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Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society, 1931, Vol. 36, No. 144,
page(s) 69-75

Published by the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society

Digital file created: March 1, 2015

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Tara Luachra.

By D. F. O'SHAUGHNESSY and P. CARROLL, Kilfinane,



MONG the forts claimed by the King of Cashel was "Temair Luachra Deaghaidh" (Tara Luachra); and which, in older days, was the most predominant of the forts of Munster: a predominance easily understood from the following curious tradition in relation to it:—"The High-King of Ireland, from its royal namesake Bregian Tara, had to send a cauldron to the King of Cashel at Temair Luachra." It had ceased to be chief centre of Munster in a prehistoric past, but the fact was not forgotten. "The King of Cashel, indeed, was expected to go to it with twenty chariots, thirty vats of liquor and food in proportion to eat the Feast of the Ernai, and stay there for a week." From this tradition it may be noticed that so high a dignitary as the King of Cashel was expected to go to it to eat the Feast of the Ernai, and this long after its predominance had ceased to be. But more remarkable still is the fact, according to the *Mesca Ulad*—a curious and ancient tract in the Book of Leinster—that Tara Luachra was the chief residence of the famous warrior-King, Curoi MacDaire. Curoi, son of Daire, was grandson of Dega, who was confirmed King of Munster, B.C. 137, by the High-King, Eochu Feidlioch, (Queen Medb's father), to which he had already been chosen for his prowess. This Dega became the eponymus of the Clanna or Corca Deagaid—the Ernai Dedaid (Ptolemy's Iouernoi); which tribe, together with the Ultonians and the Feine of Tara, were named as "the three noble races" of Ireland in *Senchas Mor*.

Curoi MacDaire was the rival of Cuchulaind, by whom and by the treachery of his (Curoi's) wife, Blathnaid, he fell; his son, Lugaid, afterwards avenging him by slaying Cuchulaind. That such a warrior-king, grandson of the king and god of his tribe, should have chosen Tara Luachra as his chief residence, speaks greatly for its ancient importance.

The site of this ancient place has given rise to much dispute among topographers, chief among whom were O'Curry, O'Donovan, Westropp and P. J. Lynch. Yet none has succeeded in actually placing it in any particular spot to his own satisfaction, though particular evidences of its site are repeatedly given in the *Mesca Ulad*, itself, a document admitted by all these archaeologists to be exact to minuteness in its topography.

In *Leabhar na gCeart* it is stated that the Feast of the Ernai was celebrated at "Temair Luachra Deaghaidh" which, of course, means that the Feast was held here in older times before the coming into evidence of the cemetery of the Deda, afterwards known as Temair Erann (of Cush, Kilfinane); i.e., the feast, held at first at the royal residence, was afterwards removed in commemoration to the burying-place of the tribe; a changing of the site of the feast, but still celebrated in the same locality, from Temair Luachra to Temair Erann. The site then of Tara Luachra must be sought

for in the locality of Tara Erann. Here is a curious fact, often repeated in history of a royal residence, or town, at first conferring fame on its burial place, itself to be only remembered, in a secondary sense, by the afterfame of the burial-place. Temair Erann to-day, and it alone, holds all the traditions of the heroes, warriors and makers of Tara Luachra. For here, in this the chief cemetery of the Ernai Dedaid or Corca Laegde, all the outstanding names of their mythic ancestry—save Deda and Curoi MacDaire—are attached to its monuments.

Mr. Westropp has identified beyond dispute Temair Erann at Ceun Abrat, Slieveeagh, Kilfinane, and he has in confirmation identified and named each rath mound and grave as given in tradition: and curious enough, he who had his finger on the spot in the one case, Temair Erann, should have been led astray in the other case, Tara Luachra, by blindly taking for granted the inaccuracies of O'Donovan, and mistaking the sense of the Mesca Ulad.

Mr. P. J. Lynch, co-establishing Temair Erann with Mr. Westropp, located Tara Luachra in its actual vicinity "to help to sustain his (Mr. Westropp's) reasoning: at the same time totally disregarding the repeatedly expressed directions in the Mesca Ulad: that Tara Luachra was west of the "regal raths and the stone columns of these royal raths" of (Temair Erann) and not in Temair Erann itself. Though Mr. Lynch, alone of topographers interested in the subject, seemed to have, at the outset, correctly understood the direct sense of the Mesca Ulad.

Dr. O'Donovan, regarding Temair Erann as identical with Tara Luachra, placed it in Kerry, and seemingly misled by appearances and similarity in sound, stated that its situation is still pointed out by Bealathanatowrig (Ford-mouth of Tara) a ford in the parish of Dysart, near Castleisland in Kerry. But Hennessy-Todd Professor—in introduction to the Mesca Ulad, says that O'Donovan, who possessed an instinctive talent for discovering the sites of places renowned in old Irish history, failed to discover, after a most diligent investigation, any substantial traces of the palace of Tara Luachra, and, (adds the Professor) the "residences and structures" must have been of a very fragile kind. But O'Donovan looked in the wrong place. Hennessy, therefore, feeling that O'Donovan had been on the wrong track, gives a guess of his own and introduces to his readers his famous triangle, the apex of which being at Glin on the Shannon and the base spreading from Newcastlewest to Duagh in the Barony of Clanmaurice in Co. Kerry, he invites his readers to place Tara Luachra anywhere (the place most convenient) within that triangle. Yet Professor Hennessy, in XII. Intro., Mesca Ulad, admits, perhaps unconsciously, that Tara Luachra was in the neighbourhood of Knockany, and despite this and the clear directions of the Mesca Ulad, he goes to West Limerick and Kerry for the site of Curoi's palace. But the mistake of the Professor, like that of Mr. Westropp, seems to be in regarding Old Oenac Clochair or Oenach Culi to be the Oenacbeg or Oenac Cairbre near Monasternenagh as laid down at first by O'Donovan; this mistake throwing the route of the Ultonians out of gear as related in the Mesca Ulad, and as a consequence placing Tara Luachra much more North and West and thus rendering all search

of topographers null and abortive. Mr. P. J. Lynch and afterwards Mr. Westropp proved all this wrong, and demonstrated that Oenac Culi—the old name of Oenac Sen Clochair—was Knocklong, so that the Ultonians, leaving the Hill of Aine, set out for Knocklong—and not for Monasternenagh—and “thence in the straight direction of the road to Tara Luachra” which was situated on the slopes of the Eastern Luachair;—a range of mountains, instead of being confined to the borders of Limerick and Kerry, extends east beyond Slieveveagh, Kilfinane. Here then, in the Locality of Slieveveagh, Kilfinane, or Temair Erann, was situated the once predominant Tara Luachra. But where? Where are the remains of the one-time palace of Curoi MacDaire; of the Iron-house, of the underground house, of the pillar-stones, and all the other details of the Mesca Ulad? At the Cahir and its vicinity, Mortellestown, Kilfinane, and these remains of the “residences and structures,” mentioned in the ancient tract, are of no “fragile kind.” The Cahir, one of the finest forts of its kind in Limerick, standing on a beautifully-rounded hill, commanding an expansive view of all its approaches, “overlooking the plain,” “its gateway to the east,” “facing the rising sun” with its view between the “black bog” of Emlygreennan and the “wood” of Ir-Luachair (etir moin ceir & craib. M. U. 24.) through which approached the Ultonians as seen by Queen Medb’s watches on the rampart, passing the “regal raths and the stone columns of those royal raths” of Temair Erann, agrees in every detail with the minute descriptions of the Mesca Ulad.

Mr. P. J. Lynch, in Notes on the Barony of Coshlea, selecting Emlygreennan as the site of Tara Luachra, says: “The slopes of Cenn Abrat, which Mr. Westropp has identified as Temair Erann, with its raths, would justify the description (of Tara Luachra). Imleach Grianan, at which there is a castle, may mark the site of the royal fort (Curoi’s palace).” But Emlygreennan and Temair Erann are almost the one in point of locality; and possibly the forts at Emlygreennan would be identical with those at Tara Erann: moreover Emlygreennan being placed in a marshy hollow and bog could not possibly “overlook the plain” a situation demanded by the Tara Luachra of the Mesca Ulad—nor “face the rising sun”—another demand—which would be completely hidden from it by the towering peak of Cenn Abrat. And in relation to Emlygreennan, so close to Temair Erann, Crom Deroil and Crom Darail, the druids and watchers of Queen Medb, as they stood watching from the rampart of Tara Luachra, gazing eastward, could not possibly describe (presumably) the raths of Temair Erann, as only to be seen by them at a distance and making the special qualification of having passed these raths the day before. Only from the rampart of the Cahir, Mortellestown, could the following conversation between these druids, take place, as related in the Mesca Ulad:—

“There were two observers and druids guarding her (Queen Medb). Their names were Crom Deroil and Crom Darail, two fostersons of the good, illustrious druid, Cathbad. It happened to them, then, to be on the wall on Tara Luachra at that time, looking and guarding, observing and viewing on every side of them. It was then Crom Deroil said: “Hast thou seen the thing that has appeared to me.” “What thing?” said Crom Darail.

"Meseems that it is swords of crimson warfare and the thread of multitudes I perceive coming over the side of the Ir Luachair (Slieveareagh) from the East."

"I would not think a clot of gore and blood in the mouth that utters that" said Crom Darail, "for that is not an army or a multitude, but the gigantic oaks past which we came yesterday" (if they were so close to the wood of Slieveareagh as at Emlygrennan why this confusion?)

"If it were they, why the immense royal chariots under them?"

"They are not chariots," said Crom Darail, "but the regal raths past which we came" (yesterday).

"If they are raths, why are those splendid all-white shields in them?"

"They are not shields at all," said Crom Darail, "but the stone columns that are in the doors of these royal raths" (presumably the columns of Gata Bawn, Temair Erann).

Surely if those were so near to the raths and stone columns of Temair Erann as at Emlygrennan, there would be no such confusion in their conversation, and the expression "past which we came yesterday" would not be needed for the purpose of qualification. No amount of argument as to the peculiar form and trick of narrative used by old writers can explain away this altercation of the druids, for if the old author had Emlygrennan in mind, as Tara Luachra, he would have altered this conversation of his characters. Those practised watchers and druids must have been at a distance near enough to lend them a perfect view of the raths and columns and woods of Temair Erann, yet great enough to justify the repetition of "passed which we came yesterday," and for the one to be mislead by appearances in the snow then falling. The Cahir, two and a half miles further east, could only justify this conversation. Anyhow Emlygrennan does not "overlook the plain" a situation specially demanded for Tara Luachra by the Mesca Ulad.

In the Mesca Ulad, page 17, the following paragraphs occur:—

"Cuchulaind proceeded into Druim-Collehailli, which is called Ani-Cliach (Knockaney).

"Say, my master Loeg, knowest thou in what territory we are?"

"I know not, indeed," said Loeg.

"But I know" said Cuchulaind. "This to the South is Cenn-Abrath of Slieve-Cain (Slieveareagh, Cush, Kilfinane). . . This is Druim-Collehailli in which we are, which is called Ani-Cliach, in the territory of the Deise-bec. Before us, to the South, is the host (the Munstermen) in Clui-mail-mic-ugaine, in the land of Curui, Son of Daire, son of Dedaid."

In the above the Ulstermen,—standing in Knockaney, are informed by Cuchulaind of the place in which they are, and he further explains that before them, to the South, is the enemy in the territory of Curui MacDaire. This direction indicated by Cuchulaind, to the South, at once precludes the possibility of Tara Luachra to be anywhere so far West in Kerry or West Limerick as supposed by O'Donovan, O'Curry and Professor Hennessy; and surely establishes the fact that only somewhere in the vicinity of Cenn-Abrat, South of Knockaney, could Tara-Luachra be. Mr. Lynch's site at

Emlygrennan we have disposed of above. The Cahir, Mortellestown, is directly south of Knockaney, and could be easily seen, as a distinctive landmark, from the latter place by the Ulstermen.

That Tara-Luachra was in the neighbourhood of Knockaney, the following in the Mesca Ulad demonstrates :—

“Speak then, O Cuchulaind,” said Conor, “what is the proper place of encampment for us during this day and night?”

“Old Aenach Clochair (Aneach Culi, Cross of the Tree, Knocklong) is here,” said Cuchulaind, “and this rough winter season is not fair time. And Tara-Luachra is on the slopes of the eastern Luachair, and in it are the residences and structures.”

“To go to Tara-Luachra, then, is right,” said Sencha, son of Ailill . . . “They went on in the straight direction of the road to Tara Luachra, and Cuchulaind as a guide before them.” Here Conor asked of Cuchulaind the proper place of encampment for the day and night. Cuchulaind, at once, offers two choices. Aenach Clochair is here (3 miles away) or Tara Luachra on the slopes of Ir-Luachair (some five miles further on). It being then the rough Winter season, it was not fair-time at the Old Aenach, then devoid of any shelters, so it was rejected. They decided to go to Tara-Luachra under the plea of taking advantage of its residences and structures. In all this there is not the slightest ambiguity; and the sentence which seems to need any explanation “they went on in the straight direction of the road to Tara Luachra” may be elucidated thus :—The Ultonians in their mad midnight ride seemed to have lost their way and even when arrived at Knockaney they were still off the direct route to seemingly such an established landmark as Tara-Luachra must, at the time, have been. The ford of Augvoona (later crossed by St. Patrick going to Ardpatrick and re-crossed by him returning from Claire) seems to have been the necessary connecting point for the Ultonians to reach to succeed in getting on the road to Tara Luachra. By leaving Knockaney towards Augvoona, the Ultonians would be actually doing what the Mesca Ulad explains: they would be going on “in the straight direction of the road to Tara-Luachra.” But it might here be stated as an explanatory alternative that the country between Knockaney and Slieveveagh, in the time of the Ultonians, abounded in bogs and marshes through which was no direct way, and the only safe route was the round about one to Knocklong and Augvoona.

When the Ultonians crossed the ford of Augvoona they marched along Ir-Luachair and reaching Cenn Abrath, they passed by the royal raths and stone columns of Temair Erann, which had been passed the previous day by the Connachtmen under Queen Medb and her consort King Ailill—they also going to Tara Luachra to visit their son, then in fosterage with Curoi MacDaire. Passing by Temair Erann the Ultonians would be clearly visible to Queen Medb’s watchers on the rampart of the Cahir, Mortellestown, and they would be directly east of it. Having passed Temair Erann, the Ultonians coming down the decline would naturally stoop under the great oakwoods—as mentioned in the Mesca Ulad, page 23—and would for the time be invisible to the watchers, until they again became conspicuous

coming to rest at the Fair-green, Kilfinane :—"Servile and strange is the description," said Medb. "Servile and strange are they whose description it is" said Curoi. "They are the three door-keepers of Conor's house, Nem, and Dall and Druithen."

"That is the description of the first division (of the Ultonians) that came into the fair-green" (Mesca Ulad p. 41). This possibly is the fair-green or Fathi of Kilfinane Moat, directly east of the Cahir and clearly visible from it. At page 27 of the Mesca Ulad we find :—"The host alighted on the green and sat in one band on the green. . . . Crom Deroil came into the house in which were Medb and Ailill and Curoi and Eocho macLuachta (and was asked by Medb to give a description of the first band of the Ultonians.) "The description of the first band of them that came into the place (the green) I have, indeed," said Crom Deroil,

"Give it to us then," said Medb.

"I saw before the Dun to the east, outside," said Crom Deroil, "a royal immense band . . ."



(Drawn by P. Carroll, Kilfinane)

There can be no doubt that the Dun mentioned herein is Kilfinane Moat which stands directly east of the Cahir and from it looks a remarkable landmark, its green or fathi being, perhaps, the eastern purlieus of Tara Luachra, and where most naturally the Ultonians would rest after crossing the glen of Garranlease and climbing the ridge, or druim, into the fair-green of Kilfinane. From here they would have a near and perfect view of Tara Luachra with its residences and structures.

In the continuation of the Mesca Ulad, page 41, we find :

"They went to the house in which Gabalglinni was maintained.

"Who is this ?" asked he.

"Crom Deroil and Faenglinni, son of Dedad, are here," said they, "to inquire of thee if the coming of the Ultonians was in prediction or in prophecy ; or if so, whether there is any preparation for them ?"

"Long has their coming been in prophecy. That they may be attended to, this is the provision. An iron house and two wooden houses about it ; and a subterranean house under it . . . There are seven chains of good iron here under the feet of this bed ; (), and let them be firmly fastened to the seven pillar-stones that are on the green outside."

This subterranean house mentioned here in which the Ultonians were imprisoned, the door of which was fastened by the seven chains of good iron to the seven pillar-stones, is still in being in the field of Mr. Thos. Ryan's farm, the Corrigeens, Kilfinane. An underground house roofed with stone, and at the end of the field in which it is situated there still stand four of the seven pillar stones ; a fifth stone is still remembered by old people in the locality. This field is only a few hundred yards from the Cahir, from the rampart of which the pillar-stones can be seen standing below a little to the east. There are also in the same locality intervening between the underground house and the Cahir two moats or lisses with souterrains as well as, more to the south, of the Cahir, a huge stone circle.

Throughout the Mesca Ulad we find that Curoi's palace was surrounded by a single rampart, that its gateway faced the east, "towards the rising sun," and that it "overlooked the plain." This certainly describes the Cahir, Mortellestown, to a nicety. It is surrounded by a single rampart, it has its gateway to the east, facing the rising sun, and it overlooks that broad expansive plain now known as the Golden Vein of Limerick. We have then the Cahir situated as explained in the Mesca Ulad ; the underground house, the pillar-stones all in the one locality and constituted as in the old narrative ; with the route of the Ultonians from Knockaney to the Cahir as described by the old author. All this can hardly be coincidence.

We claim that Mortellestown, Kilfinane, only, not Emlygrennan, West Limerick or Kerry, is the site of old Tara Luachra of the residences and structures on the slopes of the Eastern Luachair, where once dwelt Curoi MacDaire, warrior, chief and king.

ANCIENT BOUNDARY STONE ON THE BOREENMANNA ROAD, CORK.

This stone is mentioned in the *Historical & Descriptive Notices of the City of Cork* by John Windele, published by Bradford & Co., Patrick Street, 1849.

"Between the Blackrock and Bohereenmanagh roads was anciently a place of public recreation, several coins of Elizabeth, and local copper tokens have been occasionally discovered on the site.

On a stone fixed in the wall at the road side is the following inscription :—

"The ancient bounds between Gortgarra and Gortcrush.

All the wall being on Gort garra, Ano Dom, 1674."

This stone still remains in the wall behind the new residence of Mr. Mullins, Boreenmanna Road.

PHILIP G. LEE.