

I.

The Irish Franciscan college of St. Anthony at Louvain was granted a bull of foundation by Pope Paul V on 3 April 1607. This small house in what is now Leuven, Belgium, became one of the most intense centres of Irish engagement with Europe. Its history, both that of the friars who inhabited the college itself and that of the soldiers, diplomats and merchants who supported it, is also the story of Ireland's decisive step into Europe.

St. Anthony's College owed both its foundation and location to Florence Conry a Franciscan friar and future archbishop of Tuam. Conry, a native of the townland of Figh part of the civil parish of Tibohine, barony of Frenchpark, Co. Roscommon, belonged to the learned family of the Uí Mhaoil Chonaire and had been trained in *seanchas* or traditional learning before leaving to study in Salamanca. He later entered the Franciscan order and, apart from a short return to Ireland as 'confessor, adviser and favourite' of Red Hugh O'Donnell just before the battle of Kinsale in 1601, spent his life in the Spanish dominions. The combination of Gaelic sensibility, Spanish courtiership, political astuteness and Latinate scholarship found in Conry helps explain the choice of Louvain as a novitiate-in-exile and house of studies for the Irish Franciscans.

Founded in 1425, Louvain's medieval university had developed into one of the intellectual powerhouses of Europe. Given its short distance from the border with the Protestant Netherlands the university had become one of the key centres of counter-reformation thought which, when combined with its proximity to the vast printing presses of Antwerp made it an ideal training ground for priests for the Irish mission. Finally, and crucially, Louvain was situated within the Spanish Low Countries ruled by the Hapsburg Archdukes Albert and Isabella. Their court was deliberately modelled as a centre of robust counter-reformation piety and deeply influenced by Franciscan spirituality. When Albert died in 1621, his wife assumed the habit of the nuns of the Franciscan Third Order. Her court, in the style of the Escorial Palace of Spain, became a convent and many women of her own entourage, which was quite deliberately composed of Irish, English, Scots and Danish exiles, went on to become nuns. In 1606, king Philip III of Spain wrote to his brother-in-law Albert: 'Friar Florence Conry, provincial of the Irish order of St. Francis has represented to me that by reason of the persecution of heretics, there has been a great diminution of the order in that kingdom'. He went on to declare that he would allocate 1,000 ducats per annum for the support of young Franciscan students at the university of Louvain. While the friars would experience many frustrations in procuring the royal grant in the future, Philip's letter combined with Pope Paul V's bull, began a particular Irish presence in Louvain that would endure for several centuries.

The Franciscans of Louvain were of the Observant branch of the order. From the very start of Henry VIII's quarrel with the See of Rome the Observants had been synonymous with resistance to the creation of the Church of England and the Church of Ireland. Despite this pressure and the suppression of about two fifths of their houses in the 1540s the friars managed to keep both community life and formation of new members functioning until towards the end of the reign of Elizabeth I. That they were able to do so was because of their integration into both urban and rural communities. One Franciscan chronicler boasted that unlike the parochial clergy and most of the other religious orders the 'Poor Brothers' by virtue of their poverty and simplicity of life were 'inconcussus' or unshaken by the pace and vehemence of Tudor reform. As it happened the authorities in Dublin Castle concurred since they constantly identified the 'begging friars' as one of the chief obstacles to both ecclesiastical and political change during the sixteenth century. So, even before the Irish Franciscans of Louvain began their great project of recording a comprehensive history of the island of Ireland they had already succeeded in both identifying themselves and having themselves identified as essential to the survival of a particular kind of Irish Catholic identity. At the

same time the world of the Franciscan order was deeply international and Irish friars were able to draw on many connections and supporters across Europe to sustain their efforts at home. From the 1580s, Spanish Flanders, with its thriving trade and cultural links was one of a number of destinations of choice for Irish émigrés whose continued residence at home had become unsustainable due to political, religious and economic changes. As a sizeable wave of migration from Ireland intensified in the last decade of the sixteenth century and the first decade of the seventeenth century Louvain and Flanders became, after the Iberian peninsula and France, a 'natural' resort for Irish men and women on the move.

By May of 1607 a small Franciscan community under the guardianship of Donagh Mooney from Westmeath took up residence in a rented house in Louvain. Like many emigrants their initial experience was one of considerable poverty and dislocation. They used borrowed vestments to say mass in the chapel of the university's Faculty of Arts and were unable even to meet the costs of the bread and wine. Donagh Mooney would later write an account of all of the Irish Franciscan foundations which included a graphic description of the final destruction and dispersal of the friary of Donegal in 1601. The end of Donegal, itself a consequence of the growing control of Dublin Castle over the whole island, was clearly one of the factors which prompted Conry to press for an Irish house of formation in the safe haven of the Spanish Flanders. His plan, though, was far from unique even if it was the first such venture by an Irish religious order. In 1607 there were already eight Irish colleges or seminaries on the continent – Paris (1578), Lisbon (1590), Salamanca (1592), Douai (1594), Antwerp (1600), Bordeaux (1603) and Santiago de Compostela (1605). It is important to remember that St. Anthony's in Louvain was significant in its own right but also emblematic of much of the wider Irish experience in seventeenth century Europe. This was a hybrid institution, which blended the intellectual and pastoral aspirations of William Allen's 1568 English college at Douai, and those of its Irish, Scots and Dutch imitators, with the kind of exile foundation that had been springing up across Northern France, Flanders and the Iberian peninsula. So, in 1607, Louvain was a brand new and struggling foundation but also part of an emerging Irish network. The itinerary of the Ulster Earls, Hugh O'Neill and Rory O'Donnell, clearly reflects this. On 22 October 1607 the refugee Earls paid a four day visit to the Irish college at Douai. They were lavishly entertained with feasts, speeches and music. There they also met with Florence Conry whose Ulster connections were strong as he had been present in 1602 at the deathbed of Red Hugh O'Donnell in Simancas. Conry conducted them eastwards and on 31 October they were greeted near Brussels by Hugh's son, Colonel Henry O'Neill, the commander of the Irish regiment in Flanders. They then moved onto Binche, the official residence of the archdukes Albert and Isabella and, after a series of visits and receptions, arrived at Louvain on 9 November 1607. Apart from one cold excursion towards Namur the earls remained in the university city until 28 February 1608 when they resumed their journey southwards towards Rome, their eventual and reluctant destination

The Earls' stay in Louvain set the tone for the Irish college in a number of ways. To begin with the sojourn of an exile court in Louvain firmly established St Anthony's as one of a number of centres of Irish diplomatic activity on the continent. It also cemented the bond between the northern earls, their families and dependents, and the friars. At the same time the Irish regiments in the Spanish service began a long tradition of support for the Louvain community. Tadhg Ó Cianáin's account of that long icy winter is punctuated by short bulletins of events in Ireland. This is more important than it might seem at first glance. The colleges were more than just passive training-centres for Irish students. They were also the places where intelligence from Ireland was received and interpreted for presentation to the European powers and for the many Irish communities taking root across western Europe. When the Earls pressed on to Rome after the spring thaw in 1608 they left some of their retinue behind them in Louvain. Hugh O'Neill gave his very young sons Seán and Brian into the care of the English canonesses of St. Augustine as a prelude to their education by the friars. Rory O'Donnell entrusted his son Aodh and Cathbarr O'Donnell's son, also Aodh, to the Franciscans.

Cathbarr's wife, Rosa O'Doherty, also stayed on. When Cathbarr died shortly afterwards in Rome she went on to marry the military commander Eoghan Roe O'Neill who played a central role in the Irish wars of the 1640s. When Rosa herself died in Brussels in 1660 her body was buried in St. Anthony's becoming just one of a number of O'Neill and O'Donnell interments within the cloisters.

Early seventeenth century Irish Catholic opinion can be divided into roughly two parts. There were those, predominantly of Old English stock, who advocated forms of loyalty to the English crown. Part of the reason that Flanders became the chosen region for the Franciscans was that the Jesuits had, with some setbacks, gradually come to have a monopoly over the Irish colleges on the Iberian peninsula. The Fathers of the Society of Jesus were not enamoured of schemes to bring Ireland into the Habsburg dominions and, furthermore, believed that the colleges should be seminaries concerned with producing men for the Irish mission. Furthermore most Jesuits were of the view that the English language was sufficient for the mission back in Ireland. Although the Franciscans drew recruits from both the Gaelic Irish and Old English populations they were heavily invested in the Irish language, its propagation and its use as a tool for Catholic missionary activity. Consequently many friars sided with those, predominantly of Gaelic Irish stock, who urged another Spanish military intervention on the island. For much of its early history St. Anthony's at Louvain, founded by Conry, influenced by the Irish soldiers and patronised by the Earls, inclined to the latter opinion. While the death of the Hugh O'Neill in 1616 appeared to bring that chapter to a close, the involvement of the Irish regiments led by Owen Roe O'Neill in Ireland in the 1640s saw the Ulster family and its Franciscan allies reappear on the central stage of Irish politics once again. Symbolically, Owen Roe returned to Ireland on a ship named the St. Francis but, more pragmatically, the vessel was paid for by the mendicant friars themselves.

II

Florence Conry died in 1629. By the time of his death the college was on much firmer footing. In May 1616 a site on the south-east of the town just outside the city walls was purchased. Under the leadership of Hugh MacCaughwell, who had become theology lecturer in November 1607, construction began. On May 9 1617 Albert and Isabella laid the foundation stone. This carving can still be seen in the college today. A list compiled at the end of the same year, 1617, recorded that sixteen novices had been received from Ulster in the previous decade, thirteen from Connacht, fourteen from Munster, eight from Leinster, four from Meath as well as one Scot. Of all of these nine had died since 1607 and three left. So, a decade after its foundation St. Anthony's had already admitted sixty-six Irish novices and sent thirty one fully professed priests back across the sea. These figures not only demonstrate the extremely rapid growth of St. Anthony's but also point to the persistence of provincial loyalties even as the friars and other exiles were working hard to articulate a vision of a seamless Irishness for European consumption. In Louvain contact with the wider Irish presence in Flanders was mainly through the military men. Research suggests that the majority of the Irishmen serving in the army of Flanders had either brothers or other male relations who were at St. Anthony's. Hugh Mac Caughwell became the chief chaplain to the Irish regiment in 1606 and went on to combine this post with being guardian of the Irish Franciscan college. The soldiers were important to the college in two ways. Firstly income from army chaplaincies was a supplement to unpredictable alms and infrequent royal subventions. Secondly the Irish soldiers themselves made sizable donations. In 1616 Captain James Gernon's company donated 850 crowns to St. Anthony's, probably for building costs. The bulk of this money came not from the officers but from the rank and file, ordinary often-forgotten soldiers who were part of the general migration from Ireland. For these troops the friars at Louvain offered a point of contact abroad and served as an expression of their identity and culture as well as ministering to their spiritual needs. Sometimes, in fact, the

overlap was complete as it appears that some clerical students first served in Irish military companies in order to finance their studies. At Louvain a friar like Donagh Mooney who had himself been a soldier before he joined the order would not have looked askance at such an arrangement.

While many, usually better-remembered, individuals and families carved out significant careers at the continental courts, as officers or clerics, or as merchants and traders, there were others who did far less well. Right throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the sight of poor Irish people and beggars was common in European cities and ports. Yet in Louvain, as elsewhere, the Irish impact on European consciousness was fuelled by the efforts of those of modest or slender means as much as it was by exiled nobility or brilliant minds.

St. Anthony's was also in receipt of sporadic funding from other individuals and groups. A undated note, probably from the late 1620s, lists over £170 in donations from Armagh, Donegal and Dublin. The friars sometimes ate Irish butter and Irish salted fish. Ireland's maritime links with the low countries meant that not only money but books and manuscripts could travel in both directions, as could the human cargo of thirty-one freshly formed preaching friars who journeyed from Louvain back to Ireland between 1607 and 1617. In 1615 the British agent at Brussels, William Trumbull, described the community at St. Anthony's as 'perfidious Machiavellian friars' and he particularly deplored the fact that the Franciscans were attempting to replace the old medieval divisions between Anglo-Norman or Old English and Gaelic Irish with a new composite Irish identity. In this they were assisted by the recent example of Spain where the crown tried to fuse older regional identities - Castilian, Catalan, Aragonese - into a single Spanish 'nación'. One manifestation of this compound Irish identity was the significance attached to 17 March. The Waterford-born Franciscan Luke Wadding (1588-1657) was instrumental in having St. Patrick's day designated a universal feast in the Roman calendar. In Louvain the Irish community promoted the patron of Ireland by procuring indulgences for observance of the feast-day and by instituting a public sermon and other festivities. A Dutch language hymn with the Latin title *In honorem Sancti Patricii Hibernia patroni Carmen in lingua Belgica* probably dating from the late seventeenth century is still extant in manuscript form among the surviving records of St. Anthony's, now housed in UCD. Nicholaus Vernulaeus, a leading Renaissance Latinist and university professor further promoted the cult of the Irish saints in 1639 by publishing *De Propagatione fidei Christianae in Belgio per Sanctos ex Hibernia Viros*. This book presented the lives of over thirty Irish saints who were alleged to have saved the Low Countries for Christianity during the Dark Ages. This kind of expression of support from the host country which built on the fact that there had been widespread cults of Irish saints during the early middle ages in Flanders and neighbouring regions was invaluable to exile communities.

The world of the Irish colleges was inevitably precarious. Those who ran them were heavily dependent not only on the support of fellow expatriates but also on that of powerful figures in the host countries. In this respect the Louvain house depended heavily on the goodwill of the university, the Spanish authorities and the archbishop of Mechelen (Malines) whose see was held to have been founded by an Irish missionary, St. Rombold. Begging, self-promotion and diplomacy worked so well that St. Anthony's was deeply involved in three other continental foundations within its first forty years. There was a short-lived Irish Franciscan student residence in Paris between 1622 and 1627 and again between 1653 and 1668. In 1625 Luke Wadding established a college in Rome for Irish friars named after the recently canonised St. Isidore of Madrid. Wadding was an outstanding theologian and diplomat who blocked repeated attempts (including that of Florence Conry) to have him appointed a bishop or cardinal. He occupied a position of unique brokerage in Irish affairs for much of the mid-seventeenth century. His new college of St. Isidore's was almost entirely populated by Louvain professors and students at its inception. In 1629, Malachy Fallon a theology lecturer at St. Anthony's, persuaded the Holy Roman Emperor Ferdinand II to permit foundation of an Irish

college in Prague. While the college was affected by the Thirty Years war it endured and again gained most of its initial impetus from Flanders-trained Irish Franciscans. During the 1620s two further Irish colleges - one secular and one Dominican - opened in Louvain itself. Both colleges, about which far less is known than St. Anthony's, survived until a general suppression in 1797. There is also some evidence for a college of Irish Discalced Carmelites which operated during the 17th and 18th centuries. In Dunkirk the Irish Poor Clares established themselves as a prelude to making a further foundation in Westmeath in 1629. In Rome Cardinal Ludovisi and Luke Wadding were responsible for the initiation of an Irish pastoral college in 1628. Further Irish foundations were created up to 1689 in France, Italy, Spain and Portugal. This growing educational array mirrored the increasing integration and involvement of Irish migrants throughout the kingdoms and principalities of Europe. Yet even as they concentrated on continental careers and occupations many of the Irish abroad kept an eye on the island's affairs and many worked hard to influence what was happening there.

The Louvain friars were explicitly committed from the very outset to intervening in their native country. Many of them had careers which saw them switch with some regularity between continental residence and service on the Irish mission. In 1611 the living will of Robert Chamberlain, a secular priest and former confessor to Hugh O'Neill, earl of Tyrone allocated money for 'an clódh-Ghaoideilge' - an Irish font or typeface. In 1614 the Irish community took a decisive step. Supported by the synanic Archbishop Matthias Hovius of Mechelen they secured permission from the Archdukes to establish their own printing press because 'they could not find in this country any printer who knows their language or characters'. By 1617 Donagh Mooney could report that his house was exporting both preachers and 'printed books of their own composition'. It was to be in this field of language and writing and historical scholarship that the Irish college of St. Anthony of Padua at Louvain would make its distinct contribution to the Irish and European mind.

III.

Tadhg a' tsleibhe Ó Cléirigh joined the Franciscan order in about 1623 and took the name Mícheál. For him St. Anthony's was a familiar environment in an unfamiliar place. While his native Donegal and much of Ulster was now subject to the plantation policy initiated in the wake of the departure of the Earls Louvain now housed a community of men trained as members of the same learned professional class as he had been. The Ó Cléirighs were historians to the O'Donnells. Furthermore, the language of the house itself and that of most of the visitors who came from the nearby exile communities in Spanish Flanders, was Irish. In 1626, Hugh Ward whose family were themselves hereditary poets to the O'Donnells, became guardian of the house. Although Mícheál Ó Cléirigh was a lay brother and knew no Latin Ward appreciated he was perfectly suited for a project he had mind. He directed Ó Cléirigh to return to Ireland and begin copying vulnerable manuscripts which were still in the hands of those families whose fortunes were on the same wane as those of their aristocratic Gaelic patrons.

At the start of the seventeenth century Ireland was little known and little understood in Europe. Irish exiles and migrants rapidly realised that they had an acute need to explain and express themselves in their host countries. They needed to be able to say who they were and where they had come from. The Irish quickly manifested a desire to take their place among the peoples of Europe. There were several motivations for this. First, and never to be underestimated, was sheer pride of origin. Another motive, especially relevant to those in Spanish realms, was to be able to deploy the legend of the Milesians to demonstrate truly ancient links between the Iberian peninsula and the island of Ireland. This turned out to be a very useful device for integration of Gaelic nobles and professionals into the ancestry-driven Spanish social system. Furthermore the Irish had a longstanding (mainly English) accusation of barbarity to overcome. Finally because early Latin writers had referred to Ireland as 'Scotia' and the Irish as 'Scoti' there was a perceived need to show that the Irish were not

Scots and that Ireland was the more ancient kingdom. Expatriate groupings fretted over these issues to differing degrees but on the whole the Irish in Europe insisted on three things: their high civilization, their ancient ancestry and that their country was Ireland. The vast majority of them also insisted that true appreciation of these traits was demonstrated by adherence to Catholicism. The notion of the island of saints and scholars had really arrived.

St. Anthony's, Louvain, dedicated itself over several decades to providing an intellectual underpinning for this kind of Irishness. The Franciscans aimed to bring Ireland 'into' Europe but in doing so engaged with the language and the great bulk of medieval learning in such a way that the memory of the Gaelic world was itself recast in a European idiom. This vast project ranged from simple catechisms to its most famous expression in the Annals of the Four Masters. The earliest continental works in an Irish font reflected the founding mission of St. Anthony's. Bonaventure O'Hussey's *Teagasc Críodhaidhe* (Antwerp 1611, Louvain 1614/15) and Florence Conry's *Desiderius nó Sgathán an Chráidh* (Louvain 1616) put a Gaelic face and expression on Counter-Reformation catechism and piety. Two years later, Hugh MacCaughwell's *Scathán Shacramúinte na hAithridhe* was printed. This was a lengthy (six hundred pages in octavo) disquisition on penance based on the teachings of the 14th session of the Council of Trent (1550-1551) and on the 1614 *Rituale Romanum*. The short summary of the rule of St. Francis, *Suim Riaghlachas Phrionsias* (Louvain c.1614) or 'the sum of the rule of Francis' survives today in a single copy in Marsh's Library, Dublin. It consists of the creed, ten commandments (in verse), five commandments of the church (also in verse), seven deadly sins, seven gifts of the holy spirit (in verse), the seven corporal and spiritual works of mercy, the beatitudes, twenty-five precepts of the Rule, fourteen cases in which absolution can only be given by a provincial or his delegate and, finally, the prayers required of lay brothers for dead friars and for benefactors, living and dead. It is a small, simple text, similar in format to some contemporary Spanish works and most likely intended for novices as well as lay brothers. The three verse segments were borrowed from Bonaventure O'Hussey's catechism. This particular Gaelic twist on what the influential Jesuit catechists Robert Bellarmine and Peter Canisius were practicing in their influential European catechisms was doing what Donagh Mooney reported of a late 16th century Irish Franciscan preacher Eoghan O'Duffy:

At the conclusion of each sermon, even of the longest, he was in the habit of reciting elegant verses in the Irish language which contained the pith of what he said. These verses were so fruitful of good that they appear to have been less inspired by the spirit of the poetry than by the unction of the holy ghost.

All over Europe, in Latin America, and in the Catholic missions in Asia, religious doctrine was rendered into question and answer format, versified and put to simple tunes. Set in a modern typeface based on existing scribal hands and combining traditional sayings and expression with the most up to date European Catholic teachings the works just mentioned (and others in 1641, 1645 and 1663) are eloquent witnesses to the vigorous cross-fertilisation of the Irish and European that working in Louvain made possible. In 1643, shortly before his death, Mícheál Ó Cléirigh's *Foclóir nó Sanasán Nua* was published. Just as with the catechisms numerous vernacular dictionaries were appearing right across the entire continent and for the languages of the New World and of Asia. Both catholic missionary strategy and national pride fuelled these lexicographical exercises. Along with Bonaventure O'Hussey's *Rudimenta Grammaticae Hiberniae*, a grammar in Latin of the classical modern Irish language, Ó Cléirigh's dictionary of hard and obsolete words was designed to ensure Irish took its rightful place among the vernacular languages of the earth. These tracts further demonstrate the way in which the friars were determined that their work, whatever its audience, rested on sound learning.

The same passion for quality inspired the next wave of work from Louvain. The island's reputation for sanctity had become a central strand in the Irish case in Europe. A fairly frantic hunt for accounts of the lives of the Irish saints developed in the early seventeenth century. Following the shock of the Protestant reformation, Catholic intellectuals quickly sought to preserve saints' cults by collecting the oldest surviving accounts of the holy individuals. By doing so they attempted to overcome the reformers' taunts of credulity and superstition. In 1607 a vast Jesuit project based in Antwerp designed by Jean Bolland and Heribert Rosweyde began the task of establishing authoritative lives for every known saint. Irish interest was twofold. First, a Scottish Catholic Thomas Dempster had claimed all of the Irish saints for Scotland. Second, the record of the early Irish pilgrim saints or *peregrini* such as Columbanus, Fiachra and Killian could be used to claim that the Irish had evangelized large parts of Europe at the very outset. In this scenario, Europe *owed* Ireland a debt of honour. There was also the tantalizing possibility, explored first not by the Franciscans but by two Irish Jesuits (Henry Fitzsimon and Stephen White) that several of the continent's ancient abbeys might well contain really early accounts of Irish saints. This turned out to be so when in 1623 White found the very earliest life of St. Columba (or Colmcille) in Germany. In this way the seventeenth century Irish and Europeans rediscovered and celebrated Ireland's connection with the continent a thousand years previously.

In 1623 Hugh Ward, Hugh MacCaughwell and another Irish Franciscan, Patrick Fleming, met in Paris where they held discussions with Thomas Messingham, an Irish secular priest. They were in search of further ammunition to attack Dempster and to vindicate Ireland's ancient sanctity. It was as a direct result of this meeting that Mícheál Ó Cléirigh was sent back to Ireland in 1626 to collect manuscript materials on saints' lives. Ward himself died (probably of exhaustion) having translated numerous Irish lives into Latin. Another Donegal man, John Colgan, who had entered St. Anthony's in 1620 took over the project and published two large books. The first of these *Acta Sanctorum ... Hiberniae Sanctorum Insulae* (1645) contained all Irish saints whose feast-days fell in January, February and March. Two years later he issued *Triadis Thaumaturgae* which was a vast compendium of everything that was known about Patrick, Brigid and Columba who were the three patrons of Ireland. Once again these publications fused counter-reformation preoccupations and an appeal to the learned classes of Europe with Gaelic scholarship and traditions. They lifted Ireland's saints into international view. The Louvain Franciscans were very frank about their purpose. They repeatedly stated that it was for 'the honour of Ireland'.

Despite his own strenuous work Colgan's plan of covering every Irish saint for every day of the year never made it to print. Indeed much of the research of these Louvain scholars went unpublished until the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Some still remains in manuscript. Lack of funding, the pressure of running a full seminary and the distractions of exile politics all took their toll on the work. The *Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland* or as they are better known, the *Annals of the Four Masters* (a term first used by John Colgan in 1645) were not fully available in print until John O'Donovan's dual-language edition was published in seven volumes from 1848-1851. Late entry to print, though, does not lessen their significance. From 1626-30 Mícheál Ó Cléirigh worked almost exclusively on the saints' lives. Then he began to move into secular history. Writing in his swift, elegant hand, he teamed up with Cú Choigríche Ó Cléirigh (Donegal), Cú Choigríche Ó Duibhgeannáin (Leitrim) and Fear Feasa Ó Maoil Chonaire (Roscommon). First they compiled a set of genealogies for the kings and saints of Ireland. As a piece of propaganda this work usefully showed how in Ireland as elsewhere in Europe royal and saintly bloodlines intermingled. By assigning dates to each reign the Four Masters now had a chronological framework for their annals. The desire to fix chronology like this was nothing less than an obsession for European historians of this period. The Annals shared this widespread desire to find the best sources, reinterpret medieval learning and then publish the results. Indeed, despite the desire of Mícheál Ó Cléirigh and his companions to prove that Ireland had been and always would be Catholic and the totally contradictory desire of Protestant historians

such as Archbishop James Ussher to show that early Ireland had been essentially Calvinistic and independent of Rome, they ended up cooperating. They shared manuscript sources, alerted each other to new finds and even met and wrote to each other in secret. This covert liaison worked despite the increasingly polarized religious atmosphere in Ireland and Europe.

In 1631 the Four Masters now turned their attention to a new recension of *Leabhar Gabhála* or *Book of Invasions* which was an early account of the peopling of Ireland ending with the sons of Míl of Spain. Finally, in January 1632 they started work on their annals in a Franciscan house at Drowes. The work continued, with one break, until 1636. The final text was over 400,000 words long, covering everything from the first appearance of people on the island to the death of Hugh O'Neill, Early of Tyrone in 1616. Annals were familiar to the Irish and this set attempted to encapsulate the entire historical collective memory of the country. It would be a grave mistake to view the annals as the last erudite gasp of a failing civilization. The annalistic form, featuring a separate entry for each year, was actually in vogue across the continent. At the same time as Mícheál Ó Cléirigh was at work, Luke Wadding in Rome was midway through his *Annales Minorum* (1625-48) which charted the order from the birth of Francis of Assisi up to 1540. The Four Masters made two manuscript sets – one for Fergal O’Gara (MP for Sligo) who sponsored the work and another for transfer back to Louvain. It is clear from the layout of the text that there was an intention to publish and probably make a Latin translation but finances and scholarly bickering prevented the work making its appearance on an international stage. As annals of the whole island they broke free of traditional boundaries and sought to capture the past in a manner that was both modern and forward-looking. They combined chronological span with an incredible wealth of place-name references which allowed an imaginative recreation of Ireland as it had been. For exiles and emigrants on the continent and for those sympathetic to the Irish such a record of the past could be a useful tool in shaping the future.

IV.

The community at St. Anthony’s also had an influence on the wider intellectual life of Europe. A close friendship between Florence Conry and his fellow professor Cornelius Jansenius, who lived across the road from the college, brought many of the Irish friars into the hot debates on predestination which so convulsed Catholic and Protestant Europe. Luke Wadding and Hugh MacCaughwell both promoted the Immaculate Conception of Mary as part of their overall commitment to the thought of their Franciscan forebear John Duns Scotus. Conry, Mac Caughwell and Wadding had all been educated at Salamanca. The university there was a place where the distinguished teaching of Scotism ensured that this philosophical and theological system became central to debates which convulsed Europe and the New World. Scotism in turn became the intellectual engine of St. Anthony’s Louvain. Every single one of the theses defended by Franciscan students there for over a century concerned the ‘Subtle Doctor’ as he was known. The link between the Irish friars, education in Salamanca and their consequent foundation in Louvain is not only an example of how shared experiences in exile could mould the agenda of a group of expatriates but also reveals something of one of the most ambitious aspects of the entire Franciscan project at Louvain and then Rome and Prague. The simple fact was that Irish enthusiasm for Scotus was prompted by English and Polish denials of his Irishness. In 1620 MacCaughwell wrote a spirited defence of his hero’s Downpatrick roots:

Down is a city of Ireland, noble and very ancient, small nowadays but formerly very famous for the greatness of its riches, the multitude of its citizens and its monuments of piety and religion; situated in that tract of Ulster which in the vernacular is called Lecale. It is considered to exceed the other parts of the kingdom in the fertility and beauty of the land; it is called by the ancient name ‘territory of light’, in Irish ‘triocha cheud na soylise’: because by the flatness of the land and the other contributory qualities the sun, which of itself is common

to all, shines upon and beautifies that tract of land with a greater splendour. But though this account of the name is not to be spurned, I find another one which is of far greater distinction, which shows that the name was not given without divine inspiration: Our most brightly-shining star, the holy light, the great Thaumaturge, our Apostle the most glorious Patrick, was sent by God in the year of salvation 431 to bring the light to Ireland. Here he first landed, in memory of which event a small church has been erected upon the rock on which his sacred feet first trod, in Ardia; it is called the Temple of Patrick, a holy place which I have visited and where I have worshipped.

It was in this most famous city that our Subtle Doctor was born, John Duns, or Dunsius or from Down, so called from the city itself, and called Scotus from the family, not from the nation (as I will show later)... It is handed down that he was only twenty-four at the time when he took up the primary chair in theology at the University of Oxford, then very famous throughout the world and besides Theology he had a perfect knowledge of Scripture, and excelled also in Physics and Metaphysics, to such a degree that by the common acclamation of the schools he merited the name 'Prince of Philosophers and Theologians'... to this tradition all the Irish, especially the inhabitants of the Down area, witness as something completely certain. I learned it myself as a boy from learned and unlearned alike, as my conscience is my witness; and it was with much astonishment that I first heard the opposite from some, though admittedly only a few, when I crossed over into foreign parts. I can recall also practically from my infancy the tradition regarding that most famous disputation which Scotus held in the Parisian schools concerning the Immaculate Conception, which I will mention later, at which a certain doctor, to whom Scotus was known up to that point only by reputation, and who admired the profundity of his doctrine and the subtlety of his arguments, exclaimed before the grave senate of the most learned men, "You are", he said, "one of three things: an angel from heaven, a devil from hell, or Scotus from Down"; about which there is the following verse, which I would like to hear interpreted by those who would have the Subtle Doctor be anything other than Irish'

Here Mac Aingil is making an argument that links his own boyhood, the life of Ireland's patron and the early life of someone who was, along with Thomas Aquinas and St. Augustine, considered to be a star of the scholastic intellectual system that dominated the Europe of the period. The Louvain project aspired to a seamless quality that moved the physically marginal island of Ireland and its inhabitants right to the centre of an increasingly globalised Catholic world. In this world view, the island of Ireland was as free of theological poison – since there had been, the friars argued, no heretics there till the sixteenth century – as it was free, thanks to St. Patrick, of the actual venom of snakes and reptiles. The Irishness of Scotus and his defence of the Immaculate Conception were not unrelated phenomena in the minds of the Louvain scholars and their associates. This house in Spanish Flanders was not simply making an Irish case in Europe it was attempting to make Europe itself more Irish. Although these theological matters look obscure and arid from a distance they really brought Irish scholarship in Latin to the very front of the European stage in a world where kings and princes deemed theologians as necessary to their government as they did diplomats and bureaucrats.

Yet MacCaughwell, like so many of these seventeenth century friars, was also very accomplished in his native tongue. His poem *Íosagáin*:

Dia do bheatha, a Naoidhe naoimh
san mainsear do chlaon do chorp
gidh meadrach is saidbhear Tú
's glórmhar id dhún féin anocht

is still sung as a Christmas hymn. Aristocratic O'Neill and O'Donnell links with Louvain along with the presence of learned friars created an environment in which Gaelic poets and scribes were highly active. In the late 1620s Captain Sorley Mac Donnell commissioned two books known as the *Book of the O'Connor Don* and *Duanaire Finn*. These two volumes preserve a large body of bardic poetry and stories of *fiannaíocht* and are proof of a flourishing Irish literary scene in Spanish Flanders. The *Book of the O'Connor Don* itself constitutes almost seventeen per cent of the entire corpus of bardic poems surviving from the twelfth to the seventeenth centuries. These books are more than proof of literature-in-exile since their island-wide coverage and overall scope match in verse and tale the coverage and scope of the *Annals of the Four Masters*. These literary works also claimed to represent the illustrious history of an illustrious people.

The remainder of the seventeenth century brought troubled times in Ireland. In June 1644 the treasures of the cathedral of Armagh were deposited in St. Anthony's for safekeeping and were still there in 1741. The confederate wars of the 1640s gave way to the Cromwellian regime. The 1650s and 1660s brought more financial hardship and hopes of a Spanish intervention slowly faded. After 1690 the prospect of a restoration of Catholic landowning fortunes in Ireland vanished. Following banishment legislation enacted by the Dublin parliament in 1698 perhaps a majority of Ireland's Franciscans fled the country. Among these was the provincial, Anthony Kelly, who travelled from Dublin to Flanders. Chapters of the Irish Province for 1699 and 1700 had to be held in Louvain, something which had not happened even during the turmoil of the previous century. While St. Anthony's was often a first port of call for newly exiled Irish friars it was incapable of physically holding such a large community and it became a place of transit for uprooted religious whose dispersal across the continent gave the Order's authorities cause for concern. The burst of scholarly and intellectual activity that had marked the first forty to fifty years in Louvain died off and during the eighteenth century the college reverted to its original seminary function. St. Anthony's was a very successful seminary, though, since 529 Irish Franciscans appear in the pre-1800 ordination registers of the diocese of Mechelen in which Louvain lay. Franciscans who had left Ireland after the banishment legislation of 1698 became army chaplains once more and an extensive renovation of the seminary buildings in the 1750s established the basic shape of the site still apparent in the modern complex. The end of the century saw St. Anthony's itself experience suppression. First the Irish Franciscan college in Prague was closed by Emperor Joseph II in 1786 but Louvain was spared since it served the Irish mission. However this turned out to be only a brief reprieve. Starting in 1789 Europe was convulsed by events in France. The seals of the French Revolutionary authorities were placed on the gate of St Anthony's in January 1793. Initially this meant little beyond the compilation of an inventory of the goods and rooms of the college given into the care of 'Citizen Leahy' who was, in fact, the guardian Francis Leahy. Actual suppression of a community of five Irish friars and ten Flemish lay-brothers came during the winter of 1796 even as the Franciscans tried to buy time by claiming to be a British establishment. In the meantime the guardian James Cowan had a fair portion of the manuscripts including the *Annals of the Four Masters* smuggled to St. Isidore's Rome. The other part of the manuscript library was seized and is now in the *Bibliothèque Royale* in Brussels. The community itself took refuge with the aristocratic d'Oppuers family at Tildonck. Towards the end of 1800 Irish friars managed to return but after a further two decades of discontinuity the land and buildings were auctioned off in June 1822. Falling numbers in the Irish province meant that only one continental house could be maintained and it was decided that the connection with Louvain would have to be severed after just over two centuries. Fortunately many of the books were entrusted to Richard Francis Walsh who later shipped them to the Franciscan library in Wexford. When St. Isidore's came under threat of closure by the newly-formed Italian state in 1872 the British legation in Rome assisted in export of the Louvain manuscripts, via diplomatic bag, to the Franciscan house in Merchant's Quay, Dublin. While nineteenth century Ireland witnessed first Catholic Emancipation, then Famine and then ferment over land and the relationship with Britain, the site of St. Anthony's passed into the hands of the Brothers of Charity who carried out some remodeling into order to use

the buildings as a large school for boys. By the start of the twentieth century the Irish Franciscans had passed from near extinction and disarray into a period of reform and renewed confidence. In the absence of the friars the Irish connection with Louvain was maintained through the continued attendance of lay students at the university. It is worth remembering that while the work and scholarship of the Franciscans rightly occupy centre stage in most accounts of this Irish-Flemish connection, nearly 1200 Irish students attended the university from 1548 to 1797, a remarkable figure given the very low proportion of people who attended third level institutions prior to the second half of the twentieth century.

In 1922, the year the Irish Free State came into existence, the Franciscans decided to reacquire St. Anthony's. This decision - which might be viewed as nostalgic - was in fact, connected to wider movements within the Irish province and within Ireland itself in very much in the same way as the original foundation in 1607 had also been. During the twentieth century, the numbers of Franciscans in Ireland began to rise, peaking at 430 by 1965. St. Isidore's in Rome was no longer adequate to cope with the numbers training in theology. The larger cohort meant that the friars could now commit more and more of their confreres to fulltime study and by the early 1920s the idea of founding a house in Donegal near Kilbarron, the birthplace of Mícheál Ó Cléirigh was beginning to take shape although it would not take concrete form until 1946, two years after the tercentenary celebrations of the death of the scribe and annalist. Ó Cléirigh was, in his way, the symbolic point at which the Irish involvement in Louvain and in what was now Belgium overlapped with the cultural and political currents of the new Free State. Enthusiasm for the Irish language and for Gaelic culture, along with the GAA, acted as social cement in the years following the bitterness and violence of the civil war. Franciscans were heavily involved both with the language movement and in reprising the 'golden age' of the early 17th century. That 'golden age' was synonymous with Ó Cléirigh and he himself was synonymous with Louvain. Accordingly, Monsignor James Ryan, a friend of Cardinal Mercier of Mechelen, was nominated as official agent of the Irish friars in November 1923 and had his bid accepted for the repurchase of St. Anthony's at auction. In another reprise of the original collaboration between the Irish and the university, the Catholic University was the nominal owner of the college until 1972 in order to avoid the administrative difficulties that purchase by a foreign corporation would have caused. The college was officially reopened in 1927 and once again started small with a complement of six friars under the guardianship of Brendan Jennings. Jennings was himself a historian and editor of many of the seventeenth century records and documents of the Louvain Franciscans. The official reopening was, in June 1927, a part of the 500th anniversary of the university and, as it happened, the 310th anniversary of the laying of the foundation stone by Albert and Isabella. The Irish and British hierarchy and the Free State were all represented again reflecting the degree to which the Louvain experience had become part of a history which aimed to unify Irish public opinion in the wake of the civil war.

Louvain functioned as a house of studies in philosophy and theology until the German invasion in May 1940 at which point the remaining Irish friars fled on foot to Brussels and on to Ostend and back to Ireland via London. In 1945 the manuscript collection held at Merchant's Quay moved to Dún Mhuire, Seafield Road, Killiney, where the friars restored the great tradition of Irish language and historical studies. In 1946 the Irish Franciscans reclaimed the property which emerged relatively unscathed from wartime bombing raids. Following the division of the university into Flemish and French speaking parts in 1968 St. Anthony's became a charitable trust. Yet the Irish foundation at Louvain remained etched on the national consciousness. On 16 January 1973 An Taoiseach, Mr. Jack Lynch, signed Ireland's accession into the E.E.C. The official lunch and press conference was held at St. Anthony's. Ireland, by now a sovereign republic, once again entered into an intense and successful engagement with Europe in the very spot in Belgium where the Franciscans had settled almost four centuries earlier.

