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Fr Séamas Ó Muraidheagh OP (c.1703–1767): an Irish scribe and poet at Louvain

By

Pádraig Ó Macháin

A feature of Irish emigration, from earliest times to the nineteenth century, is that in many cases their books accompanied the emigrants into exile. From either end of the time-spectrum one may cite the example of the seventh-century Antiphonary of Bangor in the Ambrosian Library in Milan,1 and that of National Library of Ireland manuscript G 1417, the latter written by Patrick Ryan in Co. Tipperary, 1817–26, and brought to Québec City by him when he emigrated in 1827.2

In the seventeenth century, the Irish exiles in Europe brought with them manuscripts both ancient and contemporary. Some also set about writing manuscripts in their new homes. Most books written in such circumstances were the work of clergy, and those that were not, such as Duanaire Finn or the Book of the O’Conor Don, were produced in a decidedly clerical milieu. In this way, such manuscripts written in the Irish language in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries become one of the tokens of the movement of clergy between Ireland and Europe during that period. The Franciscan collection of manuscripts – now in University College Dublin – to which Duanaire Finn belongs, exemplifies this mixture of old and new books, as it does the phenomenon of the repatriation of manuscripts, which in the case of this collection occurred in the second half of the nineteenth century.3 The case of the Book of the O’Conor Don, on the other hand, shows that individual manuscripts, written on the Continent, could and did make the journey to Ireland independently, and sometimes by ways that are not yet completely understood.4

As is well known, Louvain was the focus of significant literary activity in Irish in the first half of the seventeenth century. New poetry was composed,5 and the great Louvain hagiographical and historical project generated much of what survives of the ‘continental’ element in Irish manuscript production of the time. Though predominantly associated with the Franciscan community and their supporters, Irish literary activity in Louvain was not exclusive to them. For instance, the turbulent Dominican priest and renowned Irish poet, Fr Pádraigín Haicéad, spent much of his time there, where he died in 1654.6 He must have composed many of his poems in Louvain. In one poem, which the manuscript tradition ascribes to that location in 1630, he records his alienation and loss of status there in contrast to what he had enjoyed in Ireland, and in terms reminiscent of Fearghal Óg Mac an Bhaird:7

Ag rioghaird h có bhinnse, do bhárr ar chéad,
fá dhiol ceana i geríochoirear Tháil is Té,

1 Biblioteca Ambrosiana ms C. 5 inf.
4 For discussion of these two manuscripts and the milieu in which they were written see contributions in Pádraig Ó Macháin (ed.), The book of the O’Conor Don: essays on an Irish manuscript (Dublin 2010).
Though I used to be best loved, one in a hundred, by the royalty of Ireland, in this country I am only considered a child, with no knowledge of wisdom beyond the present.⁸

Outside of the Franciscan project, and long after it had ended, Irish tradition bears witness to literary activity pursued at Louvain and elsewhere on the Continent both by Franciscans and by members of other orders. Single manuscripts attest to individual clergy pursuing their interest in Irish letters as time allowed. A case in point is the anthology of bardic poetry – Royal Irish Academy ms 2 (23 F 16) – written by Fr Nicolás (Fearghal Dubh) O’Gadhra OSA at Lille and Brussels during the years 1655–9, he having been exiled during the Cromwellian wars. This book later returned to Ireland with Fr Ó Gadhra and was in Co. Sligo with him in 1686. On the other hand, a manuscript that did not return was the compendium of poetry, history (Keating’s ‘Forus Feasa’), and grammar that was written in Prague in 1659 by Fr Antaine Ó Conchubhair OFM, and which remains today in a continental library.⁹

The phenomenon of the exiled cleric’s manuscript continued to the end of the eighteenth century. One such manuscript, begun on the Continent and continued in Ireland, is UCD-OFM MS A 39, a book that was added to the Franciscan collection in the twentieth century.¹⁰ It was written by Fr Brian Ó Cathalan while a student-priest at Antwerp, 1773–5, and was continued by him when Parish Priest of Inniskeen, Co. Monaghan, in later years. The manuscript contains additions by Pádraig Ó Cathalan, a student at the University of Louvain¹¹ and presumably a relative of Brian’s. One of Pádraig’s notes is a testament to the time-honoured phenomenon of the Irish scribe as eye-witness:

Air na scribhugh le Pattrig Ó Cathalan tareis a theacht air eis dó on gcach uafasach siud do tugadh air a taobh a muith de Lomhán agus an ar goinnadh móran máor de na Francaigh an feasciunt fein an dara lá de mhí na Márt mile seacht gcéud 3 bliadhna agus nóchad ⁷c¹²

Written by Pádraig Ó Cathalan having returned from that dreadful battle that was fought outside Louvain and where he witnessed very many French being killed, 2nd of March 1793 etc.

The purpose of the present paper is to bring to greater public attention two manuscripts that survive from earlier in the eighteenth century. They exemplify respectively the exiled book and the book written in exile. What links the two is an association with Louvain and with a Dominican priest of the Derry diocese, Fr Séamas Ó Muraidheagh, alias Jacobus or Jacques Murry (c.1703–1767).

British Library, MS Additional 40766
A number of manuscripts survive from the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century that are associated with the Cavan-Fermanagh region and with the inter-related families of Mág Uidhir and Ó Raghallaigh. Among these manuscripts are: TCD MSS 1297 (H.2.6), 1381 (H.5.9), 1383 (H.5.11),

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⁸ Tadhg Ó Donnchadha, Saothar filíadheachta an Athar Pádraigín Haicéad d’Órd San Doiminic (Dublin 1916) Poem VI (= Ni Cheallacháin, Filíocht Phádraigín Haicéad, Poem VII); where (pp. 120–21) Flemish as er se is explained as being the equivalent of German als es sei ‘as it is’.
¹⁰ Described in Dillon et al., Catalogue, 77–88.
¹¹ Patricius O’Callan, student (Diocese of Clogher) at University of Louvain, December 1791 to August 1793: Jeroen Nilis, Irish students at Leuven University 1548–1797: a prosopography (Leuven 2010) 280.
¹² OFM-UCD MS A 39, p. 381.
Cambridge MS 15 (Add. 5205), British Library MS Additional 40766, and Bibliothèque Municipal de Rouen MS1678. The two last-mentioned manuscripts are examples of books carried to the Continent; only one of them returned, however: Additional 40766.

The main scribe of this book does not identify himself, and his subject-matter comprises a good selection of courtly love-poems (dánta grádha), together with verse dedicated to members of the families of Ó Raghallaigh and Mág Uidhir. The manuscript appears to have been compiled for Máire Ní Raghaileigh, wife of Rudhraighe Óg Mág Uidhir and previously the wife of Aodh Mág Uidhir. Robin Flower suggests that the manuscript may have been brought to the Continent after 1691: Rudhraighe Óg died at St Germain in 1708.

A commonplace feature of Irish manuscripts of all eras is the filling of blank spaces with material inscribed by later owners and readers, material important to an understanding of the history of any given manuscript. Additional 40766 is no exception. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, and at the beginning of the nineteenth, members of the Ó Caiside family of Crossakiel, Co. Meath – Proinsias Ó Caiside in particular – added a number of items to the manuscript. Previous to this it may have been in the Dominican house of Gola, Co. Fermanagh, as a genealogy of one of the priors, Seaán Mág Uidhir (fl. 1756), was added to a blank page. This Dominican connection brings us to the earliest recorded secondary owner of the manuscript, Fr Séamas Ó Muraidheagh.

Fr Ó Muraidheagh makes three additions to Additional 40766 as follows.

(a) He signs his name at the bottom of f. 3r: ‘Seamas ua Muraidheagh brathair dord st. Domnic as Doire’.

(b) At the end of the book, on f. 120v, the following dánfhocal – perhaps his own composition – occurs in his hand:

A uadh na mogall don chrobhaing dob aoirde craobh
ad shuaínead socair gach tobar ór shin do ghaol
na smuain ar fhocal do mholladar siothadh saobh
an uair is suas don obair gur sorairreadh síos an sáor.

This verse may be translated as:

Descendant of the heroes of highest pedigree, confluence of all the springs from which your kin are descended, pay no heed to the praise of false sages: as soon as the building is completed the mason is [treated as] a lowly fool.

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17 The translation assumes MS ‘siothadh’ represents saoithe; compare ‘cliodhamh’ (claidheamh) and ‘clíon’ (claoin) in verse 3 of the poem below.
The third and longest intrusion occurs on ff. 91v–92r. It consists of an autograph poem by Fr Ó Muraidheagh.

Is cradh liom an tasg sin do thriall thar shrúill
tug mna fionna garrtha go diocrach dubhach
an taird churradh cnamhgeall don fhiallfluil úir
mac arachta Mari agas Bhriain sa núir

A núir mo léun Séamas mhuc [sic] Briain ar lár
an úr ghas reidh sheadig an fíaradh fáis
do cru na laoch leadbheach do sialach náidh
sa guingrach ce dhearfanach nach iad do bearr

Is siad do bearra thabhacha a ghleodh na ccloidiom
is siad do bearra cail is badh croga gniomh
is siad a trath gabhadh nár dhóch bheith clion
is siad do chrách tainnte is do lionn an Úr

Nír lionn mo lionna ce taoim fáca
gur líonadh tar toirinn na chathanaig
is Domhnall do lionaibh sa tír ghallda
níl go no again da ghoraimh tá an bhuidhonn [. . .]18

Buidhionn arachta a mbearrainn da maireach ná fir
buidhionn ladair nách fágtha an beallach riomh [sic] thruibh
buidhionn ghartha na namhad ar talamh, no ar muir
is criodhe [sic] craite ar an mbás le nár trasgaraibh sib

Ar na chuma, agus ar na sgriobadh le / Séamas ua muraidheagh .b. b. d. s¹. d.19 / 1732 a lobhán

This text may be translated as follows:

I am tormented by that news that has come over the sea, which has caused fair beautiful women to be deeply depressed: the great bright hero of the noble generous stock, the mighty son of Máire and Brian, is in the earth.

In the earth, alas, Séamas son of Brian is no more, the fine young cedar sapling that grew upright, of the stock of the smiting heroes of the seed of Nár, in harness who would say that they were not the best?

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18 Word obscured by staining; the following line would suggest arachta, but the fragments of the lettering visible below and above the stain do not appear to support this. Note that this verse, with disyllabic line-endings, breaks the metrical pattern of the poem, and that the first syllable of ‘Cathánaigh’ fails to assonate. This occurs at the bottom of f. 91v and may have been intended as the concluding verse, before Fr Ó Muraidheagh added a further verse on the next page.

19 Bráthair Bocht d’ord Sanct Dominic.

20 MS ‘náidh’. The Í Chatháin were one of the families said to be of the Í Náir (Nollaig Ó Muraile, Leabhar Mór na nGenealach I–V (Dublin 2003) II, 236; cf. M.A. O’Brien, Corpus Genealogiarum Hiberniae (Dublin 1962) 41).
They were best in eminence in the battle of swords, they were the best in fame, and the bravest
in action, it is they who would not be found wanting in time of danger, it is they who disturbed
herds and wounded the land.

My wounding was no wounding, though I am exhausted, until the Cathánaigh were wounded
beyond endurance, and Domhnall was wounded in the foreign country: it serves no purpose for
us to enumerate them, the group are [. . .].

A mighty group in a [battle-]gap if [only] the men were alive, a strong crowd who would not
yield the road to [any] gang, a crowd who would warm the enemy on land or sea: and a curse on
death by whom you were laid low.

Composed and written by Séamas Ua Muraidheagh, a poor brother of the Order of St Dominic,
1732 in Louvain

Séamas Ó Muraidheagh
The colophon to his autograph poem in Additional 40766, on the death of Séamas (mac Briain) Ó
Catháin, supplies enough information to identify Séamus Ó Muraidheagh. He was a Dominican priest
in Louvain in 1732, and in his signature inscribed on f. 3v he tells us that he was from Derry. Robin
Flower21 was able to equate him with the Fr Jacobus Murray ‘Conventus Deriensis Filius’ listed in
_Hibernia Dominicana_ as resident at the Dominican convent in Dublin in 1756. His age in this list is
given as 52, and he is professed for 26 years. He is said to preach excellently in the Irish language in
the chapel at 7 a.m. every Sunday.22

Séamus Ó Muireadhaigh must have been about 28 or 29 years old when he made his additions to Máire
Ní Raghallaigh's manuscript in 1732. One supposes that it was in the Dominican College of the Holy
Cross (formerly the College of St John the Baptist) at Louvain that he was situated at the time. The
research of Fr Hugh Fenning throws further light on general aspects of his biography. An effort was
made to transfer him from Louvain to Limerick in 1735, but nothing came of this.23 He eventually
returned to Ireland in 1738, but was imprisoned in 1745 and expelled the following year.24 We know
from _Hibernica Dominicana_ that Fr Ó Muraidheagh was back in Ireland by 1756.

We turn next to the ‘History of the Irish College, Paris’ by Fr Liam Swords, with its valuable calendar
of the papers of that college.25 On 7 September 1761 Bartholomew Murry, ‘doctor-regent of the
faculty of medicine of Paris’ made a remarkable series of donations to the ‘communauté des clercs
Irlandois’ at the Collège des Lombards.26 It was remarkable both for the amount of money involved
and for the detailed instructions regarding the disbursement, covering twenty-eight pages. Among the
donations was one of 100L per annum for prizes, divided into 60 for the best preacher of two Irish
sermons, and 40 for the same in English. Another donation was to be made in two burses of 500L ‘for

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21 _Catalogue of Irish manuscripts_ II, 161.
22 Thomas de Burgo, _Hibernia Dominicana sive historia provinciae Hiberniae Ordinis Praedicatorum_ (Coloniae 1762) 197; he is also listed as belonging to the Derry convent (ibid., 283). De Burgo would have known Fr Murry well, both being resident at the time at the Dublin convent in Bridge Street.
23 Hugh Fenning, _The Irish Dominican Province, 1698-1797_ (Dublin 1990) 201.
24 Ibid., 605, 187.
26 Ibid., 103–104 (§404).
those of the name Murry (not Murray), or O Cahane (mother's name), or Lafferty, or O Doherty, (all from dioc. of Armagh)’. Another three burses of 500L each were set aside:

for closest relatives of founder [i.e. donor] with preference for paternal relatives of Co. Clare, of the name Murry – other paternal or maternal relatives – descendants of all families who came from Ulster to Clare in Cromwell's time or since – those from parish of Kilmurry, birthplace of founder – those of parish of Kilferboy – poorest students of Co. Clare, with preference for new converts. Nomination by abp of Paris. Presentation by prefect advised by Jacques Murry, OP, brother, presently on mission in Ireland. Droit d’indication by oldest male descendant of Denis Murry, cousin.

Bartholomew Murry was renowned in Paris in the mid-seventeenth century as a medical authority.27 This document, and modifications made to it by Bartholomew in two subsequent letters of December 1761 and November 1766,28 provide a great amount of information about Bartholomew, about members of his immediate family in Paris at the time, and about his relation to various families such as the McSweeneys of Tirawley, one of whom, a relative of his, was married to Cúchoigríche Ó Cléirigh; or the Davitts, one of whom – a cousin – was married to ‘M. Donlevy, doctor’. For present purposes, however, our attention focuses on his brother Jacques Murry OP, who was on mission in Ireland in 1761 at the time the donations were made. He returned to Paris subsequently, and a plaque, formerly in the chapel of the Collège des Lombards (chapel of Saint Ephram le Syrien today), recorded the death of Fr Murry on 14 April 1767:

Hic Jacet  
R.P. Jacobus Murry  
Ord. Praedic. M.  
Bartholomaei Murry  
Frater Dilectissimus  
obit die 14. Aprilis  
anno. 1767. Aetatis 64  
Requiescat In Pace29

The age of Jacobus provided here gives a date of birth that coincides almost perfectly with that calculable from the age of Fr Jacobus Murray given in Hibernia Dominicana. This confirms that both priests are one and the same, and are therefore to be identified with Fr Séamas Ó Muraidheagh who inserted the autograph poem, given above, into Additional 40766 at Louvain in 1732. It is of interest to note that his brother Bartholomew predeceased him (8 January 1767) by only three months at the relatively advanced age of 72.30

27 See Richard Hayes, ‘Biographical Dictionary of Irishmen in France’, Studies 34 (1945) 106–118: 108. Bartholomew was the moderator of a series of medical quaestiones defended by students and published as pamphlets in Paris up to the year 1764; he himself had defended a quaestio in February 1736: Quaestio medico-chirurgica . . . Tuebitur Bartholomaeus Murry, Laonensis Hybernus, Baccalaureus . . . Lutetiae Parisiorum 16 Februarii 1736. (My thanks to my colleague Dr Aoibheann Nic Dhonnchadha for her help with this aspect of the history of medicine.)  
29 Recorded in Ferdinand Guilhermy and Robert de Lasteyrie, Inscriptions de la France du Ve siècle au XVIIIe V (Paris 1873) 181. This plaque, if it survives, cannot be located at present.  
30 Ibid., 195. The plaque to Bartholomew was removed from the chapel of the Collège des Lombards to the portico of the chapel of the Collège des Irlandais, where it may still be seen. I am indebted to Una O’Dwyer, Paris, for her help in this matter.
The revelation in the donation of 1761 that Bartholomew's mother, and therefore Fr Seámas's, was of the Í Chatháin probably adds significance to the lament for Séamus and Domhnall Ó Catháin composed by Fr Séamas. Further research may reveal that these were his cousins. The knowledge that Bartholomew was a native of the parish of Kilmurry (barony of Ibracken, diocese of Killaloe), Co. Clare, with the hint that his family had been displaced there in Cromwellian times, adds an element of enigma to the fact that his brother belonged to the community of Dominicans at Derry.

**St Patrick's College, Maynooth, O'Curry MS 21 (C 21)**

One complete manuscript may now be attributed to the work of Fr Séamas Ó Muraidheagh. As it was written in 1729, it probably also belongs to his time in Louvain – although no location is given – and must therefore be among the last such works of this nature to emanate from there. Most of this manuscript, Maynooth C 21,\(^{31}\) contains grammatical and lexical material deriving from the Franciscan project of a century earlier; the remainder is filled out with poetry from Co. Clare.

The paper bears the common Dutch watermark of the ‘Arms of Amsterdam’. The contents of the 188 pages are made up as follows: a description of the Irish language (pp. 1–32) and Irish prosody (pp. 33–54); and Michéal Ó Cléirigh's ‘Sanasán’ or etymology (pp. 55–166). The last twenty pages contain poems by Aindrias Mac Cruitín, the Clare poet: a poetic contention between Mac Cruitín and Brian Ó Conchubhair (pp. 167–75); and a *crosántacht* and poem by Aindrias in honour of Somhairle Mac Domhnaill of Ennistymon (pp. 176–87). Two further short satiric poems were also used to fill up p. 5 of the manuscript.\(^{32}\)

Séamas Ó Muireadhgaigh signs his work four times in the manuscript, as follows:

(a) ‘Ar ná sgríobhadh lé Séamus Ó Muraidheagh’ (p. 4).

(b) ‘ar na sgriobhadh lé Seamus Ua Muraidheagh 1729’ (p. 7).

(c) ‘Finis hujus libri, Anno Domini 1729. Scriptum per me Jacobum Murry’ (p. 166).

(d) ‘Ar ná s[g]riobhadh lé Séamas Ua Muraidheagh an dara lá do mhi August aos Chriost mile, agas seacht ecéad, agas naii mbliadhna fíthcid, do Shéamus *U Dala* [ms ull], Finis 1729’ (p. 175).

The fourth colophon is the most significant, as it indicates that the manuscript was not written by Ó Muraidheagh for his own use. Séamus Ó Dála is surely to be identified with James Augustine O'Daly OFM, Canon and Treasurer of the cathedral of Tournai, and Bishop of Kilfenora.\(^{33}\) If that is the case, then the date of August 1729 may be of significance, as it coincided with the only known occasion that Bishop O'Daly visited his diocese, May to November of that year.\(^{34}\) Perhaps the manuscript was written for presentation to the bishop on his return.


\(^{32}\) Beginning *Mairg aga mhi meannhain mhear* (omitted from catalogue), and *Neamhthinn an galar é an grádh*.


\(^{34}\) Coen, ‘Post-reformation Catholic Bishops of Kilfenora’, 57.
The association of the manuscript with O'Daly, together with the inclusion of the poems by Aindrias Mac Cruitín, points up the Clare connections of the scribe. Pádraig Ó Fiannachta, in his catalogue of this manuscript, has observed a similarity between Ó Muireadhagh's handwriting and that of Mac Cruitin. This is particularly true in the case of the y-shaped minuscule letter s employed by both scribes. Mac Cruitin (c. 1650–1738) was from Moyglass, in the Murrays’ native parish of Kilmurry, Co. Clare. It is therefore quite possible that Fr Ó Muraidheagh acquired his proficiency in written Irish from Mac Cruitin himself. We may also note a further circumstantial association, in that only a year earlier, 1728, Mac Cruitin's kinsman, Aodh Buidhe (Hugh Mac Curtin), published at Louvain his The elements of the Irish language grammatically explained in English. It is difficult to imagine that Fr Ó Muraidheagh and Aodh Buidhe would not have met each other in Louvain.

Conclusion
Both manuscripts eventually returned to Ireland. Robin Flower made the reasonable suggestion that British Library MS Additional 40766 may have reached the Dominican convent of Gola, Co. Fermanagh, c. 1756, through the agency of Fr Ó Muraidheagh himself. With regard to Maynooth MS C 21, we know that this manuscript made its way back to Fr Séamas’s native west-Clare, as it was from Micheál Ó Raghallaigh of Ennistymon, the well-known Irish scholar, that it was later acquired by Eugene O'Curry in 1839.

Both books attest to the continuity of the scholarly tradition in Irish among members of the Irish clergy on the Continent in the eighteenth century. They also demonstrate the phenomenon of the exiled book and the book written in exile, and the repatriation of such artefacts. More than anything else, however, they serve to highlight the activities of an Irish priest and man of letters, Fr Séamas Ó Muraidheagh OP, a noted preacher of sermons in Irish, and an accomplished poet and scribe. In so doing, they add one more detail to our knowledge of the Irish exiles on the Continent in the eighteenth century.

35 See, for example, Thomas F. O’Rahilly, ‘Notes on the poets of Clare’, An Claidheamh Soluis 18 July 1917, p. 4.
36 Vincent Morley, An crann os coill: Aodh Bui Mac Cruitin, c.1680–1755 (Dublin 1995) 95–100, where the possibility of an encounter between Aodh Buidhe and Bishop O’Daly at Louvain is mentioned (p. 95). Mac Cruitin’s book was the last publication to use the Louvain type: Dermot McGuinne, Irish type design: a history of printing types in the Irish character (Dublin 1992) 36.
37 Note by O’Curry in the upper margin of C 21, p. 1.
38 I am indebted to Dr Pádraig de Brún for commenting on a draft of this paper.