

O'Rourke (Ó Ruairc), Tadhg

by Emmett O'Byrne

O'Rourke (Ó Ruairc), Tadhg (d. 1376), king of West Breifne, was apparently one of the younger sons of Ualgharg O'Rourke (qv) (d. 1346), king of West Breifne, for he is not mentioned in accounts of the ill-fated expedition of the O'Rourkes against the Clann Mhuircheartaigh Mhuimhnigh O'Connors (Uí Chonchobhair) in 1340. He succeeded to the kingship on the death of his elder brother Aodh Bán in 1352. Throughout his reign he fought a bitter campaign against the Clann Mhuircheartaigh Mhuimhnigh O'Connors, who had murdered his father. In 1366, with the Maguires (Méig Uidhir) of Fermanagh, he planned to surprise the Clann Mhuircheartaigh Mhuimhnigh in a daring assault, but their intended victims ambushed them before the attack could take place, killing several of the O'Rourkes and the Maguires. Tadhg took his revenge in 1367 in a battle near Ballysadare Co. Sligo, where, with Domhnall O'Connor (qv) (d. 1395) lord of Sligo and the MacDonaghs (Meic Donnchadha), he routed the Clann Mhuircheartaigh; they, in their turn, attacked the O'Rourkes later that year, killing many of them, including Tadhg's mother, Dearbhail MacDermott (Nic Dhiarmada). In the closing years of his reign, Tadhg seems to have encouraged his brother Tighearnán Mór O'Rourke (qv) (d. 1418) to prepare himself to assume the kingship. Tadhg died in 1376, celebrated by his kinsmen for his deeds and commemorated in his obit as 'the bear of Breifny'. The kingship was not to return to his line until 1419.

After Tadhg's death leadership of the O'Rourkes duly passed to Tighearnán Mór, and then to his son Aodh Buidhe O'Rourke, who died in 1419. Another son of Tighearnán Mór, Tadhg O'Rourke (qv) (d. 1435), then claimed the title, but Eóghan O'Reilly (qv) (d. 1449), with the MacReynolds (Méig Raghnaill) of north Leitrim, the MacTiernans (Meic Thighearnáin), and the English, put forward Art O'Rourke (d. 1430), son of the elder Tadhg; their candidate prevailed and became king in 1419. The struggle between Art and the younger Tadhg caused serious uproar in the region, but by 1424 Eóghan O'Reilly had established his overlordship over the O'Rourkes and had switched his favour to Tadhg O'Rourke, installing him as king of West Breifne in Art's place. Art put up fierce resistance but after O'Reilly and Tadhg wasted his lands, he was compelled to submit. Nothing more is known of Art until his murder in 1430 by his nephew Maghnus O'Rourke.

The leadership of Art's faction was taken up by his brother, Lochlainn O'Rourke (d. 1458), who succeeded as king of West Breifne after the death of Tadhg in 1435. Little is known about his reign, but the surviving fragments show him struggling to establish his power. In 1440 he was deposed by his nephews, the sons of Art; they placed him in the custody of Donnchadh Magauran (Mág Shamhradháin), who then passed him on to the sons of Tighearnán Mór. At some stage in the 1440s he seems to have been released, and appears to have resumed his role as king of

West Breifne: the Annals of Ulster record that in 1457 Lochlainn tried to entrap the Maguires (Méig Uidhir) of Fermanagh at a parley; in spite of their small numbers, the Maguires killed most of Lochlainn's men, and impaled the heads of sixteen O'Rourke nobles on the palisade of their lord's residence. This reverse may have broken Lochlainn, as he died shortly afterwards in 1458.

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*AFM*, iv, v (1990); *ALC*, i–ii; *AU*, iii; *Ann. Clon.*; *Ann. Conn.*; *Misc. Ir. Annals*; *Ann. Inisf.*; Katharine Simms, 'Gaelic lordships in Ulster in the later middle ages' (2 vols, Ph.D. thesis, University of Dublin, 1976), 411–40; *NHI*, ix, 162–3