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Faithful Ua Conchobair  
king of Connacht

Freya Verstraten

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## Introduction

When exactly Feidlim Ua Conchobair was born is impossible to say. His father, Cathal Crobderg Ua Conchobair (d.1224), was married to Mor (d.1218), the daughter of Domnall Ua Briain.<sup>1</sup> She is most likely to be Feidlim's mother, since Cathal introduced monogamy in Connacht as part of adopting some Anglo-Norman practices. Since these practices also included primogeniture and Feidlim's brother Aed was Cathal's heir, we can assume Feidlim was the younger. We can assume that Feidlim had one wife and that his two sons who are mentioned by the annals, Aed na nGall and Aed Muimnech, are both from the same mother. The Irish were not accustomed to the use of stirrups and saddles. Cathal was still riding horses bareback at the first contact with king John.<sup>2</sup> Presumably, this was also one of his adaptations to foreign ways. His son Feidlim did not ride bareback on a horse, his seal clearly shows him riding a horse with saddle.<sup>3</sup> Cathal also introduced Anglo-Norman a new terminology making the king of Connacht the sole possessor of a God-given, royal authority in Connacht. All this was to give advantage to the king of Connacht as opposed to his rivals. However, according to Helen Perros "it was all too novel" and weakened the kingship of Connacht, instead of strengthening it against foreign and native Irish opponents.<sup>4</sup>

Since all males of the royal family were potential rulers, whether through favour of the former king, or through wealth or connections, all had to be reckoned with. Magnates such as the Burghs and the Lacys made succession-disputes in Connacht increasingly complex.<sup>5</sup> Hugh de Lacy was made the king's representative and was given a title in Meath in 1171. The Burghs and their allies were beginning to occupy key-centres in Connacht from the 1220s on.

At the Treaty of Windsor, in 1175, Ruaidri Ua Conchobair was recognised as sub-king and overlord of the Irish outside Meath, Leinster, Dublin, Wexford and Waterford. This arrangement was valid only as long as Ruaidri was faithful to the king and hereditary succession was not included.<sup>6</sup>

Cathal submitted to king John, and it was agreed upon that Cathal would hold two-thirds of Connacht and for one-third he would be a feudal tenant-in-chief, holding it directly from the king of England and being able to hand it over to his heir.<sup>7</sup> However, Cathal's refusal to hand over his eldest son and heir Aed as hostage to king John did his relationship to John no good. John started building a castle at Athlone "connived in (indeed was instrumental in organising) an invasion of Connacht by the colonists of Meath and Leinster and another invasion from the

<sup>1</sup> W.M. Hennessey ed., *The annals of Loch Ce. A chronicle of Irish affairs from A.D. 1014 to A.D. 1590 vol I* (London 1871) 258-9. Most annals were compiled in Connacht at the time. The closest affinity is between the Annals of Connacht and the Annals of Loch Ce: A.M. Freeman ed., *Annala Connacht. The annals of Connacht (A.D. 1224-1544)* (Dublin 1970) viii, xx and xxi.

<sup>2</sup> S. Duffy, 'King John's expedition to Ireland, 1210: the evidence reconsidered', *Irish Historical Studies* 30 (1996), 1-25, there 13.

<sup>3</sup> Roscommon County Museum.

<sup>4</sup> H. Perros, 'Crossing the Shannon frontier: Connacht and the Anglo-Normans, 1170-1224' in: T. B. Barry, R. Frame and K. Simms ed., *Colony and frontier. Essays on the history of medieval Ireland* (London and Rio Grande 1995), 117-38, there 136-138.

<sup>5</sup> R. Frame, *The political development of the British Isles 1100-1400* (Oxford 1995) 112-4. Lydon wrote that Anglo-Norman magnates chose a king and to "complicate matters further, dynastic rivalries among different segments of O'Connor lineages made succession to the kingship even more of a lottery." J. Lydon, 'Lordship and crown: Llywelyn of Wales and O'Connor of Connacht' in: R.R. Davies, ed., *The British Isles 1100-1500. Comparisons, contrasts and connections* (Edinburgh 1988) 48-63, there 56.

<sup>6</sup> Perros, 'Crossing the Shannon frontier', 119.

<sup>7</sup> H.S. Sweetman ed., *Calendar of documents relating to Ireland 1171-1251* (London 1877) no. 279.

south by the forces of Munster under Geoffrey de Marisco and rival sections of the Ua Chonchobair.”<sup>8</sup>

Cathal had been granted Connacht 13 September 1215, however, Richard the Burgh had received the same grant on the same day. Forfeiture of the land of Connacht after the death of Cathal led to the conquest of Connacht by Richard de Burgh.<sup>9</sup>

After Cathal’s death, his son Aed succeeded him, though not without problems. Aed needed Norman help against his own kinsmen. He was driven into rebellion when again Richard de Burgh was given a title to Connacht and this time with permission to enforce it.<sup>10</sup> Richard got twenty-five cantreds, the rest of Connacht, comprising five cantreds, the king reserved for himself. Aed reigned for four years. He was killed in 1228 in the court of justiciar Geoffrey de Marisco. This did not happen with Geoffrey’s consent, as he hanged Aed’s killer the very next day.<sup>11</sup> Though the motive for the killing is not quite clear,<sup>12</sup> the occurrence itself gave rise to succession-disputes between the sons of Ruaidri Ua Conchobair.<sup>13</sup> Beforehand they had challenged Aed’s kingship the throne,<sup>14</sup> now they fought each other over the succession to the throne. Foreign support was of decisive importance. The Anglo-Normans preferred Aed son of Ruaidri Ua Conchobair over his brother, and he was therefore supported and made king by Richard de Burgh. However, Aed turned against the justiciar and the latter then decided to support Aed’s opponent for the kingship, Feidlim son of Cathal. Together they entered Connacht and Aed fled to Ua Neill.<sup>15</sup> Orpen wrote that the English wanted “a king who would accept a subordinate position, with a restricted territory, while permitting the Normans to make settlements in the country, and who, at the same time, would be able to command the obedience of the leading Irish tribes.”<sup>16</sup> Feidlim was now made king of Connacht, trying to pacify the native Irish, as well as the king of England and the Anglo-Normans magnates.

### King Feidlim Ua Conchobair

Anglo-Norman magnates made and deposed the kings of Connacht. The king, chosen in this manner, may have undergone certain Irish rites of inauguration.<sup>17</sup> We have no proof of Feidlim being inaugurated, nor is there any prove of this happening with Cathal Crodberg or, for that

<sup>8</sup> S. Duffy, ‘King John’s expedition to Ireland, 1210: the evidence reconsidered’, *Irish Historical Studies* 30 (1996), 1-25, there 17.

<sup>9</sup> Lydon, ‘Lordship and crown’, 38.

<sup>10</sup> R. Dudley Edwards, ‘Anglo-Norman relations with Connacht, 1169-1224’ in: R. Dudley Edwards and T.W. Moody ed., *Irish Historical Studies. The joint journal of the Irish Historical Society and the Ulster Society for Irish Historical Studies* 1 (1938-9), 135-153, there 152 and 153.

<sup>11</sup> S. Mac Airt. ed., *The annals of Inisfallen* (Dublin 1951) 347; B. Mac Carthy ed., *Annala Uladh. Annals of Ulster, otherwise, annala senait, annals of senat. A chronicle of Irish affairs A.D. 431-1131: 1155-1541. Vol II A.D. 1057-1131: 1155-1378* (Dublin 1893) 279; D. Murphy. ed., *The annals of Clonmacnoise being the annals of Ireland from the earliest period to A.D. 1408* (Dublin 1896) 232-3; J. O’Donovan ed., *Annala rioghachta Eireann. Annals of the kingdom of Ireland by the four masters from the earliest period to the year 1616 vol III* (Dublin 1856) 247; *ALC*, 295-7; *AC*, 29

<sup>12</sup> See footnote *AC*, 29.

<sup>13</sup> *AC*, 29; *AFM*, 249; S. O hInnse ed., *Miscellaneous Irish annals (A.D. 1114-1437)* (Dublin 1947) 95.

<sup>14</sup> For instance in 1225: *AU*, 275; *AI*, 345-7; *AFM*, 219-237; *ALC*: 275-81; *AC*, 9-23. Aed had the protection of the Anglo-Normans, including the justiciar Geoffrey de Marisco.

<sup>15</sup> *AFM*, 249-57; *AU*, 283-5; *AI*, 347; *ALC*, 297-9; *Ann. Clon*, 233.

<sup>16</sup> G.H. Orpen, *Ireland under the Normans 1216-1333 vol. III* (reprint; Oxford 1968)174.

<sup>17</sup> Lydon, ‘Lordship and crown’, 56.



matter, his son Aed. Feidlim first assumed kingship in 1230, and if he was in fact inaugurated, we can assume the ceremony took place along the same lines as described in a poem written for another Feidlim Ua Conchobair, descendent<sup>18</sup> of Aed, son of Cathal Crobderg, who was made king in 1310. His inauguration followed the traditional rites of the Irish. The ceremony took place at the royal mound at Carnfree (co. Roscommon), where he symbolically married the province of Connacht.<sup>19</sup>

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Feidlim was only king for a few months, before Richard imprisoned him at the castle of Meelick in 1231. The annals condemn the act as being treacherous. Richard nevertheless gave Aed son of Ruaidri, with whom he had made peace, the kingship again.<sup>20</sup> Richard's career was negatively influenced by the fall of his uncle Hubert de Burgh in 1232, and he forfeited his cantreds and castles in January of the next year.<sup>21</sup> This was fortunate for Feidlim, whose release from prison was ordered by the king at the end of August of the same year.<sup>22</sup> Feidlim made sure Aed would not be reinstated a third time by killing him. Moreover, he also destroyed castles erected by the sons of Ruaidri. He also destroyed the castles of Bun Gaillme and Dunamon, Hen's Castle and Hag's Castle, all erected by Richard.<sup>23</sup> Presumably, he did not attack the Castle of Meelick, though, when in the following year Feidlim asked permission to visit the king in England, he was informed that he would get the required letters of safe-conduct from the king, but he was directed to first try to take the castle of Meelick (28 May 1233). Since Feidlim either failed or had no intention of taking the castle from Richard, the justiciar was ordered to take the castle from Richard in July of the same year. In fact, Henry had ordered Richard to surrender Meelick on 4 May 1233, but apparently to no avail. At this point, Henry III made plans to go to Ireland, but called them off when the situation in Wales demanded attention.<sup>24</sup> Feidlim received the letters of protection on 20 October 1233.<sup>25</sup> In the beginning of March 1234 Henry gives up and writes to Richard that the castle can be kept in the same hands until 1 July.<sup>26</sup>

Richard was back in favour in May 1234 and in the beginning of October the land of Connacht was restored to him.<sup>27</sup> Feidlim in either 1233 or 1234, brought forces into Meath and burned many towns.<sup>28</sup> The new justiciar, Maurice fitz Gerald, tried to obtain submission of Connacht in 1235 and this marked the start of the 'reconquest' of Connacht. Richard de Burgh, together with Hugh de Lacy and the other Anglo-Normans of Ireland burned Roscommon and the great church of Elphin. They overran the monastery of Boyle before they turned into

<sup>18</sup> Feidlim was the son of Aed, son of Eogan, son of Ruaidri, son of Aed, son of Cathal Crobderg. T.W. Moody, F.X. Martin and F.J. Byrne ed., *A new history of Ireland IX. Maps, genealogies, lists. A companion to Irish history part II* (Oxford 1984) 158.

<sup>19</sup> M. Dillon, 'The inauguration of O'Connor' in: J.A. Watt, J.B. Morrall and F.X. Martin ed., *Medieval studies. Presented to Aubrey Gwynn, S.J.* (Dublin 1961) 186-202, there: 186-7.

<sup>20</sup> *AFM*, 261-3; *AU*, 289 (ascribe the event to the year 1232); *ALC*, 307-11, *AC*, 41-3; *AI*, 349; *Misc. Ir. Ann.*, 97; *Ann. Clon.*, 233 state that the meeting was with the lord deputy and Donnogh Carbreagh Ui Briain.

<sup>21</sup> *Calendar of Patent Rolls preserved in the public record office. Henry III A.D. 1232-1247* (London 1906) 9.

<sup>22</sup> H.S. Sweetman ed., *Calendar of documents relating to Ireland 1171-1251* (London 1875), no. 1975.

<sup>23</sup> *AI*, 349; *AC*, 45-7; *AFM*, 265-9; *ALC*, 313-5; *Misc. Ir. Ann.*, 97.

<sup>24</sup> First mention of Henry's plans to go to Ireland is on 18 July 1233; *CDI 1171-1251*, 305 (no. 2046).

<sup>25</sup> *Cal. Pat. Rolls*, 28.

<sup>26</sup> *CDI 1171-1251*, nos. 1975, 2032, 2036, 2044, 2093; *Cal. Pat. Rolls*, 17.

<sup>27</sup> *Cal. Pat. Rolls*, 73.

<sup>28</sup> *AC*, 47 (ascribe the events to the year 1233); *Ann. Clon.*, 234 (ascribe the same events to 1234).

Thomond. Feidlim decided to pursue the Anglo-Normans, but the latter overpowered the combined army of Connacht- and the Munstermen. The Anglo-Normans then entered Connacht once more and sent descendants of Ruaidri Ua Conchobair to plunder. One Ua Domnaill had harboured Feidlim, and was punished by the Anglo-Normans for that. The Irish were subdued, but no pledge or hostages were taken from them. Instead, they were left without food, clothing or cattle. Thereupon the Irish “were robbing and killing each other to obtain what little the Anglo-Normans had left behind them.”<sup>29</sup>

Feidlim then decided to make peace with the justiciar. He was confined to the five cantreds which the king had reserved for himself, and only during the king’s pleasure. The rent was increased to 500 marks annually, while it had been 300 marks earlier (at this time however, Feidlim seems to have paid £400 annually<sup>30</sup>).<sup>31</sup> Feidlim thus recognised the partition of Connacht and became the king’s tenant.<sup>32</sup> One consolation was his, nevertheless: he finally broke down the castle of Meelick.<sup>33</sup>

A year later Maurice fitz Gerald banished Feidlim. The annals seem indignant of this, since Feidlim was the justiciar’s ‘gossip’, the sponsor or godfather to one of his children.<sup>34</sup> The countryside was ruined and “The castle at Onagh was built at this time as a stronghold against the men of Connacht.”<sup>35</sup> The justiciar next gave the five cantreds to Brian, grandson of Ruaidri. Then, the annals report that Feidlim was invited by some men (including the sons of his brother Aed) to come back to Connacht. With the help of Richard de Burgh he managed to defeat the descendants of Ruaidri.<sup>36</sup> During these fights, Feidlim seems to have had support of the local church.<sup>37</sup>

Orpen remarks that

“The Normans had no difficulty in overrunning the country, and the lesser chieftains seem to have been ready enough to submit and become vassals of Richard de Burgh, but as soon as an O’Conor was set up as king, he either rebelled or was attacked by rival O’Conors of the same or, more usually, of a different branch of the family.”<sup>38</sup>

This had been the same during the reign of Aed, son of Cathal Crobderg: he was only tolerated as long as he had the visible support of the native Irish. De Lacy and de Burgh also handed out grants to lesser Anglo-Norman barons, further complicating the feudal relations.<sup>39</sup>

In 1237, fights between the Feidlim and descendants of Ruaidri broke out again. This time, the former had help from the justiciar. Again Feidlim was victorious and peace was made. The annals report that Feidlim was given the king’s five cantreds “free of cattle tribute or rent.”<sup>40</sup> From this time on, Feidlim was a loyal vassal to the English king.

<sup>29</sup> *AC*, 51-7; *ALC*, 321-31; *AFM*, 275-83. The *Annals of Clonmacnoise* and the *Annals of Ulster* give a less detailed report of the events: *Ann. Clon.*, 234-5; *AU*, 293.

<sup>30</sup> G.H. Orpen, ‘Richard de Burgh and the conquest of Connaught’, *Journal of the Galway Archaeological and Historical Society* 7, no. 3, (1911-12), 129-147, there 143 and 144.

<sup>31</sup> Lydon, ‘Lordship and crown’, 59.

<sup>32</sup> Orpen, *Ireland under the Normans*, 182-185.

<sup>33</sup> *AFM*, 283; *ALC*, 333; *AC*, 59.

<sup>34</sup> *ALC*, 333-7; *Ann. Clon.*, 235; *AFM*, 285; *AI*, 351; *AU*, 293-5; *AC*, 59-61. The *Miscellaneous Irish Annals* report that Connacht was despoiled by the justiciar and de Burgh this year; *Misc. Ir. Ann.*, 99.

<sup>35</sup> *AC*, 59.

<sup>36</sup> *ALC*, 343; *AU*, 295 (ascribe Feidlim’s victory to 1237); *AC*, 65; *AFM*, 291.

<sup>37</sup> Orpen, ‘Richard de Burgh and the conquest of Connaught’, 146.

<sup>38</sup> Orpen, *Ireland under the Normans*, 187.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibidem*, 194-224.

<sup>40</sup> *AC*, 65-7; *Ann. Clon.*, 235; *AFM*, 291-3; *ALC*, 343-5; *AU*, 295 (for 1238).

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In 1240, Feidlim went to England to complain about both the Anglo-Normans and the Irish of Ireland. He received “much honour” from the king and returned home “in safety, happy and cheerful.” In 1242, he made a great hosting together with the justiciar and the Anglo-Norman barons into Cenel Conaill, to avenge the death of Tadc Ua Conchobair. Remarkably, the annals report Feidlim avenging Tadc Ua Conchobair again in 1244, though this time in Breifne, against Ua Raigillig.<sup>41</sup>

In 1245, a castle was built in Sligo by Maurice fitz Gerald. Some of the annals report that Feidlim was ordered to build the castle at his own cost.<sup>42</sup> In the same year, the king of England made a great hosting against the Welsh. The king, desperately in need for help, sent letters to Ireland (29 August), asking the men of Dublin, Waterford, Drogheda, Limerick, Cork and Carrickfergus, for immediate help. Justiciar Maurice fitz Gerald replied by sending over 3,000 men, including Feidlim.<sup>43</sup> The *Miscellaneous Irish Annals* say that Feidlim was asked to aid the king and that he was “offered lordship by the Galls of Ireland in return.”<sup>44</sup> Feidlim’s willingness to fight in Wales for the king of England is perhaps easier to understand when seen in the light of hostile feelings towards the de Lacys.

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Hugh de Lacy, quite soon after his implementation in Ireland, had decided to befriend Ruaidri. In 1180, he had married Ruaidri’s daughter, had given him a son, William Gorm de Lacy (d.1233).<sup>45</sup> At the turn of the century, Cathal had been supported by de Lacy.<sup>46</sup> But when the competition between the two branches of the Ua Conchobair family turned into a regular feud (around the year 1207<sup>47</sup>), naturally, Cathal and his descendants opposed not only Ruaidri and his descendants, but de Lacys as well. This was not only due to the alliance between Ruaidri and de Lacy, but also because of de Lacy’s position in Meath, so close to the Ua Conchobair’s heartland. The enmity between the two apparently was well known: in a letter written in April or May 1224 the king of England calls William de Lacy ‘Cathal’s enemy’.<sup>48</sup> After Cathal’s imprisonment by de Lacy in Nobber Castle, Meath, the former decided to ally with de Burgh. De Burgh then attempted to conquer Connacht, only to be stopped by king Henry III. This in turn led to “remarkably harmonious relationship between the kings of Connacht and England.” Cathal became a loyal vassal in 1203. Indeed, Cathal joined John in an expedition against the de Lacys.<sup>49</sup> Hugh and Rose de Lacy also launched a hosting together with the Anglo-Normans of Meath into Breifne in 1233.<sup>50</sup> William de Lacy held a lordship to the north of Meath and had

<sup>41</sup> *AFM*, 301-11; *AU*, 297-301; *ALC*, 353-63; *Ann. Clon.*, 235-8 (say that Feidlim was granted the five cantreds at this point); *AC*, 73-81; *Misc. Ir. Ann.*, 119-23 (though they do not give the reason for the raid into Breifne).

<sup>42</sup> *ALC*, 369; *AC*, 85; *Misc. Ir. Ann.*, 123.

<sup>43</sup> Orpen, *Ireland under the Normans*, 228-230. The *Annals of Clonmacnoise* report for the year 1246 that Feidlim and all the nobility and barons of Ireland went over to Wales to aid the king of England; *Ann. Clon.*, 238. The other consulted annals ascribe the Welsh expedition rightly to 1245. *ALC*, 369; *AFM*, 315; *AU*, 303-5; *AC*, 85.

<sup>44</sup> *Misc. Ir. Ann.*, 125.

<sup>45</sup> Perros, ‘Crossing the Shannon frontier’, 121-2.

<sup>46</sup> Dudley Edwards, ‘Anglo-Norman relations with Connacht’, 149.

<sup>47</sup> Perros, ‘Crossing the Shannon frontier’, 135.

<sup>48</sup> *CDI 1171-1251*, no. 1184.

<sup>49</sup> Perros, ‘Crossing the Shannon frontier’, 130-132.

<sup>50</sup> *AC*, 47 and *ALC*, 315.



acquired manors near Denbigh through his marriage with Gwenllian, a daughter of Llywelyn, prince of Wales.<sup>51</sup>

Feidlim therefore had double reason to oppose de Lacy: since de Lacy was in alliance with Ruaidri through marriage, and had a powerbase in Meath, which bordered Feidlim's lands.

In 1242, Ulster fell into the king's hands after the death of Walter's brother Hugh de Lacy without male heirs. Meath had been divided after the death of Walter (d.1241) and Leinster was fragmented after the death of the last Marshals in 1245.<sup>52</sup> Perhaps, since the lordship in Meath had fallen apart, Feidlim thought he might get a grant there if he would help the king in Wales. Llywelyn's war of 1223 had been supported by Hugh de Lacy, as well as by his half-brother William. We can therefore assume the marriage between William and Gwenllian took place before 1223. The Irish troops in Wales in 1245 may have come pretty close to de Lacy's manors in Denbigh, after the plundering of Anglesey: they came at least as far as Dyganwy.<sup>53</sup>

Justiciar Maurice fitz Gerald had responded to the king's request by sending an army, consisting mainly of Irishmen from Connacht. Since the justiciar had reacted too late to the crisis in Wales he was superseded by John fitz Geoffrey and the Irish were paid poorly for their efforts.<sup>54</sup> Feidlim however "was held in honour by the King [...] and was well pleased when he returned westwards."<sup>55</sup> He had reasons for being pleased. When Feidlim went home in October, he brought with him protection from the English king, until the latter's next coming to Ireland. Moreover, when the king, March 29, gave him letters of safe-conduct, he did so without calling Feidlim a king. In October, Feidlim was styled king of Connacht again.<sup>56</sup>

Gaelic rulers were last officially styled kings in Henry III's letter of May 1253. The dropping of the title can be seen as signalling the downgrading of the Irish kings.<sup>57</sup> In fact, when the king wrote a letter 22 June 1255 on how Connacht was to be divided between his brother, his son and Feidlim, he called the latter simply 'an Irishman'.<sup>58</sup> The diminishing of the status of the king of Connacht can be seen in a broader perspective. It can also be seen in Wales, for instance. On a national level, Lydon wrote that in the second half of the thirteenth century the native Irish were increasingly seen as inferior. They were left out of the common law and were governed under their own inferior brehon law.<sup>59</sup>

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In 1247 and 1248, again the annals report raids by the Anglo-Normans.<sup>60</sup> Probably in response to the raids the *Miscellaneous Irish Annals* report that the sons of the kings of Connacht led a hosting against the Galls.<sup>61</sup> The latter year moreover saw Henry III making speculative grants in Thomond and the king's cantreds, i.e., the heartlands of the Ua Briains and the Ua Conchobairs

<sup>51</sup> Frame, *The political development*, 58.

<sup>52</sup> R. Frame, 'Ireland and the Baron's Wars', P.R. Coss and S.D. Lloyd ed., *Thirteenth century England I. Proceedings of the Newcastle upon Tyne conference 1985*, 158-167, there: 160.

<sup>53</sup> J.W. ab Ithel ed., *Brut y Tywysogion or the chronicle of the princes of Wales* (London 1860), 331.

<sup>54</sup> Orpen, *Ireland under the Normans*, 229-30.

<sup>55</sup> *AC*, 85.

<sup>56</sup> *Cal. Pat. Rolls*, 450 and 461.

<sup>57</sup> A. Nic Ghiollaítha, 'The Uí Briain and the king of England', *Dal gCais* 7 (1984), 94-99, there 97.

<sup>58</sup> H.S. Sweetman ed., *Calendar of documents relating to Ireland 1252-1284* (London 1877), no. 448.

<sup>59</sup> Lydon, 'Lordship and crown', 48 and 51.

<sup>60</sup> *ALC*, 379-83; *AFM*, 325; *AC*, 93-5; *AI*, 353; *AU*, 309-11.

<sup>61</sup> *Misc. Ir. Ann.*, 125.



respectively. Frame leaves no doubt as to how these grants should be regarded:

“Some of these grants came to fruition, some did not; but the intention behind them was plainly serious. There is no shortage of additional signs that Ireland was perceived as promising ground, where the pressure on English resources could be relieved.”<sup>62</sup>

In 1249 Aed son of Feidlim sought compensation for the restriction of his father’s lands by raids. Justiciar Maurice fitz Gerald marched into Connacht and

“took from Feidlim’s son all the preys he had appropriated. But when Feidlim mac Cathail Chrobdeirg heard of the Galls being assembled thus near him, after his son had done such great harm to them, he determined to send his trains across the Shannon into Brefne and into the North of Ireland.”<sup>63</sup>

In other words, Feidlim fled to Ua Neill. The justiciar now made Toirrdelbach son of Aed son of Cathal Crobderg king, instead of Feidlim. In 1250, however, Feidlim came back from the north, drove out Toirrdelbach and was made king again.<sup>64</sup> He had to pay dearly for his son’s revolt: he lost the cantred of Omany and, according to Orpen, only held four cantreds from then on till his death. The reliability of the entry in the annals for 1257 in which it is stated that Feidlim was given the five cantreds again is questioned by him.<sup>65</sup> In any case, should the king no longer want Feidlim to hold the four cantreds, Stephen de Longespee, the king’s cousin, would hold them.<sup>66</sup>

In 1255 Aed made peace between his father and the people from northern Ireland. Aed brought the Connachtmen who were in the north because of enmity between them and Feidlim, back to Connacht. The descendants of Ruaidri, called the “deadly enemies” of Feidlim could do nothing to stop them, so the annals tell us.<sup>67</sup>

On June 22 the king granted Geoffrey de Lusignan, his (half-)brother 500 liberates in Connacht, i.e. two cantreds. He could chose the cantreds he liked, except those reserved for either Feidlim or Edward, the king’s son (who had been granted the whole of Ireland a year earlier):

“the best cantred [...] that in which the castles lie, with the castles themselves, shall remain to Edward.”<sup>68</sup>

Probably linked to this was the fact that Feidlim sent envoys to the king of England.<sup>69</sup> The response from England, in the form of a letter to Feidlim dated 29 July, can not have been very welcome. The king wrote that he had done Feidlim ‘no injury’ by granting Geoffrey two cantreds in Connacht. Moreover, he informed Feidlim of the fact that some of his own relatives had “offered the king large sums of money for a grant of them.” Thus, in no subtle terms, the king reminded Feidlim of how he was protected against his own relatives. Feidlim still held the

<sup>62</sup> R. Frame, ‘King Henry III and Ireland: the shaping of a peripheral lordship’, P.R. Coss and S.D. Lloyd ed., *Thirteenth century England IV. Proceedings of the Newcastle upon Tyne conference 1991*, 179-202, there 194-7.

<sup>63</sup> *AC*, 99.

<sup>64</sup> *AC*, 99-103; *AFM*, 335-41; *AU*, 311-3; *ALC*, 385-93.

<sup>65</sup> Orpen, *Ireland under the Normans*, 232-6.

<sup>66</sup> *CDI 1252-1284*, no. 407.

<sup>67</sup> *AC*, 113; *AFM*, 353; *ALC*, 407.

<sup>68</sup> *CDI 1252-1284*, no. 448.

<sup>69</sup> *AC*, 113; *ALC*, 407-9; strangely enough, the *Annals of the Four Masters* do not report envoys from Feidlim going to the king, but do mention envoys from the Archbishop of Tuam going to England: *AFM*, 353.

cantreds and the king therefore had done him no injury and would make sure that no injury would arise against Feidlim.<sup>70</sup>

Walter de Burgh (Richard had died in 1243 in an English expedition against the king of France) and Feidlim are reported to have had “a great meeting” in 1255 at Tochar Mona Conneda. They concluded peace there, which was ended the very next year by Walter raising an army against Feidlim which “for might and multitude had never been surpassed in Ireland, for it numbered twenty thousand to a man.”<sup>71</sup> Amongst the supporters of Feidlim were the men of Breifne. Breifne was independent, but acknowledged the overlordship of Ua Conchobair.<sup>72</sup>

In 1256 Alan le Zouche, the new justiciar, came to Ireland and met with Aed at Randon. They concluded a peace and stipulated that “Ua Conchobair should suffer no diminishing of territory of estate so long as this justiciar held office in Ireland.”<sup>73</sup>

In 1257 Feidlim met Walter the Burgh at Athlone and made peace. In the same year the king gave Feidlim a charter confirming his right to the king’s five cantreds.<sup>74</sup> As was mentioned earlier, Orpen doubted that the entry is reliable. Lydon wrote that by the new charter the king of Connacht held three, not four or five cantreds. The ‘better’ thing about it was that at least it was held at a fixed rent and in perpetuity.<sup>75</sup>

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The year 1258 saw the coming of a fleet from the Hebrides led by a Mac Somerled to Connemara. The men from the Isles plundered a merchant ship and Jordan d’Exeter, sheriff of Connacht, went into pursuit and was killed by the Hebrideans. In this year also, Aed son of Feidlim held a meeting with Brian Ua Neill and Tadc Ua Briain at Caeluisce. They decided to give the kingship to Brian, and Aed received hostages.<sup>76</sup> Since these men were sons of reigning Irish kings, theirs was not ‘just’ a rebellion against the king of England, but likewise a revolt against their fathers’ policies. Aoife Nic Ghiollamhaith says that “Aed O Conchobair was, in effect, co-ruler of Connacht, acting with considerable autonomy, long before his father’s death in 1265.” According to her the account of the meeting given in the *Caithreim Thoirdealbhaigh* is not to be taken literally. It is however an indication of the submission to Brian Ua Neill. In return for Aed’s submission and guarantee of military aid, Brian appears to have agreed to allowing Aed a free hand in Breifne.<sup>77</sup> In any case, the annals report that the Anglo-Normans and the Irish of Ireland met and concluded peace, notably without Feidlim being present.<sup>78</sup> The agreement between Ua Neill and Ua Conchobair “would have been particularly desirable to O Neill if O Conchobair was already contemplating his marriage of 1259 to a Scotswoman who

<sup>70</sup> *CDI 1252-1284*, no. 457.

<sup>71</sup> *AC*, 115. The *Annals of the Four Masters* and *Loch Ce* also mention the peace and the army the year after: *AFM*, 355; *ALC*, 407-9.

<sup>72</sup> Dudley Edwards, ‘Anglo-Norman relations with Connacht’, 135.

<sup>73</sup> *AC*, 121; *ALC*, 421; *AFM*, 361. Lydon stated, in spite of the entries in these annals, that Feidlim got the charter himself, when his son was on rampage. Lydon, ‘Lordship and crown’, 59.

<sup>74</sup> *AC*, 125; *ALC*, 423.

<sup>75</sup> Lydon, ‘Lordship and crown’, 59.

<sup>76</sup> *AC*, 127; *ALC*, 427-9; *AFM*, 369-71; *Ann. Clon.*, 241-2; *AU*, 325.

<sup>77</sup> Nic Ghiollamhaith, ‘The Ui Briain and the king of England’, 95. For 1258, e.g. the *Annals of Connacht* and *Loch ce* report that Feidlim and Aed deposed the king of Breifne and set up his son. *AC*, 127; *ALC*, 427.

<sup>78</sup> *AC*, 129; *ALC*, 429; *AFM*, 371.

was to bring him a dowry of foreign soldiers.”<sup>79</sup> In 1259 Aed went to Derry and married a daughter of Dubgall mac Somerled. The annals say that the girl brought eight scores of warriors, led by Dubgall’s brother Alan, with her. This is probably the first reference to galloglasses, though the first time the annals actually use this term is in 1290.<sup>80</sup> The *Atlas of Irish history* says that after the marriage of Aed the “subsequent employment of galloglass by other Irish kings reduced the military advantage which the English had previously enjoyed.”<sup>81</sup>

When the alliance was put to the test, in 1260 at Down, Tadc Ua Briain had died and no army from Munster fought with those from Tir Eogain and Connacht. The battle of Down was a great failure: Brian Ua Neill was killed and the Irish forces defeated. Walter de Burgh then made an expedition against Feidlim and sacked Roscommon before peace was concluded.<sup>82</sup> In August 1261 Feidlim asked the king for restitution for the losses which Walter de Burgh had caused in Connacht. He had done damage to the land of Tyrmane and “the cantred in which lie the king’s castles and those of Edward the king’s son.” Besides this, Walter had burned churches, killed nuns and clerks. Feidlim asks the king to make Walter, through the justiciar, pay for the damage he has done. In this letter, Feidlim reminded the king that he always had been a loyal subject:

“For no promise made to him [i.e. Feidlim] by the Irish had he receded, or would he recede from the K[ing]’s service.”<sup>83</sup>

In 1262 again an army was raised against Feidlim and Aed. This time, the army included not only Walter de Burgh but justiciar Richard de la Rochelle as well. After they had plundered, peace was concluded. In fact, Aed slept in the same bed as Walter and was ‘happy and cheerful.’ The Anglo-Normans also marked out the site of a castle at Roscommon. Feidlim had to pay a large fine for the peace established in 1262/3 with Henry III in consequence of the revolt of Aed. But, from 1263 to the death of Aed, the kings of Connacht seem to have paid very little rent, if at all, to the king of England.<sup>84</sup> The peace did not last very long: Walter attacked again in 1263.<sup>85</sup>

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Somewhere between 10 August and 30 September 1263, king Hakon, who was in the Hebrides at the time, received messages from Ireland,

“to the effect that the Irish offered to place themselves under his power, if he would rid them of the trouble to which the English men had subjected them; because [the English] then occupied all the best places by the sea.”<sup>86</sup>

Earlier, Hakon had sent Sigurd the Hebridean to Ireland, “in order to discover on what grounds

<sup>79</sup> Nic Ghiollamhaith, ‘The Ui Briain and the king of England’, 95.

<sup>80</sup> See footnote AC, 130-1.

<sup>81</sup> S. Duffy ed., *Atlas of Irish history* (Dublin 1997) 40.

<sup>82</sup> AC, 131-3; ALC, 433-5; AFM, 375-7; AU, 329; AI, 361; *Ann. Clon.*, 242-3. *Misc. Ir. Ann.*, 103, but ascribe the battle to the year 1261.

<sup>83</sup> *CDI 1252-1284*, no. 713.

<sup>84</sup> Orpen, ‘Richard de Burgh and the conquest of Connaught’, 145 -6.

<sup>85</sup> AC, 139-41; AFM, 385-9; ALC, 441-5; AU, 333.

<sup>86</sup> *Frisbok’s Hakon Hakon’s son’s saga* in: A.O. Anderson ed., *Early sources of Scottish history A.D. 500 to 1286 vol.2* (reprint; Stamford 1990) 634.



the Irish wished to call him thither."<sup>87</sup> Dubgall and Alan mac Ruaidri were among the Islesmen supporting Hakon. The invitation led to nothing, since Hakon was dissuaded by his own men to go to Ireland.<sup>88</sup> Perhaps these events are connected to Aed Ua Conchobair's marriage to Dubgall's daughter. The Irish annals called Aed son of Feidlim was called Aed na nGall, that is, Aed of the foreigners, almost certainly the Innse Gall, the foreigners of the Hebrides. The first time however, is not, as could be expected, in 1259, when he married a woman from the Isles, but in 1256.<sup>89</sup> Yet it is remarkable that on 15 July 1263 the king made Walter de Burgh earl of Ulster, after Ulster had been in the king's hands since 1242. Moreover, on 11 July 1263 Hakon left Norway and *Hakon's saga* says that Hakon sent people over to Dubgall to inform him that he was coming. In the same year, de Burgh raised an army against Feidlim. Also, when Hakon died after an illness in the Orkneys in December 1263, the Irish annals report his death.<sup>90</sup>

But the fact that Walter de Burgh was made earl of Ulster, according to Robin Frame, should be seen in the light of the help Walter gave to the king of England in Wales in 1263. He probably raised an army in Ireland for Edward and was in Wales only two days before the actual grant.<sup>91</sup>

In 1264 the Anglo-Normans and the Irish of Ireland met at Athlone. The parties included Feidlim and Aed Ua Conchobair, the justiciar and Walter de Burgh and peace was made once more.<sup>92</sup>

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Feidlim died early in 1265 (his son Aed wrote a letter to Henry 24 April 1265, styling himself as the king of Connacht<sup>93</sup>). His ecclesiastical activities had been restricted to the diocese of Elphin (in the heartland of his property) and had mainly consisted of the building of the Dominican priory of St. Mary's at Roscommon town in 1253, where he was buried. The church was consecrated in 1257 by the bishop of Elphin, Tomaltach Ua Conchobair, Feidlim's cousin.<sup>94</sup> In fact, many bishops of Elphin came from the Ua Conchobair family.

The *Annals of Connacht* report Feidlim's death with these words:

"Fedlim O Conchobair, the son of Mor Muman and Cathal Crobderg O Conchobair, King of Connacht, one who safeguarded and supported his own province and his friends on every side, who banished and plundered his foes in whatsoever place they were, a man full of honour and valour, of respect and importance in Ireland and in England, died after a victory of repentance and was buried in the monastery of the Preaching-friars at Roscommon, which he had presented to God and the Order."<sup>95</sup>

<sup>87</sup> *Ibidem*, 622.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibidem*, 634.

<sup>89</sup> *AC*, 119; *ALC*, 415. But perhaps this is an addition of later scribes.

<sup>90</sup> *Ann. Clon.*, 244; *AFM*, 389; *ALC*, 445; *AC*, 141; *AU*, 333.

<sup>91</sup> R. Frame, 'Ireland and the Baron's Wars', 164-5.

<sup>92</sup> *AC*, 143; *Ann. Clon.*, 244-5; *AFM*, 395; *ALC*, 447.

<sup>93</sup> *CDI 1252-1284*, no.775

<sup>94</sup> A.Gwyn and R.N. Hadock, *Medieval religious houses. Ireland. With an appendix to early sites* (London 1970) 229; *AC*, 125; *AFM*, 361; *ALC*, 425; *Ann. Clon.*, 241 report that the 'house for friars' was built this year. See also medieval religious houses II, 221 and 183 and *AC*, 97; *ALC*, 385 and *AFM*, 331.

<sup>95</sup> *AC*, 143. The *AFM*, 397; *ALC*, 451; *Ann. Clon.*, 246, as might be expected, all use very much the same words. Only the *Annals of Ulster* give a different report: "Feidhlimidh Ua Conchobuir, arch-king of Connacht, the



Aed now succeeded his father. It has already been pointed out that Aed acted as a co-ruler long before his father's death. To be sure, from 1249 on the annals report with increasing frequency raids by Aed. Nic Ghiollamhaith ascribes the disillusionment of the younger generation to, amongst others, alienation from the king. Moreover, the Anglo-Irish aristocracy had cut the Gaelic Irish off from political life.<sup>96</sup> Now that he was king he attacked Geraldine castles and lands.<sup>97</sup>

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Thomas O'Gorman convincingly argues that the figures on the slabs of the tomb of Feidlim Ua Conchobair are galloglasses. Both the *Annals of Boyle* and the *Annals of the Four Masters* mention the sculptured 'body guard of galloglasses' or 'gallowglasses or body guards' on Feidlim's tomb.<sup>98</sup> However, O'Gorman ascribed the slabs with warriors to a period long after Feidlim's death. He did so on the basis of the following arguments. He argues that the style and material of the slabs correspond not with Feidlim's tomb, but more with a niche opposite Feidlim's grave in which probably Tadc Ua Conchobair found his last resting place, exactly 200 years later, in 1465. Moreover, O'Gorman stated that the headdress, camail and shirts of mail in which the warriors on the slabs are depicted are to be ascribed to a later period than the thirteenth century. Finally, he argues that, since the first entry of galloglass warriors in the annals is in 1290, Feidlim could not have had galloglasses in his service. But, as we have seen above, the warriors who came from Scotland in 1259 with the marriage of Aed to the daughter of Dubgall mac Ruaidri were probably galloglasses. So, notwithstanding the fact that Feidlim theoretically may well have had galloglasses in his army, it is still not very probable that the slabs were initially designed for his tomb. Quite possibly, when the friary fell into ruin, they were displaced, moved from Tadc's grave to Feidlim's tomb.<sup>99</sup>

Feidlim Ua Conchobair's effigy is surely "battered by time and neglect"<sup>100</sup> as Orpen put it. Nevertheless, a lot is still discernible. O'Gorman identifies the string around the king's neck as being an ornament which might have been intended for a reliquary. Feidlim's right hand is clasped around it and his left hand is holding a sceptre. His feet rest against a lion. Around the head part of the crown may still be seen. In a footnote, O'Gorman describes the sculpture as "the work of an English, not of an Irish artist," since "authorities are undecided as to whether Irish kings wore crowns or not" and "the sceptre with a *fleur de lis* head can scarcely be regarded as an Irish emblem."<sup>101</sup> But perhaps all this should be seen in light of his father's introduction of Anglo-Norman ways which he continued.

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Gaidhel of most goodness that was in Ireland in his own period, died." *AU*, 335.

<sup>96</sup> Nic Ghiollamhaith, 'The Ui Briain and the king of England', 95.

<sup>97</sup> Orpen, *Ireland under the Normans*, 244-5.

<sup>98</sup> Quoted in T. O'Gorman, 'Some remarks on O'Connor's tomb at Roscommon', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* vol. 5 (1864-66), 546-554, there: 548.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibidem*, 549-54.

<sup>100</sup> Orpen, *Ireland under the Normans*, 244.

<sup>101</sup> O'Gorman, 'Some remarks on O'Connor's tomb at Roscommon', 547. At the time O'Gorman was writing, the tomb displayed only two galloglasses. However, he points out that in 1787 the front was composed of two slabs with each four figures on it. In the present day, eight figures are again seen in front of the tomb.

### Conclusion

The consulted secondary works depict Feidlim as “one of the most compliant kings.”<sup>102</sup> Nic Ghiollamhaith uttered this opinion by writing that Feidlim would prefer a peaceful compromise, he would fight only as a last resort.<sup>103</sup> Davies may have exaggerated slightly when writing that Feidlim and men like him “could hardly wait to make their submissions and professions of loyalty so that they could bask in the sun of their overlord’s favour and support.”<sup>104</sup> However, Davies does recognise that this was an attempt to secure themselves against their native and foreign enemies. Orpen thus summarises Feidlim’s reign:

“For thirty years Felim had been, on the whole, in difficult circumstances, personally loyal to the king of England. He had accepted the settlement of 1235, by which he held the five cantreds from the English Crown. He had visited King Henry in England and had aided him in his war in Wales. But in his later years he had found himself unable to curb the aggressive spirit of his warrior son, and he had seen in consequence one of his cantreds taken from him.”<sup>105</sup>

Feidlim is depicted as a person quite unable to move things his way. Throughout his reign alliances kept shifting, very few of them seem to have lasted for a long period of time unless, perhaps they concerned a marriage. There were long lasting hostilities like the feud between the various branches of the Ua Conchobair family though.

The primary sources give a more heroic picture of Feidlim, but they were hardly unbiased, being written in Connacht, where the Ua Conchobairs reigned for centuries after Feidlim’s death.

Feidlim seems to have been hardly reluctant to fight the Anglo-Norman barons, though he was not hesitant to make alliances with them either. He knew the English king could reduce his lands still further and therefore tried to remain on friendly terms with the king, at least from 1237 on. Later on, however, Feidlim found that, even when he was loyal, he was liable to lose his lands. Even magnates like de Burgh could find they forfeited their land.

While Feidlim was trying to hold on to whatever little was left of his lands by pacifying the English king and fighting the Anglo-Norman barons and native Irish opponents if he had to, his son tried to find compensation for the loss of lands in Breifne. It could be said that he saw the situation in a broader perspective, with the native Irish fighting the Anglo-Norman invaders.

<sup>102</sup> Duffy ed., *Atlas of Irish history*, 40.

<sup>103</sup> Nic Ghiollamhaith, ‘The Ui Briain and the king of England’, 97.

<sup>104</sup> R.R. Davies, *Domination and conquest. The experience of Ireland, Scotland and Wales 1100-1300* (Cambridge 1990) 48.

<sup>105</sup> Orpen, *Ireland under the Normans*, 244-5.

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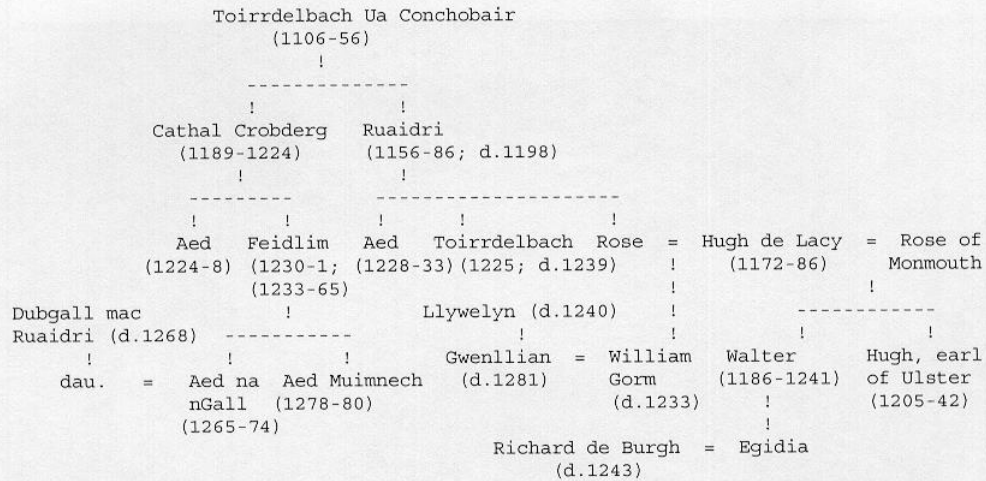
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# Appendix I<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Based on T.W. Moody, F.X. Martin and F.J. Byrne ed., *A new history of Ireland IX. Maps, genealogies, lists. A companion to Irish history part II* (Oxford 1984) 158, 170 and 173 and R. Frame, 'Aristocracies and the political configuration of the British Isles' in: R. R. Davies ed., *The British Isles 1100-1500. Comparisons, contrasts and connections* (Edinburgh 1988), 148.

## Appendix II

Feidlim Ua Conchobair's effigy in the Dominican Priory, Roscommon

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