

**ANECDOTA OXONIENSIA, TEXTS,  
DOCUMENTS, AND EXTRACTS CHIEFLY  
FROM MANUSCRIPTS IN THE BODLEIAN  
AND OTHER OXFORD LIBRARIES,  
MEDIAEVAL AND MODERN SERIES. VOL.  
I - PART IV, CATH FINNTRAGA**

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**KUNO MEYER**

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# Anecdota Oxoniensia

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MEDIAEVAL AND MODERN SERIES. VOL. I—PART IV

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*CATH FINNTRÁGA*

EDITED BY

KUNO MEYER



**Oxford**

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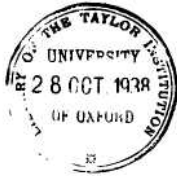
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TO  
**ERNST WINDISCH**  
I DEDICATE  
WITH ALL GRATITUDE AND AFFECTION  
THE FIRSTFRUITS OF MY CELTIC STUDIES  
WHICH I BEGAN AS HIS PUPIL  
AND CONTINUE WITH HIS COUNSEL.





## INTRODUCTION.

THE oldest extant version of the *Cath Finntrága*, here printed for the first time, is preserved in the Bodleian MS. Rawlinson B 487, ff. 1-11, a vellum quarto, dating from the fifteenth century. In a list of contents bound up with the MS. this tale is called: Finleachi o Catasai Gigantomachia Hibernice, vel potius Acta Finni mac Cooli (cum praelio de Fintra). It is followed by the oldest copy of the *Agallam na Senbrach*, ff. 12-54. Bound up with these two texts are three pieces written on paper, the first in Irish, the last two in Latin, which are thus enumerated in the list of contents: *Leges Ecclesiasticae Hibernice*, fol. 53.—*Miscellanea quaedam de rebus Hibernicis*, fol. 68.—*Pars aliqua Chronici Henrici Martiburgensis vicarii de Ballysraddan in diocesi Dubliniensi*, fol. 76.

Our text was written by a certain Finnlaech ó Chathasaig (Finlay O'Casey) who gives his name at the end<sup>1</sup>, and states that he wrote it for Sadb, the daughter of Tadhg ó Maille (Teague O'Malley), in whose praise some Irish verses, mutilated in the conclusion, are added. There are two gaps in the MS., one between ff. 3 and 4, the other between ff. 6 and 7, two leaves being missing in the first place, and one in the second.

There are fourteen paper copies of the *Cath Finntrága*, all of them of a later date, belonging to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. They are enumerated by Jubainville, *Essai d'un Catalogue de la Littérature épique de l'Irlande*, pp. 67 and 68, who, however, omits to mention a copy contained in the Edinburgh MS. lviii. pp. 197-237, and written in 1733. I have seen all of these and collated one or two of them. They all represent a different version of the tale from that contained in Rawlinson, the most remarkable difference being the insertion of the list of the harbours of Erin in the beginning, and the omission at the end

<sup>1</sup> This colophon runs thus: *Arna scribadh d'Finnlaech ó Chathasaigh do tSaidhb ingin Taidhg hi Mhaille i. sain mhna ar ghais 7 ar cineach 7 gheannmnaighacht ri.*

of the story of Gelges seeking the body of her husband among the slain, as well as her lament<sup>1</sup>. To give an idea of the variants of these later versions, and at the same time to supply the gaps in Rawl. mentioned above, I have selected the copy contained in the British Museum MS. Egerton 149, pp. 109 seqq., which, though written as late as 1821, yet on the whole gives the best text among these later copies.

Beside these prose versions there exists, in the Book of the Dean of Lismore, also a poetic account of the Battle of Ventry in the form of a dialogue between Ossian and Patrick; see M'Lauchlan's edition, pp. 7 seqq. The chief discrepancies with our version are the following. Daire Donn is introduced as king of Lochlann (*Daor Done reith Lochlin*), though later on he is also called King of the World. Conn, and not Cormac mac Airt, is mentioned as monarch of Erin at the time. There is no mention of the Túatha Dé Danand, though the line *hanyth ith chaur sar wane twoa dey hug ass gi knok*, which M'Lauchlan thus gives in modern Gaelic: *thainig de chabhar do'r Feinn sluagh do thugas gach cnoc*, seems to be a reminiscence of the old tradition. Cairbre Lifechair (*Carbryth Loaechr*) comes to the rescue with four 'bands'; Conncrithir (*Cownkreer*) 'slays the men of India, and raises their king's head on the mountain-side' (*ruk sloyg nyn kynea zeive, is di hog ea kenni reith er knok*). The son of the king of Ulster is called Conn (*Cown m' reith Wlith*). While none of the men of the world escape from the slaughter, except the king of France, who flees before Oscur like a swallow to *Glen Baltan*, there survive two 'ordered bands' of the Fenians, one band of the clanna Baiscne (*cath di clanni Bisskyni*) and one of the clanna Morna (*cath di clanni Mornyth*).

The numerous copies of our tale as well as frequent references to it in modern Irish literature<sup>2</sup> show that it was one of the favourite romantic compositions of the Irish, and indeed its memory still lingers on among

<sup>1</sup> T. C. D., H. 2, 5, the oldest of these paper copies, ends thus, after the narrative of the death of Cael and Finnachta Fiaclach: *Is and sin tangadar i. aois ceoil agus oirfide agus bandala na feine á adhlacadh corp a d-triath agus a ttiaghearnagha agus do bhreith an mheid do budh anleighis diobh leó agus budh do bheg do bhi mar sin diobh gur be sin Cath Fiontragha gonnige sin an meid do frith lind de. Finis per me Dermotus Connur pro Thomatio Drumáivile.*

<sup>2</sup> E. g. in the *Caoith Oistin a n-diaigh na feinne*, ed. O'Grady, p. 242:

*'uch! dá m-biainn-se a neart 's a lúth,  
mar bhíos gan fhudhair a g-cuan Fhionntrágha.'*

the people in the South and West of Ireland. No mention, however, is found in the older Irish literature, and it is thus likely that, as in the case of the *Torúigheacht Dhiarmuda agus Ghrainne*, the oldest MS. copy of which also dates from the fifteenth century, the origin of the story itself must not be referred back to a much earlier date than that of its oldest MS. Indeed the language of the text plainly shows that it cannot have been copied from a much older MS. Nor is internal evidence tending in the same direction wanting. Whether, as in the case of most of the older tales of the Ossianic cycle, there is some historical basis for the story, it is impossible for me to say. As to the romantic accretions, they are the same as in all later Irish compositions. They have come partly from the inexhaustible treasure of Irish popular thought and fancy, and partly from those tales derived from the classics, such as the *Togail Troi*, the story of Alexander, the *Merugud Uiliux*, &c., which, since their translation in the twelfth century have passed into Irish literature. As an example of such classical reminiscences I would regard the statement l. 19, that the cause of the invasion of Erin by the combined kings and armies of the world was the elopement of Finn with the wife and daughter of the king of France, which is clearly a reminiscence of the origin of the Trojan war; or, better still, the invulnerable Daire Donn, and the story of the weapons made by 'Vulcan, the smith of hell,' in the Egerton version.

The question may, however, be asked, though, as just said, I would not allow it in the case of the *Cath Finntrága*, whether it is not by a mere chance, namely, the accidental loss of older MSS., that most of the Ossianic tales have come down to us in later MSS. only. For the decision of this question I have the following data to offer, without being, as yet, in a position to draw more general conclusions from them.

It is now commonly assumed that many of the most popular tales of the Ossianic cycle were formed on the pattern of the heroic, a practice of which the *Macgnímrada Finn* offer a good instance. But no attempt has yet been made to fix the time when this adaptation of old features and elements to the favourite figures of the more modern cycle took place.

As I first pointed out in a letter to the 'Academy' of February 21, 1885, there is in the Book of Leinster, pp. 143 a-145 a, a poem