

LAND, SEA AND HOME

Edited by
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M A N E Y

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ROYAL FLEETS IN VIKING IRELAND: THE EVIDENCE OF *LEBOR NA CERT*,

A.D. 1050-1150

By CATHERINE SWIFT

Lebor na Cert is a collection of poems dealing with the relationships between local Irish kingdoms and their over-kings. The bulk of the collection is concerned with two key issues: agricultural renders (*cisa*) made by subordinate kingdoms to their over-king and the various gifts (*tuarastla*) which the over-king should make in return. Such gifts consisted of prestige goods relevant to a warrior aristocracy: items for war, such as swords and coats of mail, items for hunting such as dogs, items of display such as mantles and gold bracelets. Depending on the local kingdom involved, the over-king might choose to hand out ships. It is with such ships and the documentary context which they provide for archaeologically attested vessels such as Skuldelev 2 that this paper is primarily concerned.

Skuldelev 2 is a Danish-type warship (narrow, low-sided and of shallow draft), found scuttled at the entrance to Roskilde in Denmark but built in Ireland c. A.D. 1060-70 according to dendrochronological evidence. It is one of the biggest Viking warships ever found, built to carry some 40 oarsmen.¹ That it is but one surviving example of the many such ships which must have traversed the Irish Sea during this era is shown, amongst other things, by the reference in the *Annals of Ulster sub anno* 1098 which refers to three forty-man boats from the Hebrides which were plundered by the Ulaid of north-east Ireland and the killing of their crews.²

THE COMPILATION AND PURPOSE OF *LEBOR NA CERT*

As a collection, *Lebor na Cert* appears in five manuscripts of which the earliest are two belonging to the late 14th century: the Book of Uí Maine and the Book of Ballymote.² These manuscripts contain a great deal of material which, by virtue of the style of Irish used, can be dated to a much earlier period and *Lebor na Cert* is no exception. John O'Donovan, who published the first edition of the text in 1847, argued that it was a 10th-century recension of a much earlier production first compiled in the 5th century A.D. A subsequent study by Eoin Mac Neill in 1921 largely

¹ O. Olsen and O. Crumlin-Pedersen, *Five Viking Ships from Roskilde Fjord* (Copenhagen, 1985), 108-11; N. Bonde, 'Found in Denmark but where do they come from?', *Archaeol. Ireland*, 45.3 (1998), 24-9.

² *Annals of Ulster*, ed. S. Mac Airt and G. Mac Niocaill (Dublin, 1983), s.a. 1098.

followed O'Donovan's interpretation, suggesting that the compilation 'in its existing form' was drawn up in the late 10th or early 11th century but that it reflects the distribution and political relations of Irish kingdoms between A.D. 400 and 1000. A second edition, however, was published by Myles Dillon in 1962 in which it was argued, firstly, that the language of all the various poems were of a similar period and secondly that there was no valid reason for assuming that the collection was earlier than the mid-11th century. He suggested that the bulk of the text was probably written in the late 11th century while the compilation may have been made in the 12th. There has been no detailed study of the text since then but an early 12th-century date has been accepted by historians of the period such as Marie-Thérèse Flanagan while Anthony Candon has put forward reasons for believing that the compilation probably originated in the late 11th or early 12th centuries under the patronage of Muirchertach Ua Briain of Munster.³ As I intend to illustrate in the course of this paper, the analysis of ship donations in *Lebor na Cert* has produced further arguments in favour of Candon's hypothesis.

One of the complicating factors in identifying the age of *Lebor na Cert* is, as MacNeill and Dillon have pointed out, the variety of authors and sources ascribed to it within the body of the text itself. The most frequently named, both in the poems and in the prose summaries which intersperse them, is Benén mac Sescnén who is variously entitled Patrick's *saimchétlaid* or psalmist, a *sai* or high-ranking scholar, an *eólach* or learned man and a *fili* or poet.⁴ The opening lines of the compilation state that Benén's text can be found in *Lebar Glinne Dá Locha*, a manuscript which has been controversially identified with the extant Rawlinson B.502 but which, in its present form, does not contain *Lebor na Cert*.⁵ In *Lebor na Cert* Benén is linked to the Psalter of Cashel, a manuscript which is no longer extant but which is associated in later Irish tradition with the figure of Cormac mac Cúilenáin. Cormac's obit is noted in the Annals of Inisfallen in 920 and he too is mentioned as an alleged source in *Lebor na Cert*.⁶

In line with a strong trend in 19th-century Irish historiography, O'Donovan and Mac Neill were both inclined to take these various attributions seriously and they provided the under-pinning to their arguments for an earlier version of *Lebor na Cert*, belonging to the time of Patrick, followed by a later rewriting under Cormac. More

³ *Lebor na Cert: the Book of Rights*, ed. M. Dillon (Irish Texts Soc., XLVI, 1962), xxi-xxii. In this article I follow Dillon's edition of the text while on occasion providing my own translations as I disagree with a number of Dillon's interpretations.

⁴ *Leabhar na gCeart or the Book of Rights*, ed. J. O'Donovan (Dublin, 1847), viii; E. MacNeill, *Celtic Ireland* (Dublin, 1921), 84-6; Dillon, op. cit. in note 3, ix; M. Dillon, 'The date and authorship of the Book of Rights', *Celtica*, 4 (1958), 239-49; M.-T. Flanagan, 'Irish and Anglo-Norman warfare in twelfth-century Ireland', 52-75 in T. Bartlett and K. Jeffries (eds.), *A Military History of Ireland* (Cambridge, 1996), 55, n. 15; A. Candon, 'Barefaced effrontery: secular and ecclesiastical politics in early twelfth-century Ireland', *Seanchas Ard Mhacha*, 14 (1991), 1-25, at pp. 12-14.

⁵ Dillon, op. cit. in note 3, 2 (lines 1-2), 24 (line 326), 62 (lines 892-3), 92 (line 1347), 110 (lines 1626-7) and 18 (lines 227-8).

⁶ P. O Riain, 'The Book of Glendalough or Rawlinson B 502', *Eigse*, 18 (1981), 161-76; C. Breatnach, 'Rawlinson B 502, Lebar Glinne Dá Locha and Saltair na Rann', *Eigse*, 30 (1997), 109-32; P. O Riain, 'Rawlinson B 502 alias Lebar Glinne Dá Locha: a restatement of the case', *Zeitsch. celtische Philol.*, 51 (1998), 130-47; C. Breatnach, 'Manuscript sources and methodology: Rawlinson B 502 and *Lebar Glinne Dá Locha*', *Celtica*, 24 (2003), 40-54.

recent discussion of native Irish literature, in contrast, has tended to emphasize the extent to which early figures were often credited with the production of what are clearly much later texts, judging by the language used and the political references made.⁷ Since the language of the poems in *Lebor na Cert* is late Middle Irish in date, references to Benén and Cormac mac Cúilenáin in the poems should probably be seen merely as an attempt by later writers to claim a venerable antiquity for works of their own day.

In addition to these historical or quasi-historical references, however, the poems also make reference to a variety of other, unnamed books and authors. Information has been compiled by individuals identified as *sai* and *fili*—scholar and poet; also by experts in canon law, by bards and by *senchada* or historians. The information concerned is most frequently classified as *senchas* or 'historical tradition' but also as *cána* or royal laws or tributes. Books were consulted by the writers on at least three occasions and in two cases, the first person singular is used — *i llibuir chaem atchonnarc*—'in a sweet book which I have seen', and *fácbaim i llibuir*: 'I record it in a book'.⁸ It is clear that the text represents a compilation drawing on the work of many different individuals.

The social context of *Lebor na Cert* is best illustrated by a poem belonging to the collection which, on first examination, appears tangential to the main topic. It is ascribed to Dubthach moccu Lugair, a legendary poet remembered in Irish tradition as a contemporary of St Patrick and it concerns the duties of the *fili* or poet. I quote from Dillon's translation, beginning with the prose introduction:¹⁰

No province in Ireland owes hospitality to a poet who does not know the *císa* (renders) and *tuarastla* (gifts) of that province as Dubthach moccu Lugair said:

He is not entitled to visitation or reward, for he is not a wise poet in the various branches of knowledge, unless he knows exactly the secure *císa* and *tuarastla*, that they may all be bestowed according to many-branched knowledge from beginning to end.

He is not entitled to visitation in any of the fair provinces of Ireland nor to the circuit of a single *túath*, if truth be regarded, the poet who cannot distinguish firmly the revenues and burdens and exemptions, the portion of each territory he visits.

Then is he a learned historian when he studies the zealous deeds of the island of proud Éber.

Then is he a solid scholar like an immovable rock, when he understands the *tuarastla* and the *císa* without doubt, so that he will recount them all in every high assembly.

Let him not be a vessel of old proverbs for reward or friendship for a man with proper training will not cite old judgements. Let him not be bashful or timid

⁷ Dillon, op. cit. in note 3, 18 (lines 227-8) 22 (line 299), 122 (n. 13), 42 (lines 608-9); *Annals of Inisfallen* [AI], ed. S. MacAirt (Dublin, 1951), s.d. 920.

⁸ C. O Lochlainn, 'Poets on the battle of Clontarf', *Eigse*, 3 (1941-2), 208-18 and *Eigse*, 4 (1943-4), 33-47; A. M. O'Leary, 'The identities of the poet(s) Mac Coisi: a reinvestigation', *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Stud.*, 38 (1999), 53-71; D. O Corráin, 'Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn and the Circuit of Ireland', 238-50 in A. Smyth (ed.), *Seanchas: Studies in Early and Medieval Irish Archaeology, History and Literature in Honour of Francis J. Byrne* (Dublin, 2000), 239-41.

Finally, *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh* in its discussion of the triumphal tour of Brian Bóruma around Ireland, recounts how the Ulaid supplied Brian's army with agricultural renders. In return, Brian bestowed horses, gold, silver and clothing upon them. The specific terms *cisa* and *tuarastla* are not used in this passage but in the following paragraphs, Brian is said to have raised a royal fleet from the men of Dublin, Waterford, the Ui Ceinnselaig of south Leinster and the Ui Echach of Munster and this fleet levied *cisa rigda* or royal renders from the Saxons, the Welsh and the Scots. Brian is then said to have distributed this *an cis uile mar do dligud* "the whole render according to right" with a third going to the king of Dublin, a third to the warriors of the Leinster and to the Ui Echach and a final third to learned professionals, craftsmen and other worthy causes.¹³

These various references make it appear that while the professional *fili* may describe *cisa* and *tuarastla* in terms of ancestral rights and duties, political realities were also major factors. A king may be able to demand his *cisa* on a regular basis at *óenach* festivities from his closest subordinates but peoples further away were less easy to control.¹⁴ Both *Caithréim* and *Cogadh* indicate that in addition to being levied at symbolic high-points of a king's reign such as the inauguration of a king or on the royal tour of his dominions, they could also be levied in the course of military campaigns. In fact, in the case of Brian Bóruma, two-thirds of the taxes being raised go straight to the fleet commanders enforcing his royal will. This seems a clear precursor of the later system of *coinnheadh* or 'coigny' where taxes for military purposes were collected directly from the population by the soldiers themselves.¹⁵ Such stark realities underline the importance of the *fili*'s role in creating his propaganda poems — he was not just a man embodying traditional lore but someone who could coat the unpalatable realities of the contemporary world with ringing phrases and heroic vocabulary.

THE MILITARY IMPLICATIONS OF THE MUNSTER POEMS IN *LEBOR NA CERT* (Fig. 1)

The first Munster poem concerns the gifts which the over-king of Munster should offer other over-kings if he attained the status of king of Ireland. In return, each over-king had the duty to provide hospitality for the Munster ruler for a specific period, ranging from 12 days to 6 months in length. Furthermore, each over-king has to give the Munster contingent an escort through his lands. In this initial poem there is already reference to ships: the king of Áth Cliath (Dublin) is to get 10 ships, the king of Liamuin (identified as king of Leinster in the prose) is to get 30 ships while the

¹³ Mac Neill, *op. cit.* in note 4, 95; Dillon, *op. cit.* in note 3, 24 (line 331); 36 (line 524); 42 (line 595) and 110 (lines 1625–6).

¹⁴ Dillon *op. cit.* in note 3, 128, 132 and 136; *Genemain Áeda Sláine*, 133–6, 133 in R. I. Best and O. Bergin (eds.), *Lebor na hUidre* (Dublin, 1929); *Carman*, 2–25, 18 in E. Gywnn (ed.), *The Metrical Dindshenchas III* (Dublin, 1991); *Caithréim Cellachain Caisil: the Victorious Career of Cellachan of Cashel*, ed. A. Bugge (Christiania, 1905), 16–17; *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh*, ed. cit. in note 11, 136.

¹⁵ For a discussion of this model in the pre-Viking Period see Thomas Charles-Edwards, 'Early medieval Kingdoms in the British Isles', 28–59 in S. Bassett (ed.), *The Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms* (London, 1989). For the suggestion that agricultural renders were submitted to the king at *óenach* festivities, see C. Swift, 'The local context of *Oenach Tailten*', *Ríocht na Midhe*, 11 (2000), 24–50, at pp. 35–40.

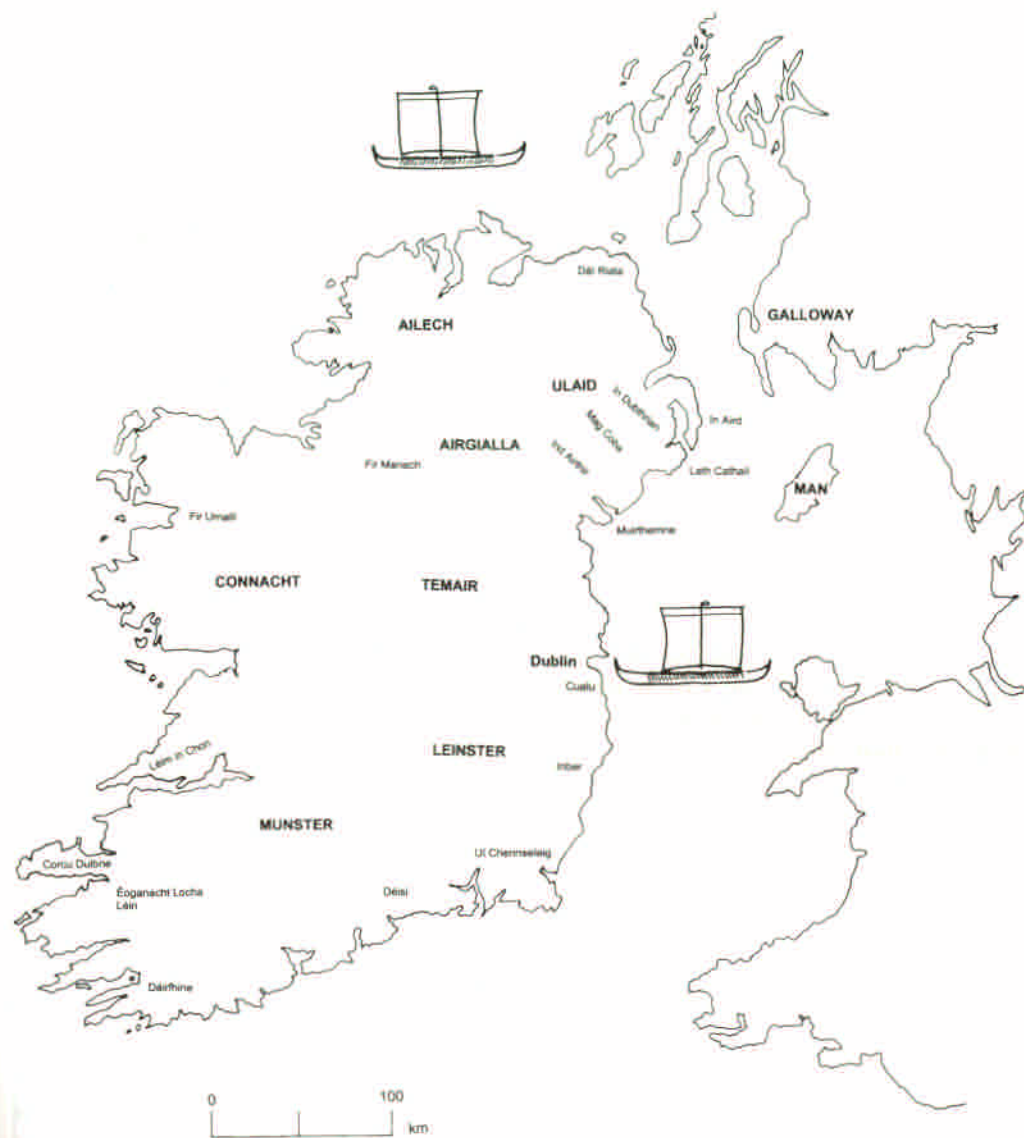


FIGURE 1. Ireland, western Britain and the Irish Sea, showing locations referred to in the text.

king of Ulaid (east Ulster) is to get either 10 or 100 ships depending on whether one believes the poem or the prose summary which precedes it.¹⁶ In other words, if a Munster king is king of Ireland, he should ensure that the three over-kingdoms of the east coast of Ireland are all awarded ships. Furthermore, one should note in passing the possibility that the king of Ulster is to receive proportionately far more ships than

¹⁶ K. Simms, *From Kings to Warlords* (Woodbridge, 1987), 127–8.

his southern counterparts although the discrepancy between poem and prose makes this impossible to ascertain.

The third Munster poem also deals with the theme of Munster ruler as king of Ireland. Here it is stated that Munster should be the political leader of Ireland just as Patrick is the ecclesiastical head and that even where he does not control all Ireland, he should control Leinster and Dublin. Interesting details in this poem include a reference to the Leinstermen being given gold and wealth from beyond the sea — an apparent allusion to a trade in imported goods from Britain and Scandinavia. Furthermore, the Leinstermen should be available to fight the *Gaill* ('foreigners') — the word used in Irish sources to indicate Scandinavians in general — if Munster so requires. In return, Munster will supply 50 horses for each battalion and will drive off any invasion of Leinster if it should occur. Similarly, if Munster has awarded the *Gaill* land on which to settle, they too must be available to fight on Munster's behalf.¹⁷ These provisions appear to be directly relevant to the need to raise and equip armies to fight on behalf of the Munster over-king.

The fifth Munster poem deals with the royal gifts granted to the various kingdoms within the province. These gifts consist of horns, swords, shields, *fidchell* sets (*fidchell* was a prestigious board game in which participants deployed miniature armies) rings or bracelets, coats of mail, horses and, in three instances, ships. These include ten ships for the Déisi (barony of Deece, Waterford), seven ships for the Dáirfhine or Corcu Laigde (Cork) and seven ships for Léim in Chon, apparently an alternative name for the Corcu Baiscinn of south Clare.¹⁸ An alternative way of looking at this distribution is to visualize the ships as being sent to the northern bank of the Shannon estuary; to Bantry Bay and to the south Irish coast between the rivers Barrow and Blackwater. In other words, the Munster over-king is sending ships as gifts specifically to powers which dominate key harbours in the province.

The introduction to the sixth Munster poem once again reiterates the military aspect to the discussion of *tuarastal*:

This is the just duty and division of those stipends from the king of Munster to the kings and territories according to the revenue of their land and kindred, by virtue of claim and heritage and according to the benefit of rank and nobility, according to the amount of their strength and suzerainty, the numbers of their foray and hosting and according to convenience, moderation, seniority and reckoning of estates and dignity.¹⁹

This sixth poem also deals with gifts to the local kingdoms of Munster but is somewhat different in detail. Here one ship only is given to the Déisi and to Léim in Chon, three ships are given to the Dáirfhine, three ships to the Corcu Dhuibne (Kerry) and ten ships to the Eoganacht Locha Léin, who controlled the Killarney lakes. Both these last two kingdoms were raided by Tairdelbach Ua Briain in 1064 and a large tribute of cattle were taken. In 1077 Donnchad Hua Flaínd, king of Eóganacht Locha Léin was killed whilst returning from the house of Ua Briain at Kincora — an

¹⁷ Dillon, *op. cit.* in note 3, 10 (lines 118 and 126), 8 (line 105) and 4 (line 43).

¹⁸ Dillon, *op. cit.* in note 3, 18 (line 250) and 20 (lines 251–62).

¹⁹ Dillon, *op. cit.* in note 3, 32 (lines 444 and 459) and 34 (line 477).

indication that he had acquired the status of an Uí Briain client. Kings of Corcu Baiscinn, though not explicitly identified as clients in the same way, are killed whilst fighting in Brian Boru's army at Clontarf in 1014, are drowned in a ship along with an Uí Briain dynast in 1030 and are killed in fights between two Uí Briain scions in 1055. It seems reasonable to deduce therefore, that the Corcu Baiscinn are also closely tied to the Uí Briain rulers as political and military subordinates.²⁰

Taking the Munster poems in *Lebor na Cert* as a whole, therefore, we see two patterns in the donation of ships. When the Munster king is king of all Ireland, he should send ships to the east coast, specifically to Dublin, Leinster and the Ulaid kingdoms. Within his own province, he should send ships to those of his clients who controlled important waterways. These might vary, depending presumably on the political imperatives of the day, but in both versions, they included the Corcu Baiscinn of Clare, the Déisi of Waterford and the Corcu Laigde of Cork.

SHIPPING IN THE OTHER IRISH OVER-KINGDOMS

In Connacht, the second over-kingdom discussed in *Lebor na Cert*, only one local king is offered ships by his provincial king: the king of Umall or Clew Bay who is offered five ships. Such a gift provides a context for the raid on Clew Bay by a fleet of seven ships of Hebrideans in 1015, indicating that the area was involved in maritime politics. In 1079, a plundering raid by Tairdelbach Ua Briain took place on the islands of Clew Bay and this would seem to imply that the Uí Briain also had an interest in the region.²¹

Interestingly, in the third over-kingdom, Ailech (north-west Ireland), no ships are listed as *tuarastla*. This is not to say that the king of Ailech did not use ships; on the contrary he is identified in one poem as *ri Febail na faen long* 'king of Lough Foyle of the prostrate(?) ships' and we know from annalistic references that the Dublin fleet was sent by the Uí Briain to fight the king of Ailech in 1100. The explanation would appear to lie in the ongoing warfare between Ailech and the Uí Briain as documented in contemporary annals. It seems clear that the southern kings would have had no interest in providing weapons which could subsequently be turned against them. One interesting aspect of the Ailech poems is the explicit statement that the king of Ailech not only received gifts and privileges from the king of Ireland but also used those same gifts to provide for his local kings.²² One might see this as a snide jab; the Ailech king was unable to acquire prestigious goods except through the kindness of his over-king. Even if taken simply at face value, however, the statement reveals a mechanism by which prestige items acquired by the king of Ireland — in emporia such as Dublin and Limerick perhaps? — could be funnelled through the medium of gift-exchange to over-kings and hence to local kings, far from the big trading settlements.

The next over-kingdom is that of the Airgialla. Here again only one local kingdom acquired five ships — the Fir Manach or the men of Fermanagh who

²⁰ Dillon, *op. cit.* in note 3, 36 (lines 510–15).

²¹ Dillon, *op. cit.* in note 3, 38 (line 543) and 40 (lines 563, 568, 571 and 578; Mac Airt (ed.), *op. cit.* in note 7, s.a. 1064, 1077, 1014, 1030 and 1055).

²² Dillon, *op. cit.* in note 3, 58 (line 836); Mac Airt (ed.), *op. cit.* in note 7, s.a. 1015 and 1079.

acquired five from their overlord.²³ The potential importance of shipping on the broad expanses of Lough Erne needs no further comment.

The fifth over-kingdom, the Ulaid of north-east Ireland, received far more ships from the king of Ireland than any other, together with a rather more diverse series of goods than his peers. This section begins with a statement that the Ulaid ruler is to receive ten ships from the king of Ireland, thus corroborating the lower figure in the first Munster poem. To his subordinates, however, he is to allocate fifty-three ships in total, subdivided between the various local kingdoms as follows:

Dál Riata (barony of Cary, Antrim): 3 ships
 Ind Airthir (baronies of Orior, Armagh): 4 ships
 In Dubthrian (barony of Dufferin, Down): 10 ships
 In Aird (baronies of Ards, Down): 8 ships
 Leth Cathail (baronies of Lecale, Down): 8 ships
 Mag Coba (baronies of Iveagh, Down): 10 ships
 Muirthemne (barony of Lower Dundalk, Louth): 10 ships.²⁴

With the exception of Dál Riata, these kingdoms are concentrated along a narrow stretch of coast, from Strangford Lough to Carlingford Lough. This is a coastline well provided with good harbours and which is visible from the hills of Galloway and the Isle of Man. When Magnus of Norway mounted his western expedition in 1098, it was Galloway and Man that he conquered in the north Irish Sea and he subsequently died in the course of an invasion of the Ulaid over-kingdom. The importance of the area lies in the fact that this is the bottle-neck controlling access to the Irish Sea from the north. As Sean Duffy has pointed out, the Dublin fleet are recorded as fighting on Rathlin island (immediately to the north of Dál Riata territory) in 1038 and again in 1045 when they killed 300 men of the Ulaid. This would seem to be directly related to the Dubliners' need to have free passage through the channel. Similar concerns can be detected when the Ulaid allied themselves with Dublin to attack Man in 1087.²⁵

As a general rule, the minor local kings tend to receive less attention in the annals and it can thus be difficult to identify them. The death of the king of Leth Cathail in a sea-battle between Dublin and Ulaid is, however, specifically mentioned in the *Annals of Tigernach* in 1022 whilst a Dublin fleet under Sitriuc son of Olaf attacked settlements within the kingdom of Leth Cathail in 1002. Both Leth Cathail and the Uí Echach Arda, as subordinate Ulaid kingdoms with ships, are also the subject of raids by the Ailech kings in 1005, 1007 and 1012. The evidence of *Lebor na Cert* suggests, therefore, that, in common with the Ailech over-kingdom, the Dubliners, the king of Norway and possibly the Manxmen, the Munster Uí Briain kings also aspired to

²³ Dillon, *op. cit.* in note 3, 62 (line 913) and 68 (lines 987–90); *Annals of Ulster* [AU], ed. S. Mac Airt and G. Mac Niocaill (Dublin, 1983), *s.a.* 1100.

²⁴ Dillon, *op. cit.* in note 3, 82 (line 1223).

²⁵ Dillon, *op. cit.* in note 3, 84 (line 1250), 86 (line 1271), 88 (lines 1291, 1295, 1311 and 1315) and 90 (lines 1326 and 1330). For identification of place-names see F. Mac Gabhann, *Place-names of Northern Ireland: Vol. 7 — Co. Antrim II* (Belfast, 1997), 1–9; A. J. Hughes and R. J. Hannan, *Place-names of Northern Ireland: Vol. 2 — Co. Down II* (Belfast, 1992), 1–4; K. Muhr, *Place-names of Northern Ireland: Vol. 6 — Co. Down IV* (Belfast, 1996), 1–7.

control this vital area, and that a major reason for that interest in the area was its control of local shipping.²⁶

In contrast to the situation in the north-east, it is striking how few ships, relatively speaking, are allocated by *Lebor na Cert* to the eastern and south-eastern coasts. No ships are given to the king of Temair, a title here used of the king of Mide whose power-base lay in the eastern midlands. This is despite the fact that the third Temair poem, already identified as a possible addendum to the compilation, specifies that when a Temair ruler holds the kingship of Ireland, he should send twelve ships as an escort for the sons of the king of Ailech.²⁷

In the first Laigin poem, the king of Ireland is said to give 10 ships to the king of Laigin (Leinster), a specification which contrasts with the 30 ships offered by a Munster king to the Laigin in the first Munster poem. The Laigin poem then goes on to state that the Laigin king, in turn, allocates a total of 24 ships to his local client-kingdoms. The king of Cualu — the area around Bray Head, south of Dublin — is allocated 8 ships. The king of Inber, the district around Arklow, is given 6 vessels whilst 10 go to the Uí Chennselaig of Wexford. This last gift is corroborated by a contemporary poem identifying Wexford town as a royal site in which ships gather.²⁸

In short, the individual poems dealing with over-kingdoms other than Munster in *Lebor na Cert* confirm the pattern of ships being given as gifts by the king of all Ireland already identified in the first Munster poem. In this section, however, the Irish high-king gives the Laigin only 10 ships (whereas Munster as high king gave thirty) and a similar number to the Ulaid. Similarly, the donation of ships by provincial rulers to local subordinates, a feature of the fifth and sixth Munster poems, is also a feature of these other poems. The most noteworthy is the king of Ulaid who gives 53 ships to seven of his local sub-kings, predominantly those on the Down and Louth coasts. The king of Laigin, south of Dublin, allocates 24 ships to his subordinates with the largest percentage going to Wexford and rather smaller fleets going to Bray and Arklow. Sub-kingdoms of Munster, get 24 ships (in the fifth Munster poem) or 17 (in the sixth) whilst the areas of Fermanagh and Clew Bay get 5 ships apiece. Clearly shipping in the area of the Ulaid kingdom is particularly important as they have at least twice the number of ships as either Munster or Laigin in this scenario.

In the case of the Ulaid and Laigin over-kingdoms, the ships go to areas with Scandinavian placenames such as Strangford, Carlingford, Arklow and Wexford. Edward Bourke has excavated an 11th- to 12th-century Hiberno-Norse settlement in Wexford town and, in the context of the specific mention of land grants to the *Gaill* cited above, it seems likely that further such settlements are to be found in Co. Down.²⁹ In Munster, the highest percentage of ships, surprisingly, do not go to the

²⁶ A. Candon, 'Muirchertach Ua Briain, politics and naval activity in the Irish Sea, 1075 to 1119', 397–415 in G. Mac Niocaill and P. Wallace (eds.), *Keimelia: Essays in Memory of Tom Delaney* (Galway, 1988), 405–7; S. Duffy, 'Irishmen and Islesmen in the kingdoms of Dublin and Man 1052–1171', *Eriu*, 43 (1992), 93–133, at pp. 99 and 110–113; *Annals of the Four Masters*, ed. John O'Donovan (Dublin, 1856), *s.a.* 1038 and 1045; AU, *s.a.* 1087 and 1022.

²⁷ *Annals of Tigernach* [AT], ed. W. Stokes (Felinfach, 1993), 361 and 247; AU, *s.a.* 1005, 1007 and 1012.

²⁸ Dillon, *op. cit.* in note 3, 126 (lines 1874–77).

²⁹ Dillon, *op. cit.* in note 3, 104 (lines 1540 and 1554); 106 (lines 1563 and 1571); Gwynn (ed.), *op. cit.* in note 14, 168.

Scandinavian settlements of Waterford or Limerick but rather to the south-west region. It is, of course, crucial to remember that this is not an account of the total number of ships operating in Ireland but simply the vessels deemed relevant to a discussion of political alliances by a compiler devoted to Uí Briain interests. It is possible, for example, that the south-western distribution of Munster ships reflects Uí Briain worries about their rivals for the provincial kingship, the Mac Carthaig. References in the annals also refer to Irish fleets on Lough Rí (between Connacht and Mide) and Lough Derg (between Connacht and Ua Briain) and this is a phenomenon to which *Lebor na Cert* only alludes in passing, saying that Connacht kings who could deploy such fleets should be considered fortunate and would often win supreme power.³⁰

SHIP DETAILS

Unfortunately, the poems in the *Lebor na Cert* do not provide much detail concerning the nature of the ships being given as *tuarastla* nor how they are made. They are consistently termed *longa*, an Irish loan-word thought to derive from Latin (*navis*) *longa* or longship. This is the most common term used in the annals and the 12th-century literary texts where it is used to identify both the ships of the Scandinavians and those of the native Irish in this period.

In the first Munster poem, the ships are described as *longa co leapthaib* 'ships with beds/sleeping compartments' while in the sixth Munster poem, a ship given to the king of the Déisi is termed *long fa láin-seólad* or a ship under full sail. In the same poem, other ships are described as *lán-chaema* or entirely fair and as *dingbála dathach*, 'perfectly coloured'. In the poem on the Ulaid, the ships are described as *lán-deasa* or entirely fine and *lánchróda*, 'entirely fierce', while a reference to five horses *a longaib lána*, 'from full ships', suggests an aristocratic trade in foreign horses which is also attested in the annals. In the poem on the Laigin, the ships are described as *ocht longa . . . co seolaib co srólbrataib*, 'eight ships . . . with sails, with fine standards', and in the final poem on Temair there is reference to ships with *corra* or pointed projections (i.e. prows?).³¹ These descriptions, while very generalized, seem to accord with the general picture of shipping in later Viking-age Scandinavia.

With regard to the process of manufacture, the only information I have been able to find is in a Middle Irish legal commentary which states that the craftsman who builds *longa* (ships), *barca* (apparently trading vessels) and *curaig* (currachs) has the second-highest honour price, behind the men who can build churches, cook-houses

and mill-houses.³² This would seem to suggest that in the Ireland of this period, the techniques required for ship-building were not considered particularly difficult.

A few references are made in the *Lebor na Cert* poems to the wider role of the ships. In the poem on the Ulaid, the king of Muirthemne is entitled to ten ships *do laech Elga*, 'for the warrior of Ireland', while his fellow ruler, the king of Mag Coba, is entitled to ten ships *dá leanann slóg*, 'which a (military-)host levies'. In the final poem on Temair, the subordinate king of Corco Mruad (Corcomroe in Co. Clare) is entitled to a *roga luingi ar ló ar feacht* or 'the ship of his choice daily upon a campaign'.³³ Taken together, these references indicate that the gift of these ships as *tuarastla* to his subordinates meant that the over-king retained a right to their use in times of war. It would also appear that the ships were crewed by the subordinates to which they had been given as *tuarastla*.

There are also three occasions where the ships are associated with the word *laideng*, a loan-word from Old Norse *leidangr*. On two occasions, the author of the final Temair poem uses the phrase *ceithri longa re laiding*. Both Dillon and O'Donovan before him translated this as 'four ships with a boat', a phrase from which it is difficult to extract much sense. The third instance occurs in the poem on the Ulaid where the phrase is *ocht longa do laidengaib* which Dillon leaves untranslated. I would suggest that the preposition in both cases have similar meanings: the first (*re*) being 'on account of' while the second (*do*) can be translated as 'for the purpose of'.³⁴ In each case, therefore, the phrase would be 'x number of ships for (the purpose of) the *laideng*' where the *laideng* can be either singular or plural.

The citations listed in the *Dictionary of the Irish Language* follow the 19th-century translations of O'Donovan and others in rendering *laideng* as boat, ship or vessel, but this is not an adequate discussion of the evidence. In *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaib*, for example, the *laideng* is specifically distinguished from *longa* 'ships' and *coblaig* 'fleets' as characteristic of Viking military activity on water.³⁵ In his 1905 edition of *Caithréim Chellacháin Chaisil*, Alexander Bugge suggested that the word should be understood as representing a borrowing of the Norse custom of a ship levy on specific districts. Judith Jesch in her recent book disagreed with this interpretation, stating that the date at which levies of the kind mentioned by Bugge were introduced is controversial. She also points out that the two instances of *laideng* in *Caithréim* are, in fact, translated by Bugge as ships or fleet. In fact, the context of the word in *Caithréim* is not diagnostic for the word is used simply as an adjective attached to Lochlann or Norway: *Lochlann laoidheang-dhuinn* or Lochlann of the dark *laideng*.³⁶

³⁰ M. Ofstedal, 'Scandinavian place-names in Ireland', 125–33 in D. Greene and B. Almqvist (eds.), *Proceedings of the Seventh Viking Congress* (Dublin, 1953); P. F. Wallace, 'The archaeological identity of the Hiberno-Norse town', *J. Royal Soc. Antiq. Ireland*, 122 (1992), 35–66, 44; E. Bourke, 'Two early eleventh century Viking houses from Bride St, Wexford and the layout of properties on the site', *Wexford Hist. Soc.*, 12 (1988–9), 50–61. For discussion of Viking settlement in and around Strangford Lough see T. Mc Erlean et al., *Strangford Lough — An Archaeological Survey of the Maritime Cultural Landscape* (Belfast, 2002), 78–87.

³¹ I owe the suggestion about possible Uí Briain worries concerning the Mac Carthaig to Tomás Ó Carragáin; see further *Annals of Inisfallen s.a.* 1124. On fleets in Irish inland waters, see *AI s.a.* 988, 993, 1095 and 1127; Dillon, *op. cit.* in note 3, 142 (lines 2146–50).

³² Dillon, *op. cit.* in note 3, 10 (line 118), 38 (line 543), 40 (line 567), 86 (line 1271), 88 (line 1291), 104 (lines 1553–4), 98 (line 1459) and 132 (lines 1988–9); *AU, s.a.* 1029.

³³ *Corpus Iuris Hibernici*, ed. D. A. Binchy, 6 vols (Dublin, 1978), V: 1612.

³⁴ Dillon, *op. cit.* in note 3, 90 (lines 1330 and 1326), 92 n. 1 for the suggestion that the phrase is here used of the king of Ulaid and 141 (lines 2116–17).

³⁵ Dillon *op. cit.* in note 3, 140–1 (line 2102), 144–5 (line 2155) and 88 (line 1315); O'Donovan, *op. cit.* in note 4, 261 and 265; *Dictionary of the Irish Language R 21 ré 6; L 5 la III; D 172 do III*. The phrase *ocht longa do laidengaib* left untranslated by Dillon is given by O'Donovan as *is ocht longa lan chuillig* and translated as 'and eight exquisitely beautiful ships': *ibid.*, 164.

³⁶ *Dictionary of the Irish Language L 25; Cogadh Gaedhel*, ed. cit. in note 11, 40; J. Jesch, *Ships and Men in the Late Viking Age: The Vocabulary of Runic Inscriptions and Scaldic Verse* (Woodbridge, 2001), 195–8; Bugge, *op. cit.* in note 14, 25, 27, 82 and 84.

Without rehearsing all the evidence here, I would suggest that there is much scope for a re-evaluation of the Irish word and that in the specific instances in which it is used in *Lebor na Cert*, it is quite possible that it does mean a ship levy. In other words, the phrases in the Ulaid and Temair poems should, in my view, be translated as 'four ships for the purpose of the *leidangr*', i.e. as vessels which could be called upon as part of the over-king's ship-levy.

This interpretation is supported by the literary account provided in *Caithréim Chellacháin Cháisil*. In this text, Cellachán is elected king of Munster after having made a tour around the province in which he defeated various kings including those of the Corcu Duibne and the Corcu Baiscinn. Somewhat later, he is captured by the Vikings of Dublin and he sends word to the Munstermen, instructing them as to what they are to do in his absence. Specifically he tells his messenger to go to the *toisig mo loingsí* 'commanders of my ships', a group which include the kings of the Corcu Duibne and Corcu Baiscinn. He concludes by stating:

tabhrat .x. longa gacha tricha cét leo or ase-sin coimtinol ar cabluigh-ne

(Let them bring ten ships from each of their divisions for it is from this is the assembly of our fleet.)

When this fleet eventually went into action, in a sea-battle off Dundalk, the saga-writer notes that as the shields and standards of the ships were unknown to the enemy, they were arranged according to the location of the lands from which they came. When the last battle was over and Cellachán had won, he then took the heroic decision to burn those of his enemies' ships which had survived.³⁷

This 12th-century account makes it clear that following the submission of kings to an over-king, the over-king is in a position to direct the military activities of his subordinates, even when he is not himself physically present. No mention is made in this text of the payment of *tuarastla* by Cellachán to these subordinates but the poems in the broadly contemporary *Lebor na Cert* specify that the kings of Corcu Duibne and Corcu Baiscinn, amongst others, are entitled to receive ships as *tuarastla* from the king of Munster. Putting these two accounts together, therefore, allows us to see the system in full: the over-king enforces his authority over his subordinates, gives them ships as *tuarastla* either at the beginning of his reign or when political circumstances make it expedient and he is then in a position to demand their allegiance as ship commanders. In battle, these naval forces fight in distinct units representing their homelands and their ships are distinguished one from another by the decoration of their shields and battle standards. The evidence of *Cogadh* cited earlier suggests that any profits accruing to the over-king as a consequence of such battles were expected to be shared with his subordinates. It seems safe to assume that, despite Cellachán's heroic actions in burning enemy ships, these would in more mundane circumstances be reallocated to loyal ship-commanders as *tuarastla*.

³⁷ Bugge, *op. cit.* in note 14, 13, 25, 29, 39 and 55.

TUARASTLA IN THE IRISH ANNALS

The above model depends heavily on the interpretation of two 12th-century literary texts. When one looks at the references to *tuarastla* or royal gifts in the annals, it is clear that such gifts help to cement relations between subordinates and over-kings in an ever-fluctuating political scene. Furthermore, the acquisition of *tuarastla* is often as a direct result of military action. Three references to *tuarastla* occur in the *Annals of Ulster sub annis* 1080, 1083 and 1084 respectively and another in the *Annals of Inisfallen sub anno* 1095. In translation, the first of these entries is:

AU 1080: Donnsléibhe Ua hEochada went into Munster with the good men of the Ulaid accompanying him, in anticipation of *tuarastal*.

The apparent rationale behind this move appears to have been Donnsléibhe's temporary loss of the kingship of the Ulaid at this time to his cousin. An alternative version of this entry, in the *Annals of Inisfallen sub anno* 1078, refers to Donnsléibhe 'coming into the house' of Tairdelbach Ua Briain. This again is a well-known idiom expressing clientship.

In AU 1083 Domnall Ua Lochlainn took the kingship of Ailech. According to the annalist, he then carried out a royal raid on the Conaille of Muirthemne and carried off a great tribute of cattle and gave *tuarastal* out of the profits of that raid to the men of Fermanagh. In AU 1084, Donnsléibhe, now back on the Ulaid throne, raided south as far as Drogheda and gave *tuarastal* to the Ua Ruairc. In 1095, in an entry which includes both idioms for 11th-century clientship, Donnchad mac Flainn of western Mide, 'came into the house of Muirchertach Ua Briain and accepted twenty ounces of gold from him as *tuarastal* on that occasion'.³⁸

Perhaps the most striking annalistic illustration of *tuarastal*, however, lies in the account of the battle of Mag Coba undertaken by Muirchertach Ua Briain against the Meic Lochlainn king of Ailech on Ulaid territory in 1103. There are long accounts of the battle in all of the major annalistic compilations although the details vary only a little. I quote here from the *Annals of Ulster*:

A great war between the Cenél nEógain [i.e. kingdom of Ailech] and the Ulaid and Muirchertach Ua Briain came with the men of Munster and Leinster and with the nobles of Connacht and the men of Mide with their kings to Mag Coba to assist the Ulaid. They all went to the plain of Armagh and were a week beleaguering Armagh; Domnall Ua Lochlainn with the north of Ireland was for that time in Ua Bresail Macha facing them. Since the men of Munster were grieved, Muirchertach went to *Óenach Macha* and to Emain and around to Armagh itself and left 8 ounces of gold on the altar and promised 160 cows and returned again to Mag Coba. Muirchertach left there the Leinstermen and some of the men of Munster. He himself went on a raid into Dál Araide and left there Donnchad son of Tairdelbach and the son of Ua Conchobair, king of the Ciarraige and Ua Beoáin and other nobles. Domnall Ua Lochlainn went with the north of Ireland into Mag Coba to attack the Leinstermen; the Leinstermen, however, and the Osraige and

³⁸ AU, *s.a.* 1080, 1083 and 1084; AI, *s.a.* 1095 and 1078.

the men of Munster and the foreigners met them just as they were and gave battle. The south of Ireland, however, was defeated and slaughter inflicted on them.

This account does not make explicit reference to *tuarastal* although Muirchertach's forces coincide with the over-kingdoms listed in *Lebor na Cert* — always excepting Ailech as the enemy against whom Muirchertach was fighting. The really interesting information comes, however, from the list of those who fell in the battle. Amongst these we find the ruler of the Gilla Mo-cholmóc's of 'Cualu', the king of Uí Enechglais who controlled Arklow, members of the Uí Chennselaig of Wexford, two heirs-designate of the Déisi (Waterford) and a heir-designate of the Corcu Dhuibne (Kerry). These represent all three of the Leinster kings awarded ships in *Lebor na Cert* and two of the five potential kings who might be awarded ships in Munster. Arising from this overlap one may deduce that the gift of a ship as *tuarastal* carried with it the concomitant obligation on the part of the recipient that he must fight for the over-king when called upon. The ships thus donated may also have been required for transport: Muirchertach Ua Briain fought annual battles in the north for nearly 20 years between 1097 and 1114; the quickest way for him to move from his base at Kincora in Co. Clare as well as to gather his widely-scattered troops was by sea.

No Connacht or Ulster king is mentioned in the accounts of the battle of Mag Coba but the importance of the Ulaid to both the Uí Briain and their rivals the Meic Lochlainn of Ailech is indicated by their frequent interventions in Ulaid politics. In 1078 Donnsléibe Ua hEochada was deposed from the Ulaid kingship and sought refuge with the Uí Briain. In 1080 he resumed his kingship and in 1081 he entered Tairdelbach Ua Briain's house. In 1084 the Meic Lochlainn raided Ulaid and in 1091, after the death of Tairdelbach and before his son Muirchertach attained widespread power, the Meic Lochlainn killed the Ulaid king. In 1095, a new Ulaid ruler, Donnchad Ua hEochada, was banished to the Meic Lochlainn; together with his hosts' help, he subsequently tried to repossess his kingdom but failed. In 1097, the Uí Briain and the Meic Lochlainn fought it out in Mag Muirthemne, one of the Ulaid client-kingdoms which received ships in *Lebor na Cert*. In 1099, both Muirchertach and the Meic Lochlainn attacked Ulaid but the abbot of Armagh made peace between them and it was the Meic Lochlainn who took Ulaid's hostages. In 1100, the Meic Lochlainn captured the king of Ulaid; it is hardly coincidence that within the year Muirchertach sent the Dublin fleet to attack Inishowen and Derry — the very heartland of Ailech. Certainly the Ulster annalist completes his account of Muirchertach's actions on this occasion with the statement that Muirchertach then took Ulaid's hostages. In 1102, the Ulaid were fighting the Meic Lochlainn and in 1103, as we have seen, Muirchertach came to Mag Coba with the explicit desire to help the Ulaid against the Meic Lochlainn.³⁹ The background to the battle of Mag Coba is, therefore, one in which the allegiance of the Ulaid is seen as crucial to both southern and northern contenders to supremacy within Ireland. The allocation of 53 ships to this area in *Lebor na Cert* gives us some idea as to the reason for their importance.

³⁹ AI, s.a. 1078, 1080, 1081 and 1095; AU, s.a. 1084, 1091, 1097, 1099, 1100 and 1102.

CONCLUSIONS

The traditional accounts of early Irish history are all heavily based on the relatively copious entries in the Irish annals. This is to accord too much importance to the annalistic record and not enough to the contemporary literature. One of the compilers of the *Annals of Ulster*, s.a. 1041, underlined explicitly the partial nature of his account:

The events are indeed numerous, killings and deaths and raids and battles. No one can relate them all but a few of the many are given so that the age in which the various people lived may be known through them.

The evidence of *Lebor na Cert* indicates that one of the ways in which the annals have distorted our interpretation is through minimizing our understanding of the political importance of shipping. There are only seven references to shipping and sea-battles in 11th-century annals.⁴⁰ A detailed analysis of the kingdoms receiving ships in *Lebor na Cert*, however, makes it clear that ships were frequently granted by the Uí Briain over-king to favoured client kingdoms. Such kingdoms were favoured, not because of their personal relationships with the supreme ruler but because the areas which they controlled were of crucial importance in the wider politics of the Irish Sea. Taken in conjunction with other literary evidence of the 12th century, *Lebor na Cert* strongly indicates that the Irish rulers of the later 11th and early 12th centuries had not only adopted one of the key weapons of the Scandinavians — the longship — but had also imposed an Irish version of the Norse ship-levy or *leidangr* on their subjects. They would give the local kings gifts of ships as *tuarastla* when they were in a position so to do but in return, they expected that such ships, together with their crews, would be available for their own campaigns. If the subject kings produced the ships, they would be rewarded with some of the spoils of the campaign. Politically, the accounts of ship-donations in *Lebor na Cert* also explains why Muirchertach Ua Briain spent much of his career as king of Ireland fighting in the territory of the Ulaid and the reason why Magnus of Norway attempted to conquer the same area. This region was clearly well provided with shipping and in addition, it provided the best anchorage bordering the relatively narrow northern passage into the Irish Sea. As such, control of the Ulaid and their ships was crucial to any ruler who wished to dominate the rich emporium of Dublin. In settlement terms, the donation of substantial numbers of ships to Wexford provides a context for the discovery of Hiberno-Norse habitation in the town. Using Wexford as an analogy, one might infer that the *Lebor na Cert* account of the wealth of shipping along the coasts of Co. Down and Louth may also imply the existence of Hiberno-Norse settlements there in the later 11th and 12th centuries.

⁴⁰ AI, s.a. 1015, 1035, 1075, 1088 and 1095; AU, s.a. 1087; AT, 311.

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