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ABBREVIATIONS

AClon Annals of Clonmacnoise
AFM Annals of the Four Masters
AI Annals of Inisfallen
ASC Anglo-Saxon Chronicle
AT Annals of Tigernach
AU Annals of Ulster
CCSL Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina
CMCS Cambridge/Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies (name changed in 1993)
CSEL Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum
EEMF Early English Manuscripts in Facsimile
EETS Early English Text Society
os original series
ss supplementary series
EHR English Historical Review
ITS Irish Texts Society
JRSAI Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries in Ireland
JTS Journal of Theological Studies
MMIS Modern and Medieval Irish Series
PRIA Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy
RC Revue Celtique
SASLC Sources of Anglo-Saxon Literary Culture
(http://www.wmich.edu/medieval/research/saslc/)
ZCP Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie

PREFACE

This publication is the outcome of an initiative taken in 1999 by members of the post-graduate community in the Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic. That they have brought their venture so successfully to fruition is testimony not only to their commitment and enthusiasm, but no less importantly to the professionalism which they have displayed at every stage of the process. The Department is proud indeed to be associated with the Cambridge Colloquium in Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic, and wishes it every success in the future.

Professor Simon Keynes
Head of the Department of ASNC
University of Cambridge
The fourth Cambridge Colloquium in Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic took place on Thursday, 22 May 2003, in the Winstanley Lecture Theatre, Trinity College, Cambridge. Papers on the theme of ‘East Meets West’ were presented in four sessions:

Session I (Chair: Flora Spiegel)
Thomas Charles-Edwards, ‘The English Invasion of Ireland and Irish Politics, 1166–1186’

Session II (Chair: Carys Underdown)
Juliet Hewish, ‘Eastern Asceticism versus Western Monasticism: a Conflict of Ideals in the Early Medieval Translations of Sulpicius Severus?’
Ashwin Gohil, ‘The Ptolemy Project’
Catherine Rooney, ‘Gerald of Wales and the Tradition of the Wonders of the East’

Session III (Chair: Emily Lethbridge)
Ross Woodward Smythe, ‘King Alfred’s Translations: Authorial Integrity and the Integrity of Authority’
Geraldine Parsons, ‘Never the Twain Shall Meet?: East and West in the Characterisation of Conchobar mac Nessa’
Augustine Casiday, ‘Thomas Didymus from India to England’

Session IV (Chair: Andrew Rigby)
Hywel Williams, ‘Pope, Propaganda and Unchristian Saint in the Life of the Soldier, Collen’
Alaric Hall, ‘Between a Celtic and a Classical Place: Did the Anglo-Saxons Play Elf-in-the-Middle?’

At the Colloquium it was announced that *Quaestio* would, from vol. 4 onwards, be known as *Quaestio Insularis*. This is to avoid confusion with another new journal also called *Quaestio*.

The members of the colloquium committee for 2002–3 were:
Flora Spiegel (Chairman), Velda Elliott (Treasurer) and Bridgitte Schaffer (Secretary).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*Quaestio Insularis* 4 was edited by Catherine Rooney with the assistance of Emily Lethbridge, James Rooney, Bridgitte Schaffer, Flora Spiegel, Carys Underdown and Lizzie White. Editorial design is by Alistair Vining, and the *Quaestio* logo was drawn by Katharine Scarfe Beckett.
Ireland and its Invaders, 1166–1186

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I. THE ISSUES

There have been two great violent encounters between east and west within the British Isles in recorded history, both of which changed the shape of the political, ethnic and linguistic map for good: the Anglo-Saxon invasion of Britain and the English invasion of Ireland. My subject is the second.¹ For a messy and violent sequence of episodes, it was relatively well recorded: Gerald of Wales's *Exspugnatio Hibernica* was written by a man who accompanied Henry II's youngest son, John, to Ireland in 1185 and who had relatives among the earliest invaders.² He is as remarkable for his insight into Welsh and Irish society as he is for his unblushingly high opinion of himself, characteristic of twelfth-century intellectuals.³ *The Song of Dermot and

¹ I am very grateful to Fiona Edmonds for commenting on a draft of this paper and for her help with the maps. I have normalized Irish names to a standard represented in the contemporary Book of Leinster, although such forms as Mael Sechnaill are shown by such texts as *The Song of Dermot and the Earl* no longer to represent normal pronunciation: T. F. O'Rahilly, "Notes on Middle-Irish Pronunciation", *Hermathena* 20 (1930), 152–95, esp. 152–63.
the Earl is a verse chronicle in Old French, portraying the invasion in heroic terms. It was evidently composed for an audience of Englishmen settled in Ireland. According to its most recent editor it was first composed in the last decade of the twelfth century but underwent minor updating for another twenty-five years. On the Irish side there is a good spread of annals, including the Annals of Tigernach, at this period close to the standpoint of one principal player, Ruaidhrí Ua Conchobair, king of Connaught and high-king of Ireland.

My endpoints are the killing of Muirchertach mac Néill, alias Mac Lochlainn, high-king of Ireland, in 1166 and the killing of Hugh de Lacy in 1186. The first precipitated the expulsion of Diarmait Mac Murchada from Ireland. The second saw the death of the man who was by then the most powerful among the early English settlers. Together with the failure in the previous year of the expedition headed by Henry II’s youngest son John (later King John) it saw the end of the first phase of the invasion. By this stage the invaders had effective control of most of Leinster and Meath, the south-east and the centre of Ireland; in addition John de Courcy had conquered most of Ulster in the north-east. Part of Munster had been conquered but there was only marginal penetration into the remaining Irish provinces, Connaught in the west and what was known as ‘the North’ in the north-west.

My concern is the way Irish politics affected the course of the invasion – a concern stimulated by two thoughts. One was about a map illustrating a contribution by Robert Bartlett to a volume on frontier societies. It showed the castles constructed in Meath in the early years of the invasion. What Bartlett did not say, but what would be practically the first thing to occur to an historian of early medieval Ireland, was that almost all the castles were constructed on the sites of well-known churches. The other was suggested by one of the principal sources for Bartlett’s map, namely The Song of Dermot and the Earl. It has accounts of the infeudation of two provinces, Leinster and Meath. The Normans had granted mainly castleries, portions of land defined as being appendant to a castle. Many of these were, as we have seen, on the sites of old churches, some of them famous, such as Durrow, Columba’s foundation, or Clonard. The geography of the infeudation of Leinster appeared to be Irish; the geography of the infeudation of Meath seemed to be primarily military. The one substituted English

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1. The Doeds of the Normans in Ireland: The Geste des Engleis en Yrlande: a New Edition of the Chronicle formerly known as The Song of Dermot and the Earl, ed. and trans. E. Mullally (Dublin, 2002); the historical notes of the earlier edition by G. H. Orpen, The Song of Dermot and the Earl (Oxford, 1892; repr. Felinfach, 1994) remain indispensable. Reference to the text will be by line-numbers. These are the same in the two editions as far as 1731, after which occurs the statement of Diarmait’s death and the Latin prayer for his soul. These are counted as two lines by Orpen but as outside the line-count by Mullally. The effect is that from this point onwards Mullally’s line-numbers are two less than Orpen’s. I shall refer to Orpen’s text as Song and Mullally’s as Doeds. Translations are those of Mullally.

lords for Irish kings; the other imposed a new political landscape based upon the castle. The crucial technique of conquest in Meath was to rely on the capacity of the castle to act as a centre from which to control territory. When one looks closer, the contrast is less clear-cut; nevertheless it remains striking.

II. THE IRISH POLITICAL BACKGROUND

At the beginning of 1166 there were two alliances of leading kings in Ireland (leaving aside Munster). The alliance which was currently dominant was headed by Muirchertach Mac Lochlann, king of Ireland and king of ‘the North’; it included Domnall Ua Cerbaill, king of Aingialla and Diarmait Mac Murchada, king of Leinster. Since the power of Ua Cerbaill extended as far south as Drogheda, near the mouth of the Boyne, and the power of Mac Murchada extended northwards over Dublin and its appendant territories as far as the Delvin, this alliance dominated eastern as well as northern Ireland. Only the previous year, it had triumphed over opposition within Ulster. The other, opposed, alliance consisted of Ruaidri Ua Conchobair, king of Connacht, Tigernán Ua Ruairí, king of Breifne, and Diarmait Ua Mail Shechnaill, king of Mide. It was the contemporary form of an ancient bond between the Clann Cholmain of Mide and the Connacht; all three principal kings within the alliance were termed Connachtach by the Annals of Tigernach in a striking and effective re-alignment of ancient political vocabulary. Both alliances thus had a geographical logic: the Connachtach in this new sense were essentially a central alliance embracing Connacht and the midlands of Ireland; the alliance headed by Mac Lochlann was a combination of ‘the North’, now extending far into the midland plain, thanks to Ua Cerbaill’s expansion, together with Leinster. Mide, and especially Eastern Mide, was the principal point of tension.

The sequence of events that led to the English invasion of Ireland began with an act of treachery at the very top, with the blinding of the king of Ulster by the king of Ireland. Eochaid Mac Duinn Shléibe, king of Ulster, had rebelled against Mac Lochlann in 1165, had been comprehensively defeated, and yet had been restored to his kingship through the good offices of Ua Cerbaill, who was his foster-father. Mac Lochlann and Mac Duinn Shléibe were feasting together at Mac Lochlann’s ‘Easter-house’ at Camus, an old church-site a few miles up the Bann from Coleraine. During the feast, Mac Lochlann took Mac Duinn Shléibe away into captivity and had him blinded. Ua Cerbaill promptly rebelled against Mac Lochlann and allied himself with Tigernán Ua Ruairí. He took troops from both their kingdoms and came upon Mac Lochlann in the south of what is now Co. Armagh; in the battle the king of Ireland was killed. Ruaidri Ua Conchobair, king of the Connachtach, was now the dominant ruler in Ireland, and he rapidly took full advantage of his opportunity.

One might have supposed that Diarmait Mac Murchada, king of Leinster, would himself have seen the implications of the death of his political patron, Mac Lochlann, and that he too would have been quick to submit to Ua Conchobair. After all, only fourteen years

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10 The most detailed account is in Mac Carthaigh’s Book, i.e. 1165 = 1166.
earlier, in 1152, Mac Murchada had been the ally of Ruaidrí's father, Tairdelbach Ua Conchobair, in an attack on Tigernán Ua Ruairc. This was the occasion of the notorious abduction by Mac Murchada of Tigernán Ua Ruairc's wife, Derbfhorgaill; the Annals of Clonmacnoise memorably, but questionably, described Mac Murchada as having 'kept her for a long space to satisfie his insatiable, carnall and adulterous lust', but he also seems to have wished to divide Tigernán Ua Ruairc from Derbfhorgaill's family, the Úi Mail Shechnaill of Meide, and to cause the maximum insult to Tigernán himself.

Yet there were reasons why it should have been impossible for Mac Murchada to make any easy settlement with the new regime. His own authority in Leinster had been sustained by a combination of some adroit alliances together with extreme violence towards his enemies. The most striking example was in 1141, when 'seventeen men of the royalty of Leinster were killed and blinded by Diarmait Mac Murchada'.

Prominent among his victims on that occasion were the principal royal lineages of northern Leinster, Úi Fhælán, Úi Muiredaig, and Úi Dunchada, the three branches of the Úi Dunlainge, which had dominated Leinster from the early eighth to the eleventh century. They were joined from central Leinster by three sons of Mac Gormáin, namely the ruler of the Úi Buirrche (around the modern town of Carlow). In addition to these former victims, the Hiberno-Scandinavian towns of Dublin and Wexford were also opposed to his rule; and even more implacable in opposition was the king of Osraige, Donnchad Mac Gilla Phátraic.

The divisions within Mac Murchada's Leinster were faithfully echoed by the two principal accounts of the English invasion from the standpoint of the invaders: the Expugnatio Hibernica of Gerald of Wales and The Song of Dermot and the Earl. For The Song, Diarmait Mac Murchada was 'the noble king, who was so renowned'; 'in Ireland at this time there was no king as worthy as he. He was very rich and magnificent; he loved the generous, hated the mean'. For Gerald, 'he oppressed his nobles, and raged against the chief men of his kingdom with a tyranny grievous and impossible to bear'. In 1166, Diarmait Mac Murchada's enemies within Leinster were quick to align themselves with Ruaidrí Ua Conchobair: 'and the son of Mac Fáeláin and Ua Conchobair Failgi came into the house of Ua Conchobair ... Mac Gilla Phátraic and the people of Osraige went into the house of Ua Conchobair and gave him their hostages'. At this point Mac Murchada's kingship hung in the balance: he was defeated and forced to submit to Ua Conchobair on humiliating terms, but he still had hostages from the Úi Fhailgi and the Úi Fhælán, even though they had also given hostages to Ua Conchobair. Yet one group of his allies, the Maic Bráenain, now killed the king of the Úi Dunchada, Mac Gilla Mo Cholmóc; according to the Annals of Tigernach (admittedly a hostile source), this outrage was committed at the instigation of Mac Murchada. The Úi Dunchada, however, were

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12 Expug., I.1.

15 Expug., I.1.
16 AT 1166.
17 Ibid.
18 The Maic Bráenain have been identified with the Úi Bráenain to whom Diarmait Mac Murchada's mother belonged. F. J. Byrne, The Trembling Sod: Ireland in 1169', in A New History of Ireland II: Medieval Ireland 1169–1534, ed. A.
situated just to the south of Dublin and were closely associated with its citizens. The ensuing rebellion against Mac Murchada therefore included the Dubliners: ‘the Leinstermen and the Foreigners (of Dublin) revolted against Mac Murchada on account of his own misdeeds’. Hostages were given by the Uí Fháeláin and Uí Fhailgi in the north and north-west of Leinster to Diarmaid Ua Mail Shechnaill, king of Mide, one of the three main figures in Ruaidrí Ua Conchobair’s alliance. As for Mac Murchada, he responded by killing the hostages of the Uí Fháeláin, including the son of their king, and the hostages of Osraige. The attack by Tigernán Ua Ruairc and Diarmaid Ua Mail Shechnaill on Mac Murchada, which drove him into exile, followed rapidly upon this breakdown of his authority in northern and western Leinster.

When Mac Murchada re-established his power in Leinster after his return from exile in August 1167, he naturally had to confront those kings in Leinster who had been only too glad to see him driven out, namely those whom The Song called ‘traitors’ and ‘felons’, meaning by the latter term men who had treacherously abandoned their sworn allegiance to their lord. The identity of these traitors is one of the two principal keys to the original infeudation of Leinster by Mac Murchada and then by Strongbow, the other being, naturally, strategic good sense. Initially, from August 1167 until the summer of 1169, Diarmaid had to accept that he only ruled lands belonging to the Uí Chéenselaig. The attacks on ‘the traitors’ had to wait until Robert fitz Stephen, Hervey de Montmorency and Maurice de Prendergast had landed at Bannow Bay in the summer of 1169. Once that had happened, Mac Murchada could proceed, step by step, to the

reduction, or at least the punishment, of his enemies: first, Wexford, and then, in turn, Osraige, Uí Fháeláin, Uí Muireadhaig, and then Osraige again.

Once Strongbow had landed on 23 August 1170, Mac Murchada’s ambition became more extensive. The new arrivals captured Waterford almost immediately, and Mac Murchada’s army was now in a position to take on another ‘traitor’, Dublin, ruled by Ascall mac Raghnaill meic Thorcaill. The city was captured on 21 September. This triumph enabled Mac Murchada to pursue a further round of attacks on his enemies, Uí Fháeláin and Osraige, but also to extend his campaign into Mide. This kingdom had been weakened further in 1169 by the killing of Diarmaid Ua Mail Shechnaill by his kinsman, Domnall Bregach, whereupon Ruaidrí Ua Conchobair had divided Mide between himself (the west) and Tigernán Ua Ruairc (the east). Mac Murchada’s campaign into Meath after the capture of Dublin induced Domnall Bregach, in need of a new patron after his killing of his kinsman Diarmaid Ua Mail Shechnaill, to submit to the king of Leinster. Mac Murchada was now back to where he had been in the days of his greatness: power, triumphant over his enemies within Leinster and in Dublin, and with a share of a dismembered Meath.

III. THE FIEFS GRANTED TO THE ENGLISH IN LEINSTER

In its account of the feuds granted to the English in Leinster, The Song presents an inconsistent tale. The main section is all in terms of what Earl Richard (Strongbow) gave to his principal vassals; and, yet, what brought them all to Ireland was Mac Murchada’s promise that ‘whoever shall wish for soil or for sod, richly shall I enfeof them’. This represents the Irish form of his name; for suggestions about the Norse form, see Expug., p. 303, n. 94. 21 Song, 3060–3127; Deeds, 3058–3125.

When Maurice fitz Gerald landed in Ireland, it was on the instructions of Mac Murchada that he established himself by building a castle at Carrick, just up the Slaney from Wexford; it was Mac Murchada, too, who entrusted Robert fitz Stephen with the custody of Wexford itself.\(^2\) Admittedly, after Mac Murchada’s death at the beginning of May 1171 and Henry II’s subsequent expedition to Ireland, many of the early arrangements had to be changed. Yet the broad disposition of the grants to the principal incomers recalls Mac Murchada’s agenda, and, in particular, the onslaught on ‘the traitors’.

We may leave aside Dublin and Wexford, since they were ultimately taken by Henry II. Otherwise, the principal traitors and the English recipients of their lands were as follows:

1. ‘The traitor Mac Faelán’, king of Úi Fháeláin (around Naas, Co. Kildare), the English grantee was, eventually, Maurice fitz Gerald (\(\text{Song}, \text{3086–91}; \text{Deeds}, \text{3084–9})\).\(^3\)

2. Gilla Comgail Úa Tuathail, king of Úi Muiredaig: his kingdom, which corresponded to the deanery of Omonth in the diocese of Glendalough, in the south of Co. Kildare, was split between two grantees: ‘Omorethi’ was given to Walter de Ridelisford (\(\text{Song}, \text{3096–9}; \text{Deeds}, \text{3094–7}; \text{Expag, II.23})\), while Narragh, alias Forrach Phàtraic, was given to Robert fitz Richard. Forrach Phàtraic or In Fhorrach (hence Norragh, Narragh) was an old vassal kingdom within Úi Muiredaig, and this explains why it could form a separate fief, even though it was included in the ecclesiastical deanery of Omonth and thus within the Úi Muiredaig kingdom as a whole.\(^4\)

\(^{21}\) \(\text{Song}/\text{Deeds, 1392–9}\).


\(^{26}\) \textit{Botha Phàtraic; the Tripartite Life of Patrick}, ed K. Mulchrone (Dublin, 1939), lines 2202–15; H. S. Sweetman and G. F. Handcock, \textit{Calendar of Documents Relating to
Map 1: Leinster Traitors

Map 2: The Leinster Fiefs
son of Diarmait Mac Murchada, regarded as king of Leinster. Two grants were made for straightforward reasons of strategy: the kingdom of Úi Baire again lay in the south of what is now Co. Wexford, adjacent to the landing-places of the invaders; it was granted to Hervey de Montmorency, close to Wexford, was given to Maurice de Prendergast and later to Robert Fitz Godipert. It is an indication of the reason for the grant of Ferann na Cenél that The Song expressly says that the grant was decided in Strongbow’s council before he ever came to Ireland. Presumably it must have been agreed with Mac Murchada that this territory would be among those granted to those knights who came to his aid; what remained to be settled in Strongbow’s council was which knight, in particular, would receive this crucial fief. One may probably go further and conclude that Mac Murchada’s promise in 1168 that he would generously enfeoff those desiring Irish lands was not some unspecific declaration. Instead it probably gave indications about

which lands would be available to be granted. It is easy then to see that the lands which might be mentioned were those, such as Ferann na Cenél and Úi Baire again, which were critical to the initial invasion, and the lands of ‘the traitors’.

The development of events was bound to compel some changes to the initial dispositions. In particular, Henry II’s intervention and his taking of Dublin, Wexford and Waterford into his own possession made some initial grants ineffective. Robert Fitz Stephen had been granted Wexford by Diarmait Mac Murchada; he ended up holding lands in Cork. Secondly, once Diarmait had died in May 1171, his particular enmities were no longer of such consequence. The Song has a list of Strongbow’s Irish allies immediately after the death of Mac Murchada in 1171: they include old allies, such as Domnall Càemánach, son of Mac Murchada, Ua Mórdha, the principal ruler of Laichsi (opposed to Mac Gilla Phàtraic of Osraige and thus well-disposed to Mac Murchada), Mac Dalbaig and Mac Gilla Mo Cholmóc; but it also contained former enemies, such as Mac Gilla Phàtraic of Osraige, Mac Fàeláin of Ua Fhàeláin, Ua Diúmsaig of Ua Fhailg, and Mac Murchada’s nephew, Muirchertach, son of the Murchad whom Ruaidrí Ua Conchobair and Tigernán Ua Ruairí had put into power in Leinster in 1166. At this stage, even in some areas granted out to English lords, Irish kings continued alongside the new rulers. This ‘parallel lordship’ is recognized in The Song, when it declares that Strongbow granted the kingdom of Úi Chennselaig to Muirchertach Mac Murchada but entrusted ‘the pleas of Leinster to Diarmait’s son, Domnall Càemánach’, while both Muirchertach and Domnall ‘were called kings

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28 AT and AFM disagree on the form of the name of Domnall Càemánach’s killers: ‘Domnall Caemnach Mac Murchada, ri Laigen, do marbad la Huib Niallain’, AT; ‘Domhnall Caemhánach mac Diarmata, ri Leigheen do mháradh la Hua Foirtecharn na Hua Nualláin i fíoll’, AFM. It is usually assumed that the Four Masters were correct (although, for another possibility, see Expug., p. 294, n. 32).

29 Song, 3070–1; Deeds, 3068–9. This was the territory of Ua Lorcaigh, who seems to have continued as ‘Irish king’ in a relationship which may be described as ‘parallel lordship’. Song, 3217; Deeds, 3215. It seems to have included the neighbouring kingdom of Fothairt Mara/Fothairt in Chain: Topographical Poems by Saide Mor Ó Dubhghaill and Grida-na-Naomh Ó Haidhein, ed. J. Carney (Dublin, 1943), lines 1093–6.

30 Song, 3074–7; Deeds, 3070–5. This territory was also known as Fir na Cenél, ‘The Men of the (Three) Kindreds’, as in Corpus Genealogiarum Hiberniae, ed. M. A. O’Brien (Dublin, 1962), §316, 22–4 (p. 344), after the descendants of three sons of Enda Cennsalach.


32 Expug., II.20 and n. 332.

33 Song, 3208–21; Deeds, 3206–19.

by the Irish of that country. The notion of Domnall Cáemáinach having charge of the pleas of Leinster recalls earlier Irish conceptions of sharing authority between two dynasties: when one held the kingship of Munster, the other would hold the office of judge of the province. In any event, Domnall Cáemáinach was recognized as king of Leinster in his obit in the Annals of Tigernach, while he, his uncle Murchad and the latter's son Muirchertach are all in the regnal list of kings of the province in the contemporary Book of Leinster.

IV. MEATH, NOT LEINSTER, AS A LAND OF CASTLES
When writing about the summer of 1181, ten years after the death of Diarmait Mac Murchada, Gerald of Wales described the building of numerous castles by Hugh de Lacy, John de Lacy, constable of Chester, and Richard de Pec. He observed that 'hitherto very many castles had been built in Meath, but few in Leinster'. After Hugh had been restored to full authority the following winter, a further programme of castle-building was undertaken, including several in Leinster.

The contrast made by Gerald between Meath and Leinster can be supported by the testimony of The Song. As we have seen, its account of the infeudation of Leinster is in terms of grants of former Irish

35 *Song*, 2185–90; *Deeds*, 2183–8.
38 *Expug.*, II.23. Among the few would have been some built in the very early days by the English, such as the castle at Ferrycarrig, *Song/Deeds*, 1396–9; the castle at Wicklow (*Expug.*, I.44, II.4) may originally have been a Scandinavian construction: *Expug.*, p. 330, n. 288. The policy of castle-building was encouraged by Henry II: *Expug.*, I.37 and n. 184.

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kingdoms. Furthermore, when Gerald described castle-building in Leinster, it was largely in terms of castles built for new English lords within former Irish kingdoms:

First a castle was built for Raymond among the Fothairt Ua Núalláin and another for his brother Gruffudd; a third castle was built at Disert Diarmata in Ul Muireadaig for Walter de Ridelsford. Castle-building in Leinster reinforced a political authority which had survived for a decade largely without castles. When *The Song* described the infeudation of Meath by Hugh de Lacy, however, only a minority of the fiefs bore the name of former Irish kingdoms, whereas the list begins with two castles:

He first gave Castleknock to Hugh Tyrrell, whom he loved greatly, and he gave Castell Bret, according to the text, to Baron William Petit.

*The Song* concludes this section with another castle, built by Richard Fleming at Slane, one of the principal churches of East Meath:

He built a motte
in order to harass his enemies.
He maintained knights and good forces in it,
both archers and men-at-arms,
in order to destroy his enemies.

39 *Expug.*, II.23.
40 Makerigalín (*Song*, 3143; *Deeds*, 3141) is Machaire Gaileng, 'the open land of the Gailenga', a territory which had been held by Ua Ragalláig, as shown by the Kells Charters (*Notitia ex Leabhar Chanannais*, 1033–1161, ed. G. Mac Niocaill (Dublin, 1961), nos. IX, XI), and yet Ua Ragalláig was one of the few staunch allies of Mac Murchada and later the English (*Song* 1740; *Deeds*, 1738); this indicates that less account was taken of previous allegiances in Meath than in Leinster; for the two castles see *Song*, 3132–6; *Deeds*, 3130–4; the phrase 'according to the text', 'solum l'escrit', has reasonably been taken as indicating that the author of *The Song* made use of an earlier document (*Deeds*, p. 35).
41 *Song*, 3178–83; *Deeds*, 3176–80.
The Song concludes its narrative of the siege of Slane with the words:

Know, then, that in this manner
the country was planted
with castles and fortified towns
and keeps and strongholds,
so that the noble and renowned vassals
were able to put down firm roots.42

It is easy to quote this passage as if it were a summary of how English Ireland was conquered.43 Yet this is oversimplified: first, we have already seen that Meath, not Leinster, was the land of castles; secondly, The Song itself made a distinction for this portrait of a resoundingly military conquest, it went on immediately to say:

Moreover, the earl had already conquered
his Leinster enemies,
for on his side he had Muirechertach
and Domnall Clemanach,
Mac Donnchada and Mac Dalbaig44

and so on for another five lines of Irish kings. Meath was held by building castles, whose garrisons plundered the Irish in the province; Leinster was held because enough Irish rulers gave their allegiance to Strongbow; their hostages he held ‘according to the ancient custom’.45

The contrast between Leinster and Meath is not, however, absolute, especially once castle-building had got under way in Leinster

after Strongbow’s death in 1176 and after Hugh de Lacy had begun to organize the construction of castles in the province from 1181. One of those built for the new English lords within Leinster was ‘the castle he built for Meilyr at Timahoe in the province of Laichsi’.46 Timahoe, Tech Mo Chua, was one of the most important early churches in Laichsi. Similarly, the castle built by Hugh for Walter de Ridelisford, the lord of Ui Muiredaig, was at Disert Diarmata, a major ninth-century foundation in the far south of the kingdom.47 In Meath, as we saw at the outset, it was almost the norm to build castles on significant church sites: Hugh de Lacy, ‘the profaner and destroyer of many churches’, was killed in 1186 when admiring his newly-built castle at Durrow;48 any visitor to Clonmacnois is likely to notice the forbidding castle perched on its motte just to the south of the main monastic remains.49

A number of reasons may be given for this tendency to place castles by churches. Sometimes it may have been the product of ‘parallel lordship’, when the old Irish ruling family remained in its principal territory, while the site chosen for the new castle was, as an ancient church-site, an alternative focus. Timahoe in Laichsi may be an example, since the main lands of Ua Morda, listed by The Song among those loyal to Strongbow, were probably further north, on the Heath of Maryborough.50 On the other hand, some churches had long been major centres of royal power: the Ui Mol Machnall kings of Mide appear to have had a house at Durrow, where some of their ancestors had been buried since the eighth century; the lay or semi-lay

42 Song, 3202–7; Deeds, 3200–5.
44 Song, 3208–21; Deeds, 3206–19.
45 Song, 3221; Deeds, 3219.
46 Expag., II.23.
47 Hid.
48 AFM 1186.
49 The motte was constructed in 1213 according to ACIon.
50 Song, 3213; Deeds, 3211; the Heath of Maryborough is likely to be the heart of Mag Réta, their principal territory: Bethu Phuirais, ed. Mulchrone, 2263–70.
clients of the monastery also provided a military force. The principal monasteries were also proto-urban settlements capable of supplying the needs of a garrison. Yet perhaps the major reason was that the early English colonists in Ireland largely lived off plunder and the major monasteries were among the richest places in the country.

V. REASONS FOR THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN LEINSTER AND MEATH

There are, therefore, points of similarity between the English presence in Leinster, especially after Strongbow's death in 1176, and the policies of Hugh de Lacy after he was granted Meath. Yet these are outweighed by the contrasts and the reasons for the latter must now be explored. Two principal explanations suggest themselves. The first is the long-term decline of the Úi Mhaille Shechnaill lineage, the ruling branch of the Clann Cholmáin dynasty which had dominated Mide (Meath) since the seventh century. Ever since the death of Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill in 1022 - 'the fierce-hearted Úa Mhaille Shechnaill son of Colmán, the great king who was so well bred and courtly' - his descendants had struggled with great difficulty to retain their lands and power. Whatever Mac Murchada's excesses and misfortunes, the provincial kingship of Leinster, by contrast, was not in long-term danger in the mid-twelfth century. On the contrary, it was one of the powerful neighbours bidding to profit from the weakness of Meath. The Úa Mhaille Shechnaill, however, were suffering territorial attrition from Tigernán Úa Ruairc, king of Bréifne, from Donnchad Úa Cernaill, king of Airgialla, and, as we have just seen, from Diarmait Mac Murchada, king of Leinster. A more remote threat was the Úa Conchobair dynasty of the Connachta. In 1169, the same year as Mac Murchada retook Leinster, one of his enemies, Diarmait Úa Mhaille Shechnaill, king of Meath, was killed by a kinsman, Domnall Bregach. Úa Conchobair responded by expelling Domnall Bregach, dividing Mide into two, keeping the western part for himself, and giving the eastern to Tigernán Úa Ruairc. Domnall Bregach reacted by submitting to Mac Murchada in 1170, only to transfer his allegiance to Tigernán Úa Ruairc after Mac Murchada's death in 1171. Gerald was thus within his rights to call Úa Ruairc king of Meath: the bitterest enemy of Mac Murchada and his English friends was now established within a few miles of Dublin.

It was hardly surprising that Henry II should grant Meath to Hugh de Lacy before he left Ireland; and yet, by doing so, he ensured that the Treaty of Windsor, which he would make with Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair in 1175, was unworkable, for any genuine high-kingship of Ireland could only exist if the holder had power in the central province, Meath. The reasons for the requirement that power be exercised in Meath are not just respect for ancient tradition but strategic necessity. Admittedly, Ruaidrí Úa Conchobair was quick to display his newly-won authority by holding the ancient Fair of Tailtiu in the old province of Brega, now part of East Meath. Yet, because Meath now stretched from the Shannon to the Irish Sea, across two-thirds of the centre of Ireland, because it included some of the most

51 AC Ion 1153 (and cf. AU 1030.10; 1123.1); AFM 758 = 763, AU 764.6.
52 Exspg., II.1; AT 1172 (first entry).
53 Song/Deeds, 35–7 (Colmán is probably from the old name of the dynasty, Clann Cholmáin, as Orpen points out in his note).
54 For Úa Ruairc, see Notitiae, ed. Mac Niocaill, nos. VII, IX, XI, and AFM 1144; for Úa Cernaill, Mac Carthaigh's Book, n.a. 1167.5; for Mac Murchada, AFM 1144.
55 AFM 1169.
56 AT 1170; AFM 1171.
58 AT 1167, 1168.
fertile land in the country, and because it was immediately adjacent to Dublin, the most important of the Hiberno-Norse towns, any claim to dominate Ireland would be absurd if the claimant did not first dominate Meath. Ancient tradition, suitably reinterpreted to fit twelfth-century conditions in Meath, can be seen in the way a source close to Ua Conchobair conceptualized the alliance on which his power rested. The annal for 1166 in the Annals of Tigernach begins with an entry on a campaign undertaken by the king of the Connacht to establish his position as king of Ireland in the aftermath of Mac Lochlainn’s death: ‘A hosting by Ruaidrí Ua Conchobair with the nobles of the Connacht in his company, namely Tigernán Ua Ruairc and Diarmait Ua Mail Shechnaill’. As was pointed out above, this represented a crucial redefinition of the Irish dynastic landscape. The rulers of Meath were now held to be as much Connacht as was Ua Conchobair himself; and, although the justification for this might be ancient tradition, cleverly adjusted, the import was accurate and contemporary. The power of Ua Conchobair rested on an alliance with Ua Ruairc and Ua Mail Shechnaill, the two most powerful rulers in Meath.

The second reason for the difference between Meath and Leinster lies in the basis on which the new English lords received their lands. Hugh de Lacy received Meath because Henry II claimed to be king of Ireland; for him, this entailed the right to grant the lands of Ireland to whomsoever he wished. Lacy could set about constructing a new Meath, one based on the east rather than the west. Meath had long been divided in this way: the great monastery of Clonard could be taken as the centre point, so that west of Clonard was West Meath, east of Clonard was East Meath.50 East Meath to a large extent continued the early Irish territory of Brega, but it also included the eastern fringes of the old Mide.61 The main centres of Ua Mail Shechnaill power lay in West Meath around Lough Ennell. On the rough the island fortress of Cró-Inis was situated, and a short distance to the east was Rubae Conaill; the two were presented by the twelfth-century Life of Colmán of Lann (by Mullingar) as twin royal centres of Meath.62 Lacy reversed this relationship, which had endured since the eighth century, by establishing his main centre at Trim, an old church in the minor kingdom of Cenél Lóegain.63 A castle was built at Rubae Conaill, as shown by charter evidence, but it was not reckoned worthy of mention either by The Song or by Gerald.64 The source of Lacy’s authority was external and the geography of his power undid four centuries of history: he was indeed ‘a stranger in sovereignty’.65

The situation in Leinster was quite different: the first English settlers gained their lands by the will of Mac Murachada, king of the province. The earliest geography of English power can be explained by Mac Murchada’s agenda, in particular by his wish to destroy the power of his principal enemies. The disloyalty of those enemies was, Lough Ennell: AFM 1144.

50 Hence it included Tlachtga, where Tigernán Ua Ruairc was killed in 1172 (AT, Exprg, I.41).
52 Song, 3222–9; Deeds, 3220–7.
54 For this term, see AFM 1144 on the killing of Conchobar mac Toirrdelbaig, where O'Donovan translates ‘uir ba ri eachtair cheneoil las i bheith sionn i righe uis fearaibh Midhe’ as ‘for he considered him as a stranger in sovereignty over the people of Meath’ (literally ‘for in his opinion a king of a foreign kindred was ruling over the men of Meath’).
in the eyes of the author of *The Song*, full justification for their disinheri
tance and thus for Mac Murchada’s grants to new vassals who were steadfastly loyal to ‘Diarmait, the noble king’. Moreover, it has been shown that these new grants fell into a pattern which went back to the early days of Mac Murchada’s reign: he had established his foster-kinsman Ua Caellaide as ruler of the Osraige kingdom of Uí Buide, on the west side of the River Barrow; Ua Lorcán, a branch of Uí Muiredaig, had been made ruler of Uí Bairrche Mara and Fothairt Mara (the south of Co. Wexford); he had given the Dubthar (Duffry) in central southern Leinster to a cadet branch of Uí Fháeláin.66 By the will of the king of Leinster several strangers in sovereignty were established in power.

VI. MAC MURCHADA AND STRONGBOW
This willingness to flout the claims of inheritance has been invoked to explain what is, without doubt, the greatest puzzle about Mac Murchada and the English:67 what did he promise to Strongbow in exchange for his help? For Gerald and for *The Song* the answer was not in question: he promised to give his daughter Aife to Strongbow in marriage, and with her the succession to the kingship of Leinster.68 In the household of Henry II – and Gerald of Wales gained his experience of Ireland through being a royal clerk – it was beyond controversy that a kingdom could pass from one dynasty to another by marriage; after all, Henry II was the son of Geoffrey, count of Anjou, who had married Matilda, daughter of Henry I. Yet the

66 Byrne, *The Trembling Sod*, p. 28.
68 ‘Dermius comitii cum regni successione filiam suam primogenitam firmiter pepigisset’, *Expiog.*, I.2. ‘He offered him his daughter as a wife, the person he held dearest in the world; he would give her to him as his wife and he would give him Leinster, provided that he would help him to win it back’, *Song/Deeds*, 340–5.

validity of such a rule of succession had been controversial even in England within living memory: the majority of English barons had not accepted Matilda’s claim in 1135, and Theobald, archbishop of Canterbury, had been quite prepared to crown and anoint Stephen (himself, admittedly, descended from the Conqueror through his mother). Moreover, it had been controversial outside the succession to the kingship.69 And, even if one were to grant that the law of the English king had validity in Ireland before that king ever set foot in the island, that would not be enough: Gerald was careful to claim that Aife was Diarmait’s eldest daughter, but when an inheritance passed to daughters, English law partitioned it between them.

Moreover, when Mac Murchada had his conversation with Strongbow, his sons Enda and Conchobor were still alive; and if Domnall Càenmà’naich, who outlived Diarmait, was regarded by Gerald as illegitimate, he was nonetheless evidently acknowledged by his father and was regarded by Irish sources as king of Leinster at his death in 1175.70 That Mac Murchada had been prepared to establish strangers in sovereignty in kingdoms subject to him does not imply that he was willing to disinherit his own kindred. Scotland is sometimes cited as a parallel, but David I and his grandsons enfeoffed knights to protect their dynasty not to subvert it.

69 See the reply of Miles de Beauchamp to King Stephen in *Gesta Stephani*, ed. K. R. Potter and R. H. C. Davis (Oxford, 1976), pp. 48/49.
70 *EXP*, I.3 (Drennaldh naturais eisdom filir; cf. *Song/Deeds*, 620–1: ‘he was the son of the king of Leinster, as I understand’, which may suggest some doubt about his paternity rather than the distinct issue of illegitimacy); AT, AFM 1175. Cf. B. Jaski’s discussion in his *Early Irish Kingship and Succession* (Dublin, 2000), p. 154, which, however, may not give sufficient weight to the distinction between what Gerald meant by illegitimacy, namely that Diarmait was not married to Domnall Càenmà’naich’s mother, and what might have harmed his claims in Irish eyes, namely that his mother was unfree (for which there is no evidence).
admittedly, the major Irish kings were prepared to attempt to intrude kings into other provinces, as Toirdelbach Ua Conchobair had made his son Conchobar king of Leinster in 1126.21 But, again, such attempts were made by major kings in order to extend the power of their own dynasties, not to curtail it. Furthermore, we have seen already that the plan envisaged the establishment of Strongbow and his leading supporters in northern Leinster in the lands of the principal ‘traitors’. When he had handed over Dublin to Henry II, Strongbow based himself in Kildare, the leading church of northern Leinster.22 If he were to succeed to Leinster in the way envisaged by Gerald and The Song, the power of the Uí Chennselaig, the leading dynasty of southern Leinster, would have been undone by a king of the Uí Chennselaig. The principal traitors might have been killed, subjugated or driven into exile, but their part of Leinster would regain its former preeminence. All these considerations make it difficult to believe that Mac Murchada intended Strongbow to succeed him as king of Leinster.23

A solution has been proposed by Professor Byrne which draws strength from Gerald’s report of a secret conversation in the winter of 1169–70 between Mac Murchada, Robert fitz Stephen and Maurice fitz Gerald (uncle to Gerald of Wales).24 In his report of this conversation, Gerald wrote that:

Mac Murchada now raised his sights to higher things and, now that he had recovered his entire inheritance, he aspired to his ancestral and long-standing rights, and he determined, by the use of armed might, to bring under his control Connacht, together with the kingship of all Ireland.25

The suggestion is that Mac Murchada planned to become king of Ireland and could thus grant Leinster to Strongbow without disinheriting his own kindred. Even though Strongbow and his descendants might hold the kingship of Leinster, the Maic Murchada of Uí Chennselaig would be a new royal dynasty of all Ireland.

Before this solution can be rendered persuasive, however, certain difficulties need to be tackled. First, Gerald does not treat Mac Murchada as feeling himself bound by his promise to Strongbow: after his conversation with Strongbow, he apparently offered his daughter to both fitz Stephen and fitz Gerald, again with the prospect of inheriting Leinster.26 Secondly, if Gerald is to be believed, Mac Murchada’s wider ambition to extend his conquest beyond Leinster was voiced only in 1169–70. This was after he had had clear evidence in the campaigns of 1169 that, with his English knights, he could defeat the armies of his enemies. When he had his earlier conversation with Strongbow, he was still an exile and his ambition was to recover Leinster. Finally, Mac Murchada cannot even have pretended to believe that, once he had left his ancestral province of Leinster to Strongbow, any of his sons would have a territorial base from which to enforce a claim to the kingship of Ireland. When Gerald wrote that Mac Murchada offered his daughter in turn to fitz Stephen and fitz Gerald ‘with the right of succession to his kingdom’, the word ‘kingdom’ may be taken to refer to the one Gerald had last mentioned – ‘the kingdom of all Ireland’.27

These objections require the theory to be modified. The first

21 AT 1126, an example cited by Flanagan, Irish Society, Anglo-Norman Settlers, p. 91.
22 Song, 2696, 2769–72; Deeds, 2694, 2767–70; AT 1172 (‘for muintir in Iada i Cill Dara’).
23 For a defence of the claim made by The Song and by Gerald, see Flanagan, Irish Society, Anglo-Norman Settlers, pp. 79–111.
24 Byrne, ‘The Trembling Sod’, p. 28.
25 Expug., I.12.
26 Ibid.; the promise to Strongbow was reported in I.2.
27 Expug., I.12; this argument is not affected by Gerald’s use of monarchia for the kingship of Ireland and regnum for the kingdom he would leave to Aife’s husband.
modification arises from the way in which leading Irish kings were prone to gain support by allowing potential rivals to bear titles which might be taken to have wider implications on the ground than was actually the case. An example is the combination of Brian Bórama and Mael Sechnaill mac Domnaill, the former as king of Ireland, the latter as king of Tara.\textsuperscript{78} It is conceivable that Mac Murchada envisaged some such arrangement. Moreover, this might have been consistent with the parallel lordship quite often found within the early territories acquired by the English in Ireland, as when Domnall Càemánach, called king of Leinster by the Annals of Tigernach, was said by \textit{The Song} to have been entrusted with ‘the pleas of Leinster’ and to have been entitled a king by the Leinstermen.\textsuperscript{79} What Mac Murchada intended is best understood through the actual distribution of authority in the months between the capture of Dublin in September 1170 and his own death in May 1171. What happened was that Strongbow appointed Miles de Cogan as his governor in Dublin, and Mac Murchada and Strongbow then mounted campaigns in Uí Fháeláin, Osraige and, most importantly, in Meath. This raises the possibility that what Mac Murchada offered was the kingdom of Dublin. Indeed, Roger of Howden, who, as a royal servant, might be expected to know something of the issues at stake, described Mac Murchada, as king of Dublin, granting the kingdom of Dublin – apparently as dowry – with his daughter.\textsuperscript{80} The arrangement with

\textsuperscript{78} AU 1014.2.

\textsuperscript{79} \textit{Song}, 2187–90; \textit{Deeds}, 2185–8.

\textsuperscript{80} Roger of Howden, \textit{Chronica}, ed. W. Stubbs, 4 vols., Rolls Series 51 (London, 1868–71), I, 269: ‘Richard Earl of Striguil, assembled a great army, invaded Ireland, and subdued a very great part of it, with the assistance of Miles de Cogan, a warlike man; and when he had made an agreement with the king of Dublin, he married his daughter and received with her the kingdom of Dublin.’ Cf. Flanagan, \textit{Irish Society, Anglo-Norman Settlers}, p. 68, n. 4. It is not necessary to suppose that \textit{regnum Dixebnias} was merely a synonym for the kingdom of Leinster, although, if there was some confusion, it would make it all the easier to claim that Strongbow was promised Leinster: Mac Murchada was \textit{rí Láigin 7 Gall}, ‘the king of the Leinstermen \textit{and} the Foreigners’ (AT 1171; by Gall here the annalist means the Hiberno-Norse of Dublin).

\textsuperscript{81} AT 1070.2, 1075.3, 4: \textit{The Annals of Inisfallen} (MS. Rawlinson B 503), ed. S. Mac Airt (Dublin, 1951). It may also be relevant that AT 1176, in its obit for Strongbow, described him as ‘earl of Dublin’, \textit{iarla Aitha Cliath}.

\textsuperscript{82} \textit{Expug.}, I.19–20.

\textsuperscript{83} For the latter, see \textit{Expug.}, I.1: ‘susceptisque ab ipso [sc. Mac Murchada] tam subsecionis vinculo quam fidelitatis sacramento’ (the same terminology is used of the subjection of the Irish kings in L.33); \textit{Song/Deeds}, 286–7: ‘I will become
entitled to warrant the tenure of English lordships within Leinster other than his own: this may explain why The Song insisted on the conception of a subinfeudation of Leinster by Strongbow, even in cases when the original grants were made by Mac Murchada, and yet also made much of Mac Murchada as the king wrongfully betrayed by the Irish and restored to his inheritance by his faithful English knights. This is essentially how The Song perceived the legitimacy of the presence of the English in Ireland. The further justifications presented by Gerald—papal bulls, prophecies of Merlin and Moling, conquests by British kings of doubtful historicity even for Gerald—were probably important for some; but The Song’s view is likely to be much closer to the beliefs of those who did the fighting for Mac Murchada and his successors. Its deep interest in Mac Murchada and, more generally, in Leinster makes it likely that it was composed for performance before an audience of the English settlers in Leinster.

The differences between the map of Strongbow’s Leinster and Lacy’s Meath are now explicable. Strongbow’s Leinster still bore the imprint of Mac Murchada’s Leinster, since that, in large part, is what it was—still in all but name a provincial kingship divided between old Irish kingdoms. It was a province which, unlike Meath, was not yet ‘planted with castles and fortified towns and keeps and strongholds, so that the noble and renowned vassals were able to put down firm roots’. The vassals of Strongbow had usually put down firm roots by the will of Mac Murchada himself. What transformed the English presence in Ireland into an attempted conquest was Henry II’s expedition, the ‘eighteen weeks, neither more nor less’ that ‘the duke of Normandy remained in Ireland’. The proposed solution is, therefore, that the earliest English settlement of Leinster was determined by Mac Murchada’s agenda. He probably offered the kingdom of Dublin to Strongbow as his daughter’s dowry in exchange for recovering Leinster; he did not offer succession to the kingdom of Leinster. Such men as Raymond le Gros and Maurice Fitz Gerald were, in the first place, Mac Murchada’s vassals for their Irish lands, not Strongbow’s. Mac Murchada’s introduction of English lords as rulers of Irish kingdoms continued his earlier policy by which he planted external Irish dynasties into kingdoms with which they had no hereditary connection. Henry II, however, would not accept that Strongbow should become king of Dublin. He made this position clear by actual measures, as well as threats, before the death of Mac Murchada—at a period, therefore, when Strongbow had gained authority over Dublin but had not yet claimed to be the ruler of Leinster. When Mac Murchada died around 1 May 1171, the position of the English in Ireland was threatened from two sides: the Leinstermen regarded Muirchertach mac Murchada, Diarmait’s nephew, as their new king, and there was no reason to suppose that he would confirm the English in their lordships; Henry II had ordered the English to leave Ireland, probably in part after Irish envoys had complained about their actions. In the event, however, Henry II was most anxious to deprive Strongbow of the coastal towns, especially Dublin. His primary concerns were in direct contradiction to Mac Murchada’s promise to Strongbow. The answer was to claim that Mac Murchada had promised Leinster, not just Dublin, and that Leinster should be

\begin{quote}
your liege man for as long as I live.’ Whatever the actual undertaking was, it was bound to be interpreted as full homage by the English after Mac Murchada’s death.
\end{quote}

\begin{enumerate}
\item \textbf{Song}, 2678–80; \textbf{Deeds}, 2676–8.
\item \textbf{Song}, 1742–45; \textbf{Deeds}, 1740–3.
\end{enumerate}
held of the king of England. This was possibly aided by confusion in English minds between ‘the kingdom of Dublin’ and ‘the kingdom of Leinster’. In any event, Strongbow as lord of Leinster could guarantee the feuds of men who were now unambiguously his vassals. In Meath, however, the situation was quite different: Henry II’s primary motive may have been to prevent Strongbow from conquering Meath and becoming a new high-king, but what Hugh de Lacy undertook was a straightforward military conquest.

‘Never the Twain Shall Meet’? East and West in the Characterization of Conchobar mac Nessa

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INTRODUCTION
This paper must begin with a clarification. Far from heralding a discussion of representations of the Occident and the Orient in tales featuring Conchobar mac Nessa and their impact upon his characterization, the ‘East’ and ‘West’ of this paper’s title are no more than metaphoric, alluding to two starkly contrasting depictions of Conchobar mac Nessa from the early modern Irish period. These characterizations – one of exemplary munificence, and one of equal depravity – demand attention. The Early Modern Irish text Oídeadh Chloinne hUisnigh depicts Conchobar mac Nessa manipulating his warriors’ gessi, winning over the allies of the sons of Uisneach with bribes and using his mendacious eloquence to convince Cathbad to defeat his opposition by means of magic; on the basis of this portrayal, Conchobar has been described as ‘one of the most Machiavellian characters in Irish literature’. The second depiction current in the early modern period is encapsulated in the poem written between

1560 and 1580 by Domhnall Mac Daire in honour of Padraig Mac Muiris, eldest son of Thomas Fitzmaurice, sixteenth Lord of Kerry and Baron of Lixnaw. This poem depicts the touching scene wherein the infant king is being taught generosity by his mother. Needless to say, Conchobar proves an attentive pupil and is seen as the ultimate symbol of regal largesse, a king whose rule rests on his liberality:

Fúair sáormhac Fhachtna Flathaigh ór chan fúis a rioghmháthair –
féile an leinbh gá chora i grion – a thogha i seilbh na sínnsior.2

These two ideas of Conchobar occur frequently in the literature of the early modern period. He is frequently employed in the apolologies of bardic poetry, often symbolising the ideal king whose reign rests on generosity and martial might, and less frequently in depictions more reminiscent of that found in Oided Mac nUisnig. In addition, both types of representation feature in the writings of Geoffrey Keating.3 It is clear, therefore, that the character of Conchobar underwent no crystallisation at the hands of a Geoffrey of Monmouth. In an effort to understand these late contradictory representations, this paper will consider treatments of Conchobar in the earlier medieval material. It is hoped that a character-analysis of such a prominent figure in medieval Irish literature will serve to illuminate some of the approaches to and concepts of characterization current at the time.

Conchobar appears in forty-four of seventy-two tales of the Ulster Cycle.4 These appearances demonstrate that Conchobar’s character is hallmarked by a number of unusual features. Most commonly identified by his matronymic, there are two conflicting traditions of his paternity, and accounts of his familial relationships are further complicated by allusions to incest with both his sister and, in later tradition, with his mother. There are a number of divergent accounts of how he assumed his kingship; instances of underhand dealings to obtain and maintain power sit uneasily alongside accounts claiming him to be a paragon of kingship, and on occasion, the first Christian in Ireland whose faith pre-empted the advent of Christianity there. For reasons of space and time, this analysis will be far more superficial than the material warrants. I propose to limit myself today to a consideration of particular texts that exemplify the diverse treatments of Conchobar in the medieval period and which might be seen as the sources for the later polarised depictions.

CONCHOBAR AS KING

This assessment of Conchobar’s characterization will focus on his kingship. It is immediately obvious that the first set of associations triggered by Conchobar’s appearance in a text would have to do with his status as king and his location. There is one example of a tale, Immacalidim in Dá Thuarad, a tenth-century poetic text, where the sole use of the character is to set the scene.

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4 Details of these appearances are supplied in the Appendix. Though a somewhat problematic term, the ‘Ulster Cycle’ will be used throughout this paper.
DEPICTIONS OF CONCHOBAR’S ASSUMPTION OF POWER

There are three distinct strata of tradition surrounding Conchobar’s assumption of kingship. The eighth-century Compert Conchobuir and

5 ‘The Colloquy of the Two Sages’, ed. and trans. W. Stokes, RC 26 (1905), 4–64, at 15, §10: ‘The place then of the colloquy it is Emain Macha. The time then of it is the time of Conchobar mac Nessa’.


Although this is the only tale that uses Conchobar for this purpose alone, five other texts open with a statement that at the time of the action, Conchobar was king in Emain Macha. Therefore, it can be assumed that these references were signposts to a literary milieu understood by author and audience alike. It would appear that as early as the eighth century, these statements functioned as an acknowledgement of an understood status quo, a jumping-off point for the action of the story. However, if the fundamental associations made by audiences were in relation to his physical location and social status, what, if any, other expectations were evoked by the appearance of Conchobar in a text? To this end, I will investigate to what extent there are homogeneous depictions of behavioural patterns and moral characteristics in the tales detailing Conchobar’s assumption of power, an episode which might be expected to encapsulate authorial attitudes towards Conchobar’s kingship.

7 T. Ó Cathasaigh, ‘Some Reflections on Compert Conchobuir and Serglige Con Culann’, in Ulidia, ed. Mallory and Stockman, pp. 85–9, ed. and trans. at pp. 85–6: ‘The druid swore by gods that it was true; a son who was begotten at that hour would be over Ireland’.

8 Ibid., p. 86: ‘Three years and three months the child was in her womb’.

9 Forbhais Droma Dámhghair: the Siege of Knocklong, ed. and trans. S. Ó Duinn (Cork, 1992) depicts both Cormac mac Airt and Fiachu Muillethan are depicted as the results of seven-month pregnancies.

10 ‘Tidings’, ed. and trans. Stokes, p. 22, §4: ‘A wonderful birth would be born with Christ’s birth on that stone yonder upon which Conchobar was born and his name was famous in Ireland’. See also ibid., p. 19: ‘Parturition on a stone (clocch) is mentioned in §4. So S. Patrick was born on a flagstone (lece), Trip. Life, p. 8. The idea may perhaps have been that the babe might absorb the valuable properties of the stone (stability, solidity, etc.)’.

11 Ibid., p. 22, §3, ‘...that is the afore-mentioned Cathbad, until he came between

the early twelfth-century Seóla Conchobair meic Nessa constitute one strand of tradition, sharing the central idea that Ness and Cathbad are the parents of Conchobar. In the earlier text Ness decides to become pregnant by Cathbad on hearing his prophecy that a son conceived at that hour would rule over Ireland: ‘As-noi in draf dar deu ba fir; mac do-génta ind air sin for-biad Héirinn.’ In this short text, Ness’s pregnancy is remarkable for its duration: ‘Boi a ngín fó brú trí mís for teorib blíadnaíb’. Ness’s three year and three month pregnancy can be understood to mark Conchobar out as a figure destined for greatness. Seóla Conchobair contains an account of the birth with similar overtones: Conchobar’s birth is delayed by his mother’s sitting on a rock to await an auspicious time to give birth.

More significant, however, is that the account of Conchobar’s birth in Séílía Conchobair takes a rather ambiguous stance on the validity of his kingship. Cathbad is here portrayed as a warrior, and this martial strength is manifested in his rape of Ness, here a female champion. The introduction of this rape might be seen to change
considerably the dynamics of this pairing, although Ness’s power and calculating nature reassert themselves in her dealings with Fergus when she agrees to marry him on condition that Conchobar is made king temporarily.


This incident forms the first of the irregular steps towards Conchobar’s kingship. The second is the garnering of support for him through his mother’s rather dubious policy of stripping every second man in the kingdom of his wealth, and granting this wealth to the champions of the Ulaid.13 Thus, Conchobar emerges as a puppet king manipulated by his mother, and as a king whose regal status has been endorsed on the basis of a false manifestation of fir flatha, the

them and spears, until that they came together, and until that she was his loving wife, and until that she bore a son to him. That son then was namely Conchobar mac Cathbad’. For a parallel to this scene, see Conchobar’s rape of Medb in ‘The Oldest Version’, ed. and trans. Meyer.

12 ‘Tidings’, ed. and trans. Stokes, p. 22, §5: ‘Fergus mac Rossha was then in the kingship of the Ulaid. He desired the woman Nessa as his wife. “No,” she said, “until its value is mine, namely the kingship of a year for my son, so that it happens that my son will be called a son of a king.” “Give (it),” says all, “and the kingship will be yours although he is called the name of a king.” The woman sleeps with Fergus then after that, and Conchobar is called the king of the Ulaid!'

13 Ibíd, p. 24, §6: ‘Ro gab tra in ben for tinchose a maicé 7 a aite 7 a muntre i. lombarb inada fir 7 a thidnacul diaraile, 7 a hó-r-sí 7 a hagat do thidnacul do a[r]rachadUlaid ardaig iarr naig dia mac’. The woman was then instructing her son and his foster-father and his household, namely to strip every second man and to bestow it upon the other, and to bestow his gold and his silver upon the champions of the Ulaid because of the result to her son’.

topos of the ‘Sovereign’s Truth’ present in medieval Irish kingship theory.14

The account of fir flatha contained in Mesu Ulad, the eleventh- or twelfth-century text which forms the second stratum of tradition concerning Conchobar’s assumption of kingship, is markedly different. Here, an adult Conchobar assumes power, having convinced his fellow kings in the territory of the Ulaid, Cú Chulainn and Finn mac Neill Niamghloannaig, to relinquish their power to him for the period of a year. An explicit statement of what might be called a true fir flatha is present in the text when it states that under Conchobar, the province was a ‘well-spring of abundance and calm’:

thinic i cind blíanda, ro boi in cóide an thóipor thuil 7 ríchta ac Conchobar, cona rabi aithlés fás falam óa Rind Semni 7 Latharnai co Cnooc Uachtair Fhoireach 7 co Duib 7 co Drobaí ean mac i n-inad a athar 7 a sheanarthic tae tagnamn da thigernu dathuig.15

In fact, this impression of the validity of Conchobar’s rule is reinforced throughout the text – for example by the statement at the
beginning that equates the time in which the province was best with the reign of Conchobar\(^6\) – and no trace of the attitudes towards his kingship expressed in the first stratum of this tradition are to be found.

Ferchuitred Medba/Cath Bóinde and Cath Leitreach Ruide, both late Middle Irish texts, constitute the third of these strata and show Conchobar exerting military force to obtain the kingship of the Ulaid from the high-king Echu Feidlech as the \(e\)ric, or compensation, for the slaying of his father. As in Mesca Ulad, Conchobar's father is Fachtna Fathach.\(^7\) (It is perhaps to avoid confusion arising out of the dual tradition of paternity that Conchobar is most commonly known by his matronymic,)\(^8\) Cath Leitreach Ruide, meanwhile, returns to the idea that Ness ensures her son's kingship by means of sexual activity. She grants sexual favours here rather than becoming pregnant, and the grateful recipient is Fergus mac Rossa, the then incumbent of the kingship of the Ulaid.

By means of this arrangement, she obtains for Conchobar the kingship of the Ulaid for one year, which is again a time of prosperity for the Ulaid.\(^9\) On this basis, the Ulaid support Conchobar above Fergus and allow him to gain the kingship of Ulster, as well as his four daughters, as recompense from Echu Feidlech.

This discussion of the various accounts of Conchobar's
assumption of kingship leads us to some preliminary conclusions. First, it is clear that throughout the Middle Ages, Conchobar's depiction was subject to change. Secondly, we note that there is no discernable chronological development towards a fixed depiction; it cannot be shown that early texts follow one pattern and later texts another. Rather, as is evidenced by the relationship between Compert Conchobar and Séile Conchobar, strands of tradition can be picked up after a gap of four centuries, despite the emergence of quite different representations in the interval. Thirdly, although Compert Conchobar and Musa Ulad contain generally positive portrayals of Conchobar's kingship, the other tales all present Conchobar gaining his kingship through rather underhanded methods. Thus, Conchobar's kingship, the defining aspect of his persona, was often presented as resting on questionable foundations.

SOME DEPICTIONS OF CONCHOBAR IN THE BOOK OF LEINSTER: AIDED CHONCHOBUIR, VERSION A; TÁIN BÓ CUALNGE; CATH RUIS NA RÍG, LONGES MAC NUISLEANN

In order to test to what extent this apparent ambiguity in the depictions of Conchobar as king is present in the rest of this corpus, I propose to examine four differing depictions of Conchobar. These texts, Aided Chonchobuir version A, Recension II of Táin Bó Cúailnge, Cath Ruis na Ríg and Longes mac nUisleann, constitute four of the most powerful characterizations of Conchobar, and as such, and because of their potential impact upon subsequent interpretations of Conchobar, they should be assessed. Furthermore, and more speculatively, their candidacy for consideration is bolstered by the fact that all these depictions are found in the twelfth-century manuscript of the Book of Leinster. It is worth considering the possibility that it was their variety in close proximity which legitimised quite contradictory representations of Conchobar by authors in the early modern period.

Perhaps the most striking example of the 'positive' depiction of Conchobar occurs in version A of Aided Chonchobuir. The medieval Irish ideology of kingship has been alluded to already, but as an understanding of some of its precepts is central to a reading of this text, it is necessary to pause and ask to what extent should the literary, and indeed the legal, kingly exemplars inform our reading of Conchobar? We can reasonably expect that many of the audiences and authors of medieval Irish narrative tales in general were familiar with the Irish Speculum Principum genre. Furthermore, Audacht Morainn, like Compert Conchobar, has been postulated as one of the texts of the Cit Dromana Snaechta manuscript, while Tecosca Cáisraid and Brithtarberosa Con Chulainn are preserved as sections embedded in Cath Airtíg and Senguige Con Cúailinn respectively; on this basis we can expect that at least some of the audiences and authors of the Conchobar texts in particular were familiar with this genre. Although the authors of the Conchobar material did not feel obliged to cohere strictly with this ideology – we have seen that the motif of 'grí flatha' is 'imperfectly' present in Séile Conchobar, while its flip-side, the concept of 'gín flatha, is even more conspicuous by its absence – Aided Chonchobuir A certainly draws on a knowledge of one major principle of this system. This text refers to the notion that the most significant external manifestation of the king's status was his appearance. The physical descriptions of Conchobar found throughout this corpus habitually emphasise his perfection and establish explicit links between his appearance and his kingly status.21 However, in this possibly eighth-century text, Conchobar is seen to break this

21 Táin Bó Cúailnge; Recension I, ed. and trans. C. O'Rahilly (Dublin, 1976), lines 3592–3: 'Loých caem seta fota and öemind, caimem do rígaib a delb, i n-aimiach na buidne', 'A fair, slender, tall, pleasant warrior, fairbat of the kings his appearance, at the head of the head'.

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fundamental condition of rightful kingship by gaining a physical blemish. Far from undermining Conchobar's right to be king, this blemish leads to his status being augmented: the Ulaid conclude that it is preferable to have Conchobar as a blemished king than to replace him stating "This asso don ind athis oldás a éc-som".22 This highly favourable representation is sustained when the text goes on to portray Conchobar as one of the first Christians in Ireland. Indeed, it even depicts Conchobar in a strongly Christ-like fashion. The dramatic climax of the tale describes Conchobar's fall, having been struck by the brain of Mess Gegra, and states that his grave is where he fell, before, in a moment reminiscent of the Resurrection, he reveals himself to be alive by demanding to be carried from the field of battle. The identification with Christ is continued in the motif found here and in other versions of the tale that he and Christ share the same birthday.23 The rest of this text, like the other versions of Aided Conchobar, relates how Conchobar hears of the Crucifixion and is then simultaneously filled with faith and rage at this deed. In the other versions, Conchobar's own death is brought about by this rage, which dislodges the brain-ball that is still implanted in his own head. The identification with Christ is particularly evident in version C, where the second of the two accounts of Conchobar's death offered depicts it as coinciding exactly with the Crucifixion.24

22 Death Tales, ed. and trans. Meyer, p. 8, §9: "It is easier for us (to accept) the blemish than his death".
23 Ibid., p. 8, §11: "In fer sin dano", ar in druí, "ni n-écnaidhe ro geine 7 rogenis-s[jiu i i n-ocht calde Enair cen cop inund bliadain"; "That man then," said the druid, "on the same night he was born and you were born, that is on the eighth of the calends of January, although it was not in the same year".
24 Death Tales, ed. and trans. Meyer, p. 16: "Antan dodechaith taimheal forsin ngrén 7 rosúi éga a ndath folia roifairfagh Concurbur immorro do Cathbad dúss cid rombádar na duile. "Do comhala-sa", ar sé, "in fer rogéanair a n-

Never the Twain Shall Meet?

The Táin and Cath Ruis na Rí provide quite dissimilar views of Conchobar as a martial leader. Although, of course, he is incapable of fighting for much of the Táin, it is clear that he is to be understood as a noble opponent. This can be illustrated by reference to, for example, the comment made by Fergus to the Connachta "Cia taim ane ar longais riam reme dabuir bréithir", ar Fergus, "ná fuil i n-fhérend nó i n-Alban óchlaich mac sma Conchobuir"25 or Medb's refusal to accept Fedelm's prophecy of the slaughter of the Connachta on the basis that Conchobar is temporarily disabled.26 This representation is sustained throughout all versions of the Táin despite the emphasis placed on tales of Cú Chulaíin's past and present feats in battle. A final statement in this recension, this time an authorial aside, strengthens the case for Conchobar's ferocity and tenacity in battle.

Coniadh sin in tress breithar is gènnu ra ràidhe bar Táin Bó Cúalnge:

ochaidh frit, anosa marar dochuirthi (?) fair 7 doradh a croich h é 7 isé sin chanuill anñ sin."; "When darkness came upon the sun, and the moon turned to the colour of blood, Conchobar then enquired of Cathbad what ailed the second of the two accounts of Conchobar's death offered depicts it as coinciding exactly with the Crucifixion.24

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This comic portrayal of Conchobar as a warrior is further underlined in a retrospective analysis of the passage at the start of the text, which depicts Conchobar in a kind of battle-frenzy reminiscent of the riastrad of Cú Chulainn in the Táin:

Cid tra acht nír churulsa do Chongobor in[dl] Heria etir ra mét leis a brotha 7 a brège 7 a báige. Et ro-mebaid loint crío 7 folra dar a bel sell sechtair. Et in cháep cró 7 folra ro-bói for a chridhe iss roscaitar ra halt na huaiare sin.28

A number of contrasts – the ‘troublesome’ drops of blood in Conchobar’s heart as compared with those on the ends of Cú Chulainn’s hair – mean that this can be read as an inverted version of Cú Chulainn’s riastrad, inferring perhaps that Conchobar’s abilities as a warrior are seen to be the antithesis of those associated with his nephew in the Táin. Cath Ruís na Ríg seems to be a direct and irreverent response to that text’s depiction of Conchobar as a warrior-king par excellence. This depiction of Conchobar as a weak and ineffectual martial leader may draw on earlier portrayals such as that in the ninth-century text Seóla Meic Maic Dathó, where he is humiliated by the charioteer Fer Loiga, and in the eleventh- or twelfth-century text, Aídeid Guíl meic Carbótha 7 Aídeid Gairb Glinne Ríge, in which he relies totally on Cú Chulainn for the defence of his territory, and is threatened physically and again humiliated by him in Emain.29

27 Ibd., lines 4257–8: ‘So that is of the three most ridiculous words spoken in Táin Bó Cúalnge. Conchobar to be taken without being wounded’.
28 Ibid., p. 18, §12: ‘However the whole of Ireland did not satisfy Conchobar at all through the amount in him of his ardour and of his energy and of his fierceness. And a drop of blood and gore burst out through his mouth a little and the clot of blood and gore that was on his heart it is that pained him at that time’.
29 Seóla Meic Maic Dathó, ed. R. Thurneysen, MMIS 6 (Dublin, 1935), 19, §20;
with the characterization of Conchobar as kingly-judge.

Caoimhín Mac Giolla Leith, in his recent edition of Oídeid Mac nUisnig, has characterized Conchobar in the earlier text as ‘the wronged king exacting a terrible but not explicitly unjust vengeance.’

This view derives no doubt from a favourable comparison with the later version, but it is clear that the author of Longes intended us to see Conchobar as more than a wronged king seeking revenge. It is his selfishness, and irresponsible attitude to his kingly duty, made manifest in his decision to put personal desires over the good of the province, that initiates the drama. He subsequently manipulates the code of honour governing his warriors, while remaining aloof from its itself. The conversation between Derdriu and Naísi in which Conchobar is described in terms of a bull is highly significant: “Atá tarb in chóidid lat,” or-se-seon, “i. ri Ulaid”.[34] Because Conchobar is not present at this time, and because Deirdriu and Naísi are as yet without the prejudices against him that arise from subsequent events, this conversation reveals a wider and more objective view of Conchobar than is available elsewhere in the text. It would appear that his warriors regard him as a formidable presence, a leader with remarkable physical strength, and perhaps a solitary figure. There is also an element of criticism present in the comment, as it also suggests that he is a headstrong, unthinking, easily angered and threatening figure. This passage may also have been intended to awaken in its audience memories of the bull-king in Andacht Morainn, a truly flawed kingly type:

Tarbflaith, to-slaid side to-sladar, ar-eilich ar-clechar, con-claid con-cladar, ad-reith ad-rethar, o-seinn to-sennar, is fris con bith-buirethar

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CONCLUSION

The images of the bull-king and of the Christ-like figure seem as far removed from one another as Kipling’s east and west. What conclusions can be drawn? The four texts discussed in the latter part of this paper offer striking and skillful interpretations of the character of Conchobar mac Nessa. Some of them can easily be thought of as the direct ancestors of later depictions, and, furthermore, the divergent characterizations of the bardic poets and Geoffrey Keating are better understood in light of the Book of Leinster’s diversity. But what does this analysis contribute to our understanding of medieval Irish concepts of characterization? On the evidence of the texts featuring Conchobar mac Nessa, I suggest that characterization, those basic sets of associations made with a particular figure that transcend textual boundaries, resided in external factors only rather than in the moral or behavioural patterns that emerge within the parameters of individual texts. That only the infrastructure of his character was fixed allowed authors to develop Conchobar’s character in whatever direction – east or west – that served their particular purposes.

[34] Longes mac nUisn: the Exile of the Sons of Udina, ed. and trans. V. Hull (New York, NY, 1949), line 113: “You have the bull of the province,” he said, “namely the king of the Ulaid”. 
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APPENDIX

Appearances of Conchobar mac Nessa in Ulster Cycle Tales


MANUSCRIPT DETAIL

Mallory and Ó hUiginn, ‘The Ulster Cycle’ provided a starting point for this list. However, as this list aims to provide references to editions, rather than translations, of these texts, it was necessary to make some modifications to that catalogue. I have standardised the spellings of tale names, where they have sometimes used the names employed in early translations, but I have retained the abbreviations given by Mallory and Ó hUiginn to counter any resultant ambiguity. I have also combined some instances of duplication, the result of a tale being partially translated by different editors. I have counted Cath Étar and Talland Étar as one text, and Aided Con Roi II and Amra Con Roi as another. I have had to conclude that their Aided Chualacht meic ConCalainn, for which no translation is given, is identical to their Cuchulain 7 Conlaeg. References to editions follow the tale names and a dating has been supplied. Where no basis for dating has been cited, the suggested date is very approximate, and where possible some indication of the foundation of my dating has been given.

For this, and for any subsequent, references to the saga lists, see P. Mac Cana, The Learned Tales of Medieval Ireland (Dublin, 1980).
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My study of Buchedd Collen is very much at an early stage, and therefore what I propose to do in this paper is to bring together various aspects of the background to Buchedd Collen, some thoughts and ideas about its main narratives and its context as a text found in three sixteenth-century manuscripts. In short, my aim is to whet your appetite, and mine, for further study of this Life. As one may have gathered from the title, this is not a typical saint’s Life! Elizabeth Henken says in her book on the Traditions of the Welsh Saints ‘Collen is a slightly unusual saint. His Life gives the impression of being totally unlike that of any other saint’. However we do find token gestures in the Life to the traditional aspects of a saint’s Life: a strange birth, the saint’s pedigree, a brief account of his childhood and learning, how he gained his lands and then his death; but this is all dealt with in less than 600 words. However, it is the two main episodes in this Life that make the Life so unique. The first episode, and the one upon which the title of this paper is based, is the story recounting how Collen saved Rome from the invading pagans. The second main episode is the tale of how Collen defeated Gwyn ap Nudd (who by the later Middle Ages in Welsh literature was both the king of the fairies and equated with the devil) on Glastonbury Tor. These two episodes

38 Serglige, ed. Dillon, p. xiv suggests that a ninth-century date is rather early for version B.
40 I owe thanks to many for their helpful discussion following this paper. Particular thanks go to Dr Maires Ni Mhaonaigh for her advice on an earlier version of this paper.

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explain why this is more a Life of a soldier than a saint. And, indeed, in the earliest manuscript the Life does not begin with 'Buchedd Collen', which would indicate the Life of a saint, but 'Ystory kollen a'i vuchedd', and in the second earliest manuscript the title given is 'Ystory Kollen vilwr', although neither of these appear as titles but as the first lines of their respective texts.

Here is a brief summary of the first main episode as found in the earliest manuscript: the pope during the time of Julian the Apostate, having received a challenge to single combat by a Greek named Byras, is told by a voice from heaven to go to Porth Hannwyd (Southampton) to find his champion. His own armies in the east had refused to fight. The champion is the first man he meets in Southampton. Collen, that first man whom he meets, accepts the challenge, and goes with the pope. He meets Byras on the prescribed day but in the fight Collen is the first to be wounded. Byras, who had used a magical ointment in his helmet, offers it to Collen who takes and uses it to heal his wound, before throwing it in the river so that neither might have further benefit from it. He then wounds Byras under his armpit until his liver and his lungs can be seen, and Byras falls to the ground. However, uncharacteristically of what one might expect from a saint, Collen is loath to grant mercy to Byras, and Byras has to threaten Collen with impeachment before God. At this Collen is obviously frightened and grants Byras his mercy.

Little is known about the date of the Life. The Welsh versions extant today seem to have been composed after the popularisation of the works of Geoffrey of Monmouth and the Romances, since we see their influence on some of the motifs in Buchedd Collen. Henken has argued that 'The Buchedd gives every appearance of its late date using the imagery of the Romances and the late concept of otherworld inhabitants'. The latter point refers to the treatment of Gwyn ap Nudd as both the king of the fairies and/or the devil, which developed from earlier concepts of him as the ruler of the otherworld, just as the realm of the fairies developed from the otherworld itself. The fifteenth century saw an increasing amount of interest in the saints of Wales. E. P. Roberts has argued in her paper on religious life in the Tudor period that the cult of the local saint flowered during the second half of the fifteenth century and into the sixteenth. She has also argued that the growth of national feeling in Wales due to the contention for the throne of England during the Wars of the Roses may have had a role in encouraging this interest in local Welsh saints. A result of this increased interest in the saints, Roberts has suggested, was the composing of a litany for St. Deiniol, the patron saint of Bangor. Could Buchedd Collen as a Welsh text have a similar background? Morfydd Owen, referring to the fifteenth century, has argued that 'Many native saints' lives must also belong to this period...' and included Buchedd Collen in a short list of such native lives found in Roger Morris's manuscript. As yet I cannot offer any answers to this. One factor that does point towards the late fifteenth century concerns the borrowing of the word bwyndwl from the Middle English Basinet, which is itself a borrowing from Old

2 'The story/history/account of Collen and his Life'. Cardiff, Central Library, Havod 19 (Cardiff 2.629), pp. 141–51, at p. 141.


4 Havod 19. For further discussion concerning the manuscripts see below, pp. 60–4.

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1 Henken, Tradition, p. 225.

2 E. P. Roberts, Cyfnod y Tuduriaid: sylwadau ar Fywyd Crefyddol y Bobl Cymreig, in Ystadiah Duw! Dealithwms ac Einain Angarlwol: Ygiwrffau ar Hanes Crefydd yng Nghymru, ed. W. P. Griffith (Bangor, 1999), pp. 73–95, at p. 79.

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French. *Geiriadur Pryfysgol Cymru* only gives two examples of its use in Welsh.\(^8\) The first is in a poem by Lewis Glyn Cothi dated by the *Geiriadur* to between 1480 and 1525, and the second example is that found in *Buchedd Collen* itself. However, Mary Irene Roach Delpino in an unpublished doctorate thesis submitted in 1980 has argued that an original Latin *Life* was composed during the fourteenth century at Glasney in Penryn, Cornwall, using elements gathered from earlier Cornish traditions. But she does agree that the texts recorded in the surviving manuscripts are of late revision, mainly and most probably at St Mary’s in Monmouth, the daughter house of St Florien-lès-Saumur, France.\(^9\)

There are eight extant copies of *Buchedd Collen*. Of those, three were written in the sixteenth century during the religious upheavals of the Protestant Reformation; Havod 19 was written in 1536 by one Dafydd ap Jeuan Henddyn, Llanstephan 117 was written in 1548 and Llanstephan 34 was written towards the end of the sixteenth century.\(^10\) Both the Havod manuscript and Llanstephan 117 were owned by Ieuan ap William ap Dafydd ap Einws, and the latter was written by him while Llanstephan 34 was written by Roger Morris. It is probable that Ieuan ap William, like Roger Morris, was a Catholic and possibly within the underground Catholic circles in North Wales during the Protestant rules of Edward VI and Elizabeth I. There certainly seems to have been a remarkable density of humanists in north-east Wales. This is where both Llangollen and Ruabon are situated and Ieuan ap William was constable of the latter in 1554. Indeed, as shall be discussed below, he wrote at the end of *Buchedd Collen* that the reason for writing these texts was so that others could read about God and the saints.\(^11\) Given the number of humanists and Catholics in north-east Wales, this could indeed have been a strong incentive. In his article ‘From Manuscript to Print’ Thomas argues that ‘The wide range of texts copied by the poet Gutun Owain would indicate the presence of a pool of literary, religious, medical, astrological and other pseudo-scientific texts in north-east Wales during the late fifteenth century, probably in one of the abbeys, Basingwerk or Valle Crucis, with which he had connections’.\(^12\) The fact that the texts Ieuan copied in his two manuscripts seem at least to belong to the same tradition as those copied by Gutun Owain and Thomas suggests that he may well have copied them from Gutun’s own manuscripts. Was *Buchedd Collen* a part of that pool of texts? If so, and even if he did not find the *Life* in that pool, an important question is what motives made Ieuan decide to include *Buchedd Collen* in his collection in Llanstephan 117? Why did he think this *Life* to be worth copying? There are a few possible answers. Firstly, Ieuan came from the Ruabon area not far from Llangollen and therefore an interest in materials pertaining to the area may have played a part. He may also have been aware that the church at Rhiwabon had been dedicated to St Collen before the Normans rededicated it to St Mary. Also, near Rhiwabon is a place called Capel Collen Field where his

\(^11\) Llanstephan 117, p. 94.
chapel and cross were to have been, and where, according to T. D. Breverton, Collen's 'wake was kept on the third week of Summer', although Breverton does not state until when it was practised. T. D. Breverton, The Book of Welsh Saints (Vale of Glamorgan, 2000), p. 151. Ieuan, however, does tell us himself what the purpose was of this section of the manuscript: 'ir mwy'n achwynych o ddarllen duw ai saint ir neib'. This would indicate that he was writing for an audience, and with the purpose of spreading these texts around to other likeminded people.

This note could also imply that Ieuan was indeed in underground Catholic circles, since it would have been illegal to circulate Catholic texts as he seems to be aiming to do here. But, given the scope of material in Llanstephan 117, it would be a simplification to cast Ieuan merely as a Catholic; he seems to have had a thirst for knowledge of all kinds, and was therefore an early antiquarian, possibly saving texts from the effects of the dissolution of the monasteries.

The manuscript Havod 19 was written just before or at the beginning of the dissolution of the monasteries. This may be what instigated the copying of the material in Havod 19 from sources which at the time could still have been in monastic hands. Valle Crucis Abbey is situated not far from Llangollen; therefore, since (as has been discussed above) much of Ieuan's material as well as Gutun Owain's might have come from there, could it not also be possible that the abbey held a copy of Buchedd Collen? Thomas claimed that Ieuan ap William was the scribe of Havod 19 as well as of Llanstephan 117. However, Delpino has claimed that a 'dd [Dafydd]

14 Llanstephan 117, p. 94; see above, p. 61 and n. 11.

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16 Llanstephan 117, p. 87: 'Ieuan ap Wylla owns this book'.
17 Gramadeg Gymraeg hyd Gruffydd Robert: yn ail yr Argraffiad y dechoswyd ei gyhoeddii ym Milan yn 1567, ed. G. J. Williams (Cardiff, 1939).
1568. Therefore, since it came to Wales from Italy via the humanists and the underground Catholic clergy, most of those who used the dotting system were themselves Catholics. The other pointer we have is of course the contents of Llanstephan 34. It is mainly a collection of saints' Lives, but also includes other religious works and treatises. Since it was written at the end of the sixteenth century and therefore well into the reign of Elizabeth I, the printing of Catholic works would have been illegal and the press itself under the control of the crown, meaning that the spreading and sharing of manuscripts would have been the main way to spread Catholic literature.

Having discussed the background to the manuscript texts I shall now move on to give an overview of some of the themes and motifs within the Life. The many remarkable occurrences and motifs show that a whole range of influences have contributed to the making of the extant texts. One of them is that the unnamed pope is made to travel to Britain. This is the only example of a visit by a pope to Britain that I know of in medieval literature. The pope is usually portrayed as waiting in Rome for the saints and pilgrims to make a pilgrimage there to seek his blessing. Here, however, he is given an active role as the ruler of Christendom, who has to find a champion to fight for him and for Christendom. His route to Britain, like his role in the story, is also different to what we usually find in hagiography. The pilgrimage routes to the Continent used by most Welsh and Irish saints in the hagiography are via the peninsulas of Wales and Cornwall and then to Brittany. The pope here, however, comes to Southampton, which is 'in line with the geography of the Romances in which journeys are made between the continent and the southeast coast of England'.

This is not the only example of the influence of the Romances on Buckedd Collen, as will be discussed below in regard to the meeting between Collen and Gwyn ap Nudd. We now move on to the single combat itself.

In the narrative concerning the war between the pope and the Greeks, Collen's role is closer to that of an epic hero than the protagonist of legend or folklore, as tends to be the case with the other saints. This is another aspect of the Life which points to more diverse influences than only hagiographical tradition. Here we see an example of a single combat fought between two champions, one of Christendom and the other of the pagan Greeks. This is a motif which is very widespread in medieval literature, but is not often found in the Lives of the saints. However, the story we expect, that of the hero winning the fight with the aid of God and granting conversion and baptism to the defeated enemy, is not what we find in this episode. Firstly, Collen does not reject the compromising situation of accepting Byras's healing balm at the price of his faith. But the author of this part of the Life, or a later copyist, tried to make up for the compromise by having Collen throw the balm into the nearby river. What one might have expected instead was a similar response to that of Tristram in his single combat with Morhaut in the Romance of Tristram and Ysolt. Tristram is the first to be wounded, but Morhaut makes him an offer: 'Yield thee as wounded and discomfit and wanting of me, and I will well and willingly bring thee unto the queen, and make her heal thy wound. Then will we be always fellows together, and all my wealth shall be in thy power, for never found I no knight that I might so praise as thee.' Tristram, wanting to keep his honour rather than his life, rejects the offer and continues to fight even though he himself is mortally wounded. Collen's behaviour goes

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16 Henken, Traditions, p. 222.
against heroic expectations as well as against what one would expect of a Christian saint. One might have expected his character to rely on a miracle to heal his wound, rather than accepting the oil and compromising his faith as a Christian as well as his honour as the hero. Delpino has found two other analogues to this episode: the oral tale of Sir Colan from St Dominica in Cornwall, and various versions of the *chanson de geste* of *Fierabras*. In the former (a folk tale first published in 1894) two Saxons, Sir Colan and Gotlieb, fight in single combat for a lady.21 Colan is the first to be wounded but ignores his wound and even though he wins, he eventually dies from his wound. Delpino has argued that 'The unhealed wound of Sir Colan may be a vestige of the original resolution of the problem in a local saint's legend' and Colen's 'unhealed wound is the badge of his sanctity'.22 The second analogue can be separated into three versions. The first is the Old French *Fierabras* in which the hero is already wounded when he begins the combat. He uses the healing ointment to gain an equal footing before throwing it away. In the second, a Norman version, the hero cuts the ties of the container so that the unused liquid sinks into the ground. The third version is a hypothetical one called 'Balan', thus named by Gaston Paris and reconstructed by Joseph Bédier.23 In this version the hero Oliver is again already wounded, but refuses the offer of healing before fighting. These analogues highlight the epic and heroic nature of Collen's fight with Byras. However, for Delpino, these analogues, and especially the last, are the link in her attempt to chart the history of the making of *Buchedd Collen*.

In her thesis24 Delpino has argued that Collen, an historical figure, may have been originally Irish, moved to Cornwall and became a Cornish saint founding churches in the sixth century, but that his name was Colan. This Colan was culted both in Cornwall and in Brittany. She has argued that the story of the single combat also originated in Ireland and at some point 'was written into a life of the Cornish-Glastonbury saint Colan or Coelanus, credited locally with defending his faith against an enemy Champion'.25 The *Life* found its way from Glasney in Penryn to Glastonbury, and to St Mary’s at Monmouth where the *Life* was revised. Here the Irish tales of the Tuatha Dé Danann and the character Balar (confused with Balan through the confusion of Insular r and n in the manuscripts) were used to revise both *Buchedd Collen* and story of *Fierabras*. It was claimed in the poem that after his baptism Fierabras the Saracen became 'St Florans de Roie'.26 This St Florans became confused with an obscure soldier named Florian, and a disciple of St Martin of Tours, St Florent of Mont Glonne. It is this latter person after whom the abbey of St Florent was named. St Florent-lès-Saumur was a daughter-house of that abbey, and in its turn St Mary's of Monmouth was a daughter-house of St Florent-lès-Saumur, which brings us back to our texts. It was also here that the *Life* of St Florentius would have

21 M. and L. Quiller-Couch, *Ancient and Holy Wells of Cornwall* (London, 1894), pp. 64–5. Delpino argued in her thesis that this Sir Colan can be identified with Colan the saint (and therefore with Collen), and that this tale may be a remnant of a tradition about the saint and may also point to where the original dedication to Collen might have been.

22 Delpino, *Ystoria Collen*, p. 278.


24 Much of her theory about the origins of Colan/Collen's cult is based on a slightly critical understanding of Bowen's theories concerning the *Peregrini* of Wales, Ireland and Cornwall and their settlements and dedications. I am not aware of any attempt, so far, to analyse and revise her use of these now outdated theories.


26 ibid., p. 295. I cannot here do justice to the argument nor give all its details; for the full argument see pp. 270–316.
had the opportunity to influence the revision of Buchedd Collen. It would also make sense to propose that it was at St Mary’s, a house known for its tradition of copying texts, that the elements more akin to the Welsh romances were added.

Nowhere is this influence seen more clearly in the Life than in the description of Gwyn ap Nudd’s castle on top of Glastonbury Tor. After being a monk and abbot at Glastonbury abbey, then leaving to preach to the people of the country for three years, Collen decides to leave the world and become a recluse in a cave on Glastonbury Tor. It is here that his second battle takes place. After Collen angrily scolds two devils who talk about Gwyn ap Nudd outside the door of his cave, he is challenged to go meet Gwyn ap Nudd on top of the Tor. After refusing twice, Collen, frightened by the threats, resolves to go, and makes some holy water to take with him which he eventually throws around him and everything disappears. The castle is described thus: ‘ef awelai ykastell teka ar awelsai irioed amerch abechin yni marchogeth ari kevyne agore pwytnt i meirch’, and should be compared with the description of the castle in Chwelyd Iarlles y Ffynnawn. Morfydd Owen also sees native Welsh influence on Buchedd Collen: ‘These native lives preserve the traditional style of medieval religious cyfarwyddyd, and quotes the opening lines of our Life as an example of a traditional genealogy. We can conclude that the nature of both conflicts in Buchedd Collen does not fit easily into the hagiographical tradition: ‘They mix the traditional strains of epic and fairy-tale with the more literary ones of the Romances’.27

27 Havod 19, p. 148. ‘he could see the fairest castle he had ever seen, and horses and youths riding on their backs and the best condition for horses’. Henken, Traditions, p. 223.
30 Henken, Traditions, p. 225.
Recent research into the Canterbury School of Theodore and Hadrian has provided a forum for very encouraging – and productive! – interaction across the disciplines of Anglo-Saxon and late antique studies. This is all to the good. Both fields are characterized by methodological diversity and both provide abundant material for studying the complex negotiations that transformed the classical world into the medieval world. Both fields stand to gain a great deal from further collaboration. A strong case could be made that the only principle separating the worlds of Anglo-Saxon England and the late antique Mediterranean is the allocation of subjects within our universities. As an offering of what sort of things we can learn by considering the British Isles as part of the world of Late Antiquity, I will trace the evolution of the apocryphal Acts of Thomas from Syrian India to the West Saxons. Naturally, I will have to miss out a number of important details along the way, but even so it is possible from considering the development of the tales about Thomas to learn something of the connections that linked two such seemingly disparate worlds.

So important are the Acts of Thomas to the Christians of Malabar that they are sometimes simply called the Christians of St Thomas. They live on an ancient trade route, and were very likely known to Cosmas Indicopleustes. Still, this community was largely forgotten in Europe until the travels of Marco Polo and especially Vasco da Gama – who were both keen to locate the saint’s relics in India – brought them once more into public notice. (Indeed, we are told by a near contemporary of Vasco’s that King Manuel commissioned him to travel to India at least in part because he was moved to contact the Christians of India.) One imagines that whatever surprise was felt upon learning of the St Thomas Christians was inspired chiefly by the discovery that the communities still existed. For the foundational document that describes the Apostle Thomas’s activity in India was known and read quite broadly in Latin and Greek from an early stage. For example, in the Greek east, Gregory of Nyssa and, in the Latin West, Ambrose and Jerome attest to Thomas’s activities in India. Gregory of Tours even refers to the monastery established at the site of Thomas’s first burial (that is, before his remains were translated to

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1 For example Archbishop Theodore, ed. M. Lapid (Cambridge, 1995).
5 See M. de Faria e Sousa, Asia portuguesa, 3 vols. in 6, Biblioteca Historica de Portugal e Brasil Serie Ultramarin 6 (Porto, 1945–7), I, 140–8, at 141: ‘O Rei sabia – motivo principal que arrebatava os corações dos seus vassalos para esta empresa, como se fossem inspirados por Deus – quanta ventura lhe adviria se prosseguisse na obra do apóstolo S. Tomé, implantando a religião cristã nasquelas terras.’
6 Gregory of Nyssa, Oratio XXXIII a Arianis II, 11, PG 36, col. 228.
8 Jerome, Epistola LIX.5, PL 22, col. 589.
Edessa). The Syriac Fathers, too, tell us a great deal about Thomas's activities in India—an instance of which we would expect, since it is overwhelmingly likely that India was Christianized by Syrian Christians and because the Persian church continued to preside over the Indian Christians for centuries. And indeed it is generally accepted that the Acts of Judas Thomas the Apostle were written initially in Syriac.

The Acts open with the Apostles casting lots for which countries they will evangelise. When India falls to Thomas, he protests on grounds of being weak and, as a Hebrew, being unable to teach Indians. But the Lord appeared to Thomas in a dream and ratified his commission. And when Thomas was still recalcitrant, the Lord intervened directly and sold Thomas as a slave to a merchant called Habban, who was seeking to buy a carpenter on behalf of his lord, King Gudnaphar. Gudnaphar was pleased by Thomas and gave him funds to build a new palace. Thomas, however, distributed the money to the poor, and when Gudnaphar learned that the money was gone and ground had not been broken, he was understandably not pleased. Not even Thomas's assurance that he had built Gudnaphar a castle in heaven mollified the king, who imprisoned Thomas and Habban. Shortly thereafter, Gudnaphar's brother Gad died; and he was succeeded by his kinsman. After Thomas's martyrdom, however, a dream appeared to his brother to abstain from sexual relations with their husbands. And when at length he converted the lady Mygdonia, Thomas was imprisoned and ultimately executed by King Mazdai and Thomas's kinsman. After Thomas's martyrdom, however, Mazdai's son fell ill and eventually Mazdai decided to use a relic of St Thomas to heal him. Thomas appeared to Mazdai in a dream and chided him, saying, 'Thou didst not believe in one living; wilt thou

9 Gregory of Tours, De gloria beatorum martyrum 33, PL 71, cols. 733–4.

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Thomas Didymus from India to England

intervened directly and sold Thomas as a slave to a merchant called Habbân, who was seeking to buy a carpenter on behalf of his lord, King Gudnaphar. Gudnaphar was pleased by Thomas and gave him funds to build a new palace. Thomas, however, distributed the money to the poor; and when Gudnaphar learned that the money was gone and ground had not been broken, he was understandably not pleased. Not even Thomas's assurance that he had built Gudnaphar a castle in heaven mollified the king, who imprisoned Thomas and Habbân. Shortly thereafter, Gudnaphar's brother Gad died; and he saw in heaven Thomas's building. Being miraculously restored to life, Gad assured his brother of the truth of Thomas's claim. And so both Gudnaphar and Gad were persuaded to become Christian. (It is worth noting that we have independent evidence that there was a Gudnaphar who ruled the Scytho-Indian kingdom lying to the east and west of the Indus, c. 19–45 A.D., and who had a brother called Gad.) This miraculous event was followed by several more, which collectively insured the success of Thomas's evangelisation. Thomas established churches and ordained clergymen, while continuing to teach.

He landed himself in trouble once more, however, when his teaching induced several women of the royal court to abstain from sexual relations with their husbands. And when at length he converted the lady Mygdonia, Thomas was imprisoned and ultimately executed by King Mazdai at the instigation of Karish, Mygdonia's husband and Mazdai's kinsman. After Thomas's martyrdom, however, Mazdai's son fell ill and eventually Mazdai decided to use a relic of St Thomas to heal him. Thomas appeared to Mazdai in a dream and chided him, saying, 'Thou didst not believe in one living; wilt thou

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believe in one, lo, who is dead? But fear not. My Lord the Messiah will have mercy upon thee because of his clemency.\textsuperscript{14} Mazdai then confessed his faith in the Lord Jesus and bowed his head to the presbyter and, taking some dust from Thomas's grave, he rubbed it on his son, who was thereby healed.

So much for the \textit{Acts} as such; when we turn to Thomas's teaching, the most notable feature is something that has already been mentioned: his insistence on celibacy. We can get some sense of how his teaching was received from Mygdonia's words in rebuffing her husband:

\begin{quote}
Remind me not of thy former doings with me, which I pray that I may forget. Remind me not of thy filthy and unclean pleasures and thy fleshly deeds, from which I pray that I may be rescued by the love of my Lord. I have forgotten all thy practices, and thy familiarities and thy doing are at an end with thyself; but my Lord and my Saviour, Jesus, abideth alone forever, with those souls which have taken refuge with him.\textsuperscript{15}
\end{quote}

Mygdonia's total rejection of Karish's advances is striking, but it is nothing more than a faithful implementation of what Thomas taught. Some scholars have taken this as evidence that the teaching and indeed the document itself are not orthodox.\textsuperscript{16} This line of thought about the \textit{Acts} can be buttressed with reference to the poems scattered throughout the text. The \textit{Wedding Hymn}, The \textit{Hymn of the Pearl} and The \textit{Praises of Thomas} are replete with dualistic, gnosticising themes. The \textit{Hymn of the Pearl} in particular is a striking poem in which the narrator describes his quest for a pearl that was being guarded by a serpent in Egypt; strong cases have been made for reading The

\textsuperscript{15} Wright, \textit{ibid.}, II, 254-255; Wright's translation.
\textsuperscript{16} Zelzer, for example.

\textit{Hyrum} as Iranian folklore, Bardesanian heresy, Manichaean myth or even Christian midrash.\textsuperscript{17} Comparatively little work has been done on The \textit{Wedding Hymn} and The \textit{Praises}, but Bousset has shown convincingly that The \textit{Praises} can be meaningfully compared to a variety of Manichaean sources.\textsuperscript{18}

For a complete picture, however, we need to be aware that the emphasis on celibacy is not particularly unusual in light of the Syriac provenance of the work. Aphraates, the Persian Sage, shares this emphasis; and it recurs through the Syriac tradition.\textsuperscript{19} Thomas's teaching is very much in keeping with this tradition. Furthermore, even if one finds The \textit{Hymn of the Pearl} suspiciously Manichaean, Johan Ferreira has noted in his recent book on that part of the \textit{Acts} that it is only found in one Syriac manuscript and in one Greek manuscript and can therefore be considered an interpolation.\textsuperscript{20} And though The \textit{Praises} has been compared to Coptic Manichaean psalms, the fact that striking points of similarity can be found is ultimately inconclusive. It seems in the end that the teaching reported in the \textit{Acts} simply represents a school of Christian thought that did not become predominant.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{17} The history of the scholarship has been well presented by Johan Ferreira in his new study on The \textit{Hyrum}; see n. 20, below.
\textsuperscript{18} W. Bousset, "Manichaíches in den Thomasakten," \textit{Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft} 18 (1917-18), 1-39.
\textsuperscript{20} J Ferreira, The \textit{Hymn of the Pearl} (Sydney, 2002); Dr Ferreira's introduction to The \textit{Hymn} is clear and very thorough.
\textsuperscript{21} It may be noted that Bornkamm has argued for the Gnostic background of the \textit{Acts}; see his introduction to the translation in The New Testament Apocrypha,
That is a controversial statement, since scholars such as Günther Bornkamm have argued that the Syriac text characteristically represents 'the Gnostic Christianity of Syria in the third century ... which was only catholicized at a relatively late date (in the fourth and fifth centuries...'). Bornkamm repeatedly invokes Walter Bauer's *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei*, to the effect that orthodoxy developed as heresy was tidied up; and Bornkamm gathers examples from the *Acts* that he claims are redolent of Gnosticism. However, he irritatingly does not substantiate those claims; and simply invoking Bauer's name is never sufficient. What is more, in his annotated translation of the *Acts* from the Syriac, A. F. J. Klijn has counterbalanced the putatively Gnostic themes adduced by Bornkamm with a number of decidedly un-Gnostic themes. Even though it is clear that the Greek version of the *Acts* is shorter and lacks a number of evocative passages (such as *The Hymn of the Pearl*), we should resist the temptation to think that this represents a loss of the true spirit of the *Acts*. The major consideration that militates against simply endorsing Bornkamm's view is that we do not actually know enough about the transmission of the text to be able to claim confidently that it is a Christian redaction of a Manichean or Gnostic document. It could just as well be the case that the Manichaens adapted a Catholic document to their own uses. In any event, the Greek is, on the whole, a painfully accurate translation from the Syriac in that it contains a number of Semiticisms that make for stylistically atrocious Greek.

Rather more interesting by comparison is what happens to the *Acts* in Latin translation. In the first place, there are in fact two Latin translations: the *Passio sancti Thomae apostoli* (*Passio*), and the *De miraculis beati Thomae apostoli* (*Miracula*). We are fortunate in that both translations exist in a good critical edition by Klaus Zelzer. Zelzer has established that the translations date to the mid-fourth century. He has also demonstrated that the translations are rather free in that they omit a substantial amount of material (for example neither of them mentions Thomas's third and fourth miracles); they re-order material (for example both of them defer mention of Karish's...
involvement in Thomas’s imprisonment until treating what is, according to the Greek reckoning, Thomas’s twelfth miracle; and they periodically add material (for example the Passio in particular adds a homily on the Holy Trinity that is not found in the earlier versions). On the whole, both versions are considerably abbreviated: Wright’s edition of the Syriac text runs to just over a hundred pages; likewise, Bonnet’s (heavily annotated) Greek text; but the Passio is only thirty-nine pages long, and the Miracula is a mere thirty-two pages.

The Miracula is found in a collection now called Virtutes apostolorum, which was formerly called Pseudo-Abías’s Apostolicae historiae. This collection, compiled in sixth-century Gaul, features apocryphal tales about all twelve apostles – Thomas among them. Because the material compiled in the Virtutes often circulated independently of that collection, it is not always easy to determine when any given reference to apocryphal information about the apostles stems from the Virtutes. And while it has been argued that the Virtutes accounts for some particular details about the apostles Andrew, John and James the Less in several Anglo-Saxon sources, as yet no traces of the Miracula have been detected in Anglo-Saxon literature. In this respect the Passio is unlike the Miracula. In fact, we have evidence for the Passio’s circulation in Anglo-Saxon England. So, for our purposes, the Passio deserves special attention.

The evidence that the Passio circulated in Anglo-Saxon England is quite simply that we find in Aldhelm of Malmesbury’s De virginitate

The provenance of that quotation has been periodically added material (for example the Passio in particular adds a homily on the Holy Trinity that is not found in the earlier versions). At virginitate soror est angelorum et omnium bonorum possessio, virginitas victoria libidinum, trophaea fidei, victoria de inimicis et utae aeternae securitas’. The provenance of that quotation has eluded scholars since at least 1884, when R. A. Lipsius acknowledged his inability to find it. It is in fact excerpted from quite early on in the Passio (ch. 12). It is satisfying to have Aldhelm’s source identified – not least because it provides a sure and relatively early date for the Passio in England. Heretofore, evidence for the Passio has been largely conjectural. Scholars have inferred that the Passio was behind Cynwulf’s Fates of the Apostles and the entry on Thomas in the Old English Martyrology. Rather more secure is the claim that Ælfric knew the Passio, who very probably referred to it in his ‘Apology’ in the Catholic Homilies. In that work, Ælfric intriguingly says, ‘the Passion of Thomas we leave unwritten because it was long ago translated from Latin into English, in verse.’ Since we are now in a position to affirm

30 'Virginitas is the sister of angels and possession of every good thing; virginity is the victory of desires, trophy of faith, victory over enemies and surety of eternal life.'

31 R. A. Lipsius, Die apokryphen Apostelgeschichten und Apostellegenden, 2 vols. in 3 (Braunschweig, 1883-7), II.2. Lapidge was also unable to find the source; see M. Lapidge and M. Herren, Aldhelm: the Prose Works (Ipswich, 1979), pp. 194-5.

32 Zelzer, Thomasakten, p. 10.


34 Ælfric, Catholic homilies II.34: Ælfric’s Catholic Homilies, the Second Series, ed. M. R. Godden, EETS os 5 (London, 1979), 298: ‘Thomas ðrowinge we forlætæ unwritten. for ðæm ðe heo was gefyrn awend. of ledene on englice on leowesone.’ I owe this reference to Prof. Biggs.
that the Passio was indeed in England a long time before Ælfric, the case for taking him to have referred to our Passio is strengthened.

But more can be said about the relevance of the Passio as Aldhelm used it. Professor Lapidge has persuasively argued that the recipients of Aldhelm’s uirg were the nuns of Barking; and he has further suggested that Cuthburh may not have been the only royal woman amongst them who had set aside her marriage to devote herself wholly to the Christian life.38 We have already had occasion to note that a strong emphasis on celibacy characterises the Acts of Thomas, even to the extent that Thomas is eventually martyred for persuading a noble woman to forego sexual relations with her husband. And while most of the aspects of the Syriac Acts that might cause the orthodox eyebrow to arch have been removed from the Passio, Zelzer has noted with a hint of lamentation that the Eheosigkeitslehre typical of the eastern versions has remained.39 But of course that teaching is precisely the Passio’s claim to inclusion in Aldhelm’s work. It is ideally suited to his purposes.

It is this convergence of Aldhelm’s promotion of celibacy and the preoccupation of the Syrian Acts of Thomas with chastity that I would suggest is of special interest. It should be noted that eminences such as Augustine of Hippo had spoken very dismissively of the Acts – precisely because it was so readily used by Manichaeans.40 But of course their disapproval was not proscriptive and Aldhelm was certainly at liberty to use the Passio in furtherance of Catholic monasticism, by redeploying in a new context precisely those elements of the Acts that provoke the disapprobation of heresiologists. In the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, we read that, in 883, King Alfred sent Sigehelm and Æthelstan to Rome to fulfil his vow of alms and that they continued on to Saints Thomas and Bartholomew.41 The elliptical reference to SS Thomas and Bartholomew (who was the other apostle associated with Syrian India) suggests the intriguing possibility that the intrepid bishops may have made their way as far as India. Aldhelm’s use of the Passio, no less than that evocative entry in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, teaches us that Anglo-Saxons participated in the late ancient world in unexpected ways.

38 Lapidge, Aldhelm, pp. 51–6.
39 Zelzer, Thomasakten, p. xxiii.

Gerald of Wales lived from around 1146 to 1223. He was the son of William de Barri, a Cambro-Norman Marcher baron from Pembrokeshire in south-west Wales, and of Angharad, the granddaughter of Rhys ap Tewdwr, king of Deheubarth. He was educated in Paris and went on to have an eventful career as a churchman (as the archdeacon of Brecon in Wales and as a candidate for the see of St Davids), as a member of King Henry II's court, and as a prolific author.¹ His works, of which nineteen survive, include historical and topographical descriptions of Ireland and Wales, theological and hagiographical studies, and several autobiographical works.² His first work, published in 1188, was Topographia hibernica or 'The Topography of Ireland', a small but comprehensive study of Ireland.³ It is divided into three books or Distinctiones, of which the first is a description of the land and its wildlife, the second an account of wonders and miracles which occurred there, and the third a study of the Irish people, including a history of the various invasions to which they had been subjected.

In Topographia hibernica, Gerald more than once explicitly compared the marvels and prodigies of Ireland with the wonders of the East. In the Preface to the work, addressed to Henry II, he said:

Just as the countries of the East are remarkable and distinguished for certain prodigies peculiar and native to themselves, so the boundaries of the West are made remarkable by their own wonders of nature.⁴

And again when he introduced the second book:

For just as the marvels of the East have through the work of certain authors come to the light of public notice, so the marvels of the West which, so far, have remained hidden away and almost unknown, may eventually find in me one to make them known even in these later days.⁵

In making this comparison he associated himself with a tradition which had its roots in Indian mythology and has fascinated audiences even to the present day. I propose to argue that this association was the result of a conscious decision by Gerald to exploit this, and other popular literary traditions of the time, in order to ensure a wide audience for his work.

The Wonders of the East, a collection of tales about monsters and

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¹ There has been a great deal written about Gerald and his career. R. J. Barlett's Gerald of Wales 1146–1223 (Oxford, 1982) is a particularly interesting study; B. Roberts, Gerald of Wales (Aberystwyth, 1982) is a more straightforward biographical work. See also J. C. Davies, 'Giraldus Cambrensis 1146–1946', Archaeologia Cambrensis 99 (1946–7), 85–108, 256–80.
³ J. J. O'Meara, 'Giraldus Cambrensis in Topographia Hiberniae: Text of the First Recension', PRLA 52C (1948–50), 113–78, and Gerald of Wales: the History and Topography of Ireland (Harmondsworth, 1982). O'Meara has not numbered the chapters, so references will be by page-numbers only.
⁴ O'Meara, 'Topographia', p. 119, and Topography, p. 31.
⁵ O'Meara, 'Topographia', pp. 134–5, and Topography, p. 57.
strange phenomena in India, had been a popular literary topic for over a thousand years by Gerald’s time. The earliest surviving account is that of the Greek Herodotus from the fifth century B.C., which itself was based on now-lost earlier accounts. Following Herodotus were another two Greeks: Ktesias, royal physician to Artaxerxes of Persia, whose work only survives now in a ninth-century abridged version, and Megasthenes, who was sent to India as an ambassador by Seleucus Nicator, the heir to Alexander’s Asian empire. Alexander’s conquests in India in 326 B.C. also spawned several works on the East (most of which are now lost in their original form), and gave rise to a whole genre of mostly apocryphal medieval literature about Alexander and his Eastern experiences. The tradition of the Wonders of the East, thus formed, found its way to the Latin West via the encyclopaedic works of Pliny, Solinus and Isidore, and was used by many authors in various forms from the seventh to the tenth century. Apart from being incorporated into large encyclopaedias and collections, The Wonders of the East also survive in various separate works. One of these was an apocryphal letter of Alexander to Aristotle describing the marvels which Alexander encountered on a military campaign in India. Another, which in its earliest form seems to go back to the fourth century A.D., is a supposed letter of one Pharasmenes to the emperor Hadrian, which now survives in several different versions, some with the author called Fermes or Feramen, in others Premo, Perimonis or Parmenios, including translations into Old English and Old French. In yet another version it is entitled De monstris et bellinis (On Wonders and Monsters). The popularity of The Wonders of the East in England is attested by the survival of three copies of it in English manuscripts, all of a version of the work not found in any other copies, which has dropped the epistolary structure and become more of a simple catalogue. John Block Friedman has remarked that these manuscripts ‘testify … to an intense Anglo-Saxon interest in wonders and monsters’. The earliest copy is to be found in the British Library manuscript Cotton Vitellius A. xv – the Beowulf manuscript. Indeed


7. For example Aethicus of Istria (a seventh-century cosmography), Hrabanus Maurus (De universa, c. 844), and other encyclopaedias and cosmographies. The tradition continued to appear in encyclopaedias of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (Wittkower, ‘Marvels of the East’, p. 169).

8. Ross, Alexander Historiatus, pp. 27–30; Epistola Alexandri ad Aristotellem ad Codicem Fidem Edidit et Commentario Critico Instructi, ed. W. W. Boer, Beiträge zur
A summary of manuscripts demonstrating a great interest in the East and fantastic stories about a dog-headed saint. The Passion of St Christopher, about a monstrosity, and fantastic stories differ from a common theme of the East. The other manuscripts containing The Wonders of the East are The Passion of St Christopher, the apocryphal English version of Aristotle's De temporibus anni, the British Library, Cotton Tiberius B. v, part I, and Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 613.

The Wonders of the East is a mid-eleventh-century manuscript containing a variety of texts (De mirabilibus mundi, a monstrosorum calendar, lunar tables, compiles, lists of Popes, kings and bishops, Alfred's De temporibus anni, Cicero's De natura deorum, and, indeed, it has been argued that Bodley 614 was copied from Tiberius B. v. It contains only two manuscript exemplars. Therefore, at least one other manuscript, the manuscript containing a variety of texts, was also to be found in Tiberius B. v, and indeed, it has been argued that Bodley 614 was copied from Tiberius B. v. It contains only one Latin copy of the text.

It is likely that there were once more than these three copies in existence. Andy Orchard has said of the Old English texts in Vitellius A. xix, that there are many differences between them and the texts to be illustrated. The other manuscripts containing The Wonders of the East are The Passion of St Christopher, the apocryphal English version of Aristotle's De temporibus anni, the British Library, Cotton Tiberius B. v, part I, and Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 613.

The Wonders of the East is in both Latin and Old English. Bodley 614 is a twelfth-century manuscript containing, as well as The Wonders of the East tradition was widespread at the time of the Crusades, which began to be preached in 1095, and which for the first time brought large numbers of Westerners into contact with the Middle East and its artistic forms.
First Crusade. It is ostensibly a history of a campaign of Charlemagne's in Spain in 778, but the events have been recast as a clash between Christians and Muslims. In the description of the Muslims there are several echoes of The Wonders of the East, for example one whose brow between his eyes was so broad that 'its measure was a good half foot', which is reminiscent of the large-headed men or headless men with faces in their chests described in The Wonders of the East, and the accursed men of Ethiopia who were all black except for their teeth, who also appear in The Wonders of the East.

Oriental wonders also turn up in The Bestiary (Bestiariurn), a work which became very popular towards the end of the twelfth century and into the thirteenth. Bestiaries were catalogues of real and fantastic animals with descriptions and allegorical interpretations. They were usually lavishly illustrated. The text of The Bestiary was based on a work called Physiologus, but it also incorporated some of

The Song of Roland (Harmondsworth, 1990).


24 Physiologus Latinus: Éditions préliminaires versio B, ed. F. J. Carmody (Paris, 1939);

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M. J. Cutley, Physiologia (Austin, TX, 1979).


26 White, Book of Beasts, p. 8.

to demonstrate how Gerald tried to reflect this context in his work. The writing of history was exceptionally popular in the twelfth century, especially the fabulous reconstruction of the far past. The most famous example of this is Geoffrey of Monmouth, who wrote his *Historia regum Britanniae* in the 1130s.28 Despite the very dubious historical accuracy of this work it went on to become a bestseller in Britain and France, surviving today in over two hundred manuscripts. There were also many other historians writing, with various degrees of reliability, in twelfth-century Britain, for example William of Malmesbury, Henry of Huntingdon, John of Salisbury, Simeon of Durham and Roger of Howden. Robert Bartlett has said that this interest in history in the early twelfth century was a response to the 'urge to save the shattered past ... in the generations after the Norman Conquest.'29

Geoffrey's *Historia* also sparked off considerable interest in legends of the past, most famously the Arthur legend, which became extremely popular from the twelfth century onwards. This dovetailed nicely with the rise of French literature and its derivatives in Britain, in the form of the *chansons de geste* but also of romances. The romances told stories of heroic deeds, knightly prowess, mistaken identities and courtly love, in a language (Anglo-Norman, in Britain) which could be understood by (at least some of) the lay people of Britain. Some, for example the *Lai d'Haveloc*, which told of King Haveloc's retaking of his own Danish kingdom and his wife's English kingdom, attempted to construct a legendary past for the country, and these poems presumably reflected the interests of their patrons and audience.30

To sum up: the Wonders of the East tradition had been popular in England since the Anglo-Saxon period and remained so in the twelfth century, helped by the interest in the East prompted by the Crusades and an interest in fantastic beasts demonstrated by *The Bestiary*. There was also an interest in the past, as evidenced by the large amount of twelfth-century historical writing, and the legends and romances which were imported from France and popularised by the use of the vernacular. I shall now consider how aspects of these popular literary forms can be seen in Gerald's *Topographia hibernica*.

Gerald did not, of course, borrow directly from *The Wonders of the East* in *Topographia hibernica*, his work was set in a different, indeed exactly the opposite, context. However, this did not stop him relating phenomena as fantastic as any from the East, and a few of them bear a certain resemblance to their Eastern counterparts. For example, Gerald mentioned a woman who 'had a beard down to her waist ... also a crest from her neck down along her spine, like a one-year-old foal'. In *The Wonders of the East* there are bearded women who wear pelts and hunt with tigers and leopards, and others with hair to their ankles, boars' tusks and teeth, tails, white bodies and camel feet.31 Gerald described a man who 'had all the parts of the human body except the extremities which were those of an ox', and a cow of which 'all the fore parts ... were bovine, but the thighs and the tail, hind legs and the feet, were clearly those of a stag'; these bear some similarity to the composite creatures described in *The Wonders of the East*.

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East, for example the lertices which have donkeys' ears, sheep's wool and birds' feet, and ants as big as dogs with grasshoppers' feet.  

There are also examples which are possibly intended to be a contrast to the East. When describing the animals of Ireland, Gerald commented that 'you will find the bodies of all animals, wild-beasts, and birds smaller in their species than anywhere else'. This compares with the descriptions of very large beasts and men in The Wonders of the East. Also, Gerald described the land of Ireland as 'fruitful and rich in its fertile soil and plentiful harvests', and discussed the absence of poisonous reptiles. This brought to mind, by contrast, the story in The Wonders of the East of a land which is sterile because of the large number of snakes. I would not care to push the point too far, as it is equally likely that Gerald included these features of Ireland simply because he observed them with his own eyes, but I consider it a possibility that he noticed the contrast with the East in these phenomena and deliberately took advantage of it. However, at the end of the first book of Topographia bibernia there is an explicit comparison of Ireland with the Orient. Gerald described in some detail how the East abounded in worldly riches like gold, gems, spices and silks, but its very air was poisonous and those who lived there could not expect a long life. In Ireland, however, the air was healthful and dangers such as earthquakes, storms, wild animals and poisons were completely absent. He said:

The advantages of the West outstrip and outshine those of the East, and nature has given a more indulgent eye to the regions traversed by

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32 O'Meara, 'Topographia', pp. 145, 146, and Topography, pp. 73, 74; The Wonders of the East, §§9, 14: Orchard, Pride and Prodigies, pp. 190–3.
34 O'Meara, 'Topographia', pp. 120, 130–1, and Topography, pp. 34, 50–2; The Wonders of the East, §§6: Orchard, Pride and Prodigies, pp. 188–9.
Catherine Rooney

This is an adaptation of the description of the eagle in *The Bestiary*, in which it is said that the eagle renews its youth by flying so high that it sings in its wings in a ray of the sun, and then diving down into a fountain.39 Also, Gerald's story of the crane which stands sentry over the flock and keeps itself awake by holding a stone in its foot, which, if the crane falls asleep and drops it, makes a noise which wakes the bird up, is also taken directly from *The Bestiary*.40 Even some of the pictures in the manuscripts of *Topographia hibernica*, of the crane and the stork, are taken from Bestiary illustrations.41

In the third book of *Topographia hibernica*, the various invasions of Ireland from that of Cesara, the granddaughter of Noah, are described.42 Though perhaps less exuberant in its detail, this account (derived from Irish vernacular pseudo-history) is of the same kind as Geoffrey of Monmouth's description of the origins of Britain and the legendary accounts in some of the twelfth-century romances. Gerald may have been attempting to create a similar history for Ireland as Geoffrey had for Wales and Brittany. It is unlikely that he did this from patriotic motives, as he was not Irish (as Geoffrey was Welsh) - his contacts with Ireland were all with its conquerors (many of whom were his relations), and he was writing for an Anglo-

41 M. P. Brown, 'Marvels of the West: Giraldaus Cambrensis and the Role of the Author in the Development of Marginal Illustration', *Eng. Manuscript Stud. 1100–1700* 10 (2002), 34–59, at 51; B. Yapp, *Birds in Medieval Manuscripts* (London, 1981), pp. 16–18, pls. 19, 20. For the crane, see for example Cambridge, University Library, Kl. 4, 25, 80r. The stork is obviously taken from a Bestiary-illustration and not from Gerald's own observations, as it is drawn with a snake in its mouth and Gerald specifically stated that there were no snakes in Ireland!

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Norman audience. Therefore it would seem rather that he was trying to construct an account which would appeal to an audience who enjoyed reading about the far past in histories and romances.

There may also be evidence in the manuscripts of *Topographia hibernica* of the influence on Gerald of the Wonders of the East tradition, and of his desire to appeal to the audience of this tradition. There is an unusually large number of manuscripts of *Topographia hibernica* datable within Gerald's lifetime - fourteen of a total of forty-six - and some of these bear evidence which suggests that they were written under Gerald's supervision. Two of these, London, British Library, Royal 13. B. viii and Dublin, National Library of Ireland, 700 have a series of marginal illustrations.43 Michelle Brown has recently argued that these illustrations originated from Gerald himself,44 and if this is the case, I think it likely that Gerald had in mind the illustrations to *The Wonders of the East* and The Bestiary when he had *Topographia hibernica* illustrated. The illustrations to *Topographia hibernica* are marginal rather than integrated into the text as in those works, but this is probably because manuscripts of *Topographia hibernica* were not *de luxe* items as manuscripts of *The Bestiary* were, and space could not be spared. Illustration was an integral part of the Wonders of the East tradition (as demonstrated by Vitellius A. xv, in which only *The Wonders of the East* was illustrated) and Gerald sought to create a similar illustration-cycle for his work. Audiences who were used to looking at illustrated manuscripts of *The Wonders of the East* and *The Bestiary* would see something familiar - and illustrations would also be a visual aid to those less able to read the text.

In conclusion: Gerald used and combined the traditions of the

types of literature which were popular at the end of the twelfth
century – The Wonders of the East, The Bestiary, crusading
literature, history and romantic legends – to create a work which
would appeal to a wide audience. With illustrations, he even
made the manuscripts of his work resemble those of popular
literature. Topographia hibernica was his first work, written when
he was still optimistic that he would secure patronage and
advancement in his career; to this end, he wrote ‘for the benefit
of laymen and of princes who are but little skilled in reading’,45
the very people who could help him advance, despite his
claims that he was writing for the benefit of posterity.46 (It is
notable that later in his life, when it became obvious to him that
his career would advance no further, he turned to more earnest –
and often bitter – theological and autobiographical accounts.)
In adapting exotic tales of foreign places to a new context –
combining the West and the East – he created an entirely new
piece of literature.

Gerald may have been consoled to learn that, in the time since
his death, Topographia hibernica has indeed become popular
literature. In an interesting twist, extracts from Topographia
hibernica were included in some thirteenth-century
Bestiaries. Topographia hibernica itself survives, wholly or
partly, in nearly fifty manuscripts (including a fourteenth-
century translation into French47 and a sixteenth-century
one into English),48 some of which also include Wonders of the East
material (namely Jacques de Vitry’s Historia orientalis,49
Solinus’s Collectanea rerum memorabilium50 and various works
on Alexander).51

45 Expugnatio Hibernica, ed. Scott and Martin, p. 3.
49 Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, 66A; London, British Library, Add.
19513 and Royal 14. C. xiii.
50 Cambridge, University Library, Mm. 2. 18 and Leiden, Universiteits-
96

Gerald of Wales and the Wonders of the East

maintaining the connection of Topographia hibernica with the tradition
of The Wonders of the East. In fact it may be considered to have
achieved one of the pinnacles of modern popularity when it became
a Penguin Classic, available for £6.99 from all good bookshops. This
is a testimony to the enduring popularity of the Wonders of the East
(and West) even today.

51 Cambridge, St. Catharine’s College, 3, London, British Library, Cotton
On 13 March of this year, Professor Malcolm Godden of Oxford delivered the H. M. Chadwick lecture to the Cambridge community. He titled his paper ‘The Translations of King Alfred and his Circle, and the Misappropriation of the Past’. Professor Godden’s lecture was the inspiration for this paper. His fundamental premise was that Alfred did not indicate to his Anglo-Saxon audience when he made changes to the meaning of his Latin texts; furthermore, Alfred occasionally and intentionally presented his changes and additions as though they were written by the Latin author. In short, Alfred was inserting his ideas into the text and giving them legitimacy by making his audience think that they were the words and ideas of the original author.

Professor Godden gave several examples of Alfred changing the meaning of the texts he was translating, or adding to the texts. I will not repeat them here. I will say that his observations were accurate and have been noted by generations of scholars. I will also say that Alfred’s textual changes have provided an important window through which historians have been able to see the thought processes of the man Alfred.

Two interesting questions arose in my mind immediately after Professor Godden finished his lecture – questions about Alfred tampering with his texts. In fact, Professor Godden posed the first question at the end of his lecture. This question is: were Alfred and his circle acting out of ignorance (did they understand that they were changing the philosophical grounding of the texts), or were they deliberately changing the meaning of the texts (were they acting cynically or manipulatively), or were they playing with the texts to reveal ambiguities of textual and authorial authority (were they deconstructing the texts like modern day English professors)? Simply put, what was Alfred’s intent? The second question that came to my mind – again revolving around Alfred’s tampering with the texts without indicating his actions to his audience – is this: what did Alfred think about authorial and editorial authority? In short, in Alfred’s mind, what gave him the right to change these texts?

Regarding the first question of intent – the question of whether Alfred was too ignorant to know that he was changing his texts, or so cynical that he intentionally made it seem that the Latin authors had written his (Alfred’s) insertions, or so intelligent that he was playing with the concepts of authorship and integrity – I think that Alfred himself supplies the answer to this question. In his preface to his law code, Alfred wrote:

introduction to his law code is not the only place where Alfred stated what he was doing, although it may be the most direct statement of action. In his preface to the *Soliloquies* (Alfred's most profound re-writing of the Latin original, incidentally), Alfred spoke metaphorically of building his own philosophical house based upon the wisdom contained in the philosophies of the Church Fathers. He wrote:

> Gaderode me þonne kigelas and stupansceftas ... bohtimbru and bolsittimbru, and, to æcelum þara weorca þe ic wyrcean eode, þæ whitegotan treowo be þam dele þe ic aberan mehte. Ne com ic naber mid anre byrdene ham þe me ne lýste ealne þane wude ham brengean, gif ic hyne ealne aberan mehte. On æcelum treowo ic gesegah hwæðhwæg þæs þe ic æt ham beþorpe. Forþam ic lære ælcne þára þe maga si and wæn hæbbe, þæt he menige to þam icanc wudu þær ic ðas stuðansceftas cearf, fertige hym þær ma, and gefeðrige his wænas mid fegrum garðum, þat he mage windan manigne smicernæ wæh, and manig ænic hus settan, and fegernæ tun timbræ, and þær murge and softhe mid magæ on eardian ægðer ge winitras ge sumeras, swa swa ic nu ne gyt ne dyde.

I then gathered for myself staves and props ... and crossbars and beams, and for each of the structures which I knew how to build, the finest timbers I could carry. I never came away with a single load without wishing to bring home the whole of the forest, if I could have carried it all — in every tree I saw something for which I had a need at home. Accordingly I would advise everyone who is strongest and has many wagons to direct his steps to that same forest where I cut these philosophical additions, that I cannot explain Alfred's actions by culture alone. Alfred was doing something more drastic than loosely translating into Old English, but I do not agree with Stanton that Alfred was intentionally creating a new, vernacular literary tradition. I would argue that Alfred was trying to create a culture of wisdom, and a by-product of this effort was an enhancement of the vernacular literary tradition. For Stanton's ideas concerning Alfred's translation programme, see his *The Culture of Translation in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge, 2002).
props, and to fetch more for himself and to load his wagons with well-cut staves, so that he may weave many elegant walls and put up many splendid houses and so build a fine homestead, and there may live pleasantly and in tranquility both in summer and winter—as I have not yet done.\(^5\)

In this famous metaphor Alfred spoke of building his own house of wisdom by reading the wisdom of previous philosophers. Alfred said that he took from each philosopher something that he could use in furthering his own wisdom. This is similar to Alfred’s collecting the laws of his predecessors and keeping those which he could use for his own law code. He looked to the past for material he could work with today. In building his own wisdom, he borrowed bits freely from the various philosophers he had encountered. Alfred directed others to follow his example, and directed them to the philosophers he had read, where he had found useful ‘props’. Alfred concluded the passage by stating that his house of wisdom was not yet finished—he had more philosophizing to do.

Before pressing ahead, the issue of ‘usefulness’ should be briefly addressed. Usefulness and utility were important to Alfred. In the passage just quoted, Alfred made the point that the forest of philosophers is there to be used, to help people better their own lives. Later on in his preface to the *Soliloquies*, Alfred prayed:

*Se þe ægðer gescop and ægðeres wilt, forgife me þæt me to ægðrum onhagiþe: ge her nytwyrde to beonne, ge huru þider to cumane.*\(^7\)

May he who created both [the temporary earth and the eternal heaven] and rules over both grant that I be fit for both: both to be *useful* here and to arrive there. (italics mine)

Alfred prayed that he would be useful (*nytwyrde*) here on earth because he believed utility was a virtue. Indeed, throughout the *Soliloquies* Alfred either contradicted or explicated Augustine in such a way that it is clear that Alfred valued utility highly. I cite the following example to illustrate this point.

In Book I of the *Soliloquies*, Reason asked Alfred’s Augustine why he loved his friends. Alfred’s Augustine answered:

\[
\text{Da cwawð heo: Ic hi lufge for freondscype and for geferedenne, and þa þeow ofer æalle oðre, þe me mastne fulum doð to ongytanne and to witanne gesceadwisnesse and wisdom, æala mæst be gode and beo urum saulum. Forðam ic wot þæt ic meg æð myd heora fulume after spurian þorne ic butan mæge.}
\]

\[
\text{Da cwawð heo: hu þonne gyf hi nellad spurian after þam þe þu spurast?}
\]

\[
\text{Da cwawð heo: Ic hi wille læran það hi wyllan.}
\]

\[
\text{Da cwawð heo: Ac hu þonne gyf þu ne mealt, and hi beoð swa recelease þæð his hu lufad oðer þingc ma þonne þæt þet þu lufast and cwawð þet hi ne magon oðde nellad?}
\]

\[
\text{Da cwawð heo: Ic hi wylle þeoh habban; hi beoð me on sumum ðingum nytte, and ic eac heom.}
\]

Augustine: I love them for friendship and for companionship, and above all others I love those who most help me to understand and to know reason and wisdom, most of all about God and about our souls; for I know that I can more easily seek after Him with their help than I can without.

Reason: How then if they do not wish to inquire after the One whom you seek?

A: I shall teach them so that they will.

R: But what then if you cannot, and if they are so foolish as to love other things more than that which you love, and say that they can not or will not?

A: I, nevertheless, will have them: they will be *helpful* to me in some...

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\(^5\) Quote and translation from Malcolm Godden’s Chadwick lecture handout.


\(^7\) *Ibid.*, pp. 73–5.
things and I likewise to them.  

Here, Alfred contradicted his Latin original. Augustine said that he would reject those friends that interfered with his pursuit of wisdom,  

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9 Augustine wrote:

Reason: ... Sed quapro abs te, cur eos homines, quos diligis, vel vivere vel tecum vivere cupias?

Augustine: Ut animas nostras et deum simul concorditer inquiramus. Ita enim facile, cui priori contingit inventio, ceteros eo sine labore perducit.

R: Quid, si nolunt haec illi quaerere?

A: Persuadebo ut velint.

R: Quid, si non possis, vel quod se invenisse iam vel quod ista non posse inventi arbitrantur vel quod aliam rem curis et desiderio praepediuntur?

A: Hebebo eos, et ipsi me, sicut possamus.

R: Quid? si te ab inquirendo etiam impedat eorum praesentia, nonne laborabis atque optabis, si aliter esse non possunt, non tecum esse potius quam sic esse?

A: Fateor, ita est ut dicis.

Reason: ... But let me ask you this: why do you want those people whom you love either to live at all or to live with you?

Augustine: So that we may together, with one mind, seek to know our souls and God. For in that anyone who is the first to discover something can easily lead the others to that same point.

R: But suppose they don't want to search for these things?

A: I shall persuade them so that they will want to.

R: But what happens if you are not able to do that? They might, for instance, think that they have already found them, or, on the other hand, think that these things cannot be found, or, again, they might be held back from enquiry by concern or even longing for other things.

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but Alfred's Augustine stated that he would keep his friends around him even if they were not helpful in his pursuit of wisdom. The reason he would keep them was that they might be helpful to him in some other enterprise, and he helpful to them. This is Alfred valuing utility in his own words in the *Soliloquies*. We must always remember that utility was extremely important to Alfred. It was fundamental to his actions.

At this point I feel confident that we are closer to answering the first question of Alfred's intent. Alfred, it seems, had a penchant for emending texts to suit his specific needs – to be useful to him and his readers. He knew that he was tampering with his texts. He was not, therefore, completely blind to what he was doing; he was not acting in complete ignorance. Furthermore, I suspect that toying with the concepts of authorship and textual integrity would have been perceived by Alfred as a waste of time – it served no useful purpose.

I can think of no statement made by Alfred or his circle of advisors that may be construed as an indication that Alfred was manipulating his texts for the purpose of challenging conceptions of authorship and textual integrity. Conversely, I can think of several statements of intent by Alfred and his circle that indicate Alfred was spreading wisdom and Christian righteousness (as he perceived it) to his
people. Therefore, I conclude, Alfred was manipulating his texts intentionally.

To address the second question – what gave Alfred the right to change these texts, where he got the authority – we must delve into the king’s belief system. A discussion of this alone would require far more time than we have now, so I will merely touch upon the fundamental beliefs that shed light on our particular question.

Starting at the very top, Alfred believed in a Christian God who was active in the affairs of men. For example, God sent the Vikings as a punishment for the sins of the Anglo-Saxons. Alfred believed that God had a divine plan in which all creatures had a role, regardless of rank. Alfred believed that God utilized his creatures, both angelic and mortal, to implement and fulfill his plan. For example, God hardened Pharaoh’s heart so that he could defeat him and show the Egyptians that God was supreme.

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10 Alfred’s prefaces to the Pastoral Care, the Soliloquies, and to Wærferth’s translation of Gregory’s Dialogues are but three obvious examples of Alfred stating his intent to spread Christian wisdom.

11 It is uncontroversial to say that medieval people believed God sent afflictions to punish sinful peoples. Ælfric, writing in 1014, stated in his Sermo Lupi ad Anglos that the Vikings were the instrument of God’s wrath, come to punish the sinful English. Alcuin, in one of his letters (Dümmler no. 17), explained the sack of Lindisfarne in terms of divine punishment upon the Anglo-Saxons for their sins. Gildas wrote in his De excidio et conquestu Britanniae that the Anglo-Saxon ‘invasion’ was God’s punishment for the sins of his wayward Britons. I suggest that the idea of invaders as a form of divine punishment was also current in Alfred’s day. Of course, the idea of God punishing a sinful nation with invasion did not originate with Gildas. Augustine wrote his De civitate Dei as a response to those pagan Romans who explained the sack of Rome in 410 as punishment sent by the traditional Roman gods for their being supplanted by the Christian God. There are also several biblical precedents of the Hebrew God punishing his wayward chosen people with invasion and captivity.

12 Exodus XIV:4: ‘...et indurabo cor eius ac persecetur vos et glorificabor in

King Alfred’s Translations

were God’s tools. He believed that heaven had a definite hierarchy: God was the king, beneath him were the nine orders of angels, the apostles, prophets, saints and, at the bottom, the saved, ordinary souls. I think that all medieval people shared this basic model of the divine world. Alfred alluded to this hierarchy several times in both his Consolation of Philosophy and his Soliloquies. Alfred believed that the earthly hierarchy mirrored the divine hierarchy in structure and function. The counterpart to the heavenly king was earthly kings – this would be Alfred, Charlemagne etc. Beneath the king was the witan – the elite made up of ealdormen, bishops, close familiars – and beneath these were the thegns, freemen and the unfree. All had a role. Alfred was the first that we know of to write of the tripartite division of labour. He wrote:

[..buton tola ic wilnode þeah 7 andweorces to þa weorce þe me
beboden was to wyrceanne; þæt was þæt ic unfracodlice 7 georfan nichte
strean 7 recan þone] anwiald þe me be[fast wes. Hwæt, þu
wast þæt nan [mon ne mag] nenne craft cyðan [ne nenne an]wealde
reccan ne si:o[r an butu] tolu 7 andweorde. [þæt þi o ælces] crafts
andweorde [þæt mon] þone craft buton wyrce [ne mag. Þæt þið
þonne cyninges [andweorde 7] ðis tol mid to ricsianne, þæt þe habbe
his lond fullmonnæ; þe sceal habban gebedmen 7 fyrdmen 7 weorcmen.
Hwæt, þu wast þætte butan þissan tolænan nan cyning his craft ne mag
cyðan. Þæt is ec his ondweorc, þæt he habban sceal to ðæm tolæ þa
þrim geferscipu biwiste. Þæt is þon heora biwiste: land to bugianne, 7
gifta, 7 waþnu, 7 mete, 7 ealo, 7 cloþes, 7 gehwaþ þæs ðe þæ þre
geferscifas behofedan. Ne mag he butan þisu þas tol gehealdan, ne
buton þisu tolun þana þinga wyrcan þe him beboden is to wyrcenne.¹⁴

...but I desired instruments and materials to carry out the work I was set to do, which was that I should virtuously and fittingly administer the authority committed to me. Now no man, as you know, can get full play for his natural gifts, nor conduct and administer government, unless he has fit tools, and the raw material to work upon. By material I mean that which is necessary to the exercise of natural powers; thus a king’s raw material and instruments of rule are a well-peopled land, and he must have men of prayer, men of war, and men of work. As you know, without these tools no king may display his special talent. Further, for his materials he must have means of support for the three classes spoken of above, which are his instruments; and these means are land to dwell in, gifts, weapons, meat, ale, clothing, and whatever else the three classes need. Without these means he cannot keep his tools in order, and without these tools he cannot perform any of the tasks entrusted to him.¹⁵

Alfred said that God entrusted to him the performance of certain tasks—tasks central to the divine plan. God gave him tools in the form of people, land and things. It was up to Alfred to fulﬁll his role in the plan, and since Alfred was a king at the top of the earthly hierarchy, he perceived that his central role was getting his people to fulﬁll their roles in the divine plan. This was a very big charge for Alfred, and one which he took seriously. In fact, Alfred came up with his own plan in order to accomplish his part in the divine plan. He would teach his people to be wise, which meant education. Education meant books. Alfred wrote in his Preface to Gregory’s Pastoral Care:

Forðy me dynæ betre ... ðet we eac sumne bec, ða de niedbedeardfosta sien callun monnum to wiotonne, ðet we da on ðet gebode wenden

¹⁵ W. J. Sedgeﬁeld, King Alfred’s Version of the Consolations of Boethius, Done into Modern English (Oxford, 1900), p. 41. I have updated Sedgeﬁeld’s language.

King Alfred’s Translations

де we alle geenanaw megen, & de gon swæ we swiðe acædæ magon ... ðæt[e] eall siu giogað dé nu is on Angelcynne foroa monnæ, ðara de ða speda hebben ðet he ðæm befoelæ magen, sien to leornunga ðefæste...¹⁶

Therefore it seems better to me ... that we should turn into the language that we can all understand certain books which are most necessary for all men to know, and accomplish this ... so that all free-born young men now in England who have the means to apply themselves to it, may be set to learning...¹⁷

Alfred’s biographer Asser mentioned in chapter 75 of his Vita Alfredi that Alfred’s youngest son was educated in both Latin and English:

Æthelweard, omnibus junior, ludis literariae disciplinae ... cum omnibus pene totius regionis nobilibus infantibus et etiam multis ignobilibus, sub diligentiorum magistrorum cura traditus est. In qua schola utriusque linguae libri, Latinae scilicet et Saxonicæ, assidue legebantur, scriptioni quoque vacabant ...¹⁸

Æthelweard, the youngest (son) of all was given over to training in reading and writing ... under the attentive care of teachers, in company with all the nobly born children of virtually the entire area, and a good many of lesser birth as well. In this school books in both languages – that is to say, in Latin and English – were carefully read; they also devoted themselves to writing...¹⁹

I wish to make two points here. The first is that Alfred believed that it was his responsibility to make good use of the tools God had entrusted to him. These tools were primarily people, but also included

¹⁶ King Alfred’s West-Saxon Version of Gregory’s Pastoral Care, ed. H. Sweet, 2 vols., EETS os 45, 50 (London, 1871–2), I, 7
¹⁷ S. D. Keynes and M. Lapidge, Alfred the Great: Asser’s ‘Life of King Alfred’ and Other Contemporary Sources (Harmondsworth, 1983), p. 126.
¹⁹ Keynes and Lapidge, Alfred the Great, p. 90.
things. The second point is that Alfred perceived that his tools were not prepared to accomplish the tasks before them (wisdom was lacking in his people). Therefore Alfred actively engaged with the problem – he created schools and translated books for his people so that they could become educated and useful. Alfred responded pragmatically.

Thus far I have addressed Alfred’s belief in the divine order and its associated responsibilities and authority in a rather general way. I think that the most direct statement of Alfred’s authority can be found in the prologue to his law code, in the section generally referred to as The Biblical Prologue.

Few would disagree that The Biblical Prologue to Alfred’s law code is one of the least studied parts of the Alfredian corpus. I suspect it has received so little attention for a couple of reasons. Firstly, The Biblical Prologue is a boiling down of the tradition of biblical lawgivers and law giving. It paraphrases large chunks of Mosaic law. In short, The Biblical Prologue is nothing new and a better version of Mosaic laws can be found in the Old Testament. Secondly, the popular and modern editions of the law code omit The Biblical Prologue altogether. Most editions begin with Alfred’s statement of intent which I quoted at the beginning of this paper (where Alfred kept most of the laws, but threw out a few, changed a few, and added a few). This statement of intent occurs at the end of The Biblical Prologue and right before the laws themselves. Hence the full Biblical Prologue is neglected.

Fortunately, the full text of The Biblical Prologue is now in print. It was included in Laurence Nowell, William Lambarde, and the Laws of the Anglo-Saxons, edited by Raymond Grant, published in 1996. In 1994, Michael Treschow published an article in Florilegium titled “The Prologue to Alfred’s law code: Instruction in the Spirit of Mercy,” and in 1999 Patrick Wormald addressed The Biblical Prologue in the first volume of his Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century. These works discuss The Biblical Prologue and put it in its context. Furthermore, they help us appreciate what Alfred was thinking. Fundamentally, Alfred, as a Christian king, was following in the tradition of biblical and Christian law-givers. Alfred believed that he had the right and obligation to make, modify and implement useful laws. He was situated in the philosophical tradition of Western medieval Christianity, of a particularly Carolingian bent. Patrick Wormald wrote:

It is evident that Hincmar [the archbishop of Rheims] and Alfred had the same conception of the structure of human legal history. Both saw Mosaic law as basic. For both, Christ’s Advent and the Holy Spirit’s descent on the Apostles and their successors preserved the essential continuity of God’s legal revelation, by modifying and complementing its details. The role of written royal law, asserted by Hincmar was put into effect by Alfred. Alfred’s code demonstrably met the archbishop’s criterion that man’s law should so far as possible resemble God’s.

Professor Wormald said that Alfred saw Mosaic law as the basic building block for legal codes. Indeed, Mosaic law was so fundamental to Alfred’s code that it comprised one-fifth of his code, this fifth is more commonly called The Biblical Prologue. By beginning with Mosaic law, Alfred created the context for his laws. After Mosaic law came Christ and the fulfilment of the law. This meant that Mosaic law was not the final word in legal codes. It was

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20 Grant, Laurence Nowell, pp. 94–137.
23 Ibid., p. 425.
24 Ibid., pp. 265, 418.
just the beginning. Christ and his apostles modified the law; the rightful heirs of Christ and his apostles—such as anointed Christian kings—could and should modify and supplement the law to suit the particular needs of their peoples. Divine law (that is, God's law in heaven) was immutable and eternal. The law God gave to Moses was correct for the Hebrew people living in that age of the world. When Christ came, a new age was ushered in, and the law of Moses, being fulfilled, was in need of updating. As Christianity spread beyond the Hebrew people to other peoples, the law had to be recast and supplemented to suit the needs of those peoples. In this context, Alfred had the divine right to tamper with biblically-based written laws so that they suited the needs of his people. The law had to be useful to Alfred's people.

To summarize this point about the law: God's law was eternal and unchanging. Man's additions to God's law were temporary and mutable, though worthy of respect since they were formed in the tradition of Biblical law making. Thus Alfred could modify and supplement the law, but he certainly did not jettison the codes he inherited and start all over. Rather, he applied his wisdom to them and made them more useful and relevant to his people.

Finally, extrapolating from this point about the law, wisdom could be divided into eternal wisdom and man's wisdom, just as the law could be divided into eternal law and man's law. Eternal wisdom was God's wisdom, and was immutable, perfect, complete. Man's wisdom was imperfect, changing, incomplete. The philosophies of men were useful only so far as they helped men perceive and apply the eternal wisdom of God. Therefore, the philosophies of men were open to emendation by other wise men so that these philosophies could be made more helpful in discerning divine truth. Alfred believed that this was his task, and who was better placed than he for it? After all, Alfred stood firmly in the line of Biblical law-givers.

25 For a fuller discussion of the stages of legal development, see ibid., pp. 420–8.

26 King Alfred's Old English Version of Boethius, ed. Sedgefield, pp. 147–9. In his ch. 42, Alfred discussed things eternal and the eternal nature of God, juxtaposed against man's limited abilities and understanding.

27 Whether Alfred realized that he had received a ceremonial title instead of a full kingship when Pope Leo IV anointed him at the age of five (see Asser ch. 8) is to miss the central idea of the ritual. From Alfred's perspective, the important thing was that he had been anointed by the pope in a regal ceremony that possessed some of the same ritual elements of his West Saxon royal coronation. Having been anointed by both the pope and the West Saxon church (and presumably acclaimed by the West Saxon people), Alfred was imbued with righteous, divinely-bestowed power and therefore had more right than any other person in England to alter the texts he encountered.
as philosophical tracts open to emendation. Utility required that these texts be updated in order that they might be more relevant to Alfred and his audience. Alfred was not being covertly cynical when he altered his texts, he was being overtly practical in the pursuit of divine wisdom; he wasn't doing something bad, he was doing something good – he was spoon-feeding wisdom to his people so that they could perform their functions in the divine plan. Alfred got the authority to alter his texts ultimately from God. God placed Alfred at the top of the earthly hierarchy. This privileged position entailed a great deal of responsibility. Alfred was an anointed Christian king, which legitimised and confirmed his authority. This placed him squarely in the mainstream of Christian law-givers, where making informed and wise changes to the law was perfectly acceptable.

In all honesty, I have only partially answered the first question 'did Alfred know that he was changing the philosophical underpinnings of his texts?'. He knew that he was changing the texts themselves. He knew that occasionally he was contradicting what the Latin authors had written – because he did not agree with the authors. But I cannot say with complete confidence that Alfred understood fully the ramifications of the changes he made. As to the second question – what gave Alfred the authority to change his texts – this question I hope I have answered more fully.

The purpose of this paper is threefold. Firstly, it is my intention to briefly survey the history of eremitic-asceticism and its contemporary partner, coenobitism, highlighting some of the differences in emphasis between the two. This will be followed by a short section on the spread of eastern religious ideals to the West and the part played by St Martin in their development. Finally, I shall focus upon late Anglo-Saxon England and the conflict between asceticism and coenobitism revealed in the monastic literature translated there.
community. Inspired by the example of the apostles, Antony sold his inheritance, gave his money to the poor and withdrew to a life of abstinence and isolation. By Antony’s death in 356, the ascetics in Egypt could be numbered in their thousands. Meanwhile, Athanasius’s *Life of Antony*, translated into Latin by Evagrius some time before 374, soon made the eremitic ideal known to those who lived far beyond the boundaries of Egypt, and across Europe.

Roughly contemporaneous with Antony was the appearance in Egypt of coenobitism (deriving from the Greek *koinos* meaning ‘common’ and *bios* meaning ‘life’), whose followers were distinguished from the eremitic-ascetics in that their religious beliefs were dominated by the concerns of a community and their lifestyles determined by a rule or established precept, whether written or not. Coenobitism owes its origins to Pachomius, the son of wealthy pagan parents who, inspired by the charity of Christians whilst conscripted in the army, became the leader of an Egyptian ascetical group. Despite the scarcity of evidence regarding Pachomius’s ideals and beliefs, from the later history of his first community at Tabennese it is clear that this was a purposeful establishment quite unlike any of the settlements associated with Antony. Situated on the fertile plains on the edge of the Nile, Tabennese appears to have been associated with the villages and towns surrounding it. Adopting a more hands-on approach to the spiritual welfare of his followers than the desert hermits, moreover, Pachomius determined that all who wished to place themselves under his guidance ‘should be subject to his authority, live, as far as possible, under one roof, and observe one and the same rule’. The Tabennesiots congregation was a highly organised society, and, according to Ryan, ‘in many respects, indeed, more highly organised than any monastic brotherhood known in the Church until the rise of Cluny’. Essential to the success of such a system was a strong, centralised government placed in the hands of a single superior, to whom complete obedience was owed. The latter virtue assumed an importance quite alien to the eremitic life, and would exercise a long-lasting influence upon western monasticism. Likewise, work, which had previously been seen as an extension of prayer and purely sedentary in character, assumed an importance quite alien to the eremitic life, and would become increasingly dependent.

Turning to the West, we find religious practices distinct from and yet related to both coenobitism and eremitic-asceticism. It is the combination of these two different eastern religious lifestyles that defines western monasticism. According to its etymology, the word ‘monastery’ derives from the Greek *monas* ‘to live alone’. At first sight, therefore, it would seem to better describe the conditions experienced by the hermit alone in the desert inspired by the Origenist idea of self-transformation. However, according to the rule of Augustine, the word *monachus* becomes associated with unity as opposed to singularity, and applied to the concept of the church as a single body:

*monas*, that is ‘one alone’ is correct usage for those who live together in such a way as to make one person, so that they really possess, as the Scriptures say, ‘one heart and one soul’ – many bodies but not many

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2 Ibid., p. 404.
souls, many bodies but not many hearts.\textsuperscript{3}

Influenced by his neo-Platonic past, however, Augustine's conception of monasticism was not entirely divorced from the eastern emphasis upon the movement of the individual soul towards the one God. Thus he combined the ideals of the solitary and the unified to create a synthesis; and it is to this synthesis that the title 'monasticism' shall be applied. Used thus, the term acknowledges the historical co-existence of eremitic-asceticism and coenobitism in the West, and the close association there found between hermits and established religious institutions.

\textbf{THE SPREAD OF ASCETICISM TO THE WEST}

Eastern religious ideals were not entirely unknown to the West prior to the dissemination of Evagrius’s translation of the \textit{Life of Antony}; several varieties of eremiticism and coenobitism were practised by western Christians as early as the second century. If there was one single force that perhaps determined the spread of specifically Eastern ideals and revived the practice of eremitic-asceticism, however, it was the spread of Arianism and the various exiles experienced because of it. During his period as a refugee in Trier and later in Rome, we might assume that St Athanasius, Patriarch of Alexandria and biographer of Antony, played some part in the dissemination of Egyptian religious ideals and the 'cult' of St Antony. Another exile as a result of the Arian heresy, Eusebius of Vercelli (344–71), is thought to have established an ascetic community in Italy. By the 370s a number of Italian cities boasted religious communities of men or women living according to the example established in third- and fourth-century Egypt.

\textsuperscript{3} M. Dunn, \textit{The Emergence of Monasticism: from the Desert Fathers to the Early Middle Ages} (Oxford, 2000), p. 65.

\textit{Eastern Asceticism versus Western Monasticism}

A similar situation can be seen in Gaul: Hilary of Poitiers spent four years in exile in Phrygia from 353, returning upon the consecration of a new, non-Arian Emperor. His greatest disciple was, of course, St Martin of Tours, who spent the period of Hilary's exile on the island of Gallinaria off the Ligurian coast in ascetic conditions. Upon Hilary's return Martin established himself at the 'hermitage' of Ligugé, where he closely imitated the practices of the Egyptian eremitic-ascetics. Like Antony, however, Martin's lifestyle soon attracted followers for whose needs he felt obliged to cater. Consequently he established what might be viewed as the first monastic settlement: a community adhering to the combined ideals of eremitic-asceticism and coenobitism. Thus Sulpicius places Martin's own eremitic-ascetic practices within the context of a community in which, he tells us, the monks dressed in the camel hair of the hermits, assembled together for food and prayer and 'no-one there had anything which was called his own; all things were possessed in common'.\textsuperscript{4} Martin's episcopate thus lay at a crucial point in European ecclesiastical history, for his ascetic practices were to provide a model for subsequent generations of religious not only in Gaul, but in areas as remote as St Patrick's Ireland. Martin was one of the first Christians in the Latin-speaking world to embrace the ascetic way of life as modelled by Antony, yet he remained sensitive to his social obligations, successfully combining his pastoral duties with the strict demands of the semi-eremetic way of life.

\textbf{ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND}

Throughout its history, eremiticism had been viewed with suspicion

amongst certain circles. With the outbreak of Pelagianism in the second decade of the fifth century, following shortly upon Jerome’s denunciation of the work of both Origen and Evagrius, eremitic-ascetics had been on the defensive against claims of heresy. Even amongst its supporters, those such as Basil the Great of Caesaria (Cappadocia), having experienced both the coenobitic and eremitic-ascetic life, advocated the coenobitic life, arguing that the solitary life held too many dangers. Likewise, figures as influential in Anglo-Saxon England as Gregory the Great and Bede admitted the superiority of the eremitic life, but in practice advocated a compromise between eremitic-asceticism and coenobitism: what was later to be known as the ‘mixed’ life. During the Benedictine reform the ideal of community and coenobitism was, naturally, at the forefront. Nevertheless, there is no evidence to suggest that there was any reduction in the number of hermits during the period – as Mary Clayton has pointed out, although direct evidence is lacking, Ælfric made familiar reference to an anchorite in a letter to Sigefyre concerned with chastity. Moreover, that the anchoritic lifestyle was not entirely without status is evidenced by the survival of late Old English Lives of Mary of Egypt and Guthlac and the Vitae patrum, to name but a few texts. This having been said, however, that certain writers remained uneasy with the potential for excess encouraged by eastern asceticism remains apparent in a number of works. Thus in the Vercelli Book’s Life of St Guthlac, Guthlac rejects the devil’s suggestion that the saint should fast for seven days lest on account of it he should fall into pride (‘forpon hie þa ealle idle and unusyme ongeat’, 134v, line 19). Similarly, in Lives of Saints XIII, Ælfric pointed out that the practices of the Egyptian desert are not suitable for those living on the edge of the world, echoing a point made by Sulpicius in the Dialogi.

As an analysis of the translations of Sulpicius’s works as found in the Vercelli Book, Blickling Homilies and Catholic Homilies will reveal, similar caution appears to have been applied to the treatment of St Martin, whose links with eremitic-asceticism these translators have all but severed. Instead, we find in these texts a portrayal of Martin which focuses upon features particular to the coenobitic life – upon his humble obedience, his interaction with those around him and concerns for the greater good of the community as a whole.

As mentioned above, Egyptian eremitic-asceticism was distinguished from coenobitism by the fact that it involved a radical withdrawal from society by men of humble origins. When we turn to the Old English translations of the Life of St Martin, however, these two defining features, not ignored by Sulpicius, are neglected entirely.

7 Sulpicius, Dialog I.8: Sulpicii Dialogi, ed. C. Halm, CSEL 1 (Vienna, 1866);
8 ‘This country is not as full of strength, here, on the outer edge of the earth’s brim, as is that in the middle, n the strong region, where men can fast more easily than here’. Ælfric, Lives of Saints XIII.106–9: Ælfric’s Lives of Saints, ed. W.W. Skeat, 2 vols., EETS os 76, 82, 94, 114 (Oxford, 1881–1900; repr. London, 1966), I, 290; translations mine unless otherwise stated.

6 É. O’Carragáin, ‘How Did the Vercelli Collector Interpret “The Dream of the
by the Anglo-Saxon adapters. In the first instance, in line with the particularly western developments of monasticism, Martin is introduced as a monk rather than a soldier. 

That excessive fasting was a concern of Ælfric is demonstrated elsewhere in his Lives of Saints, when he warns that:

 pwmum

Swa swa me sceal on eallum geoylde'.

Likewise, in the Lives of Saints

When Martin does eat, moreover, it is communally, whether with his companion during his days as a soldier, or later amongst his fellow monks.

By excluding episodes detailing the ascetic dimensions of Martin's career in this way, the communal nature of his life is automatically thrown into focus. The saint is depicted constantly

11 'He had as great temperance in his food as if he had been a monk rather than a soldier'.

Ælfric, Lives of Saints XXXI.47-8, ed. Skeat, p. 222.

12 'Many foolish deeds injure mankind, either through self-will or from lack of thought. Some men do such when they foolishly fast beyond their strength in the universal Lent until they become sick, as we ourselves have seen. Some also fast such that they refuse to eat except on alternate days, and then they eat greedily'.

surrounded by his brethren, for whom he is willing to stall the pleasures of heaven should God so desire. The intimacy of Martin's relationship with his monks is fully revealed when they learn of his imminent death and is further accentuated in the anonymous homilies by divorcing the grief shown by the religious communities from the sorrow expressed by the lay people of the district. For where in Sulpicius' Letter to Bassula all the villagers are described as mourning, in the Vercelli and Blickling homilies the final scene is that between Martin and his monks.

Consistent with the emphasis upon community values is the concern demonstrated in these translations with obedience and humility. According to Benedict of Nursia, coenobites are the *fortissimum genus*, the strongest type of religious, because they have humbly submitted to the discipline of a rule and have thus learned the virtue of obedience. When we turn to the anonymous Old English translations of Sulpicius's *Vita Martini*, the effects of this emphasis are revealed in the treatment of two episodes in which Martin has dealings with men of authority. According to Sulpicius's *Vita Martini* — and it is with the *Vita* alone that I am here concerned, since we have no evidence that these translators were familiar with the *Dialogi* — Martin had dealings with individual members of the ruling classes on two occasions: once with the Emperor Julian (ch. IV), and again with the Emperor Maximus (ch. XX). In both instances, Martin is directly confrontational and challenges the authority of those of higher rank. In the first instance, Martin refuses to fight for Julian and abandons the army, in the second he refuses to dine with Maximus until convinced otherwise, and having done so he offers the cup to his priest in preference to the emperor. Turning to the anonymous Old English translations, we find no mention of either of these episodes. Instead, Martin is depicted as a consistently humble and obedient servant; a characteristic accentuated by the translators' sparse reference to his episcopal rank. Indeed, these virtues are explicitly called upon when it is remarked that he might not find anything in his heart 'buton arfastnesse 7 mildheortnesse 7 sibbe 7 caomodnesse'. The only remnant of either of these episodes is the comment that:

In þysyn he þonne was ealles swiðest to herigenne, þæt he nætre nænigum wurdlícrum men ne cyninge syylum þurh lease ðihtunge swiðor onbugan wolde þonne hit riht wære. Ac he a in eallum soð 7 riht don wolde.11

When we turn to Ælfric's *Catholic Homilies* II XXXIV, reference is made to the conflict of opinion between Martin and Julian, whose apostasy is twice mentioned within a few lines, an element of his personality which perhaps rendered his judgement flawed. That the opinion of a superior might be flawed is a circumstance provided for by Benedict's *Rule*, where — following the writings of Basil and the pseudo-Basilian *Admonition to a Spiritual Son* — he allows a monk to explain to his superior the impossibility of the task, allowing the latter to judge whether or not to continue with the order.16 Martin's dispute with Maximus, however, is cut entirely from the *Catholic Homilies* version, and no reference to the saint's handling of kings is made.

That we should find our Anglo-Saxon translators omitting or re-

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14 'In this he was most of all to be praised, that he would never, through false flattery, bow to any man having worldly power nor to the king himself, more than it was right, but he wished to do always in all [things] truth and right'. *Vercelli Homilies* XVIII.212–15, ed. Scragg, p. 303; Edman, *Vercelli Book Homilies*, p. 123.


16 M. Dunn, *The Emergence of Monasticism*, p. 117.
interpreting these particular episodes should hardly surprise if we bear in mind the background against which these works were written, and the mixed audience of clergy and laymen at whom we assume they were aimed. The attitude here expressed is one fully in line with the Benedictine reform as it was expressed in tenth-century Anglo-Saxon England. For, central to the reform and re-foundation of monasticism in England at that time was the work of King Edgar (959–75), to whom we therefore should expect gratitude to be expressed. For, more than any other king in England or on the Continent, he founded and generously endowed a significant number of abbeys, and it is possible, though not certain, that it is from within such institutions that our translations originated. Moreover, in a text to be read by or preached to members of the laity, suppression of incidents in a saint’s life in which he demonstrates an anti-authoritarian stance must have been standard. For as the Vercelli homilist concludes:  

Ac utan we la tilian, men þa leofestan, þet we þæs halgan weres, sanctus Martinus, lif 7 his deda onherien þæs þære ure gemet sic.\(^\text{17}\)  

Turning to the version of the Life of Martin found in Ælfric’s Lives of Saints, however, we find full reference to Martin’s dispute with Julian, his repudiation of Maximus, his shaming of Valerian\(^\text{18}\) and his pacification of Avitianus.\(^\text{19}\) The opposition expressed by the Gallic bishops at his ordination is likewise mentioned where it is omitted from the other Old English translations, including his own Catholic Homilies.  

Nor are these the only instances in which Ælfric adopts a line in

\(^\text{17}\) ‘But let us now, indeed, strive, O brethren, that we the life of the holy man St Martin, and his deeds imitate as our capacity may be’. Vercelli Homilies XVIII.306-8, ed. Scragg, p. 305; Edman, Vercelli Book Homilies, p. 126.  

\(^\text{18}\) Sulpicius, Dialogi II.5.  

\(^\text{19}\) Ibid. III.4.

the Lives of Saints quite distinct to that of the other Old English translations here considered. Thus Ælfric includes mention of the fact that as a child Martin wished to retire to the desert, an ambition which he fulfilled at his desert location two miles from Tours:

\begin{tabular}{l}
\textit{Some \textit{hwile he hæfde his \textit{wip \textit{þa cyrcan}}}} \\
\textit{þa \textit{eafter suman \textit{fyrsre for \textit{þæs folces bysnunge}}}} \\
\textit{and for \textit{þære unstim-nysse he \textit{ge-stædelode him \textit{mynster}}}} \\
\textit{twa \textit{mila of \textit{þære byrig and seo stow wæs \textit{swa digle}}}} \\
\textit{þæt he \textit{ne \textit{ge-wilnode \textit{nanes opres wæstenes}.}}}
\end{tabular}

Of interest is the fact that Ælfric explicitly says that Martin did this for the example of the people, suggesting that he might have expected his own audience to emulate such behaviour. That the ascetic life is not without its dangers is made clear, nevertheless, by Ælfric’s decision to include the episode in which a solitary becomes so confused by the machinations of the devil that he determines to have his wife – who has also adopted an eremetical life – share his cell.  

From the above evidence, then, we may conclude that Ælfric’s decision to include these episodes might have been motivated by two linked factors: his increasing faithfulness towards Sulpicius in his second translation, and the fact that his intended audience were in orders, and their response to his translations, therefore, would be more controlled. As far as the first point is concerned, it becomes apparent that faithfulness towards Sulpicius involved for Ælfric an

\(^\text{20}\) ‘For some while he had a house close to the church, but after some time, as an example to the people and because of the lack of quiet, he established a monastery for himself two miles from the city; and the place was so secret that he desired no other desert’. Ælfric, Lives of Saints XXXI.310–14, ed. Skeat, p. 238.
acceptance of an ideal based upon a mixed life encompassing both the eremitic-ascetic and coenobitic to a far greater extent than seen in his earlier works. That he was willing to do so must, however, relate to our second point: that the *Lives of Saints* were aimed at quite a different audience to his *Catholic Homilies*. Immersed in the ideals of the Benedictine reform as his clerical audience must have been, he may have felt under less pressure to emphasise the Benedictine model and more at liberty to advocate the mixed life. As a disciple of both Bede and Gregory, moreover, it seems likely that Ælfric would have assented to their view that the eremitic life was the highest of all religious forms, but that it was suitable only for those with both devout intent and long monastic experience. Thus Ælfric offers to his clerical readers an insight into what it truly means to be a monastic, whose aims were always to balance the claims of individualism with the demands of a unified community. Even during the Carolingian period, when the coenobitic spirit of the Benedictine reform was at its strongest, the eremitic ideal never entirely languished. Martin's example of a synthesis between the coenobitic and eremitic-ascetic was thus an attractive model for a multitude of translators throughout the medieval period, each of which tilted the balance in favour of one or the other according to the time, place and context within which he was working.²

² The author would like to express gratitude to the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences for providing funding under the Government of Ireland Scholarship Research Scheme.