Hi Kalaind August cen ail
tiagtis ind cech tress bliadain;
agtics secht ngraiifne im gnim nglé
secht laithe na sechtmaine.

And luaitís fri bága bil
certa ocus câná in cócid,
cech recht riagla co rogor
cech tress bliadna a chórogod.

On the kalends of August free from reproach
they would go thither every third year:
they would hold seven races, for a glorious object,
seven days in the week.

There they would discuss with strife of speech
the dues and tributes of the province,
every legal enactment right piously
every third year it was settled.¹

THIS eleventh-century depiction of a gathering (óenach) held at regular intervals at Carmain provides an imagined glimpse of medieval Ireland at work and play. Conventionally but misleadingly translated ‘fair’, the óenach was an institution in which the wider community played a part. Among those said to have been assembled on this particular occasion were ‘the clerics and laity of the Leinstermen, as well as the wives of the nobility’ (clérig, láeich Lagen ille, mnáí na ndagfher). Fasting was undertaken there ‘against wrong and oppression’ (ra anrecht, ra écomlund).²

¹ *Metrical Dindshenchas*, iii, 18–19 (lines 208–16). I am grateful to Dr Fiona Edmonds of the University of Lancaster, for perceptive comments on what follows.
² *Metrical Dindshenchas*, iii, 20–1 (lines 280–2).
Misconduct was forbidden;³ knowledge was imparted of various kinds.⁴ Kings controlled these occasions, convening an óenach for a variety of reasons. It was to celebrate his accession to the kingship of Leinster that the óenach at Carmain was held by Donnchad mac Gilla Phátraic in 1033 and this poem may mark that specific event.⁵ Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill, king of Mide, had earlier hosted a similar assembly at Tailtiu [Teltown, County Meath] in 1007, when he had already been ruling for more than a quarter of a century and had achieved considerable success.⁶ His revival of óenach Tailten was designed to bolster his authority further, and it too was commemorated in a composition attributed to Máel Sechnaill’s court-poet, Cúán ua Lothcháin. In rejuvenating Tailtiu, Ireland’s premier óenach (prim-óenach hÉrend), this midland ruler takes his place in a long line of ancestral kings. Hailed as ‘the glory of the noble West’ (orddan íarthair domuin duind), he is claimed to occupy by right the royal seat (forud flatha).⁷

Underlying these carefully choreographed descriptions is a social reality, which is both mediated and informed by the constructed text. A focus on what has been called the ‘social logic of the text’ is important as we commence an evaluation of selected aspects of a transformative period in Irish history, for which the rich and varied sources at our disposal form the very fabric of the transformation itself.⁸ Máel Sechnaill had earned his kingship, in Cúán ua Lothcháin’s words, ‘since he raised the fair of Tailtiu from the sod; though of ancestral use, it was unknown’ (tuc óenach Talten a féór / ciarb atharda, rop aneól). His power is thus presented as deep-rooted, but his learned advocate is also of the view that Máel Sechnaill ‘king of Tara’ (rí Temra) and ‘singular champion of Europe’ (øen-milid na hEorapa) are one.⁹ The historical world encapsulated

³ Acra, tobuch frithir fíach / écnach, écrate, anríad / ní lámar … mad aithed and, nir chhunter …: ‘Suining, harsh levying of debts, satirising, quarrelling, misconduct is not dared … as for elopement, it is not to be heard of there’: Metrical Dindshenchas, iii, 18–19 (lines 221–3, 227).

⁴ This included cach rand rorannad Héreo ‘every division into which Ireland has been divided’; ffs cech trichat in Hérind ‘the knowledge of every cantred in Ireland’; coimgne cinte cóem-cheneóil ‘the exact synchronising of the goodly race’: Metrical Dindshenchas, iii, 20–1 (lines 247, 249, 265).

⁵ AU (Mac Airt), s.a. 1033.4; D. Ó Corráin, ‘Viking Ireland – Afterthoughts’, in Clarke et al. (eds.), Ireland and Scandinavia, 421–52, at 443–4.

⁶ Chron. Scot., s.a. 1007. Reference to it was added in a different hand in AU (Mac Airt), s.a. 1007.10; for discussion, see M. Ní Mhaonaigh, ‘A Man of Two Faces: Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill in Middle Irish Sources’, in Clarke and Johnson (eds.), Vikings in Ireland and Beyond, 232–52, at 249–50.


⁹ Metrical Dindshenchas, iv, 160–1 (lines 207–8, 197 and 200).
in this literary creation thus looks inwards and out, marking what Spiegel has termed the ‘moment of inscription’, by which she means the process through which the text’s meaning becomes fixed.\textsuperscript{10} As part of learned discourse, ‘Tailtiu’ itself shaped social ideology and in this way could have informed ‘Carmain’, a comparable literary representation from a similar milieu. In the case of these two poems, verbal parallels in fact suggest a direct relationship.\textsuperscript{11} In his rise to supremacy in Osraige and Leinster, Donnchad mac Gilla Phátraic overcame opposition from the celebrant of ōenach Tailten, Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill, as well as from his son.\textsuperscript{12} The pen served as an effective weapon alongside the sword. In presenting Donnchad as master of a gathering echoing that of Tailtiu, a partisan author buttressed that king’s position through the power of the word.

Twelfth-century kings employed ōenach Tailten to similar effect, specifically the king of Connacht, Tairdelbach Ua Conchobair and his son and royal successor, Ruaidrí, who each convened this intensely symbolic gathering to emphasise acquisition of actual gains.\textsuperscript{13} In cultivating a gathering like an ōenach, recourse was had to a sense of community and identity, and an appeal made to a polity as a whole.\textsuperscript{14} The communicative force itself, however, was harnessed by the influential few, and the cultural reality refracted represents that of elite society. In delineating the world in which ōenajig functioned, many of its contours are obscured from view. Notwithstanding this, the mediators-cum-moulders of eleventh- and twelfth-century Ireland revealed much of their present through elaborate depiction of their past and alleged projection of a specific future. They operated in centres of learning that formed part of ecclesiastical establishments. Throughout the period with which we are concerned, the mutual dependency of cleric and king ensured that written

\textsuperscript{10} Spiegel, ‘History’, 84.

\textsuperscript{11} See Metrical Dindshenchas, iv, 150–1 (lines 65–8), 152–3 (lines 71–2), and iii, 18–19 (lines 225–8), 10–11 (lines 103–4). These parallels were discussed by Denis Casey in a lecture he presented on ‘Carmain’ at a conference arising out of ‘The Óenach Project’ in Cork, March 2012. I am grateful to Dr Casey for sending me a draft version of his work on the poem.

\textsuperscript{12} See, for example, AU (Mac Airt), s.a. 1016.6, on which occasion Donnchad killed the Leinster ruler with whom Máel Sechnaill had formed an alliance (and Chron. Scot., s.a. 1013; AU (Mac Airt), s.a. 1015.2). See also Ann. Tig., s.a. 1039.


records encompassed religious and secular affairs. Court literacy became more prominent as the administrative support required by rulers in control of larger territories grew. Lay learned families are a feature of the later part of our period, serving eulogy to royal patrons and memorialising significant events. Yet irrespective of this development, the Church maintained an active interest in the transmission of knowledge more generally, even after the introduction of new religious orders in the twelfth century. The set of annals known as the Cottonian Annals or ‘Annals of Boyle’ deals with a wide range of events and was recorded in the Cistercian monastery of Boyle, County Roscommon, until 1228, before being continued elsewhere. Moreover, the association with the new orders was deemed significant, at least by some kings: Cathal Croibderg Ua Conchobair was buried in the Cistercian abbey of Knockmoy on his death in 1224, rather than in the traditional burial ground and site of a significant cultural centre, Clonmacnoise. Notwithstanding the increasing variety of loci for scholarly production, some continuity, as far as ecclesiastical participation in literary cultivation is concerned, was undoubtedly maintained.

Literary production was thus supported and promoted by secular and religious elites alike, and extant texts – whether chronicle or genealogy, legal commentary or imaginative tale – must be evaluated as the ideological documents that they so often are. This pseudo-historical record can be relativised with reference to other valuable source material, archaeological, art historical, linguistic, onomastic, to allow a multi-dimensional picture of the past to be drawn. Loan-words, place names, coins, as well as arm-rings and the like, provide other types of commentary with which the evidence of written compositions should, where possible, be meshed. Recent scholarship on óenach, for example, places landscape and literature on the same page. Yet as the óenach example highlights, we may glean why something happened without

18 AC, s.a. 1224.2.
20 This is the explicit aim of the Óenach Project, for which see https://theoenachproject.wordpress.com.
determining how it functioned on the ground. The tapestry of surviving evidence contains strands of varying thickness alongside its threadbare gaps.

King of Tara, Ruler of the Irish, Emperor of the Western World

Whatever about its physical manifestation, the óenach’s ideological significance was great. By convening óenach Tailten in particular, a king’s authority was underlined through association with the kingship of Tara. Celebrated in the literature of this period as the prerogative of the ideal sovereign, rí Temra(ch) ‘king of Tara’, as Máel Sechnaill is termed in the poem ‘Tailtiu’, marked the addressee out as an aspirant to recognition as most powerful king. Uí Néill, to whose southern branch of Clann Cholmáin Máel Sechnaill belonged, had long been inextricably linked with this prestigious kingship, though its kings were also accorded the title rí Érenn ‘king of Ireland’ from the time of its first known usage in the ninth and tenth centuries. In the account of the rivalry between Máel Sechnaill and his Munster opponent, Brian Bórama, with which our period opens, the term ‘king of Tara’ is subservient to ‘king of Ireland’, at least in the pro-Brian record of events. Thus, while both Brian and Máel Sechnaill are included in a list of Tara kings, as rí Temrach, the midlands ruler is clearly subordinate to his southern contemporary, rí Érenn, as the two march at the head of an army to Dublin in an encounter that will become known as the Battle of Clontarf. The resonances of the sovereignty of Tara remained useful and it retained its force as a legitimising label throughout our period. An eleventh-century narrative, Echtra mac nEchach Mugmedóin (‘The Adventure of the Sons of Echaid Mugmedón’), set out Uí Néill claims to rule, with reference to how their eponymous ancestor, Níall Noígíallach (Niall of the Nine Hostages), acceded to Tara. Appropriating the same story more

21 For discussion of activities at an óenach, see C. Etchingham, The Irish ‘Monastic Town’: Is this a Valid Concept? Kathleen Hughes Memorial Lecture VIII (Cambridge: Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic, 2010).


23 CGG, 4–5 (§III); AU (Mac Airt), s.a. 1014.1. The account of the battle in the Annals of Ulster has been augmented in favour of Brian: see M. Ní Mhaonaigh, Brian Ború: Ireland’s Greatest King? (Stroud: Tempus, 2007), 55–6.

than a century later, Úi Chonchobair of Connacht employed it with a twist to claim Tara and thus legitimacy for King Cathal Crobderg, descendant of Niall’s brother, Brión.  

It is, however, as ‘king of Connacht and king of the Irish of Ireland’ (ri Connacht 7 ri Gaidhel Erenn), that Cathal is described in his death notice of 1224. Indeed, even the Ua Néill ruler, Máel Sechnaill, was described as airdri Erenn in his obit, some two hundred years previously. Almost a decade earlier than that, Brian Bórama had been hailed in death, not simply as ardri Gaidhel Erenn (‘chief ruler of the Irish of Ireland’) but of the foreigners (gaill) and Britons, and ‘the Augustus of the whole of north-west Europe’ (August iartair tuaiscirt Eorpa uile) as well. As rulers of a physical domain, the designation ‘king of Ireland’ and the depiction as leader of a single geographically defined people reflected the territorial basis of rule. The importance of the ideological dimension of sovereignty endured, tales of royal ancestry forming part of the literary arsenal of kings whose ambition often extended beyond island-wide rule. The imperial accolade accorded Brian by a later commentator in the Annals of Ulster is matched by his assignation as imperator Scotorum (‘emperor of the Irish’) by his confessor, Máel Suthain, in a marginal addition penned in the Book of Armagh during the king’s own life.

It was with the claim to the kingship of Ireland, however, that all further aspiration commenced.

The parallel between Brian’s title, imperator Scotorum, and that of his contemporary, Otto III, imperator Romanorum, has long been noted. The imitation could certainly be deliberate, given Ireland’s ongoing connections with the Frankish world. Ottonian style may also have informed the later writer who deemed Brian Augustus, since it was as Romanorum imperator augustus...
that Otto II was known from the 980s. Inspired by its use in antiquity, Anglo-Saxon kings had earlier been termed imperator, including King Æthelstan in 930, and a later successor, Edgar, who was deemed basileus et imperator omnium regnum Anglorum. A number of Irish books have been associated with Æthelstan’s court, and contacts across the Irish Sea continued after his death. Thus, available models could have been manifold for the expression of Brian’s imperial power. The Munster ruler was not unusual in the scale of his ambition and in this can be compared with Cnut the Great whose imperial tendencies have also been observed. In a hyperbolic claim, comparable with Brian Bórama’s description as emperor of the western world, Cnut was celebrated as ‘king of the Danes, of the Irish, and of the English and of the Island dwellers [Orcadians]’ (konung Dana, Íra ok Engla ok Eybúa) by one of his most prolific skalds, Óttarr svarti (the black). Nonetheless, in the realm of eulogistic poetry, the description is far from outlandish and Óttarr’s desire ‘that his [Cnut’s] praise may travel with heavenly support more wisely through all the lands’ (at hans fari / med himinkrǫptium / lónum ǫllum / lof víðara) could have encompassed, in the poet’s mind, Ireland too.

Similar titles were applied to Irish kings in the twelfth century, including Tairdelbach Ua Conchobair, ruler of Connacht, who was described on his death in 1156 as ‘king of all Ireland and the Augustus of western Europe (rí Erenn uile 7 Auguist iarthair Eorpa). Brian and Tairdelbach bear further

35 Ann. Tig., s.a. 1156. Ua Conchobair’s rival, Muirchertach Mac Lochlann, who died a decade later is also termed ‘the Augustus of all of north-western Europe’ (August iarthair tuairscirt Eorpa uile): AU, ii, s.a. 1166.
resemblances. Both built fortifications for defence purposes and were engaged in conflict and communication by water, as well as land.  

The two rulers imposed their own candidates over subordinate territories, where possible, Tairdelbach doing so with great frequency throughout his reign. Each was intimately associated with the Church, using it to advance political ambition. Brian’s ostentatious gift of twenty ounces of gold on Patrick’s altar at Armagh is linked in the annalist’s view to his return homewards ‘bringing with him the pledges of the men of Ireland’ (co n-etire fer nErenn laiss). In his will, Tairdelbach left the majority of his not inconsiderable moveable wealth to various churches, the culmination of his extensive involvement in ecclesiastical affairs during his lifetime.

The connection between his son, Cathal Crobderg, and the Cistercians has already been noted. Moreover, Pope Innocent III recognised the latter’s royal authority. In terms of fortifications, Cathal is better known for his destruction rather than his construction of castles, as part of his campaign against English rule. His relationship with the settlers was more complex, however, than these destructive acts would suggest. He was granted a charter by King John, received royal protection and invoked primogeniture in an effort to secure the succession of his eldest son, Æed. His outward-looking attitude is also reflected in the image of him carved about the time of his death, curly-haired and surrounded by fleur-de-lis.

Throughout the eleventh and twelfth centuries and later, Irish kings and their image-makers continued to be influenced by their interaction with English and continental royal rule.

These cross-channel connections had a practical basis. As one of the chosen few of the generous host of Brión (brother of Niall Noigiallach), Cathal Crobderg is depicted in one of a number of contemporary poems on his rule as ‘a beautiful salmon’ (éicne án) destined to defeat ‘the British with abundance of weapons and the English and French from over the fair sea’ (Bretnaig co n-imat n-arm ... Sacsain, Francaig tar finnmuir). Ignoring the political reality of that king of Connacht’s day, the author does not make reference to Cathal’s support of King John against the de Lacy’s, nor his recourse to English

36 For fortifications: AI, s.a. 995.6; Ann. Tig., s.a. 1124. For naval warfare: AI, s.a 993.2; Ann. Tig., s.a. 1127, 1140.
37 E.g. AU (Mac Airt), s.a. 1125.3, 1126.7.
38 AU (Mac Airt), s.a. 1005.7; Ann. Tig., s.a. 1156.
40 AI, s.a. 1195.2; H. Perros, ‘Crossing the Shannon Frontier: Connacht and the Anglo-Normans, 1170–1224’, in Barry et al. (eds.), Colony and Frontier in Medieval Ireland, 177–200. Perros [Walton], ‘Ó Conchobhair, Cathal’, in ODNB.
military allies. At Clontarf, over two hundred years earlier, according to the augmented account in the Annals of Ulster, ‘the earl of Marr in Scotland’ (mormhaer Marr i nAlbain) was killed in the battle fighting on Brian’s side. His presence reflects contacts, real or desired, on the part of Brian’s descendants in an extended northern world.

Leinster too had recourse to outside assistance, as indicated by a reference in a mid-eleventh-century poem to Frainc, in the meaning ‘Normans’, in the service of Diarmait mac Mair na mBó. Moreover, the latter’s relationship with the prominent dynasty of Earl Godwine of Wessex was ongoing and intense. His sons, Harold and Leofwine, found political refuge in Leinster under Diarmait’s protection in 1051. After Harold’s death at the Battle of Hastings in 1066, bringing his short reign as king of England to an end, his sons too were harboured by Diarmait. Their gratitude may be indicated by the gift of Edward the Confessor’s standard which Diarmait presented to Tairdelbach Ua Briain, king of Munster, in 1068. Given these dealings, it is scarcely surprising that Harold’s sister, Edith, wife of Edward the Confessor, was said by the biographer of her husband to have been proficient in Irish, as well as Danish and perhaps French and Latin. Even if not factual (though there could be some truth to it), reference to her fluency in Irish is explicable against the general backdrop of this broader integrated Irish Sea world.

Notwithstanding the intensive contacts across the Irish Sea in this period, no record of the Battle of Hastings is preserved in extant contemporary Irish

42 AU (Mac Airt), s.a. 1014.2. He is accorded a prominent role in the encounter in an early twelfth-century literary account of the battle, CGG, 175–7. That text also includes Normans among the battle roll of the dead, but this evidence, and that suggesting their battle-involvement in the Annals of Loch Cé, is not contemporary: see Ní Mhaonaigh, Brian Boru, 67.
45 AI, s.a. 1068.3; the reference is to merge rig Saxan ‘the standard of the king of the Saxons’.
annalistic sources. It is noted by Marianus Scotus, alias Máel Brigte, a monk who received his early education in Moville, County Donegal, before going to the Continent in 1056 in his late twenties. He spent time in such learned centres as Cologne and Fulda, but his *Chronicon*, a universal history similar in concept to that of the early eleventh-century chronicler, Thietmar, bishop of Merseburg, was produced in Mainz where he had access to that monastery’s considerable bibliographical resources, as well as to books he had brought with him from Ireland. These too informed his writing: among the Chronicle’s prefatory material is a list of Irish kings, nestling alongside a catalogue of popes. Three stanzas of a versified biblical history by an early eleventh-century Irish scholar, Airbertach mac Coisse, are quoted in one of the margins, while the obits of some Irish and Scottish kings who had died after his departure for the Continent are also recorded. For Marianus, and others like him, the learned activity in which he engaged in ecclesiastical centres abroad was a continuation of that he had practised at home.

The Chronicle of Marianus Scotus proved influential and his work was drawn on by the twelfth-century English historian, John of Worcester, whose *Chronicon ex chronicis* continued the Irishman’s history, augmenting it considerably with English affairs. Another English historian of the same period, Henry of Huntingdon, a secular cleric and one-time bishop of Lincoln, produced for England an historical mythology, the *Historia Anglorum*, that bears comparison in approach and outlook with *Lebor Gabála Érenn* (The Book of the Taking(s) of Ireland), which was being revised and written across the Irish Sea just as the Englishman was composing his account. What links these disparate texts despite their many differences is their focus on what Rees Davies called ‘the unity, the identity, the ethnic homogeneity of a people’; each eloquently bears

47 In addition to the high-level contacts just discussed, trade between Chester, Bristol and Dublin should also be noted: D. Griffiths, *Vikings of the Irish Sea: Conflict and Assimilation AD 790–1050* (Stroud: History Press, 2010), 119–39.


witness to a shared intellectual strand. In any exploration of Ireland’s history in this vibrant era, this broader cultural heritage has an important part to play.

God’s Chosen People: Gaidil and Gaill

At the heart of what was a broader Christian learned heritage was the biblical concept of a people chosen by God.53 This idea underpins the elaborate history of Ireland set out in _Lebor Gabála Érenn_ in which the wandering Irish (‘Gaidil ‘Gaels’) are identified with the exodus of the Israelites, _túatha Dé_ (the peoples of God). Descended from Japheth son of Noah, the Irish too are accorded their place among the nations of the earth.54 Read in conjunction with another medieval staple text, _Sex Aetates Mundi_, with which it is often associated in manuscripts, _Lebor Gabála_ elucidated and embedded the Irish strand in the universal history of mankind.55 This is mirrored in microcosm in the _Banshenchas_ (Lore of Women), a metrical version of which was composed by Gilla Modutu Ua Casaide who died in 1147. Concerned primarily with Irish women who were wives and mothers of kings, the text takes as its starting point Eve and other notable females from biblical and apocryphal sources.56 The self-awareness and self-confidence this approach necessitated is evident in Irish learning from a much earlier period. The developed vernacular literature that has been posited as key to the growth of nationhood had

been present in Ireland from the seventh century or so. Yet exploration of group identity and nationality acquired renewed emphasis in Irish writing in the period under consideration here. In this, Ireland was not unusual. Susan Reynolds has documented the extent to which historical writing in general and myths of common descent in particular acquired a new purpose from the tenth century. As stories binding a particular people, they came to epitomise the unity of a group owing loyalty to what was an increasingly powerful leader, contributing to the construction of newly evolving kingdoms in the process. The eleventh- and twelfth-century Irish phase of this development saw provincial rulers – the so-called *rí co fressabra* (kings with opposition) – jockeying with each other for supreme position of *rí Érenn* (king of Ireland) or *rí Temra* (king of Tara) in turn. Fostering a shared identity by means of a universal origin myth enhanced a sense of communal solidarity. A powerful ruler, be he Ua Briain of Munster, Ua Conchobair of Connacht or Mac Lochlainn of Cenél nÉogain, could turn the conceit of collective ancestry articulated in such texts as *Lebor Gabála* to his advantage when his place in the political pecking order allowed. Writing this particular brand of history flourished as a medieval industry precisely because aspiring, ambitious rulers had a vested interest in its promotion.

*Lebor Gabála Érenn* was first written and then re-written in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, drawing on the work of contemporary poets, including a mid-eleventh-century lector of Monasterboice, Flann Mainistrech. Of note is the fact that texts concerning other peoples, such as Bede’s ‘Ecclesiastical History of the English People’ and *Historia Brittonum* ascribed to Nennius, were also translated into Irish at this time. A ninth-century Frankish text,
*De proprietatibus gentium*, describing the defining characteristics of particular gentes was similarly cast into vernacular form as *Cumtach na nÍudaide nard*. Literary enterprises were often perceived as island-wide. The landscape captured in story in *Dindshenchas Érenn* (The Lore of Ireland’s Notable Places), for example, which contains the poems on ‘Táilitiu’ and ‘Carmain’ with which we commenced, extended throughout Ireland. The Church too came to form a unit of interlinked dioceses, as the ‘reform’ of the long twelfth century progressed. In the person of Patrick, it was granted access to past knowledge by means of a journey throughout Ireland, according to the narrative, *Acallam na Senórach* (The Colloquy of the Ancients), which may have been written in Cathal Crobderg of Connacht’s reign.

By then the arrival of the English had introduced a different dimension, but one which a malleable sense of community could accommodate. Gaill, originally signifying Gauls, came later to mean vikings; in its third reincarnation, it was applied to English settlers, though Saxain was also used, as well as Engleis in French texts. The separateness signalled by such terminology underplayed the links forged between different groups from the outset of the conquest. Thus, in the late twelfth-/early thirteenth-century ‘Song of Dermot and the Earl’, which focuses on the activities of the Leinster king, Diarmait Mac Murchada, and Richard fitz Gilbert de Clare (Strongbow), a clear distinction is drawn between *nos Engleis* ‘our English’ and *les Yrreis* ‘the Irish’. Subcategorisation of the latter, in terms of dynastic affiliation, reveals more detailed knowledge. Nonetheless, King Diarmait apart, the Irish for the most part are rebel tyrants who oppose an altogether more civilised, chivalrous host. A contemporary of the author of this French poem, Gerald of Wales (Giraldus Cambrensis), expresses it more vividly, the Irish ‘live like vernacular manuscript, *Lebor na hUidre*: see D. N. Dumville, ‘The Textual History of “Lebor Bretnach”: A Preliminary Study’, *Éigse*, 16 (1975/6), 255–73, at 255.


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beasts’ (*bestialiter vivens*). Much superior to them are the new settlers with whom this Cambro-Norman cleric identified, and whose conquest he sought to justify.\(^67\) Notwithstanding the fact that Gerald had come to Ireland in 1185 with Henry II’s son, John, who was later himself to become king, his colourful commentary owes as much and more to his own specific bias and the ethnographic tradition within which he was writing.\(^68\)

Nor was his negative view anything new.\(^69\) A satirical Latin poem written around the year 1000 by Warner of Rouen, whose principal subject is a slow-witted (*stultus*) Irishman, Moriuht, ascribes bestial behaviour to the latter’s countrymen.\(^70\) In his castigation of their ignorance of God, Warner foreshadows the twelfth-century Cistercian, Bernard of Clairvaux, who considered the Irish pagan in all but name.\(^71\) Similar aspersions continued to be cast on what was perceived as a peculiar brand of Irish Christianity in the thirteenth century, as shown by the remark in 1229 of an abbot of Savigny who later followed in Bernard’s footsteps as abbot of Clairvaux, Stephen of Lexington: ‘How can anyone love the cloister of learning who knows nothing but Irish?’\(^72\) Stephen’s concern in this regard, however, must be read in the context of what was perceived to be a more general crisis of the Cistercians in Ireland. Attempting to impose uniformity, he was opposed to difference

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\(^{68}\) According to Gerald himself, he was ‘specially sent with John by his father’: *Expugnatio*, 229. On the ethnographic traditions, see R. Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales: A Voice of the Middle Ages* (Stroud: Tempus, 2006) and his *Gerald of Wales and the Ethnographic Imagination*, Kathleen Hughes Memorial Lectures, 12 (Cambridge: Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic, 2013).


\(^{70}\) Warner of Rouen, *Moriht: A Norman Latin Poem from the Early Eleventh Century*, ed. and trans. C. J. McDonough (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1995), 74–5. The author claims that though ‘many facts have been reported to me about these Irish, it is immoral to record them and it shames (me) to recount (them)’ (*de his Scottis mihi multa relata / scriber quod nefas est quodque referre pudet*).


in language as in other spheres, wishing to promote Latin as the language of the Church, or French as the vernacular of the Cistercians’ spiritual home.\textsuperscript{73} Yet Cistercian houses embodied connections too. The foundations of John de Courcy were affiliated with Furness in Lancashire. His involvement with that abbey is further indicated by his role as one of a trio of patrons to commission Jocelin, a monk of Furness, to write a biography of Patrick.\textsuperscript{74} One of de Courcy’s Irish monasteries was Inch Abbey, County Down. In relative proximity to it was Grey Abbey founded as a daughter-house of Holm Cultram in 1192 by his wife, Affreca, daughter of Gofraid mac Amlaíb, king of Man. De Courcy’s liaison with Gofraid’s daughter was a major part of his political strategy and had happened by 1180, if not before. In allying with the Manx ruler who was linked to the northern dynasty of Mac Lochlainn, de Courcy sought to invoke the support of his two powerful neighbours.\textsuperscript{75} While the Isle of Man was pivotal to de Courcy, the Isles, under the leadership of Gofraid’s enemies, Meic Shomhairle, were also increasingly drawn into Irish politics. Along with Gofraid of Man, they came to the aid of the king of Connacht, Ruaidrí Ua Conchobair, in his blockade of Dublin against Henry II in 1171. They became increasingly enmeshed in internal Irish struggles, supporting Ruaidrí’s sons in their succession struggle against their uncle, Cathal Crobderg, after their father’s death in 1183. John de Courcy himself, too, was drawn into this contest after 1185, the year in which he was entrusted with the administration of Ireland by King John.\textsuperscript{76} In this justiciar, Gofraid of Man had a powerful ally in his final years and the association between the two men exemplifies how the English conquest of Ireland influenced insular, and not just Irish, politics in a range of spheres.

Gofraid himself had been active in Ireland and he undertook what was ultimately an unsuccessful expedition to Dublin sometime in the 1150s. According to the Chronicle of Man, his expedition there was in response to an invitation by the men of Dublin to become their overlord and he was appointed king by them of one voice.\textsuperscript{77} Opposed by Muirchertach Mac Lochlann, the most

\textsuperscript{73} Watt, Church and the Two Nations, 106.
\textsuperscript{75} Duffy, ’First Ulster Plantation’, 25, 26, and n. 167.
\textsuperscript{77} Cronica Regum Mannie et Insularum, transcribed and trans. G. Broderick (Douglas: Manx Museum and National Trust, 1979), fol. 37r.
powerful king in Ireland at the time, he retreated to Man, despite being victorious in battle, according to the *Cronica*. A later alliance with Mac Lochlainn is indicated by his marriage to a member of that dynasty, Finnguala. The precise date of that union is not known, though it is frequently placed in the period between 1170 and 1172, since their son, Amlaíb, was around three years of age at the time of their canonical union in 1176. This coincides with Gofraid’s known involvement in the siege of Dublin organised by King Ruaidrí Ua Conchobair in 1171 as noted above.

Gofraid’s grandfather, Gofraid Méráncach, had ruled Dublin and Man though he was expelled as rí Gall in Dublin by Muirchertach Ua Briain, great-grandson of Brian Bórama, in 1094. Gofraid died the following year, the victim of a widespread plague, according to some sources. On his death, the Munster ruler became king-maker in Man, installing a family member, Domnall mac Taidc, in the kingship there. The allegedly tyrannous rule of Domnall was interrupted by the assumption of control in the region by King Magnús Berfœttr (Barelegs) of Norway, who was allied with and opposed to Muirchertach Ua Briain in turn. The backdrop to the shifting allegiances between Magnús, Muirchertach and Normans of Shrewsbury was control over Gwyned. Marriage alliances bolstered relations: a truce between Muirchertach and


80 Gerald of Wales writes that both Ruaidrí and Lorcán Ua Tuathail, archbishop of Dublin, sent letters to Gofraid seeking assistance in return for financial reward: *Expugnatio*, 78–9.

81 *AU* (Mac Airt), s.a. 1094.2; *AI*, s.a. 1094.2. He is termed rí Átha Cliath 7 Inse Gall on his death: *AI*, s.a. 1095.13.

82 *AI*, s.a. 1095.13. The Annals of Ulster mention his death and the plague separately: *AU* (Mac Airt), s.a. 1095.8 and 1095.11.

83 See Duffy, ‘Irishmen and Islesmen’, 108–10. Domnall may have been the son of Muirchertach’s brother Tadc, and hence was also the Munster king’s nephew and grandson of an earlier king of Man, Echmarcach mac Ragnaill. According to the Manx Chronicle, Muirchertach was requested to intervene by the people of Man and grant them a ruler ‘until Óláfr son of Guðrøðr should have grown up’ (*donec olaus filius godredi cresceret*), as a result of strife between Gofraid’s two adult sons: *Cronica Regum Mannie*, fol. 33v. This period is also discussed in various contributions in S. Duffy and H. Mytum (eds.), *A New History of the Isle of Man*, vol. III, *The Medieval Period, 1000–1406* (Liverpool University Press, 2015), for which reference I am indebted to Fiona Edmonds.


Magnús in 1102 was symbolised by a union between the latter’s nine-year-old son, Sigurd, and the Irish ruler’s five-year-old daughter, called Bladmynja in the saga of Magnus Barelegs.\(^{86}\) Around the same time, another of Muirchertach’s daughters was married to Arnulf de Montgomery, brother of Robert de Bellême, Earl of Shrewsbury, who sought the assistance of the Munster king in his rebellion against Henry I.\(^{87}\) That Muirchertach was involved is indicated by a letter written by him to Anselm of Canterbury, in which he gives thanks to the archbishop for interceding with the king on his son-in-law’s behalf.\(^{88}\)

Muirchertach’s correspondence with Anselm, like that of his father, Tairdelbach, before him, highlights once more the ecclesiastical dimension of Ireland’s contacts with the wider world. Tairdelbach had also exchanged letters with Pope Gregory VII, as well as with Anselm’s predecessor, Lanfranc, the latter considering him king of Ireland, as suggested by his address to him as *magnifico Hibernie regi Terdeluaco*.\(^{89}\) Lanfranc was closely associated with William the Conqueror, with whom Tairdelbach may also have had links through a shared interest in encouraging trade across the Irish Sea.\(^{90}\) In this connection, we may note the visitation to Tairdelbach in 1079 by a group of five Jews who may have had commercial interests. For whatever reason, their gifts were repudiated and ‘they were sent back again across the sea’ (*andíchor doridisi dar muir*).\(^{91}\) Tairdelbach, and in particular his son, were heavily associated with ecclesiastical development in the period. Muirchertach convened the first of what are deemed to be the reforming synods at Cashel in 1001. He was closely connected with Gille, bishop of Limerick and papal legate, whose treatise, *De statu ecclesia*, set out in detail the structured hierarchy of a reformed Church. Alluding to secular ranks also, his unitary structure, which implicitly extended to the kingdom within which this unified Church operated, would certainly have appealed to his patron, Muirchertach Ua Briain.\(^{92}\)

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86 AU (Mac Airt), *s.a.* 1102.7; *Heimskringla*, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson. 3 vols. Íslenzk fornrit 26–8 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1941–51), iii, 224–5.
91 AI, *s.a.* 1079.3. Hudson speculates that they were requesting permission for a settlement at Dublin, ‘William the Conqueror’, 154.
Muichertach’s northern rival, Domnall Mac Lochlainn, was similarly engaged with changes in the Church, as were his successors. As rex totius Hiberniae, his grandson, Muichertach, granted land to a Cistercian house at Newry, County Down. He was also a generous patron to Flaithbertach Ua Brolcháin, abbot of Derry and head of the important Columban federation. The building of ‘the great church of Derry’ (tempull mór Dairi) at this time symbolised that centre’s role as head of the Columban church. Such was Ua Brolcháin’s fame that the abbacy of Iona was offered to him in 1164 ‘on the advice of Somhairle, and of the men of Argyll and Innsi Gall’ (a comairli Somarlidh ocus Fer A[r]th-Gaidhel ocus Innsi-Gall). It was the intervention of Muichertach, together with the abbot of Armagh, which ensured that the offer was rejected. The incident revealed the underlying belief that Gaidil in Ireland were ultimately different from Gaidil ‘to the east’ (anair). Nonetheless, for ideological as well as political reasons, commonalities were often emphasised. Twelfth- and thirteenth-century Scottish kings promoted their Irish origins, acquiring ‘the legitimising lustre of ancient royalty’ in the process.

In the same way, his Irish connections were emphasised by Ragnall, son of Gofraid, king of Man in the early thirteenth century, most notably in Baile suthach síth Emna (‘The otherworld of Emain is a fertile place’), a conventional bardic eulogy, in which his suitability for the kingship of Tara is to the fore.

Collective ancestry, therefore, remained pivotal in certain circumstances and the myth of common descent served as a flexible device. The expression of sharp distinctions, when useful, between ‘us’ and ‘them’, was part of the same process of communal definition. It was for this reason that the viking as a negative type was resurrected in eleventh- and twelfth-century

93 Herbert, Iona, Kells, and Derry, 109–23.
94 AU, ii, s.a. 1164.
95 AU (Mac Airt), s.a. 1164: co ro [f h]astaei comarba Patraic ocus ri Erenn, idon, Ua Lochlainn ocus maithi Cene[oi]l Eogain e.
97 D. Broun, The Irish Identity of the Kingdom of the Scots (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1999), 132. Matthew Hammond’s important caveat should also be borne in mind: ‘any pan-Gaelicism must be balanced against the understanding that peoples like the Galwegians, men of Moray, men of Argyll, seem to have seen themselves as distinct gentes, despite being all Gaels’, ‘Ethnicity and the Writing of Medieval Scottish History’, The Scottish Historical Review, 85 (2006), 1–27, at 17. See also D. Broun, ‘Becoming a Nation: Scotland in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries’, in Tsurushima (ed.), Nations in Medieval Britain, 86–103.
Irish compositions. This northern caricature, as he appeared in a number of what are often termed pseudo-historical tracts, bore no resemblance to his Scandinavian relative who had long since been assimilated into the Irish social and political landscape. While the tenth-century king of Dublin, Amlaíb Cuarán, patronised churches and had vernacular poetry composed in his honour by one of the foremost authors of the day, Cináed ua hArtacáin, his recent ancestors were to be cast as destructive marauders in some eleventh- and twelfth-century literary texts. Defined solely by their difference in such matters as mores, weaponry and appearance, these gáill were deliberately set up in stark opposition to Gaídil. Moreover, the contrast becomes more marked as the period progresses. The eleventh-century author of the Fragmentary Annals of Ireland allows for the possibility of good and less good pagans of Scandinavian ancestry, distinguishing between Danair who had ‘certain kinds of piety’ (cinele crabhaidh) and Lochlannaig who are beyond redemption. By contrast, twelfth-century examples of the genre, specifically the related texts Cogadh Gáedhel re Gallaibh (‘The War of the Irish against Foreigners’) and Caithréim Chellacháin Chaisil (‘The Battle-triumph of Cellachán of Cashel’), can countenance only negative examples of what appears as a monochromatic, relentlessly evil viking type.

Ethnic stereotyping was scarcely the preserve of the Irish, however, as the depiction by Gerald of Wales of the Irish (and elsewhere the Welsh) makes clear. Gerald’s barbarian Irish, like the vikings of the Cogadh and Caithréim Chellacháin Chaisil, are distinctive in weaponry and dress. They may not be heathen, in contrast to Scandinavian genti (pagans), nonetheless, as Gerald echoing Bernard of Clairvaux complains, they were ‘most uninstructed in the rudiments of faith’. In constructing a savage Other, twelfth-century Irish authors sought to legitimise ruling dynasties by associating them with glorious ancestors who...


100 CGG; Caithréim Cellacháin Caisil: The Victorious Career of Cellachán of Cashel, or the Wars between the Irishmen and the Norsemen in the Middle of the 10th Century, ed. and trans. A. Bugge (Oslo: J. C. Gundersens bogtrykkeri, 1905).

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overthrew an almost invincible foe. In the same way, reformers and ethnographers, such as Bernard and Gerald, employed their description of a barbarian, well-nigh pagan race to justify takeover and conquest in religious and political spheres. As outsiders looking in, the perspective of Bernard and Gerald was in contrast to that of Irish writers purporting to comment on those who came to dwell in their midst. But all were writing within a broader ethnographic tradition, the influence of which is detectable in their common slant.

Lord and Subject: Commoners and Elite

That common intellectual tradition accommodated diversity. Historical memory was specific even if the framework within which it was conceptualised and constructed was general. As the specifics were adapted to fit ever-changing circumstances, the overarching structure required flexibility. The ideology it supported could shift in significant ways and be formed of overlapping cultural spheres. What was expressed, however, was the mentality of an elite. It is the views of kings concerned with control and continuity that are reflected, and of ecclesiastics and scholars, fellow-actors on an aristocratic stage. Some of these sophisticated literary productions may have been performed at an óenach, as the poem on Carmain suggests. As the nature of that institution continues to elude us, so too does a detailed appreciation of the life of those summoned to the ‘fair’.

Although activities associated with an óenach have been misleadingly adduced in support of the existence of earlier monastic towns, the only fledgling urban settlements at the beginning of our period were the port towns founded by vikings at various points in the tenth century. The minting of the first coins in Dublin under King Sitriuc Silkenbeard marks a significant moment in the history of urbanisation, and archaeological finds from Dublin provide evidence for a thriving urban culture there in the eleventh century.

The development of towns in Ireland in this period undoubtedly affected the lives of many, both beyond the burgeoning settlements, as well as within.


A fertile hinterland provided foodstuffs for a growing population. Goods produced and processed in commercial centres had utility outside a town’s walls. Agricultural production intensified and economic prosperity reached both farmer and craftsman alike.

The nature of the bond between king and subject was altered somewhat, as a result of these and other developments. A king’s authority no longer revolved around a relationship of clientship alone and administrative structures increased accordingly. Royal officials became more prominent, their various duties categorised in a textual genre concerned with ‘customs’ (nósa) and ‘rights’ (certa). An early twelfth-century example, Lebor na Cert (The Book of Rights), stems from the court of Muirchertach Ua Briain. It sets out the rights and concomitant duties of particular peoples, according a central role to the king of Cashel (Ua Briain) therein. Groups such as the Norse of Dublin are given a place, reflecting an evolving political order. Subordinate kingdoms owe tribute (cís), emphasis on which highlights its importance in a changing world; remuneration (tuarastal), for what might range from foodrenders to military service, was paid by a king in return. In effect, what is a system of taxation comes into being. It may be that due tax was considered at an óenach, as intimated in one of the stanzas quoted above; however, it is equally likely that successful kings employed tax-collectors, not dissimilar
from those described as cruel viking bailiffs in the twelfth-century pseudo-historical tract *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh*.  

The model for the system of taxation implemented according to this text may well have been one somewhat closer to home. Taxation and tribute lie behind the system of landholding also, and territorial units such as *trícha cét* and the smaller *baile biataig* suggest a shift away from the community-focussed *túath* of earlier times. Such developments reflect gradual changes in the structure of government and the nature of lordship, a relationship of service between king and subject becoming more structured and controlled. Military assistance formed part of this bond, as the evolution of the meaning of the term *trícha cét* makes clear. First attested as ‘a force of fighting men’, it came to signify the number levied in a division termed *trícha cét* and is thus intimately connected with the militarisation of Irish society. It is the *trícha cét* that lies behind the post-Conquest cantred; and thus a system associated with the English in actual fact continued an arrangement that had evolved in the eleventh and twelfth centuries in response to the need for a more centralised administration, as well as ready, regular access to tribute and armed forces on the part of powerful Irish kings. Thomas Charles-Edwards has observed that *Lebor na Cert*, written for Uí Briain at the beginning of the twelfth century, as already noted, embodies aspects of these changes. Failure to pay tribute or provide service on the part of a sub-king led to loss of land, highlighting the dependent nature of tenure. Moreover, the growth in popularity of tracts like *Lebor na Cert* concerned with the physical manifestation of the bond between ruler and subject is in itself indicative of change.

As elsewhere in the changing Europe of this period, the bond between lord and subject remained a constant, though it was scarcely, as claimed by Patrick Wormald ‘almost all that was left by way of social cement’. The extent to

109 *And luaitís fri bága bil / certa ocus cánna in cóicid* ‘There they would discuss with strife of speech the dues and tributes of the province’: *Metrical Dindshenchas*, iii, 18–19 (lines 213–14); *CGG*, 48–51 (§XL). Swift discusses tribute and reward in the case of this text and Caithréim Cellacháin Cáisíl in her ‘Royal Fleets’, 194.


111 For these developments see Charles-Edwards, ‘Society and Politics in Pre-Norman Ireland’, 87–90.


which Ireland was affected by developments prevalent in other regions, however, is sometimes difficult to measure. In the case of population growth, for example, the increase in urbanisation which we have seen to be a feature of the eleventh century in particular was undoubtedly of significance in this regard. Yet, as Howard Clarke has noted, ‘only about one fifth of the island would have had regular access to town life even at the height of the Anglo-Norman colony’ around 1270, some forty years after the end of our period. While population density undoubtedly increased, whether that expansion matched the steep rise suggested for Britain and other regions of Europe is impossible to say. Population growth is certainly reflected in an increase in food production, specifically cereals. An improved plough with coulter appears to have been used from the tenth century and this facilitated better preparation of the soil for seed planting. A further refinement in plough design saw the addition of a mould board, but it has been suggested that implements with both coulter and mould board were not employed in Ireland until after the arrival of the English in 1169. Concomitant with these changes was a decline in the significance of cattle in economic terms, arable land rather than livestock yielding more food. Concern with regulation of food resources is indicated in developments in fishing in the tenth and eleventh centuries. As sources of wealth and power, fishing rights were controlled by either secular or Church authorities, and arrangements concerning them are often laid down in nósa texts.

An aristocratic elite remained dominant, therefore, controlling new developments, as well as the commoners beneath. It encompassed lay nobility as well as ecclesiastics, with both strands of society’s upper echelons undergoing

significant change in the two hundred and fifty years under discussion here. Brian Bórama’s rule retained some aspects of itinerant kingship: his circuit of the northern part of the country in the early eleventh century was designed to impose his authority through his physical presence. His grandson, Tairdelbach, made his son, Muirchertach, governor of Dublin in 1075, seeking thereby to tighten control through having a deputy on site. Administration from afar of what was increasingly in effect a ‘capital city’ remained of key significance in the following century; a crucial factor in Diarmaid Mac Murchada’s decision to seek military assistance in England was his loss of Dublin to a rival, Ruaidrí Ua Conchobair, in 1166. The latter’s brother and successor, Cathal Crobderg, who held his land under the English crown, had recourse to an organised political machine in the running of his kingdom. His affairs involved intercourse with society’s other aristocratic arm, the Church, whose episcopal appointments he sought to influence. Brian Bórama’s brother, Marcán, as well as other members of his extended kin, held key ecclesiastical positions in Munster in his own time and that of his descendants, even in an age of a changing Church. ‘Reform’ was also championed by Diarmaid Mac Murchada, but he too had his own political interests at heart.

Religious change, supported by secular authority, was a feature of Irish life in this period, and can be measured in part through the work of a series of twelfth-century synods and the foundation throughout Ireland of a considerable number of Augustinian and Cistercian houses. Closely associated with it were developments in art, literature and sculpture, as represented in architectural terms by the construction in Cashel of the earliest extant Irish Romanesque monument, Cormac’s chapel, in 1134. The vibrancy of literary culture is manifest in a trio of vernacular manuscripts, Lebor na hUidre (The Book of the Dun Cow), Rawlinson B 502 and The Book of Leinster,
which span the twelfth century and preserve a wide variety of earlier and contemporary material in a number of forms.\footnote{129} The main scribe of the earliest of these codices written c. 1100 was also responsible for a copy of Boethius’ \textit{De re arithmetica}. Moreover, Boethius’ works were being studied and glossed at Glendalough, a centre which has been associated with the second of our vernacular manuscripts, Rawlinson B 502.\footnote{130} The third, the Book of Leinster, preserves an early vernacular adaptation of \textit{De excidio Troiae historia} (‘A History of the Destruction of Troy’) by Dares Phrygius, whose influence on vernacular narrative literature was extensive and profound.\footnote{131} Irish scholars were clearly immersed and engaged in the intellectual currents of their day.

\section*{Perception and Reality: Learning and its Place}

As the monastic provenance of these three codices indicates, the context for this learning was ecclesiastical. Yet their wide-ranging subject matter explored concerns shared by clerics and kings. Thus, when copying a tenth-century poem by Cináed ua hArtucáin into the Book of Leinster, Finn, bishop of Kildare, updated his exemplar to bring the battles listed down to his own time. A more prolific scribe of the same manuscript, Áed mac Crimthainn, an ecclesiastical official (\textit{comarba}) of the monastery of Terryglass, is likely to have composed a considerable part of the Book of Leinster version of a secular tale \textit{Esnada Tige Buchet} (The Melodies of Buchet’s House).\footnote{132} By the time Áed and Finn were writing, however, a process of profound cultural realignment had been set in train, as a result of which secular learning moved out of ecclesiastical establishments into the hands of professional learned families over the course of the twelfth century and into the thirteenth. The stanzas from \textit{Óenach Carman} with which we commenced survive in the Book of Leinster, a monastic production, as does the poetic celebration of the \textit{óenach} at Tailtiu convened by Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill in 1005. His ascent to

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\item \footnote{129} R. Ó hUiginn (ed.), \textit{Lebor na hUidre: Codices Hibernenses Eximii I}, (Dublin: RIA, 2015).
\item \footnote{132} Ní Mhaonaigh, ‘Literature of Medieval Ireland’, 36.
\end{itemize}
power in 980 marks the beginning of our period; the death of Ragnall, king of Man, in 1229 its end. As a Manx ruler intimately associated with Ireland, Ragnall’s career symbolises the extent to which any evaluation of the history of Ireland in this period must look beyond its geographical confines. His descent from his Hiberno-Norse ancestor, Amlaíb Cuarán, was deliberately recalled in a praise-poem in Irish to him. Moreover, its author equated his kingship with that of Tara. Ragnall was legitimised, as Irish kings before him, through ‘the flagstone on the side of Tara’ (labra ón leic a taib Themra) emitting an approving noise.\(^{133}\)

Ragnall’s anonymous eulogist and those of his contemporaries, including Cathal Croiberg Ua Conchobair (d. 1224), formed part of a reconstituted learned order. A member of a professional poetic family, his educational context lay beyond the confines of a changed Church which had refocused its intellectual efforts on more specific ecclesiastical ends. This pronounced shift in the locus of learning is one of the most significant, and ‘arguably the most certainly detectable’, outcomes of ‘reform’.\(^ {134}\) It may be compared more broadly with the decline of the eleventh-century European cathedral schools with their emphasis on education for both imperial and ecclesiastical concerns.\(^ {135}\) Secular learning became a feature of the court from the twelfth century, and from that point Ireland was imagined without the same level of input from the Church.

In reviewing how Ireland was perceived in the rich and varied sources of our period, I have surveyed no more than a number of pertinent themes, probing what may lie beneath. Change was undoubtedly constant though often difficult to decipher in the rich and complex textual imagery produced by professional learned classes themselves undergoing profound developments. What we know of Ireland is informed by their ideology and to gain access to her history we must negotiate their literary layers. The dual nature of what they so skilfully imaged is encompassed in the óenach – at once symbol and real.

\(^{133}\) ‘Poem in Praise of Raghnaíl’, ed. and trans. Ó Cuív, stanza 10.
\(^{134}\) Etchingham, ‘Review Article’, 217.