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The collapse of the Gaelic world, 1450–1650

This article offers some reflections on the processes of nation-making and state formation as they affected the oldest ethnic and cultural grouping in the British Isles, that of the *Gaedhil*, roughly in the period 1450–1650, and examines the ways in which these processes have been portrayed by historians. At the present day the Gaelic language remains the normal medium of communication in small areas of western Ireland and western Scotland; and in respect of political developments in both Scotland and Ireland, Gaelic customs and culture have exercised a much more substantial influence. Despite these similarities, there remain significant differences between British and Irish historians in the ways in which the Gaelic contribution to nation-making and state formation have been presented.

A basic distinction advanced by historians both of Ireland and Scotland has been one between the Gaelic peoples inhabiting Ireland and those resident in Scotland. It can be argued that this may reflect the relative importance of the Gaelic contribution to the making of two separate kingdoms, and ultimately two separate states; but it also means that the wider process of interaction and assimilation between *Gaedhil* and *Gaill* is split into separate Irish and Scottish experiences. In theory, these two Gaelic experiences should provide material for a comparative study of a particularly illuminating kind, but in practice other historiographical influences have generally militated against this kind of comparative history. One such is the more marginal position of Gaelic studies within Scottish historiography than is the case in Ireland. Considering that half of Scotland was still Gaelic-speaking in 1700, for instance, it is remarkable how few Scottish historians seem able to make use of Gaelic sources. Another is the practice of establishing separate departments of history in the universities for the teaching of national history. This has meant, for instance, that students are usually taught that portion of the *Gaedhil/Gaill* interaction process which relates to the 'nation' by specialist teachers of national history. Yet, since these national surveys reflect modern nations and modern national boundaries, students are trained to study Irishmen and Scots in the making rather than to consider how the inhabitants of late medieval Gaeldom might have viewed developments in the wider Gaelic world. Arguably, behind these approaches lies the influence of the modern nation-state. Scotland and Northern Ireland remain part of a multi-national British state which is dominated by England. And in respect of patterns of migration and settlement,

British historiography has traditionally exhibited a greater degree of empathy with 'colonial', as opposed to 'native', perspectives on the process of state formation. By contrast, in what is now the Republic of Ireland, the very success of the nationalist movement in establishing an independent Irish nation-state has perhaps helped to stimulate research on the Gaelic Irish as victims of colonisation, and also a leaning towards 'native' perspectives on colonialism. The state sought to emphasise the island's continuity with a Gaelic past as a means of promoting a separate sense of Irishness rather than a British sense of identity. Thus the emergence of the nation-state helped to stimulate historical research on the Gaelic peoples in ways that have been of particular relevance to the ambitions of the state and its citizens.

The Irish historiography of the Gaelic peoples has been much the livelier of the two, with a vigorous debate in recent years about the Gaelic response to conquest and colonisation, the question of a 'national consciousness', and the changing nature of the Gaelic mentality.[1] From the perspective of Gaelic Scotland, however, the assumptions and preoccupations of this historiography might be viewed as somewhat eccentric. In this context, three aspects of historical writings on Gaelic Ireland deserve further scrutiny. The first concerns the Hibernocentric context of the debate on the nature and extent of Gaelic resistance to English rule in Ireland. Although the tradition of heroic, continuous and successful resistance has been contested by so-called 'revisionist' historians, no participant in the debate seems willing to concede a role for Gaelic Scotland. This is particularly surprising in view of what is known about the powerful and aggressive Clan Donald and the development of the lordship of the Isles. Clan Donald consciously championed Gaelic values against the *Gaill* and was, for much of the fifteenth century, a virtually independent force, expanding into Ulster and Ross. The lord of the Isles was capable of defeating a Scottish royal army in pitched battle, was regularly included by the English as their ally in successive Anglo-Scottish

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[1]See especially Brendan Bradshaw, 'Native reaction to the Westward Enterprise: a case study in Gaelic ideology' in K. R. Andrews, N. P. Canny, and P. E. H. Hair (eds), *The Westward Enterprise: English activities in Ireland, the Atlantic and America, 1480–1650* (Liverpool, 1978), pp 66–80; T. J. Dunne, 'The Gaelic response to conquest and colonisation: the evidence of the poetry' in *Studia Hib.*, xx (1980), pp 7–30; N. P. Canny, 'The formation of the Irish mind: religion, politics and Gaelic Irish literature, 1580–1750' in *Past & Present*, no. 95 (May 1982), pp 91–116; Breandán Ó Buachalla, 'Na Stíobhartaigh agus an t-aos léinn: Cing Séamas' in *R.I.A. Proc.*, lxxxiii (1983), sect. C, pp 81–134; Bernadette Cunningham, 'Native culture and political change in Ireland, 1580–1640' in Ciaran Brady and Raymond Gillespie (eds), *Natives and newcomers: essays on the making of Irish colonial society, 1534–1641* (Dublin, 1986), pp 148–70; Katharine Simms, *From kings to warlords: the changing political structure of Gaelic Ireland in the later middle ages* (Woodbridge, 1987); Michelle O Riordan, *The Gaelic mind and the collapse of the Gaelic world* (Cork, 1990); Breandán Ó Buachalla, 'Poetry and politics in early modern Ireland' in *Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, vii (1992), pp 149–75; Joep Leerssen, *The Contention of the Bards (Iomarbhágh na bhFileadh) and its place in Irish political and literary history* (London, 1994); Breandán Ó Buachalla, *Aisling ghéar: na Stíobhartaigh agus an t-aos léinn, 1603–1788* (Dublin, 1996).

truces, and eventually in 1462 negotiated a formal treaty with the English king for the partition of Scotland.[2]

Second, recent writings concerning the Gaelic response to conquest and colonisation reveal assumptions which remain unchallenged by either side in the debate on 'revisionism'. Running through the literature is the assumption that, in terms of their wider senses of identity, those *Gaedhil* living in Ireland would naturally view the island of Ireland, and not the wider *Gaedhealtacht*, as the national territory. This may well have been the case at particular times during the medieval and early modern eras, but the question still needs proper investigation.

Finally, at a time when Scottish Gaeldom was espousing a more militant and potentially subversive form of Protestantism, similar assumptions surround the identification by Irish historians of a new and authoritarian form of Catholicism, together with stronger ties with Rome and Spain, as the natural expression of dissent from a national Church of Ireland.

In addressing these questions, this article offers a reappraisal of the late medieval *Gaedhealtacht*, focusing on the links between its Irish and Scottish components, especially those between Ulster and western Scotland.

<p style="text-align:center">I</p>

To begin with, it may be useful to consider the terminology employed in modern English to describe the Gaelic peoples and their culture. An initial problem arises from the paucity of vocabulary in the English language used to differentiate between the various lands, cultures and peoples of the British Isles. The English now inhabit the south-eastern part of Britain, called England, and speak English. In 1500, however, a person born and living outside England but within the allegiance of the king of England, and of English blood and condition — among the 'Englishries' of Ireland, Wales or Calais, for instance — was accounted an Englishman. Conversely, the Cornish, who inhabited part of England but spoke a different language, were not then regarded as English.[3] Language and culture were a stronger badge of national identity than was national territory. The Welsh language is similarly undiversified in this respect: a Welshman (*Cymry*) speaks Welsh (*Cymraeg*) and inhabits Wales (*Cymru*). With regard to the third indigenous language of the archipelago, however, there is a very significant terminological difference between language and people on the one hand, and national territory. The *Gaedhil* spoke Gaelic (*Gaedhilge*), but lived in *Alba* (Scotland) or *Éire* (Ireland) — two very different words — which perhaps

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[2]See especially Alexander Grant, 'Scotland's "Celtic fringe" in the late middle ages: the Macdonald lords of the Isles and the kingdom of Scotland' in R. R. Davies (ed.), *The British Isles, 1100–1500: comparisons, contrasts and connections* (Edinburgh, 1988), pp 118–41; J. M. W. Bannerman, 'The lordship of the Isles' in J. M. Brown (ed.), *Scottish society in the fifteenth century* (London, 1977), pp 209–40; K. A. Steer and J. M. W. Bannerman, *Late medieval monumental sculpture in the west Highlands* (Edinburgh, 1977).

[3]S. G. Ellis, 'Crown, community and government in the English territories, 1450–1575' in *History*, lxxi (1986), pp 187–204.

suggests that the Gaelic sense of identity was even more closely identified with language and culture, as opposed to national territory, than was the case with the English and Welsh. This argument is strengthened by a consideration of the label normally applied in Gaelic sources to the other inhabitants of the archipelago, *Gaill* (foreigners), regardless of whether they lived in Scotland, Ireland or England: the *Gaedhil* chose rather to stress the cultural and linguistic unity of the *Gaill* than to differentiate between them on grounds of their allegiance to different princes.

As Irish historians have long reiterated, however, there was another side to ideas of national identity among the *Gaedhil*. In Ireland a long-established tradition and literature identified the *Gaedhil* with the land of Ireland (apostrophised as *Inis Banbha* or *Inis Fáil*), with a high kingship, and with a 'national' history about the island's occupation and defence. By contrast, Scotland's Gaelic traditions, it is argued by Irish historians, arose out of the colonisation of the country from Ireland. Furthermore, although Gaelic sources could distinguish between *Gaedhil na hÉireann* and *Gaedhil na hAlban*, and also between *Gaill* and *Sasanaigh* (Englishmen),[4] these distinctions were in fact rarely made. There was no need for them, because politics in both countries normally revolved around 'cogadh Gaedheal re Gallaibh' (the war of the *Gaedhil* against the *Gaill*). Thus, on the one hand, the English were usually described as *Gaill*, not *Sasanaigh*; and on the other, as late as the eighteenth century, Gaelic-speaking Highlanders still referred to Scottish Lowlanders as *Sasanaigh*.[5]

Speakers of English or Scots consistently described the *Gaedhil* as 'Irish', or 'Erse' (a variant), regardless of whether they lived in Scotland or Ireland. This must reflect a continuing perception of the primary identification of that people and culture with Ireland. In 1542, just before the battle of Solway Moss, an English spy reported of Argyll's troops in the Scottish army, which was then approaching the English borders:

that therle of Argile had with him in the Scottisshe ost xij^{ml} [12,000] Yerishe men and ij^{ml}cc [2,200] cariage horses, and that the Scottis were more aferde of the saide Yrishe men than of thEnglishe army, for they did asmuche hurt where they cam in distroying the corn and vitailles and not paying therfore, and if they were resisted by the saide Scottis they wolde kill them.

The spy then provided a description of the customs and 'maner of the said Yrishe men' which was quite unremarkable, apart from the fact that most of these Irishmen would never have set foot in Ireland. Another report of the Scottish army was even less complimentary, noting that 'the moste parte was Ershemen, whiche be veray slaves and noo men of good ordre'.[6]

[4]See, for instance, Art Cosgrove, *Late medieval Ireland, 1370–1541* (Dublin, 1981), ch. 5; Brendan Bradshaw, *The Irish constitutional revolution of the sixteenth century* (Cambridge, 1979), ch. 1.

[5]Linda Colley, *Britons: forging the nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven, 1992), pp 14–15.

[6]*The Hamilton papers: letters and papers illustrating the political relations of England and Scotland in the XVIth century*, ed. Joseph Bain, i: *1532–43* (Edinburgh, 1890), pp lxxi–lxxiii. For other references to 'Irish' as applied to the *Gaedhil* in Scotland, and to 'Ireland' as applied to the Scottish Highlands, see G. A. Hayes-McCoy, *Scots mercenary forces in Ireland (1565–1603)* (Dublin, 1937), pp 4–5.

By contrast, a statute of the Scottish parliament of 1426, which wished to forbid the passage of ships between Scotland and Ireland during wartime, justified this on the grounds that the king's rebels 'ar reset in Erschry of Yrlande', and that 'men þat ar vndir Erschry subiect to þe king of Ingland mycht espy þe pryuateis of þis realme', but added that this act was not meant to break 'þe alde frendschip betuix þe king of Scotlande and his lieges ande þe gude alde frendes of Erschry of Yrlande'.[7] Finally, both the old and the new usages can be seen in such phrases as the description in 1545 of Donald Dubh, pretender to the lordship of the Isles, as king of 'the Scottyshe Irysshe',[8] or of Alastair MacRandal Boy MacDonnell in 1562 as 'a Scot who is as wise and subtle an Irishman as any'.[9]

The point to be made concerning concepts of nationality in the late medieval *Gaedhealtacht* is that, despite the unhelpful terminology of modern English usage, it is a mistake simply to view Irish and Scottish Gaeldom separately, focusing on two distinct processes of interaction between *Gaedhil* and *Gaill* in Ireland and Scotland, and two composite nations in the making. This statement, however, needs to be qualified in two important respects. First, it is not to deny that loyalties in the Gaelic world were chiefly localised and dynastic. Against the slight and ambiguous evidence discussed in this article for the existence of a wider 'national' sense of identity among the *Gaedhil*, there is, for Ireland at least, a much larger body of sources which would appear to indicate that the *Gaedhil* more normally thought in terms of the local dynasty and tribal lordship.[10] Second, even adopting this wider perspective, the extent to which the *Gaedhil* of north-eastern Scotland shared (if at all) in the experience of the western Highlands and Isles must, for want of evidence, remain an open question. Nevertheless, the evidence concerning the development of wider concepts of power and identity in the late medieval *Gaedhealtacht* points towards the emergence of a consolidated Gaelic kingdom spanning the North Channel rather than a revived high kingship of Ireland. In the late middle ages the Irishry of western Scotland may be seen as an extension of the Irishry of Ireland, similar to the relationship between the English Pale in Ireland and the English mainland. This was a source of strength to the *Gaedhil*, since it meant that, in marked contrast to the *Gaill*, they had strong internal lines of communication, centring on the powerful and aggressive MacDonald lord of the Isles (*rí Innsí Gall*).

In this connexion, it is hardly coincidence that during the fifteenth century we find in the Irish annals obits of leading Gaelic *literati* implying that they

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[7] *Acts parl. Scot.*, ii, 11.

[8] *L. & P. Hen. VIII*, xix (ii), no. 795.

[9] Quoted in S. G. Ellis, *Ireland in the age of the Tudors, 1447–1603: English expansion and the end of Gaelic rule* (London, 1998), p. 278. In accordance with modern Irish historiographical convention, the forms 'Randal' and 'MacDonnell' are used in this article to denote members of the branch of Clan Donald which eventually settled in north County Antrim, though it may be observed that usage of this kind has helped to sustain the false distinctions contended against here.

[10] A recent, sensitive discussion of many of the problems raised by this evidence is Leerssen, *Contention of the Bards*, esp. pp 5–16.

operated in a pan-Gaelic context — 'cend scoile Erenn ocus Alban', 'oide fer nErenn ocus nAlban re dán', 'ollam Erenn ocus Alban re sinm' — a practice which had formerly obtained but had ceased with the Anglo-Norman conquest of east Ulster in the late twelfth century.[11] It was this same period of the 'Gaelic revival' which saw the composition of those poems in the Book of the Dean of Lismore which were the work of poets based in Scotland. The earliest dates from 1310, but most were written just before the book was compiled, between 1512 and 1532.[12] There is, perhaps, some distinction in the poetry of the period between the extolling of the claims of Irish chiefs to be king of Ireland and the praise of a Gaelic chief in Scotland. The earl of Argyll is described as 'rí fial uasal Gaodhal' (the noble, generous king of the *Gaedhil*), while an elegy on John of Islay, the MacDonald (1449–93), preserved in the Book of Clanranald, claims for him the sovereignty of the *Gaedhil* and of Ireland and Scotland:

> Cennus Ghaoidheal do chlann cholla, coir a fhógra
> síad aris na gcathibh cétna, flatha fodla
> cennus eirenn ⁊ albuin an fhuinn ghríanaigh
> ata ag an dréim fhuilidh fhaobhraigh cuiridh cliaruidh.
> Fuair cennus na haicme uile, eoin a híle.[13]

The traditional pinnacle of political ambition, to judge by the poetry, was, of course, the recipient's claim to be 'ardrígh na hÉireann', but a prose account of the arms and army of the same lord describes him instead as 'áird rígh ... Gaoidheal'.[14] What this meant is spelt out in another poem to MacDonald which praises him in terms which reflect his claims over Ireland and Scotland:

> ... Guaire Gaoidheal
> aoinfher uladh ...
> Grian na nGaoidheal . gnúis í cholla
> fa bhruach banna . luath a longa
> cuilen confuigh . choisger foghla

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[11]*A.L.C.*, i, 162, 168; ii, 176, 290, 364.

[12]W. J. Watson (ed.), *Scottish verse from the Book of the Dean of Lismore* (Edinburgh, 1937), esp. pp vii–xiv.

[13]'The sovereignty of the *Gaedhil* to Clann Colla / It is right to proclaim it / They were again in the same battalions, / The heroes of Fodla / The sovereignty of Ireland and Scotland of the sunny lands / Was had by the bloody sharp-bladed tribes / The fighting champions. / The sovereignty of the entire tribes was obtained / By John of Islay' ('The Book of Clanranald' in Alexander Cameron, *Reliquiae Celticae: texts, papers, and studies in Gaelic literature and philosophy*, ed. Alexander MacBain and John Kennedy (2 vols, Inverness, 1892–4), ii, 208–10). The author of the poem is identified as one O'Henna ('O henna do rinne so deoin a híle'), and in a later transliteration of the text into Scots Gaelic the editors describe him as 'an Irish bard' (A. J. and A. M. MacDonald (eds), *The MacDonald collection of Gaelic poetry* (Inverness, 1911), pp vii, 6).

[14]'Book of Clanranald', p. 260. Notwithstanding this evidence, speculation concerning 'the possibility of political links between [Ireland and Gaelic Scotland] under an "ard rí na nGael"' has simply been dismissed: see Art Cosgrove, 'The writing of Irish medieval history' in *I.H.S.*, xxvii, no. 106 (Nov. 1990), p. 104.

croidhe cunnla bile banbha
tir na tennal deirg na dheghaidh
a bhert bunaidh techt go temhair
measgadh midhe onchu íle . . .[15]

In other words, the office of 'ardrígh na nGaedheal' was a superior kind of high kingship which comprised both Ireland and Scotland and which, within Scottish Gaeldom at least, had superseded the high kingship of Ireland as the summit of political ambition.

Poets based in Ireland were also conscious of this pan-Gaelic dimension, although they might choose to describe it rather differently. A poem by Tadhg Dall Ó hUiginn (1550–91) addressed to Sorley MacDonnell, head of the MacDonnells of Antrim, reminded him of Ireland's ancient claim on Scotland and of the oppressions which Banbha now suffered. In an age in which concepts of an Irish national territory were relatively undeveloped, the poet wondered whether Banbha would claim 'na hoiléinse thoir atá idir Fhódla is Alboin' (the islands to the east between Fodhla and Scotland) and all of Islay or Kintyre. He then recalled the departure of the three Collas to Scotland, the return of two, but the continued absence of the choicest, 'an rí ar a bhfuil Banbha ag brath' (the king whom Banbha is expecting), whose strange allegiance to a foreign land deprived her of a spouse:

Rogha leannáin Leasa Cuinn
Somhairle mhac Meic Domhnuill
brath céile do Mhoigh Mhonaidh
's re bhfoil Éire ag anamhain.

Sorley's return, he prophesied, would discharge Scotland's debt to Ireland and provide her with a husband.[16] Over a century earlier, much the same themes and sentiments had been developed — rather more diplomatically — by Tadhg Óg Ó hUiginn in a poem addressed to Alexander MacDonald, third lord of the Isles (*c.* 1423–49):

Slighe an trír tháinig a-noir
go ghabháil Fhódla a hAlbain
tiocfa réalda cinidh Chuinn
sa slighidh gcéadna chuguinn.[17]

[15]'Pride of the *Gaedhil*; / The champion of Ulster / . . . The sun of the *Gaedhil*, / the countenance of O'Colla: / By the banks of the Bann, / quick are his ships; / An angry hound / that checks plunders, / A modest heart, / the tree of Banbha / The land with fire-brands / is red after him; / His prime purpose / is to come to Tara / Putting Meath in commotion, / the leopard of Islay' ('Book of Clanranald', p. 264).

[16]'The best-beloved of Conn's dwelling / Sorley, son of MacDonnell / The expected mate from Monadh's plain / He for whom Ireland is waiting' (*The bardic poems of Tadhg Dall Ó Huiginn (1550–91)* (2 vols, London, 1922–6), i, 173–9; ii, 115–19).

[17]'The path of the three who came from the east / To conquer Fódla from Scotland / The stars of the race of Conn will come / In the same way to us' (Lambert McKenna (ed.), *Aithdioghluim dána* (2 vols, Dublin, 1939–40), i, 114–18; ii, 69–71). Dr Katharine Simms has pointed out to me that the poet had employed virtually the same couplet ('Do-ní réalda cinidh Cuinn / sa slighidh cheadna chuguinn') a generation earlier to compare Niall Óg O'Neill with the Red Branch Knights (ibid., poem no. 16), and he also addresses James Butler, fourth earl of Ormond, as the rightful ruler

Thus, alongside traditional expressions of national sentiment focusing on the land of Ireland, the *Gaedhealtacht* witnessed, during the period of the Gaelic revival, a different kind of ethnic, cultural nationalism, based on a sense of Gaelic identity. Arguably, at one level this revived sense of Gaelic nationalism provided the dynamism behind the Gaelic revival. It was, in the modern sense, as much Scottish as Irish.

What, then, was the relationship between the two halves of the Gaelic world? If Dalriada had once been Ireland's first colony, the relationship between the two was now much more symbiotic. Scottish Gaeldom provided the manpower and military technology — exemplified by the galloglas in the thirteenth century and the redshanks in the sixteenth — while the larger Irish lordships had better financial resources and provided a stronger underpinning for Gaelic culture. It is surely significant that none of the great Gaelic books and collections of poetry, such as An Leabhar Breac or the Yellow Book of Lecan, survive from a Scottish source before the sixteenth century. The Book of the Dean of Lismore is the first, and the Scottish poems in it usually depict interaction between Irish and Scottish Gaeldom in the form of the *Gaedhil* of Scotland sailing for Ireland to participate in warfare there.[18] On the eve of the battle of Flodden in 1513, however, a *brostughadh catha* (incitement to battle) addressed to the earl of Argyll urges him to summon all the *Gaedhil* for the defence of Scotland against the English, thereby demonstrating that the military traffic was not all one-way:

> Cuir thurfhógra an oir's an iar
> ar Ghaoidhlibh ó Ghort Gáilian;
> cuir siar thar ardmhuir na Goill,
> nach biadh ar Albain athroinn.[19]

Argyll was killed at Flodden, but the battle reminds us that the leadership of the *Galltacht* was divided in the late middle ages between mutually antagonistic English and Scottish kings, with military outposts like Carrickfergus and Tarbert now at the end of extended lines of communication stretching back to London and Edinburgh.

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of Ireland (ibid., no. 36). This chameleon-like tendency in the professional poets supports her argument that the political content of each poem reflects the particular patron's own aspirations: see Katharine Simms, 'Bardic poetry as a historical source' in Tom Dunne (ed.), *The writer as witness: literature as historical evidence* (Cork, 1987), pp 58–75.

[18]For example, Watson (ed.), *Scottish verse*, pp 6–12. Of course, to concentrate on the Scottish poetry is to ignore the large proportion of verse from Irish-based poets of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in the Book of the Dean of Lismore, which offer a different perspective on the direction of cultural exchange: see E. C. Quiggin, *Poems from the Book of the Dean of Lismore*, ed. J. Fraser (Cambridge, 1937).

[19]'Send your summons east and west / For the *Gaedhil* from the field of Leinster / Drive the foreigners westward over the high sea / So that Scotland be not divided' (Watson (ed.), *Scottish verse*, pp 158–64).

II

Since the 1970s Irish historians have been engaged in a fundamental re-appraisal of Gaelic society and its response to Tudor expansion. From being seen as a deeply conservative, anarchic and isolated society incapable of adapting to outside influences, Gaelic Ireland has been transformed into a dynamic, open society, highly sensitive to the problems of the age.[20] Un-doubtedly there was a need for a more sympathetic appraisal of Gaelic lordship and society: English commentators on the Irish scene, both con-temporaries and modern historians, had certainly exaggerated its conser-vatism and backwardness. Yet it needs to be stressed that, despite the modernising tendencies of late medieval Gaeldom in Ireland — its diffu-sion of armour, siege engines and castle-building skills — on the eve of the Tudor conquest Gaelic kern/caterans, or footsoldiers, still fought as 'naked men' without armour, Irish horsemen still rode without stirrups, and Irish bows were half the length of English longbows and correspondingly less penetrative. (Likewise, the practice of ploughing by the tail was also seen by contemporary observers as a notable manifestation of Gaelic backward-ness.) The 'Gaelic revival' in late medieval Ireland was in fact erected on extremely flimsy military foundations. At the same time, Tudor specialists have been revising sharply downwards traditional estimates of Tudor financial and military resources and also the priority which the Tudor state accorded to Irish affairs.[21] When these two pieces of revisionism are put together, there is a serious danger that the struggle for sixteenth-century Ireland may be presented as a much more finely balanced contest between Gael and Tudor than was in fact the case. To English officials and settlers around Dublin, it may have looked as if the English lordship was gradually collapsing in the face of a concerted popular uprising. Yet English Ireland was only a peripheral part of the wider Tudor state, and anyone familiar with policies and priorities as viewed from the centre would have known that it was not lack of resources but lack of interest which for so long prevented the Tudors from conquering Gaelic Ireland.

During the sixteenth century the gradual introduction of gunpowder and

[20]The most sweeping presentations of this 1970s revisionism are the studies by Dr Brendan Bradshaw. See especially his 'Manus "the Magnificent": O'Donnell as Renaissance prince' in Art Cosgrove and Donal McCartney (eds), *Studies in Irish history presented to R. Dudley Edwards* (Dublin, 1979), pp 15–36; 'Native reaction to the Westward Enterprise' in Andrews, Canny & Hair (eds), *The Westward Enterprise*, pp 65–80. (Cf. Katherine Walsh, 'In the wake of Reformation and Counter-Reformation: Ireland's belated reception of Renaissance humanism?' in Otto Harrassowitz (ed.), *Die Renaissance im Blick der Nationen Europas* (Wiesbaden, 1993), pp 33–50.) More balanced assessments of developments include K. W. Nicholls, *Gaelic and gaelicised Ireland in the middle ages* (Dublin, 1972); Simms, *From kings to warlords*; Mary O'Dowd, 'Gaelic society and economy' in Brady & Gillespie (eds), *Natives & newcomers*, pp 120–47.

[21]For instance, John Guy, *Tudor England* (Oxford, 1988); Penry Williams, *The later Tudors: England, 1547–1603* (Oxford, 1995); Ellis, *Ireland in the age of the Tudors*, *passim*; and for developments in Gaelic weaponry, ibid., pp 28–9.

firearms began to alter the nature of Irish warfare, but had little impact on the overall military balance until the 1590s. By the 1520s Irish chiefs had started to acquire handguns and light field artillery, and kern were gradually converted into 'shot' [handgunmen], but the manufacture of heavier siege artillery remained very much under royal control and in any case would have been too expensive for individual chiefs. Militarily, Gaelic Ireland was also much less efficient in its use of available manpower. Whereas magnates like the earl of Kildare continued to require from their 'English' peasantry feudal military service as a normal obligation of land tenure, an obligation reinforced by the militia service owed when general hostings were proclaimed.[22] Gaelic peasants did not bear arms until Shane O'Neill began to arm all his subjects in the 1560s, in response to the increasing military pressure from the Tudors.[23] Thus, although Gaelic troops were adept at exploiting the predominantly marshy, wooded or mountainous terrain of Gaelic Ireland — to which indeed they were well suited — they remained unable to challenge traditional English armies of 'bills and bows' in pitched battles in open country. As Chief Baron Finglas, writing *c.* 1528, put it, 'In all my days, I never heard that a hundreth footmen ne horsemen of Irishmen would abide to fight so many Englishmen . . . For surely Irishmen have not such wisdom ne policy in war, but Englishmen, when they set themselves thereunto, exceed them far, and touching harness and artillery, exceed them too far.'[24]

It is important to try to set in context the nature of this military balance before the start of the Tudor conquest. A particularly detailed account of the military potential of individual Gaelic chieftaincies, entitled 'A description of the power of Irishmen', was long ago published by Liam Price from a copy in the British Library: it appears to date from *c.* 1490.[25] Its author clearly intended to emphasise the strength of the Irishry (who 'be for the most part good & hardie men of warre & can live hardly & suffer great miserie') and the weakness of the Englishry, the outlying parts of which were 'so environed wth Irishmen that they cannot answere the kinges deputie neyther of power to keepe themselves', while even the four shires of the Pale 'of their owne power be scant hable to susteyne the warres of 3 Irishmen'.[26] The report lists the military power of 88 Gaelic chieftaincies (besides half a dozen surnames of English descent in Connacht who were 'of no better condition than Irishmen, wearing Irish apparayle'). Altogether they could raise a total of 3,089 horse, 41 battalions of galloglas (say, 3,000

[22]See S. G. Ellis, *Tudor frontiers and noble power: the making of the British state* (Oxford, 1995), ch. 4.

[23]Hayes-McCoy, *Scots mercenary forces in Ireland*, p. ix; Nicholls, *Gaelic and gaelicised Ireland*, p. 71.

[24]Walter Harris (ed.), *Hibernica: or some ancient pieces relating to Ireland* (Dublin, 1747), p. 44.

[25]Liam Price, 'Armed forces of Irish chiefs in the early sixteenth century' in *R.S.A.I. Jn.*, lxii (1932), pp 202–7. I am grateful to Kenneth Nicholls of University College Cork for help with the dating of this document.

[26]Ibid., pp 202, 206.

men) and 15,744 kern.[27] What saved the situation, according to the writer, was that 'God provides, setting continuall dissension emongst them & mortall warre'.[28]

A professional army of almost 22,000 men, had it ever been assembled, would have been a formidable force. It was around ten times the size of the entire Tudor bureaucracy and standing forces combined: though far wealthier and more powerful, the Tudor state relied chiefly on unpaid and part-time administrators and occasional large-scale levies of troops to meet military emergencies.[29] Yet 22,000 troops was also a crippling burden on the Gaelic economy. No doubt this in turn explains features of Gaelic Ireland which occasioned most comment from foreign travellers — its poverty, lack of towns and absence of trade.[30] Militarily, however, over 70 per cent of the Gaelic forces were unarmoured kern, whose combat value was decidedly limited, particularly in pitched battles. They were good for burning, foraging and looting — as English observers noted of their conduct in Henry VIII's armies in France and Scotland in 1544–5[31] — but for little else. Moreover, the power of individual chiefs was quite small. The military strength of MacMurrough of Leinster is noted as '200 horse well harneysed, a baytayle of galoglas & 300 kerne'; O'Brien of Thomond could make '200 h[orse], 2 b[attalions of galloglas, and] DC k[ern]'; and O'Neill of Tyrone disposed '3 b[attalions of galloglas], 200 h[orse, and] 300 k[ern]'. But these were the strongest chiefs; a border chief such as O'Toole could muster only 24 horse and 80 kern.[32] Yet in spite of this comparatively low level of individual power, it was unusual for more than two or three chiefs to combine their forces.

The corresponding power of the Englishry cannot be precisely ascertained because no muster rolls have survived for counties in Ireland, but a muster roll of 1534 for Cumberland (a small, mainly pastoral, English border county) lists 6,502 able-bodied men of military age — bills and bows, of whom 1,974 were mounted.[33] And the adjacent and rather larger county

[27]Ibid. My calculations differ slightly from the totals given.

[28]Price, 'Armed forces of Irish chiefs', p. 207.

[29]Cf. Penry Williams, *The Tudor regime* (Oxford, 1979), chs 3–4.

[30]See, for instance, *New hist. Ire.*, ii, 397.

[31]See D. G. White, 'Henry VIII's Irish kerne in France and Scotland, 1544–5' in *Irish Sword*, iii (1957–8), pp 213–25; S. G. Ellis, 'Representations of the past in Ireland: whose past and whose present?' in *I.H.S.*, xxvii, no. 108 (Nov. 1991), pp 289–308.

[32]The numbers of horsemen available to Leinster chiefs as estimated by the 'description' broadly agree with Chief Baron Finglas's estimate made a few years earlier: Harris (ed.), *Hibernica*, p. 44.

[33]P.R.O., E 101/549/13. The roll may be missing a few membranes, but the totals are consistent with those for Elizabeth's reign. In 1563 Cumberland had the lowest level of population of any shire in England: *c.* 46,000 inhabitants, or 30 per square mile. See also S. G. Ellis, *The Pale and the far north: government and society in two early Tudor borderlands* (Galway, 1988), pp 22–3; Joseph Nicolson and Richard Burn, *The history and antiquities of the counties of Westmorland and Cumberland* (2 vols, London, 1777), i, p. xci.

of Northumberland, also in the marches, mustered 2,766 mounted men in 1538, the 'thieves' of Tynedale and Redesdale excluded.[34] Thus, bearing in mind that about 1560 County Meath was reported to be 'as well inhabited as any shire in England'.[35] it is difficult to believe that Gaelic Ireland was capable of mounting a serious military challenge to the English Pale. Perhaps a more appropriate comparison for the Gaelic chieftaincies would be with the independent border surnames of the English marches towards Scotland, with whom the Tudor government normally coped quite easily. When these were 'booked' in 1528, 403 clansmen were listed in Tynedale and 445 in Redesdale. In 1550 it was estimated that north Tynedale could raise about 600 horse and foot, and Redesdale rather less.[36] Yet the combat value of these troops was high: northern horsemen were highly prized for service in Ireland, as indeed were 'Northumberland speres, light fote men, apte to take payn and labours, as the marchers of Scotland and the men of warr of this contre doo'.[37] About 180 of the Tynedalers were horsemen, as were about 130 of the Redesdale surnames, with 'small lyghtt horses after the vse off the medle marchis ffor anempst Scotland; ffor the ground is soft and all mossis, so þ' grett horsis will not serue'.[38] Both Tynedale and Redesdale were the military equal of even the most powerful Irish chieftaincies, and the problem of the border surnames was contained in much the same way, that is by booking and taking pledges, and manning peels and castles against them.[39]

Even before 1534 and the establishment of a standing garrison in Tudor Ireland, a revival of English power under the earls of Kildare had dislodged the Gaelic chiefs from some of the marchlands on which they had encroached during Henry VI's disastrous reign. I have argued elsewhere that the phenomenon of the Kildare ascendancy from the 1470s onwards rested not so much on the earls' alleged openness to Gaelic influences — about which they were, in fact, extremely selective and hard-nosed — but on their generally good working relationship with successive English kings.[40] The charges of maladministration periodically levelled against the ninth earl of Kildare as governor focused, not on his inability to defend the Englishry, but on the extortions he imposed. In 1515 Kildare had strength-

[34]Robert Newton, 'The decay of the borders: Tudor Northumberland in transition' in C. W. Chalklin and M. A. Havinden (eds), *Rural change and urban growth, 1500–1800* (London, 1974), pp 8–9, 13.

[35]Quoted in N. P. Canny, *The formation of the Old English elite in Ireland* (Dublin, 1975), p. 9.

[36]P.R.O., SP 1/48, ff 117–34v (*L. & P. Hen. VIII*, iv (ii), no. 4336 (2)); John Hodgson, *A history of Northumberland* (3 pts in 7 vols, Newcastle, 1820–25), pt 2, vol. iii, pp 208–9, 243.

[37]*S.P. Hen. VIII*, ii, 146.

[38]B.L., Cott. MS Calig. B I, f. 141rv (*L. & P. Hen. VIII*, xv, no. 570).

[39]S. G. Ellis, 'A border baron and the Tudor state: the rise and fall of Lord Dacre of the north' in *Hist. Jn.*, xxxv (1992), pp 253–77.

[40]See Ellis, *Tudor frontiers and noble power*, esp. ch. 4; idem, *Reform and revival: English government in Ireland, 1470–1534* (London, 1986), *passim*; idem, *Ireland in the age of the Tudors*, esp. chs 3–6.

ened the Pale militia by imposing a graduated scale of fines for each day's absence from a general hosting agreed by the council.[41] There were accordingly claims that 'the kinges subgetes hadde never better pease with there enymyes, in 300 yere, then they have nowe . . . [and] Iryshe enymyes was never more adred of the kinges deputye'.[42] In particular, the Leinster Irish 'were not in this hundred years more feeble to be conquered than they are now'.[43] Although there were constant complaints about Gaelic raids and the degeneracy of the English, the reality was that, militarily, Gaelic Ireland was very weak and divided.

In this context, there is an apparent contrast with Scottish Gaeldom, which had a long tradition of exporting its surplus manpower to Ireland, from galloglas in the thirteenth century to redshanks in the sixteenth. In the mid-sixteenth century the earl of Argyll could raise an army of 5,000 men, and in 1555 O'Donnell agreed to maintain 500 of Argyll's mercenaries in his territory.[44] A century earlier the lord of the Isles had probably been even more powerful. At the battle of Harlaw in 1411 the army of the lordship was reputedly 10,000 strong;[45] and as late as 1545 the last serious MacDonald pretender, Donald Dubh, brought 4,000 redshanks in 180 galleys with him to Ireland.[46] These larger numbers suggest that a greater proportion of the population traditionally bore arms than was the case in Ireland, and this presumably reflects the influence of feudalism on Scottish Gaeldom — an influence which is evident in the surviving charters of the lords of the Isles.[47] The right to bear arms also conferred a degree of political influence. An account of the election of Donald, the second lord of the Isles, in 1388 suggests a wider degree of consultation than might have been expected of an Irish chieftaincy, even though, in the event, the views of the nobles prevailed:

do bhí Ragnall mac Eóin na aird sdiubhor ar Innsibh Gall, anaimsir athar do bheth na aois ársuighe ┐ ag riaghladh os a cionn dó ar neg da athair do chuir tionnol ar úaslibh Innsibh Gall ┐ bhrathribh go haonionadh, ┐ tug sé slat an tigernais da bhrathair accill Donnainn a neige ┐ do goiredh mac Domhnuill de ┐ Domhnall ahile anaighuidh baramhla fher Innsi Gall.[48]

[41]P.R.O., C 113/236.

[42]*S.P. Hen. VIII*, ii, 16.

[43]The view of Chief Baron Finglas, in Harris (ed.), *Hibernica*, p. 44.

[44]John Mackenzie, 'Treaty between Argyll and O'Donnell' in *Scottish Gaelic Studies*, vii (1953), p. 98.

[45]Walter Bower, *Scotichronicon*, ed. D. E. R. Watt, viii (Edinburgh, 1987), 74–6. See also Grant, 'Scotland's "Celtic fringe" ', pp 131–2.

[46]Jean Munro and R. W. Munro (eds), *Acts of the lords of the Isles, 1336–1493* (Edinburgh, 1986), p. xli: J. M. Hill, *Fire and sword: Sorley Boy MacDonnell and the rise of Clan Ian Mór, 1538–90* (London, 1993), p. 30.

[47]Munro & Munro (eds), *Acts of the lords of the Isles*.

[48]'Raghnall mac Eoin was high steward of the Isles when his father was advanced in years and ruling over them. On the death of his father, he summoned the nobles of the Isles and his brethren to the one place, and he gave the rod of lordship to his brother at Cill Donan in Eigg, and he was proclaimed MacDonald and Donald of Islay against the view of the men of the Isles' ('Book of Clanranald', p. 160).

This contrast also extended to naval power. The 'Description of the power of Irishmen' noted only two chiefs, O'Driscoll and O'Malley, who 'useth long galeys'.[49] but the stronger seafaring tradition of Scottish Gaeldom is attested, for instance, by the Scottish poems of the Book of the Dean of Lismore, many of which are about the sea, ships and amphibious operations in Ireland, including the earliest poem:

Dál chabhlaigh ar Chaistéal Suibhne,
suairc an eachtra i nInis Fáil;
marcaigh ag trachtadh na dtonna,
glantair bárca donna dháibh.

Fir arda ag eagar na loingse
ar loime luath leanas cuairt:
ní bhí lámh gan ghalgha gasta,
i n-ár stargha snasta suairc.[50]

Prominent too on the seal of the lord of the Isles was a galley under sail.[51] It is no wonder, then, that Bishop Carswell intruded a prayer for the blessing of a ship in his *Foirm na n-Urrnuidheadh*, the Gaelic version of the Book of Common Order.[52]

It is worth considering, moreover, how far these apparent military differences between Ireland and Scotland may have extended to other aspects of Gaelic life — a wider participation in the political process in Scotland, for instance, and a greater openness to new influences on the bardic tradition.[53] In so far as the Gaelic world was responding to the problems of the age, it

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[49]Price, 'Armed forces of Irish chiefs', pp 202–7.

[50]'Appointment of a fleet against Sweeney's castle, / Welcome is the adventure in Inis Fáil. / Horsemen travelling the waves / Brown banks are being cleaned for them. / Tall men are arraying the ships / Which hold their course swiftly / On the sea's bare surface. / No hand without a swift javelin / In our shields shining and comely' (Watson (ed.), *Scottish verse*, p. 6). See also, 'Urnaigh mara Chlann Raghnuill' (The poem of Clanranald on going to sea) in MacDonald & MacDonald (eds), *MacDonald collection of Gaelic poetry*, pp viii, 25.

[51]Munro & Munro (eds), *Acts of the lords of the Isles*, pp lxxi, 318–20.

[52]*Foirm na n-Urrnuidheadh: John Carswell's Gaelic translation of the Book of Common Order*, ed. R. L. Thomson (Edinburgh, 1970), pp 110–17.

[53]This seems to be the implication of such innovations as the compilation of the Book of the Dean of Lismore in the ordinary Scots hand and spelling of the period (perhaps in a bid to make the Gaelic language more intelligible to English-speaking Lowlanders?); the printing of Bishop Carswell's Gaelic translation of the Book of Common Order, and in Roman rather than Gaelic type; and the early development in Scotland of a brand of vernacular poetry with a strong political content which broke with bardic conventions. On the orthography of the Dean's Book see Quiggin, *Poems from the Book of the Dean of Lismore*; and see 'The Fernaig Manuscript' in Cameron, *Reliquiae Celticae*, ii, 1–137; Neil Ross (ed.), *Heroic poetry from the Book of the Dean of Lismore* (Edinburgh, 1939), p. xv, for another seventeenth-century example. For Scottish vernacular poetry see Allan Macinnes, 'Scottish Gaeldom, 1638–1651: the vernacular response to the Covenanting dynamic' in John Dwyer, R. A. Mason and Alexander Murdoch (eds), *New perspectives on the politics and culture of early modern Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1988), pp 59–94, esp. pp 60–69.

was perhaps the Scottish half which was the more responsive and dynamic. This may in turn explain why the old Gaelic order in Scotland proved more durable, surviving the collapse of its Irish counterpart by more than a century — even though from 1603 the two parts of the Gaelic world were under the same king.

III

During the sixteenth century, however, the economic and political trends which in the late middle ages had favoured the *Gaedhealtacht* over the *Galltacht* now became increasingly unfavourable to Gaelic Ireland. The economic upswing of the late fifteenth century fostered trade and the prosperity of the lordship's towns, while demographic growth throughout the Tudor state led to rising food prices, land hunger and reduced labour costs, thereby tilting the economics of farming back towards agriculture and prompting a renewed interest in colonisation schemes for Ireland. Politically, the Anglo-Scottish treaty of 1502 was the first formal peace between the two nations since 1333, and although it did not last, it presaged a gradual improvement in Anglo-Scottish relations. This Anglo-Scottish rapprochement, exemplified in the treaty of Edinburgh of 1560, was of fundamental importance to the *Gaedhealtacht* because it prompted a new co-operation within the *Galltacht* against a common adversary.

Once again the fortunes of the most powerful of the Gaelic clans, Clan Donald and the lordship of the Isles, epitomised the changing political climate. The power and independence of Clan Donald was gradually eroded as, during the sixteenth century, the king of Scots began to make a reality of the successive forfeitures pronounced against Clan Donald between 1475 and 1545. As late as 1545 the attempted restoration of the lordship sponsored by Henry VIII as part of his 'rough wooing' won powerful support in the Isles;[54] but by the early 1560s Archibald Campbell, fifth earl of Argyll, was negotiating with Queen Elizabeth to build a coalition of island chiefs headed by MacDonald of Sleat in order to make war on the Antrim MacDonnells.[55] The traditional power base of Clan Donald in the Isles was gradually captured by the Campbells and a resurgent Stewart monarchy, but significantly, long after this, Clan Donald continued to expand into Ireland even in the early seventeenth century.[56] Militarily, the collapse of the lordship of the Isles and improved Anglo-Scottish relations deprived the Irish chieftaincies of their most important source of military supply. The signifi-

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[54]Munro & Munro (eds), *Acts of the lords of the Isles*, p. xli; Hill, *Fire and sword*, p. 30.

[55]Hill, *Fire and sword*, pp 73–4; Jane Dawson, 'The fifth earl of Argyle, Gaelic lordship and political power in sixteenth-century Scotland' in *Scot. Hist. Rev.*, lxvii (1988), pp 1–27; eadem, 'William Cecil and the British dimension of early Elizabethan foreign policy' in *History*, lxxiv (1989), pp 196–216.

[56]See especially J. H. Ohlmeyer, *Civil war and Restoration in the three Stuart kingdoms: the career of Randal MacDonnell, marquis of Antrim, 1609–1683* (Cambridge, 1993), chs 1–4.

cance of this development was underlined by the desperate attempts of the Ulster chiefs to secure their access to redshanks by marriage alliances with Scottish clans.[57]

As the Stewart monarchy consolidated its control over the kingdom's western periphery, so the *Gaedhealtacht* was gradually divided into separate Irish and Scottish entities. Similar pressures were being exerted on Gaelic society in Ireland. The chief ideological weapon deployed by the Tudors was the concept of a unitary kingdom of Ireland, embracing both *Gaedhil* and *Gaill* as common Irish subjects of the crown, with Ireland as the national territory of this new composite nation.[58] Of course, propagandists for the new order invoked earlier Gaelic traditions centring on Ireland, but what was new was the increasing exclusion of the *Gaedhil* of Scotland.

Of particular significance was the advance of the Reformation in sections of Scottish Gaeldom, notably Clan Campbell. Bishop Carswell's Gaelic translation of John Knox's Book of Common Order, printed in Edinburgh in 1567, was the first printed book in Gaelic. Although *Foirm na n-Urrnuidheadh* was dedicated to the earl of Argyll, it was clearly intended for use throughout the *Gaedhealtacht*. The translation was rendered into classical common Gaelic, the standard literary language, and not the Scottish or Irish dialects which predominated later; and the intended audience is emphasised in the translator's introduction, in which Carswell observes that the translation was made 'go h-áiridhe d'fhearaibh Alban agas Eireand' (especially for the men of Scotland and Ireland) and relates at length the disadvantages 'orainde Gaoidhil Alban agus Eireand . . . gan ar gcanamhna Gaoidheilge do chur a gcló riamh' (to us, the *Gaedhil* of Scotland and Ireland . . . that our Gaelic language has never been put into print). In particular,

atá uireasbhuidh is mó iná gach uireasbhuidh oraind gan an Bíobla naomhtha do bheith a gcló Gaoidheilge againd, mar tá sé a gcló Laidne agas Bhérla . . . agas fós gan seanchus ar sean nó ar sindsear do bheith mar an gcédna a gcló againd riamh, acht gé tá cuid éigin do tseanchus Ghaoidheal Alban agas Eireand sgríobhtha a leabhruibh lámh.[59]

Instead of preserving the word of God and the truth, Carswell adds, Gaelic writers are preoccupied with lying worldly tales composed about the Tuatha Dé Danann, the sons of Milesius, and the heroes and Fionn mac Cumhaill and his Fianna.[60]

By and large, Scotland accepted the Reformation, and Ireland resisted, with the result that Scottish and Irish Gaeldom was increasingly divided by

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[57]Hiram Morgan, *Tyrone's rebellion: the outbreak of the Nine Years War in Tudor Ireland* (London, 1993), *passim*.

[58]See below, pp 468–9.

[59]'We suffer a greater want than any other, that we have not the Holy Bible printed in Gaelic, as it has been printed in Latin and English . . . and likewise that the history of our ancestors has never been printed, although a certain amount of the history of the *Gaedhil* of Scotland and Ireland has been written in manuscripts' (*Foirm na n-Urrnuidheadh*, ed. Thomson, pp 10–11).

[60]Ibid.

religion. Paradoxically, by 1600 religion was coming to be seen as a force for unity between *Gaedhil* and *Gaill* in both kingdoms — it was just that the religion was different. Already in 1567 the poem composed by Bishop Carswell and prefaced to his *Foirm na n-Urrnuidheadh* recognised the rooted opposition to the Reformation of the friars in Ireland. After travelling throughout Scotland, he urged the book westward into Ireland:

> Dá éis sin taisdil gach tond
> go crích Eireand na bfond bfial;
> gé beag ar na bráithribh thú
> gluais ar amharc a súl siar.[61]

The strong political support for a Gaelic Reformation provided by the most powerful lord within Scottish Gaeldom, the earl of Argyll, meant that by the early seventeenth century Gaelic Scotland was increasingly Calvinist.[62] That within the *Gaedhealtacht* this religious division was now an important source of disunity was a fact recognised by the bards themselves. Arriving in Scotland on a professional visit, Fearghal Óg Mac an Bhaird soon came to regret his journey when he found that mass was not available:

> Ní chreideann Alba fa-ríor
> go dtig tonn d'fhuil [an] Airdríogh
> san abhluinn mar as dleacht dí
> adhruim don reacht do-rinne.[63]

Better to beg from door to door at home, he concluded, than live like a king in an heretical land. Significantly, traditional ties across the North Channel survived longest — at least until 1660, if not 1691 — in those districts where clans remained Catholic, such as the MacNeills and the MacDonalds of Clanranald. This ensured that in the 1620s and 1630s Irish Franciscan missionaries were accorded a sympathetic reception in the southern Hebrides.[64] Similarly, Catholic poets from Scotland were still visiting Ireland in the 1640s.[65] Within the Reformed tradition too, the translation from the Isles of successive bishops of Raphoe at this time underscores the importance of these emerging ideological divisions.[66]

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[61]'After that, travel over each wave / To the land of Ireland, of the liberal bounds; / Although the friars hate you, / Move westward within their sight' (ibid., p. 13).

[62]See especially Jane Dawson, 'Calvinism and the Gaidhealtachd in Scotland' in Andrew Pettegree, Alastair Duke and Gillian Lewis (eds), *Calvinism in Europe, 1540–1620* (Cambridge, 1994), pp 231–53; James Kirk, *Patterns of reform: continuity and change in the Reformation kirk* (Edinburgh, 1989), ch. 12.

[63]'Alas, Scotland does not believe, as she ought / That the blood of the High King / Enters into the host / But I cling to the law he made' (McKenna (ed.), *Aithdioghluim dána*, i, 204–7; ii, 120–22).

[64]Dawson, 'Calvinism & the Gaidhealtachd', pp 248–9; Cathaldus Giblin (ed.), *Irish Franciscan mission to Scotland, 1619–1646: documents from the Roman Archives* (Dublin, 1964).

[65]*New hist. Ire.*, iii, 541; T. F. O'Rahilly, 'A poem by Piaras Feiritéar' in *Ériu*, xiii (1942), pp 113–18.

[66]*New hist. Ire.*, ix, 409.

These growing divisions in Gaeldom were also reflected in the development of a new terminology. In the aftermath of the Tudor conquest, poets in Ireland quietly decided that the *Gaill* were not really foreigners after all, but fellow Irish Catholics like the *Gaedhil* to whom the common description *Éireannaigh* should apply. The real foreigners, for whom the term *Gaill* was now reserved, were the New English; and the traditional prophecies of the banishment from Ireland of the foreigners were redeployed against the *Sasanaigh*, the followers of Luther and Calvin, and other heretics. Such sentiments were clearly incompatible with the emerging Protestant tradition in Scottish Gaeldom, where similar developments saw the popularisation of the term *Albanaigh* to describe the *Gaedhil* and *Gaill* of Scotland.[67] In a recent paper on changing political ideologies in the Gaelic world of the Reformation, Professor Mícheál Mac Craith has argued that the development of a more pronounced Irish patriotism based on concepts of fatherland was the product of the late sixteenth century and involved a broadening of the meaning of the words *dúthaigh* and *athartha* from 'territory' and 'patrimony' to 'native land' and 'fatherland'.[68] Yet the previously cited poem addressed to Argyll on the eve of Flodden in 1513 already employs these terms and concepts in their modern sense, and significantly it urges in a pan-Gaelic context all of 'sliocht Gaodhal ó Ghort Gréag' (the Gaelic people from the land of Greece) to make war 'i naghaidh Gall' (against foreigners):

> Ré Gallaibh adeirim ribh
> sul ghabhadar ar ndúthaigh;
> ná léigmid ar ndúthaigh dhínn
> déinmid ardchogadh ainmhín
> ar aithris Gaoidheal mBanbha
> caithris ar ar n-athartha.[69]

Given the greater cohesion of the Scottish kingdom, it is hardly surprising to find at an earlier date a more developed, political sense of national identity within Scottish Gaeldom. It also seems more likely that Irish Gaeldom acquired these patriotic concepts from Scottish Gaeldom than from the English. Yet in Ireland the new terminology was used in a narrower, more exclusive sense.

By Elizabethan times the Irish chiefs were finding that, in the face of growing Tudor military pressure, their traditional supplies of mercenaries were declining as new ideological divisions with Gaelic Scotland opened up. There followed the belated and desperate efforts of the Ulster chiefs to

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[67]Ó Buachalla, 'Poetry & politics in early modern Ireland', pp 160–61; Mícheál Mac Craith, 'The Gaelic reaction to the Reformation' in S. G. Ellis and Sarah Barber (eds), *Conquest and union: fashioning a British state, 1485–1725* (London, 1995), pp 146–8. For Scotland see below, p. 467.

[68]Mac Craith, 'Gaelic reaction to the Reformation', pp 139–61.

[69]'Against foreigners, I tell you, / Before they have seized our native land. / Let us not yield up our native land. / Let us make terrible war / After the manner of the *Gaedhil* of Banbha. / Let us watch over our fatherland' (Watson (ed.), *Scottish verse*, p. 158).

modernise, and the final heroic struggle of the Nine Years War. But when, in Elizabeth's last years, the full resources of the Tudor state were concentrated against Gaelic Ireland, the old order collapsed surprisingly quickly and completely. By the time of the 1641 rising, political discourse in Ireland was conducted predominantly within the framework of an English-style kingdom of Ireland, with little support for the restoration of a traditional Gaelic high kingship.[70] The reason is not far to seek. Despite all the claims about the resilience and dynamism of Gaelic Ireland, the old order was far more conservative, hierarchical and autocratic than either its Scottish counterpart or its English successor. Only a tiny minority of Irish people had enjoyed any kind of influence or rights under it;[71] so for most people the imposition of the more open English administrative structures constituted progress. Moreover, because the political community of Gaelic Ireland was so small and isolated, the new régime could pursue a policy of expropriation which was even more draconian than in Scotland, where the Gaelic system had sunk deeper roots in the community.

After 1603 the bards continued to compose their traditional praise poems for as long as anyone could be found to buy them, but this kind of poetry was increasingly out of tune with political realities in the three kingdoms. In his prose account of the impact of the War of the Three Kingdoms (1638–52) on Scottish Gaeldom, Niall Mac Mhuirich (MacVurich), hereditary bard to the Clanranald branch of the MacDonalds, reflected the new political alignments which had destroyed the *Gaedhealtacht*, and also utilised the new terminology:

Giodhadh is furusda dhuit as an tenguidh choitchinn ina bfuiler ag sgiobhadh san rioghacht fios ar thriobloid na haimsire dfaghail . acht so amháin gurab cuimhnech liom gur ab íad na halbanuidh is taosga do thionsgain cogadh sa na tri Rioghachtuibh ⁊ nar bhíad sagsanuigh no eireannaigh; oir tair eis coibhinent no comhchengal do ghenamh anaghaidh an ríogh ⁊ Shagsanach um na heasbaguidh do chur ar cúl ⁊ Presbetrí do chur na nionad gur chuiredar fios ar an rabh doifigechuibh albanach sna ríoghachtuibh oile taóbh thall dairge ⁊ go ndenadar ard chommandair dalasduir Leisli .i. sensoigdeir do bhí fada accogadh ar choigcrich.[72]

Throughout the seventeenth century, however, the periodic breakdown of central control exercised by the new multiple monarchy through Dublin and Edinburgh permitted temporary restorations of traditional ties. As the

[70]See especially Michael Perceval-Maxwell, *The outbreak of the Irish rebellion of 1641* (Dublin, 1994); J. H. Ohlmeyer (ed.), *Ireland from independence to occupation, 1641–1660* (Cambridge, 1995); Ó Buachalla, *Aisling ghéar*, ch. 2.

[71]See, in general, Nicholls, *Gaelic and gaelicised Ireland, passim*.

[72]'Albeit it is easy for you to learn of the present troubles from the common language in which they are writing in the kingdom. But this I remember, that the Scots were the soonest to begin this war of the three kingdoms, and not the English or Irish. For, after the making of the Covenant or league against the king and the English in order to remove the bishops and replace them with presbyteries, they sent for all the Scottish officers in the other kingdoms overseas and they made commander-in-chief Alexander Leslie, an old soldier who had long experience of war abroad' ('Book of Clanranald', p. 176). Is this passage the first description in Gaelic of the British Civil Wars as 'the war of the three kingdoms'?

pressure and co-operation from Dublin and Edinburgh were relaxed after 1638. *Gaedhil* from Ireland, led by Alasdair MacColla MacDonnell, once again served in Scotland with *Gaedhil* from Scotland under the marquis of Montrose.[73] Recording their success in battles at Perth and Aberdeen, Mac Mhuirich could again recount the victory of the *Gaedhil* in the traditional way:

do mhétuidh búaidh an da chatha sin misnech ⁊ menmna Ghaóidheal o sin amach.[74]

Nevertheless, Gaelic consciousness of a common Gaeldom spanning the North Channel gradually faded away after the Tudor conquest, to be replaced by a sense of Irish and Scottish nationality. In retrospect, we can see that Gaelic localism and the renewed co-operation of Gaeldom's adversaries together destroyed the best chance for a powerful modernising Gaelic kingdom in the north-west, centred on Clan Donald, which might have checked the expansion of the English and Scottish monarchies. Indeed, such success as the *Gaedhil* enjoyed in Ireland in opposing English expansion there owed much to these traditional ties with Scottish Gaeldom. They rested on a broad sense of Gaelic identity which was essentially inimical to more modern concepts of Ireland as the national territory. Thus, by agreeing a partition of the *Gaedhealtacht* and the incorporation of the *Gaedhil* of Ireland and Scotland into separate kingdoms, the English and Scottish governments were together able to defuse the only really dangerous threat to their power and pretensions in the region and to integrate and assimilate the Gaelic peoples into distinct Irish and Scottish polities. Moreover, the increasing identification of Irish Gaeldom with Counter-Reformation Catholicism, far from facilitating resistance to Tudor rule, helped to isolate the Ulster chiefs from their traditional military bases in Scotland, without securing any significant support from religious dissidents in the *Galltacht*.[75]

In practice, the Tudor creation of a new dependent kingdom which was coextensive with the island of Ireland proved to be a particularly seductive and successful piece of statecraft. Ignoring established ties with Gaelic Scotland, it drew on an alternative, Hibernocentric tradition in Irish Gaeldom, combining it with traditional English values and claims to the lordship of Ireland, to promote the concept of a unitary kingdom of Ireland, embracing both *Gaedhil* and *Gaill* as common Irish subjects of the crown, and with Ireland as the national territory of this new composite Irish nation.[76] Hitherto 'Irish enemies' had been consistently denied the rights of freeborn Englishmen because, English lawyers argued, nationality was conferred by 'blood' (parentage) and allegiance. Englishness was a legal status enjoyed by those (including the English of Ireland) of free birth, born within

[73]David Stevenson, *Alasdair MacColla and the Highland problem in the seventeenth century* (Edinburgh, 1980).

[74]'The victories of those two battles raised the courage and spirit of the *Gaedhil* thereafter' ('Book of Clanranald', p. 178).

[75]Hiram Morgan, 'Hugh O'Neill and the Nine Years War in Tudor Ireland' in *Hist. Jn.*, xxxvi (1993), pp 1–17.

[76]On these developments see Bradshaw, *Irish constitutional revolution*, pt III, which construes the evidence rather differently.

the territories under the allegiance of the king of England, and of English blood and condition. Yet the legislation associated with Henry VIII's establishment of this new English kingdom of Ireland in 1541 and the parallel 1536 statute for Wales, the so-called Welsh Act of Union, now created a situation in which large numbers of non-English, namely the 'mere Irish' and the 'mere Welsh', enjoyed with Englishmen the same free status as the king's subjects.[77] The strategy was devastatingly successful. In terms of the land settlement, systems of law and administration, language and culture, Irish Gaeldom was anglicised more quickly and thoroughly than its Scottish counterpart.

In terms of Irish historiography, what is most remarkable about the collapse of the Gaelic world in the period 1450–1650 is that its passing has hardly been noticed as such, let alone properly analysed. This is not for want of accessible evidence. All the Gaelic sources quoted in this article have long been in print. Instead the conventional approach has been to focus on the growth of a common sense of Irish identity, shared by *Gaedhil* and *Gaill*, a common national territory, Ireland, and a common religion, Catholicism, in opposition to the Tudor conquest, much as Geoffrey Keating had tried to do in the seventeenth century.[78] This perspective certainly has much to commend it, particularly as an explanation of how and why the majority population on the island presently identifies with a Gaelic past. Yet it helps if, besides charting the emergence of modern nations, historians also look occasionally at interaction across modern national and state boundaries. The conventional focus on the rise of the nation in Ireland marginalises traditional pan-Gaelic ties and senses of identity and emphasises continuity over change. It also seriously understates the revolutionary nature of the change effected in Irish identity and the contribution of Tudor strategies of state formation in moulding this new sense of Irishness. Irish senses of identity in 1500 were predominantly cultural, including the *Gaedhil* of western Scotland, but excluding English-speaking Palesmen. The concept of an English-speaking Irishman barely existed. By 1650, however, a radically different definition of Irishness had emerged, based on faith and fatherland, comprehending the Old English, but excluding the *Gaedhil* of Scotland, on grounds of religion and geography.[79]

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[77]Ellis, 'Crown, community & government in the English territories', pp 187–204; idem, 'Writing Irish history: revisionism, colonialism, and the British Isles' in *Irish Review*, xix (1996), pp 1–21.

[78]Geoffrey Keating, *Foras feasa ar Éirinn: the history of Ireland*, ed. David Comyn and P. S. Dinneen (4 vols, London, 1902–14).

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