

A sixteenth century bardic poem composed for Seán Mac Conmara, Lord of West *Clann Chuiléin*¹

The corpus of bardic poetry that has survived the collapse of the Gaelic order consists of some two thousand poems, now catalogued as part of the Trinity College initiative known as the Irish Bardic Poetry Database.² Irish bardic poems are unique in historical sweep and purpose and also their discipline in terms of complexity of composition and regulated metre. Medieval and early modern Ireland was a divided polity where Gaelic lordships existed alongside the palatinate territories of Anglo-Irish lords, and where a gradation of ‘Gaelicisation’ penetrated deep into the latter territories. This resulted in a mixed culture that appreciated – and used – Gaelic concepts of law, kinship and literature.³ In Gaelic regions, it was the secular hereditary bardic families that ran schools of history and poetry and sought the patronage of the ruling lineages.

In a society where lineage and status were important qualifiers for land and power, the preoccupation with poetry crafted to assert one’s lineage rights over subordinate vassal-septs was an important reason why patronage of bardic families was an essential requisite of any ambitious Gaelic lord. This paper concentrates on the late sixteenth century bardic poem *Créd fá seachnaim síol Aodha?* composed by Domhnall Ó Maoilchonaire for his patron Seán Mac Conmara, Lord of West *Clann Chuiléin*. It was possibly written as an inauguration ode in the early 1570s for Seán.

The Mac Conmara of West *Clann Chuiléin* were the lineal descendants of the Uí Chaisín kings of east Clare and had their principal residence at Dangan (*Daingean Uí Bhigín*) tower-house north-east of Quin village.⁴ This paper will give an overview of the role of bardic poetry in late medieval Ireland as well as glean information on the bardic families settled in Thomond. The paper also offers an approximate translation, with notes, of this previously unpublished poem.

Role of the Bardic Poet in Gaelic Ireland

A survey of Gaelic Ireland in the sixteenth century would note several concurrent trends. First, the beginning of centralization under the Tudor State undermined the nature of Gaelic lordship as Tudor officials aimed to anglicize and conquer self-governing Gaelic territories. Second, the Anglo-Irish lordships shared much in common with their Gaelic neighbours and borrowed cultural elements from them, including methods of warfare and administration, and patronage of the Gaelic learned class.⁵

¹ The author would like to acknowledge the detailed and insightful advice during the preparation of the article by Prof. Pádraig Ó Riain, Dr Michelle O Riordan, Dr Eoghan Ó Raghallaigh, Brian Ó Dálaigh, Donel De Barra, Katharine Simms, Martin Breen and Risteárd Ua Cróinín. The author also thanks Prof. Damian McManus for supplying the edited version of the poem.

² The database can be accessed at <http://bardic.celt.dias.ie> and is the work of Dr Katharine Simms, Department of History, Trinity College Dublin.

³ On a discussion of shared characteristics of Gaelic and Anglo-Irish lordships see Kenneth W. Nicholls, “Worlds apart? The Ellis two-nation theory on late medieval Ireland”, *History Ireland*, Vol. 7 No.2, 1999, pp.22-26. On Anglo-Norman patronage of poets see Katharine Simms, “Bards and Barons: The Anglo-Irish Aristocracy and the Native Culture”, *Medieval Frontier Societies*, Robert Bartlett and Angus MacKay (eds), Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1989, pp.177-197.

⁴ R.W. Twigge, “Edward White’s Description of Thomond in 1574”, *North Munster Antiquarian Journal*, Vol.1. No.2. 1910, pp.75-85, p.79. Seán Mac Conmara also held Knappogue castle. On the territory and political-economy of the West *Clann Chuiléin* lordship that was contemporaneous with the poem see Luke McNerney, “The West *Clann Chuiléin* Lordship in 1586: Evidence from a Forgotten Inquisition”, *North Munster Antiquarian Journal*, Vol. 48, 2008, pp.33-62.

⁵ According to S.J. Connolly, the pragmatic adoption of Irish customs by Anglo-Irish lords such as the employment of Gaelic poets, and genealogists, and the adoption of Irish local traditions of hospitality and feasting were means of acquiring status. S.J. Connolly, *Contested Island: Ireland 1460-1630*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007, p.35.

The third trend is that the nature of Gaelic lordships were evolving and refashioned in the face of threats from the Tudor State, from long-term contacts with Anglo-Irish territories and historic exposure to continental culture. In addition, the underlying structural shifts in economic activity and modes of governance that can be characterized as hybrid-feudalism were established in Gaelic lordships.⁶

A distinctive element of organisation in Gaelic and Gaelicised lordships was the role of kinship in structuring relationships. The term ‘lineage society’ could be used to characterise the dominance of a political elite, defined by their reputed descent from a common ancestor. The Gaelic elite – members of landed lineage groups – controlled land and resources through a mix of military power and webs of dependence with lesser lineages.⁷ In Gaelic lordships a line was drawn between aristocratic lineages and the majority; it was only the former that the poets eulogized and for whom they plied their skills.⁸ By the sixteenth century much of this distinctiveness remained, not least the hereditary prerogative vested in particular families to provide valuable skills to the ruling lineage.

The bardic poet was part of the educated *literati* of his day, and by the sixteenth century most noble Gaelic families patronised a hereditary poetic family. The career of the secular hereditary poets consisted of intense training in order to be considered accomplished and a premium was attached to mastery of *dán díreach*, or straight verse, where the elaborate pattern of rhymes corresponded fully, and alliteration and syllable count remained strictly regular. For the most part the language used by the medieval bardic poets was classical early modern Irish (c.1200-c.1650) and had a fixed vocabulary and grammar which was used throughout Ireland and Gaelic speaking Scotland; it was the literary language of the learned classes, and poets were required to master the sophisticated rhyming scheme to compose poetry.⁹

Leading poets rarely composed for any except the most powerful patrons and while poets were protected by powerful social taboos—as a hereditary caste that wielded a measure of social power over the behavior of their patrons—they sometimes came under attack for ridiculing powerful lords.¹⁰

⁶ On elements of feudalism in the lordships of Thomond see Patrick Nugent, “The dynamics of parish formation in high medieval and late medieval Clare”, in *The Parish in Medieval and Early Modern Ireland*, Elizabeth Fitzpatrick & Raymond Gillespie (eds), Four Courts Press, Dublin, 2005, pp.186-208. The term ‘hybrid-feudalism’ refers to feudal practices in Gaelic lordships and the existence of a system of regulated exchange, alongside traditional concepts of kinship. These trends were in place in the high middle ages in Gaelic lordships and manifested themselves in the patronage of churches and religious houses, the increased use of primogeniture inheritance and the sub-infeudation of tenant-septs. On the use of the charter in Irish landholding and its feudal implications see Marie Therese Flanagan, *Irish Royal Charters: Texts and Contexts*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2005.

⁷ The fiction of a shared pedigree between dominant clans and subordinate vassal-septs was invoked to support patron-client dependency and a hierarchical social structure. Despite the ideology of kinship which defined the patrimonial inheritance of septs, there was a constant emplacement of weaker vassal-septs by the proliferate branches of the chiefly lineage who expanded beyond the limit of the ruling lineage’s mensal lands.

⁸ S.J. Connolly, *Contested Island: Ireland 1460-1630*, p.11.

⁹ On the professional bardic poet’s extensive training and dexterity of language see Brian Ó Cuív, “The Linguistic Training of the Medieval Irish Poet”, *Celtica*, Vol.10, 1973, pp.114-140. For further information on poets and lawyers see David Green, “The Professional Poets”, in Brian Ó Cuív, *Seven Centuries of Irish Learning 1000-1700*, Stationery Office, Dublin, 1961, pp.45-57. On lawyers and chroniclers see D.A. Binchy “Lawyers and Chroniclers” in Brian Ó Cuív (ed.), *Seven Centuries of Irish Learning 1000-1700*, Mercier Press, Cork, 1971, pp.58-86 and Katharine Simms, ‘The Poetic Brehon Lawyers of the early sixteenth century Ireland’, *Eriu*, Vol.57, 2007, pp.121-132.

¹⁰ The infamous lampooning poetry of Aenghus Ó Dálaigh was repaid by a servant of the Gaelic lord, Ó Meachair, who stabbed the poet to death at a banquet in Tipperary in revenge for a satire on his master’s hospitality. Poet Tadhg Dall Ó hUiginn reputedly had his tongue cut out after he offended members of the Ó hEadhra lineage. See John O’Donovan (ed) *The Tribes of Ireland: A Satire by Aenghus O’Daly*, (1852), re-print Cork, 1976 p.23 & p.85. Bernadette Cunningham & Raymond Gillespie, *Stories from Gaelic Ireland: Microhistories from the sixteenth-century Irish annals*, Four Courts Press, Dublin, 2003, p.56.

The bardic poet was held in high esteem and wielded almost priestly powers; the verses of a poet were believed to have the power to curse and kill and poets were said to have recourse to powers of divination.¹¹ This mysticism that surrounded poets also extended to their exalted position in society where they were frequently immune from tribute to a local lord and held a status equal to that of the clergy – sacred personages against whom any violation was a serious crime. A noted example of this was the plundering of the territory of Maoilín Óg Mac Bruaideadha, professional historian (*seanchaidhe*) to the O'Briens. Mac Bruaideadha complained to Aodh O'Donnell, Lord of Tír Chonaill, that when O'Donnell's troops plundered northern Thomond in 1599 they had carried off his cattle. The Irish annals record that O'Donnell had Mac Bruaideadha's possessions restored to him, earning a poetic quatrain from the poet which sympathetically treated the Thomond raid as historic revenge for the demolition of Grianán Ailigh by the great-grandson of Brian Boru in 1101. The cosmopolitan culture of the learned classes in Ireland was such that respect for their position resonated far wider than their immediate lordship.¹²

There were differing classes of poets with 'rhymer' known in sixteenth century English sources as the professional poets who composed for Gaelic lords. An inferior class generally referred to as 'bards' existed as reciters and attendants to the professional 'rhymer'.¹³ It was the professional bardic poet – and often those who attained the learned position of *ollamh* – who received high reward for their art. In an address to his patron Aodh Mág Uidhir in the 1580s, Eochaidh Ó hEodhusa set down the rights of an *ollamh* which included "a quiet estate in perpetuity, rent free" and "possession of an estate beside your [Mág Uidhir's] own dwelling".¹⁴ Clearly, the position of *ollamh* commanded much wealth, and in the mid-sixteenth century Mac Diarmada lordship in north Connacht, poets received 1,200 cows for their services. It should be noted, however, that the poet's art was not purely commercial or aesthetic, but valuable in the context of 'cultural capital' that it conferred on aristocratic patrons.¹⁵

Many of the great bardic families had a long pedigree stretching back, in the case of the north Munster Mac Craith family, to the eleventh century.¹⁶ The well-known bardic families of medieval Ireland included the Uí Dhálaigh family of Meath, Uí Uiginn of Sligo, Uí Chuill of Munster, Mac an Bhaired of Donegal, Mac Con Midhe of Tyrone, Uí Eodhusa of Fermanagh, Uí Shléibhín of Ulster, and Uí Ghnínmh of Antrim. The cosmopolitan nature of the professional poets meant that they travelled throughout Ireland and became attached to the courts of Gaelic families and established schools of law and poetry. After the twelfth century church reform the hereditary bardic-poets (*fili*) lost their connection to the ecclesiastical schools as the continental religious orders took over instruction of their novices, and so the

¹¹ In a treaty dated 1547 between Manus O'Donnell and his vassal O'Connor of Sligo, the satire of the poets was treated as a sanction equivalent to excommunication. Poetical satire and the dignity of the bardic class were regarded as a serious matter, on terms equal to the grades of dignity associated with the church. James Carney, *The Irish Bardic Poet*, Dublin, 1967, (re-print 1985), p.12.

¹² *Annals of the Four Masters sub anno 1599*. Maoilín Óg Mac Bruaideadha was subsequently recorded in the same source as dying in 1602 and his patrimony can be identified at Ballyogan in Kilraghtis parish. Maoilín Óg Mac Bruaideadha is identified by the antiquarian R.W. Twigge as the author of RIA Ms 23.H.22 which was copied in 1803 from the genealogical roll written in c.1588 by Maoilín Óg. This roll recounts the genealogy of lineages that comprised the Uí Chaisín. See R.W. Twigge, *Materials for a History of Clann Cuilein*, Add Ms 39266, British Library, Twigge Collection, p.315 & p.317.

¹³ Kenneth W. Nicholls, *Gaelic and Gaelicised Ireland in the Middle Ages*, Lilliput Press, Dublin, 2003, pp.93-94.

¹⁴ James Carney, *The Irish Bardic Poet*, p.24.

¹⁵ Bernadette Cuninghame & Raymond Gillespie, *Stories from Gaelic Ireland: Microhistories from the sixteenth-century Irish annals*, p.51. I have borrowed the term 'cultural capital' from this work.

¹⁶ Kenneth W. Nicholls, *Gaelic and Gaelicised Ireland in the Middle Ages*, p.92.

production of genealogies and poetry, and the study of *seanchas* and customary law, were continued in the secular schools that were established at least as early as the fourteenth century and functioned down to the seventeenth century.¹⁷

In the late middle ages the learned families of Uí Mhaoilchonaire, Uí Chléirigh and Uí Dhubhagáin produced genealogical and historical books which resonated an earlier tradition of ecclesiastical and secular learning inherited from the monastic scribes of the twelfth century and earlier.¹⁸ These books included the well-known Great Book of Lecan (*Leabhar Mór Leacain*) (c.1397), the Book of Ballymote (*Leabhar Bhaile an Mhóta*) (c.1390) and the ‘Speckled Book’ (*Leabhar Breac*) (c.1410). This renewed vigour and outpouring of literary material must have been partly drawn from cross-fertilisation of literary pursuits between the secular hereditary poetic families and the newly established continental religious orders.

The introduction of the Franciscans in Ireland and their rapid diffusion into Gaelic regions from the mid-thirteenth century, naturally drew on recruitment from the learned Gaelic families. A manuscript written in a Franciscan house in Clare (probably at Quin Friary or Ennis Friary) in c.1454 contains matter in Latin, Irish and a fragment in English and was possibly composed by an ecclesiastical scribe with a connection to one of the learned families.¹⁹ One historian has suggested that certain sections of the *Caithréim Thoirdhealbhaigh*, and the Latin section of the annals of Inisfallen for the period 1311-1319, may have been drawn from annals compiled under Mac Conmara patronage at the Franciscan house at Ennis in the fourteenth century.²⁰ The literary world of the Gaelic Irish was enriched by the interaction of the secular hereditary poetic families and the church; the latter particularly benefitting from recruitment into religious houses by members of these families.²¹

The patronage of poetic families by noble Gaelic lineages and the production of sophisticated poems formed a corpus of literary invention that found expression in genealogies, devotional books, eulogies and historic annals. Bardic poetry expressed the Gaelic lords’ assertion of suzerainty over vassal-septs and was intimately intertwined with historical justification of lordship, imbued in language that affirmed kinship ties and links to the territorial sovereignty of a ruling lineage. Often the poet would urge his

¹⁷ See Seán Duffy (ed) *et. al.*, *Medieval Ireland: An Encyclopedia*, Routledge, New York, 2005, p.35.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.100.

¹⁹ The fifteenth century ‘Gaelic revival’ saw monastic houses of the continental orders produce various manuscripts that drew on European learning and ideas. This manuscript, compiled at a Franciscan house in Clare (MS TCD F.5.3), is representative of this outpouring of religious scholarship and, in this particular instance, developed under the patronage of the Uí Bhriain kings of Thomond. Robin Flower, *The Irish Tradition*, pp.122-123.

²⁰ Aoife Nic Ghiollamhaith, “Kings and Vassals in Later Medieval Ireland: The Uí Bhriain and the MacConmara in the Fourteenth Century”, *Colony and Frontier in Medieval Ireland*, Essays Presented to J. F. Lydon, eds., Terry Barry, Robin Frame & Katharine Simms, Hambledon Press, London, 1995, pp.201-216, p.203. The coarb and erenagh lineages also served as *literati* families and enjoyed quasi-clerical status. Many church lands in West *Clann Chuiléin* were monastic lands attached to religious houses and the termon lands distributed amongst parishes and vested under the bishopric of Killaloe. On some of the termon lands of these parishes see Luke McInerney, “Clerics and Clansmen: The Vicarages and Rectories of *Tradraighe* in the Fifteenth Century”, *North Munster Antiquarian Journal*, Vol, 48, 2008, pp.1-21, footnote 53.

²¹ The shared cultural and linguistic characteristics of Ireland and western Scotland facilitated cross-fertilisation of ideas and travel not just for ecclesiasts, but also the professional families. In the early thirteenth century we find members of the Uí Dhálaigh plying their talents in western Scotland. Muireadhach Ó Dálaigh, who travelled through Scotland on his way to Levant as part of the Fifth Crusade, and who is credited with founding the Scottish bardic lineage, the MacVurichs, is a case in point. Robin Flower, *The Irish Tradition*, pp.86-87.

aristocratic patron to act, whether it be a cattle raid to demonstrate his martial prowess or patronage of learned families.²² In both cases the poet was operating in a system of traditional values that sanctioned certain behaviour and can be, in part, divined from the surviving works of bardic poetry.²³

Specific themes can be distilled from bardic poems such as when poems acted as advice pieces to their patrons or subtly derided a patron's new alliance or behavior.²⁴ Poems also explored the political theme of the historical right to claim the High Kingship of Ireland. This was the subject of around thirty poems in an exchange known as the 'Contention of the Bards' from 1616-1624.²⁵ Bardic poetry was not simply a written expression of archaic themes that sought parallels for contemporary happenings in the distant past and mythology, but evolved to present a mix of historical example with contemporary concern on events and problems.

Servants of Gaelic lords, including poets, were said to possess the power to curse and foment rebellion, making them a target for arrest and execution by English officials.²⁶ Examples can be identified amongst sixteenth century official proclamations to "punish by death or otherwise...harpers, rhymers, bards...as have not their master's bill to show whose men they are", or so read a proclamation for County Kildare dated 5 November, 1571.²⁷ In 1589 we read a complaint written in Irish by Conaire Ó Maoilchonaire of Ard Kyle to Donough O'Brien, fourth Earl of Thomond, which stated his grievance of being arrested and forced to seek a pardon under the auspices of Gaelic magnate, Mac Giolla Pádraig of Ossory.²⁸

In the Mac Conmara lordship four praise poems written by secular hereditary poets have survived, and eulogize Clann Mhic Chonmara. These poems include two early seventeenth century poems: *Buaine iná a aois iomrádh Taidhg* ('Permanent beyond his era is the fame of Taidhg') composed by the Ulster poet Somhairle Mac an Bhaird (Ms RIA 710), and *Rug cabhair ar Chloinn gCoileáin* ('He gave help to Clann Choileáin') composed by Maolmhuire Ó Móirín (Ms RIA 710); a late sixteenth century poem that is the subject of this article: *Créd fa seachnaim Siol Aodha?* ('Why do I avoid the descendants of Aodh?') composed by Domhnall Ó Maoilchonaire (Ms RIA 784); and a late fourteenth century poem *Coin airdfhiaidhigh Clann Choileáin* ('Excellent hunting hounds, the Clann Choileáin') composed by Eoghan Mac Craith (Ms RIA 710). What survives of the corpus of bardic poetry and genealogies is but a fraction

²² On cattle raiding and generosity to the learned classes see Bernadette Cuninghame & Raymond Gillespie, *Stories from Gaelic Ireland: Microhistories from the sixteenth-century Irish annals*, pp.32-33. It is suggested that the number of cattle seized in a raid was a specific quantity indicating a forced tribute, symbolic of extending the lordship of the ruling lineage. Poets and other learned men were often the beneficiaries of these seizures and incited their patrons to carry out raids to assert lineage rights and seek honour and status.

²³ Michelle O Riordan, *The Gaelic Mind and the Collapse of the Gaelic World*, Cork University Press, Cork, 1990, p.10.

²⁴ See, for example, the poem composed in c.1580 to Donough O'Brien, fourth Earl of Thomond, probably by Tadhg Mac Bruaideadha entitled *Mór atá ar theagasc flatha* ('A major task to instruct a prince').

²⁵ On the contention see Lambert McKenna, (ed.) *Iomarbhágh na bhfileadh: the contention of the bards. 2 pts.* Irish Texts Society, Dublin, Vols 20 & 21, 1918.

²⁶ David Edwards, "Two fools and a martial law commissioner: cultural conflict at the Limerick assize of 1606", in *Regions and Rulers in Ireland: 1100-1650: Essays for Kenneth Nicholls*, David Edwards (ed.), Four Courts Press, Dublin, 2004, pp.237-265, p.250. It had become necessary from the 1580s for patrons to issue passports and signed passes to protect Gaelic poets from English officials who either killed or held poets for ransom under the pretence of anti-vagrancy and martial laws.

²⁷ *The Irish Fiant of the Tudor Sovereigns: During the Reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI, Phillip & Mary, and Elizabeth I*, Éamonn de Búrca Publisher, Dublin, 1994, Fiant No.1845.

²⁸ Brian Ó Dálaigh, "The Uí Mhaoilchonaire of Thomond", *Studia Hibernica*, No.35, 2008-09 [forthcoming]. Also cited in Paul Walsh, "A Pretty Pair of Ruffians", in *Irish Chiefs and Leaders*, Sign of the Three Candles Publishing, Dublin, 1960, pp.285-6.

of what was written; it is no surprise that neglect, political instability and the deliberate targeting of Gaelic manuscripts by English soldiers reduced an extensive record to a fragment of its former scope.²⁹

Bardic Families of Late Medieval Thomond

The bardic poets of Thomond experienced difficulty in the sixteenth century. Aside from English proclamations against the poets (such as the anti-poet statute of 1549) in 1572 Conor O'Brien, third Earl of Thomond, executed three poets connected to the dynastic house of O'Donnell of Tír Chonaill. The act was viewed by the Irish annalist who recorded it as "treacherous" and was the "cause of satire and malediction to the Earl".³⁰

Little is known about the motivation of the Earl who did not abandon the traditional patronage of men of learning. This is true of the Mac Bruaidealha poets and chroniclers who acted as his court poets and may have been active in the upbringing of Conor's anglicized and Protestant son, Donough O'Brien, the fourth Earl of Thomond.³¹ Tadhg Mac Bruaidealha probably composed an inaugural ode for Donough in 1580 titled *Mór atá ar theagasc flatha* ('A major task to instruct a prince') and despite Donough's anglicizing policies and his position as the principal Gaelic loyalist in North Munster, he maintained court poets until his death in 1624.³² Donough's attachment to Gaelic culture is difficult to ascertain as his will does not mention any of the hereditary professional families.³³ The consolidation of his Thomond estates disenfranchised the Mac Conmara and other freeholders who sought legal redress against their hereditary lands being absorbed into the demesne estate of the Earl, based at the manors of Bunratty and Donass.³⁴

Thomond was one of the most coherent Gaelic lordships and it comprised a series of lesser lordships that were under the control of the Uí Bhriain kings, later styled Earls of Thomond. The Gaelic resurgence of the previous two centuries was strengthened in Thomond and the period saw a renewed vigour in the patronage of bardic poets and production of genealogies.³⁵ A ruling lineage that managed to successfully

²⁹ Kenneth W. Nicholls, "Genealogy", *The Heritage of Ireland*, Neil Buttimer, Colin Rynne, Helen Guerin (eds), The Collin Press, Cork, 2000, pp.156-160, p.157.

³⁰ *Annals of the Four Masters*, sub anno 1572.

³¹ Brian Ó Cuív, "An Elegy on Donnchadh Ó Briain, Fourth Earl of Thomond", *Celtica*, Vol.XVI, pp.87-105, p.89.

³² Bernadette Cunningham, "Native Culture and Political Change in Ireland, 1580-1640", in Ciaran Brady & Raymond Gillespie (eds) *Natives and Newcomers: Essays on the Making of Irish Colonial Society 1534-1641*, Irish Academic Press, Dublin, 1986, pp.148-170, p.154.

³³ A glance at the 1624 will of Donough O'Brien, fourth Earl of Thomond, shows that his office holders had English surnames and Richard Boyle, Earl of Cork, acted as executor of the will. This is in contrast to the will of Murrough O'Brien in 1551 which does not mention any individuals from outside of Thomond. See Brian Ó Dálaigh, "From Gaelic Warlords to English County Gentlemen: The O'Briens of Thomond 1543-1741", *The Other Clare*, Vol.25, 2001, pp.40-42 and Brian Ó Dálaigh, "A comparative study of the wills of the first and fourth Earls of Thomond", *North Munster Antiquarian Journal*, Vol.XXXIV, 1992, pp.48-63.

³⁴ See the 1 April 1619 inquisition into the lands of the Earl of Thomond at Petworth House, Archives Chichester, West Sussex, Bundle B.26.T16. In 1622 nineteen freeholders of the Mac Conmara *Fionn* clan filed claims against the Earl of Thomond, including 'McNamara Fionn of Dangan-i-viggin' who claimed 50 land denominations. James Frost, *A History and Topography of the County of Clare*, reprint, Dublin, 1973, p.295.

³⁵ On genealogies and their usefulness and limitations see Kenneth W. Nicholls, "The Irish Genealogies: Their Value and Defects", *The Irish Genealogist*, Vol.5, No.2, 1975, pp.256-261. Nicholls discusses the Mac Conmara genealogies and refers to RIA Ms 23.L.37 which records the Mac Conmara lineage from c.1380 down to the eighteenth century and which was preserved by a succession of scribes who were copying from a literary exemplar. On the revival of the Uí Bhriain in the later middle ages see Seán Duffy (ed) *et. al.*, *Medieval Ireland: An Encyclopedia*, p.459. Duffy dates the 'Uí Bhriain revival' from 1370 when Brian Sreamhach Ó Briain, King of Thomond, won a victory over the Earl of Desmond south of the Shannon and sacked Limerick. This left the Uí Bhriain one of the most powerful Gaelic dynasties in Ireland.

assert its claims to land and the customary right to levy tribute over vassal-septs conferred power and independence on itself.

The granting of tribute-free lands to *literati* families in exchange for providing specialised services to the ruling lineage points to the semi-feudalised arrangements that operated in Gaelic lordships. From existing records we can deduce territorial arrangements amongst the learned professional families in West *Clann Chuiléin*. According to an inquisition held at Galway in 1586 the tributary lands of Seán Mac Conmara, Lord of West *Clann Chuiléin*, are set down. Ard Kyle in Feenagh parish and Ballyhickey in Clooney parish were cited as subject to Mac Conmara rent but that uncertainty existed to the quantity of rent levied. It is probable that Ard Kyle, the patrimony of the Uí Mhaoilchonaire historian-chroniclers and Ballyhicky, the patrimony of the Uí Íceadha³⁶ hereditary physicians, were immune from rent and tribute.

This arrangement may have also existed for Ballyogan in Kilraghtis, the patrimony of the Mac Bruaidealha historians, and at Ballymacahill in Kilraghtis parish and Ballyallia in Templemaley parish, the patrimony of the Uí Nialláin learned physicians. These lands were recorded in the inquisition as bound to keep and bear Mac Conmara's "horses and boys with sufficient horsemeat and boysmeat every Christmas and Easter when he [Seán Mac Conmara] kept any of the said feasts at his house or town of the Dengan".³⁷ The lands comprised part of the Mac Conmara mensal estate in West *Clann Chuiléin* and for service families settled there privileged tenurial conditions must have existed.³⁸

Bardic poets were instructed at schools run by hereditary professional families. Several schools were extant in Thomond during the sixteenth century. These included the Uí Dhuibhdábhoireann school of law and poetry at Cahermacnaughten in the Burren³⁹, the Mac Bruaidealha school of history and law,⁴⁰ and Uí Mhaoilchonaire school at Ard Kyle which focused on *seanchas* and chronicling.⁴¹ Other learned families included Mac Cruitín musicians and historian-poets whose patrimony was at Carrowduff in Kilaspuglonane parish and Laghally in Kilmacrechy parish⁴² and the Mac Fhlannchadha brehon clan based at their tower-houses of Urlanmore, Clonloghan and Castlekeale (Ballysallagh West).⁴³

³⁶ The Irish Fiant's contain useful references to members of the learned families. For example, in 1602 "Donell oge O Hicky of BallymcDonell chirurgeon" [ie surgeon] received a pardon. Donell, as a surgeon, was following the hereditary occupation of the Uí Íceadha lineage in Killuran parish of Tulla barony. *The Irish Fiant's of the Tudor Sovereigns: During the Reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI, Phillip & Mary, and Elizabeth I*, Fiant 6615, p.547.

³⁷ R.W Twigge, *Materials for a History of Clann Cuilein*, Add Ms 39260, Twigge Collection, British Library, pp.180-6.

³⁸ On a discussion of the West *Clann Chuiléin* lordship see Luke McInerney, "The West *Clann Chuiléin* Lordship in 1586: Evidence from a Forgotten Inquisition", p.43 p.47 p.49, p.55.

³⁹ See George U. Macnamara, "The O'Davorens of Cahermacnaughten, Burren, Co. Clare", *Journal of the North Munster Archaeological Society*, Vol 2, Nos. 2 & 3, 1912, pp.63-93 and William O'Sullivan, "The Book of Ó Dhuibhdábhoireann, Provenance and Codicology", *Celtica*, 23, 1999, pp.276-299.

⁴⁰ See Bernadette Cunningham, "The Historical Annals of Maoilín Óg Mac Bruaidealha, 1588-1603", *The Other Clare*, Vol.13, March, 1989, pp.21-24 and also Diarmuid Ó Murchadha "The origins of Clann Bhruaidealha", *Éigse: Journal of Irish Studies*, No.31, 1999, pp.121-130. The Mac Bhruaidealha were responsible for compiling local annals in Thomond and reference to these annal entries may be distilled from compilations of various local annals under the stewardship of Mícheál Ó Cléirigh into one set of annals known as the *Annals of the Four Masters*.

⁴¹ See Fr Paul Walsh, *Irish Men of Learning*, Fleet St Publishing, Dublin, 1947, pp.34-48 and Brian Ó Dálaigh, "The Uí Mhaoilchonaire of Thomond", *Studia Hibernica*, No.35, 2008-09 [forthcoming].

⁴² The Mac Cruitín poets were attached to their patrons the Uí Lochlainn of the Burren and the Uí Bhriain of Ennistymon, but like the Uí Mhaoilchonaire clan they composed for the Mac Conmara.

⁴³ See Martin Breen, "A 1570 List of Castles in County Clare", *North Munster Antiquarian Journal*, Vol. XXXVI, 1995, pp.130-138 [q.v. *State Papers of Ireland: Elizabeth*, Vol XXX no. 68/1].

The Uí Throighthigh (O'Trehy or Troy) were a learned medical kindred based in Corcomroe in the early medieval period and in 1477 Domhnall Albanach Ó Troighthigh acting as a scribe compiled, probably from an older manuscript, the *Tripartite Life of St Patrick*. He is credited with compiling the 1482 medical treatise *Lilium Medicinae* (*Lile na h-Eladhan leighis*) which was sold to Earl Garrett (Gearóid) Fitzgerald in 1500.⁴⁴ The Mac Craith were also a *literati* family with strong ecclesiastical connections to the Augustinian Clare Abbey (*de Forgio* in Papal letters) and were attached to the Uí Bhriain kings.⁴⁵ The Mac Craith composed the noted fourteenth century saga *Caithréim Thoirdhealbhaigh*.⁴⁶

Various branches of the secular professional families were settled in the lordship of West *Clann Chuiléin* by the sixteenth century. The Mac Fhlannchadha comprised of two main branches in Thomond, one settled since the fourteenth century at Killilagh parish in Corcomroe and recorded in the fourteenth century 'O'Brien Rental' as receiving tribute out of the division of *Túath Ghlae*⁴⁷, while another branch were established at least as early as c.1400 in the vicinity of Kilnasoolagh parish in *Tradraighe*.⁴⁸ It is conceivable that the two Mac Fhlannchadha branches were established on the territories of the Uí Bhriain and Mac Conmara, with the latter likely to have been the junior branch and settled after the Mac Conmara regained the territory of *Tradraighe* from the Anglo-Norman colony in 1318.⁴⁹ The Mac Fhlannchadha first feature in the annals relating to Thomond in 1482 and individuals are referred to as "Chief Brehon and Professor and Law", "Ollav of Dal-Cais in judicature" and maintaining a "house of general hospitality" in annalistic entries.⁵⁰

A branch of the Uí Dhálaigh settled in Corcomroe in the parish of Finnavarra where they were hereditary poets of the Uí Lochlainn. The Uí Dhálaigh are first mentioned in the annals for Thomond in the year 1404 when Carroll O'Daly *ollamh* of Corcomroe died. We read in the annals that in 1415 the Uí Dhálaigh of Corcomroe were dispossessed of their lands by John Talbot, the king's lieutenant in Ireland, illustrating the hostility that learned families faced by English officials.⁵¹ The Uí Dhálaigh maintained

⁴⁴ Fergal McGrath, *Education in Ancient and Medieval Ireland, Studies, Special Publication*, Dublin, 1979, p.211. On the Uí Throighthigh in Corcomroe see *Annals of the Four Masters, sub anno* 1002 and consider the notice at the end of the Tripartite manuscript which states that it was written in 1477 at *Bailé an Mhoinin* in the house of Ó Troighthigh. Eugene O'Curry, *Lectures on the Manuscript Materials of Ancient Irish History*, James Duffy publishing, Dublin, 1861, p.346.

⁴⁵ Dermot F. Gleeson, *A History of the Diocese of Killaloe*, H. Gill & Son, Dublin, 1962, p.453. Also see Michael MacMahon, "The Charter of Clare Abbey and the Augustinian 'Province' in Co.Clare", *The Other Clare*, Vol.17, 1993, pp.21-27.

⁴⁶ See Sean Mac Ruaidhri Mac Craith, *Caithréim Thoirdhealbhaigh: The Triumphs of Turlough*, Standish Hayes O'Grady (ed), Irish Texts Society, London, 1929, Vol I & II.

⁴⁷ Patrick Nugent, *The Gaelic clans of Co. Clare and their territories 1100-1700 A.D.*, Geography Publications, Dublin, 2007, pp.92-95. The fourteenth century 'O'Brien rental' (*Suim Ciosa Ua Brain*) the Mac Fhlannchadha privileges are mentioned in connection to *Túath Ghlae*: "the immunities of the race of Flanchy" [ie. 'sil Flanncada']. The date of this document is disputed, with Patrick Nugent in agreement with a late fourteenth century date and Kenneth W. Nicholls with c.1500.

⁴⁸ See the Papal Registers for the year 1405 which refers to "Donatus Mclanchega" (Donnchadh Mac Fhlannchadha) holding the vicarage of Kilnasoolagh. The Papal Registers later record Donatus holding the rectory of Glae in Killilagh parish, which formed part of the Mac Fhlannchadha bailiwick, alluding to an early fifteenth century Glae-Kilnasoolagh connection. See J.A. Twemlow, *Calendar of Entries in the Papal Registers Relating to Great Britain and Ireland Vol. VI AD.1404-1415*, His Majesty's Stationary Office, London, 1904, p.42 and J.A. Twemlow, *Calendar of Entries in the Papal Registers Relating to Great Britain and Ireland Vol. VII AD.1417-1431*, His Majesty's Stationary Office, London, 1906, p.108. On this early connection also see Luke McInerney, "Clerics and Clansmen: The Vicarages and Rectories of *Tradraighe* in the Fifteenth Century", p.14.

⁴⁹ The chief descendant of this branch is recorded as signing the 1585 Composition Agreement as "Donogh mc Glanchi of the Urlion chief of his name", while the senior lineage of the family based in Killilagh parish in Corcomroe were recorded as "Glanihie of Knocklynne". A. Martin Freeman (ed), *The Compossicion Booke of Conought*, Irish Manuscripts Commission, Dublin, 1936, p.8 & p.11.

⁵⁰ *Annals of the Four Masters, sub anno* 1483, 1492, 1576.

⁵¹ *Annals of Connacht, sub anno* 1415.

“a house of general hospitality”, as is noted in poet Teige O’Daly’s obituary dated 1514 in the *Annals of the Four Masters*.⁵²

The Mac Bruaidealha, by contrast, first appear in the annals in the 1563 when Dermot Mac Brody “ollav of Hy-Braccain and Hy-Fearmaic” died.⁵³ It is clear that the Mac Bruaidealha functioned as both historians (chroniclers) and poets as the annalistic entry recording the death of Maoilín Óg Mac Bruaidealha in 1602 noted his standing as a “historian, poet and rhymmer”.⁵⁴ The Mac Bruaidealha, however, must have been active as a learned family from the mid-fourteenth century when one of their members composed a praise-poem for Mathghamhain Ó Briain in c.1365-69.⁵⁵

The Mac Cruitín were recorded relatively early in the annals with “Kellach Mac Curtain, Chief Historian of Thomond” dying in 1376. The Mac Cruitín, like Mac Bruaidealha, appear as historians and specialising in *seanchas* and chronicling, however some of their members were skilled in music, as an annalistic entry from 1404 indicates.⁵⁶ Several high status members of the Mac Cruitín are recorded during the fifteenth century, the most notable appearing in 1436 when “Geanann Mac Curtain, intended Ollav of Thomond in history drowned”.⁵⁷

In contrast to the learned lineages who emerged after the mid fourteenth century in Thomond, the Mac Craith retained a longstanding historical association with their Uí Bhriain patrons. The *Annals of the Four Masters* records a Mac Craith chief poet of Munster dying in 1098 while Seán mac Ruaidhri Mac Craith composed the highly stylised *Caithréim Thoirdhealbhaigh* saga in the fourteenth century. Eoghan Mac Craith is credited as composing the late fourteenth century praise-poem *Coin airdfhiaidhigh Clann Choileain* for a Mac Conmara audience.⁵⁸ The Mac Craith continued down to the sixteenth century as a literary family of note, with “William Magrath, Ollav of Dal-Cais in poetry...[and] distinguished for his knowledge of the sciences and agriculture”, recorded as dying in 1573.⁵⁹

The Uí Mhaoilchonaire of Ardkyle are credited with producing several important pieces of literature in the sixteenth century. This great chronicler and poetic family settled in Thomond in the 1540s and were under the patronage of both the Mac Conmara and Uí Bhriain where they held a school of poetry and acted as public notaries, appearing on legal documents during the sixteenth century.⁶⁰ The 1587 copy of

⁵² *Annals of the Four Masters*, sub anno 1514.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 1563.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 1602.

⁵⁵ Diarmuid Ó Murchadha, “The Origins of Clann Bhruaidealha”, p.121.

⁵⁶ *Annals of the Four Masters*, sub anno 1404.

⁵⁷ The reference to ‘intended’ may indicate that he was in training or had been expected to be appointed to the position. Given the hefty investment in training and time, the high status and relative scarcity of members of hereditary professional families, death before graduation was likely to attract attention from learned chroniclers. See *Annals of the Four Masters*, sub anno 1436.

⁵⁸ See RIA Ms 710. This poem is registered on the Irish bardic database.

⁵⁹ *Annals of the Four Masters*, sub anno 1573.

⁶⁰ Brian Ó Dálaigh, “The Uí Mhaoilchonaire of Thomond” *Studia Hibernica*, No.35, 2008-09 [forthcoming]. See, for example, Iollann Ó Maoilchonaire appearing as a juror in the 1586 inquisition into the lands held by Seán Mac Conmara, Lord of West *Clann Chuilein*. His name appears on the document as “Ilund O Molchonre of Ardkyll”. See R.W Twigge, *Materials for a History of Clann Cuilein*, Add Ms 39260, Twigge Collection, British Library, pp.180-6, p.180.

the *Táin Bó Cuailnge* in the hand of Iollann Ó Maoilchonaire is preserved at Maynooth College Library,⁶¹ and the now lost 1611 *Leabhar Oiris* which contained Mac Conmara genealogies dating from c.1380, and which was copied by David Ó Bruadair in 1671 and re-copied by Seaghan Stac in 1708, was also produced by the Uí Mhaoilchonaire.⁶²

The Uí Mhaoilchonaire professional school of history at Ard Kyle must have ceased prior to 1618 when Muiris Ó Maoilchonaire signed over his hereditary lands to the fourth Earl of Thomond and shifted his residence to Shandangan in the parish of Kilmurry.⁶³ Such a move signalled the beginning of the end of tutoring bardic-poetry and the art of chronicling in specialists schools. The political settlement after the Nine Years War dealt a fatal blow to the bardic elite as demand for legitimisation of authority based on traditional values evaporated. By the mid-seventeenth century organised bardic schools had ceased to function.⁶⁴

Lords and Patrons: The Mac Conmara and Evidence from the Poem

The bardic poem *Créd fá seachnaim síol Aodha?* was composed by Domhnall Ó Maoilchonaire of Ard Kyle for his patron, Seán mac Taidhg Mhic Chonmara, Lord of West *Clann Chuiléin*. It was possibly composed for Seán's inauguration in 1571 when he attained the lordship. In that year, his father Tadhg died, leaving the lordship of West *Clann Chuiléin* (modern day baronies of Upper and Lower Bunratty) to Seán, until his death in February 1602. The Mac Conmara were styled as *tighearna* (lord) of *Clann Chuiléin* and had colonized east Clare in the wake of the defeat and expulsion of the Norman colony at *Tradraighe* (Bunratty district) in 1318. After the capture of Bunratty castle in 1332 the Mac Conmara levied a tribute on subject clans in east Clare and consolidated their political ambition by securing important dynastic marriage alliances outside of Thomond.⁶⁵ The Mac Conmara emerged as the principal *urraí* of the Uí Bhriain kings by the mid-fourteenth century.⁶⁶

Seán Mac Conmara was the lord of a leading branch of Clann Mhic Chonmara coined in the genealogies as 'Fionn'. The Mac Conmara *Riabhach* (Reagh) lineage, by contrast, dominated east Clare (baronies of

⁶¹ Pádraig Ó Fiannachta, *Clár Lámhscríbhinní Gaeilge Choláiste Phádraig Má Nuad*, Má Nuad, 1968, fasc. v, 1 ch.1. William O'Sullivan suggests that the texts *Auraicept na nÉces* and *Acallam in dá Shuad* were produced by Uí Mhaoilchonaire scribes at Ard Kyle. See William O'Sullivan, "The Book of Ó Dhuibhdábhoireann, Provenance and Codicology", p.290.

⁶² Kenneth W. Nicholls, "The Irish Genealogies: Their Value and Defects", p.258. R.W Twigge quotes the colophon of the RIA Ms 23 L.37 as stating, "This genealogy was copied by Daibith O'Bruadar in the year 1671, the 8th March, from the Historical Book of Clann Uí Mhaoilchonaire which they compiled 60 years before that period ie. in the year 1611 and was rewritten in Cork by John Stack [Seaghan Stac], in the year of Salvation 1708". See R.W Twigge, *Materials for a History of Clann Cuilein*, Add Ms 39264, Twigge Collection, British Library, p.16.

⁶³ See Brian Ó Dálaigh, "The Uí Mhaoilchonaire of Thomond", *Studia Hibernica*, No.35, 2008-09 [forthcoming] and Petworth House Archives, Chichester, West Sussex, 'Humble petition of Daniel oge O Mulconnery, 1638', Ms 5402.

⁶⁴ Bernadette Cunningham, "Native Culture and Political Change in Ireland, 1580-1640", p.152. The legal schools, once the domain of the hereditary legalist families such as the Mac Fhlannchadha and Mac Aodhagáin suffered a similar fate, as evidenced by the confiscation of the lands of the Uí Dhuibhdábhoireann in the 1650s which certainly heralded the closure, if not earlier, of their school of law and poetry at Cahermacnaughten in the Burren.

⁶⁵ See Patrick Nugent, "The Dynamics of the Clan System in Fourteenth Century Clare", County Clare Studies, Ciarán Ó Murchadha, *Clare Archaeological and Historical Society*, Ennis, 2000, pp.55-71 and entry for the year 1332 in *Annalium Hiberniae Chronicon ad annum MCCCXLIX* (The Annals of Ireland) by Friar John Clyn.

⁶⁶ On the rise of Clann Mhic Chonmara see Aoife Nic Ghiollamhaith, "Kings and Vassals in Later Medieval Ireland: The Uí Bhriain and the MacConmara in the Fourteenth Century".

Upper and Lower Tulla) and were based at Mountallon.⁶⁷ The poem by Domhnall Ó Maoilchonaire praises the lineage of Seán Mac Conmara and legitimises his rights of lordship and territory. Interestingly, the poem scans the territory of the Mac Conmara encompassing all of east Clare from Rineanna in the south-west of *Tradraighe* on the Fergus estuary, to the port of Clonrush in the far north-east of Clare. This sweep of territory—and the inference of lordship rights over it—is probably poetic licence as West *Clann Chuiléin* comprised only mid-east Clare. Such a reference implies the historical association of the Mac Conmara lordship—real and aspirational—encompassing all of east Clare, irrespective of the Uí Bhriain patrimonial strip of land in *Uí Thoirdhealbhaigh* on the western shore of Lough Derg, and Clonrush’s location in the Uí Bhloid territory of *Uí Dhonghaile*.

The poem touches on several important themes. It alludes to the high-status position of the poetic author and that his lands at Ard Kyle constitute the demesne lands of the Mac Conmara lordship. In addition, specific reference is made to Ard Kyle and its prestige: *róimh na healadhna an Árdchoill* (‘Ardchoill—that Rome of the Arts’). The poem begins with the author, Domhnall Ó Maoilchonaire, returning from a journey through Ireland and recounts the pseudo-history of the Mac Conmara and their descent from Cas who settled Thomond in historic times.

The poem sets out the descent of several lordly septs of the Mac Conmara who stem from Mac Con Mór—a Mac Conmara lord who flourished in c.1329.⁶⁸ The four lineages of the sons of Mac Con are detailed, including the districts where their patrimonies were located: “Sliocht Shíoda Chaim” of Rosroe and progenitor of the Mac Conmara *Fionn* lineage; “Sliocht Choin Méadha” of Rathlaheen; “Sliocht Donchaidh” of Ballyogan; and “Sliocht tSeaáin mhóir” who were the descendents of Seán an Ghabháltais (John the Conqueror), the progenitor of the Mac Conmara Reagh lineage.⁶⁹ This section of the poem provides a ‘legitimising’ introduction to the medieval genealogy and details the common descent of the lordly lines of the family.

The poem deals with the Uí Bhloid clans whose original patrimony included the *trícha cé*t units of east Clare.⁷⁰ This section of the poem refers to the original position of the Uí Bhloid and their bailiwick in Thomond prior to the arrival (and expansion) of Clann Chaisín. In an apparent reference to the wars between the Mac Conmara, lords of Uí Chaisín, and the Uí Bhloid clans of the early fourteenth century, the poem suggests that the Uí Bhloid were an obstruction to Clann Chaisín (ie Mac Conmara and allied vassals). Given that the expansion of the Mac Conmara into east Clare dates from the defeat of the Uí

⁶⁷ By the 1400s Uí Chaisín was called Clann *Chuiléin* and was the territory of the McNamara Reagh and McNamara *Fionn* clans. The division of Uí Chaisín occurred after the death of Lochlain Mac Conmara in 1366. His two half sons, Teige and Aodh, agreed to the division of lands which Teige retained the lands of West *Clann Chuiléin* and Aodh in East *Clann Chuiléin*. N.C. MacNamara, *The Story of an Irish Sept: Their Character and Struggle to Maintain their Lands in Clare*, [1896] Re-published by Martin Breen, 1999, p.138. On genealogical references that cite the *Fionn* and Reagh septs of the Mac Conmara see the recording of “Meic Conmara Fhind” and “Meic Conmara Ríabaigh” and an interesting recording of another Mac Conmara sept-branch “Fer an Rosa Rúaidh” (‘the men of Rosroe’) in Séamus Pender (ed) *O’Clery Book of Genealogies*, *Analecta Hibernica*: No.18, Irish Manuscript Commission, Dublin, 1951 pp.152-153.

⁶⁸ See the Mac Conmara genealogical table in R.W. Twigge, *The Pedigree of John MacNamara, Esquire, with some Family Reminiscences*, 1908, re-print Martin Breen, Ruan 2006.

⁶⁹ On specific genealogies of Mac Conmara sept-branches settled at Rathlaheen and elsewhere see Seán Ó hÓgáin, *Conntae an Cláir: A Tríocha Agus A Tuatha*, Oifig an tSoláitair, Baile Átha Cliath, 1938, pp.140-143.

⁷⁰ These include *Uí Ronghaile*, *Uí Chonghaile*, *Uí Chearnaigh* and *Uí Ainmire*, *Uí Fhloinn*, *Uí Dhonghaile*, *Uí Thoirdhealbhaigh*, *Gleann Omra* and *Tuath Echtghe*, all of which later comprised the rural deanery of ‘Omulled’.

Bhloid at the battle of Corcomroe in 1317, it is not surprising that this features as an important theme underlying the political ascent of the Mac Conmara and their colonisation of the lands of the Uí Bhloid. Much of this can be categorised as the poet attempting to cultivate a sense of the past – a continual connected flow of events that link the past with the present; it is from this paradigm that contemporary events, in the mind of the bardic poet, can be divined.

In true style the poem praises the Mac Conmara and their communal consumption of food which parallels the central tenet of maintenance of Gaelic lordship and lordly right – the ability to levy *cuid oidhche* or hospitality rights (food tribute) over subject vassals. Hospitality rights of the household (*muinntear*) of a Gaelic lord, which included his important retainers and learned families, were an ancient right levied on subject clients and which served to cement alliances and provide a form of food-tribute to the ruling lineage.⁷¹ The ability to levy hospitality rights was a source of prestige in an environment where food was scarce and the creation of a network of obligations which could be drawn on when required cemented a lord's power.⁷² The recurrent references in *Créd fá seachnaim síol Aodha?* of communal drinking and feasting alludes to this theme. The hosting of feasts by Gaelic lords is also depicted in the poem and hints at youthfulness and glorification of great deeds and violence.

The poem makes possible reference to the inauguration of Seán Mac Conmara, Lord of West *Clann Chuiléin* in 1571. The wording hints at a traditional inauguration in the manner of Gaelic lords (*tiaghaid uime a-niar's a-noir*: 'they gather around him from west and east') where the principal representatives of the leading septs of the lordship would gather in an assembly—*oireacht*—to anoint the *taoiseach* of the clan. In a typical bardic poetry motif the author addresses the territory and land and refers to its goodness or 'fertility'. In the scheme of the poet this mention is of critical importance as it follows the reference "except the steady sweet voice of Seán" (*acht binnghlór socair Sheadain*) and draws connection between the lord's virtue and the productivity of the land, echoing pagan beliefs in the favourable constellation of the land, fertility and leadership (*Críoch iona lia mil is meas*: 'A land that is plentiful in honey and forest fruit'). There is, however, an element of ritualistic poetry here, as certain motifs are used time and again in demonstrating core poetic themes.⁷³

The ideology of kinship was the linchpin in the clan system and underscored the political economy of lordship. The fabrication that all constituent septs derive from a shared lineage was cultivated in order to 'bind' dependent vassal-septs to the ruling lineage to legitimise lordship and served as a rational response

⁷¹ Gaelic lords also raised revenue from their *lucht tighe*, or mensal lands, that provided food-stuffs to their household and where subinfeudated tenant-septs were often settled. Kenneth W. Nicholls, *Gaelic and Gaelicised Ireland in the Middle Ages* p.37 & p.40.

⁷² The practice of *cuid oidhche* was universal in Gaelic lordships and was also extant in the Scottish Highlands. See Robert A. Dodgshon, "Modeling chiefdoms in the Scottish Highlands and Islands prior to the '45", *Celtic Chiefdom, Celtic State: The Evolution of Complex Social Systems in Prehistoric Europe*, Bettina Arnoldt (ed), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995, pp.99-109, p.104. Dodgshon points out the ruling 'chiefly lineage' was keen to secure tenants to improve agricultural output and boost food stores that could be used to entice small septs to ally with larger lineages. The chiefly lineage demonstrated their power through feasts and control of food resources.

⁷³ Michelle O Riordan, *The Gaelic Mind and the Collapse of the Gaelic World*, Cork University Press, Cork, 1990, p.3. The espousal of a king or lord to his territory and its fertility is an enduring theme in bardic poetry. On landscape features in poems also see Katharine Simms, "References to Landscape and Economy in Irish Bardic Poetry", *Surveying Ireland's Past: Multidisciplinary Essays in Honour of Annagret Simms*, Howard B. Clarke (ed) et al, Geography Publications, Dublin, 1994, pp.145-168.

to relative scarcity of labour in Gaelic lordships. Only those septs that had an important connection or genealogical relationship to the lordly lineage are praised. The poem *Créd fá seachnaim síol Aodha?* mentions only two offshoot septs of the Mac Conmara *Fionn*. The Mac Fhlannchadha (McClanchy) and Mac an Oirchinnigh (McEnerhiny)⁷⁴ septs are the only independent lineages cited. Other notable lineages that were correlatives of the Mac Conmara such as Uí Mhaoilchaoine (O'Mulqueeny)⁷⁵ and Uí Chunnaigh (O'Cooney)⁷⁶ and lesser septs such as the Mac Confhormaoile (McEnormoyle)⁷⁷ and the distant noble branches of the Síol Aodha such as the Uí Ícidhe, Uí Ghráda, and Uí Dhobharchon (chief family Uí Lideadha) are notably absent.⁷⁸

The Mac Fhlannchadha and Mac an Oirchinnigh were the chief vassal-septs of the Mac Conmara *Fionn* of West *Clann Chuiléin* in the late sixteenth century.⁷⁹ Both septs had patrimonial lands in *Tradraighe* since at least as early as c.1400.⁸⁰ The Mac an Oirchinnigh featured in the *Caithréim Thoirdhealbhaigh* as allies of the Mac Conmara at the battles of Kilgorey and Corcomroe in 1309 and 1317 respectively.⁸¹ The Mac Fhlannchadha were a high status brehon clan who held numerous tower-houses in the vicinity of their principal seat at Urlanmore.⁸²

The poem initially recounts the Mac Fhlannchadha lineage as a collateral branch of the Mac Conmara, thereby establishing their credentials as a kindred connected to the ruling Mac Conmara *Fionn*. The recording of Mac Fhlannchadha pedigree—and the clan's progenitor Néill who flourished in the eleventh century—accords with the traditional genealogies.⁸³ The stanzas focusing on the two vassal-septs of the Mac Conmara refer to the higher status Mac Fhlannchadha first, and recounts their status as a professional service family (*barr ealadhna na hÉireann* – 'the choice of the learned classes of Ireland').

The second stanza refers to the Mac an Oirchinnigh family, an important freeholding sept of the Mac Conmara.⁸⁴ Their patrimonial lands were located in Kilnasoolagh parish in *Tradraighe* district. The poem

⁷⁴ On the descent of the Mac Fhlannchadha and Mac an Oirchinnigh from the Mac Conmara *Fionn* see RIA Ms 23. N12 pp.186-187 and RIA Ms 23 L.37. The latter text dates from c.1380. See Kenneth W. Nicholls, "The Irish Genealogies: Their Value and Defects", p.258. On the Mac an Oirchinnigh lineage also see RIA Ms 23.H22, p.11 which, according to the antiquarian R.W. Twigge, was copied in 1803 from a genealogical roll written in c.1588 by Maoilín Óg Mac Bruaidealha, *seanchaidhe* of the O'Brien family of Thomond. See R.W Twigge, *Materials for a History of Clann Cuilein*, Add Ms 39266, British Library, Twigge Collection, p.315 & p.317.

⁷⁵ On the Uí Mhaoilchaoine see RIA Ms 23. N12, pp.186-187.

⁷⁶ On the Uí Chunnaigh see RIA Ms 23.H 25, p.84.

⁷⁷ Rev. Patrick Woulfe, *Sloinnnte Gaedheal is Gall: Irish Names and Surnames*, Dublin, H. Gill & Son, 1923, p.339.

⁷⁸ Nollaig Ó Muraíle (ed.), *Leabhar Mór na nGenealach* [The Great Book of Irish Genealogies], Dubhaltach Mac Fhirbhisigh, Vol. III., De Búrca, Dublin, 2003, p.693.

⁷⁹ On their respective position in the lordship and the lands held in 1586 see Luke McNerney, "The West *Clann Chuiléin* Lordship in 1586: Evidence from a Forgotten Inquisition".

⁸⁰ Clerics of both septs feature in the Papal Registers respectively from 1405 and 1411 in and around the parishes of Kilnasoolagh and Kilmaleery. See Luke McNerney, "Clerics and Clansmen: The Vicarages and Rectories of *Tradraighe* in the Fifteenth Century", p.14.

⁸¹ Seán Mac Ruaidhri Mac Craith, *Caithréim Thoirdhealbhaigh: The Triumphs of Turlough*, Vol II p.38-41, 96, p.138.

⁸² For a list of McClancy castle occupiers in 1570 see Martin Breen, "A 1570 List of Castles in County Clare", *North Munster Antiquarian Journal*, Vol. XXXVI, 1995, pp.130-138, pp.131-133 and for 1574 see R.W. Twigge, "Edward White's Description of Thomond in 1574", p.77.

⁸³ See, for example, RIA Ms 23. N12 pp.186-187 which states that Néill was the brother of the Mac Conmara chief Meanmon. According to the *Annals of the Four Masters*, Meanmon, ancestor to the ruling Mac Conmara lineage, died in 1014 [q.v. "Meanma, son of the lord of Uí-Caisín, died"].

⁸⁴ On the status of the sixteenth century Mac an Oirchinnigh see Luke McNerney, "Land and Lineage: The McEnerhins of Ballysallagh in the Sixteenth Century", *North Munster Antiquarian Journal*, 2009, pp.1-26.

correctly identifies the genealogical origins of the Mac an Oirchinnigh whose reputed progenitor was Donnchadh son of Domhnall. Donnchadh can be identified in the Mac Conmara pedigrees as the brother of Cúmhara, king of Uí Chaisín, who perished at the battle of Móin Mhór in 1151.⁸⁵ The poem makes mention of the specific calling of the Mac an Oirchinnigh as an *erenagh* family in a similar vein as the poem refers to the professional position of the Mac Fhlannchadha lineage. The poem achieves this by making a clear genealogical link between the sept's reputed progenitor, Donnchadh who served as an *erenagh*, and his 'goodly descendants' (*deighshíol*) which were an established sept in the sixteenth century (*Ag sin síol an tora[i]dh thruim* – 'behold the seed of the heavy fruit').

Familiarity with the origins of these two Mac Conmara sub-septs is not surprising. Detailed genealogies would have been available to the bardic poets and they would have been expected to recount the chief genealogical (actual and fabricated)⁸⁶ relationships that underpinned Mac Conmara lordship. The enumeration of vassal-septs was also significant as the audience for the poem would not have been solely Seán Mac Conmara as patron but the wider assembly of vassals in the lordship. The purpose, in part, was to inspire a shared sense of kinship. The recording of these two landholding vassal-septs was deliberate and significant; not least because the essence of Gaelic lordship rested on genealogically-inspired relationships that underpinned land proprietorship and sustained patron-client dependency.⁸⁷

The final two stanzas return to the theme of journey and surveying the landscape, but here the focus is on the patrimonial inheritance of *Clann Chuiléin*. This is a typical poetic theme in that the poet assesses his patron's lordship and extols its virtues; here we are told that Rineanna was associated with shipping and that Clonrush served as a port. This is effectively the eastern and western extremity of the poet's imaginary 'patrimony' of Seán Mac Conmara as Lord of West *Clann Chuiléin*.

What is intriguing is that both of these locations are claimed to be under the lordship of Seán Mac Conmara. Evidently this is 'aspirational' lordship and probably employed here to assert the historical right of the Mac Conmara *Fionn* over far-flung territories, some of which had passed to their correlatives the Mac Conmara Reagh. Some had never been subject to lordship. Clonrush fell within the Uí Bhloid patrimony of *Uí Dhonghaile* and was under the suzerainty of the coarb family of Uí Ghráda.⁸⁸ Slieve Feilim, by contrast, was never under Mac Conmara lordship, but its inclusion may allude to the early

⁸⁵ This relationship is set down in several Mac Conmara pedigrees including RIA Ms 23 N.12, pp.187-189 which states: "Cúmhara—dá dearbhráithir Donnchadh sinnisir Chloinne an Oirchinnigh, [agus] Maoileachluinn ó bhfuilid Clann Uí Mhaoilchaoine". Also see RIA Ms 23. L37 pp.172-173 whose original exemplar dates from c.1380 and states: "Bhádair tri mic lais a nDomhnall sin .i. Cu Mara a quo Clann Mheigh Conmara. Donchadh Oirchinneach a quo Clann Mhic an Oirchinnic. Maolseachluin Mainech a quo gabhul Mhaoilseachluinn Mhainic". Also see Luke McInerney, 'Survey of the McInerney Sept of Thomond: Part I', *The Other Clare*, vol. 31, 2007, pp. 67-72.

⁸⁶ The Irish genealogies may be taken as relatively accurate, especially when their entries can be corroborated against an annalistic source. Given the political expediency underpinning the production of genealogies, it is no surprise that some were manufactured to suit political ambitions. The genealogies of the Mac Conmara are confused for the fourteenth century – a period of unrest and instability. Kenneth W. Nicholls, "The Irish Genealogies: Their Value and Defects", *The Irish Genealogist*, p.258. Also see Kenneth W. Nicholls, "Genealogy", pp.158-159.

⁸⁷ The ability to 'bind' sept-lineages and client farmers to the ruling lineage was critical as economic exchange, to a large degree, rested on noble lineages extending their sway – through the supply of public goods like protection and food security – over clients and maintaining them as food and tribute renders.

⁸⁸ This area fell under the colonisation of east Clare by the Mac Conmara Reagh in the fourteenth century, but the chief vassal lineage of the *túath* were the Uí Ghráda who held extensive ecclesiastical lands at *Tearmann Uí Ghráda* in nearby Tuamgraney parish. Patrick Nugent, *The Gaelic clans of Co. Clare and their territories 1100-1700 A.D.*, p.148.

Déisi connection to south Tipperary, prior to their re-emergence as the Dál gCais who conquered east Clare in the eighth century.

Likewise the reference to ‘Luchaid of the deep hillsides’ (*Ó Luchad na learg ndomhain*) is ambiguous as this was located in Kilkeedy parish in Inchiquin barony and was under Uí Bhriain control.⁸⁹ Its usage in the poem is symbolic as it completes the geographical ‘survey’ of lordship serving as a theoretical northern extremity, while the mention of the Slieve Feilim mountains serves as the southern anchor of ‘aspirational’ lordship stretching down to the Limerick-Tipperary border. These references should be taken in their non-literal ahistorical sense – that they are used by the poet to indicate the virtue of the Mac Conmara patrimony and are read in the context of the poet’s own journey back to *Clann Chuiléin*.

⁸⁹ See the reference to Kilkeedy parish in John O’Donovan & Eugene Curry, *The Antiquities of County Clare: Letters containing information relative to the Antiquities of the County of Clare collected during the progress of the Ordnance Survey in 1839*, (republished), CLASP Press, Ennis Ireland, 1997. According to O’Donovan, “At the townland of Monreagh [Kilkeedy parish] is situated the bridge and ford of Lochid, mentioned by Cormac MacCullenan in a poem on the boundaries of Thomond, and by Keating in the reign of Diarmaid, son of Fergus Cairbheoil, as Bealach na Luchaide. It is referred to by the *Four Masters* under the year 1564.” On Luchaid bridge in Inchiquin barony see Diarmuid Ó Murchadha, “A review of some placename material in *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn*”, *Éigse*, Vol.XXXV, 2005, pp.81-98, p.84. On Uí Bhriain control of Kilkeedy see R. Simington, *Books of Survey and Distribution*, Vol. 4, Clare, The Stationary Office, Dublin, 1967, pp.497-507.

Textual Notes and Commentary

The poem survives in several manuscripts, including RIA Ms 784 (*q.v.* Ms 23.G.9) which was copied by the renowned poet and scion of the professional Mac Cruitín poetic family, Aindrias Mac Cruitín, in 1708. The poem was also copied by Mac Cruitín's well-known kinsman Aodh Buidhe Mac Cruitín in 1712 (Maynooth Ms M107), whose poetic compositions have come down to us. RIA Ms 784 is a miscellany of poems and narratives such as Geoffrey Keating's *Foras feasa ar Éirinn* and was assembled by Aindrias Mac Cruitín, himself a prolific poet.⁹⁰ Unfortunately, the original exemplar for Ms 784 is not known but it is likely that it was assembled from a variety of sources, given the type of material copied. The poem presented below is a transcription from one manuscript witness (Ms 784) and is not a critical edition offering variant readings from other extant manuscripts.⁹¹ It is presented here for its relevance to the Mac Conmara lordship of West *Clann Chuiléin* and as an historical source in itself.

The poem called *Créd fá seachnaim siol Aodha?* is composed in the traditional *Deibhidhe* manner which is a subset of *Dán Díreach* verse. *Deibhidhe* style was typical of poetry forms mastered by professional poets and indicated a level of accomplishment for a bardic poet, due to its strict adherence to complex rules and metre. Normally such poems were composed in darkness and initially learnt by memory, before being committed to manuscript form.⁹² Often they were written to be sung with musical accompaniment such as harp and pipes.⁹³

Deibhidhe style which the below poem was composed in has several chief characteristics. First, all lines comprise seven syllables and two words alliterate in each line. Also, the final word in the fourth line in each stanza alliterates with the previous stressed word. This contrasts sharply to the more fluid and unsophisticated poems, often in imperfect rhyme called *bruílingeacht*. *Créd fá seachnaim siol Aodha?* departs from the *Dúnadh* style whereby the poem ends on the same word as it begun. This is unusual for a *Dán Díreach* poem composed by a professional bardic poet and could be because part of the ending of the poem is missing, or was never transcribed by the copyist.

The poem below benefits from preliminary editing by Professor Damian McManus and his team at Trinity College, Dublin. The poem also benefits from minor editing by Professor Pádraig Ó Riain and Dr Eoghan Ó Raghallaigh and to this end represents a first attempt at an approximate translation. Bardic poems can serve as a new focus on research into Gaelic lordships and the mentality of the Irish learned classes and, used with caution, can be mined for factual historical information.⁹⁴ It is with this in mind that *Créd fá seachnaim siol Aodha?* can throw some light on the social history of an otherwise little studied Gaelic polity, the sixteenth century lordship of West *Clann Chuiléin* in modern County Clare.

⁹⁰ There are some 38 poems lodged at the Royal Irish Academy that are attributed to Aindrias Mac Cruitín. I am grateful for advice on the holdings of the RIA by Bernadette Cunningham.

⁹¹ Other known manuscripts include Maynooth Ms M107; RIA Ms 488 (23.N.12); RIA Ms 491(23.E.16); and Maynooth Ms M.2.M. With the exception of the latter source these manuscripts date from the eighteenth century.

⁹² Little is known about the technique of poetical composition. According to a 1722 account by Thomas O'Sullivan from Tipperary, hereditary poetic families tutored students in remote places where, in a bardic school, students worked in cubicles furnished with beds. Students would recline on the beds in darkness and perfect poetical compositions before committing them to manuscript form and criticism by learned masters. Typically, the training lasted for six to seven years, though classes ran from November to March. Robin Flower, *The Irish Tradition*, pp.95-96.

⁹³ Kenneth W. Nicholls, *Gaelic and Gaelicised Ireland in the Middle Ages*, p.95.

⁹⁴ On bardic poetry as a source for historical research see Katharine Simms, "Bardic poetry as a historical source", in T. Dunne (ed.), *The Writer as Witnesses*, Historical Studies XVI, Cork, 1987, pp.58-75.

Créd fá seachnaim siol Aodha?
siol frisarbh f[h]jerr iontaobha
siol fineamhna is trom tora[i]dh
ríghalbha a fonn f(h)ionnAdhair.

Síol sin is uaisle ná an t-ór
siol Aodha is truime tionól
siol na ríogh ó Cheann Choradh
siol na cceall do chothúghadh.

Filleadh orra ní leasg leam
d'éis mo chuarta air f[h]jedh Éireann
cóir toighiocht 'na ccoinne céim
ó oighreacht chloinne Choiléin.

A ndearmad ní dhlíghim féin
do-gheibhim ó chloinn Choiléin
a n-ám cómhóla is caithmhe
barr onóra is órduighthe.

A-tá m'fherann fós fúthaibh
mé aca ní handúth(ch)aigh
seanadhba(dh) nách cóir do choill
róimh na healadhna an Árdchoill.

Don Mhumhain [do] ghabh[s]a(i)d greim
deighshliocht Luighdhioch Menn mhéirsheing
ar ccur cúil ré mín Mumhan
do thnúth ré tír Tuadhmhumhan.

Leo Port Láirge is Luimneach Luirc
is Caisiol na ccraobh n-orrdairc
sealbh an fhuinn ag clannaibh Cais
a-nallainn do dhruim dúthchais.

Fá leó múr Cliach is Cláire
is Dún Eochair fhionnMháighe
fa fonn mhín im linn Luimnigh
gur fhill don tír Tuaidhmhuimhnigh.

Ceithre mic maithe ag Mac Con
Síoda Cam, Séa[a]n séaghmhar,
Cú (i) Mheadha, Donnchadh dealbhda
torcha(i)r feadha fineamhna.

Sliocht Shíoda Chaim ón Ros Ruaidh
sliocht airir la mná is marcshluagh
laoich neamhchumhga ar tháille in tuir c(h)eathramhna
áille in Iobhair.

Sliocht Cho(i)n Méadha mór a mbrígh
ríoghraidh réidh Rátha Laithín
is laochradh bhenn Bhaile an tSléibhe
dream gan aire air aimhréidhe.

Sliocht Donnchaidh an ghu(i)rm(á)gha ghéir
laochraidh Bhéil Átha hOighnéin
ní clú a n-aisgidh fuair soin
buaidh ngaisgidh ar in laochraidh.

Why do I avoid the descendants of Aodh?
A family in whom it is better to trust,
A family whose vines bear heavy fruit
Regal herd from the land of fair Adhar.

A tribe more noble than gold,
Descendants of Aodh of the mightiest assemblies,
Descendants of the kings of Kincora.ⁱ
A tribe that nurtures churches.

I am not reluctant to return to them
After my journey throughout Ireland,
I should take a step towards them
From the inheritance of Clann Choiléin.ⁱⁱ

I should not forget them;
I receive from Clann Choiléin
In times of communal drinking and feasting,
Great honour and status.

My land is still held from them,
I am no stranger among them.
Ardchoill – that Rome of the artsⁱⁱⁱ
An old abode that should not be violated.

They took possession of Munster,^{iv}
Goodly descendants of slender-fingered Lughaidh Meann^v
Turning their backs on fair Munster^{vi}
In anticipation of the land of Thomond.

Theirs is Waterford and Limerick of Lorc
And Cashel of the noble branches,
The possession of the land by the tribes of Cas,
From former times on account of their inheritance.

Theirs were the forts of Cliú and Cláire^{vii}
And Dún Eochair by the fair Maigue^{viii},
It was level land about Limerick's sea [Shannon estuary],
Until they returned to the lands of Thomond.

Four goodly sons, had Mac Con:
Síoda Cam^{ix}, Seán the excellent,
Cú Mheadha, and Donnchadh the statuesque.
Offspring of the sylvan vine.

Descendants of Síoda Cam of Rosroe,^x
A line whose womenfolk and horsemen were plentiful,
Generous warriors on the battlements of the tower
The beautiful district of the Iobhar.^{xi}

Descendants of Cú Mheadha — great their strength.
Steady royalty of Rathlaheen,^{xii}
Warriors of the peaks of Ballintlea,^{xiii}
Who paid no heed to unevenness.^{xiv}

Descendants of Donnchadh of the iron-grey sharp spear,
Warriors of Ballyogan.^{xv}
They did not receive their glory as a free gift,
They are warriors of superior valour.

Sliocht tSeaáin mhóir mhic Mic Con
san lorg díreach linn leantur
coil chnuasaigh gan chéim ccoire
suas san réim ríoghraidhe.

Tús is deireadh a n-am áigh
a-tá ag siol Aodha d'uráimh
caor shluagh budh buaine brígh
is guaille eoil gach áirdrigh.

Cas mac Conaill na ccolg síth
do-níd[h] fál do chloinn Chaisín
beag 'gá ttéid im chlaon aicme
dá ghéig chumhra chlanmhaicne.

Fine Bhloid go teacht dá ttír
athair Bhloid chródha is Chaisín
bheith fá ccoim dóibh is daingne
slógh nár choill a ccómhairge.

Beith riú go héadmar ní háil
sliocht Bhloid is seintsliocht tSeaáin
do-dhén féin d'uaime ré ar-oile
dá dhuain don réim ríoghraighe.

Mac Con Mara nár mhuigh mhionn
a shlán fá uaislibh Éirionn
aonúmhlá d'aon acht d'úa Bhriain
ríogha is flaitheamhlá a finnChlia[i]ch.

D'éis buadha do bhreith a ttroid
a mbreith féin is ann iarraid
go ttriallaid a cceann chosgair
ní iarraid teann tuarusdail.

An ghasradh ghreadach ghrádhach
chupach chórnach chupánach
tromdhámhach torthach [leg. tairtheach?] as-tigh
cómhhdhalach caithfeach coibhsigh.

Tiaghaid uime a-niar 's a-noir
síol Aodha an aigne uasail
fiú an fhocail d'iomrádh ní háil
acht binnghlór socair Sheaáin.

Críoch iona lia mil is meas
críoch ionar mó gach maitheas
críoch (io)'nar lia do bhuaibh bleachta
is (io)'na lia cruacha [leg. cruaiigh?] cruithneachta.

Críoch easach innseach [fh]éarach
críoch chruithgheal chaomh chaisleánach
críoch shéadach fholtach fhuilteach
torthach trédach thiodhlaictheach.

Ó Thadhg mhac Mic Con na ccreach
sliocht mhic Taidhg na ttres neimhneach
sluagh trealmhach bruthmhar buadhach
cruthghlan mheanmnach mharshluaghach.

Descendants of Sean Mór, son of Mac Con,
In the direct line we follow:
Fruitful branch without a step of trespass,
Upward in the succession list of kings.

The descendants of Aodh have custody of the van
And rearguard in every battle,
Berry-red army of enduring vigour,
The shoulder of knowledge of every high-king.

Cas son of Conall of the fairy-swords,
He makes a fence/hedge in Caisín's family.
Few of his fragrant line of descendants
Become a perverse class.

The race of Blod,^{xvi} before coming to their land,
The father of brave Blod and Caisín.
It is most secure to be under their protection,
A host that did not violate their protection.^{xvii}

To be jealous of them cannot avail,
The descendants of Blod and ancient line of Seán,
I myself shall join together^{xviii}
Two poems that enumerate the kings.

Mac Con Mara who never broke an oath,
His surety on the nobility of Ireland.
Subject to no one but Ua Bhriain,
The most princely kings of fair Clíú^{xix}

After victory in battle
Their own choice is what they seek.
Until they go in quest of spoils,
They do not ask for a firm reward.^{xx}

The smiting and loving youths,^{xxi}
Tippling, supping, drinking,
[Having] great bardic company, fruitful at home
Given to assemblies, fond of spending, masterful.

They gather around him from west and east
The descendants of Aodh of the noble mind.
They desire to hear no word
Except the steady sweet voice of Seán.^{xxii}

A land that is plentiful in honey and forest fruit,
A land that is full of every good thing.
A land of many milking cows
And bountiful wheat stacks.

A district of waterfalls, islands and grass,
A district of bright shape and beautiful castles,
A district of gems, fine locks [of hair] and fine bloodlines.
Fruitful, well-flocked, generous.

From Tadhg the grandson of Mac Con of the campaigns,
Descendants of the son of Tadhg of the virulent battles,
A well-equipped group, ardent and victorious,
Shapely, high-spirited, cavalymen.^{xxiii}

Frith lé sliocht Flannchadha finn
meic Néill meic Aodha d'uirrim
lucht deaghgharma nách gann geall
barr ealadhna na hÉireann.

Ag sin síol an tora[i]dh thruim
deighshíol Donchadha meic Domhnaill
síol lámhghlan nách síol singil
síol ádhbhor an oirchinnigh.

Ceithre tréithe thuilleas ann
gaisge is firinne is fulang
gan díth féile ar fhlaith Leamhna
maith na tréithe tí(a)ghearna.

Ó Rinn Eanach na n-eathar
críoch chómhfhada chóimhleathan
gus an ccaladh fá Chluain Ruis
nár hanadh uaibh 'na n-éagmais.

Ó Luchad na learg ndomhain
ceart búr ccríche an ccualamhair
bhúr ttarrang^{xxiv} ar ttriall uime
go sliabh álainn Fhéilime.

Found among the descendants of fair Flannchadh,
Son of Niall, the son of the renowned Aodh,^{xxv}
A praiseworthy people not lacking in pledges
The choice of the learned classes of Ireland.

Behold the seed of the heavy fruit,^{xxvi}
Goodly descendants of Donnchadh son of Domhnall,^{xxvii}
A progeny of clean hands that is no humble people.^{xxviii}
The warlike descendants of the erenagh.^{xxvix}

Four characteristics for which they are reputed:
Bravery, veracity, endurance —
Without lack of hospitality is the Prince of Leamhain,
Good traits for a lord.

From Rineanna^{xxx} of the ships,
A district broad and long.
To the port of Clonrush,^{xxxi}
Let it not be without ye[?].

From Luchaid^{xxxii} of the deep hillsides,
Have you heard the extent of your patrimony[?]
Drawing you after travelling about it,
To the beautiful Slieve Feilim.^{xxxiii}

- ¹ Brian Boru's royal residence nearby Killaloe.
- ² The septs that comprised the Clann Coiléin mentioned in the *Caithréim Thoirdealbhaigh* included: McInerneys, O'Hartigans, O'Kinerigans, O'Halys, McConduffs, O'Meehans, McBinys, O'Keatys, McGraths, O'Kelechars, O'Quinns O'Gerans, O'Molony's, O'Malleys, O'Hallorans, O'Currys, O'Slattery's, and O'Hessias. Notably absent are the O'Mulqueenys and McClancys (anglicised forms).
- ³ This could also read as 'Ardchoill - that sanctuary of learning', as *róimh* (Rome) in this context indicates a learned central place and is without capitalisation.
- ⁴ Probably an archaic reference to the mythical Lughaidh, son of Ith, the first (Milesian) discoverer of Ireland, and his original patrimony in mid Munster (ie. Waterford and Tipperary).
- ⁵ Lugaidh Meann, third century king of Munster of the Dál gCais tribe, took from Connaught the territory afterwards called the County of Clare, and added it to north Munster (*Tuadhmhumha*). Although the Dál gCais claimed kinship to the royal Eóghanacht, they belonged to the Munster Déisi tribe based between Waterford, south Tipperary and west Limerick. While legends point to their conquest of east Clare in the third century, their historical expansion can only be dated to the early eighth century.
- ⁶ *Mín Mumhan* also read as 'fine-pasture of Munster'.
- ⁷ Cláire fort situates in County Limerick. Cliú (Cliach) is a territory in eastern Limerick and south Tipperary and historically was associated with the overlord Eóghanacht dynasty and later the tribal group known as the Déisi Tuisceart, or Dál gCais. The barony of Owney in modern Limerick was historically called *Uaithne Cliach*.
- ⁸ Dún Eochair Maighe was a fort situated at Bruree in south-west Limerick and built by Brian Boru on a royal stronghold that dated from the time of Oilioll Ólum, second century king of Munster.
- ⁹ The *Annals of the Four Masters* records for 1369 that after Limerick capitulated to the forces of Brian Ó Briain, Síoda Cam Mac Conmara assumed wardenship of the town but was treacherously slain by the English of Limerick.
- ¹⁰ Rosroe is in Kilmurry-na-gall parish.
- ¹¹ This could alternatively be read as "The four beautiful quarters of the yew-tree".
- ¹² Rathlaheen is in Tomfinlough parish.
- ¹³ Ballintlea is in Kilfintinan parish.
- ¹⁴ *Aimhréidhe* could be read as 'dissension'.
- ¹⁵ Ballyogan is in Kilraghtis parish.
- ¹⁶ The clans that composed the Uí Bhloid included: O'Aherns, O'Shanahans, O'Gradys, O'Kennedys, O'Duracks, O'Connollys, O'Muldoons, O'Lonergans, O'Moloneys (anglicised forms).
- ¹⁷ This stanza appears to refer to the original patrimony of the Uí Bhloid in east Clare and the fourteenth century expansion of the Mac Conmara into their territories.
- ¹⁸ This may refer to the kinship between the Uí Bhloid and Clann Chaisín who both descended from Cas.
- ¹⁹ This line connects the Uí Bhriain, as the leading Dál gCais lineage, to the ancient territory of Cliú (Cliach) that is located in eastern Limerick and southern Tipperary and was where the Déisi Tuisceart tribe expanded from into Clare. An important branch of the Uí Bhriain settled at Pubblebrien during the middle ages which was contiguous with the ancient territory of Cliú.
- ²⁰ Alternatively translated as 'rather than the strict wage'.
- ²¹ *An ghasradh ghreadach ghrádhach* could also read as, 'the beloved youths rich in horses [studs]'.
- ²² This appears to be Seán Mac Conmara, chieftain of West *Clann Chuiléin*. This stanza may refer to his inauguration as *taoiseach* in 1571.
- ²³ This refers to another sept of the Mac Conmara *fionn* lineage. Teige was the grandson of Mac Con Mór who flourished in c.1329. Teige was related to the four sons of Mac Con Mór enumerated in stanza nine as his father was Lochlainn who, according to one genealogy, was another son of Mac Con Mór. See the pedigree in R.W. Twigge, *The Pedigree of John MacNamara, Esquire, with some Family Reminiscences*.
- ²⁴ Read *ttarrang* as *tarraing* meaning 'drawing'. An alternative reading for *ttarrang* is *dtárainn* meaning confines/territory.
- ²⁵ The recounting of the progenitor of the Mac Fhlannchadha lineage is in agreement with the Mac Conmara genealogies. See RIA Ms 23 N.12, pp.187-189 and RIA Ms E.iv.4. f.28.
- ²⁶ Also read as 'behold the line of great numbers'.
- ²⁷ The recounting of Donnchadh, the son of Domhnall as the progenitor of the Mac an Oirchinnigh lineage is in agreement with the Mac Conmara genealogies. See RIA Ms 23 N.12, pp.187-189 and RIA Ms 23. L37, pp.172-173.
- ²⁸ *Síol lámhghlan* – 'progeny/seed of clean hands' might be poetical metaphor for a now obscure meaning. While referring to the Mac an Oirchinnigh descent this reference might infer the historic *airchinneach* occupation of Clann an Oirchinnigh and their 'unblemished' lineage and ecclesiastical connection. Bardic poets were a mandarin class who sought to extract multi-layered meanings from words using complicated syntax, allowing them to communicate subtleties to a learned few who could appreciate their dexterity of verse.
- ²⁹ *Ádhbhor* while easily confused with *adhbhor* meaning 'heir/successor', rhymes with the previous *lámhghlan* as both share a long first syllable. It is assumed that *ádhbhor* is a corrupt spelling of *ághmhar* meaning warlike.
- ³⁰ Rineanna is in Kilconry parish and exposed to the Shannon river to the west and south.
- ³¹ This is Clonrush parish in northeast Clare next to Lough Derg.
- ³² This is Kilkeedy parish in Inchiquin barony where the Bridge of Lochaid situated and was mentioned by Geoffrey Keating as spanning the boundary of the Connaught and the territory of the Dál gCais.
- ³³ Slieve Feilim mountains in eastern Limerick and south-west Tipperary.