

# The rise and fall of the Clann Éinrí Aimhréidh Uí Néill: dynastic feuding and geopolitics in the late medieval Irish Sea world

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**ABSTRACT.** *During the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, the Ulster lordship of Tír Eoghain was bitterly contested between two rival branches of the Uí Néill dynasty: the Clann Éinrí Aimhréidh and the Clann Briain Catha an Dúin. Traditionally, historians have focused mainly on the local origins and ramifications of this feud and have paid only cursory attention to how events ranging from the Shannon Estuary through to the Outer Hebrides shaped the course of this struggle. For instance, throughout the later fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries a range of different regional players from across this wider 'Irish Sea world' became drawn into pulled into this conflict, each possessing a vested interest in the outcome of the Uí Néill successional war. By drawing upon a rich corpus of primary sources, including Irish, Scottish and English material, this article locates the Uí Néill feud within a wider dynastic and geopolitical context. Ultimately, the article argues for the necessity of exploring this feud from within a wider geographic and dynastic framework of interpretation, and paying closer attention to how events within the Irish Sea world could impact and impinge upon the politics of the wider archipelago.*

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In 1435, Brian Óg Ó Néill (d. 1449) led a brief rebellion against his cousin, the ruler of Tír Eoghain, Eóghan Ó Néill (d. 1456). Brian Óg and Eóghan were the respective heads of two powerful branches of the Uí Néill dynasty: the Clann Éinrí Aimhréidh and the Clann Briain Catha an Dúin.<sup>1</sup> Brian Óg's kindred were a scion of the main Uí Néill line and descended from the fourteenth-century figure, Éinrí Aimhréidh Ó Néill (d. 1392). Their lands were based in western Tír Eoghain, bounded by the contours of the River Strule and the neighbouring Uí Dhomhnaill lordship of Tír Chonaill. Eóghan's kindred claimed descent from Brian Catha an Dúin Ó Néill (d. 1260), the last Irishman to hold the high kingship of Ireland, who fell at the Battle of Down in 1260. In contrast to the Clann Éinrí Aimhréidh, the lands of the Clann Briain Catha an Dúin centred on eastern Tír Eoghain, included the fortress of Dungannon and town of Armagh, and bordered with the English colony in northern Leinster. Between 1345 and 1403, the Clann Briain Catha an Dúin held the kingship of Tír Eoghain in an unbroken line, with

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<sup>†</sup> All Gaelic and Gaelicised personal names and the majority of Gaelic and Gaelicised lordships have been rendered in early modern Irish.

the title passing from father to son in each generation. However, the outbreak of a feud between the lines of Brian Catha an Dúin and Éinrí Aimhréidh in the mid 1390s saw both branches of the Uí Néill bitterly contest the kingship.

Although Eóghan managed to recover the kingship in 1432, the Clann Éinrí Aimhréidh continued to pose a serious challenge. In 1435, Brian Óg forged an alliance with the Uí Dhomhnaill (the O'Donnells of modern-day County Donegal) and attempted to seize the kingship of Tír Eoghain. Following two inconclusive battles, Eóghan agreed to discuss a settlement with his cousin.<sup>2</sup> A guarantee of safe passage for Brian Óg and his two sons was secured through the agency of the bard, Conchobhar Ruadh Mac Con Midhe (d. 1481), and Brian Óg set out for Eóghan's *caput* at Dungannon. However, upon arrival Brian Óg and his sons were seized by Eóghan's own, son Éinrí (d. 1484), who hacked a hand and foot from each of the captives. Brian Óg's son Aodh died instantly.<sup>3</sup> This ruthless act of maiming betrayed the dynastic insecurity of Eóghan's family. Within the context and traditions of Irish kingship, maiming rendered the victim both physically and morally incapable of ruling: Brian Óg survived the ordeal but could never be elected to the kingship.<sup>4</sup> The poet, Conchobhar Ruadh Mac Con Midhe, was also outraged by this transgression: he departed into exile in Connacht, where he composed a poem lamenting the maiming of Brian Óg and satirising Eóghan and Éinrí.<sup>5</sup> Conchobhar Ruadh's sense of injustice, however, was not enough to deter him from penning another poem eighteen years later. By this time, the Clann Éinrí Aimhréidh had faded into obscurity, while Éinrí had deposed his father, Eóghan, and seized the kingship of Tír Eoghain.<sup>6</sup> Rather than face a further extended banishment in Connacht, Conchobhar Ruadh extolled Éinrí's merciful qualities and begged his permission to return to Ulster.<sup>7</sup> The new ruler of Tír Eoghain appears to have granted the poet's request.

This article explores the origins, course and wider impact of this dynastic struggle. Despite their ignominious end, the Clann Éinrí Aimhréidh had, for a brief time, posed a very real threat to the line of Briain Catha an Dúin. Moreover, the struggle between the rival lines was not confined to Ulster; rather, it drew in a host of different regional players ranging from the Shannon estuary to the Outer Hebrides. In Ulster, the Uí Dhomhnaill intervened regularly in the conflict; further south, the rulers of Connacht and northern Munster became involved, both directly and

<sup>2</sup> All annals references are given as year, as opposed to page and volume number. *Annals of Ulster* (hereafter *AU*), ed. William Hennessy and Bartholomew MacCarthy (4 vols, Dublin, 1887–1901), 1435; *Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland* (hereafter *AFM*), ed. John O'Donovan (7 vols, Dublin, 1990), 1435; *Annals of Loch Cé* (hereafter *ALC*), ed. William Hennessy (2 vols, London, 1939), 1435; *The Annals of Connacht (AD 1224–1544)* (hereafter *AC*), ed. Martin Freeman (Dublin, 1970), 1435.

<sup>3</sup> *AFM*, *AU*, *ALC*, *AC*, 1435.

<sup>4</sup> For maiming, see Katharine Simms, *From kings to warlords: the changing political structure of Gaelic Ireland in the later middle ages* (Woodbridge, 1987), pp 50–1.

<sup>5</sup> *ALC*, *AC*, 1435; *A bardic miscellany*, ed. Damian MacManus and Eoghan Ó Raghallaigh (Dublin, 2010), no. 288; Gordon Ó Riain, 'A poem on the mutilation of Brian Óg Ó Néill' in *Éigse*, xxxvii (2010), pp 92–111.

<sup>6</sup> For deposition, see *AFM*, *AU*, *ALC*, 1455.

<sup>7</sup> For poem, see Gordon Ó Riain, 'Dán réitigh le Conchobhar Ruadh Mac Con Midhe (d. 1481)' in Pádraig Breathnach, Caoimhín Breatnach and Meidhbhín Ní Úrdail (eds), *Éigse: léann lámhscríbhinní Lóbháin — The Louvain manuscript heritage* (Dublin, 2007), pp 54–75.

indirectly. In Leinster, the Butlers of Ormond and the colonial administration negotiated with both branches of the Uí Néill, while east across the North Channel, the lords of the Clann Domhnaill of Islay had a vested interest in the outcome of the successional dispute. A considerable body of research has been completed on the Uí Néill lordship and the struggle between both branches looms large within the literature.<sup>8</sup> However, aside from a handful of exceptions, scholars have focused on the local ramifications of this feud, without considering how the conflict formed part of a much wider struggle. The pioneering work of Katharine Simms has examined the role of the Uí Dhomhnaill and the Butlers but largely overlooked the feud's Scottish dimension.<sup>9</sup> Likewise, Simon Kingston's research on the Clann Domhnaill of Islay and their kinsmen, the Clann Eoin Mhóir of Antrim, treated events in both Ireland and Scotland separately.<sup>10</sup>

The Uí Néill civil war offers a fruitful case study for investigating how events in these western regions could exert a powerful magnetic pull upon the affairs of the wider archipelago. However, scholars have proven somewhat reluctant to engage with this theme for this period. Surveys of wider Irish and British history have tended to overlook how events within the predominantly Gaelic-speaking world of Ireland and the Highlands and Islands of Scotland influenced the course of archipelagic history. Many scholars have instead preferred to focus on the fluctuation of English power as the main interpretative framework.<sup>11</sup> While this strand of research has offered numerous insights into the evolution of England's insular empire, it neglects the vibrancy of the Gaelic aristocracy during the later medieval period. Certain historians have argued for the importance of devoting closer scrutiny to the Gaelic-speaking world. Michael Brown has underlined the decline of English and Scottish royal power within the western section of the archipelago, noting that the initiative often lay with local communities, not the state.<sup>12</sup> Scholarship

<sup>8</sup> For examples, see Éamon Ó Doibhlin, 'Ceart Uí Néill: A discussion and translation of the document' in *Seanchas Ard Mhaca: Journal of the Armagh Diocesan Historical Society*, v, no. 2 (1970), pp 324–58; idem, 'The rise and fall of a dynasty: medieval West Tyrone as reported in the annals' in *Clogher Record*, xvi, no. 3 (1999), pp 71–85; Katharine Simms, 'Tír Eoghain "North of the Mountain"' in Gerard O'Brien (ed.), *Derry and Londonderry: history and society* (Dublin, 1999), pp 149–73; eadem, 'Late medieval Tír Eoghain: the kingdom of the Great O'Neill' in Charles Dillon and Henry Jeffries (eds), *Tyrone: history and society* (Dublin, 2000), pp 127–62; eadem, *Gaelic Ulster in the middle ages: history, culture and society* (Dublin, 2020), chapters 3–6.

<sup>9</sup> For example, see Katharine Simms, 'Niall Garbh II O'Donnell: king of Tír Conaill, 1422–39' in *Donegal Annual*, xii (1977/79), pp 7–21; idem, "'The king's friend': O'Neill, the crown and the earldom of Ulster' in James Lydon (ed.), *England and Ireland in the later middle Ages* (Dublin, 1981), pp 214–36.

<sup>10</sup> Simon Kingston, *Ulster and the isles in the fifteenth century: the lordship of the Clann Domhnaill of Antrim* (Dublin, 2004).

<sup>11</sup> For notable works, see Robin Frame, *The political development of the British Isles* (Oxford, 1995); David Green, 'Lordship and principality: colonial policy in Ireland and Aquitaine in the 1360s' in *Journal of British Studies*, xlvii, no. 1 (2008), pp 3–29; Andrea Ruddick, 'Gascony and the limits of British Isles history' in Brendan Smith (ed.), *Ireland and the English world in the later middle ages: essays in honour of Robin Frame* (Basingstoke, 2009), pp 68–88; Brendan Smith, 'Late medieval Ireland and the English connection: Waterford and Bristol, ca. 1360–1460' in *Journal of British Studies*, l, no. 3 (2011), pp 546–65.

<sup>12</sup> Michael Brown, *Disunited kingdoms: peoples and politics in the British Isles, 1280–1460* (Harlow, 2013).

on the high-medieval period (c.1100–c.1300) also provides some instructive models. Seán Duffy, Marie Therese Flanagan, and R. A. McDonald have considered the significance of the ‘Irish Sea world’ (the collective term used to denote the lands comprising Ireland, Man, Wales and the Highlands and Islands of Scotland) as a force within insular politics. Their scholarship has emphasised the agency of the Gaelic nobility in Ireland and the West Highlands during this period and demonstrated that these nobles possessed the capacity to shape the course of Anglo-Scottish relations.<sup>13</sup>

This present article draws upon these methodological approaches to examine the wider impact of the Uí Néill civil war. The essay utilises a rich corpus of primary material from across Ireland and Scotland, as well as English and Scottish records to explore this theme. It charts the establishment of the Uí Néill lineage during the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. It traces their growing rivalry with the Uí Dhomhnaill but also considers how their rising power brought the Uí Néill into increasing contact with the English administration in Ireland and the Clann Domhnaill in Scotland. The second section focuses on the rise of Éinrí Aimhréidh, examining Éinrí’s role in expanding Uí Néill power in western Ulster and paying close attention to how developments in Connacht shaped the affairs of Ulster. Consideration of the evolving relationship between the Uí Néill and the colonial administration demonstrates how a combination of factors, including the ambitions of the Mortimer earls of March and the rising lordship of the Uí Dhomhnaill over Ulster and Connacht, contributed to the outbreak of civil war within Tír Eoghain. The final section explores the wider impact of the Uí Néill feud. Set against the backdrop of the Hundred Years War, it considers how events ranging across Ireland and Scotland’s western seaboard shaped the course and eventual outcome of the feud.

## I

It was under the leadership of their eponymous ancestor that the Clann Briain Catha an Dúin rose to prominence. For much of the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, power within Tír Eoghain was contested between the Uí Néill and their great rivals, the Meic Lochlainn. It was not until 1241, that Brian Catha an Dúin established himself as the undisputed king of Tír Eoghain when he crushed the Meic Lochlainn at the battle of Caimeirghe in 1241.<sup>14</sup> Following this victory, Brian began to assert his newfound power across Ulster. In 1258 he became involved in an ambitious scheme whereby the Uí Chonchobhair of Connacht and Uí Bhriain of Thomond elected him as high-king of Ireland.<sup>15</sup> Although the plot held great promise, Brian met a grisly end at the Battle of Down in 1260: his forces were shattered, and Brian was killed and his pickled head sent to London.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Marie Therese Flanagan, *Irish society, Anglo-Norman settlers, Angevin kingship: interactions in Ireland in the late 12<sup>th</sup> century* (Oxford, 1989); Seán Duffy, ‘The Bruce brothers and the Irish Sea world, 1306–1329’ in *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*, xxi (1991), pp 55–86; R. A. McDonald, *Manx kingship in its Irish Sea setting, 1187–1229: King Rognvaldr and the Crovan dynasty* (Dublin, 2007).

<sup>14</sup> For the early history of Tír Eoghain, see Simms, ‘Tír Eoghain’, pp 153–5; eadem, ‘The kingdom’, pp 130–33.

<sup>15</sup> Seán Duffy, ‘The prehistory of the galloglass’ in idem (ed.), *The world of the galloglass: kings, warlords and warriors, c.1200–c.1600* (Dublin, 2007), pp 17–20.

<sup>16</sup> AU, ALC, AFM, 1260. For a lament for Brian, see Niall Williams (ed.), *The poems of Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe* (Dublin, 1980), pp 136–63.

## Ireland c.1400

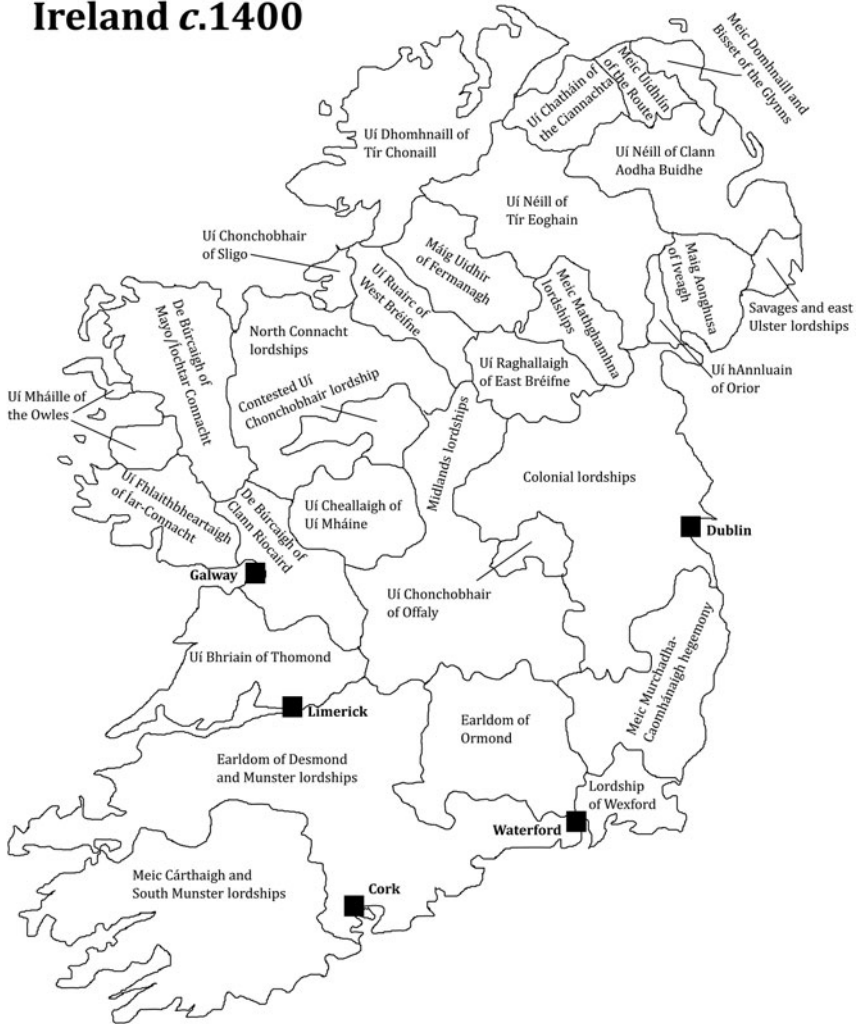


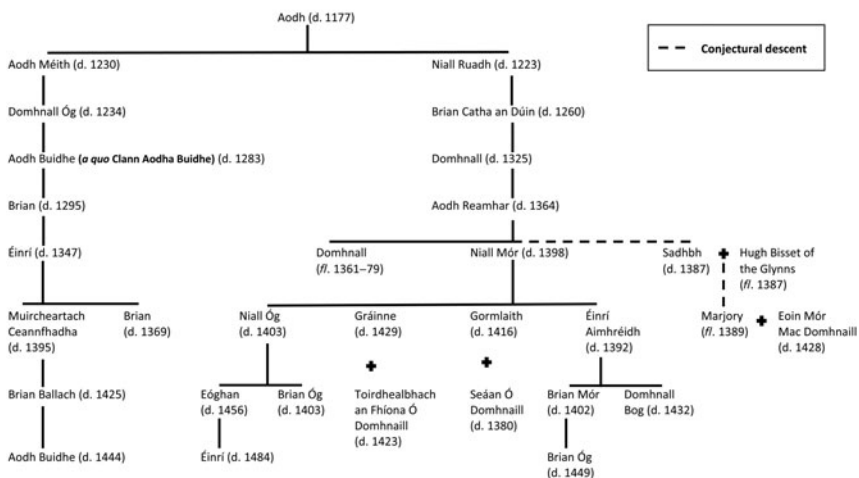
Figure is based on a map drawn by Kenneth Nicholls, see Patrick J. Duffy, David Edwards, and Elizabeth FitzPatrick, 'Introduction: Recovering Gaelic Ireland, c.1250–c.1650' in Patrick J. Duffy, David Edwards, and Elizabeth FitzPatrick (eds) *Gaelic Ireland, c.1250–c.1650: Land, Lordship and Settlement*, ed. (Dublin, 2001), pp 24–25.

Figure 1. (*Map of Ireland, c.1400*)

Following Brian's death, the Uí Néill lordship fragmented into two dominant lines. A new lordship under Brian's nephew, Aodh Buidhe Ó Néill (d. 1283), emerged on the northern and eastern shores of Lough Neagh, bounded by the River Bann in the north and stretching east and south across the Antrim plateau to the mouth of the River Lagan. Aodh Buidhe was inaugurated as the new ruler of the Uí Néill dynasty and his descendants — the Clann Aodha Buidhe — would remain a potent force in Ulster politics through to the early seventeenth century.<sup>17</sup> Brian's son, Domhnall Ó Néill (d. 1325), eventually recovered his father's lordship in the 1290s and is perhaps

<sup>17</sup> Simms, *Gaelic Ulster*, pp 100–03.

The Uí Néill of Tír Eoghain and Clann Aodha Buidhe: principal dynasts and dynastic connections c.1177–c.1456



For an expanded family tree, see T. W. Moody, F. X. Martin and F. J. Byrne (eds), *A new history of Ireland, ix: maps, genealogies, lists. A companion to Irish history, part II* (Oxford, 1989), pp 140–43.

Figure 2. (*Uí Néill family tree*)

best remembered for supporting Robert (d. 1329) and Edward Bruce (d. 1318).<sup>18</sup> Following Domhnall's death in 1325, the kingship of Tír Eoghain was once again seized by the Uí Néill of Clann Aodha Buidhe, with Aodh Buidhe's grandson, Éinrí (d. 1347), being inaugurated as the new ruler.<sup>19</sup> It was not until the tenure of Domhnall Ó Néill's son, Aodh Reamhar (d. 1364), that the line of Brian Catha an Dúin recovered the kingship.

Aodh Reamhar was aided in his rise to power by several key factors. Firstly, the Clann Aodha Buidhe had a tradition of cooperating with the colonial administration.<sup>20</sup> However, in 1345, Aodh Buidhe's grandson, Éinrí, had run afoul of the colonial government. Aodh Reamhar exploited Éinrí's weakness, deposing Éinrí and establishing himself as the new king of Tír Eoghain.<sup>21</sup> Aodh Reamhar was also able to manipulate growing fissures within the neighbouring lordship of Tír Chonaill. Between 1291 and 1333, Aodh Ó Domhnaill (d. 1333) had ruled Tír Chonaill uninterrupted. His death in 1333 sparked a successional war which lasted until 1380 (see figure 4).<sup>22</sup> This struggle was adroitly exploited by Aodh Reamhar and his successors.<sup>23</sup> To bolster his military capacity, Aodh Reamhar was capable of raising large contingents of mercenaries from Scotland's western seaboard. The Scottish-Norse wars of the 1260s, followed by the Anglo-Scottish wars of the fourteenth century, had seen numerous kindreds uprooted from the West Highlands and Islands.<sup>24</sup> Many of these families migrated westwards to Ireland, where they

<sup>18</sup> For Uí Néill-Bruce links, see Duffy, 'Bruce brothers', pp 70–76.

<sup>19</sup> Simms, 'The kingdom', pp 144–5.

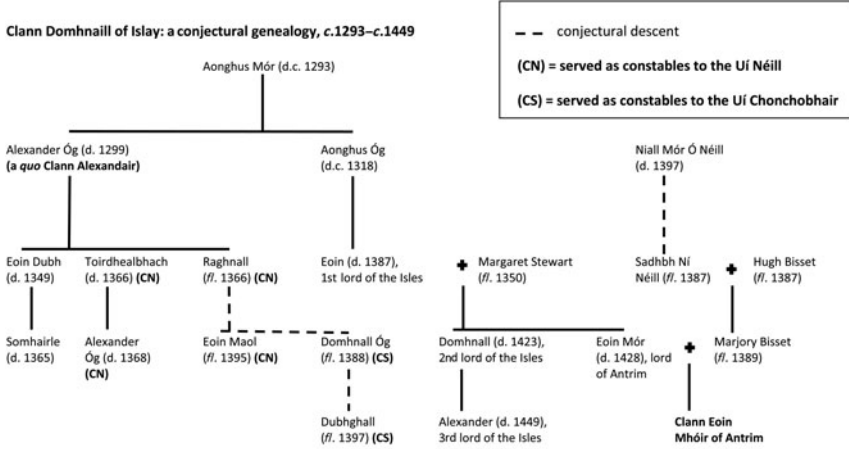
<sup>20</sup> Eadem, 'O'Hanlons', pp 81–2.

<sup>21</sup> Eadem, 'Gaelic lordships in Ulster in the later middle ages' (Ph.D. thesis, Trinity College Dublin, 1976), pp 697–9.

<sup>22</sup> For feud, see *ibid.*, p. 557.

<sup>23</sup> For example, see *AU*, 1355.

<sup>24</sup> Michael Brown, *The wars of Scotland, 1214–1371* (Edinburgh, 2004), 80–88, 265–73.



This family tree is based on the conjectural Clann Domhnaill genealogy in Noel Murray, 'A house divided against itself: a brief synopsis of the history of Clan Alexandair and the early career of "Good John of Islay", c.1290–1370' in Colm Ó Baoill and Nancy McGuire (eds), *Rannscadh na Gàidhlig 2000* (Aberdeen, 2002), pp 221–30.

Figure 3. (Clann Domhnaill family tree)

secured employment and lands within the lordships of powerful Irish dynasties.<sup>25</sup> The Meic Suibhne of Knapdale, who came to serve the Uí Dhomhnaill as hereditary galloglass in the later fourteenth century, stand as perhaps the most famous example.<sup>26</sup>

Another important Hebridean lineage also looked to Ireland at this time. During the mid to late fourteenth century, the Clann Alexandair galloglass established themselves as hereditary galloglass under the Uí Néill of Tír Eoghain. The Clann Alexandair were a branch of the main line of the Meic Domhnaill of Islay. Despite the fragmentary nature of the historical record, it appears that the Clann Alexandair were exiled from Islay by their cousin, Eoin Mac Domhnaill (d. 1387). Eoin had seized power on Islay sometime in the early to mid 1330s.<sup>27</sup> During his long career, the first and self-styled 'lord of the isles' (*dominus insularum*) carved out a huge territorial lordship on Scotland's western seaboard. Eoin negotiated with both the English and Scottish crowns, and took advantage of Scotland's so-called 'Second War of Independence' (1332–57) to extend his influence into the north-western Highlands.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, Eoin's rise to prominence may not have been as straightforward as commonly assumed and there is evidence that his lordship was challenged by the Clann Alexandair. Fearing a potential

<sup>25</sup> See Kenneth Nicholls, 'Scottish mercenary kindreds in Ireland, 1250–1600' in Duffy (ed.), *Galloglass*, pp 86–105.

<sup>26</sup> Katharine Simms, 'Gaelic warfare in the middle ages' in Thomas Bartlett and Keith Jeffrey (eds), *A military history of Ireland* (Cambridge, 1996), pp 111–12.

<sup>27</sup> *Acts of the lords of the isles, 1336–1493*, ed. Jean Munro and Robert Munro (Edinburgh, 1986), p. 286.

<sup>28</sup> For Eoin's rise, see Michael Penman, 'The MacDonald lordship and the Bruce dynasty, c.1306–1371' in Richard Oram (ed.), *The lordship of the isles* (Leiden, 2014), pp 70–80.

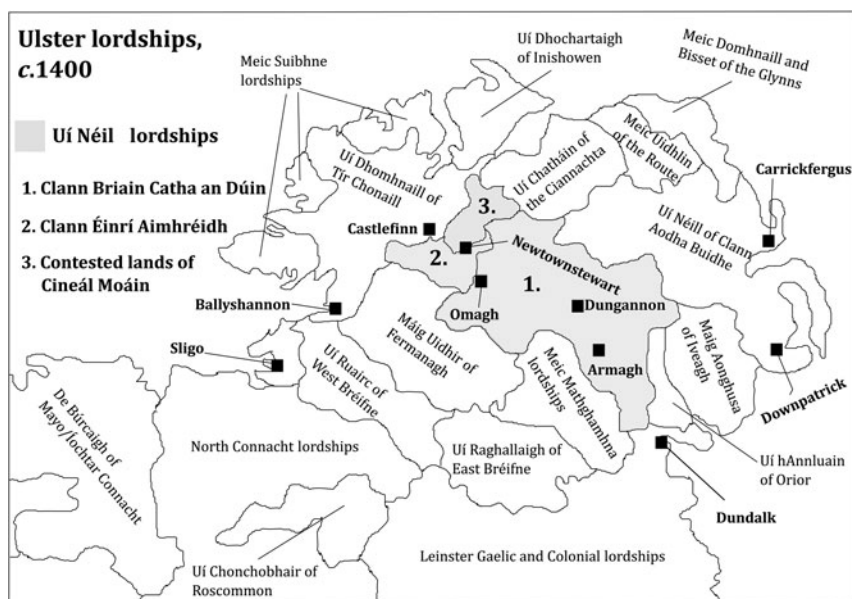


Figure 4. (*Map of Ulster*)

coup, Eoin seems to have banished the Clann Alexandair to Ireland, where they secured shelter and employment as galloglass under Aodh Reamhar.<sup>29</sup>

Surviving sources suggest that the Clann Alexandair sought the recovery of their ancestral lands on Islay during the later fourteenth century, posing a threat to Eoin and his successors that did not subside until the late 1390s.<sup>30</sup> In the meantime, the Clann Alexandair galloglass provided Aodh Reamhar and his son and successor, Niall Mór (d. 1398), with the military edge they needed to impose their lordship upon much of Ulster. In 1368, the Clann Alexandair helped Niall Mór see off the challenge of his brother, Domhnall Ó Néill (*fl.* 1361–70).<sup>31</sup> The feud between the sons of Aodh Reamhar was eventually settled in 1370 when Domhnall submitted to Niall Mór in exchange for lands in western Tír Eoghain.<sup>32</sup> Over the next two decades, Niall Mór surpassed the territorial ambitions of his father. In the east, the Uí Néill of Clann Aodha Buidhe recognised Niall Mór's lordship, as did both the Meic Mathghamhna of Airgialla and the Meic Aonghusa of Iveagh. By the early 1370s, Niall Mór had begun encroaching into what was left of the English colony in eastern Ulster and was threatening the northern fringes of County Louth. In 1374, he defeated a colonial army at Down; a decade later, he pushed into eastern Ulster and burned

<sup>29</sup> Noel Murray, 'A house divided against itself: a brief synopsis of the history of Clan Alexandair and the early career of "Good John of Islay", c.1290–1370' in Colm Ó Baoill and Nancy McGuire (eds), *Rannsachadh na Gàidhlig 2000* (Aberdeen, 2002), pp 221–30; Nicholls, 'Kindreds', pp 97–8.

<sup>30</sup> Murray, 'House divided', p. 225; *AFM*, 1366. See below.

<sup>31</sup> *AC*, 1368.

<sup>32</sup> Simms, *Gaelic Ulster*, pp 129–30.



Carrickfergus Castle.<sup>33</sup> Before long, Niall Mór had set his sights on northern Leinster. Although the colonists captured his son and heir designate, Niall Óg (d. 1402), in 1389, his release was secured the following year in exchange for hostages and an oath of good behaviour.<sup>34</sup> Two years later, he reneged and burned Dundalk.<sup>35</sup>

## II

To a large extent, Uí Néill expansion in eastern Ulster rested on the efforts of Niall Mór's son, Éinrí Aimhréidh. An obituary contained in the contemporary *Annals of Connacht* claimed that Éinrí's soubriquet *Aimhréidh* ('troublesome') was undeserved and that he was named in error.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, an examination of Éinrí's career paints a very different picture to that offered by the annalist. Éinrí Aimhréidh first appears in the historical record in 1375 when Archbishop Milo Sweetman of Armagh (d. 1380) wrote to Niall Mór, accusing Éinrí of committing murder and rape in the diocesan lands of Armagh and urging Niall Mór to restrain him.<sup>37</sup> A solution to Sweetman's problem presented itself a few years later. In 1379, Niall Mór's brother and former rival, Domhnall, rebelled alongside the king of Fermanagh, Pilib Mág Uidhir (d. 1395).<sup>38</sup> Niall Mór crushed this uprising and installed Éinrí Aimhréidh in his uncle's former lands.<sup>39</sup> From Niall Mór's perspective, Éinrí Aimhréidh's new lordship was in a strategic location. Local tradition has it that Éinrí established his *caput* on the hillside overlooking modern-day Newtown Stewart, while the western and northern approaches to his seignory were protected by the Finn, Derg, and Foyle rivers. For the remainder of his life, Éinrí was active in policing western Ulster and keeping his father's rebellious *urrithe* ('sub-kings', i.e. vassals) such as the Mág Uidhir, in line.<sup>40</sup> The level of security provided by Éinrí Aimhréidh in this western theatre was an important, if often overlooked, dynamic facilitating the expansion of Uí Néill power in eastern Ulster and northern Leinster at this time.

As already noted, the Uí Dhomhnaill lordship had been wracked by internecine feuding since the 1330s. In 1356, a year after Aodh Reamhar led his great raid on Tír Chonaill, Seán Ó Domhnaill killed his uncle, Feidhlimidh, along with his son, Raghnaill, and seized the kingship.<sup>41</sup> Despite taking power, the lordship of Tír Chonaill became increasingly fragmented under his leadership. Over the course of the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, the Uí Dhomhnaill had imposed

<sup>33</sup> *AU, AC*, 1374; *AU, AFM*, 1384; *CIRCLE: A calendar of Irish chancery letters, c.1244–1509* (hereafter *CIRCLE*), ed. Peter Crooks (Trinity College Dublin, 2011), CR 6 Richard II, no. 32; PR 8 Richard II, no. 41; PR 9 Richard II, nos. 32, 210; PR 12 Richard II no. 255.

<sup>34</sup> *AU*, 1389; *CIRCLE*, CR 13 Richard II, nos. 222, 240; *Calendar of Carew manuscripts*, ed. John Brewer and William Bullen (6 vols, London, 1867–73), i, 288–9.

<sup>35</sup> *AU, AFM*, 1392.

<sup>36</sup> *AC*, 1392.

<sup>37</sup> *The register of Archbishop Milo Sweteman, Archbishop of Armagh, 1361–1380*, ed. Brendan Smith (Dublin, 1996), pp 139–40; Simms, 'Archbishops', p. 47, no. 33.

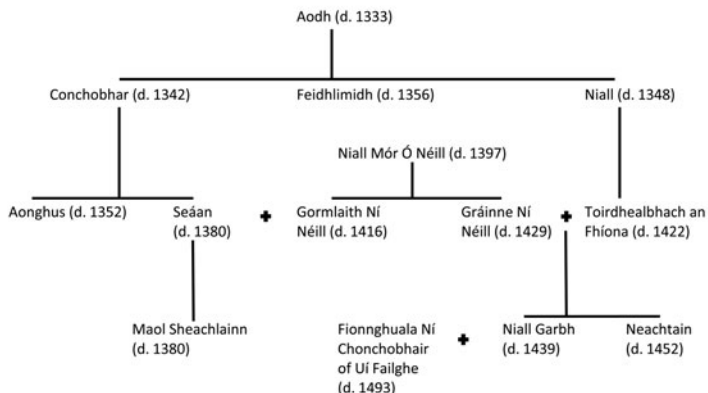
<sup>38</sup> *AU*, 1379.

<sup>39</sup> *Annals of Clonmacnoise* (hereafter *AClon*), ed. Dennis Murphy (Llanerch, 1993), 1379; Simms, 'Tír Eoghain', pp 166–7.

<sup>40</sup> Simms, 'Lordships', ii, 713–15.

<sup>41</sup> *AFM*, 1356.

## The Uí Dhomhnaill of Tír Chonaill: principal dynasts and dynastic connections, c.1333–c.1452



For an expanded family tree, see T. W. Moody, F. X. Martin and F. J. Byrne (eds), *A new history of Ireland, ix: maps, genealogies, lists. A companion to Irish history, part II* (Oxford, 1989), p. 145.

Figure 5. (*Uí Dhomhnaill family tree*)

their lordship over the modern-day counties of Sligo and Leitrim and had successfully competed for dominance in the region with the Uí Chonchobhair kings of Connacht and the de Burgh earls of Ulster.<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, the eruption of the dynastic wars in the wake of Aodh Ó Domhnaill's death in 1333 saw the Uí Dhomhnaill supremacy over northern Connacht thrown into reverse.

During the reign of Seáan Ó Domhnaill, the lordship of Tír Chonaill was exposed to the depredations of neighbouring lordships. In 1366 Seáan suffered a heavy defeat at the hands of the lord of Sligo, Tadhg Ó Conchobhair (d. 1371); three years later, Seáan's army was mauled by Pilib Mág Uidhir of Fermanagh, whose forces appear to have overrun southern Tír Chonaill.<sup>43</sup> The Uí Néill of Tír Eoghain also meddled in this war, backing both Seáan and his main rival, his cousin Toirdhealbhadh an Fhiona (d. 1423). Seáan and Toirdhealbhadh an Fhiona were married to daughters of Niall Mór — Gormlaith (d. 1416) and Gráinne (d. 1429) respectively.<sup>44</sup> In 1380, Toirdhealbhadh an Fhiona seized power within Tír Chonaill and killed Seáan and his son, Maol Sheachlainn, in the monastery at Assaroe. The Uí Néill immediately decided to support the new ruler and Éinrí Aimhréidh marched westwards with a force to aid his brother-in-law.<sup>45</sup>

Uí Néill support appears to have come at a cost, and the region known as Cineál Moáin, a territory comprising the central western section of Tír Chonaill, was ceded

<sup>42</sup> Katharine Simms, 'Late medieval Donegal' in William Nolan, Liam Ronayne and Mairéad Dunlevy (eds), *Donegal: history and society* (Dublin, 1995), pp 184–7; eadem, 'The political recovery of Gaelic Ireland' in Brendan Smith (ed.), *The Cambridge history of Ireland* (4 vols, Cambridge, 2018), i, 288–9.

<sup>43</sup> *AFM*, 1366, 1369; *ALC, AC*, 1366; *AU*, 1369; Katharine Simms, 'Medieval Fermanagh' in Eileen Murphy and William Roulston (eds), *Fermanagh: history and society* (Dublin, 2004), p. 90.

<sup>44</sup> *AFM*, 1416, 1429; *AU, ALC, AC*, 1416.

<sup>45</sup> *AFM, AU, AC*, 1380.

to Éinrí Aimhréidh.<sup>46</sup> The topography of Tír Chonaill had also contributed to the decline of Uí Dhomhnaill power. At face value, the lordship enjoyed significant natural defences: the eastern approaches to Tír Chonaill were barred by the River Foyle and its heartlands were protected by the Bluestack and Derryveagh Mountain ranges, while the River Erne functioned as a moat that protected the passes from Connacht into southern Tír Chonaill. During the thirteenth century, these physical barriers had protected the lordship from the expanding English colony and provided the Uí Dhomhnaill with a safe redoubt. However, by the late fourteenth century, the topography of western Ulster no longer acted as a bastion wall; rather, it had become something of a besieged frontier. The seventeenth-century compilation, the *Annals of the Four Masters*, portrays Toirdhealbhadh an Fhíona as an expansionist warlord during the late 1380s. He is described in 1388 as leading an assault on Sligo whereby he forced the ruling lord, Domhnall ‘mac Muircheartaigh’ Ó Conchobhair (d. 1395), to submit and surrender hostages.<sup>47</sup> Other contemporary annals, however, paint a very different picture.

Domhnall mac Muircheartaigh had taken power in Sligo in 1368 when he deposed his cousin, Tadhg.<sup>48</sup> Under his leadership, the lords of Sligo became a powerful force on Ireland’s western seaboard: during the late 1380s, Domhnall mac Muircheartaigh and his son, Muirheartach Bacach (d. 1403) led campaigns across Connacht and made several devastating raids on Tír Chonaill, burning the land as far north as Assaroe.<sup>49</sup> By this time, Niall Mór Ó Néill and his son Éinrí Aimhréidh appear to have come to view Domhnall mac Muircheartaigh as a useful ally, one that could be brought to bear against their recalcitrant kinsman, Toirdhealbhadh an Fhíona.<sup>50</sup> Faced with the recent loss of Cineál Moáin and an increasingly unfavourable strategic scenario, it could well have seemed that Tír Chonaill would continue to be picked apart by its more powerful neighbours in Tír Eoghain, Fermanagh and Sligo. Nevertheless, a series of developments, both environmental and political, saw the fortunes of the Uí Dhomhnaill transformed.

Unlike the predominantly land-locked lordship of Tír Eóghain, Tír Chonaill was located on a bustling maritime interchange. Colder temperatures brought on by the ‘Little Ice Age’ had seen the vast herring stocks of the North Atlantic migrate to Irish waters. Thousands of fishermen from Iberia to Scandinavia were thus drawn to Irish shores on an annual basis. The Gaelic nobility capitalised on this development. Taxes for the use of fishing grounds were levied upon visiting fishermen and this newfound source of wealth was a leading factor contributing to the commercialisation of Ireland’s western seaboard.<sup>51</sup> New fortifications were constructed to protect the coastline, markets and priories sprung up along the coastlines of Ulster, Connacht and Munster, while luxury items, such as wine and spices, were more readily accessible to the Irish.<sup>52</sup> As his soubriquet, *an Fhíona* (‘of the wine’),

<sup>46</sup> Simms, ‘Tír Eoghain’, p. 167.

<sup>47</sup> *AFM*, 1388.

<sup>48</sup> *ALC*, 1368.

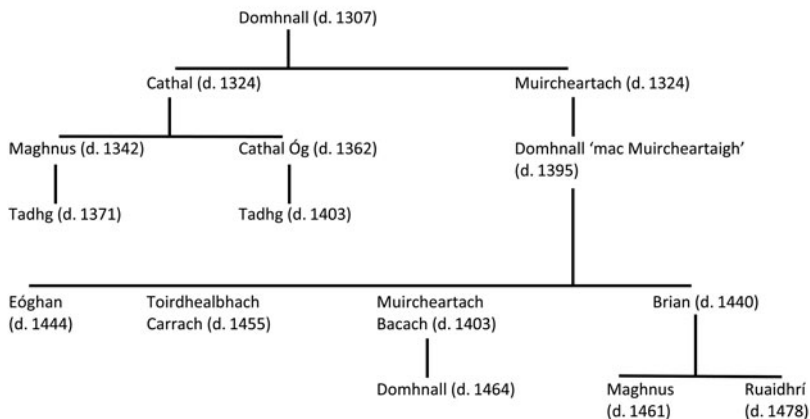
<sup>49</sup> *AFM*, 1384, 1385, 1386, 1388, 1390; *AC*, *AU*, 1385, 1386, 1388, 1390.

<sup>50</sup> See below.

<sup>51</sup> For an overview, see Mark Gardiner and Tom McNeill, ‘Seaborne trade and the commercialisation of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Ulster’ in *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* (hereafter *P.R.I.A.*), cxvi(C) (2016), pp 229–62.

<sup>52</sup> See Colin Breen, ‘The maritime cultural landscape in medieval Gaelic Ireland’ in Paul Duffy, David Edwards and Elizabeth FitzPatrick (eds), *Gaelic Ireland, c.1250–c.1650: land, lordship, and settlement* (Dublin, 2001), pp 418–36; Connie Kelleher, ‘The Gaelic

## The Uí Chonchobhair of Sligo, c.1307–1478



For an expanded family tree, see T. W. Moody, F. X. Martin and F. J. Byrne (eds), *A new history of Ireland, ix: maps, genealogies, lists. A companion to Irish history, part II* (Oxford, 1989), p. 160.

Figure 6. (*Uí Chonchobhair family tree*)

suggests, Toirdhealbhadh appears to have been engaged in this developing economy: the growing wealth of families, such as the Uí Dhomhnaill, allowed them to augment their armed forces and begin rebuilding their position.<sup>53</sup>

The second major development to benefit the Uí Dhomhnaill derived from Connacht. A civil war within the old Uí Chonchobhair kingdom saw the province remoulded into two armed camps.<sup>54</sup> One claimant to the kingship of Connacht, Toirdhealbhadh Óg Ó Conchobhair Donn (d. 1406) was supported by his powerful kinsmen in Sligo, as well as the de Búrcaigh of Clann Riocaird (formerly the de Burghs: see below) and a host of lesser families such as the Uí Cheallaigh of Uí Mháine and the Meic Donnchaidh of Tír Oilella and Corran, in addition to the Uí Ruairc of West Bréifne. Toirdhealbhadh Óg's cousin and rival, Toirdhealbhadh Ó Conchobhair Ruadh was recognised as king by the Búrcaigh of Mayo, as well as the Uí Mháille of Umhaill and the Uí Fhlaithbheartaigh of Iar-Chonnacht.<sup>55</sup> It would be a mistake to view Ó Conchobhair Donn and Ó Conchobhair Ruadh as the leaders of their corresponding factions. Rather, over time power became increasingly concentrated in the hands of their respective patrons: namely, the Uí Chonchobhair of Sligo and both de Búrca lineages. Moreover, while the conflict may have originally been confined to Connacht, the main players were each capable

O'Driscoll lords of Baltimore, Co. Cork: settlement, economy, and conflict in a maritime cultural landscape' in Linda Doran and James Lyttleton (eds), *Lordship in medieval Ireland: image and reality* (Dublin, 2007), pp 130–59.

<sup>53</sup> For maritime context, see Simon Egan, 'By land and by sea: the maritime sphere and the expansion of O'Donnell power, ca. 1380–1500' in *Journal of the North Atlantic*, xii (2019), pp 16–31.

<sup>54</sup> Kenneth Nicholls, *Gaelic and Gaelicized Ireland in the middle ages* (2nd ed., Dublin, 2003), pp 174–5.

<sup>55</sup> AC, 1384.

of marshalling significant support beyond the Shannon Basin. In Munster, the de Búrcaigh of Clann Riocaird enjoyed successive dynastic alliances with the neighbouring Uí Bhriain lordship of Thomond, while further north the Uí Dhomhnaill and Uí Néill became drawn in on different sides of the struggle.<sup>56</sup>

The Ulster dynasts became involved in this conflict largely out of strategic necessity. As noted, the Uí Dhomhnaill had struggled to assert themselves against the Uí Chonchobhair of Sligo. An alliance with the de Búrcaigh of Mayo and Ó Conchobhair Ruadh provided Toirdhealbhach an Fhíona Ó Domhnaill with allies who could strike at Sligo's western and southern flank.<sup>57</sup> With the Uí Chonchobhair of Sligo contained, Toirdhealbhach an Fhíona Ó Domhnaill could re-assert himself, withstand the Uí Néill and begin rebuilding his dynasty's earlier hegemony over northern Connacht. From the perspective of the de Búrcaigh of Mayo and the Uí Chonchobhair Ruaidh, the military power of the Uí Dhomhnaill could be brought to bear against their enemies in Connacht: in particular, the Uí Dhomhnaill war machine could open another front against the troublesome ruler of Sligo, Domhnall mac Muircheartaigh Ó Conchobhair (discussed below). Nevertheless, the alliance between the Uí Chonchobhair of Sligo and Éinrí Aimhréidh Ó Néill initially appears to have kept the Uí Dhomhnaill confined to Tír Chonaill during the late 1380s and early 1390s, allowing Domhnall mac Muircheartaigh, Ó Conchobhair Donn and de Búrca of Clann Riocaird to campaign unfettered across Connacht.<sup>58</sup> Domhnall mac Muircheartaigh was particularly active during these years. In addition to raiding Tír Chonaill, the ruler of Sligo led hostings westwards into Mayo, south into Roscommon and eastwards into Bréifne. Domhnall mac Muircheartaigh's military successes may be partly attributed to his acquisition of new fighting men. One Domhnall Óg Mac Domhnaill is recorded as dying in action in the service of Domhnall mac Muircheartaigh whilst on campaign in 1388.<sup>59</sup> As demonstrated elsewhere, all the major Meic Domhnaill galloglass stocks in Ireland were descended from the Clann Alexandair of Tír Eoghain.<sup>60</sup> It is, therefore, not beyond the bounds of reason to suggest that Domhnall mac Muircheartaigh had secured these troops from his allies in Tír Eoghain.

Momentum began to shift in Toirdhealbhach an Fhíona's favour in May 1392 when Éinrí Aimhréidh died.<sup>61</sup> Éinrí's death appears to have caught the Uí Néill unawares. Niall Mór Ó Néill was preoccupied with burning Dundalk around the time of his son's death, while Domhnall mac Muircheartaigh of Sligo seems to have been busy campaigning in Uí Mháine.<sup>62</sup> Toirdhealbhach an Fhíona Ó Domhnaill took advantage of Éinrí Aimhréidh's death and swept down upon western Tír Eoghain, capturing Éinrí Aimhréidh's son and successor, Domhnall Bog Ó Néill, and burning a large section of Domhnall Bog's lordship. Nevertheless, the Clann Éinrí Aimhréidh and Niall Mór Ó Néill were quick to respond. Niall Mór

<sup>56</sup> Simon Egan, 'Richard II and the wider Gaelic world: a re-assessment' in *Journal of British Studies*, lvii, no. 2 (2018), 234–6.

<sup>57</sup> In 1385, de Búrca of Mayo raided Sligo: *AFM, ALC, AC, AClon*, 1385.

<sup>58</sup> In 1389, the same year that Domhnall mac Muircheartaigh raided Assaroe, Éinrí Aimhréidh led an attack on Tír Chonaill: see *AC*, 1389.

<sup>59</sup> *AFM, AU*, 1388.

<sup>60</sup> Nicholls, 'Kindreds', p. 97.

<sup>61</sup> *AFM, AC, AU, AClon*, 1392; *Miscellaneous Irish Annals (AD 1114–1437)*, ed. Séamus Ó hInnse (Dublin, 1947), 1392.

<sup>62</sup> *AMisc*, 1392.

and his nephews, the sons of Éinrí Aimhréidh, marched westwards, cutting through the Inishowen Peninsula and raiding the lordship of Ó Domhnaill's *urrí*, Ó Dochartaigh, before reaching Farsetmore. Another army under Domhnall mac Muirheartaigh moved north, traversed the Erne and pushed all the way to the shores of Mulroy Bay before it was eventually halted and driven back by Toirdhealbhach an Fhiona. Following Domhnall mac Muirheartaigh's withdrawal, Niall Mór came to terms with his son-in-law and Domhnall Bog appears to have been released.<sup>63</sup> The rising threat of the Uí Dhomhnaill had been contained thanks to the swift and coordinated actions of Niall Mór and his allies. The coming decades would reveal the difficulties of maintaining these alliances.

### III

On 2 October 1394, Richard II disembarked at Waterford. The king's expedition has attracted a considerable body of scholarly interest, and historians are in broad agreement that Richard hoped to buttress his Irish colony by building a more meaningful relationship between the colonial administration and the lords of the northern and western seaboard.<sup>64</sup> In particular, Richard seems to have sought the recovery of the former de Burgh seignories in Ulster and Connacht, lands held by the Mortimer earls of March since 1367. The Scottish invasions of 1315–18 had wreaked havoc on the de Burgh lordship in Ulster, and by the time of Earl Richard's death in 1326, comital authority barely functioned west of the River Bann. Although the de Burghs retained control of their estates in Connacht, the murder of the last de Burgh earl, William, in 1333 removed the focal point for the wider dynasty.<sup>65</sup> William's lands and titles passed to his sole surviving daughter, Elizabeth (d. 1363), but his kinsmen in Connacht gradually disengaged from the governance of the colony.<sup>66</sup> Following William's death, a feud erupted between his kinsmen in Connacht, resulting in the creation of two new lordships. In southern Connacht, a new dynasty emerged under Richard de Burgh (d. 1343), more commonly known in Irish sources as Rísdeárd an Fhorbhair ('the Strong') de Búrca – *a quo* 'Clanrickard/Clann Riocaird' or Uachtar (upper) Connacht. Ristéard an Fhorbhair was opposed by his distant cousin, Éamonn Albanach ('the Scot') de Búrca, who established a separate lineage, centring on Mayo, also known as Íochtar (lower) Connacht.<sup>67</sup> Their assimilation into the socio-cultural world of Gaelic Ireland was marked in several ways. First, both branches seem to have remodelled their lordships along Gaelic lines: *primogeniture* had been abandoned in Mayo by the fifteenth century and both lines heavily intermarried with neighbouring Gaelic dynasties.<sup>68</sup> Secondly, the respective rulers of Mayo and Clann Riocaird adopted the Gaelicised version of their surname, de Búrca. Evidence for this exists in the surviving corpus of annals, as well as the bardic poetry and

<sup>63</sup> *AFM*, 1392; Simms, 'Lordships', ii, 722.

<sup>64</sup> For scholarship, see Egan, 'Richard II', pp 221–6.

<sup>65</sup> For the decline of de Burgh lordship, see Goddard Henry Orpen, *Ireland under the Normans, 1169–1333* (2nd ed., Dublin, 2005), chapters 3–8.

<sup>66</sup> Jocelyn Otway-Ruthven, *A history of medieval Ireland* (2nd ed., New York, 1980), p. 270.

<sup>67</sup> Simms, 'Recovery', pp 289–90.

<sup>68</sup> Simon Egan, 'A task too great for one dynasty? The Mortimer earls of March and the Gaelic nobility, 1370–1425' in *Journal of the Mortimer History Society*, iv (2020), p. 8.

genealogical material which was patronised by the respective descendants of Ríseárd an Fhorbhair and Éamonn Albanach.<sup>69</sup> Thirdly, and perhaps most strikingly, both lines competed for the title of ‘Mac Uilleam’, a Gaelicised patronymic denoting the wider dynasty’s descent from William de Burgh (d. 1205), the first colonial lord of Connacht.<sup>70</sup> The aspiration to this title signified the territorial and dynastic ambitions of both rival lines: indeed, their patronage of the respective Donn and Ruadh lines in Roscommon quickly became an extension of this bid for hegemony over Connacht.

The English crown made several attempts to resuscitate the de Burgh lordship during the fourteenth century. Edward III originally planned to lead an expedition to Ireland in 1331 but was soon redirected into wars in Scotland and France.<sup>71</sup> Edward, nevertheless, maintained an active interest in Irish affairs. Elizabeth de Burgh, daughter and heiress of the deceased Earl William, was betrothed to Edward’s second eldest son, Lionel of Clarence (d. 1368), in 1342; her mother, Maud of Lancaster (d. 1377) married the Irish justiciar, Ralph Ufford (d. 1346).<sup>72</sup> With these marriages, Edward increased the landed interests of his son, securing him an Irish appanage.<sup>73</sup> Lionel was himself appointed as the king’s lieutenant in July 1361 and travelled to Ireland that autumn, though he ultimately failed to recover his wife’s lands in Ulster and Connacht and spent most of his time campaigning in Leinster and Munster.<sup>74</sup> His wife, Elizabeth, died in 1363 and four years later he departed Ireland to marry a new bride in Italy, Violante Visconti of Milan (d. 1386). However, prior to his death, he negotiated a marriage for his and Elizabeth’s daughter and sole-heiress, Philippa (d. 1381), and Edmund Mortimer (d. 1381), earl of March.<sup>75</sup>

Katharine Simms has noted that scholars of the late medieval colony have underestimated the Mortimer earls’ desire to reclaim their Irish estates.<sup>76</sup> At the request of the Irish council, Edmund was appointed as king’s lieutenant in October 1379. Prior to his arrival there in May 1380, Edmund commissioned a catalogue, listing his various Irish lands, as well as the earlier agreements established by Richard de Burgh and the Irish of Ulster. Simms and Brendan Smith have both argued that the creation of this catalogue was directly linked to Edmund’s chief Irish objective: the recovery of his wife Philippa’s lands in Ulster and Connacht.<sup>77</sup> Soon after arriving in Ireland, Mortimer marched north and established a base of operations at

<sup>69</sup> *Aithdioghluim Dána*, ed. Lambert McKenna (2 vols, Dublin, 1939–40), i, nos. 37, 38, 39, 40, 41; Tomás Ó Raghallaigh, ‘Senchus na mBúrcach: réamh-rá’ in *Journal of the Galway Historical and Archaeological Society*, xiii (1926), pp 50–60.

<sup>70</sup> See also Simms, ‘Recovery’, pp 289–90.

<sup>71</sup> Robin Frame, *English lordship in Ireland, 1318–1361* (Oxford, 1982), p. 187.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 51, 264–5.

<sup>73</sup> For archipelagic context, see Stephen Boardman, *The Campbells* (Edinburgh, 2005), chapter 3.

<sup>74</sup> Philomena Connolly, ‘Lionel of Clarence and Ireland, 1361–1366’ (Ph.D. thesis, Trinity College, Dublin, 1978).

<sup>75</sup> Mark Ormrod, ‘Edward III and his family’ in *Journal of British Studies*, xxvi, no. 4 (1987), p. 409, no. 46.

<sup>76</sup> Katharine Simms, ‘The Ulster Revolt of 1404 – an anti-Lancastrian dimension’ in Smith (ed.), *Ireland*, p. 144.

<sup>77</sup> Simms, *Gaelic Ulster*, pp 133–4; Brendan Smith, ‘Transnational lordship and the Plantagenet empire: the Mortimer Lords of Wigmore, 1247–1425’ in *Welsh History Review*, xxix, no. 1 (2018), pp 39–40.

Downpatrick. According to the annals, here Mortimer received the submission of several Irish lords, including Niall Mór Ó Néill.<sup>78</sup> For reasons not explained in the annals, Edmund then began imposing his lordship upon the Irish of Ulster. He is recorded as leading an ambitious raid across Ulster, cutting through Tír Eoghain and burning the land as far west as Castlefinn in Tír Chonaill.<sup>79</sup> However, Mortimer's ability to campaign in Ulster was constrained by his office. In November 1380, he convened a parliament in Dublin; in the spring of 1381, he campaigned in the Wicklow Mountains; further west, he also had some significant military successes and managed to recover Athlone Castle, the strategic gateway across the Shannon.<sup>80</sup>

Edmund could well have envisioned further campaigns in Ulster and Connacht, but the growing threat of the Uí Bhriain of Thomond in Munster forced the deputy to travel southwards.<sup>81</sup> Plans for an expedition against the Uí Bhriain were discussed at Clonmel in August but never came to fruition, and Edmund died of sickness at Cork in late December.<sup>82</sup> It was not until Richard's expeditions of 1394–5 that Edmund's son and successor, Roger (d. 1398), was in a position to pursue the recovery of his family's Irish lands. Over the course of late 1394 and early 1395, Richard II received the submission of over eighty Irish and Anglo-Irish lords. Recent research has revealed that the majority of these submissions were coordinated by the Uí Néill of Tír Eoghain and their allies in Connacht and Munster.<sup>83</sup> Although the Uí Néill initially appear to have been concerned about Roger's ambitions, they eventually agreed to submit to Richard and render military service to the earl.<sup>84</sup> From Richard's perspective, securing the compliance of the Uí Néill was essential to the recovery of the Mortimer lands in Ulster, while the submission of the Uí Bhriain, Uí Chonchobhair Dhuinn and de Búrcaigh of Clanrickard was crucial for future military operations in Connacht. Furthermore, the recovery of the Mortimer lands, alongside the king's Irish expedition of 1394–5, fitted into a wider archipelagic strategy that extended into Scotland.

By this time, Richard's government had developed close ties with the Meic Domhnaill lords of the Isles. Eoin of Islay had died in 1387 and was succeeded as second lord of the Isles by his son, Domhnall (d. 1423). It was largely through the patronage of Richard II and the colonial administration in Ireland that Domhnall's brother, Eoin Mór (d. 1428), acquired possession of the 'seven Glynnns of Antrim', sometime in the 1390s, when he married the heiress, Marjory Bisset (see figure 3).<sup>85</sup> The Glynnns were a strategic lordship that encompassed Antrim's eastern littoral and now provided the Meic Domhnaill with a foothold in Ireland. Set against the context of the ongoing Hundred Years War, the Meic Domhnaill could be used to exert pressure on Scotland's western flank and protect English holdings across the Irish Sea Basin. It is telling that neither the Uí

<sup>78</sup> *AU, AFM*, 1380.

<sup>79</sup> *AClon*, 1381.

<sup>80</sup> *CIRCLE*, PR 5 Richard II, nos. 35, 184; Otway-Ruthven, *Medieval Ireland*, p. 314.

<sup>81</sup> Egan, 'Task Too Great', p. 11.

<sup>82</sup> *Parliaments and councils of medieval Ireland*, ed. Henry Gerald Richardson and George Osborne Sayles (Dublin, 1947), p. 115; *The chronicle of Adam of Usk, 1377–1421*, ed. Chris Given-Wilson (Oxford, 1997), pp 46–7.

<sup>83</sup> Egan, 'Richard II', pp 243–6.

<sup>84</sup> *Richard II in Ireland*, ed. Edmund Curtis (Oxford, 1927), pp 85–90, 173–9.

<sup>85</sup> *CIRCLE*, PR 10 Richard II, no. 250; *Highland Papers*, ed. James MacPhail (4 vols, Edinburgh, 1914–34), i, 32. See also, Simms, 'Revolt', p. 152.



Dhomhnaill nor their allies in Connacht are recorded as submitting to Richard II in 1394–5. There is, instead, evidence to suggest that the Uí Dhomhnaill had drifted into the orbit of Scotland's Stewart monarchs by this period, while the lords of Tír Chonaill and their Uí Chonchobhair Ruaidh and de Búrcaigh allies in Mayo also seem to have declared for the Francophile Papacy at Avignon.<sup>86</sup> The implications of this were significant and saw elements of the Irish aristocracy aligned with England's enemies in Europe. From an English perspective, the military and naval resources of the Meic Domhnaill could safeguard against this Uí Dhomhnaill-Stewart alliance, while the lords of the Isles could also be enlisted in the recovery of the Mortimer lands in Ulster.

Richard may also have been hoping to capitalise on a growing rapprochement between the Meic Domhnaill and the Uí Néill. As noted above, the Uí Néill had provided shelter to the exiled Clann Alexandair. In February 1395, one 'Johannes MacDonyld', who was then serving as Niall Mór Ó Néill's constable of galloglass, wrote to Richard II.<sup>87</sup> This Johannes has been cogently identified as Eoin Maol Mac Domhnaill, a member of the Clann Alexandair and very likely a son of an earlier constable.<sup>88</sup> In his letter, Eóghan Maol claimed that he had been exiled by his cousin (*consanguineus*) and was living in intolerable misery (*intolerabili miseria*) in Tír Eoghain. Eóghan Maol offered to become Richard's vassal, presumably in the hopes that Richard would later assist the Clann Alexandair recover their ancestral lands in Scotland. Although Richard accepted Eóghan Maol's submission, there is no evidence to suggest that he intervened on his behalf. In fact, by this time the Uí Néill and lords of the Isles appear to have viewed each other as allies. The reasons for this shift are not entirely clear but the warming of relations seems to have been the result of several factors. First, Eoin Mór Mac Domhnaill's wife, Marjory Bisset, may have been a niece of Niall Mór Ó Néill, pointing to a growing dynastic (and political) alignment between the Bissets, Uí Néill and Meic Domhnaill.<sup>89</sup> Secondly, the developing Uí Néill-Meic Domhnaill connection was shaped by geopolitical necessity: the Uí Néill and the lords of the Isles were now established clients of the English, and both dynasties cannot have felt but threatened by the Uí Dhomhnaill-Stewart alliance. The Meic Domhnaill, in particular, may have viewed the Uí Néill as a useful counter-balance to the growing power of the Uí Dhomhnaill in western Ulster.

Richard II's strategy, however ambitious, was undercut in several ways. In early 1395, Toirdhealbhach an Fhiona Ó Domhnaill raided the lordship of the Clann Éinrí Aimhréidh, now held by Éinrí Áimhreach's successor, Domhnall Bog.<sup>90</sup> Ó Domhnaill could well have been taking advantage of Niall Mór and Niall Óg's pre-occupation with Richard in early 1395: if so, the assault was a resounding success. Ó Domhnaill captured several members of the Clann Éinrí Aimhréidh, including Domhnall Bog's brother, Brian Mór (d. 1402). By taking these captives, Ó Domhnaill had effectively nullified the military capacity of the Clann Éinrí Aimhréidh and paved the way for a campaign into Connacht.<sup>91</sup> Indeed, Ó

<sup>86</sup> Simon Egan, 'Lordship and dynasty in the late medieval Irish Sea world: the Hiberno-Scottish Nexus' in *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*, lxxviii (2019), pp 35–6.

<sup>87</sup> *Richard II*, ed. Curtis, pp 87–8.

<sup>88</sup> Nicholls, 'Kindreds', pp 98–9.

<sup>89</sup> Egan, 'Richard II', pp 233–4.

<sup>90</sup> *AFM*, 1395.

<sup>91</sup> *AFM*, 1395.

Domhnall was no doubt aided here by the death of his great rival, Domhnall mac Muirheartaigh Ó Conchobhair of Sligo in late 1395. Niall Mór and Niall Óg Ó Néill appear to have been slow in responding to Ó Domhnaill's incursion. Soon after Ó Domhnaill's raid, Domhnall Bog rebelled against Niall Óg, burning his *baile* (town), and seizing his wife, Una, before handing her over to the English.<sup>92</sup> This act of insurrection was enough to convince Niall Óg and Niall Mór of the danger posed by Ó Domhnaill, and the following year, Niall Mór is recorded as ransoming Domhnall Bog's brother Brian Mór (who was exchanged for Niall Mór's son, Brian).<sup>93</sup> Although Brian Mór's release had been secured, Domhnall Bog's rebellion against the ruling Clann Briain Catha an Dúin foreshadowed a deepening rift between both kindreds.

A year later in 1396, the Uí Néill lordship was subjected to a major raid by Roger Mortimer who burned large areas of Tír Eoghain, including the cathedral at Armagh.<sup>94</sup> Niall Mór abdicated the following year and was succeeded by Niall Óg. Despite facing challenges on both their eastern and western flanks, the Uí Néill remained steadfast in central Ulster and the Clann Éinrí Aimhréidh, for a time, resumed their role in defending western Tír Eoghain. In 1398, Domhnall Bog raised an army and attacked Tír Chonaill, pushing as far west as Fanad.<sup>95</sup> A second force, under the Clann Éinrí Aimhréidh's old allies — the Uí Chonchobhair of Sligo, now led by Muirheartach Bacach Ó Conchobhair — also burned southern Tír Chonaill.<sup>96</sup> By 1399, it seemed that the Uí Dhomhnaill had been contained, enabling Niall Óg to impose his will upon the colonists. A report of 1399 claimed that Niall Óg planned to 'make war upon and destroy the whole country' and the annals note that Niall Óg inflicted a crushing defeat upon English forces in Ulster.<sup>97</sup> It is a measure of his cousins' military resources that the Clann Éinrí Aimhréidh are recorded as raiding Dundalk soon afterwards.<sup>98</sup> However, Domhnall Bog had the misfortune of being captured during this engagement and, as suggested elsewhere, Niall Óg may have welcomed his cousin's imprisonment, providing him with an opportunity to bring western Tír Eoghain under firmer lordship.<sup>99</sup> The colonial administration initially refused to ransom Domhnall Bog, but before long they seem to have come to view him as a potential counter-balance to Niall Óg. Domhnall Bog was duly ransomed in 1402 and immediately made war upon Niall Óg.<sup>100</sup> The following year, Domhnall Bog's position in Irish politics was transformed. Niall Óg died in the autumn of 1403 and was succeeded by his son, Brian Óg (d. 1403). However, Brian contracted the *galar breac* (i.e., smallpox) not long after his accession and died before the end of 1403.<sup>101</sup> The death in quick succession of father and son left the Clann Briain Catha an Dúin bereft of viable claimants: Niall Óg's other son, Eóghan, was either too young or did not yet possess the military clout necessary to pursue

<sup>92</sup> *AFM*, 1395.

<sup>93</sup> *AFM*, 1396; Simms, *Gaelic Ulster*, p. 145.

<sup>94</sup> *AMisc*, 1396.

<sup>95</sup> *AFM*, *AU*, *ALC*, *AC*, *AClon*, 1398.

<sup>96</sup> His father, Domhnall mac Muirheartaigh, died in *AFM*, *AU*, *ALC*, *AC*, *AClon*, 1398.

<sup>97</sup> *Irish historical documents, 1172–1922*, ed. Edmund Curtis and R. B. McDowell (London, 1943), p. 68; *AFM*, 1399. See also, *CIRCLE*, PR 1 Henry IV, nos. 126, 148.

<sup>98</sup> *AFM*, 1399.

<sup>99</sup> Simms, 'Gaelic Ulster', ii, 735.

<sup>100</sup> *AMisc*, 1402; *CIRCLE*, PR 3; Henry IV, no. 244; PR 4 Henry IV, no. 158, *AFM*, 1402.

<sup>101</sup> *AFM*, *ALC*, 1402 [recte 1403]; *AU*, *AClon*, *AMisc*, 1403; *LCAB*, pp 324–35.

his claim.<sup>102</sup> The lordship of Tír Eóghain thus passed to the most powerful warlord within the wider dynasty: Domhnall Bog.

#### IV

Although Domhnall Bog had been inaugurated as the new king of Tír Eoghain, his authority was not universally recognised amongst the Cenél nEogain and for the next thirty-odd years, *c.*1403–*c.*1435, the Clann Éinrí Aimhréidh and the Clann Briain Catha an Dúin bitterly contested the kingship.<sup>103</sup> It was six years before Eóghan was in a position to challenge his cousin. In 1410, Domhnall Bog was captured by the Meic Mathghamhna and handed over to Eóghan, who promptly had him incarcerated with his clients, the Máig Uidhir of Fermanagh.<sup>104</sup> Domhnall Bog's release was secured four years later when his brothers seized Eóghan and forced the Clann Briain Catha an Dúin to an exchange of prisoners.<sup>105</sup> Domhnall Bog resumed his lordship but was driven from Tír Eoghain in 1418 by Toirdhealbhadh an Fhíona Ó Domhnaill.<sup>106</sup> He seems to have briefly recovered his lordship before being ousted again in 1419 by a coalition of Eóghan, Toirdhealbhadh an Fhíona, the Maig Uidhir and Meic Mathghamhna. On this occasion, Domhnall Bog fled across the Bann into the Glynnns of Antrim, possibly seeking shelter from his Bisset cousins or their powerful kinsman and ruler of the Glynnns, Eoin Mór Mac Domhnaill. However, before he could secure aid, he was attacked by the Uí Néill of Clann Aodha Buidhe.<sup>107</sup> Faced with little other recourse, Domhnall Bog travelled to Eóghan's court where he concluded a peace with Eóghan who agreed to restore Domhnall Bog's lordship (*tighernas*).<sup>108</sup> Domhnall Bog's power was, in reality, limited and within the space of year he was driven from Tír Eoghain again by Eóghan and his allies and entered exile in Connacht.<sup>109</sup> This latest episode in a long game of cat and mouse could well have seen Domhnall Bog's banishment become permanent. Nevertheless, in 1421 Eóghan was himself captured by the Uí Néill of Clann Aodha Buidhe and held for a year until he was eventually ransomed.<sup>110</sup> His captivity was a key factor enabling Domhnall Bog to recover his lands in western Tír Eoghain, and by 1426 Eóghan and Domhnall agreed to a settlement. Eóghan recognised Domhnall Bog as the rightful Ó Néill but the lordship was divided into two spheres of influence, remaining so until Domhnall Bog's death in 1432.<sup>111</sup>

Clearly the issue of the succession was a key element in driving this dispute. It is more difficult to establish if both branches were competing with one another for resources, natural or otherwise. Tensions over control of strategically important sites, such as *crannóga* (fortified islands), castles and the symbolically important inauguration seat at Tulach Óg, as well competition for valuable grasslands, may

<sup>102</sup> Kingston, *Ulster*, p. 48.

<sup>103</sup> For events, see Simms, *Gaelic Ulster*, pp 153–69.

<sup>104</sup> *AFM, AU, ALC, AC*, 1410.

<sup>105</sup> *AFM, AU, AC*, 1414.

<sup>106</sup> *AFM, AC*, 1418.

<sup>107</sup> *AFM, AU, ALC, AC*, 1419.

<sup>108</sup> *AFM*, 1419.

<sup>109</sup> *AFM, AC*, 1420.

<sup>110</sup> *AFM, AC*, 1421.

<sup>111</sup> *AFM*, 1426.

also have shaped the course of the conflict.<sup>112</sup> The Clann Éinrí Aímhréidh also seem to have sought to gain control over diocesan lands in Armagh: Domhnall Bog's nephew, Brian Óg, was excommunicated in 1407 for raiding the archbishop's lands.<sup>113</sup> In any case, the ongoing animosity between the rival lines of Éinrí Aímhréidh and Briain Catha an Dúin created significant political instability amongst the Uí Néill and their clients. Moreover, the conflict continually drew in a host of different regional players, each of whom had a vested interest in the feud's outcome. The Uí Dhomhnaill of Tír Chonaill were among the main beneficiaries. The alliance between the Clann Éinrí Aímhréidh and the lords of Sligo had proven a major stumbling block to Uí Dhomhnaill ambitions in northern Connacht. During the early fifteenth century, the Uí Dhomhnaill were also facing growing military pressure from the new ruler of Sligo, Brian Ó Conchobhair (d. 1440). During the first two decades of the fifteenth century, Brian led successive military hostings across Connacht and into western Ulster. For instance, he was active in central Connacht in support of the Uí Chonchobhair Dhuinn and de Búrcaigh of Clann Riocaird in 1407 and 1409, while in 1412, he conducted an impressive military campaign across Connacht.<sup>114</sup>

The lord of Sligo was also very active in raiding Tír Chonaill.<sup>115</sup> He supported Domhnall Bog during his banishment of 1419 and is recorded as burning large areas of southern Tír Chonaill on Domhnall Bog's behalf.<sup>116</sup> In 1420, Brian's forces almost captured Toirdhealbhach an Fhíona's heir designate, Niall Garbh, during a raid on Ballyshannon, and following Domhnall Bog's expulsion from Tír Eoghain, Brian provided Domhnall Bog with shelter at his court in Sligo.<sup>117</sup> Indeed, it is likely that Domhnall Bog recovered his lordship in 1421 with Brian's support. By keeping southern Tír Chonaill under constant threat of invasion, Brian made it impossible for the Uí Dhomhnaill to break out and support their allies in Connacht. Toirdhealbhach an Fhíona's inability to campaign in Connacht proved telling. For instance, in 1419, Ó Domhnall's ally, Úater de Búrca of Mayo (d. 1440) marched southwards with the intention of expelling his kinsman, Uilleag an Fhíona (d. 1423), from Clann Riocaird and installing himself as the new 'Mac Uilleam'. Despite raising an impressive military force, Úater's army was crushed by the de Búrcaigh of Clann Riocaird and their Uí Bhriain allies south of Galway city.<sup>118</sup>

The Uí Dhomhnaill were largely unable to bring their forces to bear in Connacht during the first two decades of the fifteenth century (they are recorded as leading forays into northern Connacht on four occasions between 1397 and 1421 but do not appear to have penetrated south of the Erne Basin). However, the tide began

<sup>112</sup> For *crannóga*, see K. O'Connor, 'Crannóga in late medieval Ireland: continuity and change' in Eve Campbell, Elizabeth FitzPatrick and Audrey Horning (eds), *Becoming and belonging in Ireland, AD c.1200–1600: essays in identity and cultural practice* (Cork, 2018), pp 148–66. For Tuloch Óg, see Elizabeth FitzPatrick, *Royal inauguration in Gaelic Ireland, c.1100–1600* (Woodbridge, 2004), 139–55.

<sup>113</sup> *The register of Nicholas Fleming, archbishop of Armagh, 1404–1416*, ed. Brendan Smith (Dublin, 2003), no. 58.

<sup>114</sup> *AFM, ALC*, 1407, 1409, 1412; *AC*, 1407, 1409; *AClon*, 1407.

<sup>115</sup> *AFM*, 1412, 1416.

<sup>116</sup> *AFM, AU, ALC*, 1419.

<sup>117</sup> *AFM, AU, AC*, 1420.

<sup>118</sup> *AU, AC, ALC*, 1419.

to turn in their favour during the early 1420s.<sup>119</sup> As noted, Domhnall Bog returned to his lordship in 1421. In 1422, both Domhnall Bog and Eóghan Ó Néill are found participating in an Uí Dhomhnaill raid on Sligo. The reasons why Domhnall Bog would reject his old allies in Connacht and join with Ó Domhnaill and Eóghan remain unclear, but he may have been strong-armed by the increasingly assertive ruler of Tír Chonnall. Toirdhealbhach an Fhíona had abdicated in 1422 and was succeeded by his son, Niall Garbh.<sup>120</sup> Katharine Simms has suggested that when Eóghan secured help from Toirdhealbhach an Fhíona in expelling Domhnall Bog in 1419, it was akin to a relationship of equals.<sup>121</sup> Niall Garbh, in contrast, appears to have been a far more ruthless leader and his ambitions extended well beyond Ulster and Connacht. He was married to Fionnghuala Ní Chonchobhair (d. 1493), daughter of the powerful lord of Uí Failghe, An Calbhach Ó Conchobhair (d. 1458) and his wife, Mairghréag Ní Chearbhaill (d. 1451).<sup>122</sup>

Niall Garbh also seems to have been capable of quartering large numbers of West Highland mercenaries in his lordship.<sup>123</sup> While this form of military exaction was harsh on the local tenantry, it augmented the lord of Tír Chonail's already sizeable armed forces. In 1422, Niall Garbh waged war across Ulster and forced the submission of Eóghan and Domhnall Bog's various clients, including the Máig Uidhir, the Meic Mathghamhna, the Maig Aonghusa, the Uí Chatháin, the Bissets and the Uí Néill of Clann Aodha Buidhe.<sup>124</sup> As the senior dynasts within Tír Eoghain, Eóghan and Domhnall Bog remained important warlords in their own right. Nonetheless, the cousins do not appear to have been capable of competing with the military resources of the Uí Dhomhnaill: put simply, they may have little choice but to assist Niall Garbh in raiding Sligo in 1422. The following year, Niall Garbh led an army drawn from across Ulster, including Domhnall Bog and Eóghan, and burned large areas of Louth and Meath, forcing black rent (*cíos dubh*) from Dundalk.<sup>125</sup> By this time, the colonial administration had become acutely concerned about developments across the island. In 1421, the Irish parliament sent a petition to Henry V of England (d. 1422), requesting that the king lead a crusade to subdue the Irish.<sup>126</sup> The parliament had been convened by the king's lieutenant, James Butler (d. 1452), the fourth and so-called 'White earl' of Ormond. The Butlers of Ormond were among the English crown's most important intermediaries in Ireland.<sup>127</sup> Throughout his long career, the fourth earl fought in the Lancastrian monarchy's wars in France and served as the king's lieutenant on several occasions.

<sup>119</sup> See *AFM*, 1407, 1410, 1420, 1421; *AU, AC*, 1420, 1421.

<sup>120</sup> *AFM, AC*, 1422.

<sup>121</sup> Simms, *Gaelic Ulster*, p. 160.

<sup>122</sup> For Uí Failge alliance, see Cormac Ó Cléirigh, 'The O'Connor lordship of Offaly, 1395–1513' in *P.R.I.A.*, xcvi(C), no. 4 (1996), p. 91.

<sup>123</sup> *CIRCLE*, CR 6 Henry VI, no. 21; *Irish texts*, ed. John Fraser, Paul Grosjean and James George O'Keefe (5 vols, London, 1931–4), ii, 46–9; Simms, 'Niall Garbh', pp 17–18.

<sup>124</sup> *AFM*, 1422.

<sup>125</sup> *AFM, AU*, 1423; *AC*, 1424 [recte 1423]; *CIRCLE*, CR 2 Henry VI no. 23.

<sup>126</sup> *CIRCLE*, PR 9 Henry V no. 116; *Statutes and ordinances and acts of the parliament of Ireland: King John to Henry V*, ed. Henry Berry (Dublin, 1907), pp 562–84. See Elizabeth Mathew, 'Henry V and the proposal for an Irish crusade' in Smith (ed.), *Ireland*, pp 161–75.

<sup>127</sup> For rise of Butlers, see Peter Crooks, 'The "calculus of faction" and Richard II's duchy of Ireland, c.1382–9' in Nigel Saul (ed.), *Fourteenth century England V* (Woodbridge, 2008), pp 94–115.

In the mould of his predecessors, Ormond understood the exigencies of lordship in Ireland.<sup>128</sup>

Ormond initially appears to have viewed Domhnall Bog as a potential ally. In 1420, the earl campaigned in eastern Ulster, taking hostages from the Maig Aonghusa before delivering them to Domhnall Bog.<sup>129</sup> In doing so, Ormond perhaps hoped that Domhnall Bog's lordship could be used to extend the colonial administration's influence across Ulster. However, it soon became clear that Domhnall Bog could neither control the wider Uí Néill dynasty, nor their clients, let alone contain the Uí Dhomhnaill. Following Domhnall Bog's expulsion from Ulster, Ormond looked to Eóghan Ó Néill. They agreed to meet at Dundalk in the summer of 1421, though Eóghan was captured *en route* by the Uí Néill of Clann Aodha Buidhe.<sup>130</sup> Following Eóghan's release in 1422, he and Domhnall Bog were swept into Niall Garbh Ó Domhnaill's growing hegemony. Niall Garbh's great raid on Dundalk in 1423 was possibly a factor shaping the English council's decision to appoint Edmund Mortimer (d. 1425), son and successor of Roger, as the king's lieutenant in May the same year.<sup>131</sup>

Mortimer's appointment took place against the backdrop of mounting English difficulties in France.<sup>132</sup> Edmund's appointment followed a well-established, if not entirely successful, strategy: as the greatest landholder in Ireland (theoretically, if not in practice), it was hoped that he could extend English power via the recovery of his estates. Prior to Mortimer's arrival, Ormond had been active in building alliances with the de Búrcaigh of Clann Riocaird, the Uí Néill of Clann Aodha Buidhe, the Meic Mathghamhna and the Uí hAnluain with a view to containing the Uí Dhomhnaill.<sup>133</sup> It remains unclear if Ormond acted on Mortimer's behalf. Nevertheless, following Edmund's arrival in Ireland in September 1424, several Ulster dynasts travelled to Mortimer's court at Trim in early January 1425: they included the cousins Eóghan and Domhnall Bog Ó Néill, and Brian Ballach Ó Néill of Clann Aodha Buidhe. Niall Garbh Ó Domhnaill did not attend, sending his brother Neachtain (d. 1452) in his place. However, Edmund died suddenly of plague and his deputy, John Talbot (d. 1453), panicked and seized the Irish lords, though their release was soon secured.<sup>134</sup> Ormond was appointed as the king's lieutenant later that spring and set about rebuilding trust with the Ulster dynasts. In May 1425, he entered an indenture with the Meic Mathghamhna; two months later, he sealed a similar agreement with Eóghan Ó Neill.<sup>135</sup> Although Eóghan swore to render military service to the new earl of Ulster — Edmund's nephew, Richard duke of York (d. 1460) — and to refrain from attacking English holdings, the agreement yielded little initially. Eóghan made peace with

<sup>128</sup> For which, see Katharine Simms and Adrian Empey, 'The ordinances of the White Earl and the problem of coign in the later middle ages' in *P.R.I.A.*, lxxv(C) (1975), pp 161–87.

<sup>129</sup> *AFM*, 1420.

<sup>130</sup> On dating, see Brendan Smith, *Crisis and survival in late medieval Ireland: the English of Louth and their neighbours, 1330–1450* (Oxford, 2013), p. 117.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 117–19.

<sup>132</sup> Clifford Rogers, 'The Anglo-Burgundian Alliance and grand strategy in the Hundred Years War' in Peter Mansoor and Williamson Murray (eds), *Grand strategy and military alliances* (Cambridge, 2016), pp 216–53.

<sup>133</sup> *CIRCLE*, CR 2 Henry VI nos.17, 19; *AFM*, 1424; Smith, *Crisis*, pp 120–21.

<sup>134</sup> *AFM*, *AU*, 1425.

<sup>135</sup> *CIRCLE*, PR 3 Henry VI, nos. 129, 131.

Domhnall Bog and acknowledged his lordship the following year, and in 1429 and 1430, he led two major raids on Meath and Louth respectively.<sup>136</sup>

Ormond also appears to have been concerned about the ongoing activities of the Uí Dhomhnaill. In 1428, the Irish council received intelligence that Niall Garbh Ó Domhnaill was recruiting Scottish mercenaries.<sup>137</sup> The military links between Ó Domhnaill and the Scottish court have, at times, been overlooked.<sup>138</sup> From 1406–24, Scotland was ruled by the Albany Stewarts. The heir to the throne, James (d. 1437), had been captured in 1406 and spent eighteen years in English captivity. During his absence his uncle, Robert (d. 1420), and cousin, Murdoch (d. 1425), ruled the kingdom as governors: the dukes, and later King James, seem to have viewed the Uí Dhomhnaill as important allies.<sup>139</sup> Not only could the Uí Dhomhnaill be used to open a second front against the English in Ireland, but the lords of Tír Chonaill also served to counter-balance the power of the Meic Domhnaill and threaten their eastern flank from Ireland. Following James I's return to Scotland in 1424, he began dismembering the lordship of his Albany cousins and had Murdoch and several others executed.<sup>140</sup> However, James I failed to apprehend, Murdoch's grandson, James the Fat (d. 1429), who fled westwards and found shelter with Eoin Mór Mac Domhnaill of Antrim. Possession of James the Fat quickly became a point of friction between the Meic Domhnaill dynasty, now led by Eoin's cousin and third lord of the Isles, Alexander (d. 1449), and the Scottish crown: as James had no legitimate children until 1431, James the Fat was next in line to the throne.

The situation in northern Scotland exacerbated these tensions. Since the early 1400s, the Meic Domhnaill had effectively occupied the earldom of Ross. Alexander may have hoped that James would grant him the earldom in the wake of the Albany forfeitures.<sup>141</sup> Nevertheless, James was unwilling to make such a concession and, over the course of the late 1420s and early 1430s, the crown and the Meic Domhnaill jostled violently for control of the northern regions. The course of this conflict does not require retelling here, having been discussed by Michael Brown and Steven Boardman, but there are a few points to take into account for the purpose of this study.<sup>142</sup> The English crown and the colonial administration in Ireland continued to regard the lords of the Isles and their kinsmen in Antrim as allies during the early fifteenth century.<sup>143</sup> The crown even dispatched an agent to Antrim in 1429, though James the Fat died before contact could be established.<sup>144</sup> From James I's perspective, the lordship of Antrim was beyond his reach and Alexander's kinsmen there could easily re-supply their forces in Scotland.<sup>145</sup> Faced with little other recourse, it seems James I looked to Ireland for his solution.

<sup>136</sup> *AFM, AU*, 1429, 1430.

<sup>137</sup> *CIRCLE*, CR 2, Henry VI, no. 17; CR 6 Henry VI, no. 21.

<sup>138</sup> Kingston, *Ulster*, p. 67, n. 161.

<sup>139</sup> Simon Egan, 'The early Stewart Kings, the Lordship of the Isles and Ireland, c.1371–1433' in *Northern Studies*, xlix (2018), pp 68–71.

<sup>140</sup> *Scotichronicon*, ed. Donald Watt (9 vols, Aberdeen, 1987–98), viii, 245.

<sup>141</sup> See Norman MacDougall, 'Achilles' heel? The earldom of Ross, the lordship of the Isles, 1449–1507' in E. J. Cowan and R. A. McDonald (eds), *Alba: Celtic Scotland in the medieval era* (Edinburgh, 2000), pp 247–75.

<sup>142</sup> For events, see Brown, *James I*, chapter 4; Boardman, *The Campbells*, pp 126–33.

<sup>143</sup> Kingston, *Ulster*, pp 49–53.

<sup>144</sup> *AFM*, 1429; *Foedera*, ed. Thomas Tymer (20 vols, London, 1727–35), x, 415.

<sup>145</sup> Kingston, *Ulster*, pp 68–9.

Domhnall Bog was killed while defending a tower house from the Uí Chatháin in 1432 and was succeeded by his cousin, Eóghan, who was promptly inaugurated as the new Ó Néill.<sup>146</sup> Eóghan immediately made war on Niall Garbh Ó Domhnaill. He dispatched his son, Éinrí, to Sligo to secure military aid from Brian Ó Conchobhair and enlisted the support of the Máig Uidhir and Uí Néill of Clann Aodha Buidhe in raiding Tír Chonaill.<sup>147</sup> The following year, Niall Garbh responded by marching across Ulster into what is now modern-day County Down. The annals offer little in the way of detail regarding Ó Domhnaill's military aims, but it seems he hoped to draw two of the lesser Ulster dynasties — the Savages and the Meic Uidhlin — into an alliance against Eóghan Ó Néill. Ó Domhnaill's presence in eastern Ulster, coupled with his links to the Meic Uidhlin, may have foreshadowed a planned assault on the Glynnns of Antrim. The Meic Uidhlin lordship of the Route bordered with the Glynnns, while the Meic Domhnaill in Antrim had lived under the shadow of the expanding Uí Dhomhnaill for decades. As noted above, there is evidence to suggest that Domhnall Bog (and Eóghan) became kinsmen of the Meic Domhnaill through Eoin Mór's marriage to Marjory Bisset *c.*1390. Domhnall Bog had sought shelter in the Glynnns when driven there by Niall Garbh and Eóghan in 1419, and the territory was burned by Niall Garbh's forces in 1422. Eóghan's recent cooperation with the Stewart-leaning Uí Dhomhnaill can only have been a cause for alarm for the Meic Domhnaill. Nevertheless, Domhnall Bog's death in 1432 paved the way for a recalibration of Meic Domhnaill-Uí Néill relations.

Niall Garbh's incursion into eastern Ulster, regardless of whether or not he intended to attack the Glynnns, provoked a response from the lord of the Isles. The annals record that Alexander Mac Domhnaill formed an alliance with Eóghan Ó Néill and scattered Ó Domhnaill's army, forcing Niall Garbh to retreat into northern Leinster. Alexander and Eóghan then launched an invasion of Tír Chonaill: Eóghan led the main ground force, while the Meic Domhnaill sailed along the Ulster coastline and landed on the Inishowen Peninsula. It is perhaps a measure of Niall Garbh's desperation that he sought aid from the colonists. Although the then-serving king's lieutenant, Sir Thomas Stanley (d. 1459), provided Niall Garbh with a force to attack Armagh, it was not enough to make a difference to Ó Domhnaill's position and Niall Garbh was forced to make his way back to Tír Chonaill on a long circuitous route via Connacht.<sup>148</sup> In the meantime, Niall Garbh's wife, Fionnghuala Ní Chonchobhair, and his brother, Neachtain, submitted to Eóghan Ó Néill and Alexander Mac Domhnaill.

## V

This combined Uí Néill-Meic Domhnaill intervention in Tír Chonaill dramatically altered the balance of power in both Ulster and the wider Irish Sea world. With their western flank in Ireland secure, the Meic Domhnaill could deal with James I from a place of power and by 1436 the king of Scots had little choice but to accept Alexander's lordship over Ross.<sup>149</sup> In Tír Chonaill, a bitter feud erupted between

<sup>146</sup> *AFM, AU, ALC*, 1432; *AC*, 1433.

<sup>147</sup> *AFM, AU*, 1432.

<sup>148</sup> *AFM, AU*, 1433.

<sup>149</sup> Macdougall, 'Achilles' heel?', p. 250.



Niall Garbh and his brother Neachtain, and in a striking replay of the mid fourteenth century, the lordship of Tír Chonaill quickly became riven with Uí Néill-sponsored feuding. Neachtain solicited aid from the new head of the Clann Éinrí Aimhréidh, Domhnall Bog's nephew, Brian Óg, while Niall Garbh was forced to seek help from his old nemesis, Eóghan Ó Néill.<sup>150</sup> It is indicative of the new *status quo* that Niall Garbh was forced to participate in Eóghan Ó Néill's great raid on Leinster in 1434. Ó Domhnaill, however, was captured by the colonists and taken to London before eventually dying on the Isle of Man in 1439.<sup>151</sup> A year after Niall Garbh's capture, in 1435, Brian Óg and the Clann Éinrí Aimhréidh decided to make peace with Eóghan Ó Néill, the event which resulted in Brian Óg's savage mutilation. Despite sustaining these horrific injuries, Brian Óg and the Clann Éinrí Aimhréidh continued to oppose Eóghan's lordship in Tír Eoghain. For example, in 1436, Brian Óg's men killed one of Eóghan's sons and briefly occupied one of Eóghan's forts on Lough Laoghaire, near Clogher.<sup>152</sup> Brian Óg was still active against Eóghan in 1437 but the decision of their patron, Neachtain Ó Domhnaill, to make peace with Eóghan marked the beginning of their irreversible decline.<sup>153</sup> Brian Óg himself died in 1440, but the Clann Éinrí Aimhréidh continued to be a thorn — if an increasingly minor one — in the side of the Clann Briain Catha an Dúin. In 1450, Brian Óg's descendants killed Eóghan's grandson; the kindred were still active near Omagh in 1470; and in 1482, they killed another of Eóghan's grandsons.<sup>154</sup> However, by this time, the Clann Éinrí Aimhréidh had become little more than bandits. Eóghan's act in 1435, however brutal and transgressive, ensured that ruling line of Briain Catha an Dúin would not be challenged again.

## VI

Events on Ireland's northern and western seaboard have often been viewed within distinctly local contexts. This essay has argued for the necessity of placing developments in these regions within wider archipelagic and dynastic frameworks. As a case study, the Uí Néill civil war of c.1392 to 1435 underlines the value of such an approach. The origins, course and consequences of this struggle cannot be fully understood without examining the politics of Ulster, Connacht and the Hebrides and considering how the affairs of these regions intersected with one another. Events within this western Atlantic world that stretched from the Shannon Estuary to the Outer Hebrides could also exert a powerful and unpredictable effects upon the politics of the wider archipelago. The Uí Néill civil war had a direct impact on the rise of the Meic Domhnaill lordship of the Isles in Scotland, and also contributed to the establishment of the Uí Chonchobhair of Sligo as a potent force in Connacht. Furthermore, the struggle between the Clann Briain Catha an Dúin and Clann Éinrí Aimhréidh was an important phase in the history of the English lordship of Ireland. The threat posed by Niall Garbh Ó Domhnaill in the 1420s saw the colonial administration become increasingly concerned about the outcome of the

<sup>150</sup> *AFM*, *AU*, 1434.

<sup>151</sup> *AFM*, 1435, 1439; *AU*, 1435; *AD*, i, no. 23.

<sup>152</sup> Simms, *Gaelic Ulster*, pp 171–2.

<sup>153</sup> *AFM*, 1437.

<sup>154</sup> *AFM*, 1450; *AU*, *ALC*, 1470.

Uí Néill feud and its ongoing impact on the politics of the wider Irish Sea world. Above all, the conflict in Tír Eoghain perhaps best illustrates the limitations of English power within this world. While the earls of Ormond and March strove to project the own power and that of the crown westwards northwards, there were in effect intervening in regions where English influence was, at best, impressionistic. For the most part, the initiative lay with the Gaelic aristocracy, not the English of Ireland who were themselves becoming increasingly reliant on the goodwill on unreliable Irish warlords in a constantly evolving and unpredictable dynastic milieu. Moreover, the events of the Uí Néill civil war had an impact well beyond Ulster. An examination of the conflict perhaps serves as a caution not to underestimate the power of the Gaelic nobility in this period.<sup>155</sup>

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