

From Kingdom to Colony: Framing the English Conquest of Ireland*

In April 1185, John, the youngest son of King Henry II of England, embarked for Ireland to be crowned its king. The Irish annals report that ‘John, son of the king of the English, came to assume the kingship of Ireland (*do gabáil ríge nErenn*), with a fleet of three score ships, besides what there were of English foreigners in Ireland before them’.¹ The expedition had been planned with care by England’s chief administrator, the justiciar Ranulf de Glanville, in whose household John had spent his teenage years learning the subtle arts of governance. The archbishop of Dublin and other experienced administrators were sent ahead to prepare the ground for John’s arrival. Despite their efforts, however, John’s expedition was a disaster. In less than eight months John alienated many of his would-be subjects (both Irish and English), lost most of his army in battle or through desertion, and returned to England uncrowned and indigent. He was never to wear the crown of peacock feathers sent by Pope Urban III for his coronation.² John’s mishandling of his first bid for kingship has become well known to historians of medieval England and Ireland: an inauspicious start by the man who, as king of England, would eventually provoke rebellion and be forced to issue Magna Carta. Yet amidst the pomp and preparation, the struggles and miscalculation, John’s ill-fated Irish expedition of 1185 rested upon an idea that has been relatively underexplored in the context of English conquest and colonisation: the idea of a kingdom of Ireland.

In his seminal work from 1995, ‘Ireland and the English Crown, 1171–1541’, James Lydon gave voice to the problem as he saw it. Confronted with numerous references to *regnum Hibernie* in early thirteenth-century English records, he asked: ‘How could Ireland be termed a

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1. *Annals of Loch Cé*, ed. William M. Hennessy (2 vols, Oxford, 1871) [hereafter *Ann. Loch Cé*], i, pp. 170–71, s.a. 1185 (quotation); *Annála Rioghachta Éireann: Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland by the Four Masters*, ed. John O’Donovan (7 vols, Dublin, 1848–1851) [hereafter *AFM*], iii, p. 67, s.a. 1185.

2. S.D. Church, *King John: England, Magna Carta and the Making of a Tyrant* (London, 2015), pp. 12–27. For the peacock feathers, see Roger of Howden, *Chronica*, ed. William Stubbs, Rolls Series, li (4 vols, 1868–71), ii, p. 307; N. Vincent, ‘Angevin Ireland’, in B. Smith, ed., *The Cambridge History of Ireland, 1: 600–1550* (Cambridge, 2018) [hereafter *CHI*], pp. 185–221, at 194–5.

“kingdom” if it had no king until 1541 and if it was, to use a later term, a “parcel” of the English crown?³ In the subtle analysis that followed, Lydon sought his answer in the institution of lordship and the relationship that later existed between English kings as ‘lords of Ireland’ and their *terra Hibernie* (‘land of Ireland’). My argument here is more straightforward. By spanning the historiographical divides that tend to partition Irish history at the point of the English invasion in 1169, and which also frequently disaggregate the study of British and Irish history, I argue that there *were* kings of Ireland before 1541 and that the *regnum Hibernie* one finds in English records reflects the polity those men sought to rule. In short, the ‘kingdom of Ireland’ pre-dated the invasion, provided a framework for English conquest and facilitated Ireland’s transformation into an English colony.

Irish historiography has much to say about the men who claimed the title ‘king of Ireland’ or ‘high-king of Ireland’ in the centuries before the English invasion of 1169, even though it is rare to find a historian who would today describe the object of those kings’ rule as a ‘kingdom of Ireland’.⁴ Nevertheless, as we shall see below, the idea of Ireland that developed in the early Middle Ages embraced aspects of regnal solidarity found in other contemporary kingdoms, a solidarity that was supported by the organisation of the Irish Church. The testimony of contemporary observers from Britain and the Continent is also important, because they described Ireland using terms that they themselves understood. While some accentuated the island’s internal fragmentation, others rationalised Ireland as a kingdom ruled by a king. The subsequent historiography of the English invasion has emphasised the former, but the latter was no less important for the history of English rule on the island.

I argue here that the question of how Ireland ought to be ordered remained open for decades after the invasion, but ultimately resulted in replacing one form of kingdom with another as King John and his successors imposed England’s laws, institutions and political culture upon the island. English colonialism was thus driven in this respect by a legal and historical acculturation in which the vernacular histories of Irish rule, and the formative influence on Ireland’s political culture drawn from elsewhere in Europe, were overlaid by English claims. English colonialism meant replacing one type of kingdom with another, and thus bringing the pre-existing Gaelic kingdom of

3. J.F. Lydon, ‘Ireland and the English Crown, 1171–1541’, *Irish Historical Studies*, xxix (1995), pp. 281–94, at 282.

4. An exception is S. Duffy, *Ireland in the Middle Ages* (Basingstoke, 1997). One issue is that within early medieval Ireland discussions of political power and authority focused on kingship rather than kingdoms, so our surviving Gaelic sources do not offer a territorial equivalent of *rí Eireann rex Hibernie*. See, for example, F.J. Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings* (2nd edn, Dublin, 2001), esp. pp. 7–69; E. Bhreathnach, *Ireland in the Medieval World, AD 400–1000: Landscape, Kingship and Religion* (Dublin, 2014), pp. 86–150.

Ireland into conformity with an English model. In this way, Ireland was transformed from a kingdom to a colony.⁵

By spanning the 1169 watershed, I also hope to challenge a persistent tendency within the historiography to use the kingdom of England as a standard against which Irish political culture should be judged, and to find Ireland wanting in the comparison. As Rees Davies suggested in 1979, 'the informing principle of much of English historiography [has been] the belief that strong centralised government is a prerequisite of civilised life and human progress'.⁶ The medieval transformation of Ireland from kingdom to colony was in some ways based upon this value-laden assumption, which had its roots in the twelfth century and allowed the royal administration to equate Anglicisation with modernisation.⁷ It is incumbent upon historians not to accept this perspective uncritically.

I

Historical perceptions of Ireland's pre-invasion political structure and post-invasion relationship with England have long informed debates over its modern right to island-wide sovereignty. For instance, in an essay entitled 'The Conquest of Ireland', the English historian John Horace Round stated in 1899:

Whether Ireland, if left to herself, would even yet have emerged from the tribal stage of society becomes doubtful when we contemplate the persistence of the *mores Hibernici* ... We went to Ireland because her people were engaged in cutting one another's throats; we are there now because, if we left, they would all be breaking one another's heads.⁸

Round took his cue from medieval justifications of the conquest, which located the English and Irish in two separate stages of civilisation. For instance, Gerald of Wales, a royal courtier whose family participated in the colonisation of Ireland and who himself lived there for extended periods, described pre-invasion Ireland as an island of tyrants: savage and religiously deviant rustics who, never having been successfully invaded by the Romans or anyone else, remained stuck at an earlier stage of cultural progress:

They are a wild and inhospitable people. They live on beasts only, and live like beasts. They have not progressed at all from the primitive habits of

5. For critical engagement with the analytical category of 'colony' as it pertains to medieval Ireland, see P. Crooks, 'Colony', in J.W. Armstrong, P. Crooks and A. Ruddick, eds, *Using Concepts in Medieval History: Perspectives on Britain and Ireland, 1100–1500* (Cham, 2022), pp. 51–71.

6. R.R. Davies, *Historical Perception: Celts and Saxons* (Cardiff, 1979), p. 12.

7. A process which John Gillingham has labelled 'imperialism': J. Gillingham, 'The Beginnings of English Imperialism', in J. Gillingham, ed., *The English in the Twelfth Century: Imperialism, National Identity and Political Values* (Woodbridge, 2000), pp. 3–18.

8. J.H. Round, 'The Conquest of Ireland', in J.H. Round, *The Commune of London and Other Studies* (London, 1899), pp. 137–70, at 168–9.

pastoral living. While man usually progresses from the woods to the fields, and from fields to settlements and communities of citizens, this people despises work on the land, has little use for the money-making of towns, condemns the rights and privileges of citizenship, and desires neither to abandon, nor lose respect for, the life which it has been accustomed to lead in the woods and countryside.⁹

Gerald's contemporary, William of Newburgh, likewise remembered the conquest as an attempt to bring order from chaos:

Ireland, after the ancient custom of Britain, dividing itself into several kingdoms, and accustomed to have numerous kings, was perpetually rent asunder by their quarrels; and, in proportion to her freedom from foreign warfare, had, at times, her vitals pitiably torn by her children rushing to mutual slaughter.¹⁰

Produced amidst a revival of classical learning during the 'twelfth-century renaissance', these descriptions and others like them are reminiscent of imperial narratives from antiquity.¹¹

Round readily accepted these medieval characterisations and contrasted a centralised and urbanised England with an anarchic Ireland upon which the invaders imposed a 'pax Britannica' (his term). This imagery was picked up by the Irish historian Goddard Henry Orpen, who in 1911 titled a chapter on pre-invasion Ireland 'Anarchic Ireland' and posited a 'pax Normannica' ushered in by the invaders.¹² In addition to their medieval precedents, both historians were perhaps influenced by a nineteenth-century argument which asserted that any land not controlled by a 'civilised state' could simply be occupied without further justification.¹³ Irish anarchy invited English intervention.

In response, scholars working on early medieval Ireland, such as Eoin MacNeill, argued that the social, political and legal organisation of early Irish society had already evolved into 'national' institutions centred on the kingship of Ireland before the invasion.¹⁴ Writing in the politically charged atmosphere of 1923, Edmund Curtis even asserted that 'the kingdom of Ireland was, in the year 1170, already nine centuries old'.¹⁵

9. *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera*, V: *Topographia Hibernica et Expugnatio Hibernica*, ed. James F. Dimock (London, 1867) [hereafter Gerald of Wales, *Opera*, v], p. 151 (*Topographia Hibernica*, 3.10).

10. William of Newburgh, 'Historia rerum Anglicarum', in *Chronicles of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II and Richard I*, ed. Richard Howlett, Rolls Series, lxxxii (4 vols, 1884–9), i, p. 167.

11. See M. Staunton, *The Historians of Angevin England* (Oxford, 2017), pp. 353–61; J. Gillingham, 'A Historian of the Twelfth-Century Renaissance and the Transformation of English Society, 1066–ca.1200', in T.F.X. Noble and J. Van Engen, eds, *European Transformations: The Long Twelfth Century* (Notre Dame, IN, 2012), pp. 45–74.

12. G.H. Orpen, *Ireland under the Normans* (4 vols, Oxford, 1912–20), i, pp. 19–38 ('Anarchic Ireland'), ii, pp. 323–5 ('Pax Normannica').

13. A. Carty, *Was Ireland Conquered? International Law and the Irish Question* (London, 1996), p. 7.

14. E. MacNeill, *Phases of Irish History* (Dublin, 1919), esp. pp. 222–99.

15. E. Curtis, *A History of Mediaeval Ireland from 1110 to 1513* (Dublin, 1923), p. 1.

The striking point in this exchange was, as D.A. Binchy recognised in the 1950s, that each historian ‘started from precisely the same suppressed premise, that law and order were impossible in any society where the state had not substantially the same functions as the late Victorian era in which they ... grew up’.¹⁶ Medieval England was deemed precocious in this regard, so the debate even among nationalists revolved around whether Ireland lived up to England’s example before the invasion.

Since the 1970s, Irish historians led by Donnchadh Ó Corráin have adopted a more circumspect approach, and, perhaps fearing the label of ‘nationalists’, have shied away from following Curtis in framing Ireland as a kingdom. Yet many still argue that Irish kingship, like the Irish Church, was evolving towards a more centralised model (which they term ‘feudal’) in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.¹⁷ However, in a consciously provocative chapter, ‘Did Ireland Exist in the Twelfth Century?’ (published in Ó Corráin’s 2015 *festschrift*), David Dumville stated that ‘the implication of such exposition is that the country would shortly have achieved the supposedly desirable development of a “feudal” monarchy leading to a united nation-state if there had not been intervention from Britain around 1170’. Such a theory, Dumville continued, is ‘fundamentally misguided, both in terms of the political and intellectual presuppositions, and in respect of the evidence from pre-colonial Ireland itself’. Instead of focusing on royal institutions when searching for a pre-invasion Irish ‘nation’, Dumville argued that historians should instead approach it as an ‘imagined community’ which Irish kings later turned to their political advantage.¹⁸ While I agree that historians have been too willing to accept a historical model which assumes linear progression towards a modern European state system, a tendency that carries through to narratives of ‘decline’ and ‘neglect’ in the historiography of late medieval Anglo-Ireland,¹⁹ the positions that Dumville discusses are not mutually exclusive. As we shall see, interdependent programmes of identity construction and political development sought to realise a kingdom of Ireland before the arrival of the English. It was not, however, an institutionally centralised kingdom.

Beyond Irish historiography, the value-laden opposition of English order and Irish disorder has persisted into the twenty-first

16. D.A. Binchy, ‘Secular Institutions’, in M. Dillon, ed., *Early Irish Society* (Dublin, 1954), p. 62.

17. For instance, D. Ó Corráin, ‘Nationality and Kingship in pre-Norman Ireland’, in T.W. Moody, ed., *Nationality and the Pursuit of National Independence* (Belfast, 1978), pp. 1–35; K. Simms, *From Kings to Warlords* (Woodbridge, 1987); M.T. Flanagan, ‘High-Kings with Opposition, 1072–1166’, in D. Ó Cróinín, ed., *A New History of Ireland, I: Prehistoric and Early Ireland* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 899–933.

18. D. Dumville, ‘Did Ireland Exist in the Twelfth Century?’, in E. Purcell et al., eds, *Clerics, Kings and Vikings: Essays on Medieval Ireland in Honour of Donnchadh Ó Corráin* (Dublin, 2015), pp. 115–26, at 119.

19. For a critique of, and corrective to, this approach, see R. Frame, ‘Ireland within the Plantagenet Orbit’, in R. Frame, *Plantagenet Ireland* (Dublin, 2022), pp. 23–61, at 23–7, as well as the other collected essays in that volume.

century. For instance, in 2004 Geoffrey Barrow claimed that, on the eve of the English invasion, 'the ruling order in Ireland, a warrior aristocracy not far removed from the later Iron Age in its culture and outlook, had too easy a time of it, and were too ready to indulge in inter-tribal warfare and competition for cattle, slaves, land and prestige'.²⁰ In 2018, Nicholas Vincent echoed Barrow by stating that, 'the conquerors who arrived at Bannow Bay in 1169 ... found themselves time-travellers to an Iron Age, closer to the world of Bede than to that of Chrétien de Troyes'.²¹ Instead of installing a *Pax Anglicana*, however, Vincent wrote that the invaders inherited 'the traditions of their Irish forebears for whom raiding and pillage were both endemic and prestigious'. Chaos and disorder reigned, and the Irish annals 'continued to wade in gore'.²² The point here is not to suggest that Barrow or Vincent were guilty of following Round into an uncritical acceptance of medieval justifications of the English invasion. Vincent, in particular, questioned Gerald of Wales's every word and emphasised how much Gerald's testimony was built upon classical archetypes.²³ Instead, these quotations show how historians less familiar with Gaelic sources and the institutions they describe risk inadvertently perpetuating the long-standing trope of English order versus Irish disorder when comparing the two political systems.²⁴ Recent studies have consciously sought to contextualise the centrality of the king and his administration in medieval polities, emphasising instead the extent to which public authority was shared among a much wider political community.²⁵ It is therefore important that historians think carefully before using England as the norm comparator when assessing Ireland. For instance, contemporary Germany comprised a network of independently administered principalities which the king (or emperor) often sought to rule through consultation and consensus; in much of Scandinavia and East-Central Europe, Church-backed kingdom formation encountered entrenched local power structures that frustrated the development of centralised administrations and institutions; and in France, the Capetians promoted an ideology of sacral kingship

20. G.W.S. Barrow, 'Scotland, Wales and Ireland in the Twelfth Century', in D. Luscombe and J. Riley-Smith, eds, *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, IV: c.1024–c.1198, Part 2 (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 581–610, at 602.

21. Vincent, 'Angevin Ireland', p. 205.

22. Ibid., pp. 218, 220.

23. Ibid., pp. 186–7.

24. As I may have done myself when comparing English and Irish warfare: C. Veach, 'Conquest and Conquerors', in *CHI*, pp. 157–81, at 161–2. For a reassessment, see C. Veach, 'Aristocratic Violence and the English Invasion of Ireland', in S. Duffy and P. Crooks, eds, *Invasion 1169* (Dublin, forthcoming).

25. For instance, J. Firnhaber-Baker, *Violence and the State in Languedoc, 1250–1400* (Cambridge, 2014); A. Taylor, *The Shape of the State in Medieval Scotland, 1124–1290* (Oxford, 2016); T. Lambert, *Law and Order in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 2017). For post-invasion Ireland, see Frame, *Plantagenet Ireland*.

but struggled to govern directly outside the Ile-de-France.²⁶ Strong centralised political control was not the *sine qua non* for medieval kingdoms.

II

Early medieval Ireland contained multiple polities of varying size and political potency ruled by *ríg* ('kings'). From at least the seventh century, however, the intellectuals of Ireland developed a theory of social and cultural unity. An elaborate origin legend embraced every dynasty on the island and traced their mutual descent from Míl Espáine ('Soldier of Spain'), whose descendants supposedly travelled to Ireland from Spain. This can be found in the great corpus of Irish genealogies, as well as in pseudo-historical works of literature.²⁷ Language was standardised and regulated by scholars throughout the island (as Old Irish, c.600–c.900), and a vernacular national chronicle emerged at Clonmacnoise.²⁸ Jurists composed a vast array of theoretical legal texts that ordered society, some of which were presented as royal legislation or taught that things ought to be done 'according to the custom of the island of Ireland'. The texts that come down to us today were compiled in the seventh and eighth centuries as textbooks for the instruction of students, so we lack specific case evidence to prove the extent to which these 'national' laws were applied across Ireland.²⁹ Nevertheless, subsequent glossing and commentaries suggest that these legal texts remained relevant into the later Middle Ages, and show the development of political thought in areas such as marriage, clientship, military service, judicial procedures and the kingship of Ireland.³⁰ A belief thus grew that

26. G. Althoff, *Die Ottonen: Königsherrschaft ohne Staat* (Stuttgart, 2000); G.A. Loud and J. Schenk, eds, *The Origins of the German Principalities, 1100–1350: Essays by German Historians* (London, 2017); N. Berend, ed., *Christianization and the Rise of Christian Monarchy: Scandinavia, Central Europe and Rus', c.900–1200* (Cambridge, 2007); E.M. Hallam and C. West, *Capetian France, 987–1328* (3rd edn, Abingdon, 2020), esp. pp. 80–157.

27. J. Carey, *The Irish National Origin-Legend: Synthetic Pseudohistory* (Cambridge, 1994); E. Johnston, *Literacy and Identity in Early Medieval Ireland* (Woodbridge, 2013); D. Ó Corráin, 'Creating the Past: The Early Irish Genealogical Tradition', *Peritia*, xxii (1998), pp. 177–208. For the wider context of origin narratives, see B. Weiler, 'Tales of First Kings and the Culture of Kingship in the West, ca.1050–ca.1200', *Viator*, xlvi (2015), pp. 101–27, esp. 105–7.

28. K. Grabowski and D. Dumville, *Chronicles and Annals of Medieval Ireland and Wales: The Clonmacnoise-group Texts* (Woodbridge, 1984), chs 2–4; D. McManus, 'An Nua-Ghaeilge Chlasaiceach', in K. McCone et al., eds, *Stair na Gaeilge in ómós do Pádraig Ó Fiannachta* (Maynooth, 1994), pp. 335–445. My thanks to Freya Verstraten Veach for her help with McManus's article.

29. D.A. Binchy, ed. and tr., 'Bretha cróige', *Ériu*, xii (1938), pp. 1–77, at 44–5 (quotation); F. Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law* (Dublin, 1988); P. Wadden, 'The Pseudo-Historical Origins of the *Senchas Már* and Royal Legislation in Early Ireland', *Peritia*, xxvii (2016), pp. 141–57; T.M. Charles-Edwards, 'The Making of Nations in Britain and Ireland in the Early Middle Ages', in R. Evans, ed., *Lordship and Learning: Studies in Memory of Trevor Aston* (Woodbridge, 2004), pp. 11–38.

30. L. Breatnach, *A Companion to the Corpus Iuris Hibernici* (Dublin, 2005), pp. 338–53; K. Simms, 'The Contents of the Later Commentaries on the Brehon Law Tracts', *Ériu*, xlix (1998), pp. 23–40. And see section V below.

the inhabitants of Ireland were one people of one language and one faith, and that in the past there had been one king, one set of laws and one capital. The remarkable thing about these developments is that, in contrast to the construction of 'national' communities that we begin to see later in kingdoms such as England, France and Germany, this process was not contrived to support the regnal solidarity of a pre-existing polity.³¹ No one king set the process in motion to reinforce their control over Ireland. Instead, those involved had to balance formal roles within their local kingdoms with their service to a wider Irish socio-cultural community.

This is not to say that the process of community construction was entirely untouched by political ambition. From the seventh century, parallel ideological programmes sought to have the Uí Néill kingship of Tara recognised as the *de facto* kingship of Ireland, and Armagh recognised as the head of the Church in Ireland. For instance, the pseudo-historical prologue to the seventh-century law book *Senchas Már* ('Great Custom/Law') asserted that its law, which covered the entire island and knitted together the Church and kingdom of Ireland, had been determined at Tara by an assembly including the Uí Néill king of Ireland and St Patrick (with whom Armagh was identified). A central concern of the prologue, and of the law collection itself, was to emphasise the unity of the people and land of Ireland by, among other things, the frequent repetition of the terms 'men of Ireland', 'princes of Ireland', 'island of Ireland' and 'king of Ireland'.³² This imagined unity was threatened by the arrival of Scandinavian settlers from the ninth century, which provoked different responses. For instance, the king of Tara, Máel Sechnaill mac Máele Ruanaid (d. 862), emphasised the link between Church and kingship by placing high crosses throughout the Irish midlands proclaiming himself to be 'king of Ireland'.³³ The tenth-century poem *Éitset Áes Ecna Aíbind* ('Let the Pleasant Company of Scholars Listen') likewise asserted the kingship of Tara's island-wide legal authority and sovereignty, as well as Gaelic Irish intellectual, economic and political supremacy. Using a trope that would later be used against the Irish, the poem characterised the arrival of Gaelic-speaking

31. S. Reynolds, *Kingdoms and Communities in Western Europe, 900–1300* (2nd edn, Oxford, 1997), pp. 250–302. See also H. Wolfram, *Geschichte der Goten: Von den Anfängen bis zur Mitte des sechsten Jahrhunderts. Entwurf einer historischen Ethnographie* (Munich, 1979); H.-W. Goetz, J. Jarnut and W. Pohl, eds, *Regna and Gentes: The Relationship between Late Antique and Early Medieval Peoples and Kingdoms in the Transformation of the Roman World* (Leiden, 2003); T.F.X. Noble, ed., *From Roman Provinces to Medieval Kingdoms* (Abingdon, 2006).

32. J. Carey, 'An Edition of the Pseudo-Historical Prologue to the *Senchas Már*', *Ériu*, xlv (1994), pp. 1–32, at 11–13, 17–19; Wadden, 'Pseudo-Historical Origins of the *Senchas Már*', p. 147; L. Breatnach, *The Early Irish Law Text Senchas Már and the Question of its Date* (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 4–5.

33. P. Mac Cana, 'Notes on the Early Irish Concept of Unity', in M.P. Hederman and R. Kearney, eds, *The Crane Bag Book of Irish Studies (1977–1981)* (Dublin, 1982), pp. 205–19; M. Herbert, 'Ri Eirenn, Ri Alban: Kingship and Identity in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries', in S. Taylor, ed., *Kings, Clerics and Chronicles in Scotland* (Dublin, 2000), pp. 62–72, at 63–4.

people to Ireland in the distant past as bringing order and civilisation to a chaotic pre-Gaelic population on the island.³⁴ A kingdom of Ireland was therefore considered viable in literary formulations, a common language, secular political life and the organisation of the Church.

The strength of this construct was proved by the resistance the Uí Néill faced from their rivals, who, rather than denying Ireland as a political unit, sought to claim its kingship for themselves. For instance, the Eóganacht kings of Munster (who often dominated the south of the island) remembered their own Cathal mac Finguine (d. 742) as 'king of Ireland' after he fought the Uí Néill in the eighth century.³⁵ Nevertheless, it was not until the beginning of the eleventh century that the famous Brian Bóraime (from the Munster dynasty of Dál Cais) managed to break the Uí Néill monopoly on the kingship of Ireland. Having succeeded militarily, Brian was quick to secure support for his position by declaring Armagh to be the ecclesiastical capital of Ireland. This not only ensured him the backing of the powerful ecclesiastical establishment, it also preserved the ideological link between the political and religious unity of Ireland. A marginal notation beside the king's agreement with Armagh gave Brian the grandiose title *imperator Scottorum* ('Emperor of the Irish'), which seemingly echoed the title *imperator Romanorum* used by Brian's contemporary, Otto III, and mirrored the imperial pretensions of English kings such as Æthelstan (d. 939) and Edgar (d. 975) who also looked to Germany for their models of royal authority.³⁶ Brian's sons could not secure their father's inheritance, so in the century-and-a-half between Brian's death in 1014 and the English invasion of 1169 the kingship of Ireland remained an object of contention among Ireland's provincial kings.³⁷

Meanwhile, a process of ecclesiastical reform provided Ireland with its own Church hierarchy along Roman lines, an essential component of regnal solidarity in contemporary Europe.³⁸ Brian's descendants, the Uí Briain, were particularly keen champions of reform, by which they hoped to demonstrate to the papacy and their rivals that their dynasty held legitimate royal authority in Ireland.³⁹ The reformers channelled

34. E. Boyle, *History and Salvation in Medieval Ireland* (London, 2021), pp. 123–4.

35. D. Ó Corráin, *Ireland before the Normans* (Dublin, 1972), p. 97.

36. *Liber Ardmachanus: The Book of Armagh*, ed. J. Gwynn (Dublin, 1913), fo. 16v; S. Duffy, *Brian Boru and the Battle of Clontarf* (Dublin, 2014), pp. 142–51; Weiler, 'Tales of First Kings', p. 103. From this period, Irish intellectuals also began to draw upon imperial ideologies to describe power in an Ireland that included Gaelic and Hiberno-Scandinavian populations. Boyle, *History and Salvation*, pp. 124–37.

37. See S. Ó Hoireabhárd, *The Medieval Irish Kings and the English Invasion* (Liverpool, 2024), chs 18 and 19.

38. M. T. Flanagan, *The Transformation of the Irish Church in the Twelfth Century* (Woodbridge, 2010); B. Weiler, 'Crown-Giving and King-Making', *Viator*, xli (2010), pp. 57–87, at 71; S. John, 'The Papacy and the Establishment of the Kingdoms of Jerusalem, Sicily and Portugal: Twelfth-Century Papal Political Thought on Incipient Kingship', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, lxxviii (2017), pp. 223–59. My thanks to Björn Weiler for several discussions about regnal identity.

39. A. Candon, 'Barefaced Effrontery: Secular and Ecclesiastical Politics in Early Twelfth-Century Ireland', *Seanchas Ardmahacha*, xiv, no. 2 (1991), pp. 1–25; J. Harrington, 'S. Stefano al Monte Celio, Donnchad mac Briain, and Twelfth-Century Papal Legates in Ireland', *Irish*

continental theories of secular governance to Ireland, including the importance to society of kings with strong legislative and executive authority. For instance, an admonition from an Armagh churchman, *Cert cech rí co réil* ('The Tribute of Every King Is Clearly Due'), taught that a king should exercise his power through securing hostages, taxing ruthlessly and enforcing law and order:

A hard fetter on the foot, and a red cross(?) on the back [or 'strong gallows nearby'],

A filthy pit, ooze, a prison with its back to a ditch.

Water, weapons ... fire, risk of betrayal,

It is these that cause peace during a gracious king's reign.⁴⁰

Kingship became increasingly territorial rather than personal, so that individual bonds of submission were no longer sufficient from an under-king (Middle Irish: *uirrí*, Latin: *regulus*). Instead, over-kings asserted *de facto* ownership of their clients' territories by revoking their tenure should the requisite service or tribute fail. The very nature of landholding was thus altered, with a move away from the community-focused *túath* of earlier times in favour of territorial divisions such as *tríchna cé* (literally 'a force of fighting men') which became the primary unit of royal tenure, local government, law enforcement, taxation and military service.⁴¹

With the growth of territory-based lordship, twelfth-century warfare became more than the raiding of previous eras. Campaigns of royal conquest stretched across the length and breadth of the island, sometimes using naval forces to great effect. The king's vassals were paid wages (or *tuarastal*) that enabled them to remain in his service for longer periods of time, and mercenaries were recruited from around the Irish Sea littoral.⁴² The Hiberno-Scandinavian city of Dublin gradually emerged as the effective capital of Ireland, with control of the city a touchstone for the kingship of Ireland. Tied to a thriving trading network, and patrolling the Irish Sea with its fleet, Dublin had the potential to equip prospective kings of Ireland with the power and resources necessary to dominate the island.⁴³ The new reality was reflected (or

Historical Studies, xlviii (2024), pp. 1–26. My thanks to Jesse Harrington for several stimulating conversations, and for sending me a pre-publication version of this work.

40. T. O'Donoghue, ed. and tr., 'Cert cech rí co réil', in O. Bergin and C.J.S. Marstrander, eds, *Miscellany Presented to Kuno Meyer* (Halle a.S., 1912), pp. 258–77, at 271; K. Simms, *Gaelic Ulster in the Middle Ages: History, Culture and Society* (Dublin, 2020), pp. 249–60 (poem at p. 257). These terms are reminiscent of the judicial right to 'furca et fossa' one finds in late twelfth-century Scottish charters. *Regesta Regum Scottorum*, II: *The Acts of William I, 1165–1214*, ed. G.W.S. Barrow with W.W. Scott (Edinburgh, 1971), nos 185, 302, 334–5, 338, 375, 405, 428, 524.

41. T.M. Charles-Edwards, 'Society and Politics in Pre-Norman Ireland', in *L'Irlanda e gli irlandesi nell'alto Medioevo* (Spoleto, 2010), pp. 67–90, at 87–90; P. MacCotter, *Medieval Ireland: Territorial, Political and Economic Divisions* (Dublin, 2008), esp. pp. 39–53.

42. Simms, *Kings to Warlords*, pp. 11–12, 118.

43. S. Duffy, 'Irishmen and Islesmen in the Kingdoms of Dublin and Man, 1052–1171', *Ériu*, xliii (1992), pp. 93–133.

perhaps justified) in a late eleventh-/early twelfth-century gloss on a passage from *Senchas Már*, the seventh-century law tract that had originally equated the kingship of Ireland with Tara. Written while the Munster-based Uí Briain dynasty held the kingship of Ireland, the gloss stated that in order to be 'king of Ireland without opposition' one had to control the three estuaries of Dublin, Waterford and Limerick—the very Hiberno-Scandinavian cities that the Uí Briain used to consolidate their grip on the island.⁴⁴ As elsewhere, the administration of conquered territories required the growth and specialisation of royal households to include officers such as seneschal, chancellor, judge and any number of high-level officials with domestic titles such as dispenser. A genre of texts focusing on rights and customs codified the role of various royal officials, and detailed the island-wide taxation programmes of Ireland's kings.⁴⁵ As a result, the few surviving Irish royal charters may not do justice to the complexity of a political society that had evolved its own methods of governance and administration.⁴⁶

On a more theoretical level, eleventh-century compositions such as the *Lebor Gabála Érenn* ('The Book of the Taking of Ireland') and *Dindshenchas Érenn* ('Lore of the Notable Places of Ireland') reinforced the imagined community of Ireland by presenting the Gaelic Irish and island of Ireland as unities.⁴⁷ Twelfth-century works such as the *Cogad Gaedel re Gallaiib* ('The War of the Irish against the Foreigners') and *Caithréim Cellacháin Caisil* ('The Victorious Career of Cellachan of Cashel') again harnessed the past and, among other things, used Ireland's Scandinavian settlers and their descendants as convenient 'others' against whom the Gaelic Irish might further define themselves.⁴⁸ While it is always difficult to assess how widely collective identities might have been held, the confluence of various literary acts of creation in itself suggests viability, even if the idea was contested or contentious. Furthermore, there are suggestions that literary productions such as these were sometimes performed at *óenaig* (popular assemblies) in Ireland and would therefore have been broadcast to the broader society.⁴⁹

44. Simms, 'Contents of Later Commentaries', pp. 32–3.

45. *Lebor na Cert*, ed. and tr. M. Dillon (London, 1962); M. Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Perception and Reality: Ireland, c.980–1229', in *CHI*, pp. 131–56, at 151.

46. T.M. Charles-Edwards, 'The Context and Uses of Literacy in Early Christian Ireland', in H. Pryce, ed., *Literacy in Medieval Celtic Societies* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 62–82; *Irish Royal Charters. Texts and Contexts*, ed. and tr. M.T. Flanagan (Oxford, 2005), pp. 7–24.

47. *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, ed. R.A.S. Macalister (5 vols, London, 1938–56); *The Metrical Dindshenchas*, ed. and tr. E.J. Gwynn (5 vols, Dublin, 1903–35); J. Carey, 'Lebor Gabála and the Legendary History of Ireland', in H. Fulton, ed., *Medieval Celtic Literature and Society* (Dublin, 2005), pp. 32–48; C. Bowen, 'A Historical Inventory of the *Dindshenchas*', *Studia Celtica*, x (1975–6), pp. 113–37.

48. *Cogadh Gáedhel re Gallaiibh: The War of the Gaedhil with the Gaill*, ed. and tr. James Henthorn Todd (London, 1867); *Caithréim Cellacháin Caisil*, ed. and tr. A. Bugge (Oslo, 1905).

49. Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Perception and Reality', pp. 141–3, 148–50. For a reassessment of *óenaig*, see P. Gleeson, 'Kingdoms, Communities, and Óenaig: Irish Assembly Practices in their Northwest European Context', *Journal of the North Atlantic*, viii (2015), pp. 33–51.

Projects of community construction were certainly not unique to Ireland in this period.⁵⁰ In England, a similar process meant that, a century after the Norman conquest of 1066, a royal bureaucrat (and later bishop of London) could declare that among free people the Normans and English were indistinguishable.⁵¹ This was clearly an overstatement, but writers such as William of Malmesbury nevertheless portrayed the Normans as the inheritors of a glorious English past, and sought to define a community of England against their neighbours in Scotland, Wales and Ireland. This identity formation thus took on an imperialist tone.⁵² For instance, twelfth-century chroniclers seized upon King Edgar (d. 975), who had variously styled himself ‘emperor’ or ‘king’ of England, Britain or Albion, as an exemplar for island-wide rule in Britain. The monks of Worcester even forged a charter which had Edgar claim that ‘the propitious Divinity conceded to me, together with the empire of the English, to subject to the kingdom of the English all the kingdoms of the islands of the ocean, with their most ferocious kings, as far as Norway and the greater part of Ireland, with its most noble city Dublin’.⁵³ Within a decade, in 1155, the Norman poet Wace presented the new king of England, Henry II, with a vernacular French version of Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia Regum Britanniae*. Among other things, Wace (like Geoffrey) presented a succession of ‘kings of Ireland’ ruling the ‘land of Ireland’, and claimed that King Arthur triumphed over them to rule Ireland from Britain.⁵⁴ When, that same year, King Henry gathered his advisors and perhaps an army to discuss plans to conquer ‘the kingdom of Ireland’, he would have had ample historical and charter evidence to support his claim even before he sought papal backing (on which more below).⁵⁵

A flourishing Irish Sea network of trade and communication meant that these imperial pretensions cannot have gone unnoticed in Ireland. Consequently, it may not be a coincidence that the following year (1156) Toirdelbach Ua Conchobair was described in the annals as ‘king of all Ireland and the Augustus of western Europe’ (*rí Erenn uile* 7

50. Reynolds, *Kingdoms and Communities*, pp. 250–302; C. Weeda, *Ethnicity in Medieval Europe, 950–1250: Medicine, Power and Religion* (Woodbridge, 2021).

51. Richard fitz Nigel, *Dialogus de Scaccario*, ed. C. Johnson et al. (Oxford, 1983), p. 53.

52. J. Gillingham, ‘Civilizing the English? The English Histories of William of Malmesbury and David Hume’, *Historical Research*, lxxiv (2001), pp. 17–43; R.R. Davies, *The First English Empire. Power and Identities in the British Isles, 1093–1343* (Oxford, 2000).

53. S. Sobceki, ‘Edgar’s Archipelago: *Altitonantis* and the Forging of Charters in Twelfth-Century Worcester’, in S. Sobceki, ed., *The Sea and Englishness in the Middle Ages: Maritime Narratives, Identity, and Culture* (Woodbridge, 2011), pp. 1–30, at 10.

54. Wace, *Roman de Brut*, ed. J. Weiss (2nd edn, Liverpool, 2005), ll. 8079–8118, 8191–220, 8330, 8649–64, 9659–704, 10301–22, 11609–10; Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, ed. M.D. Reeve, tr. N. Wright (Woodbridge, 2007), pp. 172–3, 200–201, 204–5, 210–11, 220.

55. Robert de Torigni, ‘Chronica’, in *Chronicles*, ed. Howlett, iv, p. 186 (quotation); Sigebert of Gembloux, *Chronicon*, ed. L.C. Bethmann, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores [hereafter MGH, SS], VI (Hanover, 1844), p. 403.

Auguist iarthair Eorpa).⁵⁶ His successor in the kingship of Ireland, Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn, also immediately called himself 'king of all Ireland' (*rex totius Hiberniae*) in a charter to Newry Abbey in 1157.⁵⁷ In that charter Muirchertach went so far as to act as a *dominus terrae* by granting away portions of his under-kings' lands in Airgialla, and demanded that others who wished to grant their own lands (with his licence) notify him 'so that I may know what and how much of my earthly kingdom (*terrenum meum regnum*) the king of heaven may possess'. As 'king of all Ireland', Muirchertach, at least, seems to have assumed that he ruled a kingdom.

The titles claimed by Toirdelbach and Muirchertach contrast with a modern historiographical tendency to regard any king claiming authority over Ireland in this period as a 'high-king' (*ardri*). This appellation, while perhaps unproblematic in an earlier Irish context, runs the risk of feeding discourses which from the twelfth century have sought to draw parallels between pre-invasion Ireland and an archaic state out of which England had long since emerged. It also misrepresents the way mid- to late twelfth-century kings of Ireland were portrayed in the surviving sources.⁵⁸ For instance, the Annals of Ulster call Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn 'king of Ireland' (*rig Érend*) when recording his presence at the consecration of the church of Mellifont in 1157, and an entry in the Book of Kells affords him the same title in about 1161.⁵⁹ That same year, the Annals of the Four Masters record that Muirchertach received the submissions of the kings of Connacht and Leinster, and regranted them their kingdoms, so that 'Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn was therefore on this occasion king of Ireland without opposition' (*Rí Ereann dna cen fresabhra*).⁶⁰ The only time that Muirchertach seems to have been called 'high-king' of Ireland was after he had been betrayed to his death by disgruntled under-kings in 1166.⁶¹ Nevertheless, the Annals of Inisfallen still call him 'king of Ireland' on that occasion, and report that the king of Connacht, 'Ruaidrí Ua Conchobair took the kingship of Ireland' (*rigi Érennd*).⁶² From at least the mid-twelfth century, men

56. Whitley Stokes, ed., 'The Annals of Tigernach. The Continuation, AD 1088–AD 1178', *Revue celtique*, xviii (1897), pp. 150–97, 267–303 [hereafter 'Ann. Tigernach'], at 181, s.a. 1156.

57. *Irish Royal Charters*, ed. Flanagan, no. 5 (commentary pp. 107–24). A century earlier, Gruffudd ap Llywelyn had adopted a similar style, as *rex Britanniae & totius Gualiae*, under hegemonic pressure from England, and also claimed to be *dominus terrae* of a kingdom outside his dynastic control. *The Liber Landavensis, Llyfr Teilo*, ed. W.J. Rees (Llandovery, 1840), pp. 539–41; W. Davies, *The Llandaff Charters* (Aberystwyth, 1979), pp. 251.

58. C. Etchingham, 'His Finest Hour', *Irish Literary Supplement*, xxxiv (2015), pp. 3–4, at 4.

59. *Annala Uladh, Annals of Ulster; otherwise Annala Senait, Annals of Senat. A Chronicle of Irish Affairs, A.D. 431–1131: 1155–1541*, ed. Bartholomew MacCarthy (4 vols, Dublin, 1893) [hereafter *Ann. Ulster*], ii, pp. 130–31, s.a. 1157; G. Mac Niocaill, *Notitiae as Leabhar Cheanannais, 1033–1161* (Dublin, 1961), pp. 34–5. While at Mellifont in 1157, Muirchertach also acted as *dominus terrae* by granting away lands in Airgialla: *AFM*, ii, pp. 1124–5, s.a. 1157.

60. *AFM*, ii, pp. 1142–3, s.a. 1161.

61. 'Ann. Tigernach', p. 268, s.a. 1166; *Ann. Ulster*, ii, pp. 154–5, s.a. 1166.

62. *The Annals of Inisfallen (MS Rawlinson B. 503)*, ed. S. Mac Airt (Dublin, 1951) [hereafter *Ann. Inisfallen*], pp. 300–301, s.a. 1166.

calling themselves 'king of Ireland' thus claimed to rule an Ireland with a united Church, a system of military assessment and an articulated vision of its own unity.

In the three years immediately preceding the English invasion of 1169, the new king of Ireland, Ruaidrí Ua Conchobair, threw himself into consolidating his position. He annexed Dublin, partitioned the kingdom of Mide (granting away one half and keeping the other for himself), exacted submissions from all of the other major Irish rulers, levied a tax 'on the men of Ireland', and celebrated his authority by presiding over a national Church synod at Athboy and holding a royal council at Athlone.⁶³ He signalled his control of Ireland by celebrating the *óenach Tailten* (fair of Tailtiu), a public assembly at Teltown which was the prerogative of the ideal sovereign of Ireland. Ruaidrí also had a court historian, Gilla Asalta, to commemorate his achievements, and in 1169 made a perpetual grant to fund the education of Irish and Scottish students at Armagh (which, since the 1162 Council of Clane, claimed a monopoly on teacher training in Ireland).⁶⁴ Ruaidrí's military mastery was such that no rival could hope to challenge him in the field, and he appears to have been laying the foundation for a hereditary claim to the monarchy of Ireland.⁶⁵

III

The English invasion that began in 1169 has long been viewed as a turning point in British and Irish history, but it was also an episode in the history of Gaelic Ireland just described.⁶⁶ The progress of the invasion has been well documented, and need not be rehearsed here.⁶⁷ Suffice to say that the betrayal of Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn in 1166 eventually led one of his chief allies, Diarmait Mac Murchada, to be expelled from his provincial kingdom of Leinster and to recruit a fighting force from England and the Welsh March. The crucial point is that Diarmait offered land to a number of lords who agreed to follow him, emulating the invited colonisation practised by (for instance) the rulers of Scotland, Pomerania, Silesia, Mecklenburg and Hungary in order to strengthen their regimes.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, Diarmait's death in 1171 threatened to cut his colonists free from all control, and quickly roused the attention of their king in England. Writing in about 1188,

63. Simms, *Kings to Warlords*, p. 12.

64. *Ann. Ulster*, ii, pp. 160–63, s.a. 1169; 'Ann. Tigernach', p. 285, s.a. 1172; Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Perception and Reality', p. 133.

65. Ó Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland*, p. 307.

66. For this perspective, see Ó Hóireabhárd, *Medieval Irish Kings*.

67. See, for instance, M.T. Flanagan, *Irish Society, Anglo-Norman Settlers, Angevin Kingship: Interactions in Ireland in the Late Twelfth Century* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 56–111.

68. *The Deeds of the Normans in Ireland: La Geste des Engleis en Yrlande*, ed. and tr. E. Mullally (Dublin, 2002), ll. 141, 1990–92, 3058–3125; R. Bartlett, *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization, and Cultural Change, 950–1350* (London, 1993), pp. 24–32, 82–3.

Gervase of Canterbury even claims that 'the Irish' sent messengers to Henry II complaining of Diarmait's recruits and asking for Henry's help.⁶⁹

King Henry II's arrival in Ireland at the head of a large army in October 1171 was therefore a response to the immediate crisis created by Diarmait's death. Yet it could also be seen as the realisation of a long-held ambition from 1155 to conquer 'the kingdom of Ireland'.⁷⁰ In this regard, it is worth noting that the main sources for the invasion associated with Henry's court, including Roger of Howden (who may have accompanied Henry to Ireland in 1171) and Gerald of Wales (whom Henry later sent to Ireland with his son John in 1185), portrayed the Irish as a people and Ireland as a kingdom ruled by a king.⁷¹ Similarly, the plot of *Le Roman de Horn*, a French-language adventure story which may have been performed at Henry's Christmas court in Dublin that winter, involved its eponymous hero fighting for the Dublin-based 'king of Ireland' in his 'kingdom of Ireland' (succession to which Horn was eventually offered in marriage to the king's daughter).⁷²

Once in Ireland, Henry appropriated the imagery of Irish kingship to signal his takeover. He emulated previous kings of Ireland by claiming the strategic cities of Dublin, Waterford and Wexford for himself. He then overwintered in Dublin (which Gerald of Wales called 'regni caput' in his account) and celebrated Christmas in a temporary palace which Roger of Howden claims was built for him by the Irish kings 'according to the custom of the country'.⁷³ As Marie Therese Flanagan has noted, this was akin to the temporary feasting halls and palaces used by Irish kings to entertain their clients, and may have been intended as a public recognition of Henry's superior kingship.⁷⁴ In what could be seen as a rejection of Ruaidrí Ua Conchobair's increasingly overbearing rule, nearly every major Irish king decided to submit to Henry. The terms of those submissions were perhaps deliberately ambiguous, being described by Irish and English sources using the language of their respective institutions. While Irish sources report that the kings submitted, proffered pledges, entered Henry's house or accepted his hospitality,⁷⁵ English sources state that the

69. Gervase of Canterbury, *The Historical Works*, ed. William Stubbs, Rolls Series, lxxiii (2 vols, 1879–80), i, p. 235.

70. Torigni, 'Chronica', p. 186. See also Veach, 'Henry II', pp. 1–25.

71. Roger of Howden, *Gesta regis Henrici Secundi*, ed. William Stubbs, Rolls Series, xlix (2 vols, 1867), i, pp. 25–30; Gerald of Wales, *Expugnatio Hibernica*, ed. A.B. Scott and F.X. Martin (Dublin, 1978), esp. pp. 24–5, 40–41, 50–51, 68–9, 146–7.

72. Thomas, *The Romance of Horn*, ed. M.K. Pope and T.B.W. Reid (2 vols, Oxford, 1955–64), II. 2130 ff.; J. Weiss, 'Thomas and the Earl: Literary and Historical Contexts for the *Romance of Horn*', in R. Field, ed., *Tradition and Transformation in Medieval Romance* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 1–13, at 2–7.

73. Roger of Howden, *Gesta*, ed. Stubbs, i, pp. 24–6 (quotation); Roger of Howden, *Chronica*, ed. Stubbs, ii, pp. 29–30; Gerald of Wales, *Expugnatio Hibernica*, ed. Scott and Martin, pp. 94–7.

74. Flanagan, *Irish Society*, pp. 202–4.

75. *Miscellaneous Irish Annals, AD 1114–1437*, ed. S. Ó hInnse (Dublin, 1947), pp. 56–7, s.a. 1172; *Ann. Loch Cé*, i, pp. 144–5, s.a. 1171; *Ann. Ulster*, ii, pp. 170–71, s.a. 1171; *Ann. Inisfallen*, pp. 304–5, s.a. 1171; *Ann. Tigernach*, p. 283, s.a. 1171.

kings either swore fealty or performed homage to Henry.⁷⁶ This serves as a warning against placing too much emphasis on the precise implications of the 'homage' or 'fealty' supposedly sworn, since our sources represent different interpretations of the rituals they describe, and may themselves have been bound up in a contested political discourse at the time.⁷⁷ By 1175, even the king of Ireland, Ruaidrí Ua Conchobair, chose to recognise Henry's supremacy in the Treaty of Windsor. The treaty once again utilised a blend of English and Irish methods of submission, with the English language of fealty, homage and service on the one hand, and the Irish practices of under-kings, tribute and hostage-taking on the other. The treaty announced Henry's lordship over the entire island of Ireland by requiring his 'liegeman' (*ligius homo*) and 'under-king' (*rex sub eo*) Ruaidrí to speak for, control and extract tribute from the Gaelic Irish in areas not subject to English settlement.⁷⁸

Henry's decision to place his own men into provincial kingdoms was in keeping with the pattern of conquest and colonisation elsewhere, but it also found precedent in the actions of previous kings of Ireland such as Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn and Ruaidrí Ua Conchobair.⁷⁹ While it would be naïve to imagine that Henry's new grantees sought to rule the kingdoms of Leinster, Mide or (eventually) Ulaid exactly as the Meic Murchada, Uí Máel Sechlainn or Meic Duinnsleibe had done before them, these imported lords utilised Irish systems of alliance, clientage and labour service, promoted local saints' cults, and even married into local dynasties in order to adapt to the socio-political world in which they found themselves.⁸⁰

While Henry and his barons entrenched their rule in Ireland, Gerald of Wales sought to justify their presence by manipulating the Gaelic Irish origin story. In a description of the land, people and history of Ireland produced for an English audience, *Topographia Hibernica*, Gerald recounted a version of the origin legend that he found in the 'loose and disorderly' Irish chronicles (possibly *Lebor Gabála Éirenn*).⁸¹

76. Roger of Howden, *Gesta*, ed. Stubbs, i, p. 26; Roger of Howden, *Chronica*, ed. Stubbs, ii, p. 30; Gerald of Wales, *Expugnatio Hibernica*, ed. Scott and Martin, pp. 12–13, 94–7; Gervase of Canterbury, *Historical Works*, ed. Stubbs, i, p. 235; Ralph of Diss, *Opera Historica*, ed. William Stubbs, Rolls Series, lxxviii (2 vols, 1876), i, p. 348. William of Newburgh, 'Historia rerum', ed. Howlett, i, p. 169, wrote only of 'subjection'.

77. A. Taylor, 'Homage in the Latin Chronicles of Eleventh- and Twelfth-Century Normandy', in D. Bates, E. D'Angelo and E. van Houts, eds, *People, Texts and Artefacts: Cultural Transmission in the Medieval Norman Worlds* (London, 2018), pp. 231–52.

78. Roger of Howden, *Gesta*, ed. Stubbs, i, pp. 101–3.

79. See section II above.

80. M.T. Flanagan, 'John de Courcy, the First Ulster Plantation and Irish Church Reform', in B. Smith, ed., *Britain and Ireland, 900–1300: Insular Responses to Medieval European Change* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 154–78; M.T. Flanagan, 'Strategies of Lordship in Pre-Norman and Post-Norman Leinster', in C. Harper-Bill, ed., *Anglo-Norman Studies XX: Proceedings of the Battle Conference 1997* (Woodbridge, 1997), pp. 107–26; C. Veach, *Lordship in Four Realms: The Lacy Family, 1166–1241* (Manchester, 2014), esp. 245–51.

81. Gerald of Wales, *Opera*, v, pp. 8, 137–48.

He then inserted extracts from Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* to justify the island's rule from Britain. The *Topographia's* text is unwieldy, but this section was summarised in Gerald's subsequent history of the English invasion, *Expugnatio Hibernica*:

For the *Historia Regum Britanniae* bears witness to the fact that when Gurguintius ... king of Britain, was returning in triumph from Dacia, he found the Basque fleet in Orkney, and having provided them with guides, sent them for the first time into Ireland. It also recalls the fact that the kings of Ireland were among the rulers who paid tribute to Arthur, that famous king of Britain, and that Gillomar king of Ireland was present at his court at Caerleon along with other island kings.⁸²

According to Gerald, who later claimed to have written at Henry II's instance,⁸³ the Gaelic Irish may have come from Spain (as Basques), but they were gifted Ireland by the king of Britain. In this way, the English claim to Ireland harnessed the processes of identity construction either side of the Irish Sea.⁸⁴

Returning to 1171, Henry II sought to co-opt another pillar of pre-invasion solidarity, the Irish Church. This was part of a longer process, which perhaps began for Henry when, immediately after shelving his plans to invade Ireland in 1155, he asked the pope's blessing for a future attempt. The authenticity of Pope Adrian IV's reply, *Laudabiliter*, has been the topic of some controversy, but the pope seems to have at least authorised Henry's takeover of Ireland as long as several conditions were met.⁸⁵ In the background to this was a growing chorus of disapproval for Irish religious practice, earlier championed by Bernard of Clairvaux, to which some reform-minded prelates in Ireland also lent their voices. By 1152, their reforms had established an independent diocesan structure for Ireland at the Synod of Kells. This seemingly confounded any ambition Canterbury may have had to extend its authority over the island, and set the terms for Henry II's approach.⁸⁶ Once in Ireland in 1171, Henry called a national council of the Irish Church at Cashel, which duly ratified his rule over the island and sent letters of support to Pope Alexander III.⁸⁷ After detailing the council's provisions (for most of which he is our only source), Gerald of Wales summarised the

82. Gerald of Wales, *Expugnatio Hibernica*, ed. Scott and Martin, pp. 148–9.

83. *Ibid.*, p. 261.

84. Gerald's justificatory programme was to have significant ramifications for colonial identity in Ireland into the later Middle Ages. See R. Frame, 'Exporting State and Nation: Being English in Medieval Ireland', in Frame, *Plantagenet Ireland*, pp. 116–34, esp. 128–32.

85. A. Duggan, 'The Making of a Myth: Giraldus Cambrensis, *Laudabiliter*, and Henry II's Lordship of Ireland', *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History*, 3rd ser., iv (2007), pp. 249–312. Whatever its initial validity, *Laudabiliter* became totemic in Ireland from the late thirteenth century (if not earlier): Frame, 'Exporting State and Nation', pp. 128–30.

86. D. Ó Corráin, *The Irish Church, its Reform and the English Invasion* (Dublin, 2017), pp. 91–7; Flanagan, *Irish Society*, pp. 30–38.

87. Ó Corráin, *Irish Church*, pp. 104–15; M.T. Flanagan, 'Henry II, the Council of Cashel and the Irish Bishops', *Peritia*, x (1996), pp. 184–211.

results: 'it is proper and most fitting that, just as by God's grace Ireland has received her lord and king from England' and 'both the Church and the kingdom of Ireland are indebted to our glorious king for the boon of peace and the growth of religion', it followed that 'in all parts of the Irish Church all matters relating to religion are to be conducted ... in line with the observances of the English Church'.⁸⁸ According to Roger of Howden, the four archbishops and twenty-nine bishops of Ireland then provided Henry with sealed charters 'confirming to him and his heirs the kingdom of Ireland, testifying that they had made him and his heirs kings and lords over them forever'.⁸⁹ Whether or not one trusts their presentation of events, Gerald and Roger may at least represent the narrative emanating from Henry's court which framed his annexation in terms of a pre-existing 'kingdom of Ireland'.

Like Brian Bóraime before him, Henry sought to preserve the ideological link between the ecclesiastical and political unity of Ireland as he introduced a new practical reality. Henry's experienced administrator and advocate, Ralph, archdeacon of Llandaff, took the council's letters to the papal curia and added his own account of proceedings. Presented with a *fait accompli*, Pope Alexander III praised Henry for having 'wonderfully and gloriously triumphed over that people of Ireland', and reiterated Henry's mission to reform Christian practice there. Alexander also wrote to the Irish kings, stating that by their individual submissions they had 'received our dear son in Christ, Henry, the illustrious king of England, as your king and lord, and have sworn fealty to him'. If any were to forget their oaths of fidelity, then the Irish prelates—who in a separate papal letter were enjoined to 'firmly respect those things which belong to [Henry's] royal dignity'—were first to admonish and then lay ecclesiastical censure on them until they returned to Henry's allegiance.⁹⁰

It was also from this point that legate authority in Ireland was symbolically linked to the kingship of Ireland. In a recent study, Jesse Harrington has shown that in the formative period of English control from 1176 to 1203, the papal *legati a latere* ('legates from the pope's side') sent to Ireland appear to have been drawn from the church of S. Stefano Rotondo in Rome.⁹¹ That church is significant, because it is the burial place of Donnchad mac Briain, last surviving son of Brian Bóraime and deposed claimant to the kingship of Ireland. His pilgrimage to Rome in 1064 is recorded in all the major Irish annals but,

88. Gerald of Wales, *Expugnatio Hibernica*, ed. Scott and Martin, pp. 100–101. From at least the reign of Henry's grandson and namesake Henry III (1216–72), English kings exercised the same regalian rights over the Irish Church that they did over the English Church. Frame, 'Ireland within the Plantagenet Orbit', p. 29.

89. Roger of Howden, *Gesta*, ed. Stubbs, i, p. 26.

90. *Pontificia Hibernica: Medieval Papal Chancery Documents Concerning Ireland, 640–1261*, ed. M.P. Sheehy (2 vols, Dublin, 1962–5), i, pp. 19–23.

91. Harrington, 'S. Stefano', pp. 15–26.

according to the *Annals of Clonmacnoise* (in a seventeenth-century English translation):

Donnogh McBrian Borowa was king, some say, and was soon deposed again (and went to Rome) ... Hee brought the Crowne of Ireland with him thither, which remained with the Popes until Pope Adrean gave the same to king Henry the second that conquered Ireland. Donnogh McBrian died in pilgrimage in the abby of St. Stephen the Protomartyre.⁹²

The idea of an eleventh-century 'crown of Ireland' is almost certainly anachronistic, yet the transfer of legitimate authority communicated by this tradition fused Henry II to the lineage of Brian Bóraime and the legacy of Church reform championed by the Uí Briain.⁹³ Indeed, Harrington argues that the crown of peacock feathers that Pope Urban III sent for John's coronation in 1186 (mentioned in the opening of this article) was carried to Ireland by a cardinal of S. Stefano acting as papal legate for Ireland. If correct, this at least suggests that the papacy associated an invented crown of Ireland with Donnchad's burial place in the late twelfth century, which would have been consistent with a wider tendency to use relics and burials in Rome to assert papal jurisdiction in other realms. The papacy's decision to invest Donnchad's grave with such meaning not only seems to have validated earlier attempts by the Uí Briain to link Church reform to the kingship of Ireland, it also asserted that that reforming mission, and the kingdom of Ireland, would continue under Henry II and his son John.

Whatever the pope's thoughts, individual Irish ecclesiastics had to decide for themselves how best to handle the English king's assertion of authority. The archbishop of Dublin, Lorcán Ua Tuathail, was brother-in-law to Diarmait Mac Murchada and presided over a province that was largely controlled by the English, but he was far from a conduit of English authority. Instead, Lorcán seems to have taken seriously his ecclesiastical duty to advise and admonish Henry II once he had taken over Ireland. For instance, after attending the Council of Cashel that ratified Henry's annexation in 1171–2, Lorcán made several trips to England. We do not know why he went in 1172/3, but the timing and the fact that he was back to witness the Treaty of Windsor in 1175 suggest that he may have been party to negotiations between Henry and the former king of Ireland, Ruaidrí Ua Conchobair.⁹⁴

92. *The Annals of Clonmacnoise*, ed. Denis Murphy (Dublin, 1896), p. 179, s.a. 1063. See also A. Gwynn, *The Irish Church in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Dublin, 1992), pp. 36, 86–8. The tale of the crown of Ireland was popular in other sources from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries such as Irish bardic poetry. B. Ó Buachalla, *The Crown of Ireland* (Galway, 2006), pp. 29–30, 35.

93. The tale is reminiscent of John of Salisbury's testimony that in 1156 he brought back from Pope Adrian 'a golden ring set with a fine emerald by which investiture of right to rule in Ireland should be made': *Iohannis Saresberiensis Metalogicon*, ed. J.B. Hall and K.S.B. Keats-Rohan (Turnhout, 1991), p. 183 (iv, 42).

94. Gerald of Wales, *Expugnatio Hibernica*, ed. Scott and Martin, pp. 98–9; *Pipe Roll 19 Henry II*, Pipe Roll Society, xix (1895), p. 145; Roger of Howden, *Gesta*, ed. Stubbs, i, pp. 101–3.

Lorcán also seems to have taken a special interest in Ruaidrí. In 1179, Lorcán stopped on the way to the Third Lateran Council in order to complain about the actions of Henry's officials in Ireland, one of whom, the lord of Meath (as the English ruler of Mide was known), was threatening the Uí Conchobair hegemony.⁹⁵ Lorcán returned from Rome later that year as *legatus natus* ('born/native legate') in Ireland, and used his power to proclaim the decrees of the Council at a synod at Clonfert. The location of the synod and its attendees have led Flanagan to suggest that it may have been intended to serve the sphere of influence allotted to Ruaidrí Ua Conchobair in the Treaty of Windsor, an idea that gains more traction when one considers that that same winter Lorcán consecrated Ruaidrí's nephew Tomaltach as archbishop of Armagh.⁹⁶ This was an unprecedented display of Connacht's influence on the primatial see, and denied Henry II the rights over episcopal appointments that he claimed in England and might have expected to wield in Ireland. Whether or not this led to the 'sudden and violent quarrel' that erupted between Ruaidrí and Henry II in early 1180, Lorcán once again rushed to England to act on Ruaidrí's behalf and was forbidden by Henry to return to Ireland until peace had been concluded. It was thus that Lorcán's peripatetic life ended later that year at Eu in Henry's duchy of Normandy, where he had only just negotiated a settlement.⁹⁷ By the time he was canonised in 1225, St Lorcán's *Vita* (written in Capetian-controlled Normandy) presented him as an Irish martyr-saint in the mould of St Thomas Becket, who had defended his people against the overbearing rule of Henry II.⁹⁸ This portrayal, though influential, does not adequately reflect the diplomatic profile that Lorcán maintained during the first decade of English rule in Ireland.

Unlike St Lorcán, Ailbe Ua Máel Muaid rose to prominence in post-invasion Ireland. As abbot of Baltinglass (Co. Wicklow), he clashed with Gerald of Wales at the 1186 Synod of Dublin, where Ailbe lamented a lack of chastity among the priests whom the English brought to Ireland, and Gerald accused the Irish clergy of drunkenness and negligence.⁹⁹ Ailbe was made bishop of Ferns (in Leinster) shortly thereafter and was one of three Irish bishops to attend King Richard's coronation in 1189, both of which suggest a willingness to

95. Roger of Howden, *Gesta*, ed. Stubbs, i, p. 221; *Pipe Roll 25 Henry II*, ed. J.H. Round, Pipe Roll Society, xxviii (1907), pp. 35, 120.

96. M.T. Flanagan, 'Laurence [St Laurence, Lorcán Ua Tuathail, Laurence O'Toole]', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, available at <https://doi-org.access.authkb.kb.nl/10.1093/ref:odnb/20934>; Flanagan, *Irish Society*, pp. 260–61.

97. C. Plummer, ed., 'Vie et miracles de St Laurent, archevêque de Dublin', *Analecta Bollandiana*, xxxiii (1914), pp. 121–86, at 152; Howden, *Gesta*, ed. Stubbs, i, p. 270; A. Gwynn, 'Saint Lawrence O'Toole as Legate in Ireland (1179–1180)', *Analecta Bollandiana*, lxxviii (1950), pp. 223–40, at 227–9.

98. Plummer, ed., 'Vie et miracles de St Laurent'.

99. Gerald of Wales, 'De Rebus a se Gestis', in *Giraldus Cambrensis Opera*, I, ed. J.S. Brewer (London, 1861), pp. 66–71.

work with the English.¹⁰⁰ Ailbe also enjoyed a close relationship with King John, who bestowed patronage upon him in England and sought to have him elevated to the sees of Cashel (1206) and Killaloe (1216).¹⁰¹ This royal favour was personal rather than institutional; when King John died, in October 1216, Ailbe was left exposed. The new regent of England during the minority of John's heir, Henry III, was William Marshal, earl of Pembroke and lord of Leinster. William had already been excommunicated by Ailbe for seizing lands from his diocese of Ferns (which lay within William's lordship of Leinster) and seems to have been less concerned than Henry II or John with co-opting Gaelic Irish bishops. On 17 January 1217, just three months after King John's death, William had Henry III decree that no Gaelic Irishman was 'to be elected or promoted in any cathedral church in our land of Ireland, as disturbance might thereby, God forbid, ensue in our land'. Instead, he ordered that only 'our clerics and other honest Englishmen useful to us and our kingdom be elected and promoted to sees and dignities when vacant'.¹⁰² English candidates had already obtained sees within areas of direct colonisation, but this was a blanket statement to be carried out throughout Ireland. It certainly stopped Bishop Ailbe from attaining Killaloe. Whatever individual Irish bishops had hoped to accomplish through their response to English rule, within decades of the Council of Cashel the royal government had signalled its intention to Anglicise the Irish episcopate.

One immediate consequence of the Irish Church's support for foreign rule was its rejection by certain sections of Gaelic Irish society. As we have seen, the Irish Church had been a conduit through which continental ideas stressing the centrality of secular rule to social order had made their way to Ireland. It was therefore with the Church's assistance, both ideological and administrative, that twelfth-century Irish kings had increased their legislative and executive powers.¹⁰³ However, following the English invasion, many local kings began to look to secular sources for their royal ideologies and personnel. Bardic poets, jurists and historians—men who had been removed from Church schools once the twelfth-century reforms began—became increasingly important in Gaelic Irish society as the Church-backed conquest progressed. This trend reached its apogee in the prophesied coming of Áed Eangach, a messianic figure who became popular in the early thirteenth century and inspired a recurring theme in bardic poetry throughout the Middle

100. Roger of Howden, *Gesta*, ed. Stubbs, ii, p. 79. The other Irish bishops were John Cumin, archbishop of Dublin, and Conn Ua Mellaig, bishop of Annaghdown (in Connacht).

101. *Rotuli Litterarum Patentium in Turri Londinensi Asservati*, ed. Thomas Duffus Hardy (London, 1835) [hereafter *Rot. Litt. Pat.*], pp. 61 (Cashel), 196 (Killaloe).

102. *Calendar of the Patent Rolls Preserved in the Public Record Office* [hereafter *CPR*]: *Henry III, 1216–1225*, (1901), pp. 22–3. For Ailbe and William's relationship, see J. Marshall, 'The Pope, a Knight and a Bishop on the Edge of Christendom: The Politics of Exclusion in Thirteenth-Century Ireland', *Irish Historical Studies*, xlvii (2023), pp. 175–91.

103. See section II above.

Ages. Áed was prophesied to drive the ‘foreigners’ from Ireland, restore the Gaelic kingship of Ireland, rebuild the walls of Tara and even bring back the druids in defiance of the Church.¹⁰⁴ The parallels with the Welsh hero Arthur are clear. As the English tightened their grip, such prophesies offered a focus for resistance, and hope to the conquered.

IV

Ireland, like Henry II’s other dominions (including England, Normandy, Anjou and Aquitaine), was personally subject to him rather than to a metropolitan government in England. Henry even did his best to ensure that a kingdom of Ireland would retain its political independence under his dynasty. Just two years after the Treaty of Windsor had been agreed, Henry assembled a council at Oxford in May 1177 to discuss a new direction for Ireland. Among other things, Roger of Howden reports that Henry appointed his youngest son John king of Ireland (‘constituit Johannem ... regem Hiberniae’), had the assembled colonial barons perform homage to John for their Irish lands, and wrote to the pope to license his coronation.¹⁰⁵ The grant of Ireland to John should certainly be viewed in the context of dynastic politics following the rebellion of Henry’s older sons in 1173–4, but it nevertheless indicated that the kingdom of Ireland was to be ruled by a cadet line.¹⁰⁶

Henry’s decision to preserve Ireland’s independence in this way tends to be overlooked by historians. One reason might be that the socio-political nexus connecting Ireland to the rest of the Angevin empire was not severed. Just as members of England’s political elite maintained interests in France long after 1066, so John and his leading Irish barons also held lands in England (and sometimes France).¹⁰⁷ Another issue is that John was never actually crowned king of Ireland, being forced instead to retain the pre-coronation title ‘lord of Ireland’ (*dominus Hibernie*) when his plans for a coronation came to nothing in 1185. However, Stephen Church has argued that the title ‘lord of Ireland’, like its equivalent ‘lord of England’, was sufficient to connote royal power without a coronation.¹⁰⁸ John’s accession in England in 1199 has also obscured his earlier conduct, since it once again brought

104. A.O. Anderson, ed. and tr., ‘The Prophecy of Berchán’, *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie*, xviii (1929/30), pp. 1–56; B. Ó Buachalla, ‘Aodh Eanghach and the Irish King-Hero’, in D. Ó Corráin, L. Breatnach and K. McCone, eds, *Sages, Saints and Storytellers: Celtic Studies in Honour of Professor James Carney* (Maynooth, 1990), pp. 200–232; Simms, *Kings to Warlords*, pp. 15, 26–7.

105. Roger of Howden, *Gesta*, ed. Stubbs, i, pp. 161–5.

106. For that context, see M. Strickland, *Henry the Young King, 1155–1183* (New Haven, CT, 2016), esp. pp. 206–38.

107. See C. Veach, ‘The Angevin Empire in Britain and Ireland’, in S.D. Church, M. Strickland and L. Cleaver, eds, *The Angevin World: New Interpretations* (Woodbridge, forthcoming).

108. S.D. Church, ‘Political Discourse at the Court of Henry II and the Making of the New Kingdom of Ireland: The Evidence of John’s Title *Dominus Hibernie*’, *History*, cii (2017), pp. 808–23.

both kingdoms under the rule of the same man. Nevertheless, Richard Daines's recent study of John's patronage and justice before 1199 shows that John claimed for himself the fullness of royal power in Ireland both before and after he became king of England.¹⁰⁹ Even the act by which Henry VIII was made 'king of Ireland' in 1541 claimed that it was merely coupling form to function:

Forasmuch as the King our most gracious dread sovereign lord, and his grace's most noble progenitors, Kings of England, have bin Lords of this land of Ireland, having all manner kingly jurisdiction, power, pre-eminences, and authoritie royall, belonging or appertayning to the royall estate and majestie of a King, by the name of Lords of Ireland, where the King's majestie and his most noble progenitors justly and rightfully were, and of right ought to be, Kings of Ireland, and so to be reputed, taken, named, and called.¹¹⁰

From 1177, John and his successors ruled as uncrowned kings of Ireland.

This is not to say that John was willing to accept his new kingdom as he found it. Dauvit Broun has shown that contemporary kings of Scots actively promoted their dynasty's Irish connections to acquire 'the legitimising lustre of ancient royalty',¹¹¹ but others were less impressed. For instance, Godfrey of Viterbo accepted that Ireland was a kingdom, but declared its history unworthy of mention as he traced the line of legitimate royal authority from the Trojans, through Charlemagne, to Henry VI: 'so far as the Rus', Scots, Slavs, Danes, Irish and Welsh, as well as Frisia and Iceland: their character and way of life does not merit that their history be considered along with the deeds and kingdoms of the greater kings'.¹¹² Having been granted Ireland in 1177, John spent his teenage years in the household of Henry II's great administrator, Ranulf de Glanville, learning the most up-to-date methods of governance. These practices were clearly seen as transferable to other kingdoms, because in 1181 Henry apparently suggested to the young King Philip II that his reign would benefit from applying them to France.¹¹³ Consequently, once John was given control of Ireland in 1185 (the same year Godfrey completed his *Memoria Seculorum*), he sought to consolidate his authority by bringing its administration and political culture into line with what he had learned in England.

109. R. Daines, 'A King in all but Name: John, *Dominus Hibernie, Frater Regis*, and Unconsecrated Rulership in Two Kingdoms, 1185–99' (Univ. of East Anglia Ph.D. thesis, 2019), pp. 291–9.

110. *The Irish Statutes: 3 Edward II to the Union, AD 1310–1800* (London, 1885), p. 13.

111. D. Broun, *The Irish Identity of the Kingdom of the Scots in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries* (Woodbridge, 1999), p. 132.

112. Godfrey of Viterbo, *Memoria seculorum*, ed. G. Waitz, MGH, SS, XXII (Hanover, 1872), p. 100, a reference I owe to David Crouch.

113. Ralph of Diss, *Opera Historica*, ed. Stubbs, ii, p. 8. See also J. Gillingham, 'Bureaucracy, the English State and the Crisis of the Angevin Empire', in P. Crooks and T.H. Parsons, eds, *Empires and Bureaucracy in World History: From Late Antiquity to the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, 2016), pp. 197–220.

Beginnings are discernible in John's earliest actions, but the process was given added impetus by his loss of Normandy to the king of France in 1204. The heart of his dynasty's Angevin empire had been torn out, so its insular realms were exploited to fund its recapture. England already had an administrative system geared towards extracting money for its kings, but from 1204 John set about replicating in Ireland the mechanisms for revenue extraction that he enjoyed in his other kingdom.¹¹⁴ Around the end of August 1204, John ordered the construction of a strong castle at Dublin. It was to house the treasury, act as the centre of governmental administration and protect the city if needed. Sheriffs accounted at a Dublin exchequer modelled on the one in Westminster, though at this early stage they still recorded many of their accounts in the Irish shorthand of 'cattle' (which might still stand for monetary payments).¹¹⁵ The shires of Ireland multiplied, covering much of the south and east of the island by the mid-thirteenth century. But their sheriffs were not just concerned with these territories, and their arrangements show the persistence of Irish political structures beyond areas of direct English control. For instance, sheriffs accounted for tribute paid by Irish kings outside the shire system, which was recorded in cattle even after the rest of their accounts had moved to pounds, shillings and pence.¹¹⁶ From 1204, Dublin was transformed into the centre of a devolved Irish administration, a little Westminster on the river Liffey.

Despite these measures, it was still possible that the kingdom of Ireland might develop its own governmental culture distinct from England. Another province of the Angevin empire, Gascony, witnessed a comparable level of administrative and financial Anglicisation in the upper echelons of its institutional framework, but retained its own laws, customs and patterns of local governance. However, unlike Gascony, Ireland witnessed a significant (albeit indeterminable) level of English settlement.¹¹⁷ As Robin Frame has argued, these settlers brought with them their own ideas about customary law.¹¹⁸ The initial wave of colonisation in Ireland had come from the Welsh March and its hinterlands—a borderland characterised in this period by aristocratic autonomy and hybrid laws and customs—and many of the greatest

114. C. Veach, 'King John and Royal Control in Ireland: Why William de Briouze Had To Be Destroyed', *English Historical Review*, cxxix (2014), pp. 1051–78, at 1057–78.

115. The contrast in accounting can be seen in the two Irish pipe rolls that survive in transcripts: Armagh Robinson Library, MS KH.II.24, pp 1–22, 'Irish Pipe Roll 14 John'; Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MS 12 D 9, 'Irish Pipe Roll 45 Hen III'. I am grateful to Daniel Booker for allowing me to see his digital images of the Armagh manuscript.

116. Armagh Robinson Library, MS KH.II.24, pp. 10, 20; Royal Irish Academy, MS 12 D 9, pp. 82–3.

117. A.C. Ruddick, 'Gascony and the Limits of Medieval British Isles History', in B. Smith, ed., *Ireland and the English World in the Late Middle Ages* (Houndmills, 2009), esp. pp. 77–8.

118. R. Frame, *The Political Development of the British Isles, 1100–1400* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 85–6.

barons of Ireland fashioned for themselves semi-independent lordships akin to those they knew in Wales. This is perhaps one reason why the near-contemporary verse chronicle known today as *La Geste des Engleis en Yrlande* downplayed the political unity of Ireland, stating 'in Ireland kings were as numerous as earls were elsewhere'.¹¹⁹ Written by and for those who had participated in the initial invasion of Leinster on behalf of Diarmait Mac Murchada, the *Geste* had no interest in subsuming its heroes' individual achievements within a larger 'kingdom of Ireland'. The lords of the Welsh March owed homage to the English king, but their lands were not part of his kingdom and their courts were more or less free from royal interference. Henry II reinforced a tendency towards aristocratic autonomy in Ireland by not reserving for himself pleas of the crown (nor, in some instances, ecclesiastical investiture and control of crosslands) in his chief grants, and it may be significant that he did not reference the *regnum Hibernie* in any of his charters relating to Ireland.¹²⁰ As in Wales, Henry seems to have allowed the growth of hybrid laws and legal procedures suited to the particular conditions of individual lordships.

Henry's son John was not the type of king to delegate power easily, and from 1185 he fought to claim some of the royal rights his father had granted away. One strategy was to reserve crown prerogatives in many of his new grants, making royal lordship in Ireland more like its English cousin.¹²¹ This Anglicisation of political culture within Ireland's settler community was made easier by those John chose to enfeoff. Among John's first grantees in the 1180s were men who had experience within the English royal administration as sheriffs or justices.¹²² In contrast to the initial colonists who had cut their teeth along the frontier in Wales, these men could be relied upon to import assumptions about law and governance that were akin to John's own and to implement them in practice. Thus, what might at first glance appear to have been a natural evolution, as 'the men who from 1169 crossed the Irish Sea brought with them their customary law as they brought their accustomed speech',¹²³ was instead part of a deliberate process of importation to provide John with the type of kingdom he had been taught to rule in the household of Ranulf de Glanville.

It is from this point that the great series of governmental enrolments commenced in England, so we can see that John's royal chancery routinely referred to the *regnum Hibernie*, its customs, the king's rights over it, and the

119. *Deeds of the Normans in Ireland*, ed. Mullally, ll. 2189–90.

120. See *The Letters and Charters of Henry II, King of England, 1154–1189*, ed. N. Vincent (6 vols, Oxford, 2020). Crosslands were ecclesiastical lands in Ireland subject to intervention by the sheriff to preserve the crown's rights.

121. M.T. Flanagan, 'Defining Lordships in Angevin Ireland: William Marshal and the King's Justiciar', in M. Aurell and F. Boutoulle, eds, *Les seigneuries dans l'espace Plantagenêt (c.1150–c.1250)* (Bordeaux, 2009), pp. 41–59, at 53–4; Daines, 'King in all but Name', ch. 3.

122. R. Frame, *Colonial Ireland, 1169–1369* (2nd edn, Dublin, 2012), p. 111.

123. G.J. Hand, *English Law in Ireland, 1290–1324* (Cambridge, 1967), p. 1.

place of Irish kings, prelates and colonial barons within it.¹²⁴ Furthermore, when in 1213 King John capitulated to Pope Innocent III following the interdict, he granted the pope 'totum regnum Anglie et totum regnum Hibernie' and received them back as papal fiefs.¹²⁵ The term 'terra Hibernie', like its parallel 'terra Anglie', was also used throughout the period to denote control over a similar whole. So, in a letter to the Irish justiciar on 30 June 1205, King John referred to both the peace of 'our land' (*terra nostre*) and services due from the 'kingdom of Ireland' (*regnum Hibernie*).¹²⁶ Similarly, the infamous letter of 17 January 1217 (discussed above) complained of the disturbed peace of 'our land of Ireland', and commanded that only Englishmen useful 'to us and our kingdom' be elected to Irish sees and dignities.¹²⁷ Even as late as 1235, when *regnum Hibernie* was becoming less common in chancery correspondence, Henry III referred to the tranquility of 'our land of Ireland', but then cited the custom in 'other kingdoms' (*alia regna*) as precedent for his corrective measures.¹²⁸

The change to an English-style kingdom could not be rushed initially, since it was at odds with the custom that had developed under Henry II, but John was able to use the crisis of 1204 to accelerate his plans while also raising money for his war chest. For instance, that year John called upon his colonial barons of Ireland to provide him with a tax in the form of a feudal aid. The language of the request suggests that John knew its novelty was likely to provoke a backlash, but John stressed the unprecedented nature of the catastrophe that the loss of Normandy represented, held up the generosity of his English barons who had already acquiesced as an example, and stressed that if granted the aid would be 'not out of custom, but out of friendship' (*non consuetudinarie sed amicabilem*).¹²⁹

124. For instance, *Rotuli Chartarum in Turri Londinensi Asservati*, ed. Thomas Duffus Hardy (London, 1837) [hereafter *Rot. Chart.*], p. 71 (the king's ability to regulate the *regnum Hibernie*); *Rotuli Litterarum Clausarum in Turri Londinensi Asservati*, ed. Thomas Duffus Hardy (2 vols, London, 1833–44) [hereafter *Rot. Litt. Claus.*], i, pp. 40 (*regnum Hibernie*), 376–7 (*regnum nostrum Hibernie*), 451 (*leges et consuetudines regni nostri*), 549 (*consuetudines regni nostri*), 570 (*regnum nostrum Hibernie*), ii, pp. 179 (bishop-elect of Meath is faithful to *regnum nostrum*), 186 (ecclesiastical election according to the *consuetudines regni*); *Rot. Litt. Pat.*, p. 61 (*regnum nostrum Hibernie*), 76b (the king's money of Ireland should be current *per totum regnum*); *Foedera*, ed. Thomas Rymer (4 vols, London, 1816–25), i, pt i, pp. 115 (*regnum Anglie et regnum Hibernie*), 181; *CPR*, 1216–1225, pp. 31 (*regnum nostrum Anglie et regnum nostrum Hibernie*), 50 (*regnum nostrum*), 86 (*consuetudines regni nostri*), 100 (the archbishop of Dublin is to attend the General Council in Rome *pro negociis nostris et regni nostri*), 191 (*status regnum Hibernie*), 295 (*regnum suum Hibernie*), 381 (licence to elect an archbishop of Cashel useful to *regnum nostrum*); *CPR*, 1225–1232 (1903), pp. 80 (letter from the pope asking the prelates of *regnum Hibernie* to grant Henry III a subsidy), 236–7 (*regnum nostrum Hibernie*); *Calendar of Close Rolls* [hereafter *CCR*], 1231–1234 (1905), p. 103 (the new Irish justiciar swears justice to all in the *regnum* according to the *consuetudines regni*); *CCR*, 1242–1247 (1911), pp. 196 (no damage should accrue to *regnum nostrum*), 432 (there is to be one justiciar in *regnum nostrum Hibernie* and his writs in the king's name shall run *per totum regnum*).

125. *Foedera*, ed. Rymer, i, pt i, pp. 111–12.

126. *Rot. Litt. Claus.*, i, p. 40.

127. *CPR*, 1216–25, p. 23. And see discussion in section III above.

128. *CCR*, 1231–34, p. 165.

129. *Rot. Chart.*, pp. 133–4; H.G. Richardson and G.O. Sayles, *The Irish Parliament in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, PA, 1952), p. 45.

Matters did not always proceed so smoothly. In 1207, John's attempts to create the shires of Limerick and Munster ran roughshod over the seigniorial rights of the lord of Limerick, William de Briouze, and the royal government's heavy-handed response to local protests provoked a full-blown baronial rebellion.¹³¹ The situation was such that it required a royal expedition to Ireland in 1210, during which John called English settlers and Irish kings to his banner, attacked, cowed or exiled his recalcitrant barons, and paraded his authority throughout the east of the island. Before mounting his expedition, John reasserted his authority by issuing a new Irish coinage, replete with symbols of royal authority, that was to run 'throughout the whole kingdom'.¹³² On the obverse, the coins displayed his royal title 'king of England' and bore John's crowned portrait with a sceptre and quatrefoil. This was a change from the title 'lord of Ireland' in previous mintings, and through it John demonstrated his power as king of England over the kingdom of Ireland. On the reverse, the pennies featured a crescent surmounted by an estoile, which in this period may have signified majesty.¹³³ Roger of Wendover reports that this new Irish coinage was held to the English standard so that 'the use of this money should be general both in England and in Ireland, and that the penny of either kingdom without distinction should be placed in his treasuries'.¹³⁴ Far from being a natural process, King John deliberately pressed Irish political society into an English mould.

Royal expeditions were by their nature rare (the next reigning English king to visit Ireland was Richard II in 1394), so John sought to ensure that his rights were maintained by a devolved Irish judicial system. As in other conquests, the first English colonists did not see fit to submit themselves to the pre-existing system of Irish law. The surviving evidence shows that some English legal procedures operated in Ireland as early as the 1190s, but their use seems to have been relatively *ad hoc*

131. Veach, 'King John', pp. 1060–69.

133. D.W. Dykes, 'King John's Irish Rex Coinage Revisited', *British Numismatic Journal*, xxiii–lxxxiv (2013–14), pp. 120–33, 90–100.

134. Roger of Wendover, *Flores Historiarum*, ed. Henry G. Hewlett, Rolls Series, lxxxiv (3 vols, 1886–89), ii, pp. 56–7.

or at the very least unstandardised. For instance, in 1200 John ordered that recognitions (local inquests into crime, misconduct, landholding, etc.) could only be held by his own courts, which implies that they had already been adopted by some like-minded English colonists. By contrast, the common law assizes, which included the writ of right and the possessory actions of *mort d'ancestor* and *novel disseisin*, had to be initiated by writs *de cursu* purchased from John's own chancery rather than within Ireland.¹³⁵ As John centralised royal authority in Dublin in 1204, he also devolved upon the Irish justiciar the authority to issue such writs and mandated that they run throughout 'our land and our jurisdiction of Ireland' (*terra nostra et potestas nostra Hibernie*).¹³⁶

John's triumphant expedition to Ireland in 1210 allowed him to go even further in transforming Ireland into an English-style kingdom. At a council at Dublin attended by his barons and more than twenty Irish kings, John proclaimed that 'English laws and customs' were to apply throughout Ireland and appointed 'sheriffs and other officers who would do justice to the people of that kingdom according to English law'.¹³⁷ The original order does not survive, but the register of writs John sent to Ireland shortly thereafter stated that 'we desire justice according to the custom of our kingdom of England to be shown to all in our kingdom of Ireland who complain of wrongdoing'.¹³⁸ The setting and language of John's pronouncement are significant, as is the fact that a letter patent from 1226 claims that John had extended English law to Ireland 'at the instance of the Irish' (*ad instantiam Hiberniensium*).¹³⁹ This seems a far cry from the legal apartheid one finds in the sources for fourteenth-century Ireland, and suggests that historians have been too willing to read the later evidence backwards.¹⁴⁰ The fragmentary record available for the early thirteenth century makes the situation difficult to reconstruct, but it should be remembered that the English claim to control all of Ireland assumed that the Gaelic Irish were part of its regnal community. The Treaty of Windsor (1175) had recognised Ruaidrí Ua Conchobair as Henry II's official (or 'under-king') regarding the Gaelic Irish, but since the treaty's failure John had established direct tenurial relationships with a number of Irish kings himself.¹⁴¹ This explains the government's periodic requests that those kings pay feudal taxation, but it also placed upon John and his successors the burden of their

135. P. Brand, 'Ireland and the Literature of the Early Common Law', *The Irish Jurist*, new ser., xvi (1981), pp. 95–113, esp. 98, 104–6; Daines, 'King in all but Name', pp. 291–9.

136. *Rot. Litt. Pat.*, p. 47b.

137. Roger of Wendover, *Flores Historiarum*, ed. Hewlett, ii, p. 56.

138. *Early Registers of Writs*, ed. E. De Haas and G.D.G. Hall (London, 1970), p. 1.

139. *CPR, 1225–1232*, p. 96.

140. For instance, A.J. Otway-Ruthven, 'The Native Irish and English Law in Medieval Ireland', *Irish Historical Studies*, vii (Mar. 1950), pp. 1–16.

141. *Rot. Litt. Claus.*, i, p. 62; *Misc. Irish Ann.*, p. 86, s.a. 1210. For an unsuccessful attempt, see *Histoire des ducs de Normandie et des rois d'Angleterre*, ed. Francisque Michel (Paris, 1840), pp. 112–14.

protection. Stephen Hewer's recent work on case law from the better-documented late thirteenth century suggests that by then (or perhaps *even then*) a significant number of the Gaelic Irish were able to participate in the legal and administrative system of the colony without having first obtained explicit grants of 'English law'.¹⁴² In the absence of further evidence, and taking his other post-1204 innovations into account, it is perhaps enough to suggest here that John hoped to furnish his kingdom of Ireland with a unitary legal system imported from England, which, as with his other reforms, began to transform Ireland into an English-style kingdom.

The reality was never going to be as black and white as the official pronouncement, but at least in theory there was to be no marcher hybridity, nor an independent body of Irish customary law. Paul Brand has charted the development of the colonial judiciary in Ireland, which, from 1210, was gradually brought ever closer to its English counterpart.¹⁴³ As one might expect, a number of its first appointees had judicial experience in England. Their Anglicising tendency was ameliorated somewhat, however, by the appointment of justices from the Dublin administration. As a result, although English common law was officially the only law in the courts of colonial Ireland, some deviation based on local conditions was allowed. Nevertheless, the king's court of Ireland that emerged in the 1220s was modelled on an ideal form of the royal court in England, and analogues to the judicial eyre, Common Bench and King's Bench evolved in Ireland by the mid-thirteenth century. All the while, ultimate control of these courts remained with the English government, and the King's Bench in England reserved the right to review their rulings. A similar process was undertaken with the creation of a colonial Irish chancery in the 1230s. As with the judiciary, the chancery had licence to act on its own, in this case issuing letters under the great seal of Ireland. But ultimate control remained with the government in England. Unfortunately, most of the Irish chancery material was destroyed in two great fires (in 1304 and 1922), but from what survives of fourteenth-century rolls, we can see that orders under the great seal of Ireland sat next to those issued by the great seal of England or the king's privy seal.¹⁴⁴ The thirteenth-century English kingdom exported its laws, institutions and political culture to Ireland, all the while retaining ultimate control of them. As Robin Frame has remarked, 'describing Ireland as a "dominion of the English crown"

142. S.G. Hewer, *Beyond Exclusion: Intersections of Ethnicity, Sex and Society under English Law in Medieval Ireland* (Turnhout, 2022), esp. ch. 2.

143. Brand, 'Ireland and the Literature of the Early Common Law'; P. Brand, 'The Birth and Early Development of a Colonial Judiciary: The Judges of the Lordship of Ireland, 1210–1377', in W.N. Osborough, ed., *Explorations in Law and History* (Blackrock, 1995), pp. 1–48.

144. R. Frame, 'Rediscovering Medieval Ireland: Irish Chancery Rolls', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, cxiii, section C (2013), pp. 193–217, at 206–7. The surviving records (which begin c.1244) have been digitised by the Irish Chancery Project, available at <https://virtualtreasury.ie/gold-seams/circle>.

begs questions in the late twelfth century; by the mid-thirteenth that is exactly how it was being described by contemporaries'.¹⁴⁵

V

What, then, of the Gaelic Irish? As we have seen, the changes wrought by John and his successors were not always welcomed by the colonial community, and even provoked a baronial rebellion requiring a royal expedition in 1210. Yet the rapid Anglicisation of Ireland's governing culture also posed unique challenges to those Irish kings whose structures of authority were undermined or co-opted by the invaders, and who had to adjust to a new lexical register and vocabulary of power. A useful example comes from a thirteenth-century legal treatise by Giolla na Naomh MacAodhagáin, a unique survivor of its type from this period.¹⁴⁶ The treatise was most likely a series of abridgements assembled to make the old seventh- and eighth-century law tracts intelligible to thirteenth-century legal students. MacAodhagáin included terminology borrowed from the English legal system such as *baránta* (Anglo-Norman *warantie*: 'guarantor'), *fin(n)é* (Anglo-Norman *visné*, *vigny*: 'jury') and *seinischal* (Anglo-Norman *seneschal*: 'steward'). *Baránta* and *seinischal* were offered as alternatives to pre-existing Irish terms, *urradh* and *maor* respectively, presumably because the loanwords had found currency among the Gaelic Irish through interaction with colonial systems. The term *fin(n)é*, however, had no direct Old Irish equivalent. Its inclusion was the result of the English jury system's influence on Irish methods for exculpating the accused.¹⁴⁷ MacAodhagáin also included modified versions of early Irish laws that suggest colonial influence. The *óglaigh* ('warrior/knight') was accorded a higher legal status than had been the case in early Irish law, which may show the influence of English knighthood. In the same paragraph, the *éiric* (body-fine) due for the illegitimate son of a king was lowered relative to his legitimate brethren. Since all sons, except those by slave women, had equal status in early Irish law, this suggests that, by the end of the thirteenth century, English notions of legitimacy had gained traction in Gaelic Ireland.¹⁴⁸

While English influence thus stretched into Gaelic-controlled Ireland, the most powerful Irish kings were pulled into the world of English high politics. Unsurprisingly, many seem to have struggled to make a place for themselves in the new colonial order while also projecting, and thus protecting, the ancient dignity of their dynasties

¹⁴⁵ Frame, 'Ireland within the Plantagenet Orbit', p. 31. For some consequences, see Frame, 'Exporting State and Nation', pp. 118–23; Lydon, 'Ireland and the English Crown', pp. 66–78.

¹⁴⁶ Giolla na Naomh MacAodhagáin, *The MacEgan Legal Treatise*, ed. F. Kelly (Dublin, 2020). This section is indebted to Fergus Kelly's forensic analysis of the treatise.

¹⁴⁷ MacAodhagáin, *MacEgan Legal Treatise*, pp. 3–5, 74, 84–7, 94–5, 104–5.

¹⁴⁸ MacAodhagáin, *MacEgan Legal Treatise*, pp. 26, 84–5, 127–8.

at home. This is reflected in the imagery used to display and constitute their authority. Through a study of (mostly later) seal matrices and funeral effigies, Freya Verstraten Veach has shown that Irish kings eventually adjusted their images to suit the new Anglicised norms.¹⁴⁹ Their seals, which were meant to be broadcast to the wider arena of Latin Europe, were single-sided and equestrian. They may have contained the title 'rex' in their legends, but the imagery was aristocratic rather than royal. Similarly, their funeral effigies contained the royal symbols of crown and sceptre (though, perhaps significantly, not the orb), but were otherwise not unlike contemporary aristocratic English examples. Both classes of image consciously mirrored English designs, and depicted Irish kings in the Frankish-style attire popular in England. We know that King John made gifts of seal matrices to other rulers such as the king of Norway, and that his son Henry III may have done the same for a Welsh prince of Gwynedd, so it is tempting to speculate that they might have done so for Irish kings as well.¹⁵⁰

Having entered into a dependent relationship with the king of England, Irish kings had too much to lose to risk direct action against him. For instance, when King John travelled to Ireland in 1210, a number of Irish kings gathered to serve in his royal army, with at least one, Donnchad Cairprech Ua Brian, being knighted in the process.¹⁵¹ If John's mismanagement of the situation led to open conflict with Connacht and the northern kingdom of Tír Eógain in 1211, that at least did not stop even more Irish kings joining the royal army that marched against the rebel earl of Ulster in 1224.¹⁵² Meanwhile, the Gaelic Irish were among the few groups who decided not to rebel during the Magna Carta civil war of 1215–17. This maintenance of fidelity is all the more remarkable since the colony's defences were weakened by heavy recruitment for the war in England. Ruaidrí Ua Conchobair's brother, Cathal Crobderg, was an obvious focus for concerted resistance, and contemporary bardic poetry suggested that he might reclaim the kingship of Ireland or at least drive out the English.¹⁵³ But King John co-opted Cathal by offering him a charter for the province of Connacht. This provided Cathal with a legal title in the new formalised language of authority that was enforceable in

149. F. Verstraten [Veach], 'Images of Gaelic Lordship in Ireland, c.1200–c.1400', in L. Doran and J. Lyttleton, eds, *Lordship in Medieval Ireland: Image and Reality* (Dublin, 2007), pp. 47–71. See also F. Verstraten [Veach], 'The Anglicisation of the Gaelic Irish Nobility, c.1169–c.1366' (University of Dublin Ph.D. thesis, 2008).

150. D. Crouch, *The Image of Aristocracy in Britain, 1000–1300* (London, 1992), p. 246.

151. *Misc. Irish Annals*, p. 86, s.a. 1210.

152. S. Duffy, 'John and Ireland: The Origins of England's Irish Problem', in S.D. Church, ed., *King John: New Interpretations* (Woodbridge, 1999), pp. 221–45, at 242; Veach, *Lordship in Four Realms*, pp. 205–6.

153. B. Ó Cuív, 'A Poem Composed for Cathal Croibhdhearg Ó Conchubhair', *Ériu*, xxxiv (1983), pp. 157–74 (text at 161–71); *Irish Bardic Poetry: Texts and Translations*, ed. O. Bergin (Dublin, 2003), pp. 104–7 (text), 259–63 (translation).

the colonial courts. If that were not enough, at the same time John made a similar grant of Connacht to the colonial baron Richard de Burgh, but left it unactivated.¹⁵⁴ Since Cathal's charter stated that he held Connacht 'during pleasure', he could be stripped of it for bad behaviour. Both of these charters were issued on the same day that John informed the pope of the resumption of civil war in England following Magna Carta, so their peace-keeping purpose was clear. One might well wonder what would have happened if Cathal had not taken the king's charter, but take it he did.

The flipside of protection was fidelity, and the sword of royal justice cut both ways. So, when in 1227 King Henry III's government, headed by Richard de Burgh's uncle Hubert, decided to reverse course and activate Richard's charter for Connacht, Cathal's son Áed Ua Conchobair was hauled before the colonial court in Dublin for breaching the charter's terms.¹⁵⁵ Richard's conquest of Connacht was thus legitimised in a royal court. Nevertheless, later Irish kings followed Cathal's lead in establishing formal tenurial relationships with the king of England, and for similar reasons. Áed Ua Conchobair's younger brother Feidlim even travelled to Henry III's court in England and served in an English royal army in Wales.¹⁵⁶ Irish kings could not afford to defy the English king while ambitious English courtiers eyed their territories and dynastic rivals threatened to challenge their authority from within. When concerted resistance finally came in the 1250s, it involved a Janus-faced approach. In order to retain their lands and rights, Irish kings had to maintain a show of fidelity to the English king. In order to preserve their dynasties' authority over disgruntled populations, their sons had to champion local resentment.¹⁵⁷ As national sentiment grew in both Ireland and England, the task of facing both directions became increasingly difficult.

It was amidst this rising tide of Gaelic Irish resistance that in 1254 King Henry III granted Ireland to his 14-year-old son and heir, Edward. Henry's aim, however, was not to emulate his namesake Henry II's bestowal of an independent kingdom upon his own son John. Edward's charter was for a large portfolio of lands, including Ireland and Gascony, which were to be held 'on condition that they never be separated from the crown of England ... but that they remain wholly to the kings of England for ever'.¹⁵⁸ Ireland, already dependent upon England for its laws, administration, coinage and political culture, was for the first time formally—and permanently—tied to the English crown.

154. *Rot. Chart.*, pp. 218–19.

155. Veach, *Lordship in Four Realms*, pp. 208–11.

156. F. Verstraten [Veach], 'Both King and Vassal: Feidlim Ua Conchobair of Connacht, 1230–65', *Journal of the Galway Archaeological and Historical Society*, lv (2003), pp. 13–37, at 22–3.

157. R. Frame, 'King Henry III and Ireland: The Shaping of a Peripheral Lordship', in R. Frame, ed., *Ireland and Britain, 1170–1450* (London, 1998), pp. 31–57.

158. *Foedera*, ed. Rymer, i, pt i, p. 270.

The writing of history is not a neutral exercise. Faced with the task of reconstructing the past from its residue, historians are asked to make connections, offer meaning and draw conclusions from imperfect data. As we have seen, historians writing in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were wont to interpret the medieval English conquest of Ireland in the light of the imperial ventures of their own times, and to characterise pre-invasion Ireland as lacking political stability. A number of modern studies continue to locate medieval Ireland and England at separate points on a teleological (not to mention anachronistic) progression towards modernity, or to use the model of twelfth-century England to downplay Ireland's socio-political structures. In this way, Anglo-Irish historiography is still haunted by the spectre of Britain's former empire and its self-aggrandising Victorian constitution.

I have tried to meet these problems head-on by exploring how an approach to pre-invasion Ireland that does not measure it against England allows us to frame the relationship between these two realms in a new way. Pre-conquest Ireland had a fully functioning political system. From at least the seventh century, Irish intellectuals constructed a set of ideologies that held the island to be under a single king (sometimes an emperor) supported by under-kings. This patchwork composition was not unique in medieval Europe, and continued to evolve as the Irish Church drew upon political theories from the Continent. Recognising this has also cast light on the process by which English expectations regarding the proper organisation of a kingdom led Ireland, step by step, from a clear assumption of independence to an explicit relationship of dependence. When King Henry II contemplated an Irish expedition, first in 1155 and then in 1171, the entire kingdom of Ireland formed the object of his ambition. This is significant. Henry was perfectly willing to conquer smaller polities, such as Brittany or Toulouse in France, and could have contented himself with Leinster and the Hiberno-Scandinavian cities in Ireland. When he finally set foot on the island, however, Henry's takeover was presented in terms of the kingship of Ireland, and was facilitated by one of its main supports, the Irish Church. The claim to island-wide rule was made explicit in 1177, when Henry granted the kingdom to his youngest son John. Although he was never to wear the crown of peacock feathers sent by the pope, as lord of Ireland John set about creating a kingdom that was aligned to the theories of governance he had learned from England's chief administrator. Some colonists had already imported their own patterns of lordship to Ireland, so one of the drivers of Irish history from that point on was the interplay between private endeavour and royal state-building.

Ireland's relationship with England was further complicated by John's accession as king of England in 1199, and his response to the

crisis of 1204 accelerated the change. Dublin was established as the centre of a devolved administration, while local customs were pushed aside to make way for the new reality. This provoked a colonial rebellion in 1207, but also made life increasingly difficult for the Gaelic Irish. Yet even as Ireland was bound more firmly to England, the idea of a kingdom of Ireland was preserved. It underlay the emerging community of the realm of Ireland, which was headed by an expanding colonial Irish peerage and found voice in the Irish parliaments of the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Indeed, it is no accident that calls for home rule in Ireland from the fifteenth to the twentieth centuries almost always had a strong colonial element to them.¹⁵⁹ All of that being said, when in 1254 Henry III declared that Ireland should always remain with the crown of England he was simply stating what would have been obvious to contemporaries. As Ireland was equipped with the trappings of an English-style kingdom, it was reduced to an English colony.

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159. P. Crooks, 'Representation and Dissent: "Parliamentarianism" and the Structure of Politics in Colonial Ireland, c.1370–1420', *English Historical Review*, cxxv (2010), pp. 1–34.