COLONISATION AND CONQUEST IN MEDIEVAL IRELAND
THE ENGLISH IN LOUTH, 1170–1330

This book examines the development of English colonial society in the eastern coastal area of Ireland now known as county Louth in the period 1170–1330. At its heart is the story of two relationships: that between settler and native in Louth; and that between the settlers and England.

Fifty years before the arrival of the English, Louth was incorporated into the Irish kingdom of Airgialla, and experienced rapid change in the political and ecclesiastical spheres under the leadership of Donnchad Ua Cerbaill. This provides the context in which the achievements of the English in Louth are assessed. The book asks why well-to-do members of local society in the west midlands of England were prepared to participate in the Irish adventure in the reigns of Henry II and his sons and examines their experience in the wider setting of contemporary English colonial projects in Wales and Scotland.

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# COLONISATION AND CONQUEST IN MEDIEVAL IRELAND

*The English in Louth, 1170–1330*

BRENDAN SMITH

*For Andrew*

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# MAPS

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

# ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| *AC* | *Annála Connacht; The Annals of Connacht (A.D. 1224–1544)*, ed. A. Martin Freeman (Dublin, 1944) |
| *AFM* | *Annála Ríoghachta Éireann; Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland by the Four Masters from the earliest period to the year 1616*, ed. and trans. John O' Donovan, 7 vols. (Dublin, 1851; reprint, New York, 1966) |
| *AI* | *The Annals of Inisfallen (MS Rawlinson B 503)*, ed. and trans. S. Mac Airt (Dublin, 1951) |
| *ALC* | *The Annals of Loch Cé: A Chronicle of Irish Affairs, 1014–1690*, ed. W. M. Hennessy, 2 vols. (London, 1871) |
| *AT* | 'The annals of Tigernach', ed. Wh. Stokes, *Revue Celtique*, 16–18 (1895–7); (reprinted in two vols., Felinfach, 1993). |
| *AU* | *Annála Uladh, Annals of Ulster: otherwise Annala Senait, Annals of Senat: a Chronicle of Irish Affairs, 431–1131, 1155–1541*, ed. W. M. Hennessy and B. Mac Carthy, 4 vols. (Dublin, 1887–1901) |
| *Anal. Hib.* | *Analecta Hibernica, Including the Reports of the Irish Manuscripts Commission* (Dublin, 1930– ) |
| *Archiv. Hib.* | *Archivium Hibernicum: or Irish Historical Records* (Catholic Record Society of Ireland, Maynooth, 1912– ) |
| bar. | barony |
| *Book of Howth* | *The Book of Howth, Calendar of the Carew* |

|  |  |
|---|---|
|  | *Manuscripts*, vol. vi, ed. J. S. Brewer and W. Bullin (London, 1871) |
| CCR | *Calendar of the Close Rolls* (London, 1900– ) |
| C. Chart. R. | *Calendar of the Charter Rolls*, 6 vols. (London, 1903–27) |
| CFR | *Calendar of the Fine Rolls*, 22 vols. (London, 1911–62) |
| CIPM | *Calendar of Inquisitions Post Mortem*, 19 vols. (London, 1904–92) |
| CJR | *Calendar of the Justiciary Rolls, or Proceedings in the Court of the Justiciar of Ireland* (Dublin, 1905– ) |
| CPR | *Calendar of the Patent Rolls* (London, 1906– ) |
| Cal. Doc. Ire. | *Calendar of Documents Relating to Ireland*, ed. H. S. Sweetman, 5 vols. (London, 1875–86) |
| Cal. Papal Letters | *Calendar of Entries in the Papal Registers Relating to Great Britain and Ireland: Papal Letters* (London, 1893– ) |
| Chartul. St Mary's, Dublin | *Chartularies of St Mary's Abbey, Dublin ... and Annals of Ireland, 1162–1370*, ed. J. T. Gilbert, 2 vols. (London, 1884–6) |
| Cl. R. | *Close Rolls of the Reign of Henry III*, 14 vols. (London, 1902–38) |
| Clyn, *Annals* | *The Annals of Ireland by Friar John Clyn and Thady Dowling, Together with the Annals of Ross*, ed. R. Butler (Dublin, 1849) |
| Craig, 'Memoranda roll 3 Edward II' | D. Craig, 'The Memoranda roll of the Irish Exchequer for 3 Edward II' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Dublin, 1984) |
| DNB | *Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee, 66 vols. (London, 1885–1901; reprinted with corrections, 22 vols., London, 1908–9) |
| Dowdall Deeds | *Dowdall Deeds*, ed. C. McNeill and A. J. Otway-Ruthven (IMC, Dublin, 1960) |
| EHR | *English Historical Review* |
| Early Statutes | *Statutes and Ordinances and Acts of the Parliament of Ireland, King John to Henry V*, ed. H. F. Berry (Dublin, 1907) |
| Foedera | *Foedera, Conventiones, Litterae et Cuiuscunque* |

|  |  |
|---|---|
|  | *Generis Acta Publica*, ed. T. Rymer (London, 1816–69) |
| G.E.C. | G. E. C[okayne], *The Complete Peerage of England, Scotland, Ireland, Great Britain and the United Kingdom ...* 8 vols. (Exeter, 1887–98); ed. Vicary Gibbs and others, 13 vols. (London, 1910–59) |
| Giraldus, *Expugnatio* | Giraldus Cambrensis, *Expugnatio Hibernica: the Conquest of Ireland*, ed. A. B. Scott and F. X. Martin (Dublin, 1978) |
| Giraldus, *Topographia* | Giraldus Cambrensis, *The History and Topography of Ireland*, ed. J. J. O Meara (Mountrath and Harmondsworth, 1982) |
| *Gormanston Reg.* | *Calendar of the Gormanston Register*, ed. James Mills and M. J. McEnery (RSAI, Dublin, 1916) |
| Gwynn and Hadcock, *Med. Religious Houses* | A. Gwynn, and R. N. Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses: Ireland* (London, 1972) |
| *Hist. & Mun. Docs. Ire.* | *Historic and Municipal Documents of Ireland, 1172–1320*, ed. J. T. Gilbert (London, 1870) |
| *IHS* | *Irish Historical Studies* |
| IMC | Irish Manuscripts Commission. |
| ITS | Irish Texts Society. |
| *Ir. Cartul. Llanthony* | *The Irish Cartularies of Llanthony Prima & Secunda*, ed. E. St John Brooks (IMC, Dublin, 1953) |
| *Ir. Hist. Docs.* | *Irish Historical Documents 1172–1922*, ed. E. Curtis, and R. B. McDowell (London, 1943; reprint, 1968) |
| *Ir. Jurist* | *The Irish Jurist*, new ser. (Dublin, 1966– ) |
| *Knights' Fees* | *Knights' Fees in Counties Wexford, Carlow and Kilkenny (13th–15th Century)*, ed. E. St John Brooks (IMC, Dublin, 1950) |
| *Louth Arch. Soc. Jn.* | *Journal of the County Louth Archaeological Society* |
| *Misc. Ir. Annals* | *Miscellaneous Irish Annals (A.D. 1114–1437)*, ed. S. Ó hInnse, Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies (Dublin, 1947) |
| NAI | National Archives of Ireland, Dublin |
| *NHI* | *A New History of Ireland, under the auspices of* |

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|---|---|
|  | *the Royal Irish Academy*, 9 vols. (Oxford, 1976– ) |
| NLI | National Library of Ireland |
| NUI | National University of Ireland |
| *Ormond Deeds, 1172–1350* | *Calendar of Ormond Deeds, 1172–1350* [etc], ed. E. Curtis, 6 vols. (IMC, Dublin, 1932–43) |
| *PRI rep. DK 1* [etc.] | *First [etc.] Report of the Deputy Keeper of the Public Records in Ireland* (Dublin, 1869– ) |
| PRO | Public Record Office, London |
| PRS | Pipe Roll Society, 38 vols. (1884–1925), new ser., 41 vols. (1925–67) |
| *Parl. Writs* | *Parliamentary Writs and Writs of Military Summons*, ed. F. Palgrave, 2 vols. in 4 (Record Commission, London, 1827–34) |
| *Pat. R.* | *Patent Rolls*, 2 vols. (London, 1901–3) |
| *Peritia* | *Peritia; Journal of the Medieval Academy of Ireland* ([Cork], 1982– ) |
| 'Pipe Roll Ire., 1211–12' | 'The Irish pipe roll of 14 John, 1211–12', ed. O. Davies and D. B. Quinn, *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, 3rd. ser., 4, supp. (July 1941) |
| *RIA Proc.* | *Royal Irish Academy Proceedings* |
| *RL* | *Royal and other Historical Letters illustrative of the Reign of Henry III*, ed. W. W. Shirley, 2 vols. (London, 1862–6) |
| *RLC* | *Rotuli Litterarum Clausarum in Turri Londinensi Asservati*, ed. T. Duffus Hardy, 2 vols. (London, 1833–4) |
| *RLP* | *Rotuli Litterarum Patentium in Turri Londinensi Asservati*, ed. T. Duffus Hardy (London, 1835) |
| RSAI | Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland |
| *RSAI Jn* | *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* (Dublin, 1892– ) |
| *Reg. St John, Dublin,* | *Register of the Hospital of St. John the Baptist Without the Newgate, Dublin*, ed. E. St John Brooks (IMC, Dublin, 1936) |
| *Reg. St Thomas, Dublin* | *Register of the Abbey of St Thomas the Martyr, Dublin*, ed. J. T. Gilbert (London, 1889) |
| Richardson and Sayles, *Admin. Ire.* | Richardson, H. G., and Sayles, G. O., *The Administration of Ireland, 1172–1377* (Dublin, 1963) |

## List of abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| *Rot. Pat. Hib.* | *Rotulorum Patentium et Clausorum Cancellariae Hiberniae Calendarium*, ed. E. Tresham (Dublin, 1828) |
| *s.a.* | *sub anno/sub annis* |
| *SHR* | *The Scottish Historical Review* |
| Sayles, *Affairs* | *Documents on the Affairs of Ireland before the King's Council*, ed. G. O. Sayles (IMC, Dublin, 1979) |
| *Song of Dermot* | *The Song of Dermot and the Earl*, ed. G.H. Orpen (Oxford, 1892) |
| TCD | Trinity College Dublin |
| *TRHS* | *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* |
| *VCH* | *Victoria History of the Counties of England* |
| *WHR* | *Welsh History Review* |

# THE UA CERBAILL KINGDOM OF AIRGIALLA

Louth is the smallest of modern Ireland's thirty-two counties, comprising 82,303 hectares and 827 square kilometres. It is the most north-easterly county of the province of Leinster and borders the Irish Sea from the mouth of the river Boyne in the south to Carlingford Lough in the north, a coastline of roughly 85 kilometres in length. The most westerly point in the county is only slightly more than 20 kilometres from the sea. It is touched to the north and west by the Ulster counties of Down, Armagh and Monaghan, and to the west and south by county Meath, which now lies in Leinster. Within its small confines Louth contains a variety of terrain, but is dominated by a fertile central plain reaching from Dunleer in the south to north of Dundalk and from the coast to beyond the western boundary of the modern county. The south-Ulster drumlin belt extends into the north-west of the county and the north-east is dominated by the mountainous Cooley peninsula with its highest peak, Carlingford mountain, measuring 587 metres. To the south of the central plain an upland ridge runs from Collon in the west to Clogherhead on the coast, and south of this again the land falls away into the fertile soils of the Boyne valley.[1] The medieval county of Louth lacked defined boundaries to its north and west, but its modern limits represent quite closely the extent of English settlement in the Middle Ages, with Inishkeen and Donaghmoyne, which now lie in county Monaghan, being the only notable medieval settlements not now included within its confines.

'Louth' was one of two names used by the English to describe this area, the other being 'Uriel' (or less frequently 'Oriel'). The first name was an anglicisation of 'Lugmad', the town in the north of the present county which was the political and ecclesiastical centre of the pre-

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[1] *Archaeological Survey of County Louth*, ed. V. M. Buckley and P. D. Sweetman (Dublin, 1991), p. 5.

existing Irish kingdom. The second name was an anglicisation of 'Airgialla' which denoted both the ruling people of the area and the kingdom which they ruled. The English never succeeded in settling all the lands controlled by the Airgialla, which included what is now county Monaghan, and continued to refer to the parts which remained under Irish control as 'Uriel'. To avoid confusion, when discussing the part of the Irish kingdom which was settled by the English I will use 'Louth' rather than 'Uriel', and when referring to the part which remained under Irish control I will use 'Airgialla'.

As is well known, the twelfth century was a time of dramatic change in Ireland, and nowhere was this more the case than in the small part of the country under discussion in this book. While the English conquest of this region is the main concern of this study, it is impossible to understand that event and its consequences without first giving due attention to the fact that this represented not the first but the second conquest which the area experienced in the course of the twelfth century. The settlement of Louth by English colonists in the years after 1185 did not entail the destruction of an ancient Irish lineage with roots in the area stretching back into the mists of time, but rather the defeat of an ambitious and highly successful parvenu dynasty which had controlled the region for little more than half a century. The Uí Cherbaill, who controlled Louth when the English arrived, had seized the opportunities presented by the upheavals of twelfth-century Irish politics to enhance their status more effectively than most dynasties of comparable status, and in the person of their outstanding leader Donnchad Ua Cerbaill, king of Airgialla 1125–68, they produced one of the most remarkable men of his generation.

Donnchad's achievements appear all the more impressive when the history of the Airgialla prior to his rise to power is borne in mind. The English translation of Airgialla is 'hostage-givers' and the subordinate position suggested by the name is an accurate reflection of the steady decline of this group in the face of the rise of the Cenél nEógain people under the Uí Néill dynasty in the north of Ireland from the seventh century onwards.[2] It is indicative of their lowly status that until the twelfth century the Airgialla were not even considered worthy of inclusion in Irish regnal lists which refer to much smaller kingdoms elsewhere in the country. Within the Airgialla confederation there was

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[2] The classic study of the Airgialla remains the late Cardinal Ó Fiaich's MA thesis, which Seán Duffy is currently preparing for publication by the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies. Unless otherwise noted I have relied on this work for information on the Airgialla. T. Ó Fiaich, 'The kingdom of Airgialla and its sub-kingdoms' (MA thesis, National University of Ireland, 1950); F. J. Byrne, *The Rise of the Uí Néill and the High-Kingship of Ireland* (Dublin, 1969), pp. 19–22.

a traditional split between the eastern septs centred on Armagh and the western septs centred on Clogher (co. Tyrone). No king of Airgialla had ever been drawn from the east and since the ninth century their most powerful grouping, the Airthir of Armagh, had been subject to the Cenél nEógain. In the west the most important group kingdom was that of Uí Chremthainn which by the late eleventh century was controlled by the leading family of the Fir Fernmaige who used the surname Ua Cerbaill.[3] The rise of the Fir Fernmaige coincided with a shift in the centre of Uí Chremthainn power south from Clogher into south-east Monaghan, and by the early years of the twelfth century all of Monaghan was under Ua Cerbaill control.

In the eleventh and twelfth centuries the leading dynasties of both eastern and western Airgialla sought to expand southwards in the face of pressure from the north. The target of their expansion was the modern county Louth and this expansion drove less powerful groups before them. Sometime in the eleventh century, for instance, the Uí Méith sept under their ruling family of Ua hAnbheidh moved from their traditional base in the baronies of Monaghan and Truagh eastwards into the Cooley peninsula, where their name is remembered in the place-name Omeath. Somewhat later, similar pressure forced a migration of the Mugdorna from south-east Monaghan into south Down, where they gave their name to the Mourne mountains. The early twelfth century saw the final disappearance of smaller ruling dynasties affected by this pressure, with the last king of Fir Rois in Monaghan to be mentioned in the annals dying in 1109 and his equivalent in Mugdorna dying in the following year. To the east, the leading family of the Airthir, the Uí Anluain of Armagh, pushed before them the Uí Echdach under their kings the Uí Ruadacháin. The last mention of an Ua Ruadacán king of Uí Echdach is in 1231 and their ultimate fate is revealed in a command by the king of England to the sheriff of Louth in 1354 to enquire 'if it would be to the profit of the king and the men of the marches in the parts of Dundalk that Auly O Rogan and Peter O Rogan, Irishmen, with their following [*sequela*] should be received into peace and allowed to dwell in the land of the Englishmen there'.[4] Some important social and political developments in this part of Ireland which had their origins in the period before the arrival of the English persisted after their intervention: the pressures on smaller Irish dynasties south-

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[3] For the development of surnames in Ireland, see B. Ó Cuív, 'Personal names as an indicator of relations between native Irish and settlers in the Viking period' in *Settlement and Society in Medieval Ireland. Studies Presented to Francis Xavier Martin O.S.A.*, ed. J. Bradley (Kilkenny, 1988), pp. 79–88.

[4] *Rot. Pat. Hib.*, p. 50.

wards geographically and downwards socially were among the most significant.

The ruling group in north Louth which suffered as a result of these migrations was the Conaille Muirtheimne. They had once also controlled parts of Monaghan and Armagh but had seen their lands reduced to a narrow coastal strip around Dundalk long before the twelfth century. Although 'the men of Conaille' are mentioned in the annals as late as 1153 native Conaille rulers disappeared in the early 1100s and the whole area had been conquered by the Uí Cherbaill by the 1130s.[5] The Uí Cherbaill were not a family of ancient pre-eminence and the first king of the Fir Fernmaige of that name appears in the annals only in 1043.[6] Their push into south Monaghan and Louth was undertaken at the turn of the twelfth century by Cú Caisil Ua Cerbaill who in 1101 repelled a raid on his land by the king of Mide (Meath) and in the following decade annexed to the territory of the Fir Fernmaige Fir Rois, Conaille Muirtheimne and Lugmad (the modern barony of Louth). On his death in 1123 he was described in the annals as king of Fernmag, but two years later the title 'king of Airgialla' was used to describe his successor, Domnall, who was slain at Drogheda by the king of Mide.[7] This change of title suggests that contemporaries recognised the supremacy of the Ua Cerbaill ruler within the western portion of Airgialla by the mid-1120s. The death of Domnall Ua Cerbaill at Drogheda in 1125 indicates that by then the men of Fernmag were competing for control of the southern Louth territory of Fir arda (the modern barony of Ferrard) with its traditional overlords, the Ua Máel Sechlainn kings of Mide, under whom it was held by the men of Brega.[8] By 1133, when Domnall's successor Donnchad son of Cú Caisil Ua Cerbaill was raiding into Fingal in north Dublin, Fir arda was almost certainly under his control and the kingdom of Airgialla must therefore have stretched to the Boyne.[9]

Donnchad had been installed as king of Airgialla in 1125 by the king of Connacht and claimant to the high-kingship of Ireland, Toirdelbach Ua Conchobair, who was then at the height of his power.[10] His main

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[5] L. P. Murray, 'The Pictish kingdom of Conaille–Muirthemhne' in *Féil-Sgríbhinn Eoin Mhic Néill*, ed. J. Ryan (Dublin, 1940), pp. 445–53.

[6] *AFM s.a.* 1043.

[7] *AFM s.a.* 1123; *AT s.a.* 1125.

[8] P. Walsh, 'Meath in the Book of Rights' in Ryan, ed., *Féil-Sgríbhinn Eoin Mhic Néill*, pp. 508–21.

[9] L. P. Murray, 'The ancient territories of Oirghialla, Uladh and Conailli Muirthemhne', *Louth Arch. Soc. Jn.* 3 (1912), pp. 52–65; D. Mac Íomhair (Mac Ivor), 'The history of Fir Rois', *ibid.* 15 (1964), pp. 321–48.

[10] *Misc. Ir. Annals s.a.* 1125.

challenger for the high-kingship, Manus Mac Lochlainn of the Cenél nEógain, responded to Toirdelbach's actions by seizing the kingship of Airgialla for himself in 1127. Ua Cerbaill came to terms with Manus and from that time was usually allied with the powerful dynasty to the north, in whose ambit the Airgialla had in any case traditionally moved.[11] Donnchad's family ties were also with northern families as his half-brother was Tigernán Ua Ruairc king of Breifne, and marriage alliances bound him to the Uí Fhloinn of Uí Thuirtre in south Antrim and the Mic Duinn Shléibe in Ulaid.[12] By 1147 Ua Cerbaill was raiding Ulaid in the company of Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn, who had recently won the kingship of Cenél nEógain after a period of internal strife, and in 1149 it was at Louth that Mac Lochlainn took the submission of Ua Ruairc before journeying with Ua Cerbaill to Dublin to accept the submission of Diarmait Mac Murchada.[13]

The 1150s and 1160s showed Donnchad's fortunes to be dependent on the good-will of the Cenél nEógain. In 1152 he was temporarily expelled from his kingship by Mac Lochlainn, while in 1155 he was captured by Tigernán Ua Ruairc, only to be rescued by Ua Ruairc's rival in Breifne, Geofraidh Ua Ragallaig.[14] On the other hand, Ua Cerbaill benefited from Mac Lochlainn successes, receiving one-third of newly conquered Mide in 1153, and acquiring Bairche in south Down when Ulaid suffered the same fate in 1165.[15] The alliance between Ua Cerbaill and Mac Lochlainn came to an abrupt end in 1166, with consequences which stretched far beyond Louth. In that year Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn blinded the king of Ulaid, Eochaid Mac Duinn Sléibe, who was also the foster-son of Donnchad Ua Cerbaill. This was the signal for a widespread revolt against Mac Lochlainn by his vassals, with his rival for the high-kingship of Ireland, Ruaidrí Ua Conchobair, marching on Dublin and then taking Ua Cerbaill's submission at Drogheda or Mellifont. Donnchad then moved north and slew his former overlord near Newtownhamilton (bar. Upper Fews, co. Armagh). Immediately Leinster was invaded by Tigernán Ua Ruairc and its king, Diarmait Mac Murchada, was driven from Ireland in search of foreign support in August 1166.[16]

[11] Byrne, *The Rise of the Uí Néill*, pp. 19–20.
[12] *AU s.a.* 1171, 1176; K. Simms, 'The Gaelic lordships of Ulster in the later Middle Ages' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Dublin, 1976), p. 309.
[13] *Misc. Ir. Annals s.a.* 1145–47; *AFM s.a.* 1149.
[14] *AFM s.a.* 1152; K. Simms, 'The O Reillys and the kingdom of east Breifne', *Breifne* 5 (1976–81), p. 306.
[15] *AFM s.a.* 1153; *AU s.a.* 1165.
[16] *Misc. Ir. Annals s.a.* 1165; *AU s.a.* 1165; D. Ó Corráin, *Ireland Before the Normans* (Dublin, 1972), pp. 164–6.

Donnchad Ua Cerbaill did not live to see the consequences of Mac Murchada's expulsion. He died in 1168 after a reign of over forty years. Although the manner of his death may have been uninspiring – he was 'mangled by the axe of a man of his own household' according to one account – most of the annals bestowed upon him elaborate tributes.[17] 'Mac Carthaigh's Book' which contains a good deal of information on the Airgialla for this period recorded his death as follows:

Donnchadh son of Cú Chaisil Ó Cearbhaill, high-king of Oirghialla, who obtained the kingship of Midhe as far as Clochán na hImrime, and the kingship of Ulaidh, and to whom was offered many times the kingship of Cinéal Eóghain, chief ornament of the north of Ireland, and even of all Ireland, for appearance, wisdom, bravery, friendship, brotherliness, vigour, kingship, power, for bestowing treasure, food, bounty, and reward to laymen and clergy, for overwhelming all evil and exalting all goodness, for protecting bells, croziers, and the monasteries of canons and monks, and like unto Solomon for peacefulness in his own native territory and towards every territory around, died after repentance, having bequeathed much gold, silver and stock, and having partaken of the Body of Christ.[18]

While this account contains some exaggeration – Donnchad was never king of Ulaid and was on occasion less than peaceful in his dealing with his neighbours – it seems fair to suggest that much of the praise he received was well earned. In comparison with other contemporary kings of the second rank in Ireland, such as Ua Ruairc, Ua Máel Sechlainn and Mac Duinn Sléibe, Donnchad's achievements were impressive. By the time of his death he had extended his kingdom beyond his inheritance of Monaghan and north Louth to include south Louth as well as portions of Armagh, Meath and Down, and despite serious set-backs in an active career of over forty years he passed on to his successor a stable and powerful kingdom. What catches the eye, however, is less his success in expanding his territory than his style of rule. In an era of innovative kingship in Ireland Ua Cerbaill was among the most adventurous. He established his son and chosen successor Murchad as king over the subordinate Uí Méith and father and son together witnessed a grant by Mac Lochlainn in 1157 to the Cistercian house of Newry.[19] In this break from traditional notions of authority among the Irish he was imitating more powerful kings such as Ua Briain, Ua Conchobair, Mac Murchada and Mac Lochlainn who had

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[17] *AT s.a.* 1168; *AU s.a.* 1168.
[18] *Misc. Ir. Annals s.a.* 1167; G. Mac Niocaill, *The Medieval Irish Annals* (Dublin, 1975), p. 26.
[19] W. Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum*, ed. John Caley, 6 vols. in 8 (London, 1817–30; reprint, 6 vols., 1846; Amersham, 1970), ii, p. 1031; K. Simms, 'The O Hanlons, the O Neills and the Anglo-Normans in thirteenth-century Armagh', *Seanchas Ardmhacha* 9 (1978), pp. 72–3.

attempted in previous generations, and usually with less success, to impose members of their families as rulers over conquered peoples and territories.[20] Francis John Byrne has remarked that 'the twelfth century saw great movements of peoples and of dynastic families in Munster' and an instance of the same phenomenon from the north of Ireland can be seen in Donnchad's relocation of the Mugdorna from Monaghan to Bairche in south Down upon receipt of the latter territory from Mac Lochlainn in 1165.[21]

Inextricably linked with the innovations which occurred in Irish kingship in the twelfth century were developments in the church, and contemporary writers, who were themselves churchmen, made it clear that Donnchad Ua Cerbaill's successes stemmed from his appreciation of changing religious conditions. The fourteenth-century Antiphony of Armagh contains a copy of a prayer for Donnchad written in 1170:

1 January 1170. A prayer for Donnchadh Ua Cerbhaill, king of Origialla, by whom were made the book of Cnoc na nApstal at Louth and the chief books of the order of the year, and the chief books of the mass. It is this illustrious king who founded the entire monastery both [as to] stone and wood, and gave territory and land to it for the prosperity of his soul in honour of Paul and Peter. By him the church throughout the land of Oirgialla was reformed and a regular bishopric was made and the church was placed under the jurisdiction of the bishop. In his time tithes were received and marriage was assented to, and churches were founded and temples and bell-houses were made and monasteries of monks and canons and nuns were re-edified, and nemheds [sacred precincts] were made. These are especially the works which he performed for the prosperity [of his soul] and reign in the land of Oirgialla, namely, the monastery of monks on the banks of the Boyne [as to] stone and wood, implements and books, and territory and land in which there are one hundred monks and three hundred conventuals and the monastery of canons of Termann Feichin and the church of Lepadh Feichin and the church of . . .[22]

The entry emphasises Donnchad's commitment to the programme of the native church reformers in the diocese of Clogher, which encompassed his kingdom, stressing his efforts to increase the power and financial resources of the local bishop, his support for the new monastic

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[20] Ó Corráin, *Ireland Before the Normans*, pp. 133–74; S. Duffy, *Ireland in the Middle Ages* (Dublin, 1997), pp. 37–53.

[21] *NHI*, ii, pp. 30–1; P. Ó Mordha, 'The medieval kingdom of Mugdorna', *Clogher Record* 7 (1971–2), pp. 432–46; Ó Corráin, *Ireland Before the Normans*, pp. 168–73.

[22] This translation can be found in *The Martyrology of Gorman*, ed. W. Stokes (London, 1895), p. xx and *St Bernard of Clairvaux's Life of Malachy*, ed. H. J. Lawlor (London, 1920), p. 170. For a slightly different translation and discussion see B. T. Hudson, 'Gaelic princes and Gregorian reform' in *Crossed Paths. Methodological Approaches to the Celtic Aspect of the European Middle Ages*, ed. B. T. Hudson and V. Ziegler (Lanham, New York, London, 1991), pp. 61–82. The manuscript is to be found at TCD MS 77 B 1.1.

orders, his commitment to canonical teaching on marriage and his encouragement of sacred learning. The first manifestation of his adherence to the reform movement was his support for Máel Máedoc Ua Morgair (Malachy) in his attempt to obtain the bishopric of Armagh in 1134.[23] Particularly after the assassination of Cormac Mac Carthaig in 1138 Máel Máedoc looked to Donnchad to lead secular support for his policies and, as Marie Therese Flanagan has recently observed, 'it was in the diocese of Clogher … that Malachy was to achieve the greatest degree of success in establishing reform structures'.[24] A diocesan system had been established for the Irish church at the synod of Ráith Bressail in 1111, but in many parts of Ireland bishops were forced to compete for the resources to support themselves with ancient churches which had become the hereditary property of powerful families. The bishop of Clogher fared better than most in this regard, first because from the 1140s he combined his episcopal rank with the headship of the Augustinian order in Ireland, and second because there seems to have been little opposition to his acquisition of estates from the local hereditary clergy.[25] The most prestigious church in the area, Monaster-boice, which in the eleventh century had produced men of great learning such as the historian and Uí Néill propagandist Flann Main-istrech (d.1056), went into sharp decline thereafter, and the last mention in the annals of an abbot of the house occurs in 1122, just as the Uí Cherbaill were extending their authority over this territory.[26] Architec-tural evidence points to some new building on the site in the twelfth century but there was to be no revival in the fortunes of what had once been among the greatest churches in Ireland. Its star had waned so considerably that the late twelfth-century Life of the founder of the church, St Buite, associated the sixth-century saint not with Monaster-boice but rather with the nearby Cistercian abbey at Mellifont, founded in 1142, where the Life was presumably composed.[27]

The Antiphony also states that tithes were collected in Donnchad's time, but before concluding that this was another innovation to be associated with the reform movement, it is worth bearing in mind

[23] A. Gwynn, *The Irish Church in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, ed. G. O'Brien (Dublin, 1992), p. 213.

[24] M. T. Flanagan, 'Henry II, the council of Cashel and the Irish bishops', *Peritia* 10 (1996), p. 199.

[25] K. Simms, 'Frontiers in the Irish church – regional and cultural' in *Colony and Frontier in Medieval Ireland*, ed. T. Barry, R. Frame and K. Simms (London, 1995), pp. 184–6; R. Sharpe, 'Some problems concerning the organization of the church in early medieval Ireland', *Peritia* 3 (1984), pp. 230–70.

[26] *AFM s.a.* 1056, 1122; *NHI*, ii, pp. 7–8; J. F. Kenney, *The Sources for the Early History of Ireland: Ecclesiastical. An Introduction and Guide* (New York, 1929, repr. Dublin, 1993), p. 401.

[27] R. Sharpe, *Medieval Irish Saints' Lives. An Introduction to 'Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae'* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 29–30; Buckley and Sweetman, eds., *Archaeological Survey of County Louth*, pp. 241–5.
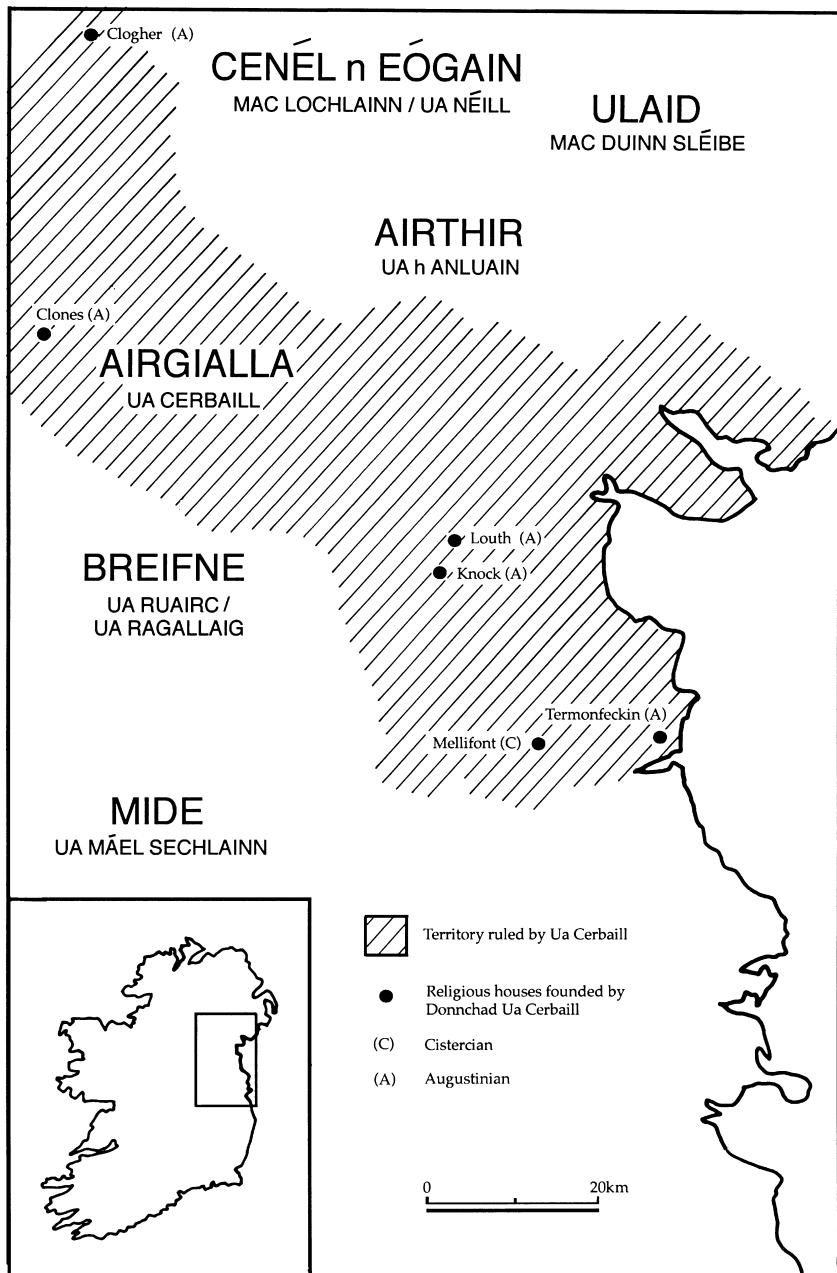
Map 2 The 1160s: politics and religion

Richard Sharpe's assertion that tithes and parishes were long-established features of the Irish church by this time.[28] Flanagan has argued for the existence of parishes in Leinster before the arrival of the English and it is possible to suggest that the same was true for Airgialla.[29] In 1187 Peter Pipard received a grant from the bishop of Clogher and the prior of St Mary's, Louth, of the advowsons to the churches of Clonkeen and Drumcar in the barony of Ardee, on condition that one-third of the tithes of these churches continued to be paid to St Mary's. Since English settlement in the Ardee area had scarcely begun by 1187 the grant implies that the institution of tithes predated their arrival, as did the churches, which were dedicated to the native saints Edan and Finian.[30]

There is no reason to doubt the sincerity of Donnchad's support for Máel Máedoc but it is also necessary to remember that it was given at a price. The dioceses established at the synod of Ráith Bressail approximated to the territories of the Irish kingdoms at that time, and much had changed in the political profile of the part of Ireland under discussion here in the years between 1111 and the mid-1130s.[31] The Uí Cherbaill had expanded south-eastwards into Louth, which the synod of Ráith Bressail had placed in the diocese of Armagh, and Donnchad wished to see this territory included with the rest of his kingdom in the diocese of Clogher, which from soon after 1111 had acquired the alternative title of the diocese of Airgialla. Máel Máedoc signalled his sympathy with Donnchad's plans by allowing his brother, Gilla Críst Ua Morgair, to became bishop of Clogher/Airgialla in 1135 and by the mid-1140s the residence of the bishop and the cathedral chapter had been transferred from Clogher to the town of Louth.[32] Donnchad Ua Cerbaill's plans had reached fruition and Louth was recognised as part of the diocese of Airgialla, just as it was recognised as part of the kingdom of Airgialla. For the next sixty years the title 'bishop of Clogher' fell into disuse and was replaced instead by 'bishop of Louth' or 'bishop of Airgialla'.[33]

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[28] R. Sharpe, 'Churches and communities in early medieval Ireland: towards a pastoral model' in *Pastoral Care Before the Parish*, ed. J. Blair and R. Sharpe (Leicester, 1992), pp. 81–109. For the situation in the west of Scotland see R. A. McDonald, *The Kingdom of the Isles. Scotland's Western Seaboard, c. 1100–c. 1336* (East Linton, 1997), pp. 225–8.

[29] M. T. Flanagan, 'Henry II and the kingdom of Ui Faelain' in Bradley, ed., *Settlement and Society in Medieval Ireland*, pp. 229–40; Gwynn, *The Irish Church in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, p. 129.

[30] 'A charter of Christian, bishop of Louth', ed. H. J. Lawlor, *RIA Proc.*, 32 C (1913–16), pp. 28–40; B. Smith, 'Church and community on the medieval Irish frontier', *Archiv. Hib.* 45 (1990), p. 39.

[31] A. Gwynn, *The Twelfth-Century Reform* (Dublin and Sydney, 1968), pp. 28–39.

[32] K. Simms, 'The origins of the diocese of Clogher', *Clogher Record* 10 (1980), p. 190; M. T. Flanagan, 'St Mary's abbey, Louth, and the introduction of the Arrouaisian observance into Ireland', *ibid.* pp. 223–34; Gwynn, *Twelfth-Century Reform*, pp. 39–53.

[33] Lawlor, ed., 'A charter of Christian, bishop of Louth', p. 30.

The decade of the 1140s was a time of almost frantic activity in the life of the church in Louth as Donnchad worked with some of the most talented and energetic men of his generation to reshape the religious character of his kingdom. Gilla Críst Ua Morgair died in 1138 and was succeeded by another reforming prelate, Áed Ua Cáellaide, a native of Leinster and confidant of Diarmait Mac Murchada, who was to serve as bishop for forty years.[34] Máel Máedoc's reform programme for the Irish church involved the introduction into the country of new religious orders which were thriving on the continent and Donnchad Ua Cerbaill was the most enthusiastic of the Irish kings in providing land for these new orders. One of the first Augustinian houses of the Arrouaisian observance in Ireland was founded by him at Louth, possibly in 1142, and Bishop Áed Ua Cáellaide became its first prior.[35] From that point the canons of St Mary's, Louth, fulfilled the function of the cathedral chapter of the diocese and this in turn facilitated the transfer of the diocesan see of Airgialla from Clogher to Louth. Louth was also Donnchad's chief residence, a fact which emphasised the closeness of the relationship between king and bishop.[36] In 1148 Ua Cerbaill founded another Arrouaisan house, dedicated to Peter and Paul, at Knock adjacent to Louth, and houses for Augustinian canons and nuns at Termonfeckin were established at roughly the same time.[37]

Donnchad's most famous foundation was what the Antiphony of Armagh described as 'the monastery of monks on the banks of the Boyne'. This was Mellifont Abbey, the first Cistercian house in Ireland, which was established in 1142.[38] Donnchad granted to it land of marginal economic value on the river Mattock, 5 kilometres north of the Boyne, which he had only recently conquered. As well as signifying a commitment to religious reform, his grant created a buffer on the southern frontier of his kingdom, effectively removing it from possible conquest by his enemies, while at the same time extending that frontier southwards to the Boyne.[39] The political thinking behind the grant is reminiscent of Muirchertach Ua Briain's gift of Cashel to the church in 1101, which deprived his Eóganacht rivals of their traditional seat of power, and anticipated the actions of Diarmait Mac Murchada who later in the 1140s granted an extensive and strategically located tract of land belonging to his rivals the Ua Muiredaig to the Cistercian

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[34] D. Ó Corráin, 'The education of Diarmat Mac Murchada', *Ériu* 28 (1977), pp. 71–81.

[35] P. J. Dunning, 'The Arroasian order in medieval Ireland', *IHS* 4 (1944–5), pp. 297–315.

[36] *AFM s.a.* 1164.

[37] *AFM s.a.* 1148; Gwynn and Hadcock, *Med. Religious Houses*, pp. 195, 324.

[38] C. Conway (Ó Conbhuí, Fr Colmcille), *The Story of Mellifont* (Dublin, 1958); G. Mac Niocaill, *Na Manaigh Liath in Éirinn, 1142–c.1600* (Dublin, 1959).

[39] R. Stalley, *The Cistercian Monasteries of Ireland* (London and New Haven, 1987), pp. 31–40.

foundation of Baltinglass.[40] The land Donnchad gave to Mellifont was carefully chosen and the grant had implications both for secular and ecclesiastical boundaries. The synod of Ráith Bressail had placed the southern limit of the province of Armagh at the Sliab Breagh hills, some 7 kilometres north of the river Boyne, but Ua Cerbaill's grant to Mellifont had the effect of pushing this boundary further south, and thereafter 'the mid-water of the Boyne' came to be accepted as the southern frontier of the province of Armagh.[41]

Donnchad's ecclesiastical policy, which had brought him such success in the 1130s and 1140s, almost led to his destruction in the early 1150s. Máel Máedoc had resigned the bishopric of Armagh in 1136 and was succeeded by the abbot of the Columban house of Derry, Gilla Meic Liac, who was also a member of the premier dynasty of the north of Ireland, the Cenél nEógain.[42] The annexation of the Louth area by the diocese of Clogher was not popular at Armagh and may also have been resented in the Augustinian house of Louth itself. As much is suggested by the composition there at some time in the twelfth century of the Life of St Mochta, the sixth-century founder of the ancient church at Louth, which stressed the links between Louth and Armagh.[43] Gilla Meic Liac was a sincere advocate of reform but the issue of diocesan boundaries continued to rankle and at the synod of Kells-Mellifont in 1152 he and Donnchad Ua Cerbaill became involved in a physical confrontation which led to the latter's banishment from his kingship by the king of Cenél nEógain, Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn.[44] Ua Cerbaill was restored in the following year, but his room for manoeuvre in the ecclesiastical sphere was significantly curtailed thereafter. The way in which he had been cut down to size was made plain at the consecration of Mellifont in 1157 when Mac Lochlainn played the leading secular role and even granted land to the abbey at Drogheda in Donnchad's territory. At the same ceremony, Gilla Meic Liac, who had received the pallium in 1152 and thus bore the title archbishop of Armagh, performed the functions of the leading ecclesiastic of the region and

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[40] Gwynn, *Twelfth Century Reform*, p. 12; A. S. Mac Shamhráin, 'The Uí Muiredaig and the abbacy of Glendalough in the eleventh to thirteenth centuries', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 25 (1993), pp. 68–9.

[41] *Pontificia Hibernica: Medieval Papal Chancery Documents Concerning Ireland, 640–1261*, ed. M. P. Sheehy, 2 vols. (Dublin, 1962–5), ii, pp. 68–72; A. Gwynn, 'Armagh and Louth in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries', *Seanchas Ardmhacha* 1, no.1 (1954), p. 2, no. 2 (1955), p. 32.

[42] Gwynn, *The Irish Church in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, p. 217; M. Herbert, *Iona, Kells and Derry. The History and Hagiography of the Monastic Familia of Columba* (Oxford, 1988, repr. Dublin, 1996), pp. 109–23.

[43] P. Ó Riain, 'Saints in the catalogue of bishops in the lost *Register of Clogher*', *Clogher Record* 14 (1992), p. 67.

[44] *AT s.a.* 1152; Gwynn, *The Irish Church in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, p. 220.

contemporary accounts do not even mention the bishop of Louth/
Airgialla, Áed Ua Cáellaide.[45] This was all in stark contrast to the
consecration of Knock Abbey in 1148 when Ua Cerbaill and Ua
Cáellaide had played the leading roles.[46] Perhaps the death of Máel
Máedoc Ua Morgair in that year marked the turning-point in terms of
how far Donnchad could successfully defy Armagh, but in any case he
avoided further confrontation with Gilla Meic Liac and in 1165 they
acted together as guarantors of an agreement between Mac Lochlainn
and Eochaid Mac Duinn Sléibe. It was the failure of Mac Lochlainn to
adhere to this agreement which led to his death at Donnchad's hands
the following year.[47]

Donnchad was succeeded as king of Airgialla on his death in 1168 by
his son Murchad who had been king of Uí Méith since at least 1157.
His apparently uncontested accession to the kingship of Airgialla bears
further testimony to the stable foundations laid by his father, and at first
Murchad continued Donnchad's alliance with Ruaidrí Ua Conchobair,
which had been strengthened in 1167 by Donnchad's attendance at a
synod sponsored by Ua Conchobair at Athboy in Meath.[48] In 1171
Murchad was part of the army brought together by Ruaidri which was
defeated at Dublin by Miles de Cogan. Later in the same year he
submitted with Tigernán Ua Ruairc to Henry II, but in 1174 was again
in the company of Ua Conchobair when Hugh de Lacy's castle of Trim
was destroyed.[49] Despite this success the building of castles in Meath
which threatened Airgialla could not be stopped. In 1176 castles were
erected at Kells, Skreen, Navan, Nobber and Slane, all within easy
striking distance of Ua Cerbaill's territory, and from them the English of
Dublin and Meath raided from the Boyne to south Armagh, causing
particular damage around the centre of Ua Cerbaill authority at Louth.
The castle at Slane, held by Richard Fleming, was particularly trouble-
some and late in 1176 Ua Cerbaill destroyed it in alliance with the king
of Cenél nEógain, Máel Sechlainn Mac Lochlainn.[50] In January 1177
John de Courcy made his expedition to Ulaid from Dublin, meeting no
resistance as he passed through Airgialla, possibly because Ua Cerbaill
was distracted by an attack made on Louth and Machaire Conaill (bar.
Upper Dundalk) by Miles de Cogan, or possibly because de Courcy's

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[45] *AU s.a.* 1157.    [46] *AFM s.a.* 1148.
[47] Ó Corráin, *Ireland Before the Normans*, p. 165.
[48] Gwynn, *The Irish Church in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, p. 295.
[49] *Misc. Ir. Annals s.a.* 1171, 1172; *AU s.a.* 1171; A. J. Otway-Ruthven, *A History of Medieval
Ireland* (London, 1968), pp. 47–50, 55–6; M. T. Flanagan, *Irish Society, Anglo-Norman Settlers,
Angevin Kingship. Interactions in Ireland in the Late Twelfth Century* (Oxford, 1989), p. 227; *Song of
Dermot*, p. 239.
[50] *AU*; *AFM*; *Misc. Ir. Annals*, all *s.a.* 1176.

small force was not perceived as a threat. Although his subsequent successes in Ulaid did add to the dangers of Murchad's position he posed little immediate threat in military terms and was defeated by the Airgialla in 1178 and 1180.[51]

More serious for Murchad was the disappearance of allies among the Irish to whom he could turn for support against the English. Since 1174 Ruaidrí Ua Conchobair had proved himself an increasingly ineffective patron, and although the alliance with Mac Lochlainn which led to the destruction of Slane in 1176 seemed to herald the revival of the Airgialla association with the Cenél nEógain which had been broken by the slaying of Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn in 1166, the reality was that with civil war raging among the Cenél nEógain between the families of Mac Lochlainn and Ua Néill little consistent help was to be expected from that quarter either. Murchad was left with no option but to deal with the English and references in the Irish sources to 'treacherous' attacks on Airgialla by the foreigners in 1177 and 1178 suggest that some arrangement, however poorly observed, had by that time been reached between the two parties. Murchad dealt with the realities of his new situation in a pragmatic and successful fashion. In the manner which had brought his family such success in the previous half-century he allied himself with the most powerful local ruler in the area. From the middle of the 1170s this was neither an Ua Conchobair nor a Mac Lochlainn but Hugh de Lacy, lord of Meath. De Lacy had been absent from Ireland from 1174 to 1177 and again from 1181 to 1182, but in 1184 he and Ua Cerbaill together raided Armagh.[52] When Hugh died in 1186 the Irish annals termed him 'king of Meath and Breffny and Uriel' and it is likely that Ua Cerbaill viewed his relationship with him in the same way as he had previously regarded his links with the Irish overkings to whom he had given his allegiance.[53]

Murchad, however, seems also to have come to some arrangement with the lord of Ireland, John, whose visit to Ireland in 1185 was in part inspired by suspicion of de Lacy's power in the country. John later asserted that Murchad had held his land of him and while there is little doubt that the lord of Ireland in 1185 granted Ua Cerbaill's kingdom to Gilbert Pipard and Bertram de Verdon, he seems also to have guaranteed Murchad the continued possession of at least part of his kingdom

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[51] *Misc. Ir. Annals s.a.* 1178, 1179; *AFM*; *AU s.a.* 1178; J. F. Lydon, 'John de Courcy (*c.* 1150–1219) and the medieval frontier' in *Worsted in the Game; Losers in Irish History*, ed. C. Brady (Dublin, 1989), pp. 37–48.

[52] *Misc. Ir. Annals; AU* both *s.a.* 1184; G. H. Orpen, *Ireland under the Normans 1169–1333*, 4 vols. (Oxford, 1911–20, repr. 1968), ii, pp. 52–6, 65–8.

[53] *ALC s.a.* 1186.

until his death.[54] This occurred in 1189 in the abbey of Mellifont which his father had founded almost fifty years before.[55] Murchad's fate is akin to that of more important contemporary dynasts such as Toirdelbach Ua Briain, king of Munster, who retired to the monastery of Lismore in 1165, and Ruaidrí Ua Conchobair who ended his days in the Augustinian house at Cong in 1198, but Murchad seems to have been the first Irish king to have died in a Cistercian house.[56] His dignified end stands in stark contrast to the fate of kings of neighbouring territories such as Manus Ua Máel Sechlainn of Mide and Tigernán Ua Ruairc of Breifne, who died violent deaths at the hands of the English in the 1170s.[57]

The Ua Cerbaill kingdom of Airgialla played a role in the key developments of twelfth-century Ireland disproportionate to its size and traditional status. By the time the English arrived in Ireland a national church, with Armagh at its head, had been established with papal blessing, and a national kingship had come fleetingly within the grasp of Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn and Ruaidrí Ua Conchobair in the 1150s and 1160s. Airgialla had played no small part in each of these advances. While the growth in authority of native kings has attracted little negative comment from historians, the church reform movement has recently been attacked for having undermined the traditional basis of learning in Ireland and for having been anti-intellectual in tone.[58] The evidence from Airgialla suggests first that political and religious developments must be seen as a single phenomenon rather than as two distinguishable themes, and second, that the successful fusion of both by Donnchad Ua Cerbaill gave a tremendous boost to the intellectual life of this part of Ireland. His commitment to church reform sparked not only a building boom but also an upsurge in scholarship as he attracted to his kingdom Irish churchmen with European experience and outlook. Gilla Críst Ua Connairche, who became the first abbot of Mellifont in 1142, was one of the Irish clerics who had been left at Clairvaux by Máel Máedoc Ua Morgair to be trained in the Cistercian

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[54] 'Seven documents from the old abbey of Mellifont', ed. C. Conway (Ó Conbhuí, Fr Colmcille), *Louth Arch. Soc. Jn.* 13 (1953), p. 37.

[55] *AFM s.a.* 1189; D. Mac Íomhair (Mac Ivor), 'The boundaries of Fir Rois', *Louth Arch. Soc. Jn.* 15 (1962), pp. 168–9.

[56] D. Ó Corráin, 'Foreign connections and domestic politics: Killaloe and the Uí Briain in twelfth-century historiography' in *Ireland in Early Medieval Europe*, ed. D. Whitelock, R. McKitterick and D. Dumville (Cambridge, 1982), p. 229; D. Ó Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland 400–1200* (London, 1995), pp. 289–90.

[57] *NHI*, ii, pp. 99, 105.

[58] D. Ó Corráin, 'Prehistoric and early Christian Ireland' in *The Oxford Illustrated History of Ireland*, ed. R. Foster (Oxford, 1989), pp. 44–52; Simms, 'Frontiers in the Irish church', p. 192; Simms, *From Kings to Warlords. The Changing Political Structure of Gaelic Ireland in the Later Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, 1987), pp. 10–14.

rule by St Bernard. In 1151 Gilla Críst was consecrated bishop of Lismore and papal legate by the first Cistercian pope, Eugenius III, who had been a contemporary of his at Clairvaux, and he went on to preside over the council of Cashel in 1171–2 at which the Irish episcopate gave its support to Henry II and set forth a thorough programme for the reform of the Irish church.[59] Donnchad also attracted to his kingdom members of the foremost learned family in contemporary Ireland, the Uí Ghormáin of Bangor, who were probably related to Máel Máedoc.[60] Flann Ua Gormáin had studied in France and England for twenty years before becoming head of the school of Armagh in 1154, a position which he held for another twenty years, while Finn Ua Gormáin was abbot of Newry and bishop of Kildare. Two of the family settled in Airgialla: Máel Chaoimgin, who was abbot of Termonfeckin and later master of the school at Louth, who died in 1164, and Máel Muire Ua Gormáin, who was abbot of Knock.[61] The reference in the Antiphony of Armagh to the making in Donnchad Ua Cerbaill's time of 'the chief books of the order the year and the chief books of the mass' relates to the Martyrology of Gorman (*Félire huí Gormáin*) which Máel Muire composed at Knock in c.1167. Reformed churchmen in Ireland saw the need for a thorough revision of the calendar of saints and Máel Muire led the way by composing in Irish a metrical martyrology which combined both native and foreign saints. In this task he used the most modern source available, a copy of a Latin martyrology from Winchester, a church with which the Irish reform movement had enjoyed sustained contact for many decades.[62]

Critics of the reform movement in Ireland also point out that bishoprics quickly fell into the hands of members of ruling dynasties which supported the reformers. In the century-and-a-half after Donnchad Ua Briain, brother of King Toirdelbach, became bishop of Killaloe in 1161, for instance, only members of the Dál Cais dynasty held episcopal rank there.[63] The beginning of the same trend may be observed in Airgialla with the accession of Máel Ísu Ua Cerbaill, a

[59] Flanagan, 'Henry II, the council of Cashel and the Irish bishops', pp. 186–7; *The Letters of St Bernard of Clairvaux*, trans. B. Scott James (Chicago, 1953), letter 385, p. 454.

[60] *NHI*, ii, p. 41.

[61] K. Simms, 'The brehons of later medieval Ireland' in *Brehons, Serjeants and Attorneys. Studies in the History of the Irish Legal Profession*, ed. D. Hogan and W. N. Osborough (Dublin, 1991), pp. 55–6.

[62] *Beatha Bharra. Saint Finbarr of Cork. The Complete Life*, ed. P. Ó Riain (London, ITS, 1994), pp. 24–5; Gwynn, *The Irish Church in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, pp. 99–115; D. Bethel, 'English monks and Irish reform in the eleventh and twelfth centuries' in *Historical Studies* 8, ed. T. D. Williams (Dublin, 1971), pp. 111–35.

[63] D. Ó Corráin, 'Dál Cais – church and dynasty', *Ériu* 24 (1973), pp. 59–61; Simms, 'Frontiers in the Irish church', p. 195.

kinsman of Murchad, to the bishopric of Louth/Airgialla in 1178 in succession to Áed Ua Cáellaide who resigned the bishopric in that year and retired to St Mary's, Louth, where he died and was buried in 1182.[64] At the risk of stating the obvious, Ireland was hardly unique in the post-Gregorian church in having aristocratic bishops and such bishops were not necessarily corrupt. Máel Ísu Ua Cerbaill's commitment to reform was shown by his attendance at the synod called by the archbishop of Dublin and papal legate, Lorcán Ua Tuathail, at Clonfert in 1179. On the death of Ua Tuathail in the following year it was Máel Ísu who provided a *liber de miraculis* to those gathering material in support of his canonisation.[65] Ua Cerbaill was also remembered with affection by the clergy of the Augustinian house of St Mary's, Clogher, for having consecrated their church and presented to it a chasuble and mitre.[66] Membership of a dynasty, in other words, did not necessarily imply a lack of religious fervour on the part of a particular bishop, and may have helped overcome opposition on occasion to aspects of the church's reorganisation. In Máel Ísu's case, however, dynastic ties encouraged ambitions which led to the reopening of old wounds. In 1180 the archbishopric of Armagh became vacant and a nephew of Ruaidrí Ua Conchobair, Tomaltach, bishop of Elphin, was translated to the see, to the apparent displeasure of King Henry II.[67] Máel Ísu's visit to England in 1181–2 may have been embarked upon in connection with this matter and in 1184 he succeeded in temporarily ousting Tomaltach Ua Conchobair from Armagh and installing himself in his place as archbishop with the support of Murchad Ua Cerbaill and Hugh de Lacy.[68] Tomaltach regained his position in the following year, but Máel Ísu seems to have wished to prolong the dispute. He died in 1187 while returning from Rome and it seems likely that he had undertaken this arduous journey at least in part in pursuance of his claim to Armagh.[69] This was not the first occasion on which the merging of secular and religious politics had resulted in conflict between Clogher and Armagh, nor was it to be the last.[70]

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[64] Gwynn, 'Armagh and Louth in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries', p. 8; 'The Register of Clogher', ed. K. Nicholls, *Clogher Record* 7 (1971–2), p. 389.

[65] Gwynn, *The Irish Church in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, p. 136; Sharpe, *Medieval Irish Saints' Lives*, p. 28.

[66] Nicholls, ed., 'Register of Clogher', p. 373.

[67] A. Gwynn, 'Tomaltach O Connor, coarb of Patrick', *Seanchas Ardmhacha* 7 (1977), pp. 231–74; Flanagan, *Irish Society, Anglo-Norman Settlers, Angevin Kingship*, p. 263.

[68] *Pipe Roll 1181–2: The Great Roll of the Pipe for the Twenty-Eighth Year of the Reign of King Henry II 1181–1182*, ed. J. H. Round (PRS 31, London, 1910), p. 148; A. Gwynn, 'Ardee in the Middle Ages', *Louth Arch. Soc. Jn.* 11 (1946), p. 78.

[69] *AU s.a.* 1187; Nicholls, ed., 'Register of Clogher', p. 387; *NHI*, ix, pp. 273–4.

[70] See pp. 61–73.

When the English arrived in Ireland Airgialla was a more powerful kingdom than at any other time in its long history, and showed no signs of declining in importance. Its rulers had played the political game of twelfth-century Ireland to perfection, and stood in good stead with the ultimate winner of that contest, Ruaidrí Ua Conchobair. There was every chance that Airgialla, along with Breifne, would continue to expand at the expense of Mide, and would strengthen its links with the economic powerhouse that was contemporary Dublin.[71] Succession to the kingship had recently progressed in an orderly fashion from father to son, and if contemporary accounts are to be believed, Donnchad and Murchad Ua Cerbaill adhered to church teachings on marriage which would have prevented the appearance of large numbers of potential claimants to the kingly title in future generations.[72] Authority in the local church rested with a bishop who controlled a diocese that contained an important Cistercian monastery and no fewer than five Augustinian houses. It is difficult to think of an area of comparable size in either Ireland or Britain which could boast as much. Finally, within the diocese and kingdom an intellectual lead was given by learned men who were familiar with the most modern thinking then current in the rest of Europe. It is against this imposing background that the English conquest of Louth must be assessed.

[71] B. T. Hudson, 'The changing economy of the Irish Sea province: A.D. 900–1300' in *Britain and Ireland 900–1300*, ed. B. Smith (Cambridge, forthcoming)
[72] Frame, *Political Development of the British Isles*, pp. 108–15.