LAND, SEA AND HOME

Edited by

JOHN HINES, ALAN LANE

and

MARK REDKNAP

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ROYAL FLEETS IN VIKING IRELAND:
THE EVIDENCE OF LEBOR NA CERT,
A.D. 1050-1150

By Catherine Swift

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

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

THE COMPILATION AND PURPOSE OF LEBOR NA CERT

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

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

One of the complicating factors in identifying the age of Lebor na Ceft is, as MacNeill and Dillon have pointed out, the variety of authors and sources ascribed to it within the body of the text itself. The most frequently named, both in the poems and in the prose summaries which intersperse them, is Benen mac Sechnen who is variously entitled Patrick's sainsbhealtid or psalmist, a satir or high-ranking scholar, an eloach or learned man and a fili or poet. The opening lines of the compilation state that Benen's text can be found in Lebor Ginné Dá Locha, a manuscript which has been controversially identified with the extant Rawlinson B.92 but which, in its present form, does not contain Lebor na Ceft. In Lebor na Ceft Benen is linked to the Psalter of Cashel, a manuscript which is no longer extant but which is associated in later Irish tradition with the figure of Cormac mac Géillesen. Cormen's obit is noted in the Annals of Inisfallen in 920 and he too is mentioned as an alleged source in Lebor na Ceft.

In line with a strong trend in 19th-century Irish historiography, O'Donovan and MacNeill were both inclined to take these various attributions seriously and they provided the under-pinnings to their arguments for an earlier version of Lebor na Ceft, belonging to the time of Patrick, followed by a later rewriting under Cormen. More recent discussion of native Irish literature, in contrast, has tended to emphasize the extent to which early figures were often credited with the production of what are clearly much later texts, judging by the language used and the political references made. Since the language of the poems in Lebor na Ceft is late Middle Irish in date, references to Benen and Cormac mac Géillesen in the poems should probably be seen merely as an attempt by later writers to claim a venerable antiquity for works of their own day.

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

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

No province in Ireland owes hospitality to a poet who does not know the cisa (renders) and taarusael (gifts) of that province as Dubtach moocu Lugair said:

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

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

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

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

Let him not be a vessel of old provers for reward or friendship for a man with proper training will not cite old judgements. Let him not be boshful or timid
Finally, *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaidh* in its discussion of the triumphal tour of Brian Boruma around Ireland, recounts how the Ulaid supplied Brian’s army with agricultural renders. In return, Brian bestowed horses, gold, silver and clothing upon them. The specific terms *cisa* and *tarassta* are not used in this passage but in the following paragraphs, Brian is said to have raised a royal fleet from the men of Dublin, Waterford, the Ui Cennselaig of south Leinster and the Ui Echach of Munster and this fleet levied *cisa rígida* or royal renders from the Saxons, the Welsh and the Scots. Brian is then said to have distributed this *cisa nile mar do diliged* “the whole render according to right” with a third going to the king of Dublin, a third to the warriors of the Leinster and to the Ui Echach and a final third to learned professionals, craftsmen and other worthy causes.14

These various references make it appear that while the professional *fidh* may describe *cisa* and *tarassta* in terms of ancestral rights and duties, political realities were also major factors. A king may be able to demand his *cisa* on a regular basis at *óenach* festivities from his closest subordinates but peoples further away were less easy to control.15 Both *Caithbreim* and *Cogadh* indicate that in addition to being levied at symbolic high-points of a king’s reign such as the inauguration of a king or on the royal tour of his dominions, they could also be levied in the course of military campaigns. In fact, in the case of Brian Boruma, two-thirds of the taxes being raised go straight to the fleet commanders enforcing his royal will. This seems a clear precursor of the later system of *coinnead* or ‘coigny’ where taxes for military purposes were collected directly from the population by the soldiers themselves.16 Such stark realities underline the importance of the *fidh* role in creating his propaganda poems — he was not just a man embodying traditional lore but someone who could coat the unpalatable realities of the contemporary world with ringing phrases and heroic vocabulary.

**THE MILITARY IMPLICATIONS OF THE MUNSTER POEMS IN **LEBOR NA NAERT

(Fig. 1)

The first Munster poem concerns the gifts which the over-king of Munster should offer other over-kings if he attained the status of king of Ireland. In return, each over-king had the duty to provide hospitality for the Munster ruler for a specific period, ranging from 12 days to 6 months in length. Furthermore, each over-king has to give the Munster contingent an escort through his lands. In this initial poem there is already reference to ships: the king of Ath Cliath (Dublin) is to get 10 ships, the king of Lianmuint (identified as king of Leinster in the prose) is to get 30 ships while the king of Ulaid (east Ulster) is to get either 10 or 100 ships depending on whether one believes the poem or the prose summary which precedes it.16 In other words, if a Munster king is king of Ireland, he should ensure that the three over-kings of the east coast of Ireland are all awarded ships. Furthermore, one should note in passing the possibility that the king of Ulster is to receive proportionately far more ships than...
his southern counterparts although the discrepancy between poem and prose makes this impossible to ascertain.

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

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

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

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

This sixth poem also deals with gifts to the local kingdoms of Munster but is somewhat different in detail. Here one ship only is given to the Déisi and to Léim in Chon, three ships are given to the Dairfhine, three ships to the Corcu Dhuibhne (Kerry) and ten ships to the Eoganacht Locha Léim, who controlled the Killarney lakes. Both these last two kingdoms were raided by Tairdelbach Ua Briain in 1064 and a large tribute of cattle were taken. In 1077 Donchadh Hua Flaind, king of Eoganacht Locha Léim was killed whilst returning from the house of Ua Briain at Kincora — an indication that he had acquired the status of an Ua Briain client. Kings of Corcu Baiscinn, though not explicitly identified as clients in the same way, are killed whilst fighting in Brian Boro's army at Clontarf in 1014, are drowned in a ship along with an Ua Briain dynast in 1030 and are killed in fights between two Ua Briain scions in 1054. It seems reasonable to deduce therefore, that the Corcu Baiscinn are also closely tied to the Ua Briain rulers as political and military subordinates.

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

**Shipping in the Other Irish Over-Kingdoms**

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

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

The next over-kingdom is that of the Argyalla. Here again only one local kingdom acquired five ships — the Fir Manach or the Men of Fernagh who

18 Dillon, op. cit. in note 5, 56 (lines 510–14).
18 Dillon, op. cit. in note 3, 58 (line 541) and 40 (lines 565, 568, 571 and 578); Mac Airí (ed.), op. cit. in note 7, 58 (line 510), 92 (line 568), 100 (line 568), 104 (line 571) and 105 (line 578).
18 Dillon, op. cit. in note 5, 58 (line 565) and 40 (lines 565, 568, 571 and 578); Mac Airí (ed.), op. cit. in note 7, 58 (line 541), 92 (line 565), 100 (line 568), 104 (line 568), 105 (line 571) and 107 (line 578).
18 Dillon, op. cit. in note 5, 58 (line 565) and 40 (lines 565, 568, 571 and 578); Mac Airí (ed.), op. cit. in note 7, 58 (line 541), 92 (line 565), 100 (line 568), 104 (line 568), 105 (line 571) and 107 (line 578).
acquired five from their overlord. The potential importance of shipping on the broad expanses of Lough Erne needs no further comment.

The fifth over-kingsdom, the Ulaid of north-east Ireland, received far more ships from the king of Ireland than any other, together with a rather more diverse series of goods than his peers. This section begins with a statement that the Ulaid ruler is to receive ten ships from the king of Ireland than any other, together with a rather more diverse series of goods, subdivided between the various local kingdoms as follows:

- Dal Riata (barony of Cary, Antrim): 3 ships
- Ind Airthir (baronies of Orion, Armagh): 4 ships
- In Dubhchain (barony of Dufferin, Down): 10 ships
- In Aird (baronies of Ards, Down): 8 ships
- Leth Cathail (baronies of Lealca, Down): 8 ships
- Mag Coba (baronies of Ineagh, Down): 10 ships
- Muirheime (barony of Lower Dundalk, Louth): 10 ships.

With the exception of Dal Riata, these kingdoms are concentrated along a narrow stretch of coast, from Strangford Lough to Carlingford Lough. This is a coastline well provided with good harbours and which is visible from the hills of Galloway and the Isle of Man. When Magnus of Norway mounted his western expedition in 1098, it was Galloway and Man that he conquered in the north Irish Sea and he subsequently died in the course of an invasion of the Ulaid over-kingsdom. The importance of the area lies in the fact that this is the bottle-neck controlling access to the Irish Sea from the north. As Sean Duffy has pointed out, the Dublin fleet are recorded as fighting on Rathlin island (immediately to the north of Dal Riata territory) in 1038 and again in 1045 when they killed 300 men of the Ulaid. This would seem to be directly related to the Dubliners’ need to have free passage through the channel. Similar concerns can be detected when the Ulaid allied themselves with Dublin to attack Man in 1087.

As a general rule, the minor local kings tend to receive less attention in the annals and it can thus be difficult to identify them. The death of the king of Leth Cathail in a sea-battle between Dublin and Ulaid is, however, specifically mentioned in the *Annals of Tigernach* in 1022 whilst a Dublin fleet under Sitriuc son of Olaf attacked settlements within the kingdom of Leth Cathail in 1002. Both Leth Cathail and the Ulaid were command over-kingsdoms. The king of Cualu — the area around Bray Head, south of Dublin — is allocated 8 ships. The king of Inishowen, the district around Arklow, is given 6 vessels whilst 10 go to the Ulaid kingdom of Wexford. This last gift is corroborated by a contemporary poem identifying Wexford town as a royal site in which ships gather. In short, the individual poems dealing with over-kingsdoms other than Munster in *Lebor na Geat* confirm the pattern of ships being given as gifts by the king of all Ireland already identified in the first Munster poem. In this section, however, the Irish high-kings give the Sénar only 10 ships (whereas Munster as high king gave thirty) and a similar number to the Ulaid. Similarly, the donation of ships by provincial rulers to local subordinates, a feature of the fifth and sixth Munster poems, is also a feature of these other poems. The most noteworthy is the king of Ulaid who gives 3 ships to seven of his local sub-kings, predominantly those on the Down and Louth coasts. The king of Leth, south of Dublin, allocates 24 ships to his subordinates with the largest percentage going to Wexford and rather smaller fleets going to Bray and Arklow. Sub-kingsdoms of Munster, get 24 ships (in the fifth Munster poem) or 17 (in the sixth) whilst the areas of Trimunagh and Clew Bay get 5 ships apiece. Clearly shipping in the area of this Ulaid over-kingdom is particularly important as they have at least twice the number of ships as either Munster or Ulaid in this scenario.

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

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

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

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


Dillon, op. cit, in note 3, 64 (line 913) and 68 (lines 987-90); *Annals of Ulster* (AU), ed. S. Mac Art and G. Mac Nioscuil (Dublin, 1987), 64, 1110.

Dillon, op. cit, in note 3, 81 (line 133).

Dillon, op. cit, in note 3, 54 (line 156), 86 (line 1375), 88 (lines 1541, 1551, 1553 and 1554) and 90 (lines 1526 and 1532). For identification of place-names see F. Mac Ghabhainm, *Place-names of Northern Ireland*; Vol. 7— Co. Antrim (Belfast, 1997), 1-7; A. J. Hughes and R. J. Higman, *Place-names of Northern Ireland*; Vol. 8— Co. Down (Belfast, 1999), 1-7.
Scandinavian settlements of Waterford or Limerick but rather to the south-west region. It is, of course, crucial to remember that this is not an account of the total number of ships operating in Ireland but simply the vessels deemed relevant to a discussion of political alliances by a compiler devoted to Ui Briain interests. It is possible, for example, that the south-western distribution of Munster ships reflects Ui Brian worries about their rivals for the provincial kingship, the Mac Carthagt. References in the annals also refer to Irish fleets on Lough R (between Connacht and Mid) and Lough Derg (between Connacht and Ui Briain) and this is a phenomenon to which Lebor na Cert only alludes in passing, saying that Connacht kings who could deploy such fleets should be considered fortunate and would often win supreme power. 30

SHIP DETAILS

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

In the first Munster poem, the ships are described as longa co leatphaib 'ships with beds/sleeping compartments' while in the sixth Munster poem, 'a ship under full sail'. In the same poem, other ships are described as lám-chaona or entirely fair and as dinghula dathach, 'perfectly coloured'. In the poem on the Ulaid, the ships are described as lándtasa or entirely fine and lándbra, 'entirely fierce', while a reference to five horses a longab lánas, 'from full ships', suggests an aristocratic trade in foreign horses which is also attested in the annals. In the poem on Laigin, the ships are described as ocht longa, 'ten longships', or ocht tré, 'eight ships' with sails, with standards, and in the final poem on Temair there is reference to ships with corra or pointed projections (i.e. prows). 31 These descriptions, while very generalized, seem to accord with the general picture of shipping in later Viking-age Scandinavia.

With regard to the process of manufacture, the only information I have been able to find is in a Middle Irish legal complaint which states that the craftsman who builds longa (ships), barca (apparently trading vessels) and curarg (curraigs) has the second-highest honour price, behind the men who can build churches, cook-houses. 32 This would seem to suggest that in the Ireland of this period, the techniques required for ship-building were not considered particularly difficult.

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

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

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


31 I owe the suggestion about possible Ui Briain worries concerning the Mac Carthagt to Tomas O Caithrín; see further Annaals of Innisfallen n.s. 112.4, Uisínfs in Irish inland waters, see A.l., 898, 993, 1046 and 1127; Dillon, op. cit. in note 1, 124 (lines 2149-50).

32 Dillon, op. cit. in note 1, lines 118, 141, 142 (lines 1427, 822), 1427, 1432, 1433 (lines 1428-9) and 1434 (line 1429).

33 Dillon, op. cit. in note 1, line 1431 (line 1427).

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35 Dillon, op. cit. in note 1, 92 (lines 1510 and 1545), 92 n. 1 for the suggestion that the phrase is here used of the king of Ulaid and 143 (lines 1416-17).

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37 The dictionary of the Irish Language 1.25; Cogadh Gaedhil, ed. cit. in note 11, 40. J. Jesch, Ships and Men in the Late Viking Age: The Vocabulary of Recent Inscriptions and Scaldic Verse (Woodbridge, 2001), 195-8; Bugge, op. cit. in note 14, 27, 82 and 84.
Without rehearsing all the evidence here, I would suggest that there is much scope for a re-evaluation of the Irish word and that in the specific instances in which it is used in *Lebor na Cemrt*, it is quite possible that it does mean a ship levy. In other words, the phrases in the Ulaid and Temair poems should, in my view, be translated as 'four ships for the purpose of the *leóndarg*', i.e. as vessels which could be called upon as part of the over-king's ship levy.

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

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tabhairt a longa gacha tric ha cet leor or ase-sin coimtind ar cabligh-ne
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(Let them bring ten ships from each of their divisions for it is from this is the assembly of our fleet.)

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

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

**Tuarastla in the Irish Annals**

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

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AU 1080: Domnallbeha Ha hEochadae went into Munster with the good men of the Ulaid accompanying him, in anticipation of *tuarastla*.
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The apparent rationale behind this move appears to have been Domnallbeha's temporary loss of the kingship of the Ulaid at this time to his cousin. An alternative version of this entry, in the *Annals of Inisfallen sub anno* 1078, refers to Domnallbeha 'coming into the house' of Tailedbalach Ua Briain. This again is a well-known idiom expressing chieftainship.

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

Perhaps the most striking annalistic illustration of *tuarastla*, however, lies in the account of the battle of Mag Coba undertaken by Muirchertach Ua Briain against the Meic Lochlann king of Ailech on Ulaid territory in 1081. There are long accounts of the battle in all of the major annalistic compilations although the details vary only a little. I quote here from the *Annals of Ulster*:

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A great war between the Cenel O'Feargaill [i.e. kingdom of Ailech] and the Ulaid and Muirchertach Ua Briain came with the men of Munster and Leinster and with the nobles of Connacht and the men of Midhe with their kings to Mag Coba to assist the Ulaid. They all went to the plain of Armagh and were a week feasting and overdrinking Armagh; Domnall Ua Lochlainn with the north of Ireland was for that time in Ulaid, to Bresail Macha facing them. Since the men of Munster were grieved, Muirchertach went to Oenach Macha and to Emain and around to Armagh itself and left 8 ounces of gold on the altar and promised 160 cows and returned again to Mag Coba. Muirchertach left there the Leinstermen and some of the men of Munster, he himself went on a raid into Dál Aratid and left there Domnach son of Tailedbalach and the son of Ua Conchobair, king of the Ciarraige and Ua Beoain and other nobles. Domnall Ua Lochlainn went with the north of Ireland into Mag Coba to attack the Leinstermen; the Leinstermen, however, and the Osraige and
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\[\text{Buighe}, \text{op. cit. in note 14, 15, 35, 59, 69 and 71.}\]

\[\text{AU, s.a. 1086, 1083 and 1084; Al, s.a. 1095 and 1098.}\]
the men of Munster and the foreigners met them just as they were and gave battle.
The south of Ireland, however, was defeated and slaughter inflicted on them.

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

No Connacht or Ulster king is mentioned in the accounts of the battle of Mag Coba but the importance of the Ulaid to both the Uí Briain and their rivals the Meic Lochlainn of Ailech is indicated by their frequent interventions in Ulaid politics. In 1078 Domnchad Ua hEochada was deposed from the Ulaid kingship and sought refuge with the Uí Briain. In 1080 he resumed his kingship and in 1081 he entered Tairdelbach Ua Briain's house. In 1084 the Meic Lochlainn raided Ulaid and in 1091, after the death of Tairdelbach and before his son Muirchertach attained widespread power, the Meic Lochlainn killed the Ulaid king. In 1095, a new Ulaid ruler, Domnchad Ua hEochada, was banished to the Meic Lochlainn; together with his hosts' help, he subsequently tried to repossess his kingdom but failed. In 1097, the Uí Briain and the Meic Lochlainn fought it out in Mag Muirthimne, one of the Ulaid client-kingdoms which received ships in Lebor na Cert. In 1099, both Muirchertach and the Meic Lochlainn attacked Ulaid but the abbot of Armagh made peace between them and it was the Meic Lochlainn who took Ulaid's hostages. In 1100, the Meic Lochlainn captured the king of Ulaid; it is hardly coincident that within the year Muirchertach sent the Dublin fleet to attack Inishowen and Derry — the very heartland of Ailech. Certainly the Ulster annalist completes his account of Muirchertach's actions on this occasion with the statement that Muirchertach then took Ulaid's hostages. In 1102, the Ulaid were fighting the Meic Lochlainn and in 1104, 1109, 1109, 1109, 1109 and 1112.

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

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

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

CONCLUSIONS

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