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Authors	Ó Macháin, Pádraig
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Tuileagna Ó Maoil Chonaire and the Book of Pottlerath

Pádraig Ó Macháin

One of the finest literary artefacts associated with Kilkenny is Leabhar na Rátha or the Book of Pottlerath. This fifteenth-century Gaelic manuscript, miscellaneous in contents, comprises sections written for Éamonn Buitilléar and his uncle, the White Earl, Séamus Buitilléar (†1452), the latter the subject of a study by Gearóidín de Buitléir published elsewhere in this volume. Unlike many another Gaelic manuscript, it was received into an institutional library at the relatively early date of 1636, when, as a spoil of conquest, it was donated to the University of Oxford by Archbishop William Laud, whose name it now bears in the Bodleian Library: Laud Miscellany 610.[1]

Of a number of scribes who worked on the manuscript, two identify themselves as Seaán Buidhe Ó Cléirigh and Giolla na Naomh Mac Aodhagáin, both members of renowned families of *seanchaidhe*. Later additions and re-inkings, dating from the time when the book was in the possession of the Earl of Desmond, are signed by members of another similarly famous family, Sioghraidh and Torna Ó Maoil Chonaire. Such was the prominence of the Í Mhaoil Chonaire in the late middle ages that many of the surviving manuscripts from that time bear traces of their influence. It is scarcely surprising, therefore, that a seventeenth-century representative of the family should show an interest in examining and recording the contents of this book during a visit to Oxford in 1673.

Cataloguing of Gaelic manuscripts only began in earnest towards the close of the nineteenth century, but the first stirrings in this regard can be traced to the seventeenth century, generally prompted by the enthusiasm of Ascendancy antiquarians.[2] It may be claimed that an early cataloguer was Tuileagna Ó Maoil Chonaire (alias Tully Conry), who read and described the Book of Pottlerath and other manuscripts at Oxford in August 1673. He made two descriptions: one in English, for the information of the Library; the other in Irish, which he brought back with him to Ireland.

Tuileagna's summary in English of the contents of Pottlerath, dated 9 August 1673, is mounted on the inside front cover of that manuscript.[3] A similar précis by him once accompanied Laud Miscellany 615 also[4] – a sixteenth-century Donegal manuscript containing a collection of poems ascribed to Colum Cille – and another is found in Bodleian MS Fairfax 29.[5] As noted by Brian Ó Cuív, a copy in Carte MS 109, f. 242, of Tuileagna's English notes formed the basis for the brief description of the three Irish manuscripts in Edward Lhuyd's *Archaeologia*.[6] His more detailed record – in Irish – of the contents of

[1] Myles Dillon, 'Laud Misc. 610', *Celtica* 5 (1960) 64–76; 6 (1963) 135–55. Anne O'Sulllivan and William O'Sullivan, 'Three notes on Laud Misc. 610 (or the Book of Pottlerath)', *Celtica* 9 (1971) 135–51. Brian Ó Cuív, *Catalogue of Irish language manuscripts in the Bodleian Library at Oxford and Oxford College Libraries* I–II (Dublin 2001, 2003) I, 62–87.

[2] Pádraig Ó Macháin, '"A llebraib imdaib": cleachtadh agus pátrúnacht an léinn, agus déanamh na lámhscríbhinní', in Ruairí Ó hUiginn (ed.), *Oidhreacht na lámhscríbhinní* Léachtaí Cholm Cille 34 (Maigh Nuad 2004) 148–78: 151–2.

[3] Ó Cuív, *Catalogue* I, 68.

[4] Information kindly supplied by Richard Sharpe from his forthcoming *Roderick O'Flaherty's letters 1696–1709*.

[5] Ó Cuív, *Catalogue* I, 7. No description of this manuscript in Irish by Tuileagna appears to survive.

[6] Ibid., 4–5; Edward Lhuyd, *Archaeologia Britannica* (Oxford 1707) 436.

Pottlerath and Laud 615 survives now in a manuscript in the Russell Library, St Patrick's College, Maynooth, where it is numbered MS C 112(d).

It is not known if Tuileagna was any immediate relation of his early seventeenth-century namesakes: for instance, the poet of Galmoy,[7] or the educator in the dioceses of Clogher and Armagh[8] (if they themselves are not identical). It is thought, however, that he is to be identified with the controversial figure – apparently a Franciscan friar – who expressed reservations about the Annals of the Four Masters in 1638 and 1641; and especially with the Tuileagna who wrote pedigrees of Ó Maoil Chraoibhe[9] and Mág Raghnaill,[10] and a list of saints,[11] in Madrid in April and March 1658, and who copied an Irish grammar, again in Madrid, in 1659.[12] In his signature to the Ó Maoil Chraoibhe pedigree he styles himself *seancha coitcheann Éireann* (‘general historian of Ireland’), and this sense of status and authority is also discernible in his work on the Book of Pottlerath.

Apart from the interesting point of literary history involved in the encounter (‘maille cead agus ughdarás')[13] of one of the last of the traditional men of learning with a manuscript of his ancestors in an English library, and that of the two types of Gaelic script (cursive and formal) exhibited in the Irish version of his catalogue, the main value of Tuileagna's Irish record of the visit is what we learn from his notes of his approach to and understanding of some of the texts in the manuscripts he was examining. His catalogue of the Book of Pottlerath (which he calls ‘Saltair na Rátha’), for example, is detailed and generally accurate.[14] At times he strays from succinct description to the slightly more expansive treatment common among later cataloguers, typified by the outstanding work of Standish Hayes O'Grady. For instance, the text (f. 15r) catalogued by Ó Cuív as ‘Dialogue on the passion of Christ between St Anselm and the Virgin Mary' is described by Tuileagna as:

> Tráchtadh uaigneach ar Anselmus naomh agus mur do fhoillsigh an Ógh mhiorbhaileach Muire Páis a haoinmhic dhó[15]

Again, on the next page, in addition to giving the first line of the poem *Annáladh anall uile* (f. 33r), he supplies a summary: ‘Duain ar Annaloibh agus comhaimsearaibh o thosach domhain go bas diarmada Mhac Maoil na mbó' (‘A poem on the annals and synchronisms

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[7] Pádraig Ó Macháin, `The hand of Conall Ó Mórdha', *Ossory, Laois and Leinster* 3 (2008) 54–72: 62.
[8] Denis J. O'Doherty, `Students of the Irish College Salamanca (1595–1619)', *Archivium Hibernicum* 2 (1913) 1–36: §§ 47, 55, 72.
[9] UCD-OFM MS A 30/7.
[10] TCD MS 804 (F.1.18), pp. 63–8.
[11] TCD MS 804 (F.1.18), pp. 75–8.
[12] TCD MS 1431 (D.4.35). Paul Walsh, ‘A link with Tadhg Dall Ó hUiginn', in idem, *Irish men of learning* (ed. Colm O Lochlainn, Dublin 1947) 74–9; Parthalán Mac Aogáin, *Graiméir Ghaeilge na mBráthar Mionúr* Scríbhinní Gaeilge na mBráthar Mionúr VII (Baile átha Cliath 1968) xi–xii; Cuthbert Mhág Craith, *Dán na mBráthar Mionúr* I–II, Scríbhinní Gaeilge na mBráthar Mionúr VIII (Baile átha Cliath 1967, 1980) II, 204–206. Tuileagna was still in Madrid in 1662: Benjamin Hazard, *Faith and patronage: the political career of Flaithrí Ó Maolchonaire, c. 1560–1629* (revised ed., Dublin 2010) 14 (and 22 n. 47).
[13] ‘with permission and authorisation' (C 112(d), p. 1).
[14] MS C 112(d), pp. 15–18, 27–28. So too his catalogue of Laud Miscellany 615, which he made on 4 August 1673 (C 112(d), pp. 9–14); at one point (p. 9), while cataloguing a prophecy-poem ascribed to Fionn mac Cumhaill, he expresses regret at being unable to transcribe more than three verses of it, presumably through lack of time: ‘As mor nach bfedam do sgriiobadh [*sic*] agus do thairngir moran naomh oile san tairngiresi’ (‘There is much that I cannot write and he prophesied many other saints in this prophecy’).
[15] MS C 112(d), p. 15 (‘A curious tract on St Anselm and how the miraculous Virgin Mary revealed to him the Passion of her only son').

from the beginning of the world to the death of Diarmaid mac Maoil na mBó'). Later he makes a point of noting how the British king-lists (including Scotland) occur in Irish, ‘agus iad araon a ngaoidhilg'.[16]

The Book of Pottlerath is a manuscript particularly noted for its informative colophons and marginalia. A selection of these was transcribed by Tuileagna, and yields some interesting information. A gap in note § 12 (according to Ó Cuív's enumeration) shows that the text was as illegible at that point in 1673 as it is in modern times. A similar gap occurs at the end of note § 40, where a blessing is requested for Éamonn mac Risteird, which is recorded by both Dillon (§ xxxvi)) and Ó Cuív as ‘.i. Emuinn mic Risderd oir is mian leis [genasalafair] (?) faris . . . aenar.' For this Tuileagna reads ‘Óir as mían leis an uasalfheil faris uaisle agus lucht leanamhna'.[17] This was thought by Pádraig Ó Fiannachta to indicate that the manuscript was more legible at that point in Tuileagna's time than it is today.[18] Plausible though it may be, however, examination of the manuscript suggests that this reading is unlikely to be correct, and must therefore represent guesswork by Tuileagna.

Other colophons and marginalia copied by him confirm this tendency to elaborate on or clarify what was in the manuscript. The beginning of note § 50 reads: ‘Dar mo breithir as mor in pian duin uisci do denum aine in Chesta'; this Tuileagna emends to: ‘Dar mo bhreithir as mór an phían dúin trosgadh ar uisge do dhenamh aoine in chesda'.[19] Note § 57 refers to an incursion by Éamonn Buitilléar into Íbh Peilme (in Cos Carlow and Wexford) at Christmas 1454, when the scribe was among his retinue, recording ‘oir do bamur ocht la agus ocht noidche inti dainneoin Laigen' (‘since we were there for eight days and eight nights in spite of the Leinstermen'). In his copy Tuileagna inserts a parenthetical clause after this: ‘(a raibh ar naghoidh dhibh)'.[20]

Details such as these show Tuileagna Ó Maoil Chonaire in the light of interpreter and editor of the texts he was examining, a role for which the traditional Gaelic scribe is well known. An examination of one of his transcriptions from the Book of Pottlerath confirms and compounds this view.

In addition to genealogical material which Tuileagna copied from ff. 75–76r of the Book of Pottlerath, he also copied two short Middle-Irish poems. One was the ribald verses on f. 9r attributed in the accompanying commentary to Feidhlimidh mac Crimhthainn,[21] and the other a two-verse poem from f. 10r. The latter begins *Fritha cech da comadais* and in Irish manuscript tradition it exists in two mildly different versions. One version (**A**) begins *Frítha gach da chosmuilius* and was edited under the title ‘National Parallels' by Kuno Meyer.[22] The other version (**B**) is preserved in such late-medieval manuscripts as the Book of Uí Mhaine, RIA MS 967 (23 N 10, an Ó Maoil Chonaire manuscript), British Library MS Harley 5280, and the Book of Pottlerath. The text of Pottlerath,[23] and that of Tuileagna's transcript,[24] are as follows:

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[16] MS C 112(d), p. 17.
[17] MS C 112(d), p. 21 (`since he wishes [to spend] the noble feast with [his] nobles and followers').
[18] Paul Walsh and Pádraig Ó Fiannachta, *Lámhscríbhinní Gaeilge Choláiste Phádraig Má Nuad: Clár* I–VIII (Má Nuad 1943–73) VI, 76.
[19] MS C 112(d), p. 22 (`On my word it is a great pain for us to fast on water on Good Friday').
[20] MS C 112(d), p. 22 (`those of them [*sc*. the Leinstermen] who were opposing us').
[21] Kuno Meyer, ‘König Fedlimids Rache', *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie* 3 (1901) 34.
[22] Kuno Meyer, ‘Two Middle-Irish poems', *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie* 1 (1897) 112–13.
[23] Lines arranged in quatrains by present writer. Translation: `Everything has its likeness, they will be remembered over the land of Banbha: the Í Néill and the Scots, the Welshmen and the men of Munster.

Pottlerath	**Tuileagna**
Fritha cech da comadais	Fríthe gach dá chomhadhais
os iath banba bit cuman	os íath banbha bidh cumhan
u neill agus albanaig	uí Néill agus Albanaigh
brethnaid agus fir muman	Sacsain agus fir Mhumhan
Ulaidh agus espanaig	Ulaidh agus Easpainnigh
segda a catha fri nítha	coinnmhe chogaidh gach criche
conachta agus saxain	Connachta agus Briotáinigh
lagin fri franca fritha	Laighin fri Francaibh fritha.

Ignoring the modernization of the orthography, it is clear that what Tuileagna wrote was not exactly what was before him on the manuscript page. From the last line of the first verse to the end, he gives a version that is close to version **A**, apart from the transposition of Connachta' and 'Briotáinigh' in the penultimate line.[25] At the major point of difference between the versions – the second line of verse 2 – Tuileagna supplies the reading of Pottlerath as a variant beside it: 'no seaghdha a ccatha fri nitha'.

The implications of this are: (1) that Tuileagna was again acting as editor and interpreter of the text before him; and (2) that among the traditional material he carried in his head was the variant version of this Middle-Irish poem which he was able to reproduce when faced with another version in the Book of Pottlerath. This in turn is a small but notable indicator of the work and mind of the *seancha* or *seanchaidh* at a time when such a profession was fast becoming an anachronism, and when a more Latinate scholarship was being pursued by a new native breed of learned man. By one such, Ruaidhrí Ó Flaithbheartaigh, Tuileagna would be spoken of in 1702 as having been 'no scholar, but in his own native tongue'.[26]

Ulstermen and Spaniards, their battalions are successful against conflicts, Connachtmen and Saxons, Leinstermen are like Franks.'

[24] MS C 112(d), p. 5. Lines arranged in quatrains by present writer.

[25] The equivalent line in Pottlerath would also benefit from a similar transposition, as both the line and the end-word are a syllable short; the other manuscripts, however, read varieties of 'Saxanaigh', which solves the difficulty. Two MSS (Harley and RIA 967) also read *gniseat/gnisit* ('they made', 'they did') instead of *segda*. The metre is a loose form of *aí freislighe*.

[26] Quotation courtesy of Richard Sharpe (see n. 4 above).