

**DISCOVERY OF THE
TOMB OF
OLLAMH FODHLA**

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EUGENE ALFRED CONWELL

**DISCOVERY OF THE
TOMB OF
OLLAMH FODHLA**

DISCOVERY

OF THE TOMB OF

Ólámh Fochta

(*Ollav Fola*),

IRELAND'S FAMOUS MONARCH AND LAW-MAKER UPWARDS
OF THREE THOUSAND YEARS AGO.

BY

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"That speechless past has begun to speak."—PALGRAVE.



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PREFACE.

SOME portions of the following pages were originally contributed to the Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy,* in a Paper read at a meeting of that body on 12th February, 1872, "On the Identification of the Ancient Cemetery at Loughcrew, Co. Meath, and the Discovery of the Tomb of Ollamh Fodhla."

Our attempt to rescue from the domain of legend and romance the memories of a locality, at one time the most famous in our island, and in so doing to revive a faded and long forgotten page in early Irish History, is here presented to our fellow-countrymen, in the hope that it may be found not only not uninteresting to them, but that it may be the means of inducing others, in various localities, to turn their attention to, and to elucidate whatever remains of Ireland's Ancient Relics may be still extant in their respective vicinities.

Our very grateful thanks are pre-eminently due to the late J. L. W. Naper, Esq., D. L., who, from the time we commenced our antiquarian researches on the Loughcrew Hills, in 1863, uniformly encouraged and aided us in supplying the amount of manual labour necessary for carrying on the explorations, without which friendly encouragement and patriotic help, whilst others laughed at what appeared to them the foolish and childish occupation of a "visionary antiquary" turning over old stones, no practical result would probably ever have been arrived at. Had he lived to see it shown that the greatest, the oldest, and the most important of the Ancient Royal Pagan Cemeteries of Ireland existed on and around his own hills, we can only imagine the amount of self-satisfaction with which he would have looked back upon the part he took in contributing to restore the historic memories of the place.

* See Vol. I., Ser. II., Pol. Lit. and Antiq., page 72, &c.

No less deeply grateful can we feel for the steps taken by his agent, Charles William Hamilton, Esq., J. P., Hamwood, well known to be ever ready to lend a helping hand to scientific progress. He not only from the first enthusiastically entered into our views by being practically present, and by taking an active part in all the operations; but, when we pointed out that the carns at Loughcrew were not recorded on the Ordnance Maps, he at once communicated with Major-General Sir Henry James, R. E., F. R. S., Director of the Ordnance Survey, calling his attention to the omission, and with praiseworthy alacrity a highly accomplished Sapper, Mr. Thomas Pearson, was sent from the Ordnance Department, Phoenix Park, with instructions to resurvey the hills, and to insert the antiquities, while our examination of them was in progress, in September, 1865, on a map 25·344 inches to a statute mile. This map, under the title of "Plan of the Sepulchral Carns of Loughcrew, in the county of Meath" (sheets 9 and 15, Part I. and Part II.), was afterwards zincographed in 1868, at the Ordnance Survey Office, Phoenix Park, under the direction of Captain Wilkinson, R. E.; and copies of it, in two parts, can be obtained from Hodges, Foster, and Co., 104, Grafton-street, Dublin.

It will be gratifying intelligence to all those who have the preservation of archaeological remains at heart to know, that the present proprietor of Loughcrew, J. L. Naper, Esq., D. L., has intimated to us, since the following pages were printed, his intention of having all necessary steps taken for the due care and preservation of the highly interesting remnants of antiquity on his property.

In the hope that it may be found useful we give a brief account of the ancient Irish MSS. we have used as authorities, and without calling in the aid of which we never could have attempted to restore the long-forgotten name and history of the Cemetery on the Loughcrew Hills. It is admitted by all who have studied the subject that the early history of Ireland never can be written until all the ancient Irish MSS. still extant are made accessible to the general reader: and this only can be done by multiplying copies and translating them. Acting on this enlightened view the Librarian of the Royal Irish Academy, John T. Gilbert, Esq., F. S. A., as a member of their council, submitted, in 1869, a suggestion for the publication of ancient Irish texts in their original integrity. The first result of the adoption of this suggestion was the publication in November, 1870, of two hundred copies from the original in the Library of

the Royal Irish Academy, of *LEABHAR NA H-UIDHRI*; with an account of the manuscript itself, a description of its contents, an index, and *fac-similes* in colours. This MS., the oldest volume now known entirely in the Irish language, is regarded as the chief surviving native literary monument, not ecclesiastical, of ancient Ireland. We submit a condensed notice of it from O'Curry's "Lectures on the Manuscript Materials of Ancient Irish History," p. 182, &c. :—

"The first of these ancient books that merits notice, because it is the oldest, is that which is known by the name of *LEABHAR NA H-UIDHRI*, or the Book of the Dun Cow :—said to have been so called from the fact of St. Ciaran having written down in a book, which he had made from the hide of his pet cow, one of the principal tracts contained in *LEABHAR NA H-UIDHRI*, viz., the celebrated tale of the *Táin Bó Chuainne*, or 'Plunder of the Cows of Cualgne' (a district now called Cooley, in the county of Louth, stretching along the bay of Carlingford). This cow from its colour was called *Odhar*, or dark grey, or dun; and the form *Uídhri* being the genitive case of the word *Odhar*, the book was ever afterwards known, from this circumstance, as *Leabhar na h-Uídhri*, or 'Book of the dun (cow).' See 'O'Curry's Lectures,' page 30.

"Of the original compiler and writer of *Leabhar na h-Uídhri*, I have been able to learn nothing more than a brief and melancholy notice of his death in the Annals of the Four Masters, at the year 1106. A memorandum in the original hand, at the top of folio 45, clearly identifies the writer of the book with the person whose death is recorded in the passage in the Annals.

"The contents of the MS., as they stand now, are of a mixed character, historical and romantic, and relate to the ante-Christian, as well as the Christian period. The book begins with a fragment of the Book of Genesis, part of which was always prefixed to the Book of Invasions (or ancient Colonization) of Erin, for genealogical purposes.

"This is followed by a fragment of the history of the Britons, by Nennius, translated into Gaelic by *Gilla Cuomhain*, the poet and chronologist, who died A. D. 1072.

"The next important piece is the very ancient elegy, written by the poet *Dallan Forgaill*, on the death of Saint Colum Cille, in the year 592.

"The elegy is followed by fragments of the ancient historic tale of the *Mesca Uladh*, [or Inebriety of the Ultonians,] who in a fit of excitement after a great feast at the royal palace of Emania, made a sudden and furious march into Munster, where they burned the palace of *Teamhair Luachra*, in Kerry, then the residence of *Caroi Mac Daire*, king of West Munster. This tract abounds in curious notices in topography, as well as in allusions to and descriptions of social habits and manners.

"Next come fragments of *Táin Bó Dóartadha*, and the *Táin Bó Flidais*; both Cattle Spoils, arising out of the celebrated Cattle Spoil of *Cuainne*. Next comes the story of the wanderings of Maeldun's ship in the Atlantic, for three years and seven months, in the eighth century. These are followed by imperfect copies of: the *Táin Bó Chuainne*, or great Cattle Spoil of *Cuainne*; the *Brúighean Da Dearga*, and death of the monarch *Conaire Mór*; a history of the great pagan cemeteries of Erin, and of the various old books from which this and other pieces were compiled; poems by Flann

of Monasterboice and others; together with various other pieces of history and historic romance, chiefly referring to the ante-Christian period, and especially that of the *Tuatha Dé Danann*. This most valuable MS. belongs to the Royal Irish Academy."

The same authority* gives us the following account of **LEABHAR LECAN**, or the Book of Lecan, so styled from the name of the place (Lecan), at which it was compiled.

"This Book was compiled in the year 1418, by *Gilla Isa Mór* Mac Firbis, of *Lecan Míe Fhírbisigh*, in the county of Sligo, one of the great school of teachers of that celebrated locality, and the direct ancestor of the learned *Dubhaltach* [or Duaid] Mac Firbis. This Book, which belongs to the Library of the Royal Irish Academy, contains over 600 pages, equal to 2400 pages of the Gaellic text of the 'Annals of the Four Masters.' It is beautifully and accurately written on vellum of small folio size, chiefly in the hand of *Gilla Isa* Mac Firbis, though there are some small parts of it written, respectively, in the hands of Adam O'Cuirmín (the historian of *Breifne*, or Breifne) and Morogh *Riabhadh O'Cuindlis*. And here I may perhaps be permitted to observe, that I believe the families of Forbes and Candlish in Scotland are the same as, and indeed directly descended from, those of Mac Firbis and O'Cuindlis in Ireland.

"The first nine folios of the Book of Lecan were lost, until discovered by me a few years ago, bound up in a volume of the Seabright Collection, in the Library of Trinity College.

"The Book of Lecan differs but little, in its arrangement and general contents, from the Book of Ballymote. It contains two copies of the Book of Invasions, an imperfect one at the beginning, but a perfect one, with the Succession of the Kings, and the tract on the Boromean Tribute, at the end. It contains fine copies of the ancient historical, synchronological, chronological, and genealogical poems already spoken of as comprised in the Book of Ballymote, as well as some that are not contained in that volume. These are followed by the family history and genealogies of the Milesians, with considerable and important additions to those found in the Book of Ballymote. Among the additions is a very valuable tract, in prose and verse, by Mac Firbis himself, on the families and sub-divisions of the territory of *Fír-Fíacharach*, in the present county of Sligo; a tract which has been published by the Irish Archaeological Society, under the title of 'The Tribes and Customs of Hy-Fiachrach.'

We have to acknowledge our obligations to Brian O'Looney, Esq., M. R. I. A., successor in the Chair of Celtic Literature to the late eminent Eugene O'Curry, for his valuable assistance in collating and revising the Irish texts quoted in the succeeding pages. To him, also, we are indebted for the following ex-

* "O'Curry's Lectures on the Manuscript Materials of Ancient Irish History," p. 192.

planation of the word DINDSENCHAS,* the name of a celebrated ancient topographical tract giving the history of the *eminent, distinguished, or notable* places in Erin, and said to be compiled at Tara about the year 550.†

"*Dindsenchas* literally means 'History of the Eminences;' but there are many different pieces under this title which should not be confounded, e. g., the tract from which I gave you the extract on the 'Fair of Taitiu,' is, called '*Dindsenchas Erion*,' or the 'History of the Eminent Places in Erin.' Again we have '*Dindsenchas Dindna Erion*,' the 'History of the eminent fastnesses and fortified places in Erin;' and another tract called '*Dindsenchas na Curad*,' the 'History of the eminent Warriors and Champions of Erin;' and several other pieces of this nature which, though totally distinct, are collectively called *Dindsenchas*."

THE ANNALS OF IRELAND to which, as will be seen, we have so often referred, were called by Colgan, the friend and cotemporary of Michael O'Clery, *Annales Quatuor Magistrorum*, and also *Annales Dungallenses*, the latter name being applied from the fact of their having been commenced and compiled at the Franciscan Convent of *Donegal*. The title of *Four Masters* was never assumed by the compilers themselves. Colgan, in his preface to his *Acta Sanctorum Hiberniæ*, gives his reasons for so denominating them; and Dr. O'Donovan remarks that as *Quatuor Magistri* had been long previously applied by the medical writers of the middle ages to the Four Masters of the Medical Sciences, this circumstance may probably have suggested to Colgan the appellation he has given to the compilers of these Annals, which, in themselves, we think, should never have been known by any other name than the simple one of the *Annals of Donegal*. The four principal scribes, however, employed in compiling them, having been four most eminent masters in antiquarian lore, at the period in which they flourished, may have in no small degree contributed to their work being now so favourably and so popularly known as the ANNALS OF THE FOUR MASTERS. Their names were Michael, Conary, and Cucogry O'Clery, together with Ferfeasa O'Mulconry.

1. Michael O'Clery, the chief of the Four Masters, was born in the parish of Kilbarron, near Ballyshannon, about the year 1580, and was descended from a family of hereditary scholars. He is said to have received, if not his classical, at least his

* Pronounced *Dinshanahus*.

† "O'Curry's Lectures," p. 188.