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SEÁN DUFFY

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For my mother and father

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PREFACE

This book is not intended to supersede any of the many histories of medieval Ireland already available, several of which are works of such importance that they are likely to remain indispensable to students of the subject for generations to come. However, some of the best work on the subject is out of print, other volumes are by now somewhat dated, and much that remains is work of such formidable scholarship that it is not readily accessible to the beginner. It is for this reason that I have had the temerity to undertake the present volume. Its aims are modest. They are, first, to provide a brief survey of Irish history in the first half of this millennium, written in a style and format that will make this quite difficult subject intelligible to those previously unacquainted with it; second, to incorporate the findings of recent research in the field; and third, to offer – such as it is – my own reinterpretation of the evidence. I hope that this will mean that it contains something of use for both raw recruit and weary veteran alike. There are, however, large gaps in the narrative. I have had limited space to devote to the church, and even less room for society and economy. I can but apologize for this, which is the consequence of trying to cover such a broad time-span in a volume of this size (though in the Bibliography I refer readers to some of the more important works in the field).

Many debts are incurred in compiling a volume even of these dimensions. My primary debt is to all those scholars, living and dead, whose work I have borrowed to build the narrative. I have tried to acknowledge the extent of my indebtedness in the Notes, but I fear that this is not enough. So many

Preface

of the ideas that one thinks are one's own are the product of reading other people's work over the years, or of attending their public lectures, or of conversations with them. Where my theft has gone unacknowledged below I apologize here. Several scholars have had a more direct involvement. Professor James Lydon, Dr Ailbhe Mac Shamhráin, Dr Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, Ms Linzi Simpson and Dr Brendan Smith have read drafts of the book in whole or in part and made many helpful comments. As I have in many instances stubbornly refused to take their advice, the exoneration normally pronounced at this point needs to have even greater force than usual.

The dedication expresses a debt of another kind.

SEÁN DUFFY
Dublin, January 1996

MAPS

Ireland c. 1000 AD

(includes the main place-names and population names mentioned in the text)

Ireland c. 1250 AD

(includes the main place-names and lordships mentioned in the text)

Ireland *c.* 1500 AD

(includes the main place-names and lordships mentioned in the text)