The Definite Article in Irish Place-Names[1]

Gregory Toner
University of Wales, Aberystwyth

The broad chronology of the structures of Irish place-names is reasonably well-established, although much work still remains to be done. Dónall Mac Giolla Easpaig dates the beginning of the demise of compounds of the type NOUN + NOUN (e.g. *Eachdhroim* < *each* 'horse' + *droim* 'ridge, back') to about 400 AD,[2] from which time they were gradually replaced by the type NOUN + qualifying GENITIVE (e.g. *Ráth Droma* 'fort of [the] ridge'), and later still by what is now the much more numerous type NOUN + definite article + qualifying GENITIVE (e.g. *Léim an Fhia* 'the deer's leap').[3] Similarly, simplex names and names of the type NOUN + ADJECTIVE tend to occur without the definite article in the earlier period (e.g. *Caiseal* 'cashel', *Achadh Beag* 'little field') but with the definite article in later names (e.g. *An Eaglais* 'the church', *An Baile Meánach* 'the middle town(land)'), although a considerable number of early names adopted the definite article in the later period (e.g. *An Bhóinn*, Boyne). It is generally accepted, therefore, that the use of the definite article is a comparatively late

---

[2] D. Mac Giolla Easpaig, 'Noun and noun compounds in Irish place-names', *Études Celtiques*, 18 (1981), 151–63 (pp. 152 and 162). See, however, a caveat introduced by O. Padel, *Cornish Place-Name Elements*, English Place-Name Society 56–57 (Cambridge, 1985), pp. xv–xvi.

[3] Names of the type definite article + NOUN + definite article + qualifying GENITIVE occur sporadically in early Irish sources but such a formation is at variance with Modern Irish grammar and is now obsolete. In Modern Irish, where two nouns come together and the second is in the genitive the definite article is omitted before the first noun (e.g. *bun an tsléibhe* 'the foot of the mountain'). If the second noun is a proper name (e.g. *teach Sheáin* 'Seán's house'), then the article is omitted altogether.

innovation in Irish place-names. Of course, as with *An Bhóinn*, some archaic names have later adopted the definite article, so that not all names containing the article are necessarily later in origin. Conversely, a considerable body of names do not contain the definite article but were very probably formed in the later period.   The name of the parish of Maghera in Co. Derry, for example, derives from Irish *Machaire Rátha* 'plain of the fort', but this form is documented only from the beginning of the seventeenth century. Prior to this date the church was known as *Ráth Lúraigh*. [4] Because *Machaire Rátha* contains a re-used name (*Ráth [Lúraigh]*) the definite article is not required.[5] This re-use of established names has probably given rise to a large number of formations of this type, so that clearly the absence of the definite article is no guarantee of the antiquity of any given name.

Although NOUN + definite article + qualifying GENITIVE is probably now the most common type of place-name in Irish, surprisingly little has been written about it, and there is still a great deal to be learnt. Most Irish grammars offer some treatment of the definite article, but the majority of scholarly work on the subject has focused on the Celtic and Indo-European roots of its different forms.[6] Place-names rarely feature in such discussions, but some general observations have been made. Thurneysen, for example, observes that the article is usually omitted before proper names in Old

---

[4] G. Toner, *Place-Names of Northern Ireland* vol. 5: Co. Derry I (Belfast, 1996), pp. 168–70. The form *Machaire Rátha* may, of course, be much older than its earliest documented form. There is some indication that it was originally applied to the church lands in the parish and so later by extension to the church and parish. Thus, the two names *Ráth Lúraigh* and *Machaire Rátha* could have existed side by side, the former referring to the church and parish, and the latter initially to the church lands.

[5] See note 3 above.

[6] For the most recent account of the origin of the Irish definite article see P. Schrijver, *Studies in the History of Celtic Pronouns and Particles*, Maynooth Studies in Celtic Linguistics II (Maynooth, 1997), pp. 44–46. See also R. Thurneysen, *A Grammar of Old Irish* (Dublin, 1946), pp. 295–99. For analyses of the syntax of the article see S. Ó Searcaigh, 'Some uses and omissions of the article in Irish', *Journal of Celtic Studies*, 1 (1950), 239–48; S. Ó Gealbháin, 'The double article and related features of genitive syntax in Old Irish and Middle Welsh', *Celtica*, 22 (1991), 119–44; G. Stockman, *Cruinneas Gramadaí agus Corrfhocal Eile* (Belfast, 1996), pp. 103–05.

Irish.[7] The Royal Irish Academy's *Contributions to a Dictionary of the Irish Language* notes that the article is not normally used in place-names in the Old Irish period (*c.*700–*c.*900 AD), but that it becomes more common in Middle Irish (*c.*900–*c.*1200 AD), particularly before nouns in the genitive, adding however that it continues to be omitted more often than included.[8] Ó Searcaigh treats only briefly of place-names in his more general examination of the definite article in Irish, noting that in 'early place-names its use seems to have been much more restricted than in place-names of a later date'.[9]

An early date for the appearance of the article in Irish place-names was envisaged by Pokorny who proposed that the element *da* in several Irish place-names is not the numeral *da/dá* 'two' as had been supposed, but rather a byform of the genitive plural of the definite article **da < inda* which normally develops into *na* via *inna* in late Old Irish.[10] Thurneysen notes that medial *nd* had become *nn* by the Old Irish period,[11] so that if Pokorny were correct then we would have to assume that names of the type NOUN + definite article + qualifying GENITIVE were being formed perhaps as early as the seventh century.[12] However, Pokorny's arguments have been convincingly refuted by Flanagan and they will not be further considered here.[13]

---

[7] Thurneysen, *A Grammar of Old Irish*, p. 296.

[8] *Dictionary of the Irish Language: Compact Edition* (Dublin, 1983), p. 397:187.14–56.

[9] Ó Searcaigh 'Some uses', pp. 247–48. He further observes (*ibid.*, p. 247) that the article is used with the names of rivers (e.g. *An Bhóinn* 'the Boyne', *An tSionainn* 'the Shannon', *An Éirne* 'the Erne', but that it is omitted after many prepositions (e.g. *Ó Bhóinn go hÉirne* 'from the Boyne to the Erne').

[10] J. Pokorny, '*Da-* in irischen Ortsnamen', *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie*, 14 (1923), 270–71.

[11] Thurneysen, *A Grammar of Old Irish*, p. 293.

[12] A few instances of archaic *-nd-* are still preserved in early Old Irish, allowing us to postulate a date as late as the eighth century for such forms. See, for example, *inda* in the hand of the main glossator in the Würzburg glosses (mid-eighth century), *dundaib* in the Cambrai Homily (763 x 780), and *dendibh* (*sic*) in the Annals of Ulster *s.a.* 727 (726) (cited Thurneysen, *A Grammar of Old Irish*, p. 293).

[13] D. Flanagan, 'A reappraisal of *da* in Irish place-names, I', *Bulletin of the Ulster Place-Name Society*, ser. 2 vol. 3 (1980–81), 71–73. Unfortunately, part 2 of the article, which was due to be published in vol. 4 of the journal, never appeared.

The most comprehensive treatment of the subject to date has been
supplied by Deirdre Flanagan in an earlier number of this journal.[14] From
an examination of several early texts she concludes that names of the type
NOUN + article + defining GENITIVE first begin to appear in very small
numbers in the ninth century, but only become really common in the
eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth centuries.[15] A further examination of the
evidence relating to names of the type article + NOUN produced a similar
profile, suggesting to Flanagan that there was a connection between the two
name types.[16]

Several problems confront anyone attempting to trace the development
of a particular naming feature during the early medieval period, most
notably the almost complete lack of contemporary MSS in Irish for the
critical period of the eighth, ninth and tenth centuries, and the retrospective
nature of what remains. Apart from a considerable amount of annalistic
material, which I shall discuss shortly, Flanagan's study of the article was
based on the Patrician material in the early ninth-century Book of Armagh
and on *Bethu Pátraic*, a late ninth- or tenth-century life of St. Patrick which
was still in the process of revision in the eleventh century.[17] She found no
instances of names of the type NOUN + definite article + qualifying
GENITIVE in the Book of Armagh material, and a low incidence in *Bethu
Pátraic*.[18] The problem with this type of material is that it is largely
retrospective, and as such tends to favour older names and ignore more
recent innovations. The Book of Armagh is an early ninth-century MS, but
much of the material it contains dates from a much earlier period, some

---

Pokorny's analysis has recently been applied to Scottish place-names by R. Ó
Maolalaigh, 'Place-names as a resource for the historical linguist', in *The Uses of
Place-Names*, edited by S. Taylor (Edinburgh, 1998), pp. 12–53 (p. 20) but without
reference to Flanagan's arguments.

[14] D. Flanagan, 'Place-names in early Irish documentation: structure and
composition', *Nomina*, 4 (1980), 41–45.

[15] *ibid*., p. 41.

[16] *ibid*.

[17] See F. Mac Donncha, 'Dáta *Vita Tripartita Sancti Patricii*', *Éigse*, 18 (1980–81),
125–42; 19 (1982–83), 354–72 (p. 370); G. Mac Eoin, 'The dating of Middle Irish
texts', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 68 (1982 [1983]), 109–37 (pp. 127–34);
K. Jackson, 'The date of the Tripartite Life of St. Patrick', *Zeitschrift für Celtische
Philologie*, 41 (1986), 5–45.

[18] Flanagan, 'Place-names in early Irish documentation', p. 41.

indeed as early as the second half of the seventh century. More importantly, it is primarily concerned with the foundation of churches and events of the preceding centuries, and so with names which were already well-established by the seventh century and certainly by the ninth. Thus, we should not look to these texts for examples of innovations in naming in the seventh, eighth and ninth centuries. If the article was coming to the fore during this period, then we should not expect to find much evidence of it here.[19] Only the latest of them, *Bethu Pátraic*, provides any such evidence.

The annals promise to provide far better evidence for new trends in naming. Although they too are historical, they were at least maintained contemporaneously from as early as the mid-sixth century.[20] Unfortunately, no copies have survived from that date, and there can be no doubt that the extant texts were frequently revised and interpolated. The earliest collection of Irish annals is the Annals of Inisfallen which is preserved in MS Rawlinson B.503 in the Bodleian Library, Oxford. Approximately half of the MS, down to the middle of the year 1092, is the work of a single scribe, after which the work was continued by a series of thirty-eight or thirty-nine annalists whose entries are more or less contemporary with the time of writing.[21] The primary MS of the Annals of Ulster (Trinity College, Dublin, MS H.1.8 (1282)) was written by Ruaidhrí Ó Luinín as far as the year 1489, after which the text was continued by two other scribes down to 1504 and probably to 1510.[22] The basic text has received numerous interpolations

---

[19] For largely the same reasons, similar results are to be expected from the martyrologies. For example, the original portions of the Martyrology of Óengus, which Ó Riain dates to 828 x 833, contains no examples of names containing the definite article (P. Ó Riain 'The Tallaght martyrologies, redated', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies*, 20 (Winter 1990), 21–38 (p. 38); but see argument for earlier dating in L. Breatnach, 'Poets and poetry', in *Progress in Medieval Irish Studies*, edited by K. McCone and K. Simms (Maynooth, 1996), pp. 65–77 (pp. 74–75).

[20] See D. Dumville, 'Latin and Irish in the Annals of Ulster, A.D. 431–1050', in *Ireland in Early Medieval Europe*, edited by D. Whitelock *et al*. (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 320–41 (p. 322) for brief summary of the positions adopted by modern scholars.

[21] *The Annals of Inisfallen*, edited by S. Mac Airt (Dublin, 1951), pp. xiii and xxviii.

[22] *The Annals of Ulster* (vol. 1 to 1131 AD), edited by S. Mac Airt and G. Mac Niocaill (Dublin, 1983), p. ix.

and glosses by four scribes identified as H1, H2, H3, and H4.[23] Ó Luinín, who died in 1528, also transcribed the annals in Rawlinson B.489 in the Bodleian Library, Oxford which are demonstrably a copy of H.1.8,[24] and so we are essentially dependent on a single late MS for the Annals of Ulster.[25]

   Until the appearance of the edition of the Annals of Ulster by Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill, there was no way of distinguishing the different hands at work on the text without reference to the MS. Although this problem has now been solved, we still have to negotiate the perils of earlier interpolations and revisions. Of these there can be no doubt. Kathleen Hughes described the earlier version of the Annals of Ulster as a 'heavily interpolated text',[26] and David Dumville draws our attention to the appearance of obviously retrospective entries in the original text such as the announcement of the birth of Brian son of Cennéitig in 941.[27] Thus, the problem for the toponymist (and the historian) is one of distinguishing between the original contemporary material and later additions. Flanagan did not attempt to make any such distinction and appears to have remained sceptical about the earliest occurrences of the article.[28] She states, for example, that 'while names of the structure "Noun governing gen. of article and noun" are instanced as early as the ninth century, it is from the eleventh century onwards that there is a noticeable increase in the frequency of usage', and that instances of the formation article + NOUN are 'not significantly represented' in the early material.[29] Indeed, it is only proper to

---

[23] *ibid.*, p. viii.

[24] *ibid.*, pp. viii and ix.

[25] Little is as yet known about Ó Luinín's work on the annals. Even the most basic questions about the later history of the annals have yet to be answered. Dumville, for example, asks whether Ó Luinín had before him a single text which he copied out and augmented from other sources, or whether he was himself the compiler, conflating two or more distinct chronicles (D. Dumville, 'On editing and translating medieval Irish chronicles: the Annals of Ulster', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies*, 10 (1985), 67–86 (p. 82)).

[26] K. Hughes, *Early Christian Ireland: Introduction to the Sources* (London, 1972), p. 128.

[27] Dumville, 'On editing', p. 85.

[28] It is perhaps significant in this context that the edition by Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill, which was the first to distinguish between the different hands of the MS, did not appear until 1983, three years after the publication of Flanagan's article.

[29] Flanagan, 'Place-names in early Irish documentation', p. 41.   As we shall see,

remain suspicious of this earlier date until the relevant entries can be authenticated. It is my intention here to examine contemporary documents to determine the earliest dateable forms, and so to establish a likely date for the emergence of the structure.

That the formation existed by the end of the eleventh century is hardly in doubt. The Annals of Inisfallen contain references in contemporary hands to the deaths of 'the king of Na Renna' and 'Dubthach Ua Sochainn, learned priest of In Fherta' in Armagh under the years 1094 and 1095 respectively,[30] and the principal scribe, whose contribution ceases in 1092, includes a considerable number of names containing the definite article. I have examined all the names considered here to determine if they are real names rather than common nouns applied to some feature or other (see accompanying notes). Although the status of a small number of the references cited here is uncertain, the majority are indisputably proper names. Thus, we can be certain that the article had begun to appear in place-names by 1092.

(598) *Cath **Rátha in Drúad** 7 cath Aird Sendaim*. 'The battle of Ráith in Druad and the battle of Ard Sendaim.'[31]
(870) *Quies Suarlich **ind Ednain**, abb Cluana Iraird*. 'Repose of Suairlech of In tEidnén, abbot of Cluain Iraird.'[32]

---

the origin of the formation is no later than the ninth century. The fact that it remained uncommon in documentation until the eleventh century is in part due to the nature of our documentation, and in part to the cumulative effect of the gradual growth of new name-types—it is only natural that examples should be rare initially (being confined primarily to new names), but that they should gradually become more common as the stock of such names is built up.

[30] '*rí na Rend*', *The Annals of Inisfallen*, edited by Mac Airt *s.a.* 1094.5; '*suiacard na Ferta*', *ibid., s.a.* 1095.13.

[31] Unidentified. Placed in Scotland (*Annals of Ulster*, index) or in Munster (*Annals of Inisfallen*, edited by Mac Airt, index).

[32] Apparently an unidentified church near Duleek, Co. Meath (*The Martyrology of Tallaght*, edited by R. I. Best and H. J. Lawlor (London, 1931), index; *Félire Húi Gormáin: the Martyrology of Gorman*, edited by W. Stokes (London, 1895), index). Cf. '*Soairlech isind Ednean*' (*Martyrology of Tallaght,* edited by Best and Lawlor, p. 35 April 23) and the various glosses in *Félire Húi Gormáin,* edited by Stokes, p. 82 (April 23: gl. 2 '*ind Edhnen 7 ab Linne Duachaille*; gl. 3 *ind Eidhnein*; gl. 4 *ind Eidhnéin*). It literally means 'the ivy place' (from *eiden(n)* 'ivy' +

(881) *Quies Aeda **ind Aileóin**, epscoip 7 anmchara Herend*. 'Repose of Aed of In tAilén, bishop and confessor of Ireland.'[33]

(907) *Sluaged Muman la Cormacc mc. Cuilennáin 7 la Flaithbertach macc nInmaineáin co m**Mag na Curre** co tucsat giallu Hua Neill*... 'A Munster hosting [led] by Cormac...[went] to Mag na Cuirre, and they took the hostages of Uí Néill...'[34]

(973.2) *Quies Cinaeda **in Durthaige**, ánchara Herend, i Cluain Ferta Brenainn*. 'Repose of Cinaed of In Durthach, anchorite of Ireland, in Cluain Ferta Brénainn.'[35]

(986.4) *Indred dano Coluim Cille do Gallaib, 7 **na Inse** do fhásugud doib, 7 epscop Iae do marbad doib*. 'Í Coluim Cille was plundered by foreigners, and the Isles (*na hInse*) were devastated by them, and they slew the bishop of Í.'[36]

(1018.3) *Gormgal **ind Ardailéoin** quieuit* 'Gormgal of in tArdailén rested'.[37]

(1031.6) *Mc. Gillai Phatraicc hi Mumain coro oirg **Dún na Sciach***... 'Gilla Pátraic's son [went] into Mumu, plundered Dún na Sciath...'[38]

---

diminutive suffix *-én*). Its status as a proper name seems to be confirmed by the reference in the Martyrology of Tallaght (above) which may be translated 'S. from Int Ednén'.

[33] Unidentified. Cf. '*Aedh Oiléin*' (*The Martyrology of Donegal: a Calendar of the Saints of Ireland*, edited by J. H. Todd and W. Reeves, and translated by J. O'Donovan (Dublin, 1864), p. 96 April 7) which may suggest that it is a name which originally occurred without the article.

[34] Unidentified. However, the context here suggests that it is a proper name.

[35] Unidentified. There are a couple of references to places called *Daurthech/Durthach* in E. Hogan, *Onomasticon Goedelicum* (Dublin, 1910), pp. 338 and 390 but none with the article and none referring to this instance. The word literally means 'oak-house' but it usually denotes 'an oratory, prayer-house' (*Dictionary of the Irish Language*, *s.v. dairthech*). This example may not be a proper name.

[36] = *Inse Gall* (Hebrides) but *inse* may simply mean 'islands' here.

[37] = High Island, par. Omey, barony of Ballynahinch, Co. Galway (*The Annals of Inisfallen*, edited by Mac Airt, index; Hogan, *Onomasticon Goedelicum*, p. 36). Cf. 'In Martyrologio Casselensi habentur sequentes 1017 Gormgal a nAird Oilén, 5 Aug' from Bibliothèque Royale Brussels 5100–4 f. 229a, cited *Félire Húi Gormáin,* edited by Stokes, p. xvii.

[38] = Donaskeagh, NE of Tipperary town (*The Annals of Inisfallen*, edited by Mac

(1035.2) *...7 a n-ár do chor dosom* **imon Soicc** *7* **imon Sinaind**. 'inflicting a slaughter upon them round the Soc (Suck) and the Sinann (Shannon).'[39]
(1058.4) *Tairdelbach Hua Briain do thabairt m. Maíl na mBó 7 Laigen 7 Osraige 7 Gall laiss do insaigid ar mc. mBriain coro loiscset ermór* **na Machare** *co Luimnech...* 'Tairdelbach Ua Briain brought the son of Mael na mBó, and the Laigin, Osraige, and foreigners with him to attack Brian's son, and they burned the greater part of In Machaire as far as Luimnech.'[40]
(1088.2) *Longges la Diarmait Hu mBriain timchell coro chrechsat Cluain Huama 7 co rucsat minna Barre a* **Cill na Clerech***...* 'Diarmait Ua Briain brought a naval force on a circuit, and they plundered Cluain Uama and bore off the relics of Barre from Cell na Clérech...'[41]
(1089.3) *Sluaged la Muirchertach Hua mBriain hi Connachta co slaided* **ind Ruadbethech** *lais...* 'A hosting by Muirchertach Ua Briain into Connachta, and he plundered the Ruadbethech...'[42]

Airt, index). See also *ibid. s.a.* 1095.13 and 1168.1.
[39] = the rivers Suck (Co. Roscommon) and the Shannon. The latter name occurs without the article in *The Annals of Inisfallen*, edited by Mac Airt, in the following entries: *for Sinaind* (963, 1001.5); *ar Sinaind* (1065.4); *o Shinaind co Ferd[r]uim* (1199.5); *tar sSinainn* (1281.7); *do Shinaind* (1311.3) but with the article in *isint [Sh]inaind* (1171.6). The use of the article with river-names seems particularly complex. Ó Searcaigh ('Some uses', p. 247) notes that although the article is commonly used with names of rivers, it is frequently omitted after many prepositions (including *tar, go, ar*) but is retained after others, particularly when there is motion, and especially with *i* and *fa*.
[40] Probably *Machaire Mór Muman*, a plain in NE Limerick and W. Tipperary (*The Annals of Inisfallen*, edited by Mac Airt, index) for which see *ibid.*, *s.a.* 1062.6 and 1202.2.
[41] = Kilnaglery, par. Carrigaline, Co. Cork (Hogan, *Onomasticon Goedelicum*, p. 206; *The Annals of Inisfallen*, edited by Mac Airt, index).
[42] Mac Airt translates '...and he felled the Ruadbethach' and describes *in Ruadbethach* in the index as 'a sacred tree at Roevehagh, in par. of Killeely, bar. of Dunkellin, Co. Galway' (*The Annals of Inisfallen*, edited by Mac Airt, index). However, the verb *slaidid* connotes 'strikes, slays; plunders, destroys' and the second element in the place-name, *beithech*, denotes 'birch-land, grove of birch' rather than a single birch tree (*beith(e)*) (see *Dictionary of the Irish Language*, svv. *slaidid, 1 beithech, beithe*). We appear, therefore, to have a locational name containing the article.

Grabowski and Dumville have demonstrated that the Annals of Ulster and a group of Clonmacnoise-based annals including the Annals of Inisfallen are based on a common source up until 911 after which they diverge.[43] Thus, any entries held in common between the two sets of annals can be assigned to the common ancestor, and so it follows that any names which they hold in common must belong to the period before 911. The following table lists names containing the definite article which occur in the Annals of Ulster down to 911 together with any parallels in the other sets of annals:[44]

	Annals of Ulster	*Annals of Inisfallen*	*AT/CS*[45]
563.1	inna Lee		*AT* 563.2, *CS* 563
586.1	oc Leim ind Eich		*AT* 586.1, *CS* 585
596.1	Bellum Ratho in Druadh	598	*AT* 596.1
683.5	na Craeibhe (g.)		*AT* 683.6, *CS* 679
731.5	in Murbuilgg		*AT* 731.4
747.12	ind Roés		*AT* 747.13
808.4	co rici Thir in Oenaigh		
810.1	ind Airecuil Do-Ciaroc (g.)		
820.2	do Druim ind Eich		
837.4	oc Inbiur na mBarc		*CS* 837
838.3	ind Airicuil		

[43] K. Grabowski and D. Dumville, *Chronicles and Annals of Medieval Ireland and Wales* (Woodbridge, 1984), p. 93. See also Hughes, *Early Christian Ireland*, where it is argued that the Annals of Ulster and the Annals of Tigernach diverge at 913 (p. 107), and that the Annals of Ulster and the Annals of Inisfallen diverge, although only briefly, after 905 (p. 109).

[44] I omit here any names in a later hand in the Annals of Ulster.

[45] AT = *Annals of Tigernach* edited by CELT (http://www.ucc.ie/celt/) from 'The annals of Tigernach', edited by W. Stokes, *Revue Celtique*, 16 (1895), 374–419; 17 (1896), 6–33, 116–263, 337–420; 18 (1897), 9–59, 150–303, 374–91. CS = *Chronicon Scotorum,* edited by W. Hennessy (London, 1886).

Do-Shenchiarocc (g.)		

The Annals of Inisfallen are recognised as a much abbreviated form of the original early tenth-century text, and not surprisingly they provide few parallels to the text of the Annals of Ulster of interest to us in this context. The Annals of Tigernach, however, are much more complete, and show several significant parallels with the Annals of Ulster. Unfortunately, they break off after the entry for the year 766 and resume again only in 975, but much of the lost material can be reconstructed by comparison with the closely-related *Chronicon Scottorum*.[46]

The table above points to a number of potential instances of the article occurring in place-names at least by 911 if not earlier, and these must now be examined to determine whether or not they are proper names. We can immediately dismiss the form *Dal Riati in Murbuilgg* 'Dál Ríata of In Murbolg' (*s.a.* 731.5) as it is almost certainly a scribal error. References to Dál Riata abound, but Dál Riata in Murbuilg is otherwise unknown to me. No instances are cited in Hogan's *Onomasticon Goedelicum*[47] or by Mac Gabhann in his discussion of the name.[48] The parallel entry in the Annals of Tigernach has *i m-Murbulg* 'in Murbolg',[49] and this appears to be the correct reading. The remaining forms do contain the definite article:

(563.1) *Genus Eugain 7 Conaill mercede conducti* **inna Lee** *7 Airde Eolargg*. 'Cenél nEógain and Cenél Conaill were hired, being given the Lee and Ard Eolarg as recompense.' This is certainly a name, the meaning of which has long since been obscure.[50] It occurs elsewhere in early

---

[46] Dumville views *Chronicon Scottorum* and the Annals of Tigernach as abstracts of a fuller text, but notes that the differences between the two texts are considerable (Grabowski and Dumville, *Chronicles and Annals*, pp. 155–83 and especially 182). Cf. Hughes, *Early Christian Ireland*, pp. 106–08 who argued that *Chronicon Scottorum* was an abridgement of the Annals of Tigernach.

[47] See note 35 above.

[48] F. Mac Gabhann, *The Place-Names of Northern Ireland* vol. 7: County Antrim II (Belfast, 1997), pp. 198–99.

[49] *Annals of Tigernach*, *s.a.* 731.4.

[50] See *Dictionary of the Irish Language*, *s.v.* 1 *lee*.

material, for example, *isnalLei* in the Irish life of St. Patrick (*Bethu Pátraic*) and *exiit in Ardd Eolorgg et ailgi et Lee Benndrigi* in Tírechán[51] (the absence of the article in the latter is not significant: we would not expect to see the article at any stage in the history of this name because it is qualified by a definite noun in the genitive).

(**586.1**) *Cummaene m. Colmain 7 Cummaene m. Libraen filii Ilannon m. Cerbaill occiderunt eum consilio Colmain .i. oc* **Leim ind Eich**. '...i.e. at Léim ind Eich'. Unidentified. In Leinster (*Annals of Ulster*, index).[52] Appears from context to be a proper name.

(**596.1**) *Bellum* **Ratho in Druadh**. 'The battle of Ráith in Druad'. See note 31 above.

(**683.5**) *Dormitatio Airmedaigh* **na Craeibhe**. 'The falling asleep of Airmedach of In Chraeb.' Clearly a shortened form of *Cráeb Lasri*, a monastery near Clonmacnoise. Cf. '*Airmidach abb Craibi Lasri*' (*Martyrology of Tallaght,* edited by Best and Lawlor, p. 3, Jan.#1) and Hogan, *Onomasticon Goedelicum*, p. 299, but see discussion of *Ros Comáin* in next entry on the possibility of this instance being a common noun.

(**747.12**) *Pausatio Comani relegiosi, .i.* **ind Roés**, *7 quies Fir da Crich abbatis Dairinse.* 'Repose of the pious Comán i.e. of In Ros, and repose of Fer dá Crích, abbot of Dairinis.' Evidently the monastery of Ros Comáin (Roscommon).[53] See also '*Commani in Rois*',[54] and *Aedan Inorois* (var. *ind Rois*) which should probably be read *Aedan ind Rois* with the other MSS.[55] This would appear to be the same Áedán whose death as abbot of Roscommon is recorded in the annals *s.a.* 782.[56] It might be argued that

---

[51] *The Tripartite Life of St. Patrick*, edited by W. Stokes, 2 vols (London, 1887), I, 160; *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh*, edited by L. Bieler (Dublin, 1979), p. 160.27–28.

[52] There is no index to *Annals of Ulster*, edited by Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill, so all references to the index are to *Annála Uladh: Annals of Ulster; Otherwise Annála Senait, Annals of Senait,* edited by W. Hennessy and B. MacCarthy (Dublin, 1887–1901), IV.

[53] It occurs as gen. *in Rois* in *Annals of Tigernach s.a.* 747.13.

[54] *Martyrology of Tallaght*, edited by Best and Lawlor, p. 1, Dec. 26.

[55] *Corpus Genealogiarum Sanctorum Hiberniae*, edited by P. Ó Riain (Dublin, 1985), 707.4 and see note on p. 218. Ó Riain thinks this section is most probably derived from MS R which has the form *ind Rois* (*ibid*., pp. 217–18).

[56] *Qu[i]es Aeda, abb Ruis Chommain* (*The Annals of Inisfallen*, edited by Mac Airt,

ind Roés here is not a proper name but a common noun used as an epithet signifying 'of the wood/wooded height/promontory', but this seems unlikely given the use of the same shortened form in association with Áedán.

(837.4) *Bellum re genntibh oc* **Inbiur na mBarc** *for Hu Neill o Shinaind co muir...* 'The heathens won a battle at Inber na mBárc against the Uí Néill from the Sinann (Shannon) to the sea...' Unidentified, but probably on Shannon (*Annals of Ulster*, index). Nevertheless, it appears from the context to be a proper name.

This demonstrates beyond reasonable doubt that the article was being used in place-names by 911. However, using linguistic evidence, we can push this date back into the first half of the ninth century. It should be noted that while some entries may go back to the mid-sixth century, there is no sure way of distinguishing these from retrospective entries which occur alongside them. Ó Máille notes that in the very early period, the language is comparatively late, in some cases as recent as the ninth century.[57] Towards the end of the sixth century, however, the language becomes older (although not necessarily contemporary) and old and late forms exist side by side in the seventh century. Only in the last few years of the seventh century does the language of consecutive entries become contemporary.[58] Thus, forms with the article may well be later—and at least one instance certainly is—than the year under which they appear. That is not to say, of course, that a late form necessarily indicates a late entry or even a late name. Ó Máille notes that there has been some modernisation of the text by a Middle Irish scribe and in particular that he modernised names with which he was familiar while leaving unfamiliar names unchanged.[59]

The definite article underwent some interesting phonological changes during the Old and Middle Irish periods, but most of these are too late to add to what we already know from our examination of the annals. For example, the usual form of the article in the gen. sing. masc. in Old Irish

---

s.a. 782); *Aedhan abbas Roiss Commain* (*Annals of Ulster*, edited by Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill, *s.a.* 782.1).

[57] T. Ó Máille, *The Language of the Annals of Ulster* (Manchester, 1910), p. 8.

[58] *ibid.*

[59] *ibid.*, p. 3.

was *in*, but the original final *-d* was retained before vowels and lenited *f, r, l,* and *n*.[60] This situation was maintained well into the Middle Irish period, although the distinction had certainly been abandoned by the twelfth century.[61] The latest occurrences of *ind* before a vowel in the Annals of Ulster is at 1173,[62] and the last occurrence before *r* or *l* is in 1025.[63] We find examples of the correct use of *ind* before vowels in the names *Leim ind Eich* (586.1)[64] and *Druim ind Eich* (820.2), and before *r* in gen. *ind Roés* (747.12).[65] Clearly, the form of the article in these names does not allow us to push the date of the article back beyond 911, the date at which the Annals of Ulster and the Clonmacnoise group of annals separated.[66]

---

[60] Thurneysen, *A Grammar Of Old Irish*, p. 294.

[61] L. Breatnach, 'An Mheán-Ghaeilge', in *Stair na Gaeilge in Ómós do Pádraig Ó Fiannachta*, edited by K. McCone *et al.* (Maigh Nuad, 1994), pp. 221–333 (p. 259).

[62] Ó Máille's last recorded instance is at 1038 (*recte* 1039), but there are much later instances continuing into the twelfth century (1042.3, 1044.4, 1061.1, 1070.6, 1070.14, 1074.1, 1077.7, 1088.1, 1121.1, 1165.10, 1173.2).

[63] *Annals of Ulster*, edited by Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill *s.a.* 1025.5. Ó Máille's latest example of this feature at 963 (*recte* 964) is incorrect (*The Language*, p. 123). There is also a single occurrence of *ind* before *n* at 1090.1, although there are no other examples anywhere in the Annals of Ulster.

[64] The first element in *Léim ind Eich* was a neuter *n*-stem in Old Irish. Neuter *n*-stems had two dative singular forms, one identical to the nom. sg. (*léim*) and a more common longer form ending in *-imm* which was created, according to McCone, sometime before the Old Irish period (K. McCone, 'An tSeán-Ghaeilge agus a réamhstair', in *Stair na Gaeilge in Ómós do Pádraig Ó Fiannachta*, edited by McCone *et al.*, pp. 61–219 (p. 106)). The ending had been lost by the Early Modern Irish period (*c.*1200–*c.*1600) where it is confined to certain deliberate archaisms (D. McManus, 'An Nua-Ghaeilge Chlasaiceach', in *Stair na Gaeilge* edited by McCone *et al.*, pp. 335–445 (p. 379)), but the shorter dative here is hardly likely to belong to that period on account of the form of the article. Nevertheless, both long and short forms appear to have been used throughout the Old and Middle Irish periods, and so this feature adds nothing to our knowledge of the date of the name.

[65] See also gen. *ind Airecuil Do-Ciaroc s.a.* 810.1; *ind Airicuil Do enchiarocc s.a.* 838.3.

[66] In any case, both *Leim ind Eich* and gen. *ind Roés* find parallels in the Clonmacnoise group and were therefore in the parent annals. The loss of the *-d* of the article in the form *Tir in Oenaigh* (*s.a.* 808.4), whose inclusion in the parent annals is not confirmed by the Clonmacnoise annals, may suggest a later date for

Similarly, there is nothing remarkable about the article in gen. *Ratho in Druad* (596.1) as it would have assumed this form in both the Old and Middle Irish periods.[67]

The form *ind Roés* is peculiar, and although the form of the article is of no help in confirming an early date for the name, the form of the generic may suggest at least a ninth-century date. Ó Máille cites a number of examples of *oe* for *ói*, all occurring in the adjective *mór* 'big' ranging in date from the fifth century to the mid-ninth.[68] There are comparable examples with similar dates of *áe* for *ái*, mostly in the diminutive suffix *-án* (gen. sg. *-áin*) but also one example before palatal *rd* in gen. sg. *Aerdd Machae*.[69] Ó Máille argues that when the older diphthong *ái* was modernised to *ae*, the original digraphs in these words (*ái*) were mistakenly modernised in the same fashion.[70] However, this is inherently implausible in most of the examples where the phonetic value can have been only too apparent. It is far more likely that it is simply an alternative method of representing the glide before a following palatal consonant, perhaps conditioned by certain phonetic environments. If that is the case, then gen. sg. *ind Roés* is probably no later than the mid-ninth century.[71]

---

this form.

[67] The first element in this name retains original final unstressed *-o* which had fallen together with *-a* in the early eighth century, but *-o* continued to appear in final position into the Middle Irish period (K. McCone, *Towards a Relative Chronology of Ancient and Medieval Celtic Sound Change*, Maynooth Studies in Celtic Linguistics I (Maynooth, 1996), p. 142). The last instance of final, unstressed *o* in the genitive in the Annals of Ulster occurs in 979, so that the form is hardly any later than this date, but we already know that the name existed by 911.

[68] Ó Máille, *Language of the Annals of Ulster*, p. 23. He takes this example as a diphthong (*ibid*., p. 35) and dismisses a further possible example, gen. *Broen*.

[69] *ibid*., pp. 21–22.

[70] *ibid*., p. 21.

[71] We have seen that the name appears also in the early ninth-century Martyrology of Tallaght (see p. 17 above), but this text too has suffered various expansions so that not all the entries are original. Ó Riain notes that the Martyrology of Óengus used the Martyrology of Tallaght 'very probably as its only source', so that where there is agreement between the two texts we can be confident that the entry in question belonged to the *urtext* of the Martyrology of Tallaght (Ó Riain, 'The Tallaght martyrologies' (note 19 above), p. 22). However, there is no entry for *Commán* in the Martyrology of Óengus, so we cannot be sure that there was such an

The shortening of gen. sg. fem. and gen. pl. *inna* to *na* occurred during the Old Irish period and so is potentially the most useful for our purposes. Carney cites instances of *na* in eighth-century poetry, and McCone cites a number of examples from the Würzburg glosses (eighth century).[72]   The longer form is retained much later in the glosses due in part at least, according to McCone, to orthographic conservatism.[73] The form is remarkably rare in the Annals of Ulster, the latest occurrence being in 822.[74] On this evidence alone, the form *inna Lee* in the Annals of Ulster *s.a.* 563.1 is certainly no later than the ninth century.[75]   The remainder of these names, however, show the later form *na*. This is to be expected in names of the ninth century and later, such as *Inber na mBarc* (*s.a.* 837.4) and *Drochat Cluana na Cruimther* (*s.a.* 926.6),[76] but it occurs

---

entry in the original text of the Martyrology of Tallaght.   The form of the article in the Martyrology of Tallaght is late (*in* for expected *ind*).

[72] J. Carney, 'The dating of early Irish verse texts, 500–1100', *Éigse*, 19 (1982–83), 177–216 (p. 199); K. McCone, 'The Würzburg and Milan glosses: our earliest sources of "Middle Irish"', *Ériu*, 36 (1985), 85–106 (p. 89).

[73] McCone, 'The Würzburg and Milan glosses', pp. 89–90.   The usual form in Middle Irish is *na* but *inna* is found in *Saltair na Rann* which is traditionally dated to the end of the tenth century (Breatnach, 'An Mheán-Ghaeilge', p. 259). Carney ('The dating of early Irish verse', p. 199) notes no examples of *inna* from *c.*900 onwards, although he dates *Saltair na Rann* much earlier than is normally accepted to *c.*870 (*ibid.* p. 185).

[74] *inna muire 7 inna locha 7 inna aibni* (*Annals of Ulster s.a.* 822.2) (nom. pl.). The latest occurrence of *inna* as gen. is *Conbadh inna Con* (*Annals of Ulster s.a.* 776.12). We find the form *in[n]a* in a marginal poem in hand H1 as late as 824 (*Annals of Ulster s.a.* 824.2).

[75] The disyllabic spelling of the second element may also suggest an early date. Hiatus disyllables were being contracted to monosyllables with long vowels as early as the Old Irish period (McCone, *Towards a Relative Chronology*, pp. 141–42) but they persist in texts until the Middle Irish period.   See Carney, 'The dating of early Irish verse', pp. 194–96 for examples and discussion. See further Breatnach, 'An Mheán-Ghaeilge', p. 231 for examples of hiatus from verse as late as Fland Mainistrech (d. 1056), and also examples of contrasting hiatus and non-hiatus from *Saltair na Rann* (late tenth century).   See also B. Ó Cuív, 'Vowel hiatus in Early Modern Irish', in *Celtic Language, Celtic Culture*, edited by A. T. E. Matonis and D. F. Melia (California, 1990), pp. 96–107.

[76] Both of these names preserve *u*-affection in the dative following the preposition *oc* 'at' (*oc Inbiur na mBarc* and *oc Drochut Cluana na Cruimther* respectively), but

anachronistically in gen. sg. *na Craeibhe* (*s.a.* 683.5).

The same linguistic criteria can be applied to other texts, and in this way we can add to the small number of early place-names containing the definite article. For example, *Bethu Pátraic* contains nine names with the gen. sing. fem./gen. pl. of the article. Three contain the older form of the article (*Telach inna nDruad*, *Achad inna Elti*, *Lecc innan-Angel*)[77] and probably belong to the ninth-century stratum of that text. Moreover, we might note the mistranscription *co Sescen in Da Cor* for *co Sescenn Da Cor* in the *Additamenta* in the early ninth-century Book of Armagh which may suggest that the scribe was familiar with place-names containing the definite article.[78] Doubtless other examples could be added to this collection, and the process will be greatly facilitated by the updated electronic version of Hogan's *Onomasticon Goedelicum* which is currently being prepared in University College, Cork.

Conclusion

We can see that the Annals of Inisfallen provide incontrovertible evidence for the existence of the article in place-names by the end of the eleventh century. Further evidence for its use as early as 911 is provided by a comparison of the Annals of Ulster and the Clonmacnoise group of annals. Linguistic evidence is, as we have seen, of limited use but it does suggest a slightly earlier date. The form *inna Lee* is certainly no later than the early ninth century, and *ind Roés* may be no later than the mid ninth century. Other texts, such as *Bethu Pátraic*, provide further evidence of a ninth century date for the use of the definite article, at least in the genitive.

Unfortunately, the number of names which it is possible to date

---

this is represented into the eleventh century in the Annals of Ulster (Ó Máille, *Language of the Annals of Ulster*, pp. 126–29).

[77] *The Tripartite Life of Patrick,* edited by Stokes, I, 130.26, 232.18–19 and 236.12. These are all almost certainly to be taken as proper names. Note in particular: *conided a ainm, Lecc innan-Angel* 'so that its name is Lecc inna n-Angel' (p. 236) and *Telach innanDrúad aainm in phoirt hiraba* 'Telach inna nDrúad was the name of the place where he was' (p. 130). The remaining names contain the shortened form: *Tech na Róman* p. 30; *hi Cluain na Manach* p. 80; *i Tailaig naCloch* p. 108; *Lía naManach* p. 136; *Telach naLici* p. 230; *Coll na nIngen* p. 232.

[78] Bieler, *The Patrician Texts*, p. 172.18, and see Flanagan, 'A reappraisal', p. 71. A second instance of the name in the same line is spelt with *-nn* and no definite article: *a Sescunn Da Cor*.

accurately and early is rather small, so that further analysis of the complete body of such names is problematic. The common stock of entries in the Annals of Ulster and the Clonmacnoise annals, as we have seen, derives from an earlier chronicle and dates from before 911. Of the proper names which occur in this group, three are of the type NOUN + definite article + qualifying GENITIVE (*Léim ind Eich, Ráith in Druad, Inber na mBarc*). The qualifiers in the first instances are nouns in the genitive singular, while that in the last example is in the genitive plural. Of the remaining names from the earlier chronicle, only one is certainly a name. It occurs in the form *inna Lee* and appears to be in the genitive plural. A further two probable names occur as epithets in the genitive singular (*in Chráeb, in Ros*). It is noteworthy that all three of these names occur elsewhere in longer forms (*Lee Benndrigi, Cráeb Lasri, Ros Commáin*) and this may suggest that the article was sometimes added to shortened forms to compensate for the loss of the qualifier.[79] It is also of interest that there are no examples in this early chronicle of the use of the article in any case other than the genitive. The earliest dateable examples of such a usage are those in the hand of the principal scribe of the Annals of Inisfallen, and so cannot be certainly placed any earlier than 1092.[80]

It only remains to consider the geographical distribution of the formation in these early sources.[81] The early chronicle which lies at the heart of the Annals of Ulster and the Clonmacnoise annals shows that the feature already had a reasonably wide distribution as early as 911. *Ráith in Druad* may be in Munster, and *Léim ind Eich* is placed in Leinster, and we have examples from Counties Derry (*ind Lee*), Roscommon (*in Ros*) and the Midlands (*In Chráeb, Inber na mBarc*?). The places mentioned by the principal scribe of the Annals of Inisfallen show a distinct south-western bias. Thus, we have *Cell na Clérech* in Co. Cork, *Dún na Sciach* in Co. Tipperary, *In Machaire* in Limerick and Tipperary, and *In Ruadbethech* (and possibly also *Int Ardailén* if it is to be included here) in Co. Galway.

---

[79] A qualifying proper name makes a common noun definite, so the removal of the qualifier would, in normal grammar, require the addition of the definite article if the generic is to remain definite. However, the article is frequently omitted (see p. 6 above).

[80] See *The Annals of Inisfallen*, edited by Mac Airt, *s.a.* 1035.2 and 1089.3 cited above. The instance *na Inse* (*ibid.*, *s.a.* 986.4) is dubious.

[81] I refer the reader to the discussions of individual names above for identifications.

In addition, we have *Int Eidnén* in Co. Meath, and *Mag na Curre*, presumably in the Midlands. Finally, the early instances from *Bethu Pátraic* show that the formation was in use in Ulster by the ninth century.[82]

---

[82] *Telach inna nDruad* was to the west of Cross Pátraic which was about one mile south of Killala, Co. Mayo (Stokes, *Tripartite Life*, index; Hogan, *Onomasticon Goedelicum*, p. 628), but the other two examples were probably in Co. Armagh. *Achad inna Elti* is identified in the text with *Aball Pátraic in Cengoba*, the last-mentioned place apparently being Kinnego, north of Armagh (Hogan, *Onomasticon Goedelicum*, p. 226), and *Lecc innan-Angel* was clearly near Armagh (*ibid.*, p. 359).