

Mac Gilla Pátraic (MacGillapatrik), Máel Sechlainn

by Emmett O'Byrne

Mac Gilla Pátraic (MacGillapatrik), Máel Sechlainn (d. 1193/4), king of North Ossory, son and heir of Domnall MacGillapatrik (qv) (d. 1185), was the last MacGillapatrik king to live on the rich lands of Kilkenny. On the death of his father, Máel Sechlainn succeeded as king of North Ossory; like Domnall he continued to hold the kingdom as a vassal of the heirs of Richard de Clare (qv) (d. 1176), earl of Pembroke and Striguil, though he did not have as close a relationship with the English. Further, his position was complicated by the advance of John (qv) (d. 1216), lord of Ireland, during 1185 into the southern midlands, which provoked a response from Domnall Mór Ua Briain (qv) (d. 1194), king of Thomond, and Diarmait Mór Mac Carthaig (qv) (d. 1185), king of Desmond. On 24 June 1185 Ua Briain sacked Ardfinnan castle, before marching into Ossory, where he gathered considerable support from the Irish, which may indicate that Máel Sechlainn and his people resented John's intrusions.

Máel Sechlainn's kingdom was to remain a hotly disputed fault line between the Irish of Munster and English Leinster. In 1189 Domnall Mór Mac Carthaig (qv) (d. 1206), king of Desmond, razed castles from Desmond to Ossory, capping this feat of regional mobility with a defeat of the English army at Thurles the next year. Mac Carthaig's exploits unsettled the Meic Gilla Pátraic (MacGillapatriks) of North Ossory and a dramatic decline took place in Máel Sechlainn's relations with the English. This coincided with the emergence of a new English lord of Leinster, William Marshal (qv) (d. 1219), who gained his position by marrying, in 1189, Isabella (qv) de Clare, the earl's daughter; after September that year Marshal obtained seisin of his wife's vast inheritance and dispatched his bailiff to Leinster.

As the heir of Clare and Diarmait Mac Murchada (qv) (d. 1171), king of Leinster, Marshal was determined to rule Leinster in its entirety, an aim that was threatened by the growing hostility of Máel Sechlainn and the unrest of the Munster kings on the southern borders of the lordship. About 1191–2 Marshal apparently authorised that the right of his MacGillapatrik vassals to hold North Ossory be declared forfeit and that a sentence of eviction be passed upon them. These actions had immediate effect in Ossory: the stewards of Marshal tightened his hold over central Ossory, building Kilkenny castle in 1192, and starting to expel the MacGillapatriks to the Slieve Bloom mountains on the borders of Laois. Máel Sechlainn's response was furious. During the upheaval, Bishop Felix Ua Duib Sláine of Ossory complained that his diocese was engulfed in warfare and transferred his seat from Aghaboe to the safety of Kilkenny in the south.

At the same time the English of Leinster moved to curtail the threat posed by Ua Briain by attempting to invade Thomond, only to be stopped in their tracks by his

army on the plain of Killaloe in east Clare. Ua Briain then pushed into the midlands, defeating another English force at Thurles before capitalising on the turmoil raging in Ossory. But by this time the MacGillapatricks had been forced from central Ossory into the Slieve Blooms, around which time – in 1193 or 1194 – Máel Sechlainn died.

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*AFM*, iii (1990 repr.); *Ann. Inisf.*; William Carrigan, *The history and antiquities of the diocese of Ossory* (4 vols, 1905), i, 70–71

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