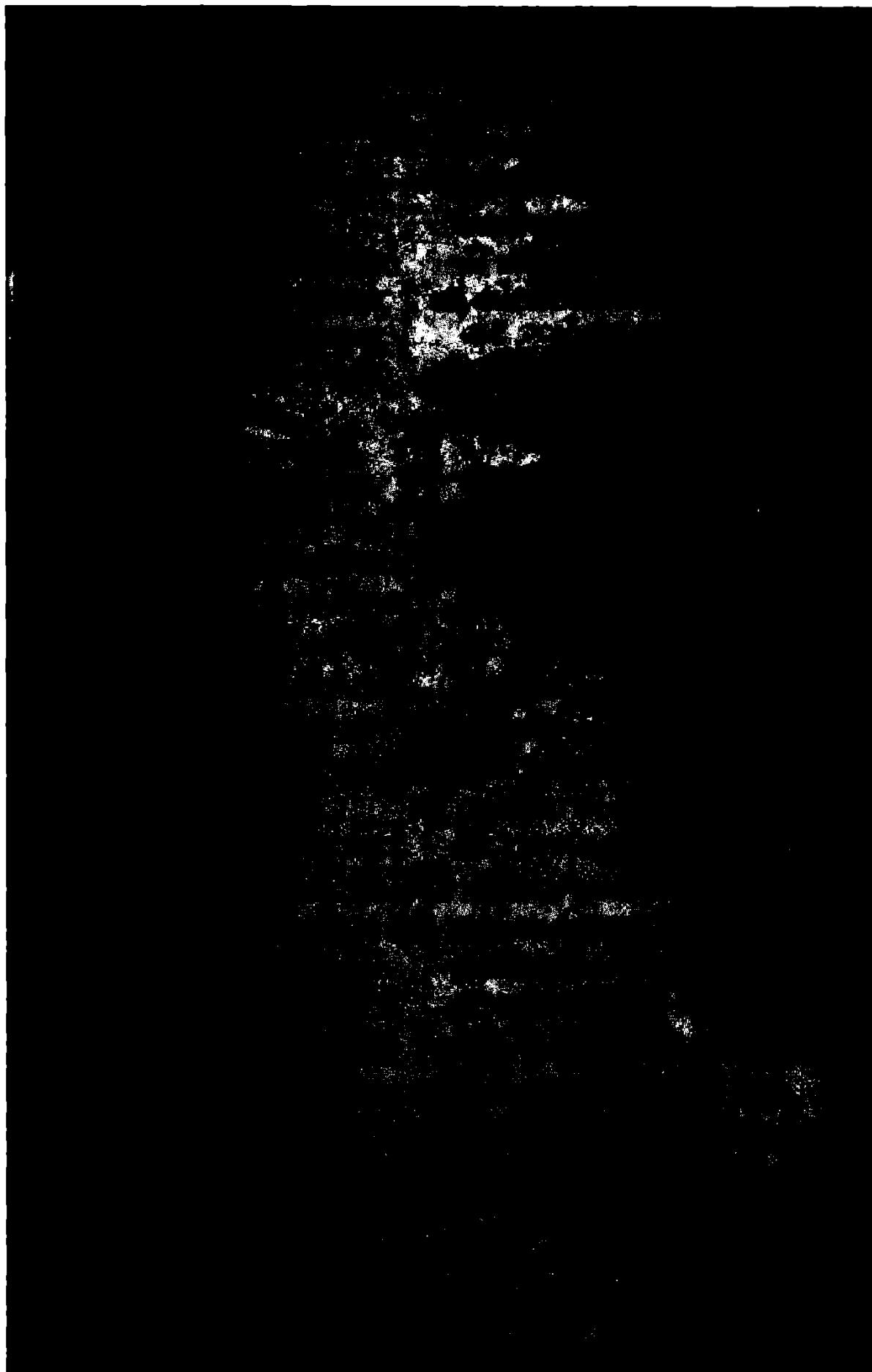
6 Ó Conchobhair genealogy in the Ó Cianáin Miscellany, National Library of Ireland, MS G 2, f. 20r. Digital image from ISOS (Irish Script on Screen).

Toirdhealbhach (s[on of] Aodh s[on of] Eóghan, high-king of Connacht), had two sons: **Aodh, king of Connacht**, and Ruaidhri, king of Connacht, f[ather of] Cathal, Eóghan, and Feidhlimidh.

Aodh s[on of] Toirdhealbhach had two sons: Toirdhealbhach, joint-king of Connacht, and Aodh Caoch, royal heir of Connacht. [Ó Muraíle (ed.), *The Great Book of Irish Genealogies*, i, 496–9].

[Compare this genealogy with Kenneth Nicholls's diagram of the Ó Conchobhair family tree in T.W Moody, F.X. Martin & F.J. Byrne (eds), *A new history of Ireland, ix: maps, genealogies, lists* (Oxford, 1984), pp 158–9. Compare also with the mid-fourteenth century manuscript genealogy in NLI G 2 (the 'Ó Cianáin Miscellany'), f. 21r. which shows Toirdhealbhach (d. 1345) the father of Aodh (d. 1356), as the reigning king of Connacht at the time the manuscript was written, marking his importance with a large illuminated initial 'T' Note that as an afterthought the scribe has added the names of three of the king's brothers, not only the Feidhlim (d. 1316) son of Aodh son of Eoghan who is recorded in Mac Firbhisigh's 'Great Book of Irish Genealogies' cited above, but two other brothers, Cathal and Muirchertach, who are not recorded at a later period. This mid-fourteenth-century version of the Ó Conchobhair genealogy transcribed by Ó Cianáin also gives a lot of space to the Clann Mhuircheartaigh Uí Chonchobhair, a rival branch who were important at the time, but dropped out of the limelight in the early fifteenth century – see Katharine Simms, 'A lost tribe: the Clan Murtagh O'Conors' in *Galway Archaeological and Historical Society Journal*, 53 (2001), pp 1–22].

Appendix 2: Agreements between
Ó Domhnaill and Mac Suibhne

[Extract from an early sixteenth-century prose tract on the family history of Clann Suibhne (the Mac Sweeneys of Fanad, County Donegal) containing in the final paragraph an apparent summary of a brehon law contract between Mac Suibhne as constable of the galloglasses and Ó Domhnaill, lord of Tír Conaill, his employer. This section of the tale opens when the sons of Seaán Ó Domhnaill (d. 1380), late lord of Tír Conaill, hired Toirdhealbhach *Caoch* Mac Suibhne, and his son Toirdhealbhach *Ruadh* Mac Suibhne with their mercenary troops to support them in a feud against Seaán's victorious kinsman and rival Toirdhealbhach *an Fhíona* ('T. of the Wine') Ó Domhnaill (d. 1423).]

Fechtus da ndeachatar slicht Seain I Domnaill ⁊ Mac Suibne dinnsaighe ar luing co Daire do fagad Torrdelbach ruad mac Mic Shuibne a faslongport a nDun Cinnfhaolaidh ac coimed a caoraigecht ⁊ tainicc Torrdelbach an fhíona annsa caoraighecht ⁊ do rinne crecha mora orra ⁊ do len Torrdelbach ruadh ⁊ a muinnter iatt ⁊ fillis O Domnaill orra annsin ⁊ tuc ruaig doib ⁊ do bris orra ⁊ do gabad mac Mic hShuibne leiss annsin ⁊ berthar a laimh co Murbach he ⁊ do gab Torrdelbach an fhína tren mor o shliabh aniar annsin.

Fechtus da rabatar acc ol dibh linaib .i. Torrdelbach an fhina ⁊ mac Mic Shuibne a Murbach ⁊ tarrla imarbaigh etorra ⁊ adubairt Torrdelbach ruadh da mbeith se fein fa réir nach beith seisen coimthren ⁊ do bí se. Gabuiss fercc adhbhalmor Torrdelbach an fhina trit sin ⁊ tuc a briathar co mbeith seisen fa réir da fhechain sin ⁊ benuis a geimhlech de annsin ⁊ do batar muinnter I Domnaill ag aithbhir imaithbhir air ar egla go mad fhír aní adubairt mac Mic Shuibne ⁊ adubairt Torrdelbach an fhína re mac Mic Shuibne a beith ag imthecht roime da duthaig fein ⁊ adubairt Torrdelbach ruadh nach imeochad munab élódh do rinne se no co fagadh culaidh persanna Thorrdelbaig an fhína dhó fein ⁊ a muinnter leis da innlacad ⁊ fuair se sin uile ⁊ do imigh iar sin ⁊ tainig a cenn a athar ⁊ a muinntire fein ⁊ do innis na sgela o thúss co deired dóibh ⁊ mar do chuala Mac Suibne sin do thinoil se co luathgairech lín a shluaig ⁊ a shocraide ⁊ teccaid rompo annsin co Murbach a cenn Torrdelbaig in fhina ⁊ an tan sin do batar ag techt do chum an baile táinicc duine áirithe mar a roibe O Domnaill ⁊ do innis dó dirma degshluaig do beith ag techt do chum an baile chuige ⁊ tuc san aithne orra ⁊ adubairt gurab iatt Clann tSuibne do bí ann ag techt na chenn fein ⁊ do gab luthgaire mor he rompa ⁊ ar mbeith adhaigh sa baile doib fuaratar comthacha mora do chenn an turuis sin ⁊ isiat so na cumthacha sin .i. ced bo ⁊ culaid persanna I Domnaill fein ⁊ tuc Mac Suibne sin da oide fein .i. do Maolmithig O Oirealla ⁊ do fhiarfaig O Domnaill do na techtaib do chuaidh leis sin an roib Mac Suibne buidheach ⁊ adubratar san nar aithnighetar fein co roibe ⁊ tuc uadh ina diaigh sin se .xx. tuag do buanacht bona a Tir Conaill fein co suthaine uadh fein ⁊ ona shlicht ina diaigh ⁊ cuairt timchill

Tire Conaill ⁊ iascc na hEirne gach enaoine o fheil Padraic co feil na croiche an fhoghmair an tan do beitdis a faslongport acois na hEirne re hagaid Connacht ⁊ da baile biataigh do Thir Mic Caothrainn da ngairer Braighid Fanutt aniugh ⁊ lethguala dheas I Domnaill gach uair da rachadh ina chenn. Do fhiarfaig Torrdelbach an fhína annsin do na techtaib cedna an roibe Mac Suibne buidhech ⁊ adubradar san nachar aithnidetar fein co roibe ⁊ adubairtt san ru sa cu chomramach do bi aige fein do breith dochum Mic Shuibne ⁊ a fhiarfaige dé an roibe sa baili enní re roibe a aire no suil aige ⁊ rucc Mac Suibne buidhechus mor ris annsin ar faicsin na con dó ⁊ ní rug se buideachus ris fa ení da fuair se conuige sin ⁊ adubairt co roibhe sa baile ní do badh maith leis dfhagail ⁊ gurab e ní sin Niall Ó Domnaill do be na macamh sa baile an uair sin dfhagail mar dalta dó fein ⁊ adubairt O Domnaill co fuighbhedh ⁊ gur maith leis he da iaraidh air ⁊ da mbeith a fhis aige go ngebad se he gurab e an dalta sin cedni do gebad sé ⁊ do gab Mac Suibne Niall O Domnaill chuige annsin mar dalta carthanach.

Et as annsin do cumadh galloglaig ar Chlainn tSuibhne ⁊ as amlaid so do cumadh iatt .i. diass as in cethramuin ⁊ da bho as an bfer nach fuigthi dibh .i. bó as an duine ⁊ bo as in éidegh ⁊ is amlaid aderid Clann tSuibne sin do beith orra luirech ⁊ sgabal fa fer díbh ⁊ seca ⁊ cinnbert fan dara fer dib ⁊ gan cáin sa cinnbert acht inchinn an galloglaig ⁊ gan cáin sa tuaigh acht sgilling ag in consabal ⁊ bonn sa nga ⁊ can buain acc O nDomnaill re nechtar aca ⁊ as amlaid do batar roimhe sin gan eirge amach can sluaigedh orra ag nech ar bith acht acc an tí do thoigeoratis fein ⁊ issé nos na hAlban do bi aca conuige sin .i. gach duine as a doman fein.

On one occasion the descendants of Seán O Domhnaill and Mac Suibhne set out by sea for Derry, and they left Toirrdhealbhach Ruadh, Mac Suibhne's son, in camp at Dún Cionnfhaolaidh 'Dunkineely' as a guard over their creaght.[1] Toirrdhealbhach an Fhíona fell upon the creaght, carrying away great spoils out of it; whereupon Toirrdhealbhach Ruadh and his people set out in pursuit of them. O Domhnaill turned to face his pursuers, defeated and routed them, and there captured Mac Suibhne's son. He was brought in custody to Murbhach, and Toirrdhealbhach an Fhíona greatly extended his power to the east of the mountain [Bearnas Mór] after his capture.

Once, when Toirrdhealbhach an Fhíona and Mac Suibhne's son were carousing in Murbhach, they chanced to have a dispute, and Toirrdhealbhach Ruadh said that if he himself were at liberty, the other would not be so powerful as he was. Toirrdhealbhach an Fhíona became exceedingly angry thereat, and declared that he would set the prisoner free, that what he said might be put to the test. He removed his fetters then. And O Domhnaill's people began to reproach him, for they feared that that which Mac Suibhne's son had said might become true. But Toirrdhealbhach an Fhíona gave orders to him to set out for his own country, to which Toirrdhealbhach answered that he would not depart without getting the King's dress for himself, and his followers for a bodyguard; otherwise he would go

1 'Creaght' or *caoraigheacht* signifies a consolidated herd of the lords' own livestock and that of their non-combatant followers and herdsmen. See K. Simms, 'Nomadry in medieval Ireland' in *Peritia*, 5 (1986), pp 379–91.

away furtively. His demands were granted in full. He departed then, and coming to his father and his own people, he narrated all the proceedings to them from beginning to end. When Mac Suibhne heard them, through gladness he summoned his whole force and following, and then came towards Murbhach to meet Toirrdhealbhach an Fhíona. And as they approached the house, a certain person came to where O Domhnaill was, and told him that there was a goodly host coming to him to his house. O Domhnaill recognised them and said they were the Clann Suibhne coming to visit himself; and on their coming to him he showed great joy. After they had spent a night in the house they received great presents for undertaking that journey. The presents were, one hundred cows and O Domhnaill's own raiment. But Mac Suibhne bestowed them on his foster-father, Maolmithigh O hOirealla 'O'Herrill' O Domhnaill asked of those who brought the presents was Mac Suibhne grateful, and they answered that they did not observe that he was. After that he bestowed on them six score axes of *buannacht bona* [that is, axe-men to be maintained] out of Tír Chonaill itself, a gift in perpetuity from himself and his posterity after him; the making of a circuit of Tír Chonaill once in the year; the spending of three nights in each house in Tír Chonaill; the fishing of the Erne every Friday between St Patrick's Day and the Feast of the Cross in Harvest, if they should happen to be encamped by the Erne to oppose the men of Connacht; two ballybetaghs of Tír Mic Caorthainn which are now called Bráighid Fánad 'the Braid of Fanad'; and to sit by the right side of O Domhnaill whenever Mac Suibhne would visit him. Toirrdhealbhach an Fhíona then asked the same messengers was Mac Suibhne grateful, but they said that they did not observe that he was. He next ordered them to bring a champion hound of his own to Mac Suibhne, and to ask him was there in the house anything which he liked or desired. And Mac Suibhne thanked him much when he saw the hound, but for nothing of all that he had until then received. And he declared there was one thing in the house he would wish to get, namely, that he should have as a foster-son Niall O Domhnaill who was a youth in the house at that time. O Domhnaill replied that he would have him, and that he was glad that Mac Suibhne had asked his son, and that, had he known that he would accept him, that foster-son was the first thing he would have offered him. And thereupon Mac Suibhne took Niall O Domhnaill as a loving foster-child.

And it was then that a levy of gallowglasses was made on Clann Suibhne, and this is how the levy was made: two gallowglasses for each quarter of land, and two cows for each gallowglass deficient, that is, one cow for the man himself and one for his equipment. And Clann Suibhne say they are responsible for these as follows, that for each man equipped with a coat of mail and a breastplate, another should have a jack and helmet; that there should be no forfeit for a helmet deficient except the gallowglass's brain [dashed out for the want of it]; and no fine for a missing axe except a shilling, nor for a spear, except a groat, which shilling and groat the Constable [captain] should get, and O Domhnaill had no claim to make for either. And previous to this arrangement no lord had a claim on them for a rising-out or a hosting, but they might serve whomsoever they wished. It was the Scottish habit [of military service] they had observed until that time, namely, each man according as he was employed. [Pól Breatnach (Paul Walsh), (ed.), *Leabhar Chlainne Suibhne*, pp 40–5].

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SOME USEFUL WEB-SITES

a) Institutions

www.ucc.ie/celt/ contains texts and translations of the main Irish annals and a number of other key texts, including published collections of bardic poetry.

www.ucc.ie/locus/ contains an electronically searchable text of Edmund Hogan's *Onomasticon Goedelicum* (Dictionary of early Irish place-names).

www.dias.ie Web-site of the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, leading into the School of Celtic Studies' pages, which give access to a catalogue of its own publications, many of them editions of medieval Irish texts; a searchable electronic version of Baumgarten's *Bibliography 1942–1971*; an updated bibliography of recent articles in Celtic studies journals, with digital texts of recent articles in *Celtica*; an electronic index to most of the extant

corpus of bardic poetry, soon to be merged with the Trinity College project, giving the actual Irish texts of both published and unpublished bardic poems; and a link to the ISOS pages, containing digital reproductions of key medieval Irish manuscripts kept at a number of different libraries round Ireland. This last project can also be accessed directly at www.isos.dias.ie

b) Individuals

Professor Dan McCarthy, of Computer Science in Trinity College Dublin, has made available a web-page www.cs.tcd.ie/Dan.McCarthy/chronology/synchronisms/annals-chron.htm which is designed to reconcile the dating inconsistencies in the various Irish annals compilations.

Štepán Kosík at http://www.volny.cz/enelen/index.htm 'Scéla: catalogue of medieval Irish narratives and literary enumerations', has compiled an extensive list of medieval Irish tales giving manuscript sources, very full references to printed editions and translations, with links to electronic text versions to be found elsewhere on the web. The list is partly based on traditional Irish tale-list categories such as 'elopements', 'sieges' and so on, but includes Irish adaptations of classical or romantic texts and some legal materials.

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