

# Lebor na hUidre

Codices Hibernenses Eximii • I • Edited by Ruairí Ó hUiginn



Lebor na hUidre (LU) is the oldest manuscript we have that is written entirely in the Irish language. This book represents the proceedings of a conference organised by the library of the Royal Irish Academy and the School of Celtic Studies at Maynooth University to mark the centenary of one of the most important studies on LU—R.I. Best's 'Notes on the script of Lebor na hUidre', published in the Academy's journal *Ériu* in 1912.

Speakers at the conference undertook a fresh examination of the history, palaeography, language and background of LU. This resulting book contains much scholarship that is new, and it represents a major landmark in the study of one of the Academy's greatest treasures.

Lebor na hUidre  
Codices Hibernenses Eximii 1



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Edited by  
Ruairí Ó hUiginn



Acadamh Ríoga na hÉireann  
Royal Irish Academy

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*Tomás Ó Con Cheanainn*

*In Memoriam*



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## Acknowledgements

A conference marking the centenary of the publication of R.I. Best's paper on the scribal hands in *Lebor na hUidre* was organised at the Royal Irish Academy on 22–23 November 2012 by the Library of the Academy and the School of Celtic Studies at Maynooth University. It was opened by the then president of the Academy, Professor Luke O'Connor Drury, to whom I am grateful for his interest and for the support he gave since the conference was first suggested. I am deeply indebted to my co-organiser, the Academy librarian Siobhán Fitzpatrick, as I am to the Academy's library and IT staff for their help in making the event an outstanding success. I also am grateful to all the speakers and to those who attended and took part in the discussions that followed each paper.

For publication of this volume, which presents nine of the ten papers delivered at the conference, I am grateful to the Academy's Library Committee and Publications Office, in particular to Helena King who has seen the work through press and to Fidelma Slattery who designed the layout of this volume and the series of which it forms the first part. All contributors to this volume are greatly in the debt of three anonymous readers who provided detailed comments, queries, corrections and suggestions in their reports on earlier drafts of each paper.

As the final proofs for this volume were being corrected, news reached us of the death of Professor Tomás Ó Con Cheanainn (13 June 2015). All who are interested in the medieval Irish manuscript tradition in general and in *Lebor na hUidre* in particular will be aware of the many contributions Tomás made to the study of this manuscript. Accordingly, it was felt fitting that the first volume in this series should be inscribed to his memory.

Ruairí Ó hUiginn  
June 2015



# Introduction

Lebor na hUidre (Leabhar na hUidhre), ‘the Book of the Dun Cow’, is the oldest manuscript we have that is written entirely in the Irish language. There exist many earlier manuscripts that contain material in Irish, but apart from the imposing bilingual *Liber Hymnorum* dated to the eleventh century,<sup>1</sup> their primary language is Latin and their Irish content is typically in the form of glosses, marginalia, poems or shorter texts. For this reason, and also by virtue of its contents, Lebor na hUidre (LU) occupies a central place in the study of the Irish language and its literature and has much to tell us about that literature and the intellectual culture in which it came into being.

As it has been transmitted to us, the 67 vellum leaves of LU represent a fraction of its original extent. From its medieval foliation and from earlier references to it, we know that the manuscript was once significantly more extensive. As late as the seventeenth century it contained at least a further 21 leaves and its original extent was at least 110 leaves (Oskamp 1966–7, 132).<sup>2</sup> What became of this lost material is not known, nor do we know much about its travels in the two centuries or so from the time the Franciscan scholar Míchéal Ó Cléirigh consulted it in the 1620s to 1837, at which time it was in the collection of the Dublin booksellers Hodges and Smith,<sup>3</sup> being subsequently sold to the Royal Irish Academy in 1844. See the letter from Eugene O’Curry, written at the Academy in February 1844 and reproduced below, in which he refers to the copy in the possession of Hodges and Smith.

In its present form, LU contains 37 different texts. These range from an incomplete version of the saga *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, through a number of other tales assigned to the Ulster Cycle (*Mesca Ulad*, *Táin Bó Dartada*, *Táin Bó Flidais*,

<sup>1</sup> TCD MS 1441. Edited by Bernard and Atkinson (1898).

<sup>2</sup> Oskamp’s estimate of the original extent of LU differs from the earlier estimate of Best and Bergin (1929, xxiii), who suggested that 67 leaves have been lost, of which 51 had been lost before the foliation that was carried out by the seventeenth century and a further 16 afterwards.

<sup>3</sup> While in their possession it had been consulted by George Petrie, who refers to it in his lengthy paper on the Hill of Tara (1839, 169).

*Serglige Con Culainn*, *Síaburcharpat Con Culaind*, *Fled Bricrend*, *Tochmarc Emere*, *Compert Con Culainn*), to tales associated with legendary kings of Ireland (for example *Aided Nath Í*, *Genemain Áeda Sláne*, *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*, *Fotha Catha Cnucha*) to other ‘historical’ texts (such as *Sex Aetates Mundi*, *Lebor Bretnach*). In addition to this matter, LU contains a copy of what many hold to be the oldest Irish-language text in existence, *Amra Choluim Chille*, reputedly composed by the poet Dallán Forgaill after the saint’s death in 597.<sup>4</sup> Other works of a manifestly religious nature are *Dá Brón Flatha Nime*, *Scéla Laí Brátha*, *Scéla na Esérge* and *Fís Adamnán*. Due to the loss of leaves at various points throughout the manuscript, more than half of the texts it contains are incomplete. The LU fragment of *Táin Bó Dartada*, for instance, consists merely of the four opening lines of the text (LU 1553–7).

LU is mentioned a number of times in late medieval sources. The earliest reference we have occurs in an entry in the Annals of the Four Masters under the year 1470, which informs us that this manuscript and another named An Leabhar Gearr (‘The short book’) were taken in a raid made by Aodh Ruadh Ó Domhnaill, Lord of Tír Chonaill, on the Uí Chonchubhair stronghold at Sligo where they had been held since the Lordship of Seaán Ó Domhnaill (1356–80). The substance of this entry is corroborated in a precatory entry by an unknown scribe on page 37 of LU, where we are informed that An Leabhar Gearr had been given as ransom for the return of Ó Dochartaigh while LU had been given for the release of the son of Ó Domhnaill’s *ollamh* of *seanchas* (‘chief historian’). The events referred to here can be associated with a battle fought in Ballyshannon in 1359, which resulted in victory for Ó Conchubhair over Ó Domhnaill and the capture by the former of Seaán Ó Dochartaigh and other Ceinéal gConaill nobles (*AFM, AConn. s.a.*).

While in Connacht, LU was partially re-inked by a scholar named Sigráid Ó Cuirrnín (Sioghraidh Ó Cuirrnín), and in a scribal note on page 37 of the manuscript he attributes its writing to a certain Máel Muire mac meic Cuinn na mBocht who ‘copied and searched out this book from [other] different books’ (*ro scrib , ro scrút a lebraib eqsamluib in lebur sa*). The attribution to Máel Muire is strengthened by the appearance of his name in two *probationes pennae* on pp 55 and 70 of the manuscript.

References to certain other books that were used in the compilation of LU are indeed found in various colophons in the manuscript. Thus, the

<sup>4</sup>This dating has recently been challenged by Bisagni (2009).

colophon that follows *Senchas na Relec* remarks that the text had been compiled by a certain Flann and Eochaid eolach [‘knowledgeable’] úa Cérin from the books of Eochaid úa Flannacán in Armagh and from the books of Monasterboice, in addition to the *Lebor Buide* which had been in Armagh but was subsequently lost, and the *Lebor Gerr* which had been in Monasterboice but had been stolen and taken overseas (LU 2919–23). The tale *Serglige Con Culainn* is introduced by the phrase: *Slicht Libair Budi Slane* (‘this is the version of the Yellow Book of Sláine’; LU 3220),<sup>5</sup> and *Cín/Libur (Dromma Snechtai)* is cited several times as a source (LU 8005, 8025, 10938 n.a, 10557, 10880).<sup>6</sup>

The Annals of the Four Masters record in 1106 the killing in Clonmacnoise of a Máel Muire mac mic Cuinn na mBocht and, if we are correct in identifying the subject of this entry as our scribe, it provides a *tempus* and *locus* for him. Apart from the *probationes pennae* in LU, however, there is nothing in the manuscript as it now stands to associate it with Máel Muire, and it is not clear if Sigraíd Ó Cuirrdín based the attribution solely on them or if he had seen other entries to this effect in the section of LU that is now lost. It is also possible that the association of LU with Máel Muire was known in the late medieval scholarly circles to which Ó Cuirrdín belonged.

Later tradition also associates LU with Clonmacnoise. The *Life* of St Cíarán records a legend that the hide of a brown prodigious cow, the *Odhar Chiaráin*, which had belonged to the saint, was venerated in this monastery and anyone who lay on it before dying would have eternal life with Christ (Stokes 1890, 122–3, ll 4103–18; Plummer 1910, 205 §xv). The tale *Tromdámh Guaire* relates that the hero Fergus mac Róich arose from the dead to relate the saga *Táin Bó Cúailnge* to the saints of Ireland who had gathered at his grave, and that St Cíarán wrote what Fergus told them on the hide of his dun cow.<sup>7</sup> Geoffrey Keating, in his *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn* (c.1634), names the *Uidhir Chiaráin, ro scríobhadh i g-Cluain-mhic-nóis* (‘The [Book of the] Dun Cow of Cíarán which was written in Clonmacnoise’) as one of the sources he used.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Presumably the same *Lebor Buide* that is mentioned in the earlier colophon.

<sup>6</sup> There are further references to alternative versions of material in LU being found in *araili lebuir*, ‘other books’ (LU, 4730 n.b., 5390, 5557, 7953, 9020), which evidently were known to the scribes but were not used.

<sup>7</sup> Edited by Joynt (1941), ll 1275–84.

<sup>8</sup> Edited by Comyn (1901), 78–80.

Apart from Keating, LU is also named as a source by Míchéal Ó Cléirigh in a number of the texts he and his fellow scholars transcribed in the 1630s at the Franciscan Convent in Donegal (Best and Bergin, 1929, xi). In 1631 he transcribed a copy of *Lebor Gabála Éirenn*, a text no longer extant in LU, from a manuscript written by Muirgheas mac Pháidín Ó Maoil Chonaire (†1543), who refers six times to LU as the source of his transcription.<sup>9</sup> The fact that Ó Cléirigh had been able to make use of LU only a year prior to that in compiling the Martyrology of Donegal<sup>10</sup> may suggest that the part of LU containing *Lebor Gabála* had been lost between the time Ó Maoil Chonaire copied it and the time Ó Cléirigh had access to the manuscript.<sup>11</sup> The poet Lughaidh Ó Cléirigh would also appear to have had access to it, as he cites it as a reliable source in one of his poems composed as part of a bardic contention,<sup>12</sup> and would appear to have transcribed material from it. Some of his transcriptions were used by An Dubhaltach Mac Fhir Bhisigh, writing in the 1660s (Ó Muraíle 1996, 234–5).<sup>13</sup>

The composition and background of LU has attracted the attention of scholars since its acquisition by the Royal Irish Academy. Eugene O’Curry compiled a catalogue of its contents as early as 1861, but the study of the codex was greatly helped by the Academy’s production in 1870 of a facsimile, executed by Joseph O’Longan (Seosamh Ó Longáin), a member of the illustrious scribal family.<sup>14</sup> In 1887, Heinrich Zimmer wrote a long and detailed paper in which he examined the manner in which several of the saga texts in the manuscript had been redacted, and also traced the background of the Meic Cuinn na mBocht, Máel Muire’s family, through many generations back to seventh-century Armagh.

<sup>9</sup> On this scribe, see Cunningham and Gillespie (2008–9); for the references to LU see Ó Concheanainn (1996, 87–8) and for a discussion of the LU text of *Lebor Gabála*, see Carey (2009).

<sup>10</sup> Edited by O’Donovan (1864), 257.

<sup>11</sup> Ó Cléirigh’s transcription of *Lebor Gabála* was made in the house of Maguire in Lisgoole, Co. Fermanagh (Ó Concheanainn, 1996, 89–90). Part of Ó Maoil Chonaire’s transcription of LU survives in RIA MS 1224 (D iv 3).

<sup>12</sup> *Féach leat Leabhar ha hUidhre / is ann dearbhóchad m’fhuighle / is an amhras i dtéid sibh / ar bhreith Aimhirghin ghlúin-ghil* ‘Look at the Book of the Dun Cow. In it I will prove my judgement and show the mistake you make as to the judgement of white-kneed Aimirghin’ (McKenna 1918, 54–5, v.8).

<sup>13</sup> Best and Bergin (1929, xii) also state that John Colgan makes reference to it in his *Acta Sanctorum Hiberniae* (1645).

<sup>14</sup> On the Ó Longáin family, see Ní Úrdail (2000), particularly 119–33 where Seosamh’s career is discussed. Ó Longáin’s facsimile was roundly criticised by Stokes; see Gaidoz (1873–5, 429–31).

R.I. Best's (1912) study of the scribal hands found in the manuscript marked a major advance in our understanding of how LU was compiled. In this seminal essay he identified three separate hands, which he designated as A, the first scribe; M, Máel Muire or the main scribe; and a third scribe he designated H, so-called because he had penned the homiletical texts found in LU. When writing this paper, Best was evidently unaware that John O'Beirne Crowe had observed some 40 years earlier that there was more than one scribal hand involved in LU (1871, 372–3), but these observations were acknowledged in a subsequent paper (1916a) and included in the introduction Osborn Bergin and he wrote to their diplomatic edition of the text (1929).

Best's examination of the scribal hands led him to believe that scribes A and M had worked together, A sometimes commencing a text before being relieved by M, who brought it to completion (1912, 171). Other texts were commenced and completed by M. The interventions of H, however, he held to be of a different order and concluded that 'he was not a relieving hand, or even one of the principal scribes, but a late comer, supplementing from other sources what was defective in the exemplar of Maelmuire, or substituting what seemed to him a better version' (1912, 171). This he achieved by effacing text written by M, through washing or scraping the vellum, or by wholesale removal of leaves and intercalating replacements or extra leaves to accommodate the material he wished to include. In a subsequent paper (1914), Best claimed to have identified a further specimen of this hand in a number of glosses found in the first twelve folios of Rawlinson B 502, another manuscript that has been assigned a date in the twelfth century.<sup>15</sup>

The hand of H, according to Best, is not uniform but exhibits 'far more variety than the preceding [i.e. Hands A and M], is liable to deteriorate, and ranging from a neat and careful script to an untidy scrawl' (1912, 165; Best and Bergin 1929, xvi), and although he was tempted to consider the involvement of a fourth hand in the composition of the MS, he felt that the scribal variation evident in the H interpolations could be attributed to a single scribe.

The interventions of H throughout are characterised as 'rude and violent' by Best and Bergin in the introduction to their diplomatic edition (1929,

<sup>15</sup> See Ó Cuív (2001, 163–5) for a discussion of Rawlinson B 502.

xvi), and while this may be true with regard to the manner of their execution, H appears to have undertaken the task with the goal of supplying from other manuscripts he had to hand different or more extensive versions of the texts he found in LU (Thurneysen 1921, 27–32).<sup>16</sup> Rudolf Thurneysen, for his part, also addressed the question of when scribe H might have been active and, on the basis of some of the sources he used for his interpolations, concluded that this scribal hand be placed in the thirteenth century (1921, 31). Best (1912, 172) had previously suggested that the three scribes, A, M and H belonged to the same school and were of the same period, a proposal that would place H in the early twelfth century, but in the introduction to their diplomatic edition, Best and Bergin (1929, xvii–xviii) seem to have been swayed by Thurneysen’s arguments and accepted the later dating, albeit with some hesitation.<sup>17</sup>

The publication of this diplomatic edition has laid the foundation for all subsequent study of LU. Not only were the texts presented in a readily accessible book format, but the substantial introduction to the work synthesised and analysed much of the research that had been carried out up to that point on the manuscript.

Shortly after its appearance, this edition was the subject of a detailed and valuable article by Paul Walsh (1947, 133–50), who reviewed some of the research carried out on LU up to that time and discussed its contents and possible sources.<sup>18</sup> In addition, Walsh pointed out some factual errors in the precatory note found on page 37 and established that the Sigráid Ó Cuirnndín who re-inked LU while it was in Connacht was not the scholar whose death is recorded in 1347 (*AFM* s.a.), as Best and Bergin (1929, x) had assumed, but a later bearer of the self-same name who was killed in 1388 (*AFM* s.a.), having renovated the manuscript in 1380. This important observation allowed him to show that the period of LU’s sojourn in Connacht extended from 1359 to 1470.

Since the appearance of the diplomatic edition, much of the scholarly attention devoted to LU has been concerned with the interventions of

<sup>16</sup> The sections of the text assigned to the different hands are presented in tabular form in Best and Bergin’s introduction to their diplomatic edition of the text (1929, xx–xxii).

<sup>17</sup> M.A. O’Brien (1959, 68) goes much further in stating that H worked ‘perhaps two hundred years later’ than A and M, but offers no argument or evidence in support of this.

<sup>18</sup> Walsh’s work originally appeared in the form of two papers published in 1929 and in 1939, which were subsequently brought together in the posthumous volume *Irish men of learning* (1947).

scribe H, his motives and the time at which he was active. Thurneysen's suggestion that his work be placed in the thirteenth century has not won widespread approval. Having examined the formation and ornamentation of capital letters in all three hands, Henry and Marsh-Micheli have argued that 'the three scribes worked very nearly at the same date and were trained in the same style of ornament' (1962, 115), thus favouring Best's original opinion on the matter and pushing the involvement of H back to the earlier part of the twelfth century. David Greene has voiced a similar opinion:

we can sum it up by saying LU was written in Clonmacnois by Maol Mhuire, and another scribe, some time before 1106, and that it was revised by another member of the community, using different sources, not very long after that date (1967, 71–2).

Greene's reasoning here was informed by an earlier examination (1958, 110 n.1) of some linguistic aspects of H's interpolations, in which he expressed strong doubts about the date Thurneysen has proposed for this scribe.

Hans Oskamp's (1966–7) extensive study of the make-up and foliation of LU and of the work of the three scribes led him to conclusions that differed radically from those expressed by previous scholars. In the first place, he suggested that scribes A and M did not work together on the manuscript but were active at different times (1966–7, 122), M working 'slightly later' than A. Their work, he held, was not carried out at Clonmacnois, even though M had close associations with this monastery, but most probably took place in one of the centres associated with some of the manuscripts that are mentioned in scribal colophons as sources for LU or that he otherwise believed to have been associated with it, that is Armagh, Monasterboice or Durrow. During the first part of the twelfth century, subsequent to its being brought to Clonmacnois—most probably by M—it suffered damage, and some time prior to the sack of the monastery in 1178, H set about restoring, completing, interpolating and reordering the manuscript. LU was then brought from Clonmacnois directly to Donegal, where we know it was by 1359.

Following further remarks on the foliation of LU by Roger Powell (1969), who had worked in 1967 on the restoration and rebinding of the manuscript, Oskamp offered some additional observations on the original extent of LU and reiterated his earlier suggestion that scribe H had found

the manuscript in a serious state of disrepair and thus ‘set to repair what was not beyond repair to complete what could be completed from any source he could find, and to add whatever he thought fit to add to the already mixed contents of the manuscript’ (1974, 149–50).

A different, but equally radical, scenario was proposed by Tomás Ó Concheanainn (1973–4), who has contributed a number of important studies on the history of LU. On linguistic evidence, he also finds himself in disagreement with Thurneysen’s dating of H to the thirteenth century, and argues that ‘the reviser [H] is to be placed fairly close to the original scribes or well within the first half of the twelfth century’ (1974, 284). However, he also takes issue with the commonly accepted identification of scribe M with Máel Muire and proposes in its stead that Máel Muire’s work is to be found in the hand designated as H. Such an identification would, of course, place the work of the earlier scribes A and M firmly in the eleventh century and set a *terminus ad quem* of 1106 for H. This opinion has won the support of David Dumville (1975–6; 1996, 392), who also rejects the argument forwarded by Oskamp that A and M were not contemporaries. On the other hand, like Oskamp, he favours the thesis that LU was commenced in another centre, most likely Monasterboice, before being brought to Clonmacnoise where it underwent substantial revision (1996, 392). The argument that H can be identified as Máel Muire has also won the approval of Cecile O’Rahilly (1976, vii, n.8), but was strongly disputed in a further study by Oskamp (1975–6). Oskamp, however, accepted Ó Concheanainn’s linguistic arguments and accordingly proposed that ‘the restoration of Lebor na hUidre [i.e. by H] must have taken place some time before 1130’ (1975–6, 182).<sup>19</sup>

Kenneth Jackson, on the other hand, has rejected both Ó Concheanainn’s arguments about the date and identity of H, arguing on linguistic grounds—without providing concrete examples in support of his contention—that ‘the language of H’s interpolations is very often distinctly later than that used by A and M . . . and I feel sure that H was writing a good deal later than the others—not indeed in the thirteenth century but quite probably in the latter half of the twelfth’ (1983, 4).

In a further series of papers, Ó Concheanainn has sought to establish the influence LU may have had on other medieval manuscripts. Thus, he holds

<sup>19</sup> As also did David Greene (1978, 58).

(1984) that some materials found in the Book of Leinster, including the tales *Táin Bó Flidais* and *Cath Cairn Chonaill*, are based on the versions found in the interpolated text of LU. In another series of articles (1985, 1988b, 1991) he has argued that during the time LU was in Connacht (1359–1470), it was used by different scholars and scribes in that province and that it has influenced the redaction of texts found in several codices of Connacht provenance. Not all of the arguments he has advanced have won acceptance. Uáitéar Mac Gearailt (1984–8, 210–11), Máire West (1990), Tomás Ó Cathasaigh (1990), Gregory Toner (1998) and Kim McCone (2000), for instance, have argued strongly against LU having had any influence on the redaction of certain of the texts to which Ó Concheanainn alludes in these papers. Ó Concheanainn (1991), for his part, has responded to some of these criticisms and, in a later series of studies on the manuscript (1996, 1997), not only restates his position on the identification of scribe H with Máel Muire but, in agreement with some other scholars, casts doubt on Clonmacnoise as the *incunabula* of LU (1996, 67). He makes the further suggestion that the manuscript may have been for some time in the monastery of Roscommon, or elsewhere in central or eastern Connacht before being brought to Donegal (1996, 84; 1997, 57).

Gearóid Mac Eoin (1994) had earlier mooted the possibility that LU spent a period in the Roscommon area, but in a context different from that proposed by Ó Concheanainn. On the evidence of some of the glosses and interpolations made by H, he has argued that the familiarity this scribe shows with certain minor place-names in mid-Connacht suggests that he may have been associated with this area and perhaps was an early member of the learned Uí Mhaoil Chonaire family who later were to come to prominence in Cluain Polcáin, Co. Roscommon. This theory would remove H from the Clonmacnoise setting with which he usually has been associated and locate him further north in Connacht. On certain linguistic evidence, Mac Eoin further suggests that H may have been active in the mid- to late twelfth century (1994, 46).<sup>20</sup>

While not examining the question of scribal hands or their provenance, Máire Herbert (2007, 92) accepts that LU was compiled in Clonmacnoise in the eleventh century, but adduces further evidence to argue that the libraries of Armagh and Monasterboice were the ultimate source of some of its main content (2007, 93).

<sup>20</sup> Some of the orthographical evidence Mac Eoin has adduced is disputed by Breatnach (1996, 206–7).

With regard to H's purpose in making his interpolations, Gregory Toner (2009) has argued that many of his interventions betray a distinct interest in history, a point also made by the present writer (2006, 2014) with regard to his interventions in *Táin Bó Flidais* and in the Annals of Tigernach. Further discussion about the compilation of LU and the roles played by the various scribes can be found in editions and studies of different texts in LU (see, for example, O'Rahilly 1976, vii–xviii; Slotkin 1978; Mac Gearailt 2009, 2012; Imhoff 2008).<sup>21</sup>

The research carried out to date has shed some light on the compilation and history of LU, but it is clear that there are still substantial gaps in our knowledge and that there are many points on which we do not have unanimous agreement.

The present volume represents the proceedings of a conference held at the Royal Irish Academy on 22–23 November 2012 to mark the centenary of the publication of Best's (1912) paper on the scribal hands in LU. It was the intention of the organisers to revisit some of the questions raised in earlier studies on the background, compilation and history of LU. In the course of two days, ten speakers addressed a number of aspects of the manuscript and not only focused on issues raised by previous scholars, but also addressed some aspects of the work that had not been highlighted previously. Nine of these papers are published here in revised and extended formats.<sup>22</sup>

Donnchadh Ó Corráin presents a detailed study of the background and lineage of Máel Muire, the only scribe involved with LU that it is believed we can identify. Other papers in the volume are concerned with the input of scribe H. In what can fairly be described as a revolutionary reassessment of the scribal hands found in LU, Elizabeth Duncan has argued that the designation 'H' covers not one but a multiplicity of scribes. It will be recalled that Best (1912, 165) had indeed observed a degree of variation in the writing of H but was unwilling to invoke the involvement of a further hand to account for it. On the basis of her close palaeographical study of the sections of LU attributed to H, however, Duncan maintains that we now should reckon with the input of no fewer than *six* different scribes.

<sup>21</sup> See also Thurneysen's (1921) discussion of the different saga texts found in LU.

<sup>22</sup> Abigail Burnyeat's paper '*Compilatio* and the creation of *Lebor na hUidre*' was not available for publication in this volume, but it is hoped that it will be published elsewhere in the near future.

Liam Breatnach offers a detailed linguistic examination of some of the H interpolations and comes to the conclusion that the language of these interpolations should be dated no later than the first third of the twelfth century. Máire Herbert's study subjects three texts containing interpolations by H to close scrutiny and seeks to establish what they can tell us about this scribe and the source material he used, while the contributions of John Carey, Elizabeth Boyle and Gregory Toner examine possible interests and motives the H scribe(s) may have had in copying, excising and adding material to LU. The essays of Ruairí Ó hUiginn and Nollaig Ó Muraíle examine aspects of the later history of the manuscript.

Those who compiled LU are often referred to as 'scribes', a usage that is frequently followed in this volume. This should not give the reader to understand that they are viewed as simple copyists—although this may sometimes have been their function—rather, the term covers a range of activities from that of amanuensis to the 'busy scholar' or 'confident and bold reviser' (Ó Concheanainn 1997, 82), as demanded by context.

Personal names appear in a variety of orthographical conventions in the material discussed in this work. For the purposes of unity these have been standardised according to the conventions of Early Irish (for example Máel, Rúad) or Early Modern Irish (Maol, Ruadh) as appropriate. This, of course, does not apply to forms that appear in direct citation.

Future researchers who engage with LU will be greatly helped by two initiatives taken in recent years. The first of these is the provision of high-quality digital images of LU that have been made available through the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies' Irish Script on Screen (ISOS) project.<sup>23</sup> The second is the availability of a digital and searchable copy of the text of LU, provided by University College Cork's Corpus of Electronic Texts (CELT) initiative.<sup>24</sup> Resources such as these will be indispensable for future research on LU and other medieval Irish manuscripts.

Much more remains to be said about LU. There are many long-standing questions still to be answered, and doubtless some new queries have been raised by this collection of studies. It is hoped that this volume and the issues touched upon herein will inspire renewed interest in this most important of Irish manuscripts.

<sup>23</sup> Material digitised as part of the ISOS project is available at: <http://www.isos.dias.ie/>.

<sup>24</sup> The CELT initiative texts are available at: <http://www.ucc.ie/celt/>.

RIA/4 B 58/2

Royal Irish Academy  
Dublin 20<sup>th</sup> February 1844.

Dear Sir

I beg to return you my sincere thanks for your interesting letter of the 13<sup>th</sup> Ultimo, and my regret at not being able to answer it until now.

The ~~copy~~ ~~manuscript~~ ~~one~~ is in my opinion one of the oldest, if not the very oldest, pieces of composition with which I am acquainted in the Irish Language. It contains some valuable historical facts, with a great deal of rude and very remote romance.

There are two very fine ancient copies of this tract now in Dublin - one in the collection of Messrs. Hoages and Smith of College Green, and the other in the University - both transcripts, on vellum, of the early part of the twelfth century, and both in perfect and serviceable preservation.

I have studied this tract, perhaps, longer and closer than any other person now living, and I give you the above opinion with all the confidence which such long and close study can bestow on me.

Numbers .1.8.9. of the Scotch Collection appear to me to be the most valuable, and I should be very glad to see a more definite account of their entire contents, but more especially of the two latter two.

Whoever made out the account of these MSS. which you had the kindness to send me, was not troubled with a great deal of knowledge of their contents - but a little antiquarian knowledge carries one of our Caledonian

fellow subjects over a great stretch of antiquarian travel.

With respect to Collectors of Irish manuscripts, I don't know of any in Ireland but those that you are acquainted with in Dublin, and Dr. Murphy, R. C. Bishop of Cork.

As the Academy are in expectation of <sup>soon</sup> hearing from you, I hope I shall soon have an opportunity of writing a few lines to you again. - In the mean time allow me to subscribe myself,

Your truly obliged

Eugene Curry.

Robert Mac Adam Esq.  
Col. Square  
Delfart.

Recd

Letter from Eugene O'Curry to Robert McAdam, 1844 (prior to the purchase of LU by the Royal Irish Academy); RIA 4 B 58i and 4 B 58iii; © Royal Irish Academy, reproduced with permission.



## Máel Muire, the Scribe: Family and Background

Donnchadh Ó Corráin

Máel Muire mac Céilechair meic Cuinn na mBocht is the principal scribe of *Lebor na hUidre*: he is responsible for some 60 per cent of what survives of the manuscript. His work bears witness to his craft and his culture as a hereditary man of learning. This is a brief enquiry into his family, his status and his place within his institution and its hierarchies. It may throw some indirect light on *Lebor na hUidre* itself and the milieu in which it was written.

We owe the first detailed description of the manuscript to the great Eugene O'Curry (1861, 181–6, 571). Strictly speaking, his contemporary evidence for linking the book to Máel Muire is confined to two *probationes pennae* by Máel Muire himself in the manuscript, and the remarkable entry in the *Annals of the Four Masters* for the year 1106. The *probationes* read: 'probatio pennae Mail Muri meic meic Cuind < >' (p. 55b); and 'probatio pennae Mail Muri inso' (p. 70). Best is certain that these are by Máel Muire (Best 1912, 161–74; Best and Bergin 1929, xv–xvi). Others questioned this judgement. What began as no more than a reasonable doubt hardened into a certainty for some, and from this conviction important deductions were made about the date and origin of the manuscript (Oskamp 1966–7; Ó Concheanainn 1973–4; Oskamp 1974; Dumville 1975–6; Ó Concheanainn 1975–6; Mac Eoin 1994). However, the scholarly consensus now seems to have returned to Best's original position (Oskamp 1975–6) and it is indeed close to the precatory colophon (p. 37b), dated to 1380 (Walsh 1947, 144–6), that has something to say of Máel