

The
O'Conors of Connaught

an Historical Memoir,
compiled from a MS of

The Late John O'Donovan, LL.D.

with additions

From the State Papers and Public Records

By the

Rt. Hon. Charles Owen O'Connor Don.

DUBLIN :
HODGES, FIGGIS, AND CO., GRAFTON STREET
PUBLISHERS TO THE UNIVERSITY.
1891.

A.D. 358 - 968

EOCHY MOYMEDON, A.D. 358 to A.D. 366.

With this monarch, who came to the throne about the year A.D. 358, most of the special pedigrees of the O'Conors usually start, probably because he was the last monarch of Ireland of their line, until the time of Turlough Mor in the eleventh century, and by connecting the pedigree with him it is connected with the long list of previous sovereigns.

Eochy, it would appear, had been proclaimed King of Connaught for some years before he assumed paramount authority in Ireland. Not many remarkable incidents are recorded in his reign. He appears to have been engaged in constant warfare with the King of Leinster, by whom he was defeated in several battles. He was married twice, and apparently divorced from his first wife, Mongfinn, one of the royal family of Munster, as she survived him. His second wife was Corrine, a Saxon princess ; and by both marriages he had a large number of children. After a reign of thirteen years, he died peaceably in his palace at Tara.

Upon his death, Crimthan, King of Munster, brother to Eochy's first wife, Mongfinn, succeeded to the throne ; and a most remarkable tradition is handed down in regard to his tragic end.

Mongfinn, actuated, it is said, by motives of ambition for the aggrandisement of her own offspring, determined to poison her brother, in the hope that her eldest son, Brian, would then succeed to the throne. For this purpose she joined her brother's court, and prepared with her own hands the fatal cup, and, having, to prove her good faith, first drunk of it herself, she presented it to him, and both she and her brother died from its effects.

This desperate deed of the Irish queen had not the result she anticipated, as on the death of Crimthan, Nial, a son of Eochy by his second wife, Corrine, was selected in preference to

Brian, the eldest son, and no descendant of Mongfinn ever reigned over Ireland except Turlough O'Conor, and his son Roderick, in the twelfth century.

As Brian was the ancestor of the O'Conors, their pedigree can no longer be traced through the monarchs of Ireland ; and hence, from this period, the information handed down in regard to each generation is more scanty, although the succession has not been less clearly recorded.

BRIAN, son of Eochy, died A.D. 397.

Although the claims of Brian, who was then King of Connaught, to the succession to the monarchy, had been set aside in favour of his younger brother Nial, surnamed " of the Nine Hostages," yet he still held the throne of Connaught, and his descendants retained possession of that kingdom until long after the English invasion. The records of the history of this subordinate kingdom are naturally much less detailed than those of the Irish supreme monarchy ; and from this date until the sovereignty reverted to the line of Brian in the person of Turlough the Great, in 1056, little more is recorded, in many instances, than the dates of the accession and death of various Connaught princes. For the purpose of a pedigree, and tracing the line of succession, this of course is amply sufficient ; and as the greatest care was taken to register and hand down to posterity these dates and this descent, as little doubt can be cast upon them as upon any previous event in Irish history.

Soon after the accession of Nial to the throne of Ireland, dissensions arose between Brian, King of Connaught, and another half-brother, named Fiacha, and a battle was fought, in which Fiacha was defeated and taken prisoner, and delivered by Brian into the hands of Nial. After this, Dathi, son of Fiacha, determined to be revenged for his father, and challenged Brian to a battle at a place called Damclone, near Tuam, where Brian and his forces were defeated. The victorious Dathi pursued his retreating uncle to Tullagh-donnell, where Brian was overtaken and slain, and his body was buried in the place where he fell, and there it remained for many years, until St Aedus, patron of the Church of Roscam, near Galway, removed his bones and buried them at Roscam. [1]

After the fall of Brian, his half-brother, Fiacha, was set at liberty, and was made King of Connaught, and generalissimo of the forces of his brother Nial, the monarch. He was killed in a predatory incursion into Munster, upon which, his warlike son, Dathi, became King of Connaught, and on the death of Nial, A.D. 406, he was unanimously chosen to succeed him as monarch of Ireland, leaving the kingdom of Connaught to another brother, named Auley. Dathi was subsequently killed by lightning at the foot of the Alps, but his body was brought over to Ireland, and interred at Rathcroughan in Roscommon. [2]

DUAGH GALACH, son of Brian, died A.D. 438.

Brian left, it is said, twenty-four sons ; and after the death of Oilil Molt, son of Dathi, who succeeded Auley as King of Connaught, one of these sons, named Duagh Galach, or Duagh the Valorous, became King of Connaught Duagh was the youngest son of Brian. Before he came to the throne, and whilst it was held by his uncle's family, St Patrick is stated to have visited Connaught Of this visit and its results, so far as Duagh is concerned, O'Flaherty, in his History of West Connaught, gives the following account [3]: —

“ An old unpublished History of Ireland, preserved in the library of the R.I.A., informs us that St Patrick arrived in Connaught, A.D. 434 ; and making towards the twenty-four sons of Brian, Eoghan, the eldest, mounting his horse, set spurs to him, and advised the rest of his brethren to do the same, and not to countenance the blessed man, which they all did, save only Duagh Galach, the youngest, who, staying on foot, courteously saluted St Patrick, and

tendered him respect and obedience. The holy man went still after Eoghan ; and having overtaken him, asked him if he was the man, which he denied, but St Patrick, notwithstanding, cursed him, saying, ‘ If you be Eoghan, I deprive both you, and all your brethren about you, of all royalty and plenty, except him only who honoured and cherished me for my Lord Jesus Christ’s sake.’ Then Duagh replied that if he was the eldest son he would have further pleased the holy man. St Patrick blessed him, saying, ‘ You and your posterity shall be kings over your brethren ;’ and so it came to pass, for the future Kings of Connaught were descended from this Duagh.”

Duagh subsequently became King of Connaught, and reigned for nineteen years. According to the *Annals of the Four Masters*, he died in A.D. 438, the chronology here not corresponding with the date given in the above recited legend.

Duagh left one son, named Eoghan, or Owen Shreve.

EOGHAN SHREVE died about A.D. 464. He does not appear to have been King of Connaught. He left a son.

MUIREDACH MAL, who also never became King of Connaught, the kingship having at this period passed to the family of Oilil Molt, son of Dathi, son of Fiacha, who was, as related above, a brother of Brian. Muiredhach Mal died about the year A.D. 489, leaving two sons, Cathal and Fergus, neither of whom, according to O’Donovan, ever became King of Connaught

FERGUS, according to some accounts, was, for a time, King of Connaught; but if so he did not retain the kingship for more than a few years, and had relinquished it before his death, which took place A.D. 517. He left two sons, Duagh Teangumha and Eochy Termacherna. Duagh became King of Connaught during his father’s lifetime, and was killed in the battle of the Seaghais (the Curliu Mountains) in the year A.D. 504.

EOCHY TERMACHERNA probably became King of Connaught after the death of Eoghan Bel, descendant of Dathi, who was a most distinguished king, and who died from a wound received in the battle of Sligo, A.D. 537. This battle was fought by the King of Connaught against Fergus and Donnell, sons of the then monarch of Ireland, some days before his death. Finding his end approaching, this Eoghan Bel besought St Keiran of Cloonmacnoise, to allow his son Ceallagh, who was intended for the priesthood, and who was preparing for holy orders at the monastery, to leave this retreat, and to take on himself the government of Connaught ; but it does not appear that St Keiran consented to this, or that Ceallagh ever reigned for any length of time. Eochy died A.D. 543, a natural death, leaving a son named Aedh.

AEDH, or HUGH, came to the throne of Connaught some time before the year A.D. 554, as in that year [4] an occurrence took place which is related in all the old records, and which proves that he was then King of Connaught. It is stated that Curnan, the son of Hugh, son of Eochy Termacherna, King of Connaught, who was a hostage for his father, with Diarmid, monarch of Ireland, was put to death by that monarch, in violation of the guarantee of St Columbkille. The result of this was a war between Hugh and Diarmid, in which St Columbkille exercised all his authority and powers against the monarch, and raised up his family adherents in Tirconnell and Tyrone to oppose Diarmid. A battle ensued in the Co. Sligo, in which Diarmid was defeated with great loss. After the battle, Diarmid and Columbkille were reconciled, and a MS., about which Columbkille and St Finian had been disputing, was handed over to Columbkille.

The following account of this dispute, and of the events which followed it, is given by O'Donovan in his MS., and is stated by him to be taken from O'Donnell's *Life of Columbkille* [5]:—

“ St. Finian had a unique MS. of the Psalter, which he lent to Columbkille, who secretly made a copy of it. St Finian, when he discovered this, claimed the copy as his, but Columbkille resisted. The matter was referred to Diarmid, who decided that as the lamb belonged to the sheep, so did the copy to the book, and that St Finian, as the owner of the one, was entitled to the other ; his judgment being thus against Columbkille.

“ At the same time Curnan, son of Aedh, King of Connaught, who was a hostage in the hands of Diarmid, was playing ball in the pomarium of the city with other youths ; and a quarrel having arisen in the game, he slew the son of the chief of the household by striking him on the head with his hurlet, and to avoid the anger of the king, he fled to St Columbkille, whose asylum he thought no man would dare violate ; but the king's rage was so great that, regardless of the privileges of the Church, and of the sanctity of Columbkille, he dragged the youth from the very bosom of the saint, and immediately put him to death. Columbkille, who could not brook this insult to the privileges of the Church, threatened revenge, and said to the king, ‘ I shall expostulate with my brethren and kinsmen concerning thy unjust decision and contempt of me and thy violation of the immunity of the Church, that they may take revenge of thee for so profane deeds.’

“ The saint proceeded into Ulster, and induced his kinsmen of the races of Eoghan and Connell to challenge the monarch to a pitched battle, at a place called Cuil-Dreimhne, in the territory of Carbury, north of Sligo. There they were joined by Aedh, King of Connaught, who was glad to avail himself of their aid, to take revenge for the death of his son. They mustered their forces to the number of 3,000 men, and the monarch met them with a force of 2,300 men, consisting of charioteers, cavalry, and pedestrians. The monarch was defeated with great slaughter, in consequence, it is said, of the efficacy of the prayers of St Columbkille, who knelt and prayed on a neighbouring hill during the battle.”

After the battle, Diarmid and Columbkille were reconciled, and the copy of the book made by him from St Finian's MS., was left to him.

“ This identical MS., in an ancient reliquary, called the Cathach or Caah of Columbkille, is still in existence, and has been deposited in the Museum of the Irish Academy by its present owner, Sir Richard O'Donnell.”

The MS. here referred to had been preserved for generations in the O'Donnell family, and one of its possessors. Brigadier Daniel O'Donnell, in 1723, caused a solid silver rim to be placed round the shrine. Some years later he left this important heirloom of his family in a monastery in Belgium, with an injunction that it should be delivered to whoever could prove himself to be the representative, or head, of the O'Donnell family. In this monastery the relic remained, until the late Sir Neal O'Donnell of Newport, having received from Sir W. Betham the necessary certificate, claimed and obtained it. From him it passed to his son, the late Sir Richard O'Donnell, who placed it in the care of the Royal Irish Academy.[6]

Although successful in the contest with the monarch Diarmid, the King of Connaught, does not appear to have gained much by his victory ; and little more is recorded regarding him until his death, which took place in the year 577.

UADA, son of Hugh, died A.D. 599 or 601.

Hugh, the late King of Connaught, was succeeded by a cousin, who reigned seven years, and was followed by another cousin, who also reigned seven years, after which the government reverted to his son Uada. He reigned for nine years, and died a natural death, according to the *Annals of the Four Masters*, in 601, and according to other accounts, in 599.^[7] After the death of Uada, the sovereignty of Connaught again passed to the descendants of Dathi, until Roghallach, son of Uada, recovered it after the battle of Ceann-Gabha, in which the then King Colman was slain.

ROGHALLACH, son of Uada, died A.D. 645 or 648.

Roghallach, having wrested the sovereignty from his rival, reigned twenty-five years. According to the *Annals of the Four Masters*, he was killed in 645. In the *Annals of Ulster* his death is placed in 648, and O'Donovan accepts this date as correct, whilst Charles O'Conor adopts the date fixed by the Four Masters.

Roghallach was a great warrior, and his exploits formed the subject-matter of many ancient lays. He was killed whilst on horseback by a chieftain named Moyle Bride. The *Annals of the Four Masters* thus record his death : —

“ Roghallach, son of Uatach, was pierced on the back of a white steed ;
Muireann (his wife) hath well lamented him, Cathal (his son) hath well avenged him ;
Cathal is this day in battle, though he is bound (to peace) in the presence of kings ;
Though Cathal is without a father, his father is not without being well revenged.
Estimate his terrible revenge from the account of it related ;
He slew six men and fifty, he committed sixteen devastations ;
I had my share like another in the revenge of Roghallach ;
I have the grey beard in my hand of Maelbride, son of Mothlachen.”

FERGUS, son of Roghallach, died A.D. 649 or 654.

Roghallach left three sons, Cathal, Ceallagh, and Fergus, all of whom appear to have held for a time the sovereignty of Connaught. Fergus did not reign for a long term. He was killed in battle, in the Co. Galway, A.D. 649 or 654. ^[8] After his death the sovereignty passed to other branches of the descendants of Brian, and for a short period was held by his brother Cellagh. Eventually it reverted to Fergus's son, Muiredhach.

MUIREDHACH MUILETHAN, died A.D. 700 or 702.

Muiredhach Muilethan, or “ Murray of the Broad Crown,” was elected King of Connaught about the year 696, ^[9] and died in 700 or 702. ^[10] He was called also Muiredhach of the Maghery or plains of Connaught ; and the race which descended from him, and which became very numerous, was called the Sil Muiredhach or Siol Murray. Amongst the families belonging to this race were the O'Conors, M'Dermots, M'Donoughs, O'Beirnes, O'Flanagans, Magheraghtys, and O'Feenaghtys. Muiredhach left three sons, Conway, Innrechtach, and Cathal. ^[11] From the first are descended the O'Feenaghtys of the valley of the Suck, from the second the O'Conors, and from the third the O'Flahertys. The eldest son, Conway, never obtained the sovereignty, which was bestowed on the second son, Innrechtach, or Enright, ^[12] but in consequence of his seniority, his descendants were granted great privileges over the other chieftains.

“ O'Feenaghty,” says Duaid M'Firbis, “ was called the Royal Chieftain of ‘ Clann’ Conway, and possessed before the English invasion forty ‘ ballys,’ lying along both sides of the river Suck ; but the Burkes drove him from his patrimonial territory.”

Muiredhach Muilethan was succeeded by the descendants of other branches of the family ; and three kings intervened before the succession reverted to his second son, Enright

INNRECHTACH, or ENRIGHT, died A.D. 723.

This prince reigned ten years as King of Connaught, and died peaceably in 723. [13] He left two sons, Aedh, or Hugh, who succeeded him, and Murgil. Hugh reigned fourteen years, and died a natural death in 737, without issue. After his death the sovereignty reverted to the descendants of Ceallach, son of Roghallach, and several kings of this line intervened before the descendants of Innrechtach recovered possession of the throne. [14]

MURGIL, son of Enright, died A.D. 751.

Murgil, the second son of Enright, never attained the sovereignty. [15] He left one son, Tomaltach.

TOMALTACH, son of Murgil, died A.D. 774.

Tomaltach also was never king. He is called illustrious in the *Book of Lecan*, [16] He died about the year 774, leaving three sons, Muirgis, Fenachta, and Dermot Finn. Both Muirgis and Dermot Finn were subsequently Kings of Connaught

MUIRGIS, son of Tomaltach, died A.D. 810 or 813.

Muirgis, eldest son of Tomaltach, reigned as King of Connaught for several years, and died a natural death in 810 or 813. [17] He had four sons, Teige, Flaithnia, Cathal, and Maelduin. Of these only one, Cathal, ever attained the sovereignty. He became king in 832, and died in 836. [18]

TEIGE, son of Muirgis, died A.D. 841 or 842.

Teige was apparently set aside in favour of his brother Cathal. Whether he ever became king seems doubtful. O'Donovan states that he did not ; but as he is styled Teige Mor, or Teige the Great, in the Annals, it would appear that he did. He died in 841 or 842, leaving one son, Concovar, or Conor. Shortly before his death, in 837, Dublin was first taken by the Danes.

CONCOVAR, or CONOR, son of Teige, died A.D. 879.

Conor was King of Connaught for about thirty years. He fought on the side of the Irish monarch Hugh, in a battle which took place near Drogheda, against the Danes of Dublin and the Leinster men. [19] On this occasion the *Annals of the Four Masters* record that the *Foreigners* and the Leinster men were defeated. [19] Conor died about the year 879, [20] leaving five sons — Hugh, who became King of Connaught, and was killed by the Danes [21] in 885, Maelcluiche, Innrechta, Teige, and Cathal.

CATHAL, son of Conor, died A.D. 925.

Cathal, one of the younger sons of Conor, became king after the decease of his brothers Hugh and Teige, both of whom preceded him as Kings of Connaught. Teige died in the year 899. [22] The fair of Tailton was revived in the reign of Flann, Monarch of Ireland, in the year 894, [23] and Teige revived the fair of Connaught.

Cathal assumed the sovereignty probably about the year 900. In 903 he joined Flann in an expedition against Cormac, King of Munster, who was defeated and slain. [24] In 920 his eldest son, Innrechtach, died, and he himself followed five years later, dying in the year 925. [25]

TEIGE OF THE THREE TOWERS, died A.D. 954 or 956.

Immediately after the death of Cathal, a contention arose between his two sons, Donnell and Teige, each of whom sought to become king. Donnell being killed in this contest, Teige was left undisputed victor. [26] Why he received the surname “ of the Three Towers” is not clear. O’Donovan says :[27] “ It may be safely conjectured that the appellation arose from the fact of his having built three towers of defence, but whether these were castles or round tower belfries it is impossible to determine. Our historians,” he adds, “are of opinion that the ‘*Castellum*’ erected in the twelfth century by King Turlough O’Conor, at Tuam, was the first castle of any importance ever erected in Ireland.”

In 931[28] Murtough, a general of the monarch of Ireland, made a circuit of the country, and compelled most of the provincial kings to submit to him, and to give hostages to his master, Donchad the monarch. He came to Connaught amongst other places, and there met Conor, son of Teige, who, however, gave no hostages. He then returned, carrying with him some of the provincial kings and their hostages, whom he sent to Donchad.

The death of Teige is recorded in the *Annals of the Four Masters* as having occurred in 954. [29] According to the *Chronicum Scotorum*, he died a year later, in 955. He left five sons — (1) Conor, (2) Cathal, who was King of Connaught for a few days, and was killed in 971, (3) Muirgis, (4) Mulrooney, ancestor of the M’Dermots, and (5) Muiredhach.

A.D. 968 — A.D. 1106.

CONCOVAR, or CONOR, son of Teige, died A.D. 971.

Upon the death of Teige, the sovereignty of Connaught passed for a time to the family of the O’Rourkes, who were descended from Fergus, third in descent from Duagh Galech. Fírgal O’Rourke, their chieftain, who was recognised as king, was slain in the year 964 by Donnell, Lord of Breagha.[30] Four years later, in 968, [31] Conor, son of Teige, recovered the sovereignty held by his father. He died in 971, and in the same year his brother Cathal was killed after a reign of a few days. [32] From this Concovar, or Conor, the family name of O’Conor has arisen, his descendants being called O’Conor, or the sons, or descendants, of Conor.

“ This name, O’Conor,” says O’Donovan, “ is written in Irish O’Conchobhair, and it has been variously at different times anglicised O’Conquovar, O’Conogher, O’Knogher, O’Konnor, O’Conner, O’Connor, and O’Conor, according to the ever-varying whims of usage. The Irish form of the second part contains a guttural sound, which was usually represented by ‘ gh’ in old English, but for the last three centuries it has been usually written O’Connor or O’Conor. The Irish Conchobhair means a hero or champion, and the motto of the family, ‘ O Dhia gach cu cabrach,’ *i.e.*, ‘ From God comes every helping hero,’ has reference to this signification of the name of their progenitor.” [33]

CATHAL UI CONCOVAR, or CATHAL O’CONOR, died A.D. 1010.

Whether Cathal succeeded his father immediately appears to be doubtful. Most probably he did not, as the sovereignty about this time, and for many years later, appears to have alternated between the O’Rourkes and O’Conors, both descendants of the same stock.

In the year 980 the Annals record the death of Muirgis, son of Conor, and royal heir of Connaught ; and in 991 the death of Mor, daughter of Teige of the Towers, whom they style Queen of Ireland.

According to O'Donovan, Cathal O'Conor reigned for thirty years, and as he died in 1010, [34] he must have succeeded to the throne of his father about the year 980. In the year 1000 he built a stone bridge over the Shannon at Athlone, probably the first bridge of such magnitude ever constructed in Ireland. He it was who also built the sepulchral chapel of the O'Conors at Cloonmacnoise, which is referred to by Petrie in his work entitled *Ancient Ecclesiastical Architecture of Ireland*. [35]

In the year 1001 [36] Brian Boru, King of Munster, deposed the monarch of Ireland, and assumed the chief sovereignty himself. Before succeeding in this enterprise, he marched an army to Athlone, and obtained the submission of Connaught to his authority. Brian was nearly connected with Cathal ; his wife Dunchalvy being the daughter of the King of Connaught. Cathal having reigned twenty-eight years, resigned his throne, took the habit of a monk, and died two years afterwards in 1010. [37] He left five sons — Teige of the White Steed ; Brian ; Conor ; Donnell Dubhshuilech, or the Black-eyed ; and Teige Direch, or the Straight.

TEIGE OF THE WHITE STEED, died A.D. 1030.

After the death of Cathal, the O'Rourkes again became possessed of the sovereignty of Connaught, and held it for fifteen years, [38] when Teige, son of Cathal, surnamed Teige of the White Steed, recovered the throne of his fathers. According to the *Annals of the Four Masters*, O'Rourke held the throne for less than five years, [39] as Teige is named as King of Connaught in 1015, when he is referred to as having slain the son of O'Rourke, in revenge for the death of his brother Donnell. In 1023 he is again styled King of Connaught, [40] on the occasion of his leading an expedition into Leyney in Co. Sligo. In 1025 [41] Neal O'Conor, called the royal heir of Connaught, was killed, and in 1028 [42] Brian, brother of Teige, met the same fate. In 1029 he appears to have blinded [43] his brother Conor, who probably was engaged in some plot to supplant him, and in 1030 [44] he himself was slain by Melachlan, Lord of Meath.

This Teige, or his father Cathal, was the first who took the name of O'Conor as an hereditary surname, and about this period the adoption of such surnames appears to have become general. The white steed of magical fleetness, from which he took his particular designation, had been presented to him by O'Hanly. [45]

It is stated in the Dublin copy of the *Annals of Innisfallen* that this Teige commanded the forces of Connaught in the battle of Clontarf, on the side of King Brian Boru, but his name does not appear in any of the older annals, and the very contrary is recorded in the *Annals of Cloonmacnoise*, which state that the O'Neals forsook King Brian in this battle,- as did all Connaught, except Farrell O'Rourke, and Teige O'Kelly. [46] Besides this, as Teige did not come into the sovereignty of Connaught until a year after the battle of Clontarf, which was fought in 1014, it is not probable that he took part in the encounter.

Teige left one son Hugh.

HUGH OF THE BROKEN SPEAR, died A.D. 1067.

Hugh succeeded his father as King of Connaught, but his supremacy in that kingdom appears to have been disputed by the O'Rourkes, with whom, for many years, he was engaged in almost constant contentions. [47] In 1036 he slew Melachlan, King of Meath, in revenge for the death of his father Teige and his brother Brian. [48] Whether he was King of Connaught at this time or not is not clear, as O'Rourke was at one moment in the ascendant, and O'Conor at another. In 1046 his great antagonist, Art O'Rourke, was killed, and in 1047 [49] Neal O'Rourke met the same fate, when Hugh O'Conor appears to have, beyond doubt,

been generally accepted and recognised as king. In 1051 he fixed his residence in West Connaught [50] (Co. Galway), having deposed the chieftain of that district. In 1054 he made an expedition into the Co. Clare, [51] and took “innumerable spoils,” and in the following year he did the same in Westmeath, making many prisoners. [52] In 1059 the son of Brian Boru, the late monarch, submitted to him, [53] and acknowledged his authority, and he seemed to be on the high road to obtain the sovereignty of Ireland. In 1061 [54] he defeated O’Flaherty, chief of West Connaught ; and carried his head as a trophy to Rath Cruachan, the chief seat of the Connaught kings. In the same year the following entry in the Annals of Cloonmacnoise shows that King Hugh’s ambition extended far beyond the limits of his own province : —

“ A.D. 1061, Hugh O’Conor broke down the royal palace of King Brian at Kincora ; burned Killaloe, and did also eat the two salmon that were kept in the king’s fountain, or fish-pond, there.” [55] In 1063 another battle took place between the forces of Hugh O’Conor and O’Flaherty’s son, in which O’Flaherty was defeated. [56] About this time the monarch of Ireland, probably alarmed at the prowess displayed by the King of Connaught, marched an army into that kingdom, and Hugh O’Conor, as well as the O’Rourkes, submitted to him, and acknowledged his supremacy. [57] In 1066, the year in which William the Conqueror came to England, O’Kelly and O’Rourke made an expedition against Cloonmacnoise, and plundered it, upon which Hugh O’Conor raised an army, and proceeded against them and defeated them, “through the miracles of God, Kiaran, and Brennain, whose churches they had plundered,” and a great slaughter ensued, and O’Kelly and O’Rourke left their boats, and the ship which had taken them on the Shannon, in the hands of Hugh O’Conor. In the following year, [58] Hugh himself was slain in a battle near Oranmore, in Co. Galway. This battle was fought between Hugh O’Conor on the one side, and Hugh O’Rourke on the other, and in it perished, along with Hugh O’Conor, several of the principal chieftains of Connaught. [59] After the battle Hugh O’Rourke became King of Connaught, and reigned for twenty-one years. [60] Hugh O’Conor left several sons. The following are mentioned by O’Donovan : Rory, Cathal, Teige, and Hugh. [61] And the *Annals of the Four Masters* [62] mention another son Murtough, probably the eldest, who is called royal heir of Connaught, and who was killed in 1070.

O’Donovan says : “The origin of the cognomen ‘of the Broken Spear’ though a most remarkable one, has not been explained by our genealogists or historians.”

RODERICK O’CONOR, surnamed “RORY OF THE YELLOW HOUND,” died A.D. 1106 or 1118.

Whether Roderick succeeded to the throne of Connaught immediately on his father’s decease, or whether some years intervened before his accession, is not quite certain. He is first mentioned as king in 1076, [63] when he submitted to Turlough O’Brien, King of Munster, who in that year invaded Connaught. This submission was probably only a temporary expedient, as shortly afterwards, in 1079, [64] O’Brien re-entered Connaught, and expelled Roderick from the kingdom. After O’Brien’s departure, Roderick again obtained supreme power in Connaught, which he held until 1082, when his brother Cathal set himself up as a rival for the throne, encouraged in doing so by promises of aid from O’Brien. [65] Cathal’s first exploits were, as was usual in those days, stained with the blood of some of his nearest relatives. He killed, say the ancient annalists, his nephew, Donnell O’Conor, son of his brother Teige, and heir to Connaught, “without any reason known to any man except envy and malice,” [66] and then engaged in battle with his brother Roderick. In this battle he was unsuccessful ; his followers being defeated, and he himself slain. After this, Roderick regained full possession of the country, threw off all allegiance to O’Brien, and in 1087 defeated and killed Hugh, son of Art O’Rourke, who disputed his authority. [67]

Roderick O’Conor was doubly allied by marriage with his chief enemy, O’Brien, Roderick’s wife being O’Brien’s daughter, [68] whilst, on the other hand, O’Brien, after the

death of his first wife, had married Dervorgil, sister to Roderick. These family alliances had little effect in preventing hostilities. O'Brien was determined, if possible, to make his son-in-law his subject ; and after the death of O'Rourke, twice unsuccessfully invaded Connaught ; first proceeding up the river Shannon, and subsequently attacking the country from the sea-coast. O'Conor, finding these repeated attacks from Munster more than he could constantly repel, determined to strengthen himself by an alliance with Donnell M'Loughlin, the then monarch of Ireland. Accordingly, he made his submission to him, and induced him to proceed to Munster, where the allied forces of the monarch and the King of Connaught burned Limerick, and demolished O'Brien's palace of Kincora, and carried off as hostages one hundred and sixty of the most distinguished men of Munster. This war was continued in the following year. O'Brien first sailed up the Shannon to Lough Ree ; Roderick O'Conor then blocked the passage of the Munster ships, which eventually were abandoned at Athlone, after which O'Conor and M'Loughlin again proceeded to Munster, and laid waste the country as far as Tipperary.

O'Brien, finding that he could no longer withstand the combined forces of the north and west, in 1090 submitted to M'Loughlin, and a meeting took place in that year between the respective Kings of Ulster, Munster, and Connaught, and " they all mutually acknowledged M'Loughlin as monarch, and gave hostages to him, and parted in peace, and tranquillity was restored to the island." [69]

Two years later, in 1092, [70] Roderick O'Conor's eyes were put out, and his reign brought to a close, by the treachery of one of his subordinate chiefs, O'Flaherty, with whom he was on the most intimate terms, and connected by a tie regarded as sacred by the Irish, namely, the tie of gossipred, O'Conor having stood as sponsor for seven of O'Flaherty's children. After this, O'Flaherty became king for a month, but was then killed ; in revenge, it is said, for his treachery to O'Conor. King Roderick, having been blinded by O'Flaherty, was obliged, according to the rules which bound the Irish succession, to abdicate, being no longer eligible as a sovereign. He entered the monastery of Cloonmacnoise, and lived there in seclusion for twenty-six years, his death occurring in 1118. [71] After his abdication the sovereignty of Connaught remained for several years in dispute. O'Flaherty first assumed it ; Teige O'Conor, son of Roderick, then held it for a short time, or, at least, was recognised as the head of the Siol Murray. He was killed in 1097. [72] O'Rourke then became king, and held the crown till he was killed in 1102. [73] After this, Donnell O'Conor, brother of Teige, and son of Roderick, became king. In 1103 he joined in an expedition with the King of Meath into Munster, and Donchod, son of Turlough O'Brien, was killed on this occasion. [74] Three years later he was deposed by O'Brien, and his brother Turlough, afterwards known as Turlough Mor O'Conor, was inaugurated in his place, at the ford of the Termon, probably near Tarmon-barry. [75]

From the preceding account it might appear that Roderick O'Conor's reign, like that of most of his predecessors, was occupied with nothing but civil war, and that the murder or mutilation of one king seemed to be almost the necessary prelude to the succession of another. No doubt the temper of those days was warlike, and the position of a king very dangerous. Few of the Irish kings escaped a violent death ; but in this respect Ireland differed little from other nations at the same date. " Examine the thrones of the world," says Gratianus Lucius, " and how few of the occupants do you find dying a natural death!"

How many Roman Emperors fell by poison and the sword ! Caligula, with pillows, smothered his predecessor. Tiberius, and perished himself by the dagger ; Claudius was cut off by poison, administered through the treachery of his wife, who desired the succession of her own son Nero— and he, in his turn, met a violent death by his own hand. Galba, who

succeeded him, had his head struck off by the followers of Otho ; who, after a short reign of three months, made way, by suicide, for Vitellius ; and Vitellius was beaten to death by the soldiers of Vespasian.

England supplied similar examples in abundance. In the time of the Heptarchy, kings followed each other in regular succession, through the violent deaths of their predecessors ; and under the military system then in force, and the elective character of the monarchies, no other result could be expected. Besides this, as the warlike successes of the different princes were considered the most important events of the day, these are the principal items recorded by the chroniclers, and all the other really more noble actions and deeds of the rulers of the country escaped record or transmission to posterity. It would be a mistake, however, to suppose that the sole, or indeed the chief, occupation of the rulers of the people consisted in bloodshed and destruction of property. That the fine arts flourished in these days is proved by many of the monuments preserved even to the present time.

The kings and princes, notwithstanding their frequent quarrels, were munificent in their endowment of the Church. Rich presents and gifts of all sorts were constantly made ; and it is to what has remained of these that we have to look, in order to understand the position which the fine arts had attained amongst our ancestors. The Abbey of Cloonmacnoise, where many of the kings were buried, was specially favoured in this respect. Referring to this fact, Lord Dunraven, in his *Notes on Irish Architecture* observes [76] : —

“ The monastery of Cloonmacnoise seems to have been singularly rich in objects of art. The altar of the great church there was adorned with jewels, which were carried away, when it was plundered in 1129. The annalists enumerate amongst other things stolen, a model of Solomon’s temple ; the cup of Donchad, son of Flann ; the three jewels presented by King Turlough O’Conor ; also a silver goblet, a silver cup with a gold cross over it, and a drinking-horn of gold, the drinking-horn of Ua Riada, King of Aridh ; a silver chalice, with a burnishing of gold upon it, with an engraving by the daughter of Ruaidhri O’Conor, and the silver cup of Ceallagh, the successor of St Patrick. The crozier of Ciaran is also mentioned in the year 930. The shrine of St Manchan, at Lemanaghan, within a few miles of Cloonmacnoise, is also another work of this school, which, we are told, was executed in 1166 by Ruaidhri O’Conor, and an embroidery of gold was carved over it in as good a style as a relic was ever covered in Ireland.” “ This shrine is still in existence, and forms a fine example of late Celtic Christian art.”

The Ruaidhri O’Conor first alluded to is the king of whom we now treat, and Finola, his daughter, who designed the carving on the chalice, died in 1147, in the Abbey of Cloonmacnoise. This beautiful chalice is still preserved in the Museum of the Royal Irish Academy. It was stolen, with other ornaments of great value, from the Church of Cloonmacnoise, in 1129, by a Dane, but was recovered in 1130 by O’Brien, King of Munster, who restored it to Cloonmacnoise. The Dane who committed the robbery was arrested, and executed, and before his death confessed that he had made many efforts to get out of Ireland, and had tried to escape from the ports of Limerick, Waterford, and Cork, but, on all occasions, the ship in which he was a passenger was put back, as he said, by St Ciaran. [77]

[1] “ The burial-place of King Brian is to be seen to this day at Roscam, near the round tower.” — *Tribes and Customs of Hy Feachra*, p. 344.

[2] The tombstone of “ Dathi” is still shown at Rathcroughan.

- [3] Hardiman's *O'Flaherty's West Connought*, p. 147.
- [4] According to some of the Annals, this took place A.D. 562. According to the *Annals of Ulster* 560.
- [5] O'Donnell's *Life of Columbkille*, Lib. IL, Triu. Thaum., p. 409.
- [6] O'Curry's Lectures, p. 331.
- [7] This discrepancy of three or four years between the dates in the *Annals of the Four Masters* and other records exists in regard to almost every event recorded, but as the dates usually vary in exactly the same ratio, the discrepancy really rather strengthens than weakens the authority of these records.
- [8] *The Annals of the Four Masters*, p. 265.
- [9] O'Donovan MS.
- [10] *The Annals of the Four Masters*, p. 301 ; *Chronicum Scotorum*, p. 115,
- [11] O'Donovan MS.
- [12] O'Donovan MS.
- [13] *The Annals of Ulster* record death of Innrechtach in 722.
- [14] According to the pedigree of the Siol Murray, preserved in the *Book of Lecan*, fol. 74, Murgil, the second son of Enright, was the ancestor of the O'Conors.
- [15] O'Donovan MS.
- [16] O'Donovan MS.
- [17] *The Annals of Ulster*, p. 814 ; *The Annals of the Four Masters* and O'Donovan MS.
- [18] *Chronicum Scotorum*, p. 163.
- [19] *The Annals of the Four Masters*, p. 505.
- [20] *The Annals of Ulster*, p. 881.
- [21] *The Annals of the Four Masters*, p. 537.
- [22] *Ibid*, p. 554 ; *Chronicum Scotorum*, p. 177.
- [23] *The Annals of the Four Masters*, p. 553.
- [24] *Ibid*, p. 567.
- [25] *Ibid* p. 613 ; *Chronicum Scotorum*, p. 195.
- [26] *Ibid.*, p. 613.
- [27] O'Donovan MS.
- [28] *The Annals of the Four Masters*, p. 663.
- [29] *Ibid.*, p. 673 ; *Chronicum Scotorum*, p. 213.
- [30] *Annals of the Four Masters*, p. 687.
- [31] *Ibid.*, p. 693.
- [32] *Annals of the Four Masters*, p. 697 ; *Chronicum Scotorum*, p. 223.
- [33] O'Donovan MS.
- [34] According to *Annals of Ulster*, he died a.d. 1009.
- [35] " In the still perfect doorway of another church at Cloonmacnoise we have a specimen of a work of the close of the tenth century. The doorway occurs in the sepulchral chapel of the O'Conors of Connaught, which, from the registry of Cloonmacnoise, appears to have been erected by Cathal, son of Conor, King of Connaught, who died A.D. 1010." — *Petrie's Ecclesiastical Architecture*, p. 273.
The entry in the registry here referred to is as follows : —
" Thus have the O'Connors their part of that cemeterie, and they gave this for their sepulture place, *i.e.*, a place for six little cells belonging to Cloon, 48 days to every cell. The O'Connor who bestowed those lands was called Cathal O'Connor." Petrie adds :
" Temple Connor is now used as the Parish Church. It measures externally 45 feet in length by 27 in breadth, and the walls are 4 feet in thickness."
- [36] *Annals of the Four Masters*, p. 747.
- [37] O'Donovan MS.
- [38] *Ibid*.

- [39] *Annals of the Four Masters*, p. 785.
- [40] *Ibid.*, p. 805 ; *Chronicum Scotorum*. p. 263.
- [41] *Annals of the Four Masters*, p. 809.
- [42] *Ibid.*, p. 817.
- [43] *Ibid.*, p. 819.
- [44] *Ibid.*, p. 819.
- [45] O'Donovan MS.
- [46] O'Donovan M.S.
- [47] *Ibid.*,
- [48] *Annals of the Four Masters*, p. 850.
- [49] *Ibid.*, p. 853.
- [50] *Ibid.* 859.
- [51] *Annals of the Four Masters*. p. 867.
- [52] *Ibid.*, p. 869.
- [53] *Ibid.*, p. 877.
- [54] *Ibid.*, p. 881.
- [55] In the *Chronicum Scioiorum*, under the year 1059, p. 287, the same account is given.
These salmon were regarded as sacred fish.
- [56] *Annals of the Four Masters*, p. 883.
- [57] *Ibid.*, p. 885.
- [58] *Ibid.*, p. 893.
- [59] In *Chronicum Scioiorum*, p. 289, the following entry appears, in reference to Hugh O'Conor : — “ The men of Breffni, with Hugh, son of Art O'Rourke, went to plunder Connaught. Their number was 6,000. A sharp, valorous battle was fought, in which was slain Hugh O'Conor, the champion of the west of the world ; the Cuchulain of the Gaidhil, the flood of dignity and nobility of Erinn, and the man who was wont to give the most of food and clothing, of gold and cows, for his soul in Erinn.”
- [60] O'Donovan MS.
- [61] O'Donovan MS. Calhal, son of Hugh, had two sons Cathal and Teige, and this latter had a son Cathal mentioned in the *Annals* in 1118 and 1135.
- [62] *Annals of the Four Masters*, p. 889.
- [63] *Ibid.*, p. 911.
- [64] *Ibid.*, p. 915.
- [65] O'Donovan MS.
- [66] *Annals of the Four Masters*, p. 919.
- [67] *Ibid.*, p. 929.
- [68] *Chronicum Scotorum*, p. 299.
- [69] *Annals of the Four Masters*, p. 939.
- [70] *Ibid.*, p. 943.
- [71] Donovan MS.
- [72] *Annals of the Four Masters*, p. 955.
- [73] O'Donovan MS.
- [74] *Annals of the Four Masters*, p. 975.
- [75] *Ibid.*, p. 983.
- [76] *Notes on Irish Architecture* by the Earl of Dunraven, Vol. II., p. 90.
- [77] *Monasticon Hibernicon, Chronicum Scotorum*, p. 329, Hennessy's Edition.

The O'Conors of Connaught : An Historical Memoir. (1891)

Author : John O'Donovan , Charles Owen O'Conor O'Conor Don

Publisher : Hodges, Figgis

Year : 1891
Language : English
Digitizing sponsor : Google
Book from the collections of : Harvard University
Collection : americana

Source : Internet Archive
<http://www.archive.org/details/oconorsconnaugh00dongoo>

Edited and uploaded to www.augty.org
August 23 2010