

The mendicant orders and vernacular Irish learning in the late medieval period

The significant contribution of the mendicant orders, and especially the Franciscans, to medieval European and English literature has for long been a subject of much detailed examination by scholars. It has been argued that the spiritual ethos and style of communication to society of the Franciscans, articulated by St Francis himself, brought about a greater use of vernacular languages throughout Europe in lyrical poetry and preaching and in catechetical and devotional texts.¹ While earlier religious communities had fostered certain types of texts, such as exegetical works and saints' lives, the new orders of friars had a greater impact on a wider section of society. This phenomenon has been best summed up by John A. Fleming in his consideration of the friars and medieval English literature: while the impact of the friars on literature grew from the culture of earlier religious communities, a series of related factors caused them to come to greater literary prominence. The friars appeared in Europe at the same time as the emergence of vernacular literary languages within the Romance and Germanic worlds, and since they pursued a missionary apostolate among lay people in the vernacular world, 'their religious mission logically led them to the creation and exploitation of a wide range of literary texts. They were among the most assiduous of medieval literary popularisers and translators.'²

Ireland was not exempt from this mendicant literary phenomenon. The carols of Bishop Ledred of Ossory (Bp. 1317–c.1360) – primarily written in Latin, some with Middle English tags – reflect the themes and vocabulary of Franciscan songs known from elsewhere. B.L. Harleian MS 913, probably of Franciscan origin and dating to c.1330, includes English, Latin and Norman French verse, with unmistakable threads of Franciscan influence throughout the manuscript.³ Among

¹ Much has been written on this subject. For comprehensive commentaries, see D. L. Jeffrey, *The early English lyric and Franciscan spirituality* (Lincoln, 1975); J. V. Fleming, *An introduction to the Franciscan literature of the Middle Ages* (Chicago, 1977); eadem, 'The friars and medieval English literature' in D. Wallace (ed.), *The Cambridge history of medieval English literature* (Cambridge, 1999), pp 349–75; B. Roest, *Franciscan literature of religious instruction before the Council of Trent* (Leiden, 2004), pp 275–313.

² Fleming, 'The friars & medieval English literature', p. 350.

³ A. B. Scott, 'Latin learning and literature in Ireland, 1169–1500' in D. Ó Cróinín (ed.), *A new history of Ireland, i: prehistoric and early Ireland* (Oxford, 2005), pp 974–80; A. Bliss and J. Long, 'Literature in Norman French and English to 1534' in A. Cosgrove (ed.), *A new history of Ireland, ii: medieval Ireland, 1169–1534* (Oxford 1987, reprint 2008), pp 720–32; N. Cartlidge, 'Festivity, order and community in fourteenth-century Ireland: the composition and contexts of BL MS Harley 913' in *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 33 (2003), pp 33–52.

the religious poems in the manuscript is at least one composed by Friar Michael of Kildare: ‘a friar minor composed this song – may Jesus Christ help him! Lord, bring him to the tower [of heaven], Friar Michael of Kildare!’.⁴

Religious writing in the Irish language had a long tradition, extending back at least to the seventh century, and the language had been subject to many European spiritual influences throughout the medieval period. The introduction and progress of mendicant themes and literature into the vernacular followed patterns similar to those apparent on the Continent and in England, but, as often was the case in the Irish tradition, also diverged significantly from these patterns. As elsewhere, the mendicant literary movement in Irish was dominated by the Franciscans.⁵ The common themes of this movement – the Passion of Christ, the role of the Blessed Virgin, St Francis as the image of Christ, sin, judgement and repentance⁶ – occur in Irish poetry and homilies.⁷ These themes even occur in secular vernacular narratives, as in the case of *Oidheadh Chloinne Lir*, the death-tale of the children of Lir, which has been interpreted as reflecting the virtues of patient endurance of unjust suffering and the transitory nature of temporal pleasure – values especially preached in a Franciscan Observant milieu.⁸ A marked increase in the translation of devotional texts into Irish, particularly in the fifteenth century, is comparable to such activity elsewhere, albeit at a later date in Ireland and very rarely directly associated with individual friars or their foundations. The great increase in mendicant literary activity that occurred on the Continent in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries is not evident in the Irish vernacular tradition. It comes at a later stage, possibly with the rise of the Observant movement in Ireland, and develops in a somewhat different form and context. The lack of earlier vernacular material (and especially texts in Irish) might suggest that this is a reflection of more extensive recruitment in the English-speaking regions of Ireland. While this may explain the situation to a certain extent, the friars needed to be familiar with both languages from the beginning for their pastoral work to be effective.⁹ The more likely explanation for a dearth of vernacular literature dating from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries relates to trends in Irish vernacular literature in general and to the survival of material from these centuries. Of the surviving corpus of religious medieval Irish bardic poems, there is a fourfold increase between surviving poems dated to 1250–1500 and poems dated to 1500–1700. This phenomenon is also apparent in the survival of Irish vernacular prose works and manuscripts that tend to proliferate in the later period.

Popular songs and lyrics, so common elsewhere and composed in English and Latin in medieval Ireland, do not survive in Irish, and may not have existed in any great quantity. What poetry survives is closer to poems preserved in the thirteenth-century English friar miscellany MS Harley 2253; these were intended for a sophisticated audience and possibly directed at knights, merchants and landed

⁴ Bliss & Long, ‘Literature in Norman French & English’, p. 722.

⁵ For a survey of this subject and an indication of primary and secondary sources, see C. N. Ó Clabaigh, *The Franciscans in Ireland, 1400–1504* (Dublin, 2002), pp 137–41.

⁶ Jeffrey, *The early English lyric*, pp 231–61.

⁷ R. Flower, ‘Ireland and medieval Europe’ in *Brit. Acad. Proc.*, 13 (1927), pp 282–92.

⁸ C. Breatnach, ‘The religious significance of *Oidheadh Chloinne Lir*’ in *Ériu*, 50 (1999), pp 38–40.

⁹ F. J. Cotter, *The Friars Minor in Ireland* (New York, 1994), pp 77–8.

gentry, similar to the poetry of the troubadours in Provence.¹⁰ The composition of poetry in medieval Ireland – or, at least, of that which has survived – and much of the translation and transmission of texts was the occupation of a noble, professional learned class. Their patrons – Anglo-Norman and Irish lords – endowed mendicant foundations throughout the island, and thus the mendicants interacted with noble households and with lay schools of learning directed by professional and hereditary learned families. While such families operated in most parts of Ireland and often crossed cultural boundaries, the main body of evidence emanates from the west and north-west.

I

A striking feature of the intense activity of the Irish Franciscans on the Continent – most notably in Louvain – in the first half of the seventeenth century is that many of the foremost friars belonged to professional learned families.¹¹ The founder of St Anthony's College, Louvain (1607), Flaithrí Ó Maoil Chonaire (Florence Conry) belonged to a family of poets and historians from Connacht that had long associations with the Franciscans. His own training in medieval Irish bardic poetry is alluded to in a poem addressed to him by a fellow poet, Fearghal Óg Mac an Bháird:

When Flaithrí son of Fítheal the comely
Was a master-poet [*ollamh fileadh*]
There would have been kindness in his heart –
That shield that protected Magh Maoin.¹²

He used his mastery of Irish history and genealogy when petitioning on behalf of the Irish nobility for pensions from the Spanish Crown by using their medieval pedigrees to demonstrate that they were of noble stock.¹³ Flaithrí's confrères in Louvain, Aodh Mac an Bhaird (Hugh Ward), Seán Ó Colgáin (John Colgan), Eochaidh Ó hEodhasa and the intrepid lay brother Mícheál Ó Cléirigh – who accomplished a massive hagiographical and historiographical project in Ireland – all belonged to such families. An indication of how comfortable some seventeenth-century Franciscans were with this medieval learned tradition is evident from the episode in 1624–5 during their mission to the Scottish Highlands and islands. One of the missionaries, Cornelius Ward (Mac an Bhaird), reported to Rome on his success in converting the laird Campbell of Calder of Muckairn back to Catholicism. Ward claimed that it had been difficult to gain access to Calder, but knowing that the laird held poets in high regard, Ward – having composed a poem in praise of Calder – disguised himself as an Irish poet. Accompanied by a singer with a harp, as was the custom, he presented himself before Calder,

¹⁰ Jeffrey, *The early English lyric*, pp 211–12.

¹¹ B. Jennings, *Michael O' Cleirigh, chief of the four masters, and his associates* (Dublin, 1936), reprinted as N. Ó Muraíle (ed.), *Mícheál Ó Cléirigh, his associates and St Anthony's College, Louvain. Brendan Jennings OFM, Paul Walsh, Felim O'Brien OFM and Canice Mooney OFM* (Dublin, 2008).

¹² O. Bergin, *Irish bardic poetry* (Dublin 1970; reprint 1974), pp 43 §15, 228 §15.

¹³ I am grateful to Dr Benjamin Hazard for this insight into Flaithrí Ó Maoil Chonaire's career.

who welcomed him graciously. Ward remained disguised for three days, finally disclosing that he was a Franciscan. After much persuasion, he brought the laird back to the faith.¹⁴ Similarly, his confrère in Louvain, Eochaidh Ó hEodhasa – who was instrumental in establishing a printing press in the college in 1614, and was a bardic poet in his own right¹⁵ – interspersed his catechism *An Teagas Críosdaidhe* with poetry as a method of memorising its contents.¹⁶ Ironically, once the printed version of his work returned to Ireland, it entered the manuscript tradition and was copied by scribes until the nineteenth century – an indication of the dynamic between the cultures of printed books and manuscripts that is evident elsewhere from the earliest period of printing.

When earlier centuries are examined in detail, the origins of the close connection between the mendicant orders – chiefly the Franciscans – and the Irish learned class is perceptible in the sources. The role of the friars and their foundations in a particular network in society is crucial to appreciating how they related to the secular learned orders (poets, historians and lawyers). Both had the same patrons – lords such as the Uí Dhomhnaill and the Uí Bhriain. In some instances, bardic poets were patrons of friaries: the list of late fifteenth and early sixteenth-century benefactors of the friary of Adare includes Margaret Fitzgibbon, wife of Cunlaid Ó Dálaigh (*uxor... boni poetae*), who erected the great chapel.¹⁷ The history of the Franciscan order, *Brevis synopsis Provinciae Hiberniae FF. Minorum*, completed by Friar Francis O'Mahony (alias Matthews) by 1629, lists four members of the Uí Dhálaigh who were worthy of note: Friar Alanus Ó Dálaigh, Doctor of Theology (1504), Friar Flanus Ó Dálaigh, vicar provincial of the Observants (1510–13), Doctor of Theology and forceful defender of the order (1510), Friar Thadeus Ó Dálaigh, martyr and priest of the friary of Askeaton (1570), and Friar Phillipus Ó Dálaigh, author of vernacular lyrics (*carmina*) devoted to the Virgin Mary.¹⁸ Other members of learned families noted in early seventeenth-century sources include Ferallus Mac Aodhagáin (legal family),¹⁹ Hugo Mac Aodhagáin²⁰ and Bernardus Conrius (Ó Maoil Chonaire).²¹

Medieval lords often conducted both their political and spiritual lives in friaries. Some entered the friary, as in the case of Cú Connacht Ó Raighilligh, king of Bréifne, who became a friar in 1362 and handed his kingship over to his brother Pilib. Lords were instrumental in determining the nature of a friary: for example, Seán son of Cathal Ó Raighilligh caused the transfer of the Franciscan friary of

¹⁴ C. Gíblin (ed.), *Irish Franciscan mission to Scotland, 1619–1646: documents from the Roman archives* (Dublin, 1964), pp 53–4.

¹⁵ C. McGrath, 'Three poems by Bonabheantura Ó hEódhasa' in *Éigse*, 4 (1944), pp 175–96.

¹⁶ F. Mac Raghnaill (ed.), *An Teagas Críosdaidhe* (Baile Átha Cliath, 1976).

¹⁷ B. Jennings (ed.), 'Donatus Moneyus, de provincia Hiberniae S. Francisci' ['Brussels MS. 3947'] in *Arch. Hib.*, 6 (1934), p. 63; C. Ó Clabaigh, 'Patronage, prestige and politics: the Observant Franciscans at Adare' in J. Burton and K. Stöber (eds), *Monasteries and society in the British Isles in the later Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, 2008), p. 76.

¹⁸ B. Jennings (ed.), 'Brevis synopsis Provinciae Hiberniae Fratrum Minorum' ['Brevis synopsis'] in *Arch. Hib.*, 6 (1934), pp 167–8, 174, 183.

¹⁹ Idem (ed.), 'Brussels MS. 3947', p. 57; idem (ed.), 'Brevis synopsis', p. 169 (1552, 1561).

²⁰ Idem (ed.), 'Brussels MS. 3947', p. 93.

²¹ Idem (ed.), 'Brevis synopsis', p. 168 (1533).

Cavan from the Conventuals to the Observants in 1502.²² War was conducted and peace concluded in friaries: Eoghan son of Tighearnán Ó Ruairc was killed in the Franciscan friary of Dromahaire (Leitrim) in 1532, while the Annals of Ulster record how, in 1539, O'Neill and O'Donnell made peace at Donegal 'on the relics of the monastery of the friars'.²³ Not only did such events impinge on the life of lords and friars, they also would have been noted among the court professionals, whether by recording them in a chronicle or by composing a poem to celebrate or lament an event. This is graphically illustrated in the agreement reached on 23 June 1539 between Maghnus Ó Domhnaill and Tadhg Ó Conchobhair concerning occupation of Sligo Castle: if he breached the agreement, Ó Conchobhair was subject to ecclesiastical sanctions, including excommunication, and, most significantly, could be satirised by the poets of Ireland 'Conchobhar Ruadh Mac an Bhaird and Ó Cléirigh and Fearghal son of Domhnall Ruadh Mac an Bhaird'.²⁴ The witnesses to the agreement included the guardian of Donegal friary, Ruaidhrí Mac Carmaic, and his entire community. The agreement concludes that it was written in the friary of Donegal on the feast of St John's Eve (23 June) 1539.²⁵ Nothing could demonstrate more clearly the close relationship between lord, friar, bishop and poet.

The proximity of castle, friary and school of learning is also exemplified in a series of entries relating to the fifteenth century in the Annals of Connacht. The Uí Mhaoil Chonaire family were closely associated with the friary in Elphin, County Roscommon: in 1468 Tórna Ó Maoil Chonaire, chief poet and historian (*ollam ... a senchus 7 filidecht*), died in his own house at Lis Ferban (possibly Clonaslee, County Roscommon²⁶), and was buried 'under the protection of Patrick and St Francis' in Elphin. His successor as *ollam*, Urard Ó Maoil Chonaire, who died in 1482, is described as a skilled poet and chronicler and also as the translator of part of the Scriptures from Latin into Irish. This comment corroborates other evidence, discussed below, that lay learned families were instrumental in circulating devotional texts in medieval Ireland. In 1471 Cú Choicgríche Ó Maoil Chonaire, an heir to the office of the *ollam* of Síol Muiredhaigh (O'Connors), died in Ballyloughmask, County Mayo, in the castle of Mac Uilliam Burke, and was buried in the Franciscan friary of Rosserrilly, County Galway. The burial of members of other learned families in friaries occurs throughout the annals: CorMac Ó Cléirigh,

²² The Conventual Friars were a branch of the Franciscan order that followed a moderate form of the Rule of St Francis allowing it to hold property in common. The Observant Friars consisted of reformed branches of the order who considered themselves followers of the 'primitive' rule of St Francis. They were formally separated from the Conventuals in 1517. They expanded rapidly in Ireland in the late fifteenth century, and most Irish friars were Observants from the sixteenth century onwards. See Ó Clabaigh, *Franciscans in Ireland, passim*; D. V. Monti, *St Francis and his brothers: a popular history of the Franciscan friars* (Cinninati, 2009).

²³ *Annála Uladh, Annals of Ulster; otherwise Annála Senait, Annals of Senat: a chronicle of Irish affairs, 431–1131, 1155–1541*, ed. W. M. Hennessy and B. MacCarthy (4 vols, Dublin, 1887–1901), iii, 627.

²⁴ M. Carney, 'Agreement between Ó Domhnaill and Tadhg Ó Conchobhair concerning Sligo Castle (23 June 1539)' in *I.H.S.*, iii (1943), pp 282–96.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 291.

²⁶ *Annála Connacht ... (A.D. 1224–1544)*, ed. A. Martin Freeman (Dublin, 1944), p. 834.

possibly a member of the learned family of historians, died as a Friar Minor in 1542.²⁷ The location of his friary is not noted. Caiterfína Ní Duibhghennáin (belonging to a family of historians from Kiltronan, County Roscommon) was buried in the friary of Donegal in 1525, and the lawyer and poet An Cosnamach son of Feargal Mac Aodhagáin was buried in Elphin in 1529. While it appears from the sources that the Franciscans may have monopolised contacts and burials among this class, the burial of Brian son of Feargal Ruadh Ó hUiginn (poets) in the Dominican priory of Áth Leathan (Straide, County Mayo) in 1476 may offer evidence that other mendicant orders also benefited from burial rights. Similarly, Maghnus son of Baethghalach Mac Aodhagáin died as Dominican prior of Sligo in 1411.²⁸ The Calendar of Papal Letters and the lost Annals of Leacán tell of Tadhg Bráthair Mac Fhirbhisigh, an Augustinian friar who was associated with the short-lived Augustinian friary of Scurmure, County Sligo, founded under the patronage of Tadhg Ó Dubhda in the mid-fifteenth century without papal permission.²⁹ Tadhg Bráthair and another friar, Eoghan Ó Caomháin sought permission from Rome in 1454 to regularise the friary's status and to fish on the River Moy. They were given permission to salt the fish and sell it for the benefit of the community. It appears, however, that the friary at Scurmure did not flourish, and that the Annals of Leacán were compiled in the Augustinian friary of Ardnaree, County Mayo, established by another member of the Ó Dubhda lords around 1400 and associated with the Mac Fhirbhisigh family until the late seventeenth century.³⁰

II

Medieval Irish manuscripts, of which many survive, contain an extensive variety of texts.³¹ Some consist of one literary genre, such as the poem-book (*dúanaire*), which contained bardic poetry and was addressed to one noble family. Most, however, are miscellanies that include early sagas, poems, genealogies, topographical lore (*dindsenchas*), saints' lives and, increasingly in the fifteenth century, devotional texts. The copious marginal glosses of many medieval Irish codices reveal the *modus operandi* of professional medieval Irish scribes and scholars. For example, the marginal glosses of the fifteenth-century codex known as the *Leabhar Breac* (Speckled Book) or *Leabhar Mór Dúna Doighre* (Great Book of Duniry (County Galway)), are instructive in this respect. The *Leabhar Breac* is a major compilation of homilies, passions, saints' lives and a myriad of devotional poems and texts. Unusually for such a miscellany, it includes very few secular texts. It is likely to have been compiled by one scribe, Murchadh Riabhach Ó Cuinnlis of Baile Locha Deacair, County Galway, between 1408 and 1411.³²

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp 722–3.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp 410–11.

²⁹ A. Gwynn and R. N. Hadcock, *Medieval religious houses. Ireland* (Dublin, 1988 reprint), p. 301.

³⁰ N. Ó Muraíle, *The celebrated antiquary. Dubhaltach Mac Fhirbhisigh (c. 1600–71)* (Maynooth, 1996), pp 39–40, 366–7.

³¹ For a fair description of the main manuscripts of the late medieval period, see J. Carney, 'Literature in Irish, 1169–1534' in Cosgrove (ed.), *A new history of Ireland, ii: medieval Ireland*, pp 690–4.

³² T. Ó Concheanainn, 'The scribe of the *Leabhar Breac*' in *Ériu*, 24 (1973), pp 64–79.

It was in the hands of the professional legal family the Mic Aodhagáin during the sixteenth century, and was kept at their residence in Duniry, County Galway. The scribe's progress as he compiled his manuscript can be traced through the marginal glosses. His main abode while transcribing texts was Cluain Leathan in Múscraige Tíre (possibly at Ballymacegan or Kiltyroe, County Tipperary), but he also worked in Clonmacnoise, Mag Ua Farga (in the barony of Ballybritt) and Clonsast, County Offaly, and in Baile Riccín, County Tipperary. At one stage he resided in Loughrea, County Galway, where he made two comments: 'This following story I am writing on Loch Riach in solitude is a good and wonderful story' (folio 2i: *Is deigscel ingnad in scelsa sis oca scribend er Loch Riach hi n-uainges*), referring to the Passion of the Image of Christ,³³ and 'Great turbulence of Loch Riach since Michaelmas; a week from tonight until Samain' (folio 8i: *Ferg mor er Loch Riach o Fhéil Michil induas, .u.main o nocht cu Samain*). He adds the second comment at the Passion of Marcellinus.³⁴ While it cannot be proven conclusively, it is possible that Murchadh Riabhach Ó Cuinnlis was residing in the Carmelite friary in Loughrea, where he would have had access to such texts. The issue arises – especially in relation to the Passion of Marcellinus, which seems to be a Middle Irish version – whether such a text was likely to have been kept in a late medieval Carmelite friary.³⁵ In its later history the manuscript was transferred from the Mac Aodhagáin residence at Duniry to the Franciscan friary of Kinaleghin, County Galway, where it was used in 1629 by Mícheál Ó Cléirigh.³⁶ It is noteworthy that Ó Cuinnlis was also the scribe of a lost religious compilation known as *An Leabhar Ruadh Muimhneach*, which was preserved at Quin, County Clare, when Mícheál Ó Cléirigh transcribed texts from it.³⁷

A further possible connection between the Mac Aodhagáin family and the Carmelites occurs in Royal Irish Academy MS D iv 2 (no. 1223). This manuscript is a typical late medieval miscellany containing early Irish sagas, tales of Irish saints, topographical poems and translations of classical tales. Although no colophon provides a date, the manuscript appears to date to the fifteenth century. One of the two scribes is Seán Mac Aodhagáin (ms *Seaán Mac Aedacain*), who enters two colophons: at folio 56 vbi, when transcribing the prose and metrical version of the lore (*dindshenchas*) of Crechmháel (Craughwell, County Galway), he notes: 'I am in the monastery of Kilcormick. I am Seán Mac Aedacáin who wrote [it].' (*I Mainistir Chillí Cormaic dam. Misi Seaán Mac Aedacain qui scribsit.*) Further on (folio 64va), he enters another colophon: 'Today I am in Kilcormick on the Thursday before Easter. I am Sir Seon Mailéadanán.'³⁸ (*Dardain roim Chaise indiu dam i Cill Chormaic. Misi Sair Seon Mailéadanán.*) Two

³³ R. Atkinson, *The passions and homilies from Leabhar Breac* (Dublin, 1885), pp 41–8 (text), 278–86 (translation).

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp 56–9 (text), 295–9 (translation).

³⁵ On the complexity of the textual tradition and its dating in *Leabhar Breac.*, see B. Murdoch, 'Preaching in medieval Ireland: the Irish tradition' in A. J. Fletcher and R. Gillespie (eds), *Irish preaching, 700–1700* (Dublin, 2001), pp 52–5.

³⁶ Jennings, *Michael O' Cleirigh, chief of the Four Masters*, p. 89.

³⁷ Ó Concheannain, 'Scribe of the *Leabhar Breac*', p. 67.

³⁸ The cataloguer (*Catalogue of Irish manuscripts in the Royal Irish Academy* (28 fasc., Dublin, 1926–70), fasc. xxvi, pp 3297–8), suggests that the name Sair Seon Mailéadanán is a playful emulation of the Knights of the Round Table whose story occurs in translation in the same manuscript but written in a different hand.

other medieval manuscripts of Kilcormick provenance survive: the 1458 missal copied from an exemplar at the friary in Loughrea, and the 1489 breviary.³⁹ Of particular note in the context of the use of Irish by the Kilcormick friars are the obituary notices – mainly of their patrons the Uí Mhaolmhuidh (O'Mulloys) – and the text of a deed agreed in 1503 between them and their patron Theobald Ó Maolmhuidh:

This is the indenture that was made between Theobald the son of Donogh, and the friars, and his wife and his children, and it was written on the day of the feast of Matthew, and the intention of this indenture is, that the friars are to give this family a pledge for their part of Baile Átha Buidhe [Ballyboy, County Offaly, one of the chief residences of the O'Mulloys]. And it is thus that the pledge is to be distributed, namely, eleven cows to John O'Mulloy, and two cows to the son of Mortagh, son of Hugh, and four cows to Theobald himself. And these are the sort of cows the friars have undertaken to give away, namely, beautiful, fat, and in-calf cows, and to be given up at the time of writing [this indenture]. And this is the food that the friars owe along with that, namely, the food of four persons each quarter of a year, according to the custom of the country. The year of the Lord, one thousand five hundred and three years.⁴⁰

Apart from providing a rare insight into the economic relationship between medieval Irish lords and friars, the incorporation of this deed in Irish in the Kilcormick missal reflects the continuation of a tradition from the early medieval period of entering such agreements into liturgical manuscripts. Among the earliest Irish deeds to survive are those written into the Book of Kells and the Book of Durrow.⁴¹

The contents of the important manuscript T.C.D. 667 have been discussed elsewhere in the context of the pastoral role of the friars as preachers.⁴² On the evidence of a brief chronicle included in the manuscript (p. 66)⁴³ – which mentions a number of prominent members of the Uí Bhriain dynasty (Brian Bórama, Donnchad Mac Briain and Donnchadh Cairbreach) and also the fall of Limerick into English hands in 1174 – Robin Flower argued that it was 'written about 1454, apparently in a Franciscan house in Clare'.⁴⁴ While the assessment that the manuscript – or parts of it, at least – may emanate from a Franciscan provenance is plausible, the fact that two scribes' names appear has been overlooked. In the early part of the manuscript (p. 54), the name Donaldus O Maelechlaynd appears, while in a separate section of Irish devotional texts, the scribe is Conn Mac Eogain (p. 181a). Nothing can be said of the latter. Of Domhnall Ó Maoileachlainn, his hand is otherwise unknown. The surname Ó Maoileachlainn is traditionally associated with the midlands, although he need not necessarily have been working there. It is noteworthy, however, that three scribes – Feardorcha, Morchadh and Niall – of the same surname added marginal glosses to the recension of *Acallam na Senórach*, which formed part of the library of St Anthony's College, Louvain (U.C.D.–O.F.M. A 4). This manuscript, tentatively dated to the fifteenth or

³⁹ W. O'Sullivan, 'Medieval Meath manuscripts' in *Ríocht na Midhe*, 7, no. 4 (1985–6), pp 7–8, 15.

⁴⁰ J. H. Todd (ed.), 'Obits of Kilcormick' in *Miscellany of the Irish Archaeological Society* (1849), pp 103–4. I have made minor changes to Todd's translation.

⁴¹ M. T. Flanagan, *Royal Irish charters: texts and contexts* (Oxford, 2005), pp 15–19.

⁴² Ó Clabaigh, *Franciscans in Ireland*, pp 138–40.

⁴³ Marvin Colker, *Trinity College Dublin descriptive catalogue of the medieval and Renaissance Latin manuscripts* (2 vols, Aldershot, 1991), 2.

⁴⁴ Flower, 'Ireland & medieval Europe', p. 282.

sixteenth centuries, is in the hand of one unidentified scribe, and although Niall Ó Maoileachlainn claims to be that scribe, this seems unlikely.⁴⁵ This additional information suggests that, at least, the scribe of the earlier part of T.C.D. MS 667 may have belonged to an hereditary scribal family and may have originated in the midlands, although, if following the normal pattern of scribes' lives, Domhnall Ó Maoileachlainn could have been working in the lordship of the Uí Bhriain.

A considerable body of religious bardic poems in Irish dating from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries is extant.⁴⁶ This corpus clearly demonstrates that bardic poets, like their counterparts elsewhere, could produce spiritual, and often highly personal, poems. These poems also frequently reflect new religious ideas and devotional trends, many ultimately attributable to the mendicant orders and, in particular, the Observants.⁴⁷ While comparatively few of the poems engage directly with mendicant themes or were composed by friars, they nevertheless provide a sufficient basis for a comparison with parallels from England and the Continent. As noted earlier, such poems date mainly to the fifteenth century and are highly stylised, according to the bardic tradition. Yet their themes mirror the themes of mendicant poems in general. One of the difficulties in identifying authors of bardic poems is that many of them survive only in manuscripts of the seventeenth century or later, and attributions can often be incorrect.

What appears to be the earliest surviving bardic poem dealing with a Franciscan theme is *Dá ghrádh do fhágghus Éirinn*, attributed to Tadhg Camchosach Ó Dálaigh, who is also credited with an inauguration poem addressed to Niall Ó Néill (d. 1397): *Bean ar n-aithéirghe Éire*.⁴⁸ While the attributions to Tadhg Camchosach are late and therefore uncertain, the first poem was definitely composed by a Franciscan about to depart Ireland for distant places:

For love of Him have I left Ireland, as a poor unlettered mendicant friar; even though it was difficult to depart from the green-swarded land of Fál and the people whom I have left.⁴⁹

The poet's inclusion of a version of the life of St Louis of Toulouse (d. 1297) in his poem has gained attention,⁵⁰ although its context in the overall theme of the poem has gone unnoticed. It would seem that the poet's family and friends disapproved of him becoming a friar:

I have heard – and it sorrows me – that our poor people are sad that I should have bent my back under the yoke of religion, turning my back on my friends.⁵¹

St Louis is given as the model for his action: not alone did he become a Franciscan,

⁴⁵ Myles Dillon, Canice Mooney, O.F.M. and Pádraig de Brún (eds), *Catalogue of Irish manuscripts in the Franciscan Library, Killiney* (Dublin, 1969), pp 10–11.

⁴⁶ The essential tool for research on Irish bardic poetry is the database compiled by Dr Katharine Simms and available on the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies' website: www.bardic.celt.dias.ie.

⁴⁷ S. Ryan, 'A slighted source: rehabilitating Irish bardic poetry in historical discourse' in *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*, 48 (2004), p. 79.

⁴⁸ C. Mhág Craith, *Dán na mBráthar Mionúr* (2 vols, Baile Átha Cliath, 1967), i, 1–15; ii, 1–6.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, ii, 4 §1.

⁵⁰ R. Flower, *The Irish tradition* (Dublin, 1947), pp 117–18; Mhág Craith, *Dán*, ii, 100–1; Ó Clabaigh, *Franciscan in Ireland*, p. 113.

⁵¹ Mhág Craith, *Dán*, ii, 5 §9.

by doing so as second son of Charles II of Anjou, he lost his worldly inheritance. This was, of course, exactly as St Francis had done. The poet makes much of this loss of inheritance, and although insisting that he should not be compared to St Louis, he clearly regards his position as similar (6d ‘a holy precedent’). He is of noble stock leaving Ireland and his noble kindred behind:

Though going off into distant places away from those with whom I was reared and separating from the land of Ireland is a meritorious act, it has been a cause of heartfelt sorrow for me...

Many kings even, and princes and nobles have assumed the yoke that was no deceiving yoke and turned their backs on the world – a cause of grace.⁵²

St Dominic is invoked in three bardic poems.⁵³ Two of these may have been composed by Tadhg Óg Ó hUiginn, although this is far from certain. Tadhg was a very eminent poet who was buried in the Dominican priory of Áth Leathan (Straide, County Mayo) in 1448. *Cia ghabhas m’anmain ré ais* (‘Who will take charge of my soul?’)⁵⁴ is a fervent plea to St Dominic to be the poet’s advocate as he approaches death. He seeks to set Dominic’s holy way of life and role as the other Christ against his own failures:

In atonement for my wealth, let me offer the poverty of his life, so poor that the Lord of friars lived again in my poor friar.

I am slow to rise in time for matins; pardon me for this, setting it against the cold nights he arose.⁵⁵

The poet is aware of a version of Dominic’s life and miracles. He stresses Dominic’s preference for a solitary life in the wilderness, and relates miracles of angels providing food to him and his friars, his cloak being untouched by rain, his books miraculously surviving intact despite falling into the sea, God paying his passage on a ship, and a blind man being cured by touching the saint’s relics.⁵⁶

The second poem, *A-tú i gcogadh rem chairdibh* (‘I am at variance with my friends’),⁵⁷ is a rather dejected composition in which a sick poet complains that his intercessors in Heaven have abandoned him, among them SS Patrick, John the Baptist, Peter, Paul and Andrew. He ends his poem with a plea to St Dominic:

Saint Dominic, too, forgot me; bitter my reproach against John of the Bosom [Eoin Bruinne]; I grieve to think that they care not for me; if they do where is the proof?⁵⁸

The third poem in which St Dominic appears, *San Dominic ’s a dhúthracht* (‘St Dominic and his fervour’), is attributed to Pilib Bocht Ó hUiginn, an Observant Franciscan and the most prolific mendicant poet known to have composed

⁵² *Ibid.*, ii, 4, §3, 6 §27.

⁵³ For medieval Dominicans and the Irish tradition, see C. Kearns, ‘Medieval Dominicans and the Irish language’ in *J.E.R.*, 94 (1960), pp 17–38; H. Fenning (ed.), *Medieval Irish Dominican studies* [Benedict O’Sullivan O.P.].

⁵⁴ L. McKenna, *Dán Dé: the poems of Donnchadh Mór Ó Dálaigh, and the religious poems in the duanaire of the Yellow Book of Lecan* (Dublin, 1922), pp 6–8 (IV); 74–5 (VI).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp 74–5, §§14–5.

⁵⁶ For consideration of references to SS Dominic and Francis in bardic poetry, see S. Ryan, ‘Popular religion in Gaelic Ireland, 1445–1645’ (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, N.U.I. Maynooth, 2002), pt. I, 258–66.

⁵⁷ McKenna, *Dán Dé*, pp 24 (XIII), 91–2 (XIII).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp 24 §10, 92 §10.

bardic poetry. His obituary in the Annals of Ulster in 1487 records that he was an Observant and one of the most excellent authors of religious poems of his time. Nothing else is known of him except what can be gleaned from the nearly thirty poems attributed to him. As with all bardic poets, there is no certainty that he composed all of these poems. However, the attributions to Pilib Bocht can be measured against two factors: the inclusion of an original *envoi* to St Francis, often with one also to St Michael the Archangel, at the end of a poem, and a poem's inclusion in the fifteenth-century manuscript Royal Irish Academy (R.I.A.) C ii 2 (no. 1235).⁵⁹ This fragmentary manuscript is of particular interest as it would seem to be contemporary with, or at least close in date to, Pilib Bocht's lifetime. It has no colophon but consists only of religious poems, many of them attributed in later manuscripts to the poet. There are no attributions to him in the manuscript – something that can be regarded either as being of no consequence or, instead, that if it belonged to himself or to his friary or family, there was no need for attributions. It might have been his *dúanaire*. Of the twenty-three poems in the manuscript, all but two include the *envoi* either to St Francis or to Michael the Archangel or to both. It appears to be in the one hand and has been re-inked in places. The decorated capitals are of the period and somewhat similar to those found in codices such as the fourteenth-century Book of Ballymote. That it belonged to the Ó hUiginn family at a later stage is suggested by the one marginal note in a later hand on folio 18, which reads 'CorMac O Higgin'. A second manuscript, T.C.D. 1340 (H 3 19) – a collection of religious verse compiled by Brian Mac Giollaphádraig in 1631 – includes virtually all the poems in R.I.A. C ii 2, with a number of attributions to Pilib Bocht.

Pilib Bocht Ó hUiginn was undoubtedly trained as a bardic poet. His florid style and inclusion of the stock metaphors employed by bardic poets in their devotional poems clearly demonstrates a bardic training. He regards himself as of noble stock, as any medieval Ó hUiginn would: *do ghéagaibh croinn uasail inn* ('I come of noble stock') (1 §21d⁶⁰). As an Observant Franciscan, he is strident in his promotion of the reform movement, and, as discussed elsewhere, his poems are remarkable for their fusion of bardic literature with material drawn from Latin hagiography, preaching material and *exempla*.⁶¹ He adheres to the themes found in Franciscan poetry in England and on the Continent: the Passion, the Virgin Mary as *mediatrix*, the Day of Judgement, the need to repent, the lives of medieval saints such as SS Catherine of Alexandria and John the Evangelist, and the Apostles. It is in his four poems on St Francis and the friars, however, that his own personality and concerns are most vividly portrayed. *Beag nar sáruigheadh San Froinséis* ('St Francis is almost deprived of honour') (1) deals in a fervent manner with the division in the order between Observants and Conventuals, and, as is the case throughout his poems, stresses that the virtues of chastity, obedience and poverty were Francis's legacy (*geanmnaidheacht i n-aice umhla/ do b'í oidhreacht fhuair a chlann* ('chastity and obedience were the inheritance his family got') (1 §6a–b)). Apart from the Observants, he regards those following the rule of St Clare (*bean*

⁵⁹ *Cat. Ir. MSS R.I.A.*, pp 3418–21.

⁶⁰ All references are to McKenna's edition, although translations are occasionally altered (poem number followed by verse and line numbers).

⁶¹ C. Ó Clabaigh, 'The cult of St Francis in late medieval Ireland' in R. Moss, C. Ó Clabaigh and S. Ryan (eds), *Art and devotion in late medieval Ireland* (Dublin, 2006), pp 158–9.

thuas ós na hordmhnáibh í ('she surpasses all religious women') (1 §12d)) and the Third Order as part of the Franciscan family. On the latter, he remarks that St Francis devised a rule for them that left them in possession of their own property (*riaghail nar bhean díleas díobh* (1 §15d)).⁶² He deals with the saint's stigmata and with his relations with the four elements and nature – again, common Franciscan themes. It is often difficult to gauge what Pilib Bocht's formation as a friar involved as regards Franciscan spirituality and textual tradition. Clearly, he was well trained in versification in Irish, and had been educated in a lay school to a high standard. In this poem, he claims not to have a proper grasp of the saint's life. This may be a poetic conceit of humility, or may indicate that he did not have sufficient Latin to fully comprehend the life (1 §§28–30):

The reason I pass over them – no matter who blames me for doing so – is that, though I have been long pondering over them, I am not the proper man to tell of his miracles.

I cannot tell the wonders of the master of the Three Families: though my words suffice to recall them, many are those my story leaves over.

To strive to recount his marvels, many feats not understood by a wise man [*saoi*] – were it not trying to count the stars? I shall act more satisfactorily in leaving them alone.

A second poem, *Dlighthear don bhráthair bheith umhal* ('The friar is bound to be obedient') (8), contains versions of many of the attributes associated with St Francis. He is the angel who replaced Lucifer in Heaven after the latter's downfall (8 §12):

In Heaven Francis was given the place of the Angel of Light; love be to Him who decreed the choice of him and his Three Orders.

The saint's stigmata is rather beautifully depicted (8 §19):

An cló ór buaileadh boill do cholla
a chúig litre na luit úd
braithidh gach luibh féin a fréamha
céir i bhfuil bhar séala súd.

Those wounds are the five letters left by the nail marking your limbs; they are the wax with your seal; a plant reveals its own roots.

Francis lived his life suffering the agony of Christ on the cross (8 §25c-d). Of the saint's grave, Pilib Bocht remarks that much as the great church of Assisi was loved by his order, it was not given the honour of being Francis's last resting place (8 §27).⁶³ He ends this poem with a familiar bardic entreaty: *go dtugadh dhamh duais mo laoidheadh* ('may he reward my poem') (8 §37), except that in this case the reward was not to be in cattle or land but the saving of his soul.

Rugadh báire ar an mbochtacht ('Poverty has lost the game')⁶⁴ – a poem attributed to Pilib Bocht and contained in R.I.A. MS C ii 2 – returns to the very topical theme of the Franciscan order losing its way by ignoring Francis's fundamental

⁶² On the Third Order in Ireland, see Ó Clabaigh, *Franciscans in Ireland*, pp 80–105.

⁶³ On the history of the entombment of St Francis and the subsequent rediscovery of his remains, see R. B. Brooke, *The image of St Francis. Responses to sainthood in the thirteenth century* (Cambridge, 2006), pp 48–50, 454–64.

⁶⁴ *Irish Monthly*, no. 58 (1930), pp 150–3.

rule on poverty.⁶⁵ Clearly, it was composed in the context of the dispute between the Conventuals and Observants. Of the Conventuals, Pilib Bocht is damning:

Since his day rare is the friar
among us who cherishes
the Rule I speak of;
weeds have grown in it.

'Tis great discredit to a friar
to have any private goods;
'tis clear he is not worth
a single coin of his money.⁶⁶

Not that poverty came easily to the poet. He compares himself to the saint: *deacra dhúinne iná dhuitse ... beag an phian do bhí id bhochtacht* ('it is harder for me than it was for you ... thy poverty had little pain').⁶⁷ There are other slight insights into his character, although always shrouded in devotional bardic language and imagery. The poem *Maith agus maithfidir duid* ('Pardon and you will be pardoned') (15) may have been composed as a result of a dispute, or it may be regarded as a sermon on pardon and mercy (15 §§5, 7):

Remember this, you whom I now advise, even your Guardian Angel cannot stop your
anger or malice unless you help him to check them...

Unless a man forget his wrath with his brother, 'tis in vain to pray to God; so says the
Lord's teaching.

And of himself, Pilib Bocht admits, as he does in other poems, that his was the sin of pride (15 §8). Although normally strident to the point of harshness in his language, occasionally he reveals a more lyrical or pleasant aspect, as in the case of the poem addressed to the Virgin Mary, *Gin go gcarthair cara siur* ('A sister, even unloved, is ever a friend') (13 §1a), parts of which imitate a bardic love poem. He describes love for Mary in a touching metaphor of human love (13 §4):

A fhagháil madh ál do mhnaoi
grádh d'fhagháil nír fhaláir dhi
ní sirthear acht ar eacht é
searc an té ar a sirfeadh sí.

If a man would have a woman's love she must get it first from him: a woman asks a man for love only as a debt due to her.

Apart from deep devotion to Mary and Francis, Ó hUiginn may also have had a devotion to SS Dominic and Patrick, if he was the author of *San Dominic's a dhú-thracht* (20) and *Fada gur háitigheadh Éire* (10). The poem to Dominic is similar in content to *Cia ghabhas m'anmain ré ais* (discussed above), especially regarding the saint's miracles.⁶⁸ An indication, however, that the attribution to Pilib Bocht is genuine is the inclusion of an assertive statement in the poem in a manner similar to his declarations regarding the division in the Franciscan order. He portrays Francis and Dominic as brother saints (20 §15):

The wise say that, as Francis, to our relief, won Christ's coming for our sin's sake, God
granted this to Dominic, too.

⁶⁵ Ó Clabaigh, *Franciscans in Ireland*, p. 120.

⁶⁶ McKenna, 'To St Francis', p. 152 §§29–30.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 153, 32a, c.

⁶⁸ Ryan, 'Popular religion in Gaelic Ireland', pt. 1, pp 258–60.

He comments on the divisions between the two orders – a change that was contrary to ‘the love of these two saints’ (20 §18c–d). He then expresses the desire to be accepted by the Dominicans (20 §21):

From those who came after him [i.e. the Dominicans], may I obtain as Francis did, if this is our destiny, the love of the scripture-scholar.

His emphasis on Dominic’s ability to preach may reflect the friars’ fundamental duty to preach (20 §§41–2):

The fruit of your preaching bore – rich wisdom given us – annoyed the angels of hell by the many souls who attained Heaven.

O full nut of Adam’s race, to your ardent strong preaching [*dot sheanmóir*], as it deserved, great love was given by the brethren [*Ó na compánaibh*].

The capacity of both saints to enthrall and to save souls through their preaching is also mentioned in *Rugadh báire ar an mbochtacht*. Of Francis, the poet declares:

No man who heard his gentle sweet speech could distrust aught he said; the effects of it were as a sermon [*seanmhóir*].⁶⁹

The poem to St Patrick diverges considerably from the rest of the corpus, and for that reason alone may not have been composed by Pilib Bocht. The *envoi* (10 §52), which mentions the angel and the patron (not clear whether Michael and Patrick or Francis, as they are not named), could have been added as the previous verse provides the necessary *dúnad* (closure): *Fada ... fada*. Nevertheless, it is included in R.I.A. MS C ii 2 and in T.C.D. 1340 (without attribution). The poem narrates a version of the life and miracles of Patrick, but its significance, if composed by Pilib Bocht, relates to the references to Croagh Patrick and St Patrick’s Purgatory. According to the poet, the hereditary family (*maor*) of Magh Fhobhair (the Patrician church of Aghagower, County Mayo, at the foot of Croagh Patrick), who were granted the termon by Patrick, were due a tithe (*cíos*) for being the keepers of the saint’s relics (10 §§27–8). The early medieval genealogies of Irish saints tell how Patrick left a tooth at Aghagower with Bishop Senach.⁷⁰ A number of the erenaghs of Aghagower, the Mic Airechtaig, are mentioned in the late medieval annals, including Donn Cathaig (*Ann. Conn.* 1233) and Benedictus (*Ann. Conn.* 1247), who was killed by the Uí Chonchobhair. Dáuid Mac Airechtaig, who died in 1346, is designated as *comarba Pátraic* (coarb (successor) of Patrick).⁷¹ Clearly, the author of the poem on St Patrick was familiar with the relic (or relics) kept at Aghagower and with the tithes due to the church’s erenaghs. If the author was Pilib Bocht, it might be argued that this detail associates the poet with Mayo, where various branches of the Ó hUiginn family held lands.⁷² While it may be of no consequence, the Elizabethan Fiants record the name Tadhg Crossagh (Crosach)

⁶⁹ McKenna, ‘To St. Francis of Assisi’, p. 151 §17.

⁷⁰ Pádraig Ó Riain (ed.), *Corpus Genealogiarum Sanctorum Hiberniae* (Dublin, 1985), p. 2, §1.3. There seems to have been a number of relics that were reputedly St Patrick’s teeth, the most notable being the Shrine of St Patrick’s tooth, which was originally made in the twelfth century and altered in the 1370s by Thomas Bermingham, Lord of Athenry (d. 1376); (P. F. Wallace and R. Ó Floinn, *Treasures of the National Museum of Ireland* (Dublin, 2002), pp 270, 292–3 (Plates 7:25–6)).

⁷¹ *Ann. Conn.*, pp 298–9.

⁷² For a full account of the Ó hUiginn family, see E. Knott, *The bardic poems of Tadhg Dall Ó Huiginn (1550–1591)* (London, 1921 [1926]), pp 305–25.

Ó hUiginn as holding land in Cloinnegrosse (County Mayo?).⁷³ Pilib Bocht's father, Conn Crosach, had the same soubriquet.⁷⁴ If from this region, perhaps Pilib Bocht was a friar in Moyne, one of the earliest Observant friaries in Ireland – founded sometime in the 1450s – and possibly the only friary where the Observance was lived in its full rigour.⁷⁵ This would provide a suitable context for Pilib Bocht's advocacy in his poems of the Observant reform.

Finally, a poem dedicated to St Patrick and which refers to Patrick's Purgatory (10 §39) is wholly in keeping with the Irish Franciscan tradition. T.C.D. MS 667, which may be Franciscan in origin, includes a series of texts on St Patrick and Patrick's Purgatory.⁷⁶ This devotion to St Patrick manifested itself among the Irish friars on the Continent, as in John Colgan's compilation of the life of Patrick in his *Trias Thaumaturga*, in the celebration of the saint's feast day in St Anthony's College, Louvain, for which a papal indulgence was obtained,⁷⁷ and in Luke Wadding's success in adding 17 March to the Roman calendar.

The resurgence of devotional texts in Irish and of religious compilations in the fifteenth century in particular has often been remarked upon by scholars, and in recent years this subject has been placed in wider English and European art historical, literary and theological contexts.⁷⁸ While it is clear that Ireland conformed with elsewhere in relation to the circulation of ideas and texts, the speculation that the mendicant orders, and especially the Franciscan Observants, contributed to this movement in the fifteenth century has yet to be proven. It can be seen from the evidence available (discussed above) that the mendicant orders were part of the network of patrons, learned families, scribes and the Church that operated as one class in late medieval Ireland. It is not surprising, therefore, that (as is evident in the landscape and in architecture) the castle, the school of learning and the friary often interacted. Bardic poems were intelligible to patrons and their households as they were composed for inaugurations, upon deaths and on other important occasions in a noble family's life cycle. Although Pilib Bocht Ó hUiginn's poems often appear to be intensely personal, many of them could have been recited to a congregation or audience on feast days or on other occasions. His poems regarding the state of the Franciscan order are not simply personal. It is quite possible that they formed part of the Observant reform's campaign in the 1450s and 1460s in the west of Ireland. What better weapon to have than bardic poems promoting the reform composed by a trained poet and member of a distinguished bardic family?

There are many manifestations of the network of castle, Church and learned family at work in late medieval Irish manuscripts. In some instances, a scribe can be seen to specialise in producing compilations of devotional texts, as in the case of a certain Tadhg Ó Rígbardáin, a late fifteenth-century scribe, a number of whose manuscripts survive and who may have worked in the Tipperary/Limerick

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 321.

⁷⁴ The soubriquet *crosach* – 'marked with a cross, marked with a scar' – is relatively rare.

⁷⁵ Ó Clabaigh, *Franciscans in Ireland*, p. 54.

⁷⁶ Colker, *Cat. Latin MSS T.C.D.*, pp 1159–60 (items 326, 326 (a)–(e)).

⁷⁷ Jennings (ed.), *Louvain papers*, p. 9, document no. 9 (16 Aug. 1607).

⁷⁸ S. Ryan, 'Windows on late medieval devotional practice: Máire Ní Mháille's "Book of Piety" (1513) and the world behind the texts' in Moss et al. (eds), *Art & devotion*, pp 1–15; B. Cunningham, 'Illustrations of the Passion of Christ in the *Senchas Búrcach* manuscript' in *ibid.*, pp 16–32.

region.⁷⁹ R.I.A. MS 3 B 22 consists of a series of homilies on the usual range of subjects – the Passion, the Virgin, Christian governance, the love of God and repentance – and also a series of extracts from the *Meditationes Vitae Christi*, including a copy of Tomás Ó Bruacháin’s Irish translation. R.I.A. MS 3 B 23, which belonged to the O’Brien family in the eighteenth century, contains homilies on almsgiving, poverty, mercy and sin, an Irish version of *Speculum Peccatoris*, as well as early Irish ecclesiastical texts, such as the Rule of the Monastery of Tallaght and *Abgítir Crábaid*. A third manuscript, R.I.A. MS 24 P 1, was written in 1473 and again includes a series of homilies and other texts, among them an Irish translation of *De Contemptu Mundi*. It is possible that these manuscripts were produced as books of piety for noble families, similar to the first part of *Leabhar Chlainne Suibhne*.⁸⁰ That particular manuscript was compiled by a certain Ciothruadh Mag Fhionnghaill in Donegal in 1513–14 for Máire Ní Mháille, co-founder with her husband Rúaidhrí Mac Suibhne of Fanad of a Carmelite foundation in Rathmullen, County Donegal, in 1516.⁸¹ Notably, in the context of mendicant-order literature, Ciothruadh records (§68) that the story of a revelation made by the lost soul of a certain Guido of Verona to a Dominican was translated into Irish in 1457.⁸² Other Dominican writers whose works were translated into Irish include St Raymond of Pennafort (d. 1275), a highly influential writer whose works influenced confessors’ manuals widely, and copies of which were kept in the Franciscan friary at Youghal.⁸³ A translation into Irish of his rules on the behaviour of clerics at mealtimes is preserved in a series of manuscripts, including the fifteenth-century compilation known as *Liber Flavus Fergusiorum* (R.I.A. MS 23 O 48 (no. 476)).⁸⁴

The internal evidence from the marginalia and colophons of late medieval Irish manuscripts suggests that for the most part miscellanies of devotional texts such as *Leabhar Chlainne Suibhne*, B.L. MS Egerton 1781 and *Liber Flavus Fergusiorum* were compiled by lay scribes, many of whom were members of hereditary learned families. Scribes occasionally resided in friaries – as was the case with Seán Mac Aodhagáin working in Kilcormick – or perhaps used their libraries. Texts were transmitted in this kind of milieu; for example, the contents of the Rennes MS, which was written in the Franciscan friary in Kilcrea,⁸⁵ closely mirror the contents of Tadhg Ó Rígbardáin’s compilations. Similarly, the composite Paris

⁷⁹ R.I.A., 3 B 22–3 (nos 1226–7), 24 P 1 (no 1228).

⁸⁰ Ryan, ‘Máire Ní Mháille’s ‘Book of Piety’.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁸² P. Walsh (ed.), *Leabhar Chlainne Suibhne. The Book of the MacSweeneys. Text and genealogies* (Dublin, 1920), pp xliv–v, li. The text known as *Spiritus Guidonis* also occurs in an Irish translation in the fifteenth-century manuscript known as *Liber Flavus Fergusiorum* (R.I.A. MS 23 O 48, f. 13 (15) r). See B. Millett, ‘The translation work of the Irish Franciscans’ in *Seanchas Ardmhacha*, 17 (1996–7), pp 1–25.

⁸³ Ó Clabaigh, *Franciscans in Ireland*, pp 147, 167.

⁸⁴ R.I.A. catalogue 23 O 48 (no. 476) folio 20v^o begins *Le[g]thar eig Reimunn ina shuim féin* ‘it is read in his own *Summa* by Raymond’; see www.isos.dias.ie.

⁸⁵ G. Dottin, ‘Notice du manuscrit irlandais de la Bibliothèque de Rennes’ in *Revue Celtique*, 15 (1894), pp 86–7. The scribe notes at folio 69: *Dardæin manndála indiu 7 ar comurci an fer do caitheis indiu damh 7 i Cill Creidhi damh* ‘Today Holy Thursday and I put myself under the protection of he who I received today and I am in Kilcrea’; Ó Clabaigh, *Franciscans in Ireland*, pp 137–8.

MS BN Celt. 1⁸⁶ incorporates stock devotional translations, such as Pope Innocent III's *De Contemptu Mundi*. One fragment of this manuscript was written by the prolific scribe Uilliam Mac an Legha around 1473, who also compiled B.L. Add. MS 11809. Interestingly, the latter manuscript not only includes the popular Irish translation of pseudo-Bonaventure *Meditationes Vitae Christi* but also a fragmentary translation of the thirteenth-century tract *Stimulus Amoris* attributed to the Franciscan Jacobus of Milan.⁸⁷ As with the *Meditationes*, this tract was a reflection of Franciscan piety that was widely known to friars and lay people. It has been argued, for example, that some passages in the *Stimulus Amoris* inspired the iconography of the stained-glass windows in the nave of the basilica at Assisi.⁸⁸ The relationship between castle, scribe and friary that probably led to the production of such compilations is further reflected in the Rennes/Kilcrea MS that includes Finghin Ó Mathghamna's Irish version of the travels of Sir John Mandeville translated in 1475 at Finghin's residence in Ros Brin in west Cork.⁸⁹ Further evidence that Ros Brin was a centre of intellectual activity during Finghin's lifetime is found in R.I.A. MS 29 P 15, a medical manuscript compiled by an unknown scribe in Ros Brin in 1478.

A final example of this late medieval noble, learned and ecclesiastical class in operation is that of the Ó Siaghail family. In October 1636 Mícheál Ó Cléirigh made a fair copy of a translation into Irish from English of the Rule of St Clare for the Poor Clare nuns at the convent of Bethlehem on the shores of Lough Ree. In his colophon added to the Rule, he stated that 'Fr Aodh O Raghailigh and Fr Seamus Ó Siaghail translated this Rule into Irish from English'. Jennings, in his comments on this colophon, noted that nothing was known of the two translators except that Fr Ó Siaghail was in Athlone when the town was taken by General Preston in 1648, and was one of the friars allowed to remain there because he was opposed to the policy of Rinuccini.⁹⁰

Whatever about his politics, it is likely that the friar Seamus Ó Siaghail was a member of the hereditary family of Ó Siaghail who were physicians to the Meic Cochláin,⁹¹ and also scribes and patrons of the learned class throughout the late medieval period. Mícheál Ó Cléirigh, for example, copied the Life of Rúadhán in 1628 at Athlone from *Leabhar Eachraidhe I Shiaghail* ('the book of Eachraidhe Ó Siaghail').⁹² A number of well-known late medieval Irish manuscripts are associated with the Ó Siaghail family, and their contents have a notably devotional

⁸⁶ H. Omont, 'Catalogue des MSS celtiques et basques de la Bibliothèque Nationale' in *Revue Celtique*, 11 (1890), pp 390–405.

⁸⁷ R. Flower, *Catalogue of Irish manuscripts in the British Museum* (3 vols, London, 1992) ii, 550 (5); these volumes were first published from 1926–53.

⁸⁸ Brook, *The image of St Francis*, pp 329–31.

⁸⁹ G. Dottin, 'Notice du manuscrit irlandais de la Bibliothèque de Rennes', p. 87; see also Flower, *Cat. Ir. MSS in B.L.*, ii, 540–1 (B.L., MS Egerton 1781).

⁹⁰ Jennings, *Michael O' Cleirigh, chief of the Four Masters*, pp 150–2.

⁹¹ John O'Donovan (ed.), *Annála Ríoghachta Éireann: Annals of the kingdom of Ireland by the Four Masters, from the earliest period to the year 1616. Edited from MSS in the library of the Royal Irish Academy and of Trinity College Dublin with a translation and copious notes* (7 vols, Dublin, 1848–51), v, 1508 (s.a. 1548), note b. Niall O'Shiel subscribed the will of Sir John Coghlan in 1590. Turlough Mac Cochláin was one of Mícheál Ó Cléirigh's patrons.

⁹² B. Jennings, *Michael O' Cleirigh, chief of the Four Masters*, pp 150–2.

character. B.M. MS Egerton 1781, dated to c. 1484–7, includes a colophon (§149b) by the scribe (probably a member of the Mac Parthaláin family) that states that that section of the manuscript – tale of the poor man and king David – was written in the house of Niall Ó Siaghail.⁹³ A contemporary manuscript, Oxford Bodleian Rawlinson B513, was also written in Niall Ó Siaghail’s house – variously identified as being in Baile Uí Shiaghail, near the River Brosna, parish of Gillen, barony of Garrycastle, County Offaly,⁹⁴ or in the parish of Lynally, barony of Ballycowan, County Offaly.⁹⁵ The scribe was Conall Ballach Mac Parthaláin. This manuscript consists of devotional, allegorical and homiletic texts in Irish, among them a Marian text based on *Manipulus Florum*, a homily on Christ’s passion, a version of the *Liber Scintillarum*, and a version of *Speculum Peccatoris*. Two recensions of the Life of Colum Cille, which was commissioned by Maghnus Ó Domhnaill in 1532, survive in Bodleian MS Rawlinson B514 and U.C.D.–O.F.M. MSA8. The Rawlinson manuscript is in the hand of Giolla Riabhach Mór Ó Cléirigh, who probably wrote it for Maghnus Ó Domhnaill.⁹⁶ A8 – which was presumably transferred in the seventeenth century from the friary in Donegal to St Anthony’s, Louvain – is in the hand of Eoghan Carrach Ó Siaghail (*fl.* 1530–45) and was written for Maghnus Ó Domhnaill’s son-in-law Niall Ó Néill.⁹⁷ Eoghan Carrach Ó Siaghail, Brian Ó Siaghail and Aodh Ó Siaghail made additions to Bodleian MS Laud 615, which contains a collection of late medieval poems attributed to Colum Cille, and which may have been compiled when work was in progress on the Life of Colum Cille.⁹⁸

III

The contribution of the mendicant orders to late medieval Irish architecture is a striking feature of the Irish landscape, be it the tall, slender towers of Franciscan friaries or the square towers of Carmelite and Dominican friaries. These medieval monuments enhance our knowledge of the scale and structure of Irish friaries, and of the aspirations of the wealthy patrons who endowed them. They are vital to understanding the place of the friary not alone in the Irish landscape but also in Britain and on the Continent, where such extensive remains do not survive. Irish vernacular literature contributes to our understanding of the role of the friars in the intellectual and literary tradition of late medieval Ireland. While direct connections between the mendicant orders and learned families in late medieval Ireland can often be elusive, sufficient proof exists to suggest that the orders were part of a close network of patrons and professional learned families. The values of the friars and favourite themes communicated by them to the laity in their sermons became the stock of vernacular devotional texts in the fifteenth century.

⁹³ Flower, *Cat. Ir. MSS in B.L.*, pp 526, 542–3 (art. 26).

⁹⁴ O’Donovan (ed.), *A.F.M.*, v, p. 1508 (s.a. 1548), note b.

⁹⁵ B. Ó Cuív, *Catalogue of Irish language manuscripts in the Bodleian Library at Oxford and Oxford college libraries* (2 parts, Dublin, 2001–03), pt. i, 256.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 261ff. As Ó Cuív notes (p. 262), Giolla Riabhach Ó Cléirigh also compiled a personal *duanaire* for Maghnus Ó Domhnaill (T.C.D., MS 1319 (H.2.17)).

⁹⁷ Dillon et al., *Cat. MSS FLK*, pp 16–17.

⁹⁸ Ó Cuív, *Cat. Ir. MSS in Bodleian Library*, i, 89–90.

Their poetry evoked their preferred saints. Their imprint can be seen on many late medieval manuscripts. Thus, we find the transmission of texts between families and the movement of scribes among patrons – patrons who were not only secular rulers but also physicians, lawyers, poets and historians. This noble class endowed the mendicant foundations in which they were finally buried, thus strengthening the bond between castle, friary and school of learning.⁹⁹

EDEL BHREATHNACH
Mícheál Ó Cléirigh Institute, University College Dublin

⁹⁹ I wish to thank Dr Joseph MacMahon O.F.M., Dr John McCafferty, and the editors for their observations on an earlier draft of this paper.