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Ireland



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HORSE-TRADING AND WIFE-SWAPPING:
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IN TWELFTH-CENTURY IRELAND¹

ABSTRACT

On the eve of the English invasion (1169), Ireland's marriage practices were regarded as barbarous and scandalous by contemporary European ecclesiastics. But were they really so divergent, and if so, why does it matter? This article proposes to explain the rationales underlying marriage with special reference to the *Banshenchas*, a twelfth-century record of aristocratic women and their sons. Close attention is given to pairings in terms of their dynastic affiliation and social standing, and a complex picture emerges: alliance was just one of a variety of political motives – others include suzerainty and local ties – and such strategic thinking was by no means universal. The expectations each family might have from a marriage of their daughters or sons existed on a spectrum from the very great to the very meagre; a spectrum greatly extended by the fact that an Irish royal dynasty might have many more children than their counterparts elsewhere in Europe.² There are indications of female agency and even marriages of no political importance, as well as evidence to support the view of serial monogyny over polygyny. Most importantly, marriage could be considered a recognition of royal status among groups that shared a common kingship. Constituting or avoiding such matches therefore had implications as dynasties sought to monopolise these kingships. In one province in particular, the failure of any one group to edge out their rivals contributed to political crisis: this was Leinster, whose king, Díarmait Mac Murchada, asked Henry II's aid in 1166 and thus enabled the English invasion.³

¹I would like to acknowledge and thank those who read versions of this paper as it developed, and offered their comments: Ruairí Ó hUiginn, Elizabeth Boyle, Michael Potterton, the late Colmán Etchingham, Niamh Wycherley, Tiago Veloso Silva, Colin Veach, Seán Duffy and the anonymous reviewer for *Celtica*. I owe the title to the suggestion of Caitlin Ellis.

²In this article, 'political marriage' represents the portion of the spectrum where a qualitative change in the relationship with another dynasty can be observed, inferred or reasonably assumed; the range of these relationships is also one of our concerns. By comparison, less politically charged marriages (some perhaps even non-political) are characterised by features which make advantages to at least one of the families unlikely: principally the other party having a relatively low social status or being separated by a substantial geographical distance.

³I have endeavoured to follow the naming conventions of the *New History of Ireland* series, albeit with some modifications of my own, including substituting Irish plurals for Anglicised versions.

IT IS WIDELY ACCEPTED that early Irish law distinguished a greater variety of marriage-types than did the legal systems of many other European kingdoms, but the implications of this are more difficult to pin down. A variety of unions were recognised, though not all were considered marriage, and even in the formal categories divorce was easy to obtain.⁴ Consequently, many Irish kings had multiple wives. The prevailing consensus is that these men practised serial monogyny: marrying, divorcing, and re-marrying different women.⁵ A less popular view is that such marriages represent polygyny: re-marriages not preceded by divorce.⁶

Ireland came to the attention of European ecclesiastical authorities from the late eleventh century onwards for its divergent practices, which were openly criticised. Pope Gregory VII's letter to Toirdelbach úa Briain may represent an early example of such criticism, albeit quite a subtle one. Gregory addressed Toirdelbach as 'the illustrious king of Ireland', and in very vague and general terms exhorted the latter to be loyal to the church's teachings: 'to St. Peter and his vicars ... the whole world owes obedience and likewise reverence: these things you should remember to show the holy Roman church with a faithful mind'.⁷ He similarly offered general terms of friendship: 'Should any matters of business arise among you which seem to call for our aid, be sure straightway to have recourse to us, and whatever you rightly ask you will with God's help obtain'.⁸

⁴The Irish term *lánamnas* is not limited to marriage but extends to all sexual unions; nine categories are acknowledged in the law tract *Cáin Lánamna* (Law of Couples). Like Bart Jaski and others, I am construing 'marriage' to apply more narrowly to the categories involving a formal period of betrothal (*lánamnas comthinchuir*, *lánamnas mná for ferthinchur*, and *lánamnas fir for bantinchur co fognam*). The distinction between these forms of marriage rests on the contributions made to the marriage fund. Of the three, *lánamnas comthinchuir* (mutual contribution) had achieved dominance among the nobility by the twelfth century so that, in practical terms, this is what is meant by marriage in this article. See Bart Jaski, 'Marriage laws in Ireland and on the continent in the early Middle Ages', in C. E. Meek and M. K. Simms (eds), *"The Fragility of Her Sex"? Medieval Irish Women in Their European Context* (Dublin, 1996), 16–42, esp. 20–7.

⁵See Fergus Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law* (Dublin, 1988), 70–9; Anthony Candon, 'Power, politics and polygamy: women and marriage in late pre-Norman Ireland', in Damian Bracken and Dagmar Ó Riain-Raedel (eds), *Ireland and Europe in the Twelfth Century* (Dublin, 2006), 106–27; Liam Breatnach, 'On Old Irish collective and abstract nouns, the meaning of *cétmuintir*, and marriage in early mediaeval Ireland', *Ériu* 66 (2016), 1–29.

⁶A preference for the theory of polygyny is found in Charlene M. Eska, *Cáin Lánamna: An Old Irish Tract on Marriage and Divorce Law* (Leiden, 2010), 3, though it is unclear whether Eska extends this view to the twelfth century; another similar view can be found in Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession* (Dublin, 2000), 153.

⁷H. E. J. Cowdrey (ed.), *The Epistolae Vagantes of Pope Gregory VII* (Oxford, 1972), 138–41, at 138–9: '*Terdeluacho inclito regi Hiberniae*', '*Beato igitur Petro eiusque uicariis ... orbis uniuersus obedientiam similiter et reuerentiam debet, quam mente deuota sanctae Romanae aecclesiae exhibere reminiscimini*'.

⁸Cowdrey, *The Epistolae Vagantes of Pope Gregory VII*, 138–41: '*Siqua uero negotia penes uos emeruerint quae nostro digna uideantur auxilio, incunctanter ad nos dirigere studete, et quod iuste postulaueritis Deo auxiliante impetrabitur*'; Martin Brett thought this letter might be a forgery due to its departures from Gregory's normal proof-texts, but his suggestion has not met with general acceptance. See idem, 'Canterbury's perspective on church reform and Ireland, 1070–1115', in Damian Bracken and Dagmar Ó Riain-Raedel (eds), *Ireland and Europe in the Twelfth Century* (Dublin, 2006), 13–35, at 19–20, n. 14.

H. E. J. Cowdrey, the editor and translator of the letter in question, offered only a broad dating of 1074 × 84, but considering the communications of Lanfranc, archbishop of Canterbury, both with Toirdelbach and Gregory, an early date in that range is likely. Lanfranc was more specific in his criticisms and he also seems to have hoped to establish Canterbury's authority over the Irish church. Gregory did not openly sanction this, but he wrote to Lanfranc about Irish marriage practices, implying the latter's authority to correct them.

Lanfranc wrote to Toirdelbach úa Briain in 1074 to complain on the same score. He also oversaw the ordination of the bishop of Dublin in that year, and Canterbury's primacy was accepted among the Hiberno-Norse towns from at least that point until 1140.⁹ Six and perhaps seven Hiberno-Norse bishops were consecrated at Canterbury in that period, hailing from Limerick and Waterford as well as from Dublin.¹⁰ These towns were central to the affairs of the great provincial kings in the eleventh century, especially the Uí Briain kings of Munster, and it was therefore natural for the archbishops of Canterbury to make contact with them.

Though Canterbury's claim of authority over Ireland remained speculative, Lanfranc admonished the king of Ireland, saying 'in your kingdom a man abandons at his own discretion and without any grounds in canon law the wife who is lawfully married to him, not hesitating to form a criminal alliance – by the law of marriage or rather by the law of fornication – with any other woman he pleases, either a relative of his own or his deserted wife or a woman whom somebody else has abandoned in an equally disgraceful way'.¹¹

Lanfranc's letter to Toirdelbach is regarded as a companion of one he sent to Gofraid mac Amlaíb, king of Dublin. In that epistle, he made essentially the same complaint: 'there are said to be men in your kingdom who take wives from either their own kindred or that of their deceased wives; others who by their own will and authority abandon the wives who are legally married to them; some who give their own wives to others and by an abominable exchange receive the wives of other men instead'.¹²

A generation later, Anselm, successor of Lanfranc in Canterbury, sought to exert the same influence in Ireland. Anselm wrote to Toirdelbach's son and

⁹J. A. Watt, *The Church and the Two Nations in Medieval Ireland* (Cambridge, 1970), 7.

¹⁰Watt, *The Church and the Two Nations*, 7.

¹¹Helen Clover and Margaret Gibson (eds and trans.), *The Letters of Lanfranc Archbishop of Canterbury* (Oxford, 1979), 70–1: *uidelicet quod in regno uestro quisque pro arbitrio suo legitime sibi copulatam uxorem nulla canonica causa interueniente relinquit et aliam quamlibet, seu sibi uel relicte uxori consanguinitate propinquam siue quam alius simili intemeritate coniungit*. It is also worth considering the impact of these criticisms on Irish society. For example, it appears that the Synod of Cashel (1101) legislated against marriages where the couple had pre-existing affinity (see Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'The Synod of Cashel: conservative or innovative?', in David Edwards (ed.), *Regions and Rulers in Ireland c. 1100–c. 1650* (Dublin, 2004), 13–19). Similarly, Ruairí Ó hUiginn has argued that a version of the tale *Tochmarc Emire* exhibits clear evidence of a concern with unregulated unions that arose out of eleventh-century clerical distaste for Irish marriage customs (idem, *Marriage, Law and Tochmarc Emire* (Cambridge, 2013)).

¹²Clover and Gibson, *The Letters of Lanfranc Archbishop of Canterbury*, 68–9: *In regno uestro perhibentur homines seu de propria seu de mortuorum uxorū parentela coniuges ducere, alii legitime sibi copulates pro arbitrio et uoluntate relinquere, nonnulli suas aliis dare et aliorum infanda commutatione recipere*.

successor Muirchertach c. 1106, reiterating his predecessor's complaints: 'We have heard that in your kingdom marriages are being dissolved and altered without any grounds; that those related to each other do not fear to live together openly without reproof despite canonical prohibition'.¹³ In what is either another version of this letter or a separate missive, Anselm put the case even more forcefully, saying he had been informed that in Ireland 'husbands freely and publicly exchange their wives for the wives of others, as if they were exchanging one horse for another or anything whatever for something from someone else, or they abandon them at their pleasure and without reason'.¹⁴

We will leave aside Canterbury's claim on primacy over the Irish church, since we are more concerned here with their perspective on marriage.¹⁵ But, whether taking their lead from Canterbury or from Rome, there is no doubt that the 'reforming' faction in Ireland regarded marriage as one of their principal targets. Even so, it was an area in which they had limited success. Take, for instance, the case of Cormac Mac Cárthaig. The king of Munster was considered a major ally of reform, through his association with Máel Máedoc Ua Morgair (St. Malachy) and his subsequent sponsorship of new foundations and buildings, notably Cormac's chapel at Cashel, which is perhaps the most famous example of Romanesque architecture in Ireland.¹⁶ The Romanesque style is generally regarded as a signature of twelfth-century reformers, and in Cormac's case we are even more certain that he supported their cause. Nonetheless, his approach to marriage was considered less than satisfactory. In the *Visio Tnugdali* he is depicted enduring the penance of standing in fire up to his waist with his upper body in a hairshirt for three hours each day, because 'he had sullied the sacrament of lawful marriage'.¹⁷ This comment is particularly interesting because, in other sources he is only associated with one wife: Derbail ingen Uí Lorcáin of Uí Muiredaig in Leinster.¹⁸

¹³Walter Fröhlich (ed. and trans.), *The Letters of Saint Anselm of Canterbury*, 4 vols (Kalamazoo, 1990–4), iii, 203; F. S. Schmitt (ed.), *S. Anselmi Opera Omnia*, 6 vols (Edinburgh, 1938–63), v, 374: *Auditor apud nos quia coniugia in regno vestro sine omni ratione dissolvuntur et commutantur; quia cognati, sive sub nomine coniugii sive alio modo, palam sine reprehensione contra canonicam prohibitionem commisceri non vereantur.*

¹⁴Clover and Gibson, *The Letters of Saint Anselm of Canterbury*, iii, 215; Schmitt, *S. Anselmi opera omnia*, v, 382: *Dicitur enim quod viri ita libere et publice uxores suas uxoris aliorum commutant, sicut quilibet equum equo aut aliam quamlibet rem re alia ab alio commuta aut pro libitu et sine ratione relinquunt.*

¹⁵Readers wishing to engage more closely with this question could begin with some of the following interpretations: Brett, 'Canterbury's perspective on church reform and Ireland, 1070–1115', 13–35; Mark Philpott, 'Some interactions between the English and Irish churches', in Christopher Harper-Bill (ed.), *Anglo-Norman Studies XX: Proceedings of the Battle Conference in Dublin, 1997* (Woodbridge, 1998), 187–204; Dan Armstrong, 'Gregory VII, Lanfranc and Ireland', in Dan Armstrong, Áron Kecskés, Charles C. Rozier and Leonie V. Hicks (eds), *Borders and the Norman World: Frontiers and Boundaries in Medieval Europe* (Woodbridge, 2023), 149–70.

¹⁶See Tadhg O'Keeffe, *Romanesque Ireland* (Dublin, 2003), especially 123–65.

¹⁷Jean-Michel Picard (trans.) and Yolande de Pontfarcy (ed.), *The Vision of Tnugdali* (Dublin, 1989), 144–6; Marie Therese Flanagan, *The Transformation of The Irish Church in The Twelfth Century* (Woodbridge, 2010), 171.

¹⁸Margaret E. Dobbs, 'The Ban-Shenchus', *RC* 48 (1931), 163–234, at 192, 234 [hereafter *Banshenchas* [part two]]; Muireann Ní Bhrolcháin, 'The Prose *Banshenchas*', unpublished PhD thesis, University College Galway, 1980, §565, pp. 304, 418. Note: Ní Bhrolcháin's edition supersedes

From the reforming perspective, there were far more egregious cases than Mac Cárthaig. We know of six wives of Toirdelbach Ua Conchobair, king of Connacht, for instance, and it is likely there were more still whose names have been forgotten. Five of these women have obituaries in the annals: Arlaith ingen Uí Máel Sechlainn in 1115,¹⁹ Mór ingen Meic Lochlainn in 1122,²⁰ Tailtiu ingen Uí Máel Sechlainn in 1127 or 1128,²¹ Derbforgaill ingen Meic Lochlainn in 1151,²² and Dub Coblaid ingen Uí Máel Rúanaid in 1168.²³ The other, Caillech Dé ingen Uí hEidin, is attested in the *Banshenchas*.²⁴ Between them, these women produced at least twenty-two sons²⁵ and three daughters.²⁶ As with wives, it is probable that there were others, especially daughters, who went unnoticed in the record.

It has sometimes been thought that the order of marriages could be deduced by the seniority of sons, where that can be established or surmised. Among the many sons, it appears Áed was the oldest and most senior; certainly, it was either he or Máel Ísa who subsequently became *comarbae* of Roscommon.²⁷ The *Banshenchas* states that Derbforgaill ingen Meic Lochlainn was mother of Domnall, Áed, and Cathal; a statement which was copied into her obituary in *AFM*.²⁸ In the genealogies, a similar notice recorded that Rúaidrí, Domnall 'Mór', and Cathal Crobderg were the three sons of Toirdelbach's wife, the daughter of Mac Díarmata.²⁹ John Ryan read this statement to mean that Dub Coblaid ingen Uí

that of Dobbs and is based on all extant manuscripts but, since it is unpublished, I include reference to both throughout the article. For some discussion of the manuscript tradition, see below, p. 98.

¹⁹*Chron. Scot.* s.a. 1115.4: 'Arlaith'.

²⁰*AU* s.a. 1122.4; *ALC* s.a. 1122.4; *AI* s.a. 1122.9.

²¹*AFM* s.a. 1128.17; *AU* s.a. 1127.7; *ALC* s.a. 1127.7; *Ann. Clon.* s.a. 1108.

²²*AFM* s.a. 1151.7.

²³*AFM* s.a. 1168.22.

²⁴*Banshenchas* [part two], pp. 191, 233; Ní Bhrolcháin, 'The Prose *Banshenchas*', §566, pp. 304, 418.

²⁵Dubhaltach Mac Fhirbhisigh, *Leabhar Mór na nGenealach: The Great Book of Irish Genealogies*, ed. and trans. Nollaig Ó Muraíle, 5 vols (Dublin, 2003), i, §219.16, pp. 486–7: Rúaidrí, Cathal Crobderg, Domnall Mór, Máel Ísa, Áed Dall, Tadc Álainn, Brian Bréifnach, Brian Luigneach, Magnus, Lochlann, Muirchertach Muimnech, Donnchad, Máel Sechlainn, Tadc Fídnachta, Cathal Miguran, two sons named Conchobar, Díarmait, Domnall, Muirghes, Tadc of Dairéan, & Murchad Fionn. This list is chosen in preference to a less comprehensive one found in the Ó Cléirigh Book of Genealogies (Seamus Pender (ed.), 'The O Clery book of genealogies 23 D 17 (R.I.A.)', in *Analecta Hibernica* 18 (1951), ix, xi–xxxiii, 1–198, at §894, p. 102), which says Toirdelbach had seventeen sons and proceeds to list nineteen.

²⁶*Banshenchas* [part two], p. 234; Ní Bhrolcháin, 'The prose *Banshenchas*', §566, pp. 304, 418.

²⁷There are alternative readings of a line in the genealogies here. Lists of Toirdelbach's sons include the line, 'Máel Ísa comorba Comáin sindser a cloindí & a oigri [&?] Áed dall', which can be read either as 'Máel Ísa comarba of Comán the eldest of his family and his [Toirdelbach's] heir, and Áed Dall', as in Ó Muraíle, *Leabhar Mór na nGenealach*, i, §219.16, pp. 486–7; or alternatively, 'Máel Ísa comarba Comáin, and the eldest of his family and his [Toirdelbach's] heir Áed dall', as in Jaski, *Early Irish kingship and Succession*, 139. See also RIA MS 23 P 2, fol. 63v.

²⁸*AFM* s.a. 1151.7.

²⁹Pender (ed.), 'The O Clery book of genealogies', §894, p. 102: *Ruaidrí rí Ereann et Cathal Croibhderg rí Connacht, ocus Domhnall Mór tanaíse na h-Ereann as do tucadh an toradh cétach fa dheoidh; a tri mic lia a mnai posda insin .i. ingen mac Diarmada*'; Ó Muraíle, *Leabhar Mór na nGenealach*, i, §219.16, pp. 486–7: *Ruaidhrí, rí Ereann bheós, Cathal Croibhdhearg, rí Connacht,*

Máel Rúanaid (alias Mac Díarmata) was Toirdelbach's first wife, even though hers is by far the latest of the surviving obituaries.³⁰

The two claims are not necessarily incompatible, since Toirdelbach had two sons named Cathal and two sons named Domnall, but it is probable that both of these documents claim at least the same 'Domnall' (i.e. Domnall Midech d. 1176), and perhaps also the same Cathal (Cathal Crobderg, d. 1224), and if so, there is a contradiction. Again, if so, there is every indication that the version recorded in the more contemporary *Banshenchas* is to be relied upon over that in the genealogies. It is also practically certain that Dub Coblaid ingen Uí Máel Rúanaid was not Toirdelbach's first wife, a supposition which must surely be incompatible with her being mother to Cathal Crobderg (d. 1224), Toirdelbach's youngest son, and dying in 1168. These discrepancies go to show the prestige women enjoyed by having sons who went on to claim kingship; only with a distance of time would it have been clear who was most creditable in this regard.

It is worth noting that non-canonical marriage practice could assist political strategy. Two of Toirdelbach's wives were drawn from Meath, a further two from the Northern Uí Néill, and two from his own province, developing significant internal and external relationships.³¹ The sobriquets by which some of his sons were distinguished reveal the areas in which they were fostered (an important practice in Gaelic Ireland), and they also show the development of internal and external relationships. Brían Bréifnech, then, was fostered in Bréifne, Brían Luigneach in Luigne, and Muirchertach Muimnech in Munster. Considering that fosterage took place during formative years, it may even be that these individuals developed characteristics and accents associated with different territories.

It was perhaps for such connections that Rúaidrí Uí Conchobair followed his father's lead and ignored the reformers' zeal. Under the year 1233, recording the fall of Rúaidrí's sons from power for the final time, *Ann. Conn.* pointedly attributed their demise to Rúaidrí's moral failings: 'Here ends the rule of the children of Ruaidri O Conchobair, King of Ireland. For the Pope offered him the title to (the kingship of) Ireland for himself and his seed for ever, and likewise six wives, if he would renounce the sin of adultery henceforth; and since he would not accept these terms God took the rule and sovranity [sic] from his

Domhnall Mór, tanaiste Connacht (as dó tugadh an toradh ceudach fa dheóigh): a thrí mec re (a) mnaoi posda.

³⁰John Ryan, *Toirdelbach O Conchubair: King of Connacht, King of Ireland co Fresabra* (Dublin, 1966), 6.

³¹It may be of interest that the tale *Bórama Laigen* or 'The cattle tribute of Leinster', preserved in the (predominantly) twelfth-century Book of Leinster, recounts a dispute that resulted from the social norm of marrying older daughters off before younger ones. Eochu, king of Leinster, took the elder of the king of Ireland's two daughters as his wife. After marrying her, he was mocked by his own men, who said 'you left the better one behind you' ('*is ferr ind ingen ro fhácabais*'). He subsequently returned to the king of Ireland, Túathal Techtmar, telling him that his elder daughter had died, and that he wished now to take the younger one to replace her. Túathal agreed, but when his younger daughter went to Leinster and discovered her sister still living, they both died of shame. It is possible this account preserves a scandal connected with Toirdelbach Uí Conchobair or another king who married two or more sisters in succession. See Standish Hayes O'Grady, *Silva Gadelica*, 2 vols (London, 1892), i, 359–90, at 359–60; ii, 401–24, at 402.

seed for ever, in punishment for his sin.³² Apart from explaining the spectacular damage which the English invasion had dealt to Rúaidrí's kingship with reference to supposed moral failings, this comment suggests a contrast, in the mind of the author, with those who seized power at the expense of Rúaidrí's sons – i.e. Cathal Crobderg's sons. No doubt it was the same annalist who penned Cathal Crobderg's obituary of 1224, praising him as 'the king who was most chaste of all the kings of Ireland; the king who kept himself to one consort and practised continence before God from her death till his own'.³³ Cathal Crobderg's only wife, Mór, daughter of Domnall Úa Briain, had died in 1218.³⁴

The comment in *Ann. Conn.* that Rúaidrí had at least six wives has been dismissed as an anachronism that more properly applied to his father, Toirdelbach.³⁵ Though it is true that only one wife of Rúaidrí's is known by name, Tigernán Úa Rúairc's daughter Dub Coblaid (d. 1181), there is plenty of evidence to suggest the annalist's complaint was substantive.³⁶ The genealogies give an incomplete list of Rúaidrí's sons, comprising seven individuals.³⁷ With reference to the annals we can increase this to at least fourteen sons,³⁸ and at least eight daughters.³⁹ Some of these are mentioned on one occasion only,

³²*Ann. Conn.* s.a. 1233.3: *Deod flaithesa clainni Ruaidri h.Conchobair Rig Erenn ann sin. Uair tarcaid in Papa cert ar Erin do fein & da sil 'na diaid co brath 7 seser do mnaib posta 7 scur do pecad na mban o sin amach, 7 o nar gab Ruaidri sin do ben dia rigi & flaithius dia sil co brath a ndigaltus pecaid na mban.* See also *ALC* s.a. 1233.2, 1233.3, 1233.4.

³³*Ann. Conn.* s.a. 1224.2: *Ri is geannmaide tanicc du rigaib Erenn; Ri ro congaib he fein ar oennai posta 7 dorone continaitt do Dia dara hes nocur marb;* *ALC* s.a. 1224.2; *AFM* s.a. 1224.7. These entries have been contrasted before (to the same effect), and it has been shown that Rúaidrí Úa Conchobair's 'reputation as a paragon of old-world regal immorality was to endure' down to the seventeenth century, when Geoffrey Keating reported that it had been his practice to have his way with every woman in his kingdom 'whether she were married or not'. See Ó hUiginn, 'Why was the king offered six wives by the pope?', in Terence Dooley, Mary Ann Lyons and Salvador Ryan (eds), *The Historian as Detective: Uncovering Irish Pasts. Essays In Honour of Raymond Gillespie* (Dublin, 2021), 37–40; Osborn Bergin (ed.), *Trí Bior-Ghaoithe an Bháis*, ITS (Dublin, 1931; repr. Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1992), 171, ll. 5460–70.

³⁴*ALC* s.a. 1218.6; *AU* s.a. 1218.5; *AI* s.a. 1218.2; *AFM* s.a. 1217.3.

³⁵Flanagan, 'Úa Conchobair, Ruaidrí [Rory O'Connor] (c. 1116–1198), high-king of Ireland' in *ODNB* (<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/20522>) (accessed 12 June 2018).

³⁶*Ann. Clon.* s.a. 1181.

³⁷Ó Muraíle, *Leabhar Mór na nGenealach*, i, §220.9, p. 488: Áed, Tadc, Conchobar, Muiredach, Toirdelbach, Murchad, Díarmait.

³⁸These are Áed (d. 1159), Murchad (blinded 1177, died 1216), Conchobar Maenmaige (d. 1189), Conchobar Úa nDíarmata (d. 1189), Donnchad Úaithnech (d. 1200), Díarmait (d. 1221), Murgius Canonach (d. 1224), Áed Muimnech (d. 1233), Muiredach (d. 1207), Toirdelbach (d. 1239), Áed (d. 1233), Domnall Murach (d. unknown), Rúaidrí (d. 1211), Gilla na Naem (d. 1228), and possibly also Donnchad Mór (d. 1233). Donnchad Mór is recorded as a son of Rúaidrí in *Ann. Clon.* s.a. 1233, but elsewhere as a grandson through Díarmait (*Ann. Conn.* s.a. 1233.2; *ALC* s.a. 1233.1; *AFM* s.a. 1233.4). This list is at variance with a similar list by Bart Jaski on the following points: Jaski considers Murchad (blinded 1177) and Murchad or, in his version, Muirchertach (d. 1216) to be separate individuals; and he excludes both Gilla na Naem (d. 1228) and Donnchad Mór (d. 1233), the latter of whom he includes as a son of Díarmait mac Rúaidrí, following *Ann. Conn.*, *ALC*, and *AFM*. See Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession*, 153; idem, 'Genealogical tables of the medieval Irish royal dynasties', published online (https://www.academia.edu/4144299/Genealogical_tables_of_medieval_Irish_royal_dynasties) (accessed 12 September 2022), no. 65.

³⁹An unnamed daughter married to Úa Máel Doraid (d. 1176), Núalad, wife of Mac Duinn Sléibe (d. 1226), Duibhessa, wife of Cathal Mac Díarmata (d. 1230), an unnamed daughter married

purely incidentally, indicating that many more probably went unrecorded. Like Toirdelbach, Rúaidrí used his children to forge bonds inside and outside his province, so it is likely that if he had more than one wife, they offered the same opportunity; certainly, his one recorded marriage, to Tigernán Úa Rúairc's daughter, was politically important.⁴⁰

Úa Rúairc's own case was different: Derbforgaill appears to have been his only wife. He had only two recorded sons, both of whom predeceased him: Máel Sechlainn (d. 1162) and Áed Manach (d. 1171). The former's name was no doubt an acknowledgement of Derbforgaill's family, a common way by which forenames were introduced into families, while the latter was named for Tigernán's father, Áed in Gilla Srónmael (d. 1122).

A comparison of the Uí Chonchobair and Uí Rúairc in this period shows the impact such divergent marriage practices had on dynastic development. Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair's productivity effectively accelerated the process of segmentation in his dynasty; there were no subsequent kings of Connacht who did not descend directly from him. Other existing segments, even those descended from Toirdelbach's father Rúaidrí na Saide Buide or his grandfather, Áed in Gaí Bernaig, were therefore excluded from the kingship. In the 1220s and 1230s, Rúaidrí's sons, referred to generally as the 'meic Rúaidrí', contested the kingship with Cathal Crobderg's sons. Had they been successful, it is possible that 'Meic Rúaidrí' would have eclipsed 'Uí Chonchobair' as the surname of the royal dynasty, just as 'Meic Duinn Sléibe' replaced Uí Eochada in Ulaid, for example.

A relatively distant dynastic segmentation prevailed among the Uí Rúairc. Two sons of Úalgarg Úa Rúairc (d. 1057), Tigernán and Domnall, gave rise to the 'Meic Tigernáin' and 'Meic Domnaill' lines respectively. Áed in Gilla Srónmael (d. 1122) and Tigernán Úa Rúairc (d. 1172) belonged to the Meic Domnaill line, but this group did not monopolise the kingship of Uí Briúin Bréifne. The Meic Tigernáin candidates of Donnchad in Gilla Braite (d. 1124) and his son Áed (d. 1184) interrupted their rule at intervals. This was certainly the case after Áed in Gilla Srónmael's death in 1122, when Donnchad in Gilla Braite took over, and also in 1152, when Tigernán was temporarily deposed. Tigernán had already suffered a deposition in 1140, and this may also have been in favour of Áed mac Donnchada in Gilla Braite. When Tigernán died in 1172, with his sons all dead before him, the Meic Tigernáin line took the kingship again.⁴¹

Traditionally, Úa Rúairc has not been considered a 'reforming' king, unlike his contemporaries Cormac Mac Cárthaig, Donnchad Úa Cerbaill, Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn, and Díarmait Mac Murchada, for example. As we have seen, such a categorisation tells us nothing about the marriage practices of such men anyway (like Mac Cárthaig, Mac Murchada had more than one wife), but

to Hugh de Lacy and later to Henry de Blund (d. unknown), Finngúala (d. 1247), Ragnailt (d. 1211), Caillech Dé (d. 1211), and Éacht (d. 1206).

⁴⁰See below, p. 109.

⁴¹For a full discussion of this point, see Seán Ó Hoireabhárd, 'Succession in twelfth-century Bréifne', *Bréifne: Journal of Cumann Seanchais Bhreifne* 15/58 (2023), 369–80.

given the fact that Úa Rúaire's wife Derbforgaill has been regarded as an ally of reform, and since it has now been established that her patronage was offered in concert with her husband, and not in opposition to him, it may well be that theirs is an example of 'reformed' marriage practice taking root in Ireland.⁴² Cathal Crobderg Úa Conchobair is more notable in this regard because the annalists emphasised the point, but this was surely to create a contrast with Rúaidrí Úa Conchobair as well. If this was so, Mac Murchada's abduction of Derbforgaill in 1152 appears all the more calculated.

This paper's focus on the twelfth century reflects the centrality of Gaelic marriage practice in contemporary justifications of the English invasion, but it is also determined by the availability of good-quality source material; for instance, both the prose and metrical versions of the *Banshenchas* date from this era and inform us particularly well about it. Nevertheless, there is also a wider context in which findings about the twelfth century might be proved consequential. Gaelic culture stretched beyond Ireland into Scotland and the Western Isles, and broadly speaking, what applies in one case may apply equally well in another. Similarly, the customs grouped here under the heading of 'Gaelic marriage practice' proliferated well beyond the twelfth century, and even beyond the Middle Ages, so that evidence from later periods might also bear upon the twelfth century.

The durability of these practices is widely accepted. Katharine Simms, who has given their later history a great deal of attention, has explained that 'On the Gaelic side, although brehon law in the later Middle Ages had changed and developed considerably since the Old Irish period, the broad principles governing a woman's position in regard to property, marriage and legal guardianship seem to have remained surprisingly constant. She could possess movable goods, such as gold and silver, sheep and cattle, and when she married, she did not surrender this property completely into her husband's hands, she always retained some say in business matters which concerned them both. If divorce occurred, as was permissible under Irish secular law, she was normally entitled to receive her marriage-portion back intact'.⁴³

Another historian, W. D. H. Sellar, also elaborated their geographical extent in an important paper on 'Marriage, divorce and concubinage in Gaelic Scotland'. He wrote: 'Given the tenacity of the institution in Ireland one would expect to find Celtic secular marriage also in Scotland. Scotland was united by a dynasty of Gaelic-speaking kings of Irish origin. In the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, as in Ireland, an archaic kin-based Gaelic society survived the Middle Ages [...] It is true that the surviving Scottish record, especially

⁴²See Seán Ó Hoireabhárd, 'Derbforgaill: twelfth-century abductee, patron and wife', *Irish Historical Studies* 46/169 (May, 2022), 1–24.

⁴³Katharine Simms, 'Women in Norman Ireland', in Margaret Mac Curtain and Donncha Ó Corráin (eds), *Women in Irish society: The Historical Dimension* (Dublin, 1978), 14–25, at 14.

from the Gaelic side, is sparser than the Irish, but enough has survived to indicate that Celtic secular marriage had a long history in Gaelic Scotland as in Ireland'.⁴⁴

Sellar has also suggested that 'Celtic law' underwent a revival in the Isles and Highlands after the 1100s and noted in particular the Morrisons of Ness in Lewis, who were the best known of the judges continuing to use the title of *brithemh*. They certainly continued to practise Gaelic law in the sixteenth century, while at the same time Shane Ó Néill employed an Anglo-Irishman, William Fleming, as *Judex Tyroniae*, apparently in response to the perception that Irish brehons were 'ignorant of English law, and very unskilled in civil and canon law'.⁴⁵ It is not surprising, therefore, to find that the Isles and Scotland provide useful evidence for the nature of marriage and divorce in a broader context.

This proves useful when we try to imagine what a sequence of marriages might have looked like in practice. If we accept that serial monogyny was the framework – an argument which will be developed further below – then the nature of divorce or separation inevitably comes to the fore. This is especially true when we face examples like Toirdelbach Ua Conchobair (d. 1156), who had six wives, or Toirdhealbhach 'An Fhíona' Ó Domhnaill (d. 1423), who had ten.⁴⁶ In many cases wives predeceased their husbands, probably often a result of complications during childbirth; occasionally, their deaths are recorded in the annals. This fact does not, however, account for such prodigious examples – much less explain them.

Nonetheless, there is no need to revive the theory of polygyny; the type of separation which we are seeking is alluded to in a variety of sources, some of which we have already seen. Certainly, this is what Lanfranc and Anselm meant by the 'dissolution' of marriages, and the 'abandonment' or 'exchange' of wives. In the Irish and Scottish sources, we hear it frequently referred to as 'putting away your wife' (*léig/cor do sétche úair*). Even though Sellar appears to have accepted early modern accusations of polygyny against certain individuals, the evidence he highlighted tends towards the contrary view. So, for instance, the second earl of Clanrickarde (d. 1582) was said to have been married six times, with five wives living with him at the same time – but four of them had nevertheless been 'put away by him', and another had died.⁴⁷ Similarly, there is the case of Rev. Farquhar MacRae's excursion to Lewis in 1610,

⁴⁴W. D. H. Sellar, 'Marriage, divorce and concubinage in Gaelic Scotland', *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness* (1978–80), 464–93, at 474. I would like to thank Ruairí Ó hUiginn for this reference.

⁴⁵Simms, 'The legal position of Irishwomen in the later Middle Ages', 107; *Cal. State Papers Ire.* 1509–73, 229.

⁴⁶Paul Walsh (ed.), *Beatha Aodha Ruaidh Uí Dhomhnaill. The Life of Aodh Ruadh O Domhnaill*, 2 vols, ITS 42 and 45 (London, 1948 and 1957), ii, 168–9; K. W. Nicholls, *Gaelic and Gaelicized Ireland in the Middle Ages*, second ed. (Dublin, 2003), 12, 83–7; Séamus Pender, 'The O Clery Book of Genealogies: 23 D 17 (R.I.A.)', *Analecta Hibernica* 18 (1951), pp. ix, xi–xxxiii, 1–198 at 8.

⁴⁷Sellar, 'Marriage, divorce and concubinage in Gaelic Scotland', 472.

where he married a great number of people ‘thereby to legitimate their children’ and ‘to abolish the barbarous custom that prevailed of putting away their wives upon the least discord’.⁴⁸

Even more detail can be provided for another seventeenth-century case, quoted in full below. It shows how Ranald Mór of Benbecula had ten sons by five wives – three of whom he put away, while another died:

Ranald, son of Allan, a good man according to the times in which he lived; he was hospitable and generous, thrifty and friendly. He took unto him as his first wife the daughter of Ranald, son of James, i.e., Tanist of South Oirear, and she bore him a good son, Angus Mor, son of Ranald. He put her away, and she was afterwards married to Coll Mac Gillespie. She was the mother of the Clann Coll, namely, Gillespie, Ranald and Alaster, and a good family of daughters, who were afterwards married to good gentlemen. Ranald, son of Allan, having put away the daughter of Ranlad, took Fionnsgoth Burke, a lady of the Burkes of the Province of Connaught, in the County of Mayo, and she bore three sons for him, namely Alexander, Rory, and Farquhar. He put away Fionnsgoth, and married Margaret, the daughter of Norman Macleod of Harris, the wife whom Norman Og Macleod of Lewis had. She bore a family to the son of Allan, namely, Allan Og, son of Ranald. That good wife died from him. After her he took Mary, the daughter of Gillespie of Medhe Connaill, and she bore a son to him, namely Donald Gorm, son of Ranald, and he put her away. After all these he married Margaret, the daughter of Angus, son of James, and her issue were made heirs of Benbecula and of Ardnish. She bore him a good family, namely Ranald Og, the heir, and John Og, Angus, Ranald, and Rory.⁴⁹

These examples show quite clearly that only one woman occupied the position of wife at any given time. A replacement was found only after the incumbent had died or been ‘set aside’. The fact that a powerful man might have several wives over the course of his life is to be accounted for by the ease with which he could set them aside at a moment of his choosing. It seems very probable that twelfth- and thirteenth-century practice corresponded.

Only a prosopographical methodology can hope to explain the rationales behind non-reformed marriage practice in Ireland. There are some difficulties with this approach, however. On rare occasions marriages themselves are recorded, but this was not typical; we are instead dependent on chance references and obituaries to build a picture of these connections from the annals.⁵⁰ We also

⁴⁸Sellar, ‘Marriage, divorce and concubinage in Gaelic Scotland’, 484 and n. 84, with thanks to John Bannerman; J. R. N. MacPhail (ed.), *Highland Papers* (Edinburgh, 1914–34), i, 226.

⁴⁹Sellar, ‘Marriage, divorce and concubinage in Gaelic Scotland’ (my emphasis), 485–6; Alexander Cameron, Alexander Macbain, John Kennedy, ‘The Book of Clanranald’ in Alexander Macbain & John Kennedy (eds), *Reliquiae Celticae* (2 vols, Inverness, 1894) ii, 149–288, at 173–5.

⁵⁰See for instance, *AFM* s.a. 1159.5; *Ann. Conn.* s.a. 1259.6; *AU* s.a. 1263.22.

have the *Banshenchas*, mentioned above, which was a twelfth-century genealogical record of the sons (and sometimes the daughters) produced by prominent aristocratic women. Though the origins of some named individuals are obscure, many more links are illuminated than could be by reliance on the annals alone.

We must assume, for our present purpose, that the mothers named in the *Banshenchas* were all wives as well; this is likely to be correct in the vast majority of cases, but there may be exceptions of which we are unaware. In the original, metrical, *Banshenchas*, the author, Gilla mo Dutu Úa Caiside, stated his purpose in this regard: 'I omit from my poem the harlots and unfree offspring, evil women and people of a low birth of the generations. Since I have not enumerated them strictly, so that there would be no true dishonour against the king by listing them before their peoples'.⁵¹ It was probably an aim that appealed to those who added entries to their prose versions of the text.

There are eight extant manuscripts of the prose *Banshenchas*, including six major copies, and all appear to derive from Úa Caiside's work. The exemplar in the Book of Lecan is the longest copy of the text, containing 457 of the 569 entries in Ní Bhrolcháin's diplomatic edition. It shows a sustained interest in the Uí Máel Sechlainn of Meath and has been dated to c. 1160.⁵² The only manuscript that provides this study with substantial alternative information is the Book of Uí Maine text. With 412 entries it is the second longest version, and it contains 64 entries not found elsewhere. It shows a strong interest in Leinster, and in Díarmait Mac Murchada – even sympathising with him because Úa Rúairc had forced him overseas.⁵³ For both this and for its reference to Conchobar Mac Murchada's execution, as well as some other details, it has been assigned a date of c. 1170. We are indeed fortunate to have this twelfth-century record and are fully justified in placing weight on it while re-creating the links between Irish dynasties.

Modern commentary has hitherto argued in general terms for the use of women as 'political pawns' in Gaelic Ireland, and for the existence of an alliance system comparable to continental Europe.⁵⁴ This is not a fanciful suggestion: there are cases where marriage links clearly coincided with important military and political alignments. Perhaps the most obvious example in the twelfth century is that of Tigernán Úa Rúairc and Rúaidrí Úa Conchobair, already mentioned: a long-lasting alliance, the beginning of which is recorded in the annals,⁵⁵ and in support of which there was a marriage.⁵⁶ An earlier example may be found in Ragnailt ingen Amlaíb,

⁵¹Muireann Ní Bhrolcháin, 'An *Banshenchas Filíochta*', unpublished MA thesis, University College Galway, 1977, §269, pp. 147, 214: *Eachlacha is dear-clanda is droch-mna daine droch-ceneoil na ndream. Facbaim cen a cor a cuibdes mod na ro thuirmes co tend. Na beith beim for rig da ririb tria reim dib da tirib thall.*

⁵²Ní Bhrolcháin, 'The Prose *Banshenchas*', 29–33.

⁵³Ní Bhrolcháin, 'The Prose *Banshenchas*', 41–2.

⁵⁴Muireann Ní Bhrolcháin, 'The *Banshenchas* revisited', in O'Dowd and Wichert, *Chattel, Servant Or Citizen: Women's Status in Church, State and Society* (Belfast, 1995), 70–81 at 72; Flanagan, *The Transformation of the Irish Church*, 185.

⁵⁵AFM s.a. 1159.10.

⁵⁶Ann. Clon. s.a. 1181.

whose father may be identified as Amlaíb Cúarán of Dublin. She was mother of Muirchertach úa Congalaigh,⁵⁷ who died in 995,⁵⁸ reflecting the alliance between the Norse of Dublin and Domnall mac Congalaig of Síl nÁedo Sláine c. 970, ill-fated though it ultimately was.⁵⁹

However, the relationship reflected by marriage between major families was often not alliance but suzerainty. The marriage of Cathal Crobderg to Mór, daughter of Domnall Úa Briain, a figure over whom Úa Conchobair tried to establish his authority, was one such. This had even more significance because it was Cathal Crobderg's only marriage. Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair's repeated marriages to the daughters of Murchad Úa Máel Sechlainn, at a time when overkingship of Meath was contested by Connacht and the Northern Uí Néill, also corresponds with this rationale for marriage.⁶⁰ It is clear, too, that when Rúaidrí Úa Conchobair offered his daughter in marriage to Díarmait Mac Murchada it was the confirmation of his authority over Mac Murchada, not the creation of a future alliance.⁶¹ Another daughter of Rúaidrí's had been given to Mac Duinn Sléibe in the same way.⁶²

Neither alliance nor overlordship explain all or even most recorded aristocratic marriages. Marriages between families of geographical proximity constitute a significant portion of the total recorded specimens, whether between families of regional, local, or provincial influence, or inter-marriages between the same. They frequently took place across provincial boundaries. Rúaidrí na Saide Buide Úa Conchobair's marriage to Úa Conaing's daughter, producing Domnall mac Rúaidrí Uí Chonchobair (d. 1118), was one such example.⁶³ Domnall later lost the kingship of Síl Muiredaig to his half-brother Toirdelbach because the latter's mother was a sister of Muirchertach Úa Briain, and Úa Briain supported Toirdelbach over Domnall in 1106 as a result. In this case, therefore, the son of an intra-provincial marriage lost out to the son of an inter-provincial marriage.

Ailenn ingen Uí Baigelláin of Fir Manach, whose father was a figure of only regional importance, was mother of two provincial kings in different provinces: Tigernán Úa Rúairc of Bréifne and Donnchad Úa Cerbaill of Airgíalla. She therefore had at least two local marriages, one intra-provincial (to the king of Fernmag) and one inter-provincial (to the Uí Briúin Bréifne).⁶⁴ Similarly, the Uí Egra family of north Connacht are recorded to have had multiple marriages

⁵⁷ *Banshenchas* [part two], 188, 227; Ní Bhrolcháin, 'The Prose *Banshenchas*', §417, pp. 272, 389.

⁵⁸ *Ann. Tig.* s.a. 995.4.

⁵⁹ On this alliance, see Benjamin T. Hudson, 'Óláf Sihtricson [Óláfr Sigtryggsson, Amlaíb Cúarán] (c. 926–981), king of Dublin and of Northumbria', in *ODNB*, accessed online (<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/20671>) (4 April 2019).

⁶⁰ *Chron. Scot.* s.a. 1115.4; *AFM* s.a. 1128.17; *AU* s.a. 1127.7; *ALC* s.a. 1127.7; *Ann. Clon.* s.a. 1108.

⁶¹ A. B. Scott and F. X. Martin (eds), *Expugnatio Hibernica: The Conquest of Ireland by Giraldus Cambrensis* (Dublin, 1978), 50–1.

⁶² *AFM* s.a. 1226.6; *ALC* s.a. 1226.6; *Ann. Conn.* s.a. 1226.6.

⁶³ *Banshenchas* [part two], 191; Ní Bhrolcháin, 'The Prose *Banshenchas*', §449, pp. 279, 395; as Ní Bhrolcháin noted, the Uí Briain Ratha transcribed by Dobbs should read Uí Briúin Ratha.

⁶⁴ *Banshenchas* [part two], 191; Ní Bhrolcháin, 'The Prose *Banshenchas*', §447, pp. 278–9, 395.

with the Uí Chonchobair. Étaín, mother of Cathal Úa Conchobair (d. 1082) was a daughter of Úa hEgra,⁶⁵ Dub Coblaid ingen Toirdelbaigh Uí Chonchobair and wife of Úa hEgra died in 1131,⁶⁶ and the wife of Murchad Úa hEgra who died in 1134 was also a daughter of Toirdelbach Úa Conchobair, though it is possible that the last two entries refer to the same person.⁶⁷

In the same category we can mention Caillech Caímgín ingen Ocain Uí Fallamain, a minor family of Síl Muiredaig, who was the mother of Rúaidrí na Saide Buide Úa Conchobair.⁶⁸ Similarly, Mór ingen Conchobair Failge married Conchobar úa Máel Sechlainn; they were notable figures and Anthony Candon has suggested that Mór may have been used as a political hostage.⁶⁹ The Uí Failge were from north Leinster and the Uí Máel Sechlainn were the royal dynasty of Meath.

Another wife of Conchobar úa Máel Sechlainn's, if Dobbs's identification is accepted over that of Ní Bhrolcháin, was Sadb ingen Uí Anradáin,⁷⁰ perhaps the family of that name from Corco Roide in Meath discussed by Patrick Woulfe.⁷¹ The origin of Conchobar's own mother, Cacht ingen Briain Uí Bicin of Síl Báithín, is unclear, but certainly it was a minor and probably a local family.⁷² Gormlaith ingen Uí Donnacáin, king of Arad Tíre in Thomond, was the mother of the Murchad Úa Briain who died in 1068.⁷³

Such marriages may reflect political concerns, and they may not – but other examples show even less useful connections. For instance, Caintigern (or Caindeach) ingen Gúairi Uí Lachtnáin of east Tethba was a wife of Flann mac Máel

⁶⁵ *Banshenchas* [part two], 191; Ní Bhrolcháin, 'The Prose *Banshenchas*', §448, pp. 279, 395.

⁶⁶ *AFM* s.a. 1131.2.

⁶⁷ *AFM* s.a. 1134.19; *Ann. Tig.* s.a. 1134.12; *Ann. Clon.* s.a. 1135; *Chron. Scot.* s.a. 1134.4.

⁶⁸ *Banshenchas* [part two], 190; Ní Bhrolcháin, 'The Prose *Banshenchas*', §444, pp. 278, 394.

⁶⁹ Candon, 'Power, politics and polygamy', 123–5.

⁷⁰ *Banshenchas* [part two], 196; Ní Bhrolcháin, 'The Prose *Banshenchas*', §511, pp. 291, 406, 466. This depends on one's reading of the Irish: '*clann sin Chonchobar meic Mail tEchlainn*'. Ní Bhrolcháin was evidently of the view that it meant 'that is the family of Conchobar son of Máel Sechlainn', for whom she suggested possible counterparts in the annals under 1003 and 1105 ('The Prose *Banshenchas*', 466). Dobbs, by contrast, must have interpreted this as 'that is the family of Conchobar grandson of Máel Sechlainn', i.e. Conchobar úa Máel Sechlainn, who died in 1073.

⁷¹ Patrick Woulfe, *Sloinne Gaedheal is Gall: Irish Names and Surnames* (Dublin, 1923), 555–6; Another daughter of the Uí Anradáin is noted to have been mother of Muirchertach mac Taide Uí Briain in the *Banshenchas* (*Banshenchas* [part two], 197; Ní Bhrolcháin, 'The Prose *Banshenchas*', §515, pp. 292, 407), and the entries are located beside one another, suggesting they refer to the same family. There was a family, usually rendered 'Uí Anracháin', among the Dal Cais, as well as the family of Meath mentioned above – one or perhaps both of these marriages were local links, then.

⁷² *Banshenchas* [part two], 190; Ní Bhrolcháin, 'The Prose *Banshenchas*', §440, pp. 277, 393. Ó hUiginn has suggested to me that the name Cacht (originally meaning 'captive' or 'slave') may be significant under certain circumstances. There are certainly cases where captive women were impregnated by their captors: see Sellar, 'Marriage, divorce and concubinage in Gaelic Scotland', 482; Alexander son of John Cathanach Mac Donald, 'begotten by the Savages' daughter in the County of Downe in Ireland and spouse of Achilles Bay MacCartin, they being both at the same time his [John Cathanach's] prisoners', and the 'association' between Shane Ó Néill and Catherine MacLean, widow of the fourth Earl of Argyll and wife of Calvagh Ó Donnell: 'this association, which produced several sons, began when Catherine and her husband Calvagh were Shane's prisoners'; G. A. Hayes-McCoy, *Scots Mercenary Forces in Ireland (1565–1603)* (Dublin, 1937), 149–52.

⁷³ *Banshenchas* [part two], 190; Ní Bhrolcháin, 'The Prose *Banshenchas*', §417, pp. 272, 389.

Sechlainn and mother of two of his sons whose obituaries appear in the annals, Murchad (d. 1076) and Domnall (d. 1094).⁷⁴ Her father, Gúaire Úa Lachtnáin, was described as the ‘learned man of Clonmacnoise’ in the *Banshenchas* entry containing his daughter’s marriage to Flann mac Máel Sechlainn, revealing a clerical background. At the time of their union, the early to mid-eleventh century, Clonmacnoise was still firmly in the Meath sphere, so if there were any political expectations from the marriage, they must have been very limited indeed.⁷⁵ Even more obviously non-political is the case of the unnamed ingen Dearrsada Uí Diumai (elsewhere Úa Berri), wife of one Donnchad, perhaps of Osraige, and mother of Gilla Pátraic mac Donnchada. Her father is reported to have been the ‘royal jester of Leinster’ – a low social position indeed for the mother of royal offspring.⁷⁶

Marriages of no apparent political importance were formed by even the most prominent families. Mór, daughter of Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill (d. 1022), was the mother of Cenn Fáelad Úa Dúngalaig, the king of Múscraige Tíre in Munster who died in 1078.⁷⁷ It seems probable that this figure was the Cenn Fáelad mac Finn of the genealogies, and if so the person to whom Mór was married of little significance.⁷⁸ The mother of Toirdelbach úa Briain, king of Ireland (d. 1086), was Mór ingen Gilla Bríde Úa Máel Múaid, the king of Fir Cell, a regional kingdom in Meath.⁷⁹ Likewise, the mother of Díarmait Mac Murchada was Arlaith ingen Gilla Michil, perhaps of the Fothairt Airthir Life who had a base at Kilteel, County Kildare; they were a subject people and therefore not of any great political value at the time of the union – although it is true that they did prove useful to Díarmait himself towards the end of his reign.⁸⁰

In a study of certain aspects of the role of honour in early Irish literature, Philip O’Leary has shown that women’s honour was defined with reference to their husbands. Women are depicted boasting about the adherence of their husbands to the honour-code, and their honour has been described as a ‘function’ of their husbands’ status and actions.⁸¹ Women are also depicted inducing and inciting their husbands and sons to action, and this was no doubt a consequence of how inaction reflected upon them personally.⁸² The opposite does not apply,

⁷⁴ *Banshenchas* [part two], 190, 226; Ní Bhrolcháin, ‘The Prose *Banshenchas*’, §§441, 514, pp. 277, 292, 393, 407.

⁷⁵ *Banshenchas* [part two], 190: ‘*fear-leigind Cluana Meic Nois*’; Ní Bhrolcháin, ‘The Prose *Banshenchas*’, §441, pp. 277, 393.

⁷⁶ *Banshenchas* [part two], 228: ‘*rig-druth Laigen*’; Ní Bhrolcháin, ‘The Prose *Banshenchas*’, §433, pp. 275, 391.

⁷⁷ *AFM* s.a. 1078.11.

⁷⁸ M. A. O’Brien (ed.), *Corpus Genealogiarum Hiberniae* (Dublin, 1962), 367.

⁷⁹ *Banshenchas* [part two], 228; Ní Bhrolcháin, ‘The Prose *Banshenchas*’, §436, pp. 276, 392.

⁸⁰ *Banshenchas* [part two], 98, 231; Ní Bhrolcháin, ‘The Prose *Banshenchas*’, §533, pp. 297, 411; Francis John Byrne ‘The trembling sod: Ireland in 1169’, in Art Cosgrave (ed.), *A New History of Ireland II: Medieval Ireland 1169–1534* (Oxford, 1987), 1–42, at 27.

⁸¹ Philip O’Leary, ‘The honour of women in early Irish literature’, *Ériu* 38 (1987), 27–44, at 28–29.

⁸² O’Leary, ‘The honour of women’, 7, n. 1, 29–30; J. H. Todd (ed.), *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh; The War of the Gaedhil with the Gaill* (London, 1867), 142–5.

however. Men were apparently not negatively affected socially by taking a wife of a minor dynasty, whether from close-by or far away. As such, they were relatively free to choose partners for more aesthetic or amorous reasons.

If this literary depiction reflected reality, it may also indicate the agency of women in the selection of husbands. There are examples of women who married on multiple occasions, and for whose natal families at least one of the connections appears to have been politically unhelpful. *Sadb ingen Domnaill Meic Gilla Pádraig* of *Osraige* married into the *Uí Máel Sechlainn*, the *Uí Chonchobair Failge*, and the *Uí Uidir* of *Airgíalla*, with no obvious political reason for the final pairing – which was considerably further removed from her kin than the first two. Similarly, *Gormlaith ingen Máel Sechlainn Uí Máel Sechlainn* was mother of *Cú Ulad Úa Caindelbáin* of *Láegaire*, which was a regional kingdom in *Meath*, of *Congalach Úa Conchobair Failge*, from a regional kingdom in *Leinster* on the *Meath* border, and of *Rúaidrí Úa Flaithbertaig* of *Uí Briúin Seóla* in west *Connacht*.⁸³ Again, no obvious advantage could accrue to *Gormlaith*'s natal family by the establishment a third union so far afield.

In other words, there are indications that the interests of a woman's natal family were less directly represented in second and subsequent marriages. Furthermore, a woman who had already been married had more independent wealth than one who had not, through the *coibche* or brideprice, a payment made to her by a prospective husband upon her marriage. This sum was increasing in the central Middle Ages, and greater wealth naturally allowed for the exercise of greater discretion.⁸⁴

Elsewhere in Europe, a dynasty's fortunes could rest on the marriages of its one or two sons or daughters; in Ireland, the fact that a sequence of marriages produced much larger dynasties relieved the pressure on these links. Therefore, in Ireland, a woman's natal family could afford to be more indulgent. Of course, that does not mean they took no interest in her marriages or that Irish royal women had absolute autonomy over their matches.

It may be worth calling to mind the poem *Éirigh a ingen an rígh*, published with a translation and commentary by Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha in 2000. This poem, which purports to be an address by *Cormac mac Cuillennáin* (d. 908) to his wife *Gormlaith* (d. 947, daughter of *Flann Sinna*), can actually be dated with some confidence to the late eleventh or early twelfth century.⁸⁵ Ní Dhonnchadha remarked that 'the dominant image of *Gormfhlaith* projected by the poem is that of the serial monogamist', and suggested that the poem may reflect church reformers' advocacy of celibacy for clerics.⁸⁶ We may note in particular that *Cormac* left *Gormlaith* for the church and, saying to her 'you are not one who

⁸³*Banshenchas* [part two], 191, 233; Ní Bhrolcháin, 'The Prose *Banshenchas*', §§446, 557, pp. 302, 394, 417; Ní Bhrolcháin, 'The *Banshenchas* revisited', 77.

⁸⁴Ó Hóireabhárd, 'Derbforgaill: twelfth-century abductee, patron and wife', 8–13.

⁸⁵Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha, 'On *Gormfhlaith* daughter of *Flann Sinna*', in Alfred P. Smyth (ed.), *Seanchas: Studies in Early and Medieval Irish Archaeology, History and Literature in Honour of Francis J. Byrne* (Dublin, 2000), 225–37, at 226, 234. I would like to thank Máire Ní Mhaonaigh for this reference.

⁸⁶Ní Dhonnchadha, 'On *Gormfhlaith* daughter of *Flann Sinna*', 226.

ever refused [a partner]’, he arranged that she be married again.⁸⁷ True, in this instance Gormlaith had a partner picked for her, by her soon to be ex-husband no less, but the idea that she was ‘not one who ever refused’ presupposes that she had been propositioned multiple times before, and had the authority to refuse prospective partners if she so chose.

There are other literary examples of this right to choose being exercised. In *Tochmarc Emire*, the hospitaller Forgall Monach tries to marry his daughter, Emer, to Lugaid mac Nóis, king of Munster – but she declines so as to keep faith with Cú Chulainn.⁸⁸ Similarly, in *Tóruigheacht Dhiarmada agus Ghráinne*, Fionn hesitates to ask Gráinne’s hand because she has already refused a great number of high-ranking suitors. Though she accepts Fionn at her father’s request, she later makes clear that she only did so to gain the acquaintance of Diarmaid. She also makes comments about the greater suitability of a younger man.⁸⁹ As Ó hUiginn has pointed out, the failure of her elopement reprimands the young woman’s reckless disregard for her father’s will, but so too does the shaming of Fionn imply that this kind of forced marriage should be avoided.⁹⁰ In other words, the intended audience would hear that there were dangers for all parties; just as daughters should take their father’s advice, nevertheless they had the power to exercise discretion over their suitors.

In light of this evidence, we may confidently support a reading of serial monogyny over polygamy or polygyny in early and high medieval Ireland. For one thing, as mentioned above, the complaints of Lanfranc and Anselm do not envision either sex having multiple concurrent marriage partners, whatever their other misgivings. Indeed, Lanfranc said Irish men ‘abandon the wives legally married to them’ and take others ‘by an abominable exchange’, while Anselm described Irish men leaving their wives and taking women ‘whom somebody else had abandoned in an equally disgraceful way’. The language of abandonment and exchange is an understandable response to serial monogyny but not polygyny; there is nothing here to suggest the acquisition of multiple wives concurrently. Nor are these passages about concubines – a phenomenon with which the archbishops were doubtless familiar – but rather wives taking the place of other wives.

As we have seen, evidence from early modern Scotland supports this view. Men whose unorthodox marriages had been criticised by non-Gaelic contemporaries are nevertheless described as putting one wife aside in order to taken another – and not just once, but on several successive occasions. If it was acceptable to have several wives simultaneously, there would have been no question of ‘setting aside’ at all.

⁸⁷Ní Dhonnchadha, ‘On Gormfhlaithe daughter of Flann Sinna’, 236: ‘ní tusa ríamh ro ob’.

⁸⁸Ó hUiginn, *Marriage, Law and Tochmarc Emire*.

⁸⁹Ó hUiginn, ‘*Tóruigheacht Dhiarmada agus Ghráinne*: characters, themes and history’, in Kevin Murray (ed.), *Tóruigheacht Dhiarmada agus Ghráinne: reassessments*, ITS Subsidiary Series 30 (Dublin, 2018), 43–71, at 62–3.

⁹⁰Ó hUiginn, ‘*Tóruigheacht Dhiarmada agus Ghráinne*: characters, themes and history’, 70–1.

Likewise, if we accept that a woman's status was determined by her husband, it tells against polygyny – where nothing would have distinguished her from other wives of the same man. It also suggests women would have exercised any agency they had in the selection of a partner whose qualities would have reflected on them. That is to say, if the above examples are indeed reflective of something other than the dynastic interests of a woman's natal family, it is likely to be the influence of the woman herself. The life of another Gormlaith (d. 1030), who was married to three major kings in turn, illustrates the practice of serial monogamy as it existed in medieval Ireland – i.e. with female agency in the selection of partners. Gormlaith, whose interesting life is turned to great effect in the *Cogad Gaedel re Gallaib*, is sometimes characterised as a literary trope – a personification of sovereignty – but this results from a notion that such successive marriages were atypical. They certainly were not.

Of course, this excludes concubinage, which was at least as prevalent in medieval Ireland as it was in the rest of Europe. It is the concubine (*adaltrach*) who is envisioned in the legal principle that a wife (*cétmuintir*) has the right to inflict violence on her husband's other partners.⁹¹ Confusion on this point may have been occasioned by the traditional mistranslation of *cétmuintir* as 'first wife'. It has been shown by Liam Breatnach that this term should be translated as 'wife', 'husband' or 'spouse' according to context – but certainly not 'first wife'.⁹² Nor do I know of any evidence to support the view of Kathleen Mulchrone, endorsed and amplified by Charlene Eska, that fosterage was intended to mitigate the enmity of rival wives and their sons; if it were so we ought to be able to point to a literary or historic example.⁹³ Not only can we not do so, but there are no other reasons for thinking such a situation prevailed.

We can now turn our attention to another (hitherto unnoticed) pattern of aristocratic marriage, to show how one province was out of step with a twelfth-century norm. In provinces where kingship alternated between two or more distinct lines, in a system called *sel* or *selaidecht*, marriages between those same lines were regularly constituted. This took place regardless of similarly regular animosity, which was characteristic of competition for a common kingship. But, when the kingship became dominated by one group and the other segment was edged out, or the common kingship otherwise collapsed, marriage links between these formerly associated lines ceased to be formed. It therefore appears that among certain groups, marriage could be deemed a recognition of royal status.

In Ulaid, the Dál Fíatach and Dál nAraide represent an example of this practice. A granddaughter of the ninth-century Dál nAraide king of Ulaid Bécc,⁹⁴ Ablach ingen Domnall mac Béicce, married Áed mac Madagáin of Dál Fíatach,

⁹¹ *CIH* 7.29, 289.31; Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, 79.

⁹² Breatnach, 'On Old Irish collective and abstract nouns, the meaning of *cétmuintir*, and marriage in early mediaeval Ireland', 6–26.

⁹³ Kathleen Mulchrone, 'The rights and duties of women with regard to the education of their children', in R. Thurneysen, Nancy Power and Myles Dillon (eds), *Studies in Early Irish Law* (Dublin, 1936), 187–234, at 187; Eska, *Cáin Lánamna*, 8.

⁹⁴ *AFM* s.a. 889.6.

and produced Eochacán mac Áeda, himself described as ‘joint king of Ulaid’ in the *Banshenchas*, and ‘king of Ulaid’ in the annals.⁹⁵ Ailenn daughter of Ainbith mac Áeda meic Madagáin married back into the Dál nAraide, albeit as her second marriage, producing Cellach mac Béiccce, who died in 941 and was named as king of Dál nAraide.⁹⁶ Barrdub, daughter of Lethlobar, the Dál nAraide king of Ulaid who died in 873, married Áed mac Eochacáin, the Dál Fíatach king of Ulaid who died in 919.⁹⁷ Another manuscript version of the *Banshenchas* records Barrdub ingen Lethlobair to have married Bécc Bairche, also of Dál Fíatach, and produced Áed Róin, the king of Ulaid who died in 734.⁹⁸ It is possible that two different women are in question as Dál nAraide men named Lethlobar lived in both periods, but it seems more likely that the manuscript traditions have diverged in their record of the same person. Nevertheless, it is still of significance that both record the intermarriage of Dál nAraide and Dál Fíatach.

The Uí Néill also practised *selaidecht*, but the pattern was complicated by a second common kingship. Both northern and southern branches had their own kingships, and also recognised the possibility of extending authority over the other branch. Marriage links between the segments of the northern and the southern branches are therefore also relevant. Within this dynamic the Cenél nEógain (of the north) and Síl nÁedo Sláine (of the south) are the pairing with the greatest number of recorded marriages.

A daughter of Níall Caille of Cenél nEógain married Conaing mac Flainn of Síl nÁedo Sláine and produced Flann mac Conaing, the king of Brega who died in 868.⁹⁹ Eithne ingen Áed Findléith of Cenél nEógain married Flannacán mac Cellaigh of Síl nÁedo Sláine, and was mother to Máel Mithig, the king of Brega who died in 918 or 919.¹⁰⁰ Another Eithne, Eithne ingen Fergaile meic Domnaill meic Áeda Findléith of Cenél nEógain, also married into the Síl nÁedo Sláine. She married Congalach mac Máel Mithig and produced Muirchertach mac Congalaig, who died in 964.¹⁰¹ There was also a marriage between Derbail ingen Máel Dúine meic Áeda Ordnige of Cenél nEógain and the Síl nÁedo Sláine. The *Banshenchas* itself is unclear on whether she married Cellach mac Flannacán or his father Flannacán mac Cellaig, but it was nevertheless another marriage between the Síl nÁedo Sláine and Cenél nEógain.¹⁰²

⁹⁵ *Banshenchas* [part two], 226: ‘leith-rig Ulad’; *AFM* s.a. 882.12: ‘rí Uladh’; Ní Bhrolcháin, ‘The Prose *Banshenchas*’, §397, pp. 267, 385.

⁹⁶ *Banshenchas* [part two], 187; Ní Bhrolcháin, ‘The Prose *Banshenchas*’, §402, pp. 268, 385; *AFM* s.a. 941.10.

⁹⁷ *Banshenchas* [part two], 226; *Chron. Scot.* s.a. 919.2; Ní Bhrolcháin, ‘The Prose *Banshenchas*’, §401, pp. 268, 385.

⁹⁸ *Banshenchas* [part two], 187; Ní Bhrolcháin, ‘The Prose *Banshenchas*’, §401, pp. 268, 385.

⁹⁹ *Banshenchas* [part two], 186; Ní Bhrolcháin, ‘The Prose *Banshenchas*’, §389, pp. 265, 383; *AU* s.a. 868.4.

¹⁰⁰ *Banshenchas* [part two], 226; Ní Bhrolcháin, ‘The Prose *Banshenchas*’, §396, pp. 267, 384; *AU* s.a. 918.7; *AI* s.a. 919.3.

¹⁰¹ *Banshenchas* [part two], 226; Ní Bhrolcháin, ‘The Prose *Banshenchas*’, §407, pp. 269, 386; *Chron. Scot.* s.a. 964.6.

¹⁰² *Banshenchas* [part two], 225; Ní Bhrolcháin, ‘The Prose *Banshenchas*’, §395, pp. 266–7, 384.

By comparison, other north–south marriage links in the Uí Néill are less well attested. In this category we find Dunlaith ingen Muirchertaigh meic Néill Glúnduib of Cenél nEógain, who married Domnall Donn mac Donnchada of Clann Cholmáin and was the mother of Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill, the famous king of Ireland, ancestor of the Uí Máel Sechlainn, and rival of Brían Bóraime.¹⁰³ There may also be an example of Clann Cholmáin and Cenél Conaill intermarriage in the case of Caindech ingen Chanannáin, who is named as the third wife of Donnchad mac Flainn of Clann Cholmáin.¹⁰⁴ This would be the case if her father was the Canannán from whom the Uí Chanannáin of Cenél Conaill descended.

Within the Southern Uí Néill the pattern can again be found, and the fact that it occurs to a lesser extent than in Ulaid may reflect the fact that the kingship was less evenly contested. The Clann Cholmáin and Síl nÁedo Sláine dynasties occasionally married into each other, notably during rare periods of prominence for the weaker Síl nÁedo Sláine branch. Gormlaith ingen Flainn meic Conaig of Síl nÁedo Sláine married Flann mac Máel Sechlainn of Clann Cholmáin and was mother of Donnchad mac Flainn, who died in 942 and was called king of Tara in the *Banshenchas* and king of Ireland in the annals.¹⁰⁵ Another child of Flann mac Máel Sechlainn, Ligeach, a daughter not of Gormlaith but of a different woman, married back into the Síl nÁedo Sláine. She married Máel Mithig mac Flannacáin, and was mother of Congalach mac Máel Mithig, king of Ireland and the last Síl nÁedo Sláine king of the Southern Uí Néill.¹⁰⁶

The example of the Northern Uí Néill underscores the relationship between this pattern of intermarriage and the status of each branch within the kin-group. The marriage of the unnamed ingen Earnaine of Cenél Conaill to Fergal mac Máel Dúin, the king of Cenél nEógain and Ireland who died in 722, is the latest example of a marriage between these dynasties in the *Banshenchas*.¹⁰⁷ Apart from the anomalous Rúaidrí úa Cannanáin (d. 950),¹⁰⁸ Domnall mac Áeda Muindeirg, who died in 804, was the last Cenél Conaill ‘king of the North’¹⁰⁹ until Flaithbertach Úa Máel Doraid, who was styled (more ambiguously) king of Cenél Conaill and Cenél nEógain in his obituary of 1196.¹¹⁰ Evidently the dominance of the Cenél nEógain in the common overkingship precluded the perpetuation of marriage links between the two dynasties.

¹⁰³*Banshenchas* [part two], 188; Ní Bhrolcháin, ‘The Prose *Banshenchas*’, §418, pp. 272, 389.

¹⁰⁴*Banshenchas* [part two], 187; Ní Bhrolcháin, ‘The Prose *Banshenchas*’, §405, pp. 269, 386.

¹⁰⁵*Banshenchas* [part two], 226; Ní Bhrolcháin, ‘The Prose *Banshenchas*’, §404, pp. 268, 386; *AFM* s.a. 942.13.

¹⁰⁶*Banshenchas* [part two], 226; Ní Bhrolcháin, ‘The prose *Banshenchas*’, §406, pp. 269, 386.

¹⁰⁷*Banshenchas* [part two], 186; Ní Bhrolcháin, ‘The Prose *Banshenchas*’, §378, pp. 263, 381.

¹⁰⁸Even though the growing importance of Rúaidrí úa Cannanáin’s family in the mid-tenth century does not seem to have been recognised by a marriage with Cenél nEógain, it was acknowledged in this way by the Clann Cholmáin: Cainnech, a daughter of Canannán, was married to Donnchad Donn mac Flainn, king of Ireland (*AFM* s.a. 927.16 (*recte* 929)).

¹⁰⁹*AU* s.a. 804.1: ‘rex Aquilonis’.

¹¹⁰*ALC* s.a. 1196.20; *AFM* s.a. 1197.3; *Misc.Ir.Annals* s.a. 1197.4.

Fourteen Uí Néill kings of Tara appear in the *Banshenchas* with no named mother or wife.¹¹¹ Most of these men were from the Síl nÁedo Sláine or Cenél Conaill; that is to say, from the weaker branches of their respective dynasties.¹¹² It is therefore likely that there were more marriages of this type for which the record is defective. Anne Connon suggested that the compiler of the main source for the ‘Tara framework’ of the *Banshenchas* did not have access to a good-quality record for these groups.¹¹³ This is possible, but it may also be that such matches were diplomatically sensitive at the time the *Banshenchas* itself was compiled; that is, in the twelfth century when the Cenél nEógain and Clann Cholmáin were dominant.

The key point here is that such marriages were abandoned after monopolisation. In Ulaid, the successor segments of Dál Fiatach, which were Uí Mathgamna, Uí Eochada, and later Meic Duinn Sléibe, had no recorded marriages with the successor segments of Dál nAraide, Uí Lethlobair and Uí Loingsig. The last Dál nAraide king of Ulaid was Áed mac Loingsig (d. 972), and the latest recorded marriages between the two branches concern tenth-century figures.¹¹⁴ Among the Southern Uí Néill, the Uí Máel Sechlainn, successors of the Clann Cholmáin line, had no recorded marriages with the Meic Gilla Sechnaill, Uí Chellaig, Uí Chongalaig, Uí Airt, or other successors of the Síl nÁedo Sláine dynasty in east Meath. The last Síl nÁedo Sláine king of the Southern Uí Néill was Congalach mac Máel Mithig (d. 956),¹¹⁵ and the latest marriages between Clann Cholmáin and Síl nÁedo Sláine also concerned tenth-century individuals.¹¹⁶ Regarding the Uí Néill generally, the common kingship that broke down in the late tenth or early eleventh century, is also reflected by marriage practice. The mother of Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill (d. 1022), the last claimant to such an authority, was of Cenél nEógain, and hers is one of the latest recorded marriages between Cenél nEógain and Clann Cholmáin.¹¹⁷ The very latest is that of Ben Mide (d. 1137) ingen Chonchobair Uí Máel Sechlainn (d. 1073) who was the mother of Níall Mac Lochlainn, but there is some uncertainty with this example. The only record of the pairing is the *Banshenchas*, which reports that Ben Mide was ‘*mathair Neill mc Mail Eachlaind mc meic Lochlaind*’, which rendered literally, might be ‘mother of Níall son of Máel Sechlainn son of Úa Lochlainn’, though one manuscript omits the final ‘*meic*’.¹¹⁸ This individual was identified by Dobbs as Níall mac Máel Sechlainn (d. 1061); the Máel

¹¹¹ Anne Connon, ‘The “*Banshenchas*” and the Uí Néill queens of Tara’, in Alfred Smyth (ed.), *Seanchas: Studies in Early and Medieval Irish Archaeology, History and Literature in Honour of Francis J. Byrne* (Dublin, 2000), 98–108, at 106.

¹¹² Connon, ‘The “*Banshenchas*”’, 106.

¹¹³ Connon, ‘The “*Banshenchas*”’, 106.

¹¹⁴ *Banshenchas* [part two], 187, 226; Ní Bhrolcháin, ‘The Prose *Banshenchas*’, §399, pp. 267, 385.

¹¹⁵ *AU* s.a. 956.3.

¹¹⁶ *Banshenchas* [part two], 188, 226; Ní Bhrolcháin, ‘The Prose *Banshenchas*’, §406, pp. 269, 386.

¹¹⁷ *Banshenchas* [part two], 188; Ní Bhrolcháin, ‘The Prose *Banshenchas*’, §418, pp. 272, 389.

¹¹⁸ *Banshenchas* [part two], 190; Ní Bhrolcháin, ‘The Prose *Banshenchas*’, §442, pp. 277, 386.

Sechlainn in question also being the father of Lochlainn from whom the Meic Lochlainn descend. As the obituary for this Máel Sechlainn is under 997, he and Ben Mide were not contemporaries, however.¹¹⁹ Ní Bhrolcháin thought the entry was corrupt, and suggested an alternative identification, also Cénel nEógain.¹²⁰ More recently, this Níall has been identified by Flanagan as Níall mac Domnaill Meic Lochlainn (d. 1119).¹²¹ In this latter case he would have the pedigree of son of Domnall, son of Ardgar, son of Lochlainn (*a quo* Meic Lochlainn), son of Máel Sechlainn (d. 997). While Domnall Mac Lochlainn and Ben Mide ingen Conchobair Uí Máel Sechlainn were contemporaries, his is clearly not the name given in the *Banshenchas*. The significance of the point is that, if Flanagan's identification is correct, the twenty-eight-year-old Níall mac Domnaill Meic Lochlainn killed in 1119 puts the Clann Cholmáin-Cénel nEógain pairing in 1090–1 and thus a slight anomaly to the pattern being discussed, whereas if it was at a date closer to the mid-eleventh century it would not be as incongruous.¹²² It may be relevant that the common kingship of the Uí Néill did not become dominated by one dynasty like the provincial kingships, but rather fell out of use. As such, this very late example can provide evidence of an ambition to perpetuate the office, whether in a mid-or-late eleventh-century context. This also serves to underline the innovation shown by Domnall Mac Lochlainn (d. 1121) in abandoning it – a subject worthy of fuller consideration elsewhere.

One fact that should be noted here is that there were late marriages between the Uí Chathasaig and Uí Máel Sechlainn, and the Uí Chathasaig of Saithne were also descendants of the Síl nÁedo Sláine. Tailtiu ingen Chonchobair Uí Máel Sechlainn was wife of Ímar Úa Cathasaig of the Saithne,¹²³ and an unnamed daughter of Úa Cathasaig was mother of Conchobar Dall Úa Máel Sechlainn.¹²⁴ Both examples come from the mid-to-late twelfth century, by which time this area, Saithne, was under the control of Hiberno-Norse Dublin rather than the Southern Uí Néill of Meath.¹²⁵ This interesting behavioural modification emphasises the overtly political nature of such matches: the transfer of one group into another kingdom evidently relieved the prohibition on the creation of marriage links.

Unfortunately, we lack enough examples to include Munster in this discussion. Similarly, in Connacht there was no longstanding alternation for the provincial kingship, which was largely the preserve of the Uí Briúin Aí, and later their successor segment Síl Muiredaig. The Uí Rúairc of Uí Briúin Bréifne, itself a questionable genealogy, only latterly competed for kingship but there

¹¹⁹*AU* s.a. 997.2.

¹²⁰Ní Bhrolcháin, 'The Prose *Banshenchasi*', §442, pp. 277, 386, 455.

¹²¹Flanagan, 'Ua Lochlainn, Domnall [Domhnall O'Lochlainn] (1048–1121)', in *ODNB*, accessed online (<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/20744>) (10 May 2019).

¹²²*AFM* s.a. 1119.5; *AU* s.a. 1119.8; *ALC* s.a. 1119.6; *Misc.Ir.Annals* s.a. 1119.1; *Ann. Tig.* s.a. 1120.1; *AI* s.a. 1120.3.

¹²³*AFM* s.a. 1171.6.

¹²⁴*Banshenchas* [part two], 192; Ní Bhrolcháin, 'The Prose *Banshenchas*', §463, pp. 281, 397.

¹²⁵MacCotter, *Medieval Ireland*, 165–6.

are almost no recorded marriages between the two dynasties.¹²⁶ The marriage of Tigernán Úa Rúairc's daughter to Rúaidrí Úa Conchobair may here be discounted, as it clearly corresponded with an alliance and occurred at a time when the Uí Rúairc were no longer challenging to be kings of Connacht. One such marriage may be pointed to: that of Fergal Úa Rúairc to Bé Binn ingen Taidc in Eich Gil Uí Chonchobair.¹²⁷ After Fergal was killed by Domnall mac Congalaigh of Síl nÁedo Sláine, Bé Binn became the wife of Domnall, showing how wives could be considered spoils of war in some circumstances.

Recorded marriages concerning the Uí Rúairc overwhelmingly point to marriages into Meath and the Southern Uí Néill, not back into Connacht. This may well reflect the concern of the original author of the metrical *Banshenchas*, Gilla Mo Dutu Úa Caiside, with emphasising this particular link (he was from Ardraccan in Meath and was patronised by Úa Rúairc and Derbforgaill).¹²⁸ We must be aware that he, and other later redactors, may have heavily censored the examples included in the various iterations of the *Banshenchas*.

In all provinces where *selaidecht* existed, the dominant line (the one that held the kingship most frequently) is also recorded to have had a greater number of external marriage links. The leading lines of the Northern Uí Néill and Ulaid, the Cenél nEógain and Dál Fiatach, married into each other while also pursuing the type of intra-provincial marriage outlined above. The marriage of Dunlaith ingen Domnaill meic Áeda mac Néill of Cenél nEógain to Áed mac Eochacáin of Dál Fiatach is one of many such examples.¹²⁹ The Cenél nEógain also formed marriage links with the Connachta,¹³⁰ the Airgíalla,¹³¹ and even the Eóganachta Durlais (alias Eóganacht Airthir Clíach) in Munster.¹³² The Clann Cholmáin contracted a number of marriages with Osraige¹³³ and with the Connachta.¹³⁴ They also had marriages with the Dál Fiatach, in the case of Bé Bail ingen Cathail 'rí Ulad', married to Donnchad mac Domnaill Midi.¹³⁵ Such wider links can only occasionally be shown to exist for the subordinate or weaker dynasties.

International marriages were also the preserve of the most important dynasties. Notably, Máel Muire ingen Cináeda meic Ailpin king of Scotland married into both the Cenél nEógain and the Clann Cholmáin, producing Níall Glúndub and Domnall mac Flainn meic Máel Sechlainn for those dynasties

¹²⁶Eoghan Ó Mordha, 'The Uí Briúin Bréifni genealogies and the origins of Bréifne', *Peritia* 16 (2002), 444–50.

¹²⁷*Banshenchas* [part two], 188; Ní Bhrolcháin, 'The Prose *Banshenchas*', §409, pp. 270, 387.

¹²⁸See Kevin Murray, 'Gilla Mo Dutu Úa Caiside' in John Carey, Máire Herbert and Kevin Murray (eds), *Cin Chille Cúile: Texts, Saints and Places. Essays in Honour of Pádraig Ó Riain* (Aberystwyth, 2004), 150–62.

¹²⁹*Banshenchas* [part two], 226; Ní Bhrolcháin, 'The Prose *Banshenchas*', §400, pp. 268, 386.

¹³⁰*Banshenchas* [part two], 188; Ní Bhrolcháin, 'The Prose *Banshenchas*', §413, pp. 271, 388.

¹³¹*Banshenchas* [part two], 186; Ní Bhrolcháin, 'The Prose *Banshenchas*', §387, pp. 264, 382.

¹³²*Banshenchas* [part two], 186; Ní Bhrolcháin, 'The Prose *Banshenchas*', §388, pp. 265, 383.

¹³³*Banshenchas* [part two], 187; Ní Bhrolcháin, 'The Prose *Banshenchas*', §392, pp. 265, 383.

¹³⁴*Banshenchas* [part two], 187; Ní Bhrolcháin, 'The Prose *Banshenchas*', §403, pp. 268, 386.

¹³⁵*Banshenchas* [part two], 186; Ní Bhrolcháin, 'The Prose *Banshenchas*', §385, pp. 264, 382.

respectively.¹³⁶ Muirchertach Úa Briain gave a daughter to the son of the king of Norway, Magnus Barefoot Ólafsson, in 1101, and another to Arnulf de Montgomery.¹³⁷ The marriage of Áed Úa Conchobair to ingen Dubgaill meic Rúaidrí of Clann Somarlaide in the Hebrides in 1259 is another example.¹³⁸

There were some Anglo-Gaelic marriages in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries as well. Hugh de Lacy's (d. 1186) marriage to Rúaidrí Úa Conchobair's daughter (c. 1180) is particularly noteworthy because it was undertaken without Henry II's licence and according to Irish custom, by which the payment of *coibche* by the husband is probably indicated.¹³⁹ William Gorm de Lacy, a fascinating character in both Irish and Angevin domains, was the result of this marriage.¹⁴⁰ There was also Richard de Clare's marriage to Aife ingen Díarmata Meic Murchada, of course, through which Giraldus Cambrensis suggested de Clare was entitled to the kingship of Leinster. Cambrensis also wrote that Mac Murchada had offered Aife to Robert fitz Stephen, while in England, but that fitz Stephen had refused because he was already married; the veracity of these statements is often doubted.¹⁴¹

John de Courcy married Affrica, daughter of Gofraid (d. 1187), king of Man and the Isles, c. 1180. While this was not a marriage into Gaelic Ireland, the Norse rulers of the Isles had been active in Irish politics for centuries; Gofraid himself had also married Finngúala, a granddaughter of Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn.¹⁴² There is the case of William de Burgh as well; while the source we rely on for this is very late, it seems that he married a daughter of Domnall Úa Briain's (d. 1194) shortly before the latter's death, and Richard de Burgh, future conqueror of Connacht, was a product of the union.¹⁴³ Later, Donnchad Cairprech Úa Briain may have married a daughter of William de Burgh, but the evidence for this is slight.¹⁴⁴ It is perhaps surprising that such unions were not more prevalent – though this may simply reflect our sources, which are much poorer for the early thirteenth century than the twelfth. It is strange, for example, to note that the lords of Ulaid, John de Courcy and Hugh de Lacy (d. 1242), did not contract marriages with the Uí Néill Glúnduib or

¹³⁶ *Banshenchas* [part two], 188, 225; Ní Bhrolcháin, 'The Prose *Banshenchas*', §§393, 406, pp. 266, 269, 384–5, 386.

¹³⁷ *AFM* s.a. 1102.11.

¹³⁸ *AFM* s.a. 1259.5; *Ann. Conn.* s.a. 1259.6.

¹³⁹ For the importance of *coibche*, see Ó Hóireabhárd, 'Derbforgaill', 8–13.

¹⁴⁰ See Colin Veach and Freya Verstraten Veach, 'William Gorm de Lacy: "chiefest champion in these parts of Europe"', in Seán Duffy (ed.), *Princes, Prelates and Poets in Medieval Ireland: Essays in Honour of Katharine Simms* (Dublin, 2013), 63–84.

¹⁴¹ M. T. Flanagan, 'Aife (Aoife, Eva)', in *DIB.*, accessed online (<https://www.dib.ie/biography/aife-aoife-eva-a0069>) (accessed 29 July 2021); David Beresford, 'fitz Stephen, Robert', in *DIB.* (<https://www.dib.ie/biography/fitz-stephen-robert-a3123>) (accessed 29 July 2021).

¹⁴² Colmán Etchingham, Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, and Elizabeth Ashman Rowe, *Norse–Gaelic Contacts in a Viking World* (Turnhout, 2019), 165–6; George Broderick (ed.), *Cronica Regum Mannie & Insularum: Chronicles of the Kings of Man and the Isles BL Cotton Julius A viii*, second ed. (Douglas, 1995), fol. 37r.

¹⁴³ John O'Donovan (ed.), *The Tribes and Customs of Hy-Many* (Dublin, 1843), 44–5.

¹⁴⁴ C. A. Empey, 'Ó Briain, Donnchad Cairprech [Donogh Cairbrech O'Brien]' in *ODNB*, accessed online (<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/20451>) (27 July 2022).

Meic Lochlainn of the North, a policy which might have helped them advance westwards – as it had William de Burgh.

The situation in Leinster may now be juxtaposed with these kingdoms to show how this practice is relevant to the course of events in the twelfth century. Here, kingship was contested by the Uí Fáeláin, Uí Dúinchada, and Uí Muiredaig for much of the medieval period. The claim of the Uí Chennselaig was resurrected by Díarmait mac Máel na mBó in the mid-eleventh century, after a period of dormancy since the eighth century. His successors claimed the same provincial authority, with success, though on occasion, even in the twelfth century, they were only recognised with the lesser title ‘king of Uí Chennselaig’, while other dynasties also advanced a claim.¹⁴⁵ That is to say, even though it is often assumed that the Uí Chennselaig monopolised the kingship of Leinster from Díarmait mac Máel na mBó onwards, they did not.

Marriages continued to occur between all of the dynasties with royal aspirations in Leinster. For instance, Caillech ingen Dunlaing of the Uí Muiredaig branch of Uí Dunlainge married Máel Mórda of the Uí Fáeláin and was mother of Braen mac Máel Mórda, the king of Leinster who was blinded and died of his wounds in Dublin in 1018.¹⁴⁶ Cacht ingen Uí Fáeláin married Loísech mac Aimerigin of the Laígis and was mother to Cú Críche mac Laísig, styled king of Leinster in the *Banshenchas* but merely king of Loígis in the annals on his death in 1042.¹⁴⁷ Sadb ingen Máel Mórda Uí Domnaill, the king of Uí Chennselaig who died in 1024, was mother of Gilla Comgaill Úa Túathail.¹⁴⁸ Gormlaith ingen Éanna Mac Murchada of Uí Chennselaig, the king of Leinster who died in 1126, married into the Uí Mórda.¹⁴⁹ Díarmait Mac Murchada’s first marriage was with Sadb ingen Cerbaill mac Fáeláin of Uí Fáeláin.¹⁵⁰ His last marriage was to Mór ingen Muirchertaigh Uí Thúathail, a daughter of the king of Uí Muiredaig.¹⁵¹ Both were to families that had held the kingship of Leinster, and, in keeping with the pattern discussed above, both therefore recognised the royal status of those families. Had the Uí Chennselaig monopolised the kingship, they would not have acknowledged the Uí Fáeláin or Uí Thúathail in this way.

Further evidence may be found in the 1177 obituary of Máel Mórda Úa Fáeláin, killed by the Uí Thúathail, described as ‘the best crownprince [*rigdamna*] in Leinster’.¹⁵² The exact meaning of the term *rigdamna* has been debated, but it may be taken to mean the leader of a segment currently excluded

¹⁴⁵ *AFM* s.a. 1089.5, 1092.9, 1115.5; *ALC* s.a. 1115.4; *AU* s.a. 1115.4.

¹⁴⁶ *Banshenchas* [part two], 228; Ní Bhrolcháin, ‘The Prose *Banshenchas*’, §426, pp. 274, 390; *AU* s.a. 1018.2; *AI* s.a. 1018.4; *AFM* s.a. 1017.5.

¹⁴⁷ *Banshenchas* [part two], 233; Ní Bhrolcháin, ‘The Prose *Banshenchas*’, §563, pp. 304, 418; *AFM* s.a. 1042.9.

¹⁴⁸ *Banshenchas* [part two], 195; Ní Bhrolcháin, ‘The Prose *Banshenchas*’, §498, pp. 289, 404.

¹⁴⁹ *Banshenchas* [part two], 233; Ní Bhrolcháin, ‘The Prose *Banshenchas*’, §562, pp. 303, 418.

¹⁵⁰ *Banshenchas* [part two], 233; Ní Bhrolcháin, ‘The Prose *Banshenchas*’, §559, pp. 303, 417.

¹⁵¹ *Banshenchas* [part two], 232; Ní Bhrolcháin, ‘The Prose *Banshenchas*’, §555, pp. 302, 416.

¹⁵² *Ann. Tig.* s.a. 1177.12: ‘*rigdamna rob fherr do Laiginib*’.

from kingship who had a prospect of reclaiming it for his dynasty.¹⁵³ It was also this term that was applied to Énna Mac Murchada, son of Díarmait, in the same collection of annals, only nine years before, when he was blinded by the king of Osraige.¹⁵⁴ Furthermore, under 1103 there is a reference to a ‘Muirchertach Mac Gilla mo Cholmóg, king of Leinster’, in both *AFM* and *Ann. Tig.*¹⁵⁵ The Meic Gilla mo Cholmóg belonged to the Uí Dúinchada. Later, Díarmait Mac Murchada’s own daughter was married to Domnall Mac Gilla mo Cholmóg (d. 1185).¹⁵⁶

Perhaps even more importantly, the Book of Leinster acknowledges the royalty of Conchobar Úa Conchobair Failge (d. 1115), who is described as having ‘joint sovereignty’ with Donnchad mac Murchada for two years.¹⁵⁷ Both died in battle against Muirchertach Úa Briain and his son Domnall.¹⁵⁸ In *AFM*, *AU* and *ALC* descriptions of that event, both men are given their regional titles (i.e., king of Uí Chennselaig and king of Uí Failge). In *Ann. Tig.*, Donnchad mac Murchada is ‘king of Leinster’ and Conchobar Úa Conchobair Failge merely ‘king of Offaly’.¹⁵⁹ Nonetheless, the Book of Leinster’s interpretation is further evidence that the Uí Chennselaig had not persuaded everyone else that their claims were now defunct.

This discovery has considerable implications for our understanding of Leinster in the twelfth century. Possession of the provincial kingship was not considered a settled issue, and both Mac Murchada and his subordinates knew it. It is therefore clearer why, to take one example, his vassals should seek to betray him in 1166. In the words of *The Deeds of the Normans in Ireland*, ‘All his men from Leinster and from Osraige have abandoned him. When King Diarmait saw then that he was betrayed, that his own men had failed him, and that he was thus betrayed and that they wanted to capture him, to hand him over and sell him to Ua Ruairc, and that moreover the king of Connacht would inflict great destruction on him – but why should I prolong our chronicle in any way? His own men have driven out King Diarmait by force’.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵³See Donnchadh Ó Corráin, ‘Irish regnal succession: a reappraisal’, *Studia Hibernica* 11 (1971), 7–39, at 35: ‘I suggest, then, with some hesitation, that the *rígdamna* is usually the head of the main segment out of the kingship and that his office is what Goody calls, a pledge to the segment that it would have the next bite of the cherry. And the degree to which the dynasty is segmented together with the power (or weakness) of the king in office determines whether the *rígdamna* is nearly or distantly related to the king’.

¹⁵⁴*Ann. Tig.* s.a. 1168.2: ‘*Enda Mac Murchadha, rígdamna Laigen, do dallad la Donnchadh Mac Gilla Padraic la rí Osraigi*’.

¹⁵⁵*AFM* s.a. 1103.10; *Ann. Tig.* s.a. 1103.4. Note also that Muirchertach Mac Gilla mo Cholmóg is mentioned in similar entries in *ALC*, *AU*, and *AI*, but without the provincial title (*ALC* s.a. 1103.3, 1103.4; *AU* s.a. 1103.5; *AI* s.a. 1103.4).

¹⁵⁶John T. Gilbert (ed.) *Chartulary St Mary’s Dublin*, 2 vols (London, 1884), i, 31–2.

¹⁵⁷Best et al. (eds), *The Book of Leinster*, i, 184: ‘*i comflathius*’.

¹⁵⁸*AU* s.a. 1115.4, 1115.6.

¹⁵⁹*Ann. Tig.* s.a. 1115.4: ‘*rí Laigen*’, ‘*ri h-Úa Failghi*’.

¹⁶⁰Evelyn Mullally (ed.), *The deeds of the Normans in Ireland: La Geste des Engleis en Yrlande. A new edition of the chronicle formerly known as The Song of Dermot and the Earl* (Dublin, 2002), 58, ll. 204–27: *Tute sa gent li sunt faillie De Leynestere e de Osserie. Quant ço vit Dermot li reis Que traï esteit a cele feis, Sa gent demeine lui sun failliz, Ent el maere iert traïz E que voleint [le] prendre, A O Roric liverer e vendre, Si li f[le]jist mult grant essart De Connoth li reis d’autre part-*

Similarly, we can better understand why Giraldus Cambrensis wrote of Díarmait Mac Murchada that ‘From his earliest youth and his first taking the kingship he oppressed his nobles, and raged against the chief men of his kingdom with a tyranny grievous and impossible to bear ... He preferred to be feared by all rather than loved. He treated his nobles harshly and brought to prominence men of humble rank’,¹⁶¹

F. X. Martin suggested that too much credence had been given to this commentary, which he deemed to be anti-Irish rhetoric, and which certainly was at odds with the positive image of Mac Murchada portrayed in *The Deeds*.¹⁶² But we know that Giraldus had grounds for his comments because in 1141 Mac Murchada had killed or blinded seventeen of his leading nobles. They included Domnall Úa Fáeláin, Muirchertach Mac Gilla mo Cholmóg, and Murchad Úa Túathail.¹⁶³ In other words, those who suffered at Mac Murchada’s hands represented genuine rivals whose designs he feared. Thomas Charles-Edwards’s argument that Mac Murchada intended to secure his own (and his dynasty’s) hold on Leinster by having the early English invaders take land holdings in the territory of his rivals within Leinster is entirely harmonious with the present interpretation.¹⁶⁴ Mac Murchada clearly planned to damage the independent power of his subordinates by planting Anglo-Normans on their lands. In this way he could ensure Uí Chennselaig dominance of the provincial kingship of Leinster going forward.

This discovery also answers the question of succession in Leinster after Díarmait. Since we can now show that one of the main aims of his scheme was to ensure his dynasty’s dominance, there can be no question that he willingly bequeathed the province to Richard de Clare. This assertion, underlying the Anglo-Norman claim in Leinster, has always been suspect, but hitherto Mac Murchada has also been difficult to understand. I suggest, too, that the execution of his son Conchobar by Rúaidrí Úa Conchobair surprised him, and I hope to deal with this point on another occasion.

There are some limits to this argument that must be acknowledged. The *Banshenchas* contains a strong stratum of Leinster material, based on the Book of Uí Maine exemplar, as discussed above, and we therefore have a better chance of observing such unions here than we do for some other provinces, particularly Munster and Connacht, for which such detailed material is lacking. At the same time, we lack a dedicated collection of annals for Leinster, impeding our understanding of the development of rival claims on its kingship in the twelfth century.

Kev us irrai purloingnant De nostre geste tant ne quant? Le reis Dermot en unt geté Sa gent par vive poësté.

¹⁶¹ Scott and Martin, *Expugnatio Hibernica*, 25–6, 40–1.

¹⁶² F. X. Martin, ‘Díarmait Mac Murchada and the coming of the Anglo-Normans’, in Art Cosgrave (ed.), *New History of Ireland II: Medieval Ireland 1169–1534* (Oxford, 1987), 43–66, at 46–7.

¹⁶³ *Ann. Tig.* s.a. 1141.5.

¹⁶⁴ T. M. Charles-Edwards, ‘Ireland and its invaders, 1166–1186’, *Quaestio Insularis* 4 (2003), 1–34; *The Deeds*, 100, ll. 1852–56.

Since marriages are usually only recorded incidentally in the Irish annals, typically in the form of obituaries of notable wives, there are certainly vast gaps in our knowledge. Our data, such as they are, provide a window on marriage practice in medieval Ireland and most especially on the twelfth century. Judging by what we can see through this window, Irish nobles typically practised serial monogyny, often complemented with concubines in the case of powerful men. Political motives can be seen as an important factor, but certainly not the only one, and the agency of women in the selection of partners is equally perceptible.

The fact that marriage could be seen as an endorsement of royal status complicated internal politics once a particular dynasty monopolised the kingship, since they were now disincentivised to contract marriages with their former rivals. Some such unions probably occurred, particularly in the period when monopolisation was not firmly established, but the *Banshenchas* shows a definite trend away from such pairings. As such, the continued inter-marriages of aspiring royal dynasties in Leinster informs us about the difficulties and policies of its famous twelfth-century king, Díarmait Mac Murchada.

There are two important links here with the English invasion of Ireland. In the first place, Ireland's divergent marriage practices were strongly criticised by the archbishops of Canterbury in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries. This dialogue played a role in the perception of Ireland at the curia later in the twelfth century, and perhaps even in the papal bull *Laudabiliter* (though this is open to question).¹⁶⁵ Crusading language certainly supported the invasion after the fact, with Irish marriage practice a key consideration, as is clearly shown by a letter of Pope Alexander III to Henry II, urging him to subjugate 'this barbarous and uncouth race which is ignorant of divine law'.¹⁶⁶

The second link is that it was Díarmait Mac Murchada who, when driven from Ireland in 1166, sought Henry's aid. The king of England may not have been particularly inclined to act on that occasion, but his barons were, and he later renewed his enthusiasm for the scheme. Because it was Mac Murchada who solicited aid, it was Leinster in which the earliest arrivals first staked claims to land. It was also succession in Leinster with which they were concerned when Mac Murchada conveniently died in 1171. We may wonder how Richard de Clare and his allies understood succession in an Irish context, but they were doubtless made aware of the rival claims which, in Leinster, extended across the province.

¹⁶⁵Marie Therese Flanagan, 'Laudabiliter', in S. J. Connolly (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Irish History*, second ed. (Oxford, 2003), 319.

¹⁶⁶Maurice P. Sheehy, *Pontificia Hibernia*, 2 vols (Dublin, 1962–5), i, 19–20 at 20: '*gentem illam barbaram, incultam et divine legis ignaram*'.

ABBREVIATIONS

<i>ALC</i>	<i>The Annals of Loch Ce: a chronicle of Irish affairs, 1014–1590, ed. W.M. Hennessy (2 vols, London, 1871).</i>
<i>Ann. Clon.</i>	<i>The Annals of Clonmacnoise, being annals of Ireland from the earliest period to ad 1408, translated into English, ad 1627, by Connell Mageoghagan, ed. Denis Murphy (Dublin, 1896).</i>
<i>Ann. Conn.</i>	<i>Annála Connacht, [...] (ad 1224–1544), ed. A. Martin Freeman (Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1944).</i>
<i>Chron. Scot.</i>	<i>Chronicum Scotorum: a chronicle of Irish affairs [...] to 1135, and supplement [...] 1141–1150, ed. W. M. Hennessy (London, 1866).</i>
<i>DIB</i>	<i>Dictionary of Irish Biography (online).</i>
<i>Misc.Ir.Annals</i>	<i>Séamus Ó hInnse (ed.), Miscellaneous Irish annals (ad 1114–1437) (Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1947).</i>
<i>ODNB</i>	<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (online).</i>

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