University of Nevada, Reno

Ireland in Ruins: Roots of Ireland’s Cultural Revival, History and Archaeology in the Nineteenth Century

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in History

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May, 2016
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entitled
Ireland in Ruins: Roots of Ireland’s Cultural Revival, History and Archaeology in the Nineteenth Century

be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

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ABSTRACT

This thesis will analyze the interpretations of ancient sites in Ireland for their place in the history of antiquarianism, and trace the progression of influences through written accounts of Irish history and archaeological interpretations compiled around these sites for culturally nationalist underpinnings. The sites were used to market an evolving imagined community of Irish citizens, and create varying stages of a common Irish history: the ancient tomb Newgrange; The ringfort of Dun Aengus, the monastery of Clonmacnoise, and the Hill of Tara. When I compare the narrative given to the sites in the nineteenth century with the later reinvestigations, a new history of the professionalization of archaeology and the changing interpretation of heritage in Ireland can be discerned. I demonstrate that both efforts at objective scientific analysis and ideologically invested interpretation, were always present and that the dialectic between them is what characterizes the evolution of antiquarian to professional.
Acknowledgements

To my advisor, Professor Dennis Dworkin, whose expertise, guidance, generosity, support, and patience allowed me to explore a topic that has fascinated me and captivated my imagination, thank you. It was a great honor and a pleasure.

To Professor Martha Hildreth, thank you so much for your invaluable direction and support throughout the course of my graduate work. You helped me immensely with both my writing and dedication to history. It has been a wonderful experience working with you.

To Professor Carolyn White, thank you so much for your assistance in working and researching in a field that was new to me. The advice and support you provided was a priceless asset.

Thank you Professor Jen Hill for you support in expanding my thinking and encouraging a flexibility and sophistication of thought that helped to provide a solid foundation for my thesis.

Thanks to Howard Goldbaum, whose work on recording and capturing visually ancient archaeological sites around Ireland was an inspiration.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, thank you to my parents and my family; they endured endless lost hours, mind-numbing recitations of research findings, and missed family functions with no complaints. I could not have completed this without you.
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Introduction

Gaelic revivalists constructed a national identity for Ireland in the popular imagination through a connection to the ancient legacy of a Celtic\(^1\) past found in the ruins that dot the landscape. Cultural nationalists and antiquarians seemed to comprise two discreet groups superficially; in reality, these two groups were closely linked and their roles comingled. Both cultural nationalists and antiquarians also shared an interest in investigating and preserving the past and together powered the Gaelic Revival, a cultural renaissance that spanned the nineteenth century and beyond. Their goals sometimes diverged, but the unified account of the “Irish” past they created has become the dominant historical narrative. Key to this was the underlying tension that emerged in the early years of the nineteenth century between scholars who were cultural revivalists and those who were determined to pursue the study of antiquity with an aspiration toward scientific impartiality. This tension was evident early in antiquarian research (see table 1) and would change and evolve as the antiquarians themselves moved toward professionalization. The ideology represented by cultural nationalism was eventually supplanted by an aspirational scientific analysis that only served to introduce yet another ideology, revisionism.

First, it seems crucial to define the two groups that later I term collectively as Revivalists. Antiquarians were mainly highly educated lay researchers interested in collecting relics of the ancient past, and were the precursors to professional

\(^1\) The term Celtic is one that many antiquarians used to reference their ancient past. I find it a useful to reference to often amorphous people that inhabited the island prior to any cohesive written histories, as no other term seems universally applicable.
archaeologists and historians. Specifically in Ireland, antiquarians were those interested in the study of history associated particularly with ancient artifacts, archaeological and historical sites, manuscripts, ballads, music and bardic tales. This study was based on empirical evidence mixed with authoritative analysis of documents collected by these same scholars. Cultural nationalists were those constructing a cultural heritage that would promote cultural aspirations of an “Irish” nation. The goals of antiquarians and cultural nationalists coalesce in the evolving interpretations of the ancient sites of Ireland. This evolution can be seen through the lens of the Gaelic Revival, and the participants can therefore be seen as Revivalists, a varied group of scholars and researchers who had sometimes-disparate goals, but came together in their interest in protecting and investigation of the ancient history of Ireland. Their goal in the construction of this narrative was both overt, as in the unification of disparate groups of a newly forming citizenry of Ireland, and covert in the more veiled motive of glossing over a disjointed and tumultuous past. The result was the representation of a unified and ancient heritage is one that pre-dates the arrival of the Normans and Danes who eventually made their way to Ireland’s shores. Revivalists investigated ancient sites around Ireland – ruins, castles, and tombs – and used them as a foundation upon which cultural and civic nationalists could build the future of a united nation. Various sites were seen to evoke images of warrior kings, druidh practitioners of magic and ritual, and the fae fairy folk and leprechauns. Obligatory tourist sites for all those who go now to Ireland are but

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2. I will use the moniker “Irish” sparingly, to designate the sense of an imagined community of the people that Revivalists were attempting to create through their research of Ireland’s ancient past. The “Anglo-Irish” is used to describe those who are a part of the English power center but consider themselves to be citizens of Ireland. The other use will be the designation of the Gaelic language that was to be codified and standardized in the nineteenth century.
representations of the sites that captured the interest of the romantic and Victorian age tourists: they include sites of varying ages and significance. The ancient sites presented today are, specifically, a result of the marketing of an imaginary community that cultural revivalists helped to create in the nineteenth century.

Ancient sites around Ireland were foci of revivalist energies and material representations of a particular history, and the interpretations of those sites demonstrate the evolving tensions I describe. These sights pave a long path toward a storied history of the people in Ireland, one that nineteenth century revivalists claimed historians had long neglected. 

Revivalists also began to write a specifically “Irish” history. They used the medieval monastic historical Annals of their Celtic past (the most famous being the collection of historical Annals housed in Clonmacnoise) as guides. They treated them as established authorities on early antiquity of Ireland for the compilation of a Celtic history, though antiquarians would later prove much of those sources mainly conjecture. The association with the mystical world of fairies and magic to ancient sites began with the Revivalists in the 1830’s, and was by the late nineteenth century either justified by scholarly reinvestigation or rooted out, depending on first, their utility, and second, their veracity. By the twentieth century the tide had shifted: a revisionist trend in history would be the impetus behind that reinvestigation. This development ran parallel to the progression of antiquarian lay researcher to professional archaeologists, historians, ethnographers and anthropologists. 

The evolution of scholarship surrounding key ancient sites in ancient by antiquarians, from roughly 1830 – 1922, is crucial to

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3. This fact was lamented by many nationalists of the era. I will address this particularly with Sister Mary Francis Cusack; see Cusack, Mary Francis. History of the Irish Nation: Social, Ecclesiastical, Biographical, Industrial, and Antiquarian. 1876. J.G Murdoch accessed in the National Library of Ireland, March 2015.
understanding the tension between the two ideologies of cultural nationalism and revisionism, and the professionalization of the amateur researcher.

Antiquarian research began as early as the sixteenth century in England.\textsuperscript{4} English scholars began a tradition of rejecting the historicity of national origin myths, (e.g. King Arthur) for a more systematic consultation of early documentary evidence of “law, religious practices and royal prerogative.”\textsuperscript{5} These lay researchers had also begun the systematic study and measuring of ancient sites. The Enlightenment brought with it an introduction of the scientific method to the investigations posed by antiquarians, and romanticism introduced a burgeoning nostalgia and a focus, on both a sweeping grand narratives of history, the broad evolution of culture, as well as locally specific interests. The nineteenth century romantics created a new sense of nationalism and an interest in the folklore and myths of eleventh- and twelfth-century histories. Close links to English intellectual culture enabled scholars in Ireland to benefit from this antiquarian evolution and developments associated with it. Antiquarians in the 1880’s were those who bridged the gap of an evolving modern conception of archaeology and traditional antiquarian scholarship. This developed within an intellectual context that attempted to bridge societal confines of religion and class.

Scholars from a variety of backgrounds united behind a single purpose: to create a history of the nation of Ireland and unite her people. Between the 1840’s and 1920’s particularly, there was a shift in the methodologies of the analysis and reconstruction of

\textsuperscript{4} It was cited in the Oxford English Dictionary as emerging in the sixteenth century by those interested in antiques, from the Latin antiquarius
\textsuperscript{5} Bruce G. Trigger, \textit{A History of Archaeological Thought}. 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed., reprinted. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2007, 84.
the ancient past (See table 1 for timeline). The advent of a rational approach to the construction of the history and culture of their collective past began with lay researchers and scholars investigating origins of national myths and evolved into a scientific analysis of historical sources and archeological sites. This was not a simple transition, however. Many cultural revivalists in Ireland were still bent on producing a cultural heritage rooted in romantic nostalgia and a reverential treatment of the ancient past. Key figures in cultural and civic nationalist movements emerged as both founders of antiquarian and archaeological societies (e.g. Thomas Moore, Thomas Davis, Douglas Hyde, and W.B. Yeats for example) and key supporters of the resultant societies and journals, which exemplify a close intellectual link between antiquarianism and cultural revivalism.

As more technologically advanced methods of data collection and dating techniques developed, historians and archaeologists attempted a more scientific and rational understanding of ancient history. One of the most important examples of the more scientific approach to both culture and society was the creation of the Ordnance Survey. After the political tensions that remained subsequent to the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745, the British government began a military mapping program of the Scottish Highlands that eventually encompassed the whole of Great Britain. After the Act of Union of 1801, the mapping program was extended to Ireland by 1823. Under the direction of Lieutenant Thomas Larcom and Thomas Colby, the OS employed an archaeological consultant, marking a transition in the initial purpose and ultimate goals of

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the survey. Place names, as instructed by Colby, were to be gathered using the authority of local inhabitants:

For the name of a house, farm, park or wood, or other part of an estate the owner is the best authority. For names generally the following are the best individual authorities and should be taken in the order given: Owners of property; estate agents; clergymen, postmasters and schoolmasters, if they have been some time in the district; rate collectors; borough and county surveyors; gentlemen residing in the district; Local Government Board Orders; local histories; good directories. Assistance may also be obtained from local antiquarian and other societies, in connection with places of antiquarian and national interest.7

The Ordnance survey, which was implemented between 1823 and 1846, became a useful tool by which those scholars mapping the island, and the antiquarians they consulted, could begin locating important sites for the study of the heritage of Ireland: the accumulation of name place data facilitated a deeper investigation of the Gaelic language that in some places was fading into obscurity.

It was during these mapping expeditions that Revivalists realized that one key element in accomplishing their goals was to recover, or re-interpret, the ancient ruins and tombs that they had discovered in their expeditions. Technological advancements in geography and mathematics paved the way for the deeper investigation of ancient heritage. They used methods of the newly emerging scientific treatment of heritage, most specifically the emergence of new methods in archaeology, and their overall purpose continued to be the construction of a national identity rooted in the distant past of Ireland. The struggle to form a unified “Irish” identity separate from English cultural hegemony began in earnest with the cultural revival of the nineteenth century.

The resultant relationship between cultural nationalists and antiquarians was integral to the inspirations of antiquarian research into the ancient past, as archaeological discovery motivated cultural nationalists providing an atmosphere of cooperation that characterized the Gaelic Revival, and highlighted the underlying tension that existed from the beginning. Antiquarians examined a host of ruins that cover the countryside of Ireland in an attempt to discover, develop, and ultimately invent a unified heritage. They wanted to concretize a developing identity and, ultimately, construct a conception of a unified nation. These revivalist investigations are the nexus by which we can understand the interplay among the goals of the cultural nationalists, emerging scientific inquiry used by antiquarians and archaeologists in Ireland, and an expanding desire for an “accurate” history. The result was a deeper study of the development of a communal national identity and efforts to establish trusted and scientifically based histories for a changing nation.

Revivalists viewed ancient sites as the “natural” vehicles for the “legitimization” of a national identity. Antiquarians in Ireland could interpret and manipulate the sites toward their own ends. Antiquarians had close ties to prominent cultural revivalists of the period, like Thomas Davis (1814 – 1845), who worked closely with, and openly defended, archaeologist George Petrie (1790 – 1866) in his interpretations of sites all over Ireland. To this purpose, antiquarians focused mainly on ancient ruins and tombs that were, by their very antiquity, not subject to English influence. The temptation lay in the potential to manipulate the interpretation of ancient sites that time had obscured.

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8. The term “accurate” is obviously problematic, but as antiquarians and archaeologists used modern dating techniques, and more objective analysis of past sources, they revealed inconsistencies in previous interpretations that led to what they referred to as inaccurate history.
9. I speak here of historical legitimacy.
While not necessarily because of a deliberate misinterpretation or misrepresentation, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century antiquarians often did not properly contextualize the sites due to a lack of scientifically accurate dating techniques or unfamiliarity with emerging objective archaeological techniques. These facts have also often led to an overly biased interpretation of the purpose and origin of these locations. Time obfuscated biases and motivations, but by the twentieth century professional archaeologists and historical geographers began reinvestigating past explanations.

In this thesis, I will examine three sites in particular that are useful in tracing the evolution of antiquarians to professional historians and archaeologists in the context of Ireland. Several sites represent the historical evolution of the Irish past that was being constructed as well as appeared as repositories of knowledge, both textual and mystical. I use the records of the ruined monastery at Clonmacnoise (image 1), the passage tomb of Newgrange (image 2) and the nearby hill of Tara (image 3), and the Ring fort of Dun Aengus (image 4). Clonmacnoise acted as a symbol of a unified Christian past and housed important documents relating to the Irish past. The ruined sixth-century abbey of Clonmacnoise and its nearby castle, a stronghold of scholarship and Catholic faith, is the home of some of the best-preserved examples of the famous “Celtic” crosses of Ireland. The Hill of Tara, in contrast represented the mythical and spiritual past to the antiquarians, housing the knowledge of the pre-Christian legendary past. One of the most celebrated and ancient sites is the passage tomb of Newgrange. It is a large earthen mound that Revivalists claimed to house the remains of the pagan people who predated

10. The fort of Dun Aengus has multiple spellings, including the Gaelic Dun Aonghasa. I have used the most widely accepted Anglicized version, Dun Aengus, for ease of representation, and will do so with any Gaelic names as appropriate.
the Celts who inhabited Ireland in the Bronze Age. Revivalists linked Newgrange to the adjacent Hill of Tara, the posited location where the “high Kings” of Ireland were crowned, and that predates any definitive “Irish” settlement. The Iron Age ruins of the ring fort, Dun Aengus, lie on the western isle of Inis Mór, in the Aran Islands, and are said to have been built by an then-legendary tribe known as the Fir Bolg, who battled the Tuatha Dé Danann (also known as the fairies), to claim control over Ireland in the fifth and sixth centuries. From the Bronze Age to the sixteenth century, these sites represent the long unbroken chain of historical knowledge and culture that was being constructed by the Revivalists of the nineteenth century.

This thesis will analyze the interpretations and descriptions of these ancient sites for their proper place in the history of archaeology and heritage management and preservation, enabling me to trace the progression of influences and motivations through written accounts of Irish history and archaeological interpretations compiled around these sites for culturally nationalist underpinnings. Each site tells a story of its own. The sites were used to market an evolving imagined community of Irish citizens, and create varying stages of a common Irish history: the ancient prehistoric past of Newgrange; the warrior “Celtic” lords of the ring forts that can be found throughout Ireland, the origins of the early Christian past at sites such as the monastery of Clonmacnoise and the fictitious political unity that was represented by the crowning of the “high kings” of Ireland at Tara. When I compare the narrative given to the sites in the nineteenth century with the later conception of the sites as told via new interpretations and methodologies in the early twentieth century, a new history of the professionalization of archaeology and the changing interpretation of heritage in Ireland can be discerned. That is not to say that
science triumphs over nationalism, or any other ideology. This thesis instead
demonstrates that both impetuses, objective scientific analysis and ideologically invested
interpretation, were always present and that the emergence of one or the other is what
characterizes the evolution of antiquarian to professional.

Research Context

Particularly interesting and helpful in the contextualization of my research has
been the new discourse regarding the largely nationalist archaeology in Ireland of the
ancient past. It is an acknowledged fact that the existence of nationalist perspectives
within archaeological excavation and interpretation has created a romantic and dramatic
history of these monumentalized sites to the point that scholars today have difficulty
determining a site's original purpose. In the interest of contributing to this conversation,
it is important to first look at the temporal and political context of the analysis reached by
both historical and modern scholars. Nineteenth-century nostalgia and nascent cultural
nationalism have played a significant role in the history of heritage protection and
archaeological development. There is, however, little analysis on the history of
nineteenth-century heritage or archaeology in Ireland. Most of the relevant discussion
focuses on the developments of the mid- to late twentieth century, when large “modern”11
excavations occurred. Modern revisionist history and anthropological discussion have
acknowledged and attempted to revise the Revivalist influence on the interpretation of the
sites, but little has been done in the analysis of its roots. The discourse this research will
enter into, then, is part of the reconsideration of heritage creation and preservation and

11. Modernity, in this context, refers both to the technological advancements, as well as the
professionalization of the field and the more impartial analysis of the archaeological record.
archaeological development by contemporary archaeologists and historical geographers who have argued that nationalism played a critical role in the interpretation of ancient sites.

Geographers and archaeologists have recently questioned much of the history and significance that antiquarians and historians in the nineteenth century assigned to the ancient sites. Scholars in these fields have begun to realize that much of the work by nineteenth century “nationalist archaeology” should be reinterpreted by current geographers, anthropologists and historians. One foundational piece of scholarship can be found in Nationalism and Archaeology (1996). Gabriel Cooney, a noted Celtic archaeologist at University College, Dublin, contributes to this new discourse in the article “Building the Future on the past: Archaeology and the Construction of National Identity in Ireland.” Cooney argues that archaeology in Ireland has served as an important element in the fabrication of a national identity. Contemporary archaeologists have only recently recognized the role of nationalism as an important influence on the way archaeology developed in Ireland. Cooney states that nationalism affected archaeology differentially through time, and acknowledges that two particular veins of nationalism in Ireland, Irish Republican and Ulster Unionist, utilized artifacts and ancient sites as symbols linking the past and present. Nationalism and archaeology articulate with the history in Ireland from the early developments of the Gaelic Revival of the late eighteenth century, including the establishment of the Irish Royal Academy in 1785, the

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creation of the United Irishmen in 1791, and the creation of antiquarian societies like the Royal Societies of Antiquarians of Ireland in 1845. Cooney considers artist and antiquarian George Petrie to be the father of Irish archaeology. Cooney claims that the period between 1830 and 1860 (when Petrie was a major figure in antiquarian research) was a transitional phase prior to the institutionalizing of archaeology late in the nineteenth century. As a leading antiquarian researcher in the early nineteenth century, Petrie also provides a link between the antiquarians of centuries and the newly emerging archaeological approach to the investigation and preservation of ancient sites in Ireland.

According to Cooney, there were three phases in the cultural nationalist interpretation of the past. The first phase began in the mid-eighteenth century, and represented Romantic influences. The second phase occurred in the mid-nineteenth century saw the early stages of Irish archaeology, and the third phase in the 1890’s and early 1920’s with the partition of Ireland and the competing nationalist movements in the north and south). The first phase characterized the transmission of the history of ancient Ireland, and laid the groundwork for later revivalist interpretations of ancient sites. As Cooney states it, “it is the openness and vagueness of the artifacts and symbols that are used in “nationalistic imagery that gives them a continuing relevance, despite the changing character of the nationalistic ideology they are being used to buttress, and that makes them a vital link between cultural and political nationalism.”

Cultural revivalists in Ireland claimed that ancient Ireland was a unified and self-governing Celtic

culture that antiquarians presented in contrast to the religiously divided and turmoil-ridden climate in contemporary Ireland. ¹⁶

We can learn much about the use of the important link between political and cultural nationalism by considering the work of geographer David Harvey. Harvey has been integral to the development of a critical analysis of the creation of heritage within the historical geographical and, secondarily, the anthropological communities. The question of the importance of the creation of heritage and the culture of history is highlighted in his article "‘National’ Identities and the Politics of Ancient Heritage: Continuity and Change at Ancient Monuments in Britain and Ireland, C.1675–1850" (2003). He examines the interpretation of Newgrange passage tomb, located at the complex of Brú Na Bóinne in eastern Ireland, in contrast with the stone ring of Avebury in Western England. Harvey argues that sites like Newgrange in Ireland and Avebury in Western England, “have recently acquired the label ‘ritual landscape’… an appellation that, like all previous interpretations, says more about the interpreters, their agendas and socio-political context, than it does about the site itself.” ¹⁷ He argues that national identity is a creative process in which historical culture and heritage are created to reflect the context of the political climate of the time. Hence, heritage should be understood as a process related to human action and agency, and as an instrument of cultural power in whatever period one chooses to examine. ¹⁸ As Harvey has indicated, ancient monuments, by definition, comprise a set of structures for which the original meaning is not (and, indeed, can never be) known. This allows for endless re-interpretation by later

¹⁶ Cooney, “Building the future on the past,” 150
¹⁷ Harvey, “‘National’ Identities and the Politics of Ancient Heritage,” 474
¹⁸ Harvey, “‘National’ Identities and the Politics of Ancient Heritage,” 475
societies. In the article, David Harvey also examines the “monumentalization” of ancient sites. In Harvey’s view, Irish republicans attached a meaning to them that is unsubstantiated.

They [ancient sites] are portrayed, often in an alarmingly homogenous way, as a generalized set of edifices seemingly ‘monumentalizing’ something that is strangely unaccountable, and yet mysteriously located within an undifferentiated deep past. As with most forms of history culture, the meaning and interpretation of ancient monuments does not depend on a historically accurate chronology.\(^\text{19}\)

As the examination of the excavation, study and preservation of Irish archaeological sites and the influences of nationalism is a distinctive approach, I have relied upon the guidance of a more general secondary scholarship to help inform my examination of the stages of archaeological interpretation of ancient sites. The work of Raphael Samuel, in his *Theaters of Memory: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* has proven a useful tool. The book is not about Ireland, but it addresses more general questions that are relevant to my work. Samuel claims that history can be many things, but most often cultural theorists use it to refer to an intellectual discipline. It is an amorphous set of ideologies that function independently from outside influences. As a discipline, history has been described by academics as “a species of intellectual life bequeathed by the forces of modernity.”\(^\text{20}\) The more relevant cultural force, according to Samuel, is history as the articulation of a host of active and mutable series of erasures described as “screen memories.”\(^\text{21}\) Memory and history are functions of condensing the chaos of the lived experience into a narrative of explanation. History involves the

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19. Harvey, “‘National’ Identities and the Politics of Ancient Heritage,” 476
dialectical relationship between the imaginary and the real. One of the best examples of this phenomenon used by Samuel is Stonehenge, arguably one of the most quintessentially English, and generally famous, ancient sites in the western world. He describes, in his discussion of the creation of heritage, sites like Stonehenge as “intersections of science, magic, and religion. [It is this intersection] that connects heritage and pre-history.” This brings to mind the magical and mythical interpretations of places like Newgrange in Ireland and the cult of Druidism they inspired in the nineteenth century, and continue to stir today. This is especially keen when examining documents that date Newgrange to 3200 BCE, when compared (as it was by cultural revivalists one could say religiously) to the age of Stonehenge (originally dated to circa 3000 BCE).

In the context of Ireland, Samuel’s analysis is useful when comparing megalithic sites, such as Newgrange and Tara, which have become symbols of the ancient foundations of Ireland, as well as religious centers for modern ideas of a larger constructed Celtic or Druid pagan past. As Samuel explained, an attraction to Druid and Celtic Wizards coincides with the contemporary understanding of these sites that provided a powerful draw. For those who wished to examine sites for their pagan association with the solstice celebrations every year, or their perceived magical prominence, sites like Stonehenge and Newgrange were irresistible. The mystical association with Fairy magic far surpasses any link to a unified Irish heritage.

the collective memory of the Irish imagination, influence those who travel there to experience the “Real Ireland” and are an intrinsic part of the exterior forces on the site itself. The tourist expectations and the resultant re-imagination of the site’s significance are often manifested in a slight altering of the history surrounding the site that, over time, can drastically alter the very nature of the site itself. It is this phenomenon that is an interesting lens through which to examine Irish archaeological sites between the 1850’s and the 1920’s, when the tourist industry truly expanded in Ireland alongside Revivalist exploration.

The book establishes the idea that a community or group forms a nation through ties that exist only in the popular imagination. It is indeed different from an actual community, since it is not based on everyday personal interaction between its members. Instead, members of the nation hold an “imagined” ideal of that link. People’s affinity for the imagined community manifests itself in the form of patriotism when the nation is

**Theory**

Within the fields of archaeology and historical geography, the question of the influence of nationalism in archaeology has already entered into the discourse surrounding the interpretations of archeology and history. In inserting my own voice into this conversation, the theory that I found most helpful in assessing the influences on the sites and their use in the construction of Irish history and heritage is the concept of an “imagined community.” Benedict Anderson’s seminal text on nationalism, *Imagined Communities*, is a useful framework upon which to build my analysis of the methods used by nineteenth-century cultural nationalists in their construction of an Irish identity.
involved in a contest or struggle in a larger, usually international, context. The people’s struggle as a self-styled victim of oppression and colonization, especially when that victimization is largely true, provides the battleground for the choice to imagine themselves part of an amorphous national collective.  

According to Anderson, national identity develops within the context of emerging modernity. He cites print capitalism and homogeneous empty time, as measured by clocks and calendars, as being critical to this process. We can use these ideas to understand the production of an imagined community in Ireland. The advent of more advanced and inexpensive forms of print capitalism in Ireland was absolutely crucial to the first stirrings of the Celtic revival and the dissemination of the discoveries of the antiquarians and, therefore, of the representation of “Irishness.” The cultural nationalist’s establishment of a unified cultural and historical memory would have been next to impossible without print capitalism. The key feature in the development of nationalism is the proliferation of printed materials whose ideas could establish a universalized cultural identity. In the context of Ireland, mechanized print capitalism produced inexpensive books, magazines, newspapers, and academic journals that not only opened up the debate to a wider audience, but also disseminated the overarching theme of a unified Irish past.

Another key concept is the “homogeneous empty time” of cultural nationalism, which helps explain why one person acting out their life in Dublin and another simultaneously in Limerick are inextricably linked. Their time is the same across the

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breadth of this expansive space because they are willingly a part of that nation.\textsuperscript{26} The suspension of the individualized concept of time for the wider concept of a shared present as well as a shared past is crucial to the successful formation of an imagined community. The now blanket term of Irishness has been successfully deployed to encompass a “community” that literally spans the globe and speaks to its participants through time and space.

These concepts help us unravel the influences, conscious and unconscious, that exerted control over the cultural nationalists in their search for the unifying history and heritage that could provide a base for the formation of Irish national identity.

Antiquarians investigated the antiquity of Irish archaeological sites that were the perfect vehicles for the creation of that past, their present, and their future. By investigating the antiquarians and archaeologists examining and interpreting the sites, and looking for alternate explanations for the origins and historical significance of the sites I selected, it is possible to reveal their influences and biases.

**Archival Work**

With these concepts in mind, I investigated the documents created by early Irish antiquarian societies, the first publications of scholarly peer-reviewed journals, and the Ordnance Survey, to discover how cultural nationalists established the base for both nineteenth century cultural heritage and, later, twentieth century archaeology. At the Royal Society of Antiquaries Ireland (RSAI), I examined the repository of data concerning the foundation of one of the key antiquarian research associations in Ireland.

The RSAI has an extensive digital archive of their first journals that include discussions of the ancient sites.

At the National Irish Library archive, I was able to examine the place name notes, OS original data collection keys, and maps of the 1824 Ordnance survey. The place name notes and original maps of the sites gave a general idea as to the process by which the OS workers and surveyors went about choosing place names to map and how the sites were situated in the general mapping of the localities. I examined original notes taken by OS surveyors in their collection of place-name data regarding both townships and historic sites. Handwritten notes regarding various names and spellings of sites like Dun Aengus gave me an insight into the process by which these sites were identified, examined, and earmarked for further study based on their importance locally as well as nationally.

At the Royal Irish Academy’s archive, I investigated the publication of the results and the personal thoughts of the actors performing the survey. They are important to discovering the overarching themes of their research and perhaps their less explicit motives. The survey maps have served as the basis for the search for a national identity. The Library at the Royal Irish Academy (RIA) also has an extensive collection of the original sketches and descriptions of many of the ancient sites all over Ireland. They provided me with an interesting look into what sites were investigated and the ways in which these sites were treated by the antiquarians and the intellectuals of the period. I have examined closely the images, attempting to discern who chose the sites depicted and how and why were some lauded and some ignored? The images of Newgrange and Dun Aengus were particularly helpful in a visual representation of the changing interpretations of the sites over the course of several decades (Images 5 – 9).
At the RIA, I also found the writings of George Petrie, known as the father of Irish archaeology, particularly useful. Using antiquarian and archaeological descriptions of the sites, I have completed close readings of the descriptions of the sites, the debate surrounding their interpretations, and the sites themselves to discover alternate interpretations. I have chosen three representative sites, Newgrange and Tara, Clonmacnoise and Dun Aengus, to reveal the influences of the interpretations of the sites.

**Thesis Components**

I discovered a wide spectrum of beliefs, from the overtly nationalist to the scientific, as antiquarians developed new research methods and technology throughout the nineteenth century. The relationship that existed between these two ideals resulted in a shift from a dominant culturally nationalist interpretation to a prevailing revisionist, determinedly dispassionate, reinterpretation of history and archaeology by the early twentieth century. This thesis has several components, detailing three general stages of the development of antiquarianism in Ireland, and how those stages reflect the varied influence of nationalism on antiquarian and archaeological research and scholarship. The spectrum of tension I have described began in the eighteenth century and evolved throughout the nineteenth century. The tension was evident in the evolving relationship between cultural nationalists and antiquarians. The range included the overtly romanticized and culturally nationalistic to the aspirationally unbiased and scientific. The revivalist was buttressed by the scientific and this would be the focus of the evolution of these two ideals. The relationship would eventually reverse itself, with unbiased dominating revivalist, but the revivalist ideology would still underpin the
scientific analysis. That relationship and the evolution of antiquarians from amateur researchers and scholars to professionally organized historians, archaeologists, and ethnographers is a process that took place within the broader context of the Gaelic Revival.

The thesis has three chapters. Chapter one will deal with the Gaelic Revival as played out through the early stages of cultural nationalism and antiquarian history and interpretation of historic sites. Ideas and observations of heritage and culture had crystallized with the creation of the antiquarian-based Royal Irish Academy in 1785, and began the initial association of cultural nationalists and antiquarians in a common goal of the investigation into the past of Ireland. This coincided with the emergence of an increasing academic interest in the ancient sites around Ireland, the development of antiquarianism in Ireland, and often the initial “discoveries” of the ancient sites by the educated elite. This chapter will provide historical background and context of antiquarianism, the societies that they established and key antiquarians and their links to nationalism.

The second phase emerged contemporaneously with the politico-cultural Young Ireland movement in the mid-nineteenth century, which was critical to highlight the development of a Celtic Renaissance. This corresponded with the initial study and interpretations of the ancient sites, most particularly in the study of pre-historic and pre-religious sites. Chapter two will outline the early stages of the transition from lay

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28 The Young Irelanders was a cultural, political, and social movement founded in the 1830’s by poet Thomas Davis (1814 - 1845). Along with other nationalist luminaries like Daniel O’Connell and his Repeal Association, this movement also led to a rebellion in 1848 to repeal the Act of Union.
researchers and antiquarians to professional historians and archaeologists. The antiquarians’ investigation of key sites shows the evolution to change to a more dominant aspirationally scientific approach to the examination of Clonmacnoise, Tara, Newgrange and Dun Aengus. Sister Mary Cusack exemplifies the early nationalist history written during the Gaelic Revival. George Petrie is both a key archaeologist, and an important supporter of cultural nationalism and is representative of the evolving relationship between nationalism and science already perceptible by the early- to mid-nineteenth century. His writings represent the continued close ties between the historical and antiquarian community and the cultural nationalists of the 1860’s, as well as an emerging desire to provide a scientific analysis of the history and antiquity of Ireland. Petrie’s conclusions and archaeological discoveries provided imagery and validity for the cultural revival of the late 1890’s.

The Gaelic League, which promoted a revival of Gaelic athletics, drama, literature and heritage, was led by revivalists Douglas Hyde, Arthur Griffith and others in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and characterized the third stage of cultural revivalism, and the eventual ideological divergence between cultural nationalists and professional archaeologists and historians. The professionalization of the fields of archaeology and history particularly, were also approaching the third stage. Chapter three represents that third stage of the connection between archaeology and nationalism. During this period, the nationalism of the nineteenth century had become institutionalized by the Irish Free State created in 1922. The reaction to the culturally nationalist power structure was the revisionist trend of history and archaeology and coincided with the professionalization of these fields. Thomas Westropp was a transitional figure in the
beginnings of a revisionist movement in Irish history and archaeology. Westropp’s writings demonstrate a separation of nationalist sentiments with a more fundamentally scientific approach to archaeological research and analysis. He was both an advocate for the preservation of Irish folklore and mythological tradition and a critic of the use of those writings as authorities for past archaeological and historical.

I will use these chapters to demonstrate that the ancient sites of Ireland, and their interpretation, are representative of a long evolution of Irish intellectual thought. As political ideology changed or was altered with changing political and economic pressures, first cultural revivalism and then scientific objectivism dominated intellectual analysis of the history of Ireland. This thesis will demonstrate that throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth century, historians and archaeologists struggled with varying phases of the transition from latent nationalist ideology, as represented through cultural revivalism, and a desire for objective, tested history and archeological analysis that eventually dominated intellectual life. Neither supplanted the other, but worked, to varying degrees in concert with one another to create the prevailing understanding of the heritage and history of Ireland that exists today.
Chapter 1: Nineteenth Century Nationalism and the Celtic Revival

In a process that took place within the broader context of the Gaelic Revival, nineteenth-century researchers replaced the largely folkloric-based research into the Irish past that characterized that produced by early antiquarians with an increasingly more fact-based, scientific approach to evidence and resources. In this chapter, I will follow the path of the development of antiquarians’ scholarship and their increased professionalization in the nineteenth century in the context of the varied influence of cultural nationalists and the impact of archaeology, history, and heritage. I discovered a wide spectrum of perspectives, from the overtly nationalist to the more scientific, that created ideological tension as antiquarians developed new research methods and technology throughout the nineteenth century. The tension that existed between these two ideals resulted in a shift from a dominant nationalist interpretation to a revisionist, avowedly objective, reinterpretation of history and archaeology by the early twentieth century. The early antiquarians and revivalists represent the initial stage of this evolution.

I - Context

The Gaelic Revival of culture and heritage was comprised of both cultural nationalists and antiquarian scholars. The beginning stage of cultural nationalism was based on a political foundation constructed around the time of the Revolution began by the United Irishmen, but the main trajectory of the development of the cultural nationalists’ ideology was more closely tied to the development of antiquarian scholarship. The intellectual influences of the Romantic feelings of nostalgia, a
reverential treatment of antiquity, and an emotional fascination with the revitalization of literature and art had a profound influence on Gaelic Revivalist goals. These feelings were combined with a movement toward antiquarian rediscovery and investigation of the Gaelic language, scientific advancement in research technologies, and a construction of pre-English history and literature. The significant association of the pre-Christian faith, pastoralism, nostalgia, and mythic heroism with “Irishness” emerge as integral to producing an Irish national identity.

One of the most prominent academic disciplines that combined these ideas was archaeology. The emergence of archaeology as a discipline in the first decades of the nineteenth century was part of a larger trend toward the study of the history of culture and ethnography that would eventually be placed under the umbrella of anthropology. It would also include linguistics, another key component of the revivalist construction of an Irish national identity. One key role of the archaeological trend in scholarship was, and continues to be, the examination of the process of the creation of group identity. Identity is a social and cultural construction: it is a perceived collection of traits that result in the formation of collective consciousness, or an imagined community. The analysis of nineteenth century nationalistic movements by modern scholars has enabled them to define the intricacies involved in the explosion of nationalistic feelings that resulted in the development of “modern” nation-states in a variety of ways. One definition of cultural nationalism is “a modern phenomenon that, challenging established social identities, promotes a novel historical vision of an integrated and distinctive political
Cultural nationalism can also be described as the identification of “a unique character...a nation was defined by its culture, by which [cultural nationalist Thomas] Davis meant its literature, its history, and, above all, embodying these, its language.”

As a movement in Ireland, cultural nationalism and its fundamental ethnic or social component is a cultural construct; a creation and/or proliferation of a common ethnic origin, often linguistic in nature, and unified by a shared history. The term “shared history” is, of course, problematic, as most of the histories were either constructed or based on biased historical interpretations during the course of nationalist movements. Historical “truth,” then, is a result of the construction of a shared past and the creation of a unifying shared history, the interpretation and dissemination of which is an integral part of both cultural and constitutional nationalism. The members of a nation need not be wholly alike, but only to feel a sense of community and solidarity.

Throughout the nineteenth century, cultural revivalists in Ireland identified the material record, concrete artifacts, ruins and important cultural sites, as physical manifestations of that history. Contemporary and cultural interpretations of a site, artifact or aspect of heritage for the popular audience is the result of a complex interplay of politics, collective memory, nationalism, and perception. The construction of a national identity is a process that requires the interpretation and re-interpretation of both perceived and “accurate” history, as well as the invention of heritage mechanisms that could

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preserve and celebrate Ireland’s ancient past.\textsuperscript{32} Ireland has embodied the intersection of these different ideas into the twentieth century, when more recent debates among revisionist historians resulted in the reinterpretation of both recent and ancient histories, which I will discuss in detail later.

To begin, however, it is important to first examine the historical framework within which the analysis and interpretation of the sites occurred. Revivalists in Ireland created a discourse surrounding the history of the “Celtic” people, an investigation of both when “Irish” culture was created and if it predated that of the English “invasion” of Ireland. The standard narrative of “conquest” began with Henry II’s arrival in 1171, the passage of Poyning’s Law in 1494\textsuperscript{33}, then proceeded with the Cromwellian invasion of the seventeenth century, cultural consequences of the Jacobite Rebellion, and the still controversial role of the Battle of the Boyne\textsuperscript{34} in 1690. Nationalists’ call for a unified nation and freedom was based on a long history of perceived English oppression of the inhabitants of Ireland. The result, the nationalist creation of a storied and cohesive past, was a contrast to the reality of a deeply divided nation. The disparate nationalist groups within Ireland represented often-conflicting forces: Catholics and Protestants; the landed educated elite and peasantry; industrial and agricultural classes. Among the intellectual and cultural intelligentsia, a movement of Irish cultural revivalists attempted to unite the

\textsuperscript{32} As I will demonstrate, the preservation and spread of Irish history was facilitated by travel writings, preservation groups, such as the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland and the Royal Irish Academy, and eventually offices like the Office of Public Works, that acted to present and decipher ancient sites for the mass audience.

\textsuperscript{33} Poyning’s Law, enacted in 1494, was the beginning of the subordination of the power structure in Ireland to that of England. It stated that the Parliament of Ireland could not meet unless the legislation proposed was approved by the Lord Deputy of Ireland and then by the English Monarch.

\textsuperscript{34} The Battle of the Boyne is still crucial to the political language of both Irish Unionism and Republicanism, particularly in Northern Ireland. The anniversary of King William of Orange’s victory is the origin of a parade in the protestant neighborhoods of Belfast, and the roots of ongoing political violence as a result.
“people” under the auspices of a cultural homogeneity that downplayed the heterogeneity of the Irish past and present, and was based on the legacies of a pre-Christian or early Christian past. Beginning in the nineteenth century, however, parts of the intellectual and artistic intelligentsia in Ireland found inspiration in the Romantic nostalgia for an ancient “Celtic” past, and a new desire for a preservation and investigation of their roots within that history.

Although the revivalists began and thence developed their nationalistic fervor based on a goal towards the inclusion and participation of all peoples living on the island of Ireland, it was, in large part, exclusive. Nationalism in Ireland is such an incredibly complex and integrated matrix of cultural understandings that it cannot help but be both contradictory and, in many ways, incongruous. The largely protestant Anglo-Irish elite who headed the early nationalistic movements were often primarily interested in the maintenance of political power.35 As the national identity of the “Irish” began to evolve and become more dependent upon the unity of that concept (Irishness), the more divisive and fragmented it became. The conflicting ideas as to what Ireland was—and should be—was full of inconsistencies and contradictions: from democratic theory to Jacobinism; comprehensive nationalism to sectarianism; and constitutionalism to revolution.36 Most often, the narrative presented was one in which these seemingly polarized groups banded together and formed temporary alliances; if these unions eventuated, historically, it was to the detriment of the movement as a whole. At the center of this attempt were cultural nationalist leaders like Thomas Moore (1779- 1852), Thomas Davis (1814-1845), and

later William Butler Yeats (1865–1939), who sought to unite the people in Ireland, whether Protestant or Catholic, through a shared Celtic culture. These efforts were predicated on the idea of “native” unity, or ethnic nationalism, regardless of religious affiliation. The reality of the power structure already prevalent in politics of the nineteenth century Ireland created tensions and contradictions that revivalists were forced to either ignore or overcome. 

Journalist and cultural nationalists like Thomas Davis transformed the culture of nineteenth century nationalism in Ireland. His songs, contributions to *The Nation* newspaper and mixed Anglo-Irish lineage led to an inclusive civic and cultural nationalist turn that was new at the time. His Anglo-Irish heritage enabled him to speak to those who believed that only an association with the emerging ancient lineage of the Celts bestowed true “Irishness.” Davis claimed that to be “Irish” was not dependent on blood, but on a willingness to be a part of the “Irish” nation. The new nation of Ireland should be an educated and tolerant group that was inclusive and talented. Davis wrote:

> We grappled with the difficulty. We left sacred things to consecrated hands—theology and discipline to Churchmen. We preached a nationality that asked after no man's creed (*friend's or foe's*); and now, after our Second Year's Work, we have got a practical as well as a verbal admission that religion is a thing between man and God—that no citizen is to be hooted, or abused, or marked down because he holds any imaginable creed, or changes it any conceivable number of times. 

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37 One of the underlying threads of the nationalist discourse was the definition of “native.” During the evolution of ethnography and race identification, the labeling of Irish was especially important. Although many families within Ireland were of English or Scottish descent, they had arrived in Ireland in the fifteenth centuries, or before. Were they therefor to be considered a “native?” How long and by what measure was a family to be considered ethnically, racially, culturally Irish? Richard English problematizes the use of “native” Irish in his seminal work *Irish Freedom: the History of Nationalism in Ireland*, p 26.


Davis argued for ethnic and political unity, a necessity to focus on the fight against British rule, rather than on the battles waging between Protestant and Catholics still being waged.

Scholars of the late eighteenth and late nineteenth century established heritage organizations that helped to disseminate and preserve culture and history. The sense of patriotism, unity, or homogeneity that characterizes modern ideas of a national singularity has its roots in material manifestations of culture and the establishment of a sense of authenticity through heritage and tradition. Whether a nation’s ancient past is re-discovered or invented, the transmission of that culture, through art, music, literature, poetry, museums, etc. is what can and did produce an imagined community of a nationalist conception of Irishness.

The first scholars to emerge as the preservers and investigators of Ireland’s past were antiquarians: they extended a tradition that began in England in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. As nineteenth century scientific and theoretical advancements in the field of antiquarian research and archaeological excavation took place, an increase in interest in the archaeological record of both Britain and Ireland swiftly followed. In the first decades of the nineteenth century, antiquarians and archaeologists began applying methods of stratigraphy (the analysis of the layered remnants of geological time) to the archaeological record, and they were in common practice by the late nineteenth century.

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42 The term archaeologist was often used interchangeably with antiquarian in Irish scholarship until the formalizing of a scientific profession in the late nineteenth century. I will use archaeologist for those either who referred to themselves as such or who were earned that moniker from the societies with whom they were affiliated.
These scholars utilized dating methods to establish more concrete historical periods from which to further examine the material remains of a shared history. Revivalists then proceeded to establish conceptions of a verifiable and ancient past using this evidence.

More recognizably modern dating techniques changed the face of antiquarianism and archaeology, encouraging the already emerging trend toward a more scientific and less subjective stance on the collection of data by the twentieth century. The use of stratigraphy and the relative dating techniques in categorizing relics and sites were popular in the increasingly professionalized and specialized field of archaeology. One theory in particular, that of contextual dating, was one of the most important archaeological developments investigated and perfected over the course of the nineteenth century. Contextual dating derives from the geological use of the idea that sedimentation takes place according to uniform principles. During an excavation of archaeological sites below the surface of the ground, the identification of the context of each find is vital in enabling the archaeologist to draw conclusions about the site and about the nature and date of its occupation. Archaeological stratification is the superimposition of single units of stratigraphy, or contexts, onto the archaeological record.\textsuperscript{43} It is this technique that enabled early dating of sites and artifacts discovered there by both antiquarians and “professional” archaeologists.

The early emergence of technological advancements in archaeology enabled a more scientific approach to the preservation and analysis of Ireland’s heritage, also highlighting an increasing tension between those of a culturally independent, nationalist

\textsuperscript{43} Trigger, Bruce G. \textit{A History of Archaeological Thought}. 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed., reprinted. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2007: 122
bent and those of a more aspirational scientific motivation. Within this broader context, cultural revivalists had also been working toward a goal of a united Irish nation, a cultural and social construction that would provide a base for a political state separate from Great Britain’s direct rule. This attempt at cultural unity that manifested in the origins of societies dedicated to the promotion and dissemination of literature, drama, art, and sport, also provided a foundation upon which a newly forming national identity of Ireland would emerge. This process focuses attention toward the development of the first stage of the spectrum of tension I’ve described.

The first stage manifested itself within the community of cultural revivalists and scholars from roughly the 1850’s – 1880’s. The goal of Irish cultural nationalism was the identification, creation, and dissemination of unifying cultural societies. Linguistic nationalism was a key component in the investigation of ancient sites and material culture. Nineteenth century revivalists investigated and reinstituted the use of Gaelic place names and traditional folkloric heroes with ancient sites to further establish their unique Irish heritage. Cultural institutions and material culture, represented in ancient sites and the artifacts in museums, are the visible vehicles for the transmission of a national identity.

One key aspect in this investigation arose out of a renewed interest in language that can be traced to the development of linguistic nationalism, utilized throughout a broad range of nationalistic movements in Europe and around the globe that provided a base for the creation of cultural identities. In some of the areas involved in the 1848 revolutions (in Ireland, the modern Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Spain to name just a few), linguistic nationalism was integral to the ethnical, cultural, and political
development of sovereign states. Language was critical to the larger movement of cultural rediscovery and affirmation and provided the demonstration of political authenticity for newly emerging nation-states. One reality in European history is the deeply imbedded nature of language to European culture and identity. Many of the first European nation-states formed around their “national print-languages;” the idea of language as the foundation upon which a national identity was culturally constructed is, therefore, not a new one. In the eighteenth century for example, Johann Gottfried Von Herder (1744 – 1803) claimed that the true core of a nation, and the German nation particularly, was linguistic and cultural in origin. For a nation composed of disparate groups and contained within various political states, the ties of language and culture offered a valuable connection for the unification of a cultural or ethnic nation before becoming a political one. Von Herder also offered the argument for a racial and cultural homogeneity that became part of a clarion call for cultural nationalists in Ireland.

A key component of the Gaelic language revival in Ireland in the nineteenth century was the reconstruction of the nearly extinct and largely diverse set of dialects in Ireland by key antiquarian researchers. Language - print language in particular- has played a crucial role in the creation of a unified cultural identity that would facilitate a fight for political independence. It has also enabled those ethnic groups, like the Basque, and later political states, like the German, Italian and Irish, to establish a

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44 Anderson, Imagined Communities, 18

45 This obviously brings to mind the extremist nationalist cause of the Nazi party and proponents of ethnic cleansing. I have no intention of implying that Irish nationalism was similarly radical, but the concept of a pure and unified Irish race and culture was one aspect of the cultural nationalist movement of the period.

cohesive unified linguistic and cultural identity to solidify and test their political status. The use of Gaelic as an intellectual language was key to the cultural revivalist establishment and acceptability of an independent Irish nation.

Linguistic nationalism is a term that offers problems as well as clarification. Generally, the term is defined as the purging of a spoken or print “national” language of foreign vocabulary, expressions, and influences. This approach was a seemingly drastic one that was often difficult to achieve. Language, and its application in nationalism, is crucial as “there is a relation between a language and the rest of the culture of the society which uses it.” The second definition, which I will use, is a method cultural nationalists applied in either reconstructing or reconfirming native languages, creating a more universal and cohesive language with which to combat cultural and political hegemony. This was often part of a process of de-colonization and a collapse of ancient empires throughout the world in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Cultural Revivalists in Ireland addressed the preservation of the “Irish” language, or Gaelic, due to its steady decline as a spoken tongue, consisting only of a variety of localized dialects, and remaining in common usage mainly in isolated rural areas. In the urban centers of places like Kilkenny and Dublin, the centers of archaeological and antiquarian research, the language was all but extinct. Revivalists were faced with the fact that English was the dominant language of the majority in Ireland, and although it

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49 Irish, or Irish Gaelic, is one of a family of languages referred to Insular Celtic languages that includes, Welsh, Scottish Gaelic, Manx (from the Isle of Man), Breton and Cornish. For further see: Borsley, Robert D., and Ian G. Roberts, eds. *The Syntax of the Celtic Languages: A Comparative Perspective*. Cambridge [England]; New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
represented English cultural hegemony, it was necessary for political and economic communication. The immediate goal of the Gaelic League was to reverse that trend, and to reinvent the Gaelic language as a standardized, easily disseminated tongue that could compete with English. This aspiration culminated in the move toward making the Irish language compulsory in education, finally achieved under the Irish Free State in the 1920’s.  

The influence of linguistic nationalism was critical in the investigation of the creation of the Irish language. The collection of Gaelic language vocabulary and grammar began with antiquarians involved in the British Ordnance Survey (OS) in 1824. The Survey was initially a military one, under the direction of English geographer and Member of the Royal Astronomical Society Colonel Thomas Colby (1784 – 1852), and assisted by Lieutenant Thomas Larcom (1801 – 1879). The overt purpose of the survey was to undertake an inspection of Ireland and to map the entire country at a scale of six inches to one mile. Larcom and his contingent of Irish and English surveyors completed the cartographic element of the OS project in 1846, and a full set of maps still exists for each Irish county. Anglo-Irish geologist Richard Griffith (1784 – 1878) proceeded to use the Ordnance Survey maps to further investigate Irish residency data for tax collection, creating a geological map of Ireland, the Primary Valuation maps from 1847 - 1864.  

Nineteenth-century antiquarians used these maps to investigate their “Celtic” past. These maps provided minute detail of both the topography and geological structure of areas of Ireland never previously explored. Ordnance surveyors recorded both place names of

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official British record, as well as local origins and Gaelic place names. Surveyors, and later cultural revivalists, located and mapped ruins, tombs, dolmens, crosses, and memorial, and subsequently earmarked them for further study and investigation. Antiquarians of English and Irish descent began systematic investigations of the ancient Irish past. These investigations were broadened in scope and became more focused in their importance over time, especially after the upheaval of the Irish Famine between 1845 and 1852.

Another key development stemming from the OS maps was the awareness of the necessity for the protection and preservation of heritage. Heritage organizations had already begun forming first within the upper echelons of society and coincided with the establishment of antiquarian societies, but the Ordnance Survey provided much-needed detail for the location of relevant sites. The standards of heritage protection were then codified through parliamentary acts by the late nineteenth century. Many of the Acts of Parliament passed during this period helped to establish the broad range of preservation societies and bodies incorporated into National Trust organizations of Ireland. Another result of these early explorations and societies resulted in the successful efforts of amateur archaeologist and British Member of Parliament Sir John Lubbock (1834-1913) to pass the Ancient Monuments Protection Act in 1882. This Act established the protection of ancient sites in both Great Britain and Ireland that had begun with the antiquarians decades earlier. It was this British parliamentary act that began the codified protection and, therefore, preservation and state ownership of the heritage sites in Ireland.

52 Many of the heritage organizations stemmed from the “hobbies” of aristocratic landowners attempting to preserve the heritage on their own land. These early manifestations took on an almost feudal flavor, a paternalistic protection of local history and interest.
It was from this preservation that a more focused tourist trade would emerge. Antiquarians, in some cases were also travel writers, detailing the myriad of “ancient wonders” one could see on a trip to Ireland.

A subtler and more veiled purpose of the OS was the investigation into the Irish past and language. Key to this trend was John O’Daly (1800 – 1878). Born in County Waterford, O’Daly was educated in the informal environment of a hedge school. He was a founding member of the Celtic Society and helped to publish and promote native Irish literature. O’Daly became a key figure in the investigation of Gaelic in rural locales.

Along with figures like O’Daly, revivalists, particularly John O’Donovan (1806 – 1861) and Eugene O’Curry (1794 – 1862) were integral in the translation of many important ancient texts as well as the publication of a universal standard grammar and vocabulary for the formal education of Irish Gaelic. Their translation of ancient Annals, histories and collections of Irish folklore was integral to the rise of antiquarianism in Ireland. John O’Donovan, an antiquarian from County Waterford, came from a long line of scholars, and was a leading expert of the Irish language. He taught Gaelic to Thomas Larcom and eventually would become an instructor of Celtic languages at Queen’s University in Belfast. ⁵³ Antiquarian Eugene O’Curry was the son of a farmer from County Clare. He was a self-educated scholar of Irish folklore and legend, translating Irish texts and eventually becoming a professor of history and archaeology at the Catholic University of Ireland. ⁵⁴ O’Donovan and O’Curry spent much of their careers researching the Irish language and eventually co-authored the *Dictionary of the Irish Language*, published in

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1852 by the Royal Irish Academy. This volume outlined the history of Gaelic and the stages and variations of its evolution. The standardization of the Gaelic language and its use as a tool for nineteenth century Revivalists were integral to the building of a unified Irish culture and identity. In *A Group of Nation Builders: O'Donovan – O’Curry – Petrie* (1913), Reverend Patrick McSweeney describes the contributions of these men in the construction of a unified national Irish identity. It is from this book – that I will discuss in Chapter 2 in more detail - that the early links between nationalism and cultural societies and foundations are established. These early advancements in technology served two purposes. The first is the support and encouragement of antiquarian scholarship, which highlighted the already emerging relationship between science and nationalism that I have been arguing existed from the beginning. The second is to provide energy for the progress of antiquarians from amateur to professional.

**II – Antiquarians and their Societies**

Antiquarian societies provided the foundation for the work of nationalists and revivalists alike. They were scholars that influenced and inspired key figures and movements that shaped the course of the cultural development of Ireland. Revivalists in the nineteenth century facilitated the creation of, and then disseminated, a national identity through their construction of heritage. This fact is revealed by the cultural organizations that developed in Ireland at this time, namely antiquarian societies. Cultural institutions and material culture, represented through the interpretation of ancient sites and the displayed artifacts in museums, are critical to the representation of a national
identity.

As I have argued, the minds behind this cultural transformation were the lay researchers, antiquarians and scholars. Antiquarians began with the Ordnance Survey, and alongside these mapping explorations, key researchers collected linguistic data and legends of historical significance. Antiquarianism in Ireland then flourished using the details in these maps, and finally reached its peak, scientifically, in the late 1880s, with the development of a systematic chronicling method for the registering of artifacts exhumed from ancient sites. The examination and preservation of heritage led naturally to the scientific investigation of the numerous ruins that OS surveyors identified over the whole of the island, which led to the Revivalists’ systematic investigations of the ancient Irish past.

Several important figures that emerge during this period demonstrate the early stage of the ideological formation that I have argued existed, from eminently nationalist to determinedly scientific. Scholars such as Mary Cusack (1829 – 1899), George Petrie (1790 – 1866), and Thomas Johnson Westropp (1860 – 1922), along with many others, demonstrate the evolution of the antiquarians and revivalists to professional historians and archaeologists and the influences of nationalist feelings. First, I will address the antiquarian societies themselves and the revivalist ambitions in which they played a role.

Nineteenth century revivalists, in an effort to organize their findings and disseminate this information, established a number of societies and coalitions that were dedicated to the investigation and collection of historical narratives and antiquity in Ireland. Cultural nationalist, literary figure, and antiquarian Thomas Davis (1814 – 1845) was also a vocal supporter of Petrie and the Royal Society of Antiquaries Ireland. Davis
engendered both awareness and a newly invigorated interest in a shared unique Irish past, by encouraging people in Ireland to visit newly established museums and ancient sites and to learn of their ancient past. To establish a nation, in Davis’ view, the people must choose to unify behind their common past; anything else was counterproductive. In Davis’ words, “If we [the people of Ireland] attempt to govern ourselves without statesmanship—to be a nation without a knowledge of the country’s history, and of the propensities to good and ill of the people… These—all these things—we, people of Ireland, must know of Ireland, must know if we would be a free, strong nation.”

Davis was a key supporter of the work of antiquarians and the founders of their societies and journals. The antiquarian and archaeological societies joined forces with already prominent or established mathematical and scientific societies to promote the preservation and study of the Irish past in hopes that it would unify the country. The evidence for this fact can be found in the vast array of specialized articles and monthly supplements published by societies like the Royal Irish Academy. The Royal Irish Academy, the Royal Society of Antiquaries Ireland, and local societies such as the Cork Historical and Archaeological society (1891) provided the foundation for the construction and investigation of the heritage and history of Ireland. These organizations were established to investigate and disseminate knowledge about Ireland’s ancient past.

Two of the most important scholarly societies that emerged in the early nineteenth century were leaders of the study of Irish language and antiquity: The Royal Irish Academy (or RIA - founded in 1785, and significantly expanded in membership and participation in the nineteenth century) and the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland.

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(or RSAI – was formed from the Kilkenny archaeological society in 1849). The RIA declared its aims to be the “promotion and investigation of the sciences, polite literature, and antiquities, as well as the encouragement of discussion and debate between scholars of diverse backgrounds and interests.”\(^5\) A key interest of the early society was the promotion of antiquarian research. A unique characteristic of the RIA was its successful balance of the interest of the humanities and the scientific disciplines. Distinguished members included Edmund Burke (1729 – 1797), archaeologist George Petrie (1790 – 1866), Charles Darwin (1809 – 1892), and linguistic scholars Eugene O’Curry and John O’Donovan. Among its publications were archaeological books and the journal *Proceedings of the RIA*, which contains three sections; section C of which was devoted to the archaeology, linguistics, and literature of Ireland.

The second (and still prominent society) is the Royal Society of Antiquaries Ireland (RSAI). It demonstrates the transference of local historical interest to national ones. Originally the Kilkenny Archaeological Society in 1849, after several name changes and a move to Dublin, it officially became the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland in 1890, and was one of the more prominent of the nineteenth century societies in all its iterations. Consisting of members from a variety of political and cultural perspectives, the Society helped to shape the course of the collection of artifacts and investigation of the heritage of Ireland. The ‘mission statement’ of the Kilkenny Archaeological Society was to “preserve, examine and illustrate all ancient monuments and memorials of the arts, manners and customs of the past, as connected with the

\(^5\)Harbison, Peter, ‘Royal Irish Academy’, in *Encyclopaedia of Ireland*. Brian Lalor (ed.), (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2003), 948
antiquities, language, literature and history of Ireland.” Its stated philosophy was non-sectarian and non-political, and its membership subscription (less than £1), while still expensive, was intended to be socially inclusive.

The RSAI was assisted and promoted by men who were also closely tied to the both dedicated historians and newspapermen and political writers. The articles published by figures powerful within the antiquarian community, including Rev. Graves Prim, and George Petrie give an indication of the variety of backgrounds of the participants in the early societies. The first two general secretaries, Reverend James Graves (1815 – 1886) and John Prim (1821 – 1875), who were integral to the widespread success of the society, illustrate this fact. Graves was an Anglican minister, who was the son of an Anglican minister from Kilkenny, and educated at Trinity College, Dublin. He was a dedicated historian and researcher of Ireland’s history. Prim was a middle-class Kilkenny Newspaper man and journalist who worked for the Kilkenny Moderator along with Standish O’Grady, a nationalist, loyalist, and historian integral to the foundation of the Gaelic Revival. Petrie was the son of an Aberdeen businessman, antique collector, and painter, who was suspected of having ties to the United Irishmen. These men banded together to form one of the most important journals of early Irish antiquarianism in the nineteenth century, the *Journal of Royal Society of Antiquaries Ireland* (1849). The writings of these men demonstrated both their enthusiasm for the history of Ireland and a

nationalist influence in the promotion of a unified culture. Graves was already a prominent antiquarian and artist who was known for his sketches of the monasteries and churches of county Kilkenny. Prim was an antiquarian, transcribing ancient medieval manuscripts and collecting ancient ballads of Ireland. They began the society with an interest in both the preservation and study of Kilkenny history and the collecting of antiques and relics from Ireland’s ancient past. The society began accumulating enough materials that by their second meeting in 1850 they decided to establish a museum to protect the objects for comparison and study.

The RIA and RSAI both had researchers examining the utility of the Brehon law of medieval Ireland. Brehon Law was the standard, codified, set of customs and traditions that governed the tribes of Ireland before the English monarchy banned it in the seventeenth century. English Common Law eventually supplanted it. In 1894, Laurence Ginnell (1852 – 1923) presented the legal handbook of ancient Brehon Law to the Irish Literary Society. Ginnell stated that it was his intention to understand the greatness and importance of his nation’s past by examining the ancient traditions comparatively. In this context, Ginnell compared the study of Brehon law to that of English Common law. It was Ginnell’s conclusion that the legal and cultural misperception of the ancient people

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of Ireland that existed historically resulted from a disruption in the greatness and evolution of Brehon law by first the Danes, then the Anglo-Normans. According to Ginnell, The Kilkenny Statutes of 1367, written in Norman French, characterized the disruption, and declared the Irish, and by extension Irish culture and tradition, as adversarial. Ginnell described the results in his conclusion of the 1894 publication on “The Brehon Laws: A Legal Handbook”:

The Gaelic race, with its peculiar institutions, national and domestic, was kept disorganised until disorganisation became its normal condition. It was not so much that civilisation was undergoing a change as that it was being strangled. There were two nations in the land, animated not by a desire to evolve a better condition of things, but by a mutual desire to thwart each other at every hand’s turn. (Ginnell, 1894: Conclusion)

For Ginnell, the very meaning of words previously defined by “the English intelligentsia was “necessarily” reexamined by Irish Gaelic scholars, specifically RSAI’s O’Donovan and O’Curry, for clarity. It was with this precept, the necessity for clarification and reexamination that the investigation of Irish culture began in the nineteenth century with the adoption of antiquarian investigation that led to the new field of archaeology. It also provided the basis for the Irish Dáil (An Chéad Dáil) in 1919. These and other examinations were made possible by the founding of antiquarian societies and journals. Antiquarian societies provided the foundation for the work of nationalists and revivalists alike. They were scholars that influenced and inspired key figures and movements that shaped the course of the cultural development of Ireland. The

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65 It is interesting to note that many of the antiquarians had either honorary or earned degrees and titles related to their association with the bar in Ireland, and civil law, signified by LL.D et al.
culmination of the desire for a cultural revival in Ireland was the Gaelic League. Douglas Hyde (1860 – 1949) established it in 1893: it represented the culmination of this revivalist movement. The creation of societies like the Gaelic League would have crucial and lasting influences that can be seen in the creation and encouragement of the Celtic revival (*Athbheochan Ghaelach* in Gaelic) in Irish literature, language, law, and culture. The League, along with newly forming cultural programs and associations like the Gaelic Athletic Association, or the GAA (originally named The Gaelic Athletic Association for the Preservation and Cultivation of National Pastimes), played an active role in promoting both “Gaelic sport” and culture and worked to seek out ancient Irish civilization to unify Ireland culturally. The founder of the GAA, Michael Cusack (no relation to the Mary Cusack) was a staunch nationalist and well known to Hyde. Hyde proclaimed that Cusack and the GAA had done more in a practical sense for the revivalist cause in five years than all the toothless talk of “de-Anglicization” did in sixty.67

### III – Societies in Action

The societies that formed in the nineteenth century were not simply scholarly clearinghouses, but also encouraged active field research. The main requirement of the members of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland was that they provide comprehensive and thorough reports regarding the investigations of important sites in their own regions. The first General Secretaries, Graves and Prim, were involved in early

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66 Gaelic Sport includes sports like hurling and *Peil Ghaelach*, or Irish Football.

excavations of two *raths*, or ringforts, at Glenfoyle and Dunbel. Tenant farmers wanting to level the fort for their use prompted Prim and Graves to begin the excavation of Dunbel. The excavation was described in general terms in the *Transactions of the Kilkenny Archaeological Society* in 1852, describing removing objects of jet and bone, iron weapons and a fragment of a comb that were subsequently put on exhibit. The Society was also interested in the accurate preparation of drawings of the architectural studies of monuments, castles, cathedrals, and ruins in the area. This interest represented the first stirring of a preservation movement. The conservation of buildings was responsible for important work at still-important ancient sites such as the ruined abbey and castle of Clonmacnoise, the round towers, church, and cemetery at Glendalough in County Wicklow. It was also integral in the preservation of the high crosses and round tower of Monasterboice in County Louth, and protection of important site like the Hill of Tara, in County Meath.⁶⁸

The Society also assumed the role of watchdog for the safety and conservation of important historical sites. One particularly fraught example occurred later in 1899, when, led by Arthur Griffith (1872 – 1922), the members of the society began a writing campaign in 1899 to put a stop to excavations at Tara that ‘ought not to be undertaken except under the supervision of competent archaeologists, and subject to their advice.’⁶⁹ A group of British activists, known as the British Israelites, attempted to confirm that the Hill of Tara was home to the Ark of the Covenant, and they began an excavation in 1899. They believed they had successfully traced the bloodlines of the Welsh Celts, Cymry, to

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⁶⁹ RSAI. “Proceedings.” *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland:Formerly the Royal Historical and Archaeological Association of Ireland, Founded in 1849 as The Kilkenny Archaeological Society* 29 (1899), 352
the lost tribes of Israel. It was their intention to prove that they had a long history of ownership of the site that supplanted or nullified completely the local claims to the site. To accomplish this, it was the British Israelites’ intention to use the discovery of the lost Ark of the Covenant within Tara as the central argument of that claim. Most revivalists and scholars assumed the site was the location where the ceremonial crowning of the High Kings of Ireland took place, a sacred and established ancient claim. Griffith, the founder of Sinn Féin, campaigned with cultural nationalists William Butler Yeats, Douglas Hyde, and Maud Gonne, against the profaning of their ancient site, by lighting a bonfire and singing Thomas Davis’s “A Nation Once Again.” They claimed the excavation of the site was tantamount to the destruction of Ireland’s first formal national monument. The Hill of Tara was linked through a litany of more recent historical events that led to the cultural revivalists’ impassioned defense of it. Tara was also important as the scene of a disastrous battle during the 1798 United Irishmen rebellion, and still holds their graves (image 8). Nationalist Daniel O’Connell held one of his monster meetings there in August of 1843, attended by hundreds of thousands of people. The British Israelite excavation proceeded despite the protest, but in 1902 it ended in failure. Neither the Ark, nor any evidence at all was found, and the Hill of Tara endured its first controversy on a grand public scale, but not its last.

The RSAI also condemned and intervene during the destruction of Dowth for the construction of a road in 1879. Dowth was one of the monuments housed in the Brú Na Bóinne complex of tombs. Ironically, in 1847 the tomb had already been decimated. The

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71 A monument to the rebels who died during the 1798 rebellion still exists at Tara.
Royal Irish Academy sent an expedition to Dowth in hopes of finding a passage similar
to the cave-like entrance at Newgrange. The team effected devastating destruction, using
every means available to dig into the center of the tomb, leaving it in waste. Rev. Graves
wrote,

> We must lament that this grand national monument has been left to destruction.
> …When I saw it, the materials of the tumulus were lying about in sad confusion,
> and evidently had never been placed back. Being so, Mr. Elcock, the tenant of the
> land, naturally thought they would form good building materials and acted
> accordingly. Thousands of tons of stones for ‘road metal’ were also taken from it,
> for Mr. Elcock was a road contractor as well as a house builder.\(^2\)

The disregard and seeming disrespect for the ancient monuments of their shared past
inspired the members of the societies to intensify their quest to document, analyze, and
protect ancient monuments that antiquarians then identified as part of an ancient Irish
past, like Newgrange, Tara and Dun Aengus.

Revivalist interest in the history and heritage of Ireland provided the foundation
for more concerted preservation and conservation effort. The British parliament
established the Office of Public Works (OPW) in 1831, for the performance of “kings’
duties” in Ireland. By the time of the famine of 1848, the OPW was assigned tasks of
hunger relief and civic responsibilities (caring for post offices, police barracks, royal
universities etc.). Thus, they were in place for later movements for governmental
preservation of heritage. The Royal Irish Academy, along with other heritage groups,
successfully helped to lobby the British Parliament for the monument protection
legislation to be extended to Ireland. It also campaigned for Ireland to be included in the
proposed national monuments legislation already proposed in 1880. When this

legislation was passed in 1882, in the form of the Ancient Monuments Protection Act, the Society declared it ‘defective’ since only prehistoric monuments were covered.\textsuperscript{73} Parliament passed more comprehensive legislation in 1892 to include sites of historic and natural beauty. The OPW has now identified and is actively preserving and presenting interested scholars, tourists and the people in Ireland with over 740 national monuments all over The Republic of Ireland. It also provides a backdrop for the analysis of ancient sites scientifically as opposed to romantically or nationally. The OPW was, and is, responsible for the preservation, protection, and marketing of ancient sites all over Ireland, including key ancient sites of archaeological and historical significance.

As I have described thus far, antiquarian societies, and the scholars they contained, had many roles in the early years of the nineteenth century. From 1830 – 1850 particularly, antiquarians began to form around ideas of investigating and constructing an ancient history for Ireland. Their common goals obscured an emerging pressure between revivalists who were influenced by cultural nationalism and those who were attempting to find a balance with a more objective scientific review of empirical evidence.

Chapter 2: Irish antiquarians and the ancient past: Early Histories and interpretations

So far, I have laid out the early basis for the aspirational unbiased scientific analysis and the culturally nationalist ideologies. I will now discuss the important evolution of that relationship, covering mainly the years beginning with a short discussion of key figures between 1830 – 1850 and then 1850 – 1880 (see table 1 for timeline). The spectrum of tension in Ireland between an impartial analysis and the nationalist need for an authenticated and unified history is demonstrated in the study and understanding of the ancient three sites I have chosen as examples. In this chapter, I will examine the emerging trend toward overt forms of cultural nationalism in the interpretation of ancient relics and historic sites by three important nineteenth century antiquarians, providing the background for the second phase of evolution of antiquarian to professional. I will then look at the contemporary revivalist discussion regarding the effectiveness of reliance on ancient sources, their use in the interpretation, historical analysis and dating of ancient sites. Lastly, I will discuss each relevant site individually to demonstrate early descriptions and interpretations and their influences.

I – Important Antiquarians and the History of Ireland

The beginning stages of antiquarian scholarship demonstrate only the first stirrings of tension between the scientific understandings of the ancient world and the relics found therein and the nationalist goals of many of the leading researchers and members of antiquarian societies. From the earliest emergence of nineteenth century antiquarian tradition in history, educated observers were enamored by a romantic
nostalgia for the ancient past. The second phase was a gradual awakening of scholars within the Revivalist movement that a more scientific analysis could be encouraged for the ancient sites to reach the level of achievement they desired. This trend brings to light the most relevant tensions that developed within the antiquarian community. Implicit in the research are two important questions: could they, and should they, balance the needs of the Gaelic Revival of the culture of Ireland with a more methodical analysis of the sources and sites? Would one counter the other or can they work in harmony?

According to revivalist scholars in the mid-nineteenth century, the written history of Ireland was a compilation of past English accounts that needed to be revised. Revivalists believed that previous histories were written from the point of view of both an occupying force and a hegemonic cultural influence. For centuries, early English historical accounts written by Edward Spenser, Edmund Campion, and others based their recitations and interpretations of the prehistory of Ireland on the scholarship of monks from the eleventh century: authors of the Annals of the Four Masters, medieval scholars, etc. Revivalists claimed that English historians tended to dismiss the history of Ireland and accomplishments in literature, the arts, and music while portraying the Irish people as hopeless ingénues in need of saviors (a role that the English happily provided) or worthless savages. Many revivalists believed that the general populace’s previous


75 Mary Cusack, among others, claimed their twelfth century, Medieval predecessors as authorities in their Irish prehistoric and early historic narratives. These authors were also cited by Frederick Engels in his 1870 article “Ancient Ireland” see Engels, Frederick. “History of Ireland, 1870.” In Marx and Engels on the Irish Question, Marxist Internet Archive. Progress Publishers, 1870. https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1870/history-ireland/index.htm.

dismissal, or ignorance, of the history of Ireland, was due to the “embarrassment”
engendered by the treatment of the culture of Ireland by the British government. 77

The foundation for the history of Ireland, and thus the exploration of the surviving
ancient sites, began with antiquarians like Mary Margaret Cusack. Mary Cusack, born
Margaret Anna Cusack (1829 – 1899), was the self-described “Nun of Kenmare.” She
was born to Anglican gentry in County Dublin, who obtained their land during the
Protestant ascendancy of the eighteenth century. 78 Her father and uncle assisted the poor,
working as doctors in a government dispensary. Cusack learned the value of social
activism and assistance throughout her youth, often alongside her father and uncle. She
joined an Anglican convent in England to once again work with the poor after the death
of her fiancé. 79 Cusack followed the example of prominent Anglican “tractarians,” 80
and reformists (along with reformist Cardinal Wiseman in particular), and converted to
Catholicism, moving back to Ireland, entering the Franciscan Sisters of the Poor Clares in
County Down. 81 She volunteered to move to the village of Kenmare to teach and
continue her service, following her call to social activism. 82 During her tenure there,
Cusack was a prolific writer, authoring numerous pamphlets and manuscripts regarding
political and social issues of the day including Home Rule, famine relief, and the
investigation of the native history of Ireland.

78 Richardson, Janet Davis, U.S. Catholic Historian. Vol. 22, No. 3, “Ireland and America: Religion,
Politics, and Social Movements” (Summer, 2004), Catholic University of America Press.
79 Richardson, Janet Davis, “Ireland and America: Religion, Politics, and Social Movements” p. 104.
80 Tractarianism was a movement that began in Oxford and was devoted to reintroducing older
Christian, or Catholic traditions. They were perceived as “Romanizing” the Anglican church. Many
81 Richardson, Janet Davis, “Ireland and America: Religion, Politics, and Social Movements” p. 105
82 Richardson, “Ireland and America: Religion, Politics, and Social Movements” p. 104
Cusack’s more political and secular books include *A Student’s History of Ireland*; *Woman’s Work in Modern Society* (1868); and the *Life of Daniel O’Connell* (1872), which were well-received and lauded as a corrections to the “nonsense” that had been loosely presented as Irish history previous to her work.\(^{83}\) The glowing and patriotic history of Ireland that is found in the writings of Cusack represents the thread of nationalist sentiment that was inextricably woven into the fabric of the antiquarian and historic societies that had already emerged. She also demonstrated, however, the emerging tensions that I have argued existed between more objective interpretations and Revivalist history. Cusack wrote several books on the history of Ireland.\(^{84}\) Her histories, exhaustive and comprehensive and showed a marked link to the cultural nationalism of the mid-nineteenth century. Cusack was influenced and inspired by the great histories of the past, detailed in rediscovered and translated tomes, including the *Book of Durrow* (c. 650), the *Book of Kells* (c.800), the *Book of Dun Cow* (c. 1106), and perhaps most importantly, the *Annals of the Four Masters*, that had been compiled in the seventeenth century, but forgotten by many antiquarians as valuable sources of information. Cusack approached history as a reinvestigation of these *Annals* written by monks and Catholic scholars of ages past. The Irish Annals, largely the chronology of feast days, also included valuable genealogical data. Volumes like the *Book of Invasions* (*Lebor Gabála Érenn*) and the *Annals of the Four Masters*, in particular, provided a history of Ireland from the first inhabitants to the seventeenth century, linking the Gaelic past of Ireland to the both Old Testament and the pagan past. Cusack lamented in 1870 the significant lack


\(^{84}\) Some of her more famous works include: *Illustrated History of Ireland from AD 400 to 1800* (1868), *The Student’s Manual of Irish History* (1870), and *History of the Irish Nation: Social, Ecclesiastical, Biographical, Industrial and Antiquarian* (1876).
of “Irish scholarship.” Interestingly, she, at one time lauded the Irish interest in their own
history and literature (An Illustrated History of Ireland, 1868), and then, in another book
published two years later (1870), admonished the Irish people in general for their
disinterest or dislike of their own history. In the preface to the 1876 publication of her
“The History of Ireland: Ecclesiastical, Social, Biographical, Antiquarian, and
Industrial.” Cusack laments the lack of interest in and dismissal of Irish history. She
wrote:

We have been accustomed for centuries to hear that we have no History or that
any history we have is so disreputable that the less we say about it the better. Yet
there are few misrepresentations so completely unsupported. We have a History,
we have a Literature, and we have no reason to be ashamed of either the one or
the other. 85

The sentiment behind the assertion is one that is present in many of the Irish histories of
the nineteenth century.

Cusack, and many others, used the sources and Annals widely as a source of
authority, and it became a mine for the “true” pre-history of Ireland. Cusack herself
refers to the authority of the variety of ancient texts it in this way:

The manuscript materials for ancient Irish history may be divided into two
classes: the historical, which purports to be a narrative of facts, in which we
include books of laws, genealogies, and pedigrees; and the legendary, comprising
tales, poems, and legends. The latter, though not necessarily true, are generally
founded on fact. …For the present we must devote our attention to the historical
documents. 86

According to both recent historiography as well as accounts of some antiquarians already
questioning ancient sources, the problem with history in Ireland was its reliance on a

85 Cusack, Mary Francis. History of The Irish Nation: Social, Ecclesiastical, Biographical, Industrial
and Antiquarian. J.G Murdoch, 1876, 1
86 Cusack, Mary Francis. An Illustrated History of Ireland from AD 400 to 1800. 2nd ed. Dublin,
1868, 24
subjective interpretation of the facts presented, and a tendency to fill in blanks within
documentary evidence with fiction, as Cusack’s statement demonstrates. She states in
her introduction to Chapter 1 of the Student’s Manual of Irish History (1870), “The
authority for the facts recorded in ancient Irish history may be found partly in
manuscripts still preserved and well authenticated, and partly in the ancient and still
current oral traditions of the whole race.”87 She uses these Annals, often peppered with
Folk tales and legend, as the historical basis for her narrative of the history of Ireland.
She describes an account of pre-Christian history as “a period comprising many centuries
precedes the five great invasions of Ireland, the accounts of which, though purely
traditionary, are, nevertheless, so generally and uniformly recorded in all the Bardic
annals of ancient Erin as to render it necessary that they should be mentioned here.”88
These accounts trace the Celts back to the children of Noah after the flood. Although
Cusack qualified the tale as “improbable,” she claims the Annals of the Four Masters also
cites this tale, presumably thereby rendering it fact. This acknowledgement is
representative of the first stirrings of doubt within the antiquarian scholarship regarding
the veracity of the sources. It was, initially, a secondary thread that was subtle and
largely dismissed by early scholars in preference for creating a long unbroken chain of
the history of Ireland.

Some in the antiquarian world already questioned the reliance on these sources.
Irish antiquarian George Petrie (1790 – 1866) was a contemporary of Mary Cusack and a
fellow scholar of Irish antiquity. Petrie represents a useful contrast to Cusack’s ideas

87 Cusack, Mary Francis. History of The Irish Nation: Social, Ecclesiastical, Biographical, Industrial
and Antiquarian. J.G Murdoch, 1876, 4.
88 Cusack, Mary Francis. History of The Irish Nation: Social, Ecclesiastical, Biographical, Industrial
and Antiquarian. J.G Murdoch, 1876, 6.
about the veracity of the sources involved. In 1839, while examining evidence as to the origins of Tara Hill, Petrie stated:

[One] detail it must be confessed has but little agreement with the meagre [sic] and unsuspicious account given by Tighearnach [10 century Irish scholar and Saint]. On every thing stated by the Four Masters the earlier annalist is silent except the notice of the cause of his death and even in this what is doubtfully put by the one, is made positive by the others. Whether however those details be true or false or in whatever degree they may be so it is due to the character for veracity of the Four Masters to mention that they found what at least appeared to them sufficient evidence upon which to ground their statements in very ancient documents.\(^89\)

Modern historians and scholars now view these sources as more fiction than fact, made so by the early scholars’ supplementing the available documentary evidence of births and deaths of aristocratic families with material from fables, legends and folktales passed down through both oral tradition and written collections to expand on the historical records.

Cusack provided an interesting vision of how a new national identity could be perceived. She was a converted Protestant, and she is useful as an exemplar of the emerging standard the revivalists and antiquarians would represent or to which they would aspire; educated and well versed in Irish culture, literature, language, and politics. She was also a useful example of who was making the decisions regarding a history of Ireland, a former member of the Protestant elite who was investigating not Catholicism or Protestantism in Ireland, but focusing on its pre-Christian and Catholic history. It was in this environment of a new interest in the history and language of Ireland that the revivalists of the mid-nineteenth century began their investigation of their own heritage.

A developing national identity for Ireland, the creation of an imagined community, was viewed as being a necessary counterpoint to English cultural hegemony: if a new national identity was to be formed, what did it mean to be Irish? Cusack’s tomes were by no means the only histories of their kind. Other histories, written by Eugene O’Curry and George Petrie, contributed to that discussion. It is with these writings, and the early interpretations of the sites I will address, that the second phase of the tension developed: the seemingly fraught marriage of an aspiring unbiased analysis and romantic revivalism.

George Petrie was the son of an Aberdeen businessman and miniature painter James Petrie, who settled in Dublin in 1780. Petrie’s father was suspected to have ties to the United Irishmen, and was known to have painted the portraits of figures like Robert Emmet and Lord Edward Fitzgerald, introducing Petrie to nationalist figures early in his life. George Petrie was educated as a landscape painter, becoming well known for his depictions of important sites around Dublin and Ireland of both pastoral and antiquarian interest. In 1828, the Ordnance Survey names Petrie as the lead antiquarian and historical representative. It was in this capacity that Petrie began to demonstrate his interest in what he saw as scientific observation and analysis of the archaeological record in Ireland. In 1829, the members of the Royal Irish Academy elected him to the council of the Academy, where he also began to publish observations and analyses of Ireland’s antiquities in journals and newspapers, leading to his appointment as editor of the Dublin Penny Journal in 1832. His work on the Ordnance Survey enabled him to travel the whole of the island, facilitating a comprehensive study of the ruins of the ancient past.

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Beginning in 1833, Petrie published several essays, the first entitled “Origin and Uses of the Round Towers of Ireland” – for which he won an award from the Royal Irish Academy – then studies on the “Military Architecture of Ireland” in 1834, the “History and Antiquities of Tara” in 1837, and “Cromlechs [Stone Circles] and Sepulchral Remains” in 1838. For his work in analyzing the remains of the history of Ireland, Petrie earned the moniker the father of Irish archaeology.

It was his work later in life, however, that demonstrates most clearly his continued link to cultural nationalism through his love of traditional folk songs, or airs of Ireland. One of Petrie’s most enduring works was his collection of music from local counties in Ireland; in 1855, he published a collection known as the *Ancient Music of Ireland* under the auspices of the Society for the Preservation and Publication of the Melodies of Ireland, for which he served as president. In the introduction to the collection, he states that the life-long romance he had with Irish music was more than just a love of lyrical or melodic songs he was collecting. Petrie wrote:

> Though I have been, during the whole course of my life, a zealous collector of Irish melodies, I have been actuated in this pursuit by no other feelings than those of a deep sense of their beauty, a strong conviction of their archaeological interest, and a consequent desire to aid in the preservation of remains so honourable to the national character of my country.

It was Petrie’s intention, through his close association with antiquarian societies, to establish cultural significance through the celebration of “Irish airs.”

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Using his own work on the Ordnance Survey as well as with the tax survey maps of Sir Richard Griffith (1784 – 1878), Petrie – acting as an assistant to Griffith himself – was able to collect folk tales and melodies as well as their historical context and origins. He often waxed lyrical regarding the “Irishness of their construction”, and the “ancient” nature of the melodies. When describing one romantic air in particular, Petrie wrote:

And although it [the song] may not have a claim to so high a place in Irish melody as some other airs of its class, it is, as I conceive, a melody of no ordinary beauty, —perfectly Irish in the artful regularity of its construction, and deeply impressed with those peculiar features which would give it a claim to a very remote, though, like most of our fine airs, an unknown and undeterminable antiquity.

Petrie’s descriptions and study of both the music and the ancient ruins of Ireland show a deep affection for his country, and close intellectual affinity to revivalists who were his contemporaries.

It was George Petrie and other members of the Ordnance Survey as they transitioned from work in the mapping of Ireland to antiquarian scholarship that first initiated a new set of investigations and translations of the ancient texts. He played an integral role in what has been referred to as an ethnic revival, a cleansing, as he saw it, of English dominance in the early-nineteenth century, through his investigation of art, music, and archaeology. His inspiration, the glories of the past, in turn encouraged key Revivalist figures like his contemporary Thomas Moore (1779 – 1852) and then later Douglas Hyde in the promotion of a Gaelic or Celtic revival by the late nineteenth century.

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century. His contribution to the study of archaeology and the ancient sites of Ireland are his most significant achievement.

The investigation into the folk tales, music and culture of Ireland has a direct link to the material culture that the ruins of Ireland were seen to represent. The history of the ancient sites, most especially Dun Aengus, Tara and the complex at Brú Na Bóinne were linked inextricably to the ancient Annals of Ireland. Their histories, as studied by Petrie, O’Donovan, and other early antiquarians and archaeologists, demonstrate a long reach of “Irishness” that pre-dated any “Teutonic,” or Anglo-Norman aristocratic invasion. Antiquarians and scholars verified early bardic histories by virtue of their close association with persistent place names of old Gaelic and their apparent validity borrowed from the age of the names themselves. The key members of the Ordnance Survey researched traditional local titles for sites - gleaned from interviews, local legends and medieval annals - as well as later “official,” legal titles. The early antiquarians relied on these ancient accounts for interpretation, relative dating, and cultural context. Although later antiquarians and scholars would discredit parts of the “history” in the Annals as fiction, many of the early Revivalists saw few barriers to using these accounts to provide proof of the antiquity, historicity, and, perhaps most importantly, Irishness of the sites. The conflict between revivalist passion and aspirational impartial analysis can be seen within Petrie’s observations. He took a position of cautious enthusiasm. He noted that “it would be equally premature to reject these traditions as wholly fabulous, as

96 Macalister, Robert Alexander Stewart. *Ancient Ireland a Study in the Lessons of Archaeology and History*, 1937. P 83
to receive them as real history, until the whole body of evidence contained in the Irish MSS [Irish Manuscript collections] shall be subjected to critical examination."\(^98\)

It is therefore understandable that these Revivalists were, for many, not just scholars but nation builders. In 1913, Patrick MacSweeney suggested this in his book *A Group of Nation-Builders O'Donovan, O'Curry, Petrie:*

In the battle for intellectual freedom it is true to say that O'Donovan, O'Curry, and Petrie are national heroes. They loved Ireland and the Irish people with a lasting love. They cherished the Past of Ireland, they reverenced it, and they believed in it. They determined that the Ireland of the Future should be bound to the Ireland of the Past by the strong links of knowledge and of love. They forged these links in the white-heat of patriotic research. They were, in every true sense of the word, Nation-builders\(^99\)

It was with these words that MacSweeney demonstrated the relationship between cultural nationalists and scientific archaeologists that was emerging. As he described the importance of Petrie’s more scientific approach to researching Ireland’s past, MacSweeney recalled that earlier scholars practiced “bad philology, or rather guesswork etymology.”\(^100\) He cited English antiquarian Sir William Betham's (1779 – 1853) views as a particularly egregious case. Betham’s “a priori method led him to support his theories on what he called the ‘affinity of the Phoenician, Etruscan and Celtic languages’ by etymologies which it is difficult for us to believe could have ever found their way into the Transactions or Proceedings of any learned society.”\(^101\) The early presentations and analyses of three ancient sites in particular demonstrate materially the evolving views on the importance of attempting to be more unbiased in the collection of data that may or

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\(^101\) MacSweeney, *Group of Nation-Builders*: 90
may not align with mythic or heroic histories: this change represents the second phase of
the articulation of scientific and Revivalist interpretation of ancient archaeological sites.

II – The Sources and the sites – questions of legitimacy?

The three most notable sites, as I have enumerated them, are the ring fort of Dun
Aonghasa (Dun Aengus – shown above), the Brú Na Bóinne complex of tombs, crowned
by the famous passage tomb of Newgrange (shown below left), and the adjacent Hill of
Tara. The abbey complex at Clonmacnoise (below right) is a significant site, in that it
provided a base from which antiquarians accessed the history, and the annals housed
there, and was key in the construction of both the past of Ireland, and the growing sense
of a shared cultural history.\textsuperscript{102}

First, a note on the discourse surrounding the sources used in the interpretation of
the sites themselves. Antiquarians located and began their study of sites such as the
ringfort of Dun Aengus by the 1830’s. In 1834, George Petrie referred to the fort in his
diaries as “probably the most magnificent barbaric monument extant in Europe,”\textsuperscript{103} a
description that would be repeated and cited frequently throughout the nineteenth
century.

John O’Donovan, upon first catching a glimpse of the fort of Dun Aengus in
1839, exalted at its magnificence. O’Donovan, along with fellow antiquarians

\textsuperscript{102} As a material site, the ruins of Clonmacnoise and their treatment as a tourist destination are
intriguing. I will therefor address Clonmacnoise as a site that antiquarians found useful in the earlier
nationalist phase of history, and their subsequent analysis of the carvings around the ruins of the site, and
the “Celtic high crosses,” and its importance in the creation of an Irish identity. It will then be addressed
only peripherally as it becomes less relevant in the more scientific era of archaeology and antiquarianism.

\textsuperscript{103} One example is listed in: Alden, Henry Mills. “The Arran Islands.” \textit{Harper’s New Monthly
Magazine}. January 1, 1881, 62 edition, 508
W.F. Wakeman and Eugene O’Curry, led by the drawings and journals of the Aran islands (authored by George Petrie), travelled from Dublin to the Aran islands looking for early medieval roots. In an article from *Duffy’s Hibernian Magazine* in 1839, Wakeman described their journey and discoveries in detail. He related ODonovan’s reaction this way: “I shall never forget O’Donovan's burst of enthusiasm when the old palace fortress of the days of Queen Maeve first met our view. He literally shouted with delight, and, after launching his umbrella a marvellous height into the air, threw himself the ground, and shouted again and again.”

The transparent glee of the explorers at their arrival on the site seems indicative of the enthusiasm with which they treated their emerging history.

As the articles and histories published during the nineteenth century demonstrate, the enthusiasm of the Revivalists often outweighed their caution. The awe and power with which they treated the early history of the monks who transcribed the *Annals of the Four Masters*, *Annals* and *Register of Clonmacnoise*, and other examples are demonstrated in a description of the early inhabitants of the Aran islands: “The earliest reference to the pre-Christian history of Aran is to be found in the accounts of the battle of Moytourney, in which the Firbolg's, having been defeated by the Tuatha-de-Dananns, were driven for refuge into Aran, and other islands on the Irish coast, as well as into the western islands of Scotland.”

The *Firbolg* were a race of people, believed to have been descendants of the original inhabitants of Ireland, and who archaeologist Thomas Westropp (1867 – 1962) would later label as mythological rather than historical. The

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monks who first transcribed these annals filled in the gaps in the history with local myths and legends. The early analysis of the forts was then also filled with the assumptions of a string of authoritative notations. For example, after a long involved history of Queen Maeve (who herself was possibly mythical) and her gifting of the Aran islands to the Firbolg, Wakeman describes his references in this way: “These particulars are mentioned in O'Flaherty's ‘Iar-Connaught’ and ‘Ogygia’ and more in detail in an Irish manuscript tract on the Firbolgs, by MacFirbis, who refers to much older authorities on the subject.” This long list of authoritative sources was not sufficient for all antiquarians. As I have mentioned, there was already noticeable tension between aspirationally unbiased researchers and those whose enthusiasm and nationalist fervor possibly led questionable sources to remain unexamined; others, even closer to the source, began to doubt their veracity, while still maintaining a revivalist zeal. John O’Donovan, who exalted so enthusiastically at the first sight of the fort of Dun Aengus, questioned the veracity of the Registry of Clonmacnoise when he translated and published the volume with commentary in 1857, citing numerous errors within the text that cast doubt onto the usefulness of the whole source. Closer examination of the more obvious errors brought to light subtler ones, which introduced the seed of doubt that would eventually turn the tide against relying on the ancient authorities.

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106 According to George Petrie, Duald MacFirbis (1585 – 1670) was an Irish scholar in the seventeenth century who compiled a comprehensive history of the genealogy of Ireland from the fifth century to the fifteenth. He may have been the last of a generation of scholars trained formally in Irish Gaelic and Brehon law. He was descendant of Lecan MacFirbis, the author of the Book of Lecan in County Sligo. Petrie, George (1836). "On an Irish MS. called the Book of Mac Firbis". Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy (0302-7597), 1: 37

III – The Sites

Considering this critique, the early interpretations become much more interesting. The association of sites like the ring forts of Dun Aengus (image 1) with the people of the Fir Bolg is a noteworthy example. The fort itself is located on the Aran Islands, located off the western coast of Ireland. It is a large and crumbling structure perched on top of a sheer 60-meter (roughly 196 feet) cliff, with two rows of semicircular defenses. There are three extant concentric circles and a fourth outer wall that is almost completely destroyed. Outside the third ring of walls lays a defensive system of stone slabs, known as a cheval de frise, planted in an upright position in the ground and still largely well preserved. Early assumptions indicated that these stones were meant to impede access, presumably from enemy forces. A low-lintelled doorway leads in from the north side of the structure. The innermost citadel (that was part of the 1884 reconstruction and whose massive buttresses are modern) has a fine lintelled entrance, wall-walks, and chambers, and encloses an area roughly 145 feet across. Surviving stonework is 13 feet wide at some points. The original shape was presumably oval or D-shaped, but portions of the cliff and fort have since collapsed into the sea. These ruins also feature a huge rectangular stone slab in the innermost “citadel,” the function of which is still unknown. Impressively large among prehistoric ruins, the outermost wall of Dún Aengus

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108 Cotter, Claire. *The Western Stone Forts Project*. A Discovery Programme Monograph. Dublin: Wordwell Ltd (for the Discovery Programme), 2012. The exact nature of the reconstruction is unknown. Brief references to the locals buttressing the walls and rebuilding doorways is mentioned, but no scholarly account was written until the excavations in the 1990’s led by Claire Cotter.


110 Thomas Westropp utilizes the term citadel in his earliest depictions of the site. See image 5 as reference.
encloses an area of approximately 14 acres. The location also provides a view of as much as 75 miles of coastline.

The fort is impressive and intimidating, especially when first happening upon it in the desolate landscape of the Aran Islands. It was thought by many that only a great warrior people, the first inhabitants of ancient Ireland, could have built such a structure: the intent to keep other invading tribes at bay. The mythical race of people, the *Fir Bolg*, were said to have sought refuge there in the first century and constructed the fort to honor their chieftain, Aengus. Most of their history was obtained from the translated text *Lebor Gabála Érenn* (*The Book of the Invasion of Ireland*), which was proven to be largely mythic rather than historical. The *Fir Bolg* (literally translated men of bags) was possible representations of the early race from Gaul, the Belgae. The construction of the fort by the *Fir Bolg* was not the only myth that referenced the site. Revivalists referenced the supposed discovery of a vast array of Druidic temples and altars, maintaining the site and the surrounding Aran Islands as scenes of religious ritual. “The Isles of Aran abound with the remains of Druidism-open temples, altars, stone pillars, sacred mounts of fire worship, miraculous fountains, and evident vestiges of oak groves.”

The sources are not questioned and the stories of the original purpose of the structure are seemingly more romantic than balanced.

The problems, as many historians would see it, were both the relative unfamiliarity of Irish scholars with the Gaelic language and the age of the manuscripts referenced. In his 1905 book *Celtic Myth and Legend*, English folklorist Charles Squire

wrote “The scribes of the earlier Gaelic manuscripts very often found, in the documents from which they themselves were copying, words so archaic as to be unintelligible to the readers of their own period. To render them comprehensible, they were obliged to insert marginal notes which explained these obsolete words by reference to other manuscripts more ancient still.” The somewhat dubious nature of the history gleaned from texts like the Book of Invasion and texts like it was due, in large part, to problems with translation and scarcity of clear sources. The tension I describe between science and revivalism can also be seen as the antiquarians’ gradual realization, through intellectual achievement, the need to question and re-evaluate ancient sources otherwise deemed accurate.

Despite the fort’s ambiguous origins, Dun Aengus took on a sense of heroic importance in the ancient past of Ireland. Antiquarians from all over Ireland traveled to the sites, chronicling their journey to the remote islands and detailing what they found in glowing terms. Books like Beauties and Antiquities of Ireland: Being Tourist's Guide to its most Beautiful Scenery & An Archaeologist's Manual for its most Interesting Ruins (1897), demonstrate a love for the ruins to be found all over Ireland, but most especially evocative tombs and forts like Dun Aengus.

The local inhabitants were far less impressed. Antiquarians lamented at Dun Aengus’ disrepair and use for “rabbit hunting” in the nineteenth century. In 1857, a large antiquarian banquet concluded a tour of the ancient sites, hosted by Revivalist William Wilde (Oscar Wilde’s father) along with George Petrie, Eugene O’Curry, and John O’Donovan. During a speech on the tour, Eugene O’Curry exhorted the audience of
native Aran islanders to desist chasing rabbits into the fort to help preserve the site.\footnote{Cotter, Claire. \textit{The Western Stone Forts Project}. A Discovery Programme Monograph. Dublin: Wordwell Ltd (for the Discovery Programme), 2012, 294.}

The importance of the fort’s link to an Iron Age period of Ireland was ostensibly being established, along with other stone forts and early Christian constructions in the Western Aran Islands. The impressive size and presence of the site persisted through the twentieth century, where study of the stone forts located throughout the Aran Islands provides proof of the nineteenth century assumption of a link to a Pan-European trend in Celtic forts in Northern France, Iberia, Scotland and Wales. This trend toward a link to a Celtic past was enhanced by the Revivalists’ assertions of the distinctiveness of the passage tombs and burial mounds found throughout Ireland. The most impressive example, however, was north of Dublin.

The rural green hills of eastern Ireland, where the temple complex known as Brú na Bóinne (for Petrie’s map see image 5) is located, is a lush pastoral landscape. The rolling emerald hills spreading out between the large cities within the historical area known as the Pale still bring to mind the warrior chieftains of ancient Irish lore. The mist that covers the ground of a morning evoke thoughts of the fae, the Tuatha Dé Danann of legend, hiding among the wild fuchsia and gentle hillocks. Clover covers the fields, tempting the visitor to stop and search for the elusive 4-leaf clover for luck. One almost expects to hear a pipe playing in the distance, as the smell of a peat fire can still be found on a cold morning in spring. It is this landscape and the mystery that surrounds it that inspired cultural nationalists and antiquarians alike. The complex of Brú na Bóinne covers over 350 acres of land and several centuries in time, and includes 40 henges of
wood and stone and several passage tombs, three of which represent the crowning jewels of the site, Knowth, Dowth (still extant in its ruined state), and Newgrange. The most famous of these is the tomb of Newgrange (see image 2), which occupies a space of approximately an acre. The site is composed of a central grass-covered mound that contains a passage tomb, or cairn, that is 36 feet high and is surrounded by short standing stones that form a circle 340 feet in diameter (see Michael O’Kelly’s sketch, image 6).

The megalithic passage tomb represents one of the largest and most complex of the ancient sites still extant in Ireland today. Left to the elements since the nameless Irish tribes abandoned the site in the second millennium BCE, the tomb was largely reclaimed by the surrounding environment.\textsuperscript{113} Newgrange was built by an unidentified group of people that are still shrouded in myth and mystery despite the attempts of what are referred to as nationalist archaeologists to uncover the details of the lives of the community that produced this monument. According to the carbon dating done by archaeologists during archaeologist Michael O’Kelly’s excavations in the 1960’s, it is over five thousand years old, more than five hundred years older than the Great Pyramid of Giza in Egypt, and predates Stonehenge by about a thousand years.

The Revivalists’ claim that the “Irish high kings” were buried at Newgrange was part of a legend that persisted throughout the nineteenth century. The “High Kings” of Ireland would have ruled over the lesser kings, or chieftains, of the Irish regions. The site was first believed to be a cave, then a religious site or even an entrance to the fairy

\textsuperscript{113} The condition of the site was described in detail by Michael and Claire O’Kelly, lead archaeologists excavating the site in the 1960’s, in their published excavation report and interpretive analysis \textit{Newgrange: Archaeology, Art and Legend}. 
Remains were found inside the tomb, as well as grave goods and artifacts that proclaimed the bodies as belonging to wealthy inhabitants. Irish revivalists quickly claimed this valuable and genuinely ancient site for their own purposes. According to modern methods of carbon dating, Newgrange was used primarily during the Neolithic period from 3200 BCE until approximately 2000 BCE, when it was abandoned. After this period, the tomb was sealed and fell into disuse, until the latter part of the seventeenth century when it was discovered by Scottish landowner Charles Campbell. The tomb was referenced in the *Annals*, and Newgrange became crucial to the constructed history and validity of revivalist claims of Ireland’s ancient roots. In 1927, Robert Alexander Stewart Macalister (1870 - 1950) said in his presidential address to the Royal Irish Academy (RIA) that ‘almost all roads in the study of this period of our country’s history lead, sooner or later, to New Grange’\textsuperscript{115} The early understandings of the origins were far less important than the fascination with which the cultural revivalists viewed the tomb.

Upon initial entry into the tomb in the early eighteenth century, antiquarians found a wealth of artifacts and jewelry along with human remains. The discovery of human remains in the cruciform center of the tomb, the grave goods located within the main chamber of the tomb, and the carvings for decoration within the main chamber and small recesses, though not overly informative, did reaffirm the assertion that this was a tomb for people of some import during the period in which it was in use. What captured

\textsuperscript{114} One example was the work The *Fairy-Faith in Celtic Countries* in which American Anthropologist Walter Yeeling Evans-Wentz (1878 –1965) cited O’Curry, O’Donovan and Petrie in his analysis of the links between New Grange and the fairy folk. See: Evans-Wentz, W.Y. *The Fairy-Faith in Celtic Countries*. London; New York: H. Froude, 1911: 416

\textsuperscript{115} Harvey. “‘National’ Identities”: 474.
the imagination of the revivalists was the astronomical orientation of the site that allows the sun to enter the tomb on the winter solstice, thus establishing the considered intent of the ancient builders. Newgrange was not the only such tomb in Ireland. It, alongside the hundreds of other passage tombs built during the Neolithic period, showed evidence of a religion that venerated the dead. Prominent archaeologists would come to believe that this "cult of the dead" was just one of the religions practiced by Neolithic peoples all over Europe.\textsuperscript{116} George Petrie, Thomas Westropp, and other researchers all had their own explanation for the sites’ construction: from calendars to astronomical observatories, ritual sites for Druidic and Christian religious observances to ancient Phoenician constructions. Illuminated manuscripts and collections of folk tales from Ireland’s past, recorded and collected by revivalists in the nineteenth century, have their own explanations for the existence of the tomb. Some claimed that the mound was a fairy fort that housed the most powerful of the fairies (\textit{Tuatha Dé Danann} in Irish). Another script, in the illuminated manuscript entitled the \textit{Book of Leinster} (1160), claimed that the complex of tombs housed the burial remains of the ancient traditional Celtic Kings of Ireland, the high kings of Tara.\textsuperscript{117} Revivalist accounts highlight the ritual purpose of the site. In 1841, one antiquarian, Samuel C Hall indicated in his book, \textit{Ireland - Its Scenery, Character Etc.}, that “of their [the tombs] Druidical character, no one can entertain the remotest doubt.”\textsuperscript{118} The religious significance of the site was always essential to interpretations.

\textsuperscript{118} Hall, Samuel C. \textit{Ireland - Its Scenery, Character Etc.}. Vol. 2. London: How and Parson, 1841. 391
According to the lead archaeologist during the 1960’s reconstruction of the tomb, Michael O’Kelly, the building of the passage tomb now called Newgrange "cannot be regarded as other than the expression of some kind of powerful force or motivation, brought to the extremes of aggrandizement in these three monuments, the cathedrals of the megalithic religion." Revivalists labeled these sites as “cathedrals,” and represented them as sacred due to the sites’ links to winter solstice ritual.

Irish revivalists imbued sites like Newgrange with a position and authenticity that they may not warrant. The designation of the Newgrange tomb as a ritualistic “cathedral” can be read in another way. When an object becomes a "protosymbol," it can remain so for the purpose of maintaining the "large group identity." A protosymbol is created when, during a time of social “crisis,” material objects can be imbued with emotions and significance that transform them into an abstract idea. Revivalists sought to define the powerful emotional and largely subconscious forces at work in the creation of “heritage sites.”

Newgrange has become the material expression of this phenomenon. The tomb became a symbol of the people of Ireland that harkens back to ancient times and establishes an emotional and religious link with their ancestors who first allegedly established homes on the Emerald Isle over 10,000 years ago.

The sites of Brú Na Bóinne and The Hill of Tara (image 3) are closely tied in history and in Revivalist memory, as symbolic of Irish power and identity. Tara is located approximately one hundred miles to the southwest of the Newgrange site. The site

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encompassed by the Hill of Tara is a complex of mounds, *raths* (or circular enclosures surrounded by earthen walls), and tombs. The site is shaped by an oval enclosure on top of a small hill, topped by an Iron Age hill fort of over half a mile in circumference, known as the Royal Enclosure. The fort contains a number of earthen structures, which includes two small ringed mounds known as *Teach Chormaic* (Cormac's House) and the *Forradh* (King’s Seat). The main feature on the site’s landscape is the *Lia Fáil*, or Stone of Destiny, shown below, crowns the mound known as the King’s Seat. The revivalists made the *Lia Fáil*, known as the Stone of Fate or the Stone of Scone famous, or infamous. The *Lia Fáil* (image 7) was said to have been the same stone upon which Scottish kings were once crowned, and can now be found housed in Scotland with a display of the Scottish crown jewels in Edinburgh castle. The stone is reputed by some revivalists to have its origins traced to the Hill of Tara, brought to Scotland by invading Irishmen in the eleventh century. The Stone was lost, or hidden according to legend, before Edward I transported it to Westminster.\(^\text{121}\) Petrie denied this claim in his descriptions and analysis in his *On the History and Antiquities of Tara Hill* (1839). Petrie instead theorized that the stone was still *in situ* at Tara, and was found on the Mound of Hostages, adjacent to the Kings seat, in 1824 to mark the grave of the thirty-seven “revolutionary heroes” of the failed Rebellion of United Irishmen, referred to as Croppies Grave. A more recent headstone (shown right) was placed on the sight in the early twentieth century and the *Lia Fáil* remained on the site as a symbol of Irish royal authority and authenticity.

\(^{121}\) It is now on loan to Scotland and is displayed with the Crown Jewels of Scotland. See: Petrie, George. “On the History and Antiquities of Tara Hill.” *The Transactions of the Royal Irish Academy* 18 (January 1, 1839): 160.
Despite the rich narratives derived from mythologies, recent scholarship by modern archaeologists has proven that Tara was less a true seat of national kingship than a sacral site associated with local kingship ritual. Historians have argued that the concept of a “High King of Tara” was mostly mythical. Regardless of its veracity, the reputation and historicity of Tara as the seat of Irish power remains powerful throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. George Petrie illustrated the debate emerging as to the veracity of these writings in his descriptions of Tara.

But as this document [Dindshenchas, or Lore of Place Names] is the sole authority from which the Irish writers of the two last centuries have drawn their startling accounts of the magnificence and splendour of the regal palace of the Irish monarchs, it is necessary that its statements should be exposed to rational investigation without any partial suppression, or mutilation; nor should those parts, which receive corroboration from existing circumstances, be hastily rejected in consequence of their being associated with traditional details dressed in the garb of bardic exaggeration, and which, viewed even as fictitious, are still valuable as evidences of the notions of civilization prevalent at the time. 122

Descriptions of the Hill of Tara for nineteenth century audiences were, as they are now, infused with a mystical and captivating story of the crowning of the High Kings of Ireland from the island’s distant past. Developments in the antiquarian and early archaeological disciplines in Ireland, in which the sites of Newgrange and Tara played a prominent role, would seem to form an important role in ‘underwriting the legitimacy’ of later nationalist missions.123

122 This document was thought to have been a collection of place names that was included and cited in the Irish Annals of the twelfth century, The Book of Ballymote and the Book of Lecan particularly. Petrie, George. “On the History and Antiquities of Tara Hill.” The Transactions of the Royal Irish Academy 18 (January 1, 1839): 186.

The ruined Abbey of Clonmacnoise (image 4) is located in west-central Ireland, south of Athlone, County Offaly at a bend in the River Shannon. The site of Clonmacnoise consists of seven churches (image 9): Temple Dowling, Temple Hurpan, Temple Ri, Temple Ciaran, Temple Connor (image 20) and the Nuns Church. The ruins of a cathedral stand at a prominent hill central to the main site. Two round towers are also extant at the site, though still in a largely ruined state. One is called O’Rourke’s tower (image 10), and the other remains unnamed. The main focus of the site is the ruins of the cathedral and its surrounding graveyard. The ruins of the temples and tombs were the objects of study for nineteenth century revivalists. According to ecclesiastical records, St. Ciaran founded Clonmacnoise in the sixth century C.E.

Clonmacnoise represents another example of the attempts to test and analyze the history of early-Christian Ireland, and the previous assertions that the site had Hebrew inscriptions from ancient times. One travel writer of the nineteenth century O’Neil Russell (1828 – 1908) described Clonmacnoise as “by far the most interesting architectural remains on the Shannon. [One can see limitless landscapes] standing at the base of any of the ruined shrines of this ancient seat of piety and learning.” There are still visible ruins of the main body of the monastery church (image 11), as well as remains of the keep (image 12), along with several outbuildings and a graveyard with some of the finest examples of traditional “Celtic high crosses” in Ireland (a sketch of one can be seen in image 19).

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124 See his text, *The Beauties and Antiquities of Ireland Being a Tourist’s Guide to Its Most Beautiful Scenery & an Archaeologist’s Manual for Its Most Interesting Ruins*. Russell was an important member of the Gaelic League as well. He along with Douglas Hyde, and several others founded *Conradh na Gaeilge*, a society to promote the Irish language, in 1893.

Clonmacnoise was, in fact, a repository of learning and scholarship. Mary Cusack described Clonmacnoise and one its more famous inhabitants in her *Illustrated history of Ireland* in this way:

Our illustration can give but a faint idea of the magnificence and extent of the ancient abbey of Clonmacnois, [is] the home of our famous annalist, Tigernach. It has been well observed, that no more ancient chronicler can be produced by the northern nations. Nestor, the father of Russian history, died in 1113; Snorro, the father of Icelandic history, did not appear until a century later... Indeed, he may be compared favourably even with the British historians, who can by no means boast of such ancient pedigrees as the genealogists of Erinn [sic].

Cusack attempts to relate the scholar and saint Tigernach with the sons of Moses, a link to many other proposed lineages from antiquarians of the nineteenth century. Cusack's account of the third "taking" of Ireland described a people named Nemedh, who fled to Ireland “to fight with the ‘Fomorians in general,’” an unpleasantly pugilistic race, who, according to the Annals of Clonmacnois, "were a sept descended from Cham, the sonne of Noeh [sic], and lived by pyracie and spoile of other nations.”

The Monastery and keep of Clonmacnoise is mentioned repeatedly as a place of learning, refuge and wealth in many of the chronicles. The main source of reference to the abbey is as a repository of the annals that were written by the monks who lived here, the so-called *Annals of Clonmacnois*.

The most interesting aspect of the early importance of Clonmacnoise is its association with Hebrew inscriptions. Sixteenth century scholars Sir James Ware (1594 – 1666) and Sir John Davies (1569 – 1626) describe tombstones containing both Hebrew

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126 Cusack, *An Illustrated History of Ireland*: 31
127 Cusack, *An Illustrated History of Ireland*: 38
and Irish letters. John O’Donovan states that in the Registry of Clonmacnoise, there are entries claiming that Hebrew inscriptions can be found on tombstones in the area, but he then cast doubt on these assertions:

Another passage in the Registry which looks very strange is which states that the livings bestowed for sepultures were in Hebrew characters on the tombstones … but no ancient or even modern Hebrew has been found at Clonmacnoise by any of our antiquaries nor does it appear that the ancient Irish ever inscribed any monuments with Hebrew characters.

On the one hand, O’Donovan perpetuated the idea that Hebrew inscriptions can be tied to the ancient Monastery of Clonmacnoise, lending credence to the oft-cited narrative of the history of Ireland that extends back to Noah. On the other hand, he questioned the reliability of these claims. This deliberation seems to illustrate the tension that is created between the pull of a Revivalist celebration of ancient heritage and the aspirations towards a scientific analysis that would be less biased.

The interpretation and presentation of these ancient sites are all, to varying degrees, dependent on two problematic assumptions. The first is an ability to depend on ancient authorities that certainly had agendas and issues of their own. The second is a reluctance to delve further into already assumed histories when they coincided with revivalist narratives. Although somewhat romantic, the main goal was of course to unify the history of Ireland, and the process by which they arrived at this goal was sometimes less important than the attainment of the dream itself.

In the nineteenth century revivalist conventions were based on the presumed fact that the Act of Union ratified in 1801 created a reality in which the people of Ireland

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128 Ware, Sir James, and Sir John Davies. The Antiquities and History of Ireland. London: A. Crook for E. Dobson, 1705: 28

needed to reassert their own autonomy by creating a separate identity, unique and one that was more dominant than that of England. Their hopes to merge a disparate group of people torn asunder by political and religious differences resulted in a complex cultural identity. The more recently established official tourist board of Ireland, *Bord Fáilte* (1952) still continues to “sell” Irishness and links to a deeper, shared past, promoting the tracing of ancestry to find one’s roots, perpetuation of beliefs in fairies and “little folk, and the romanticized vision of the past. Road signs across much of the Republic of Ireland are in both Irish Gaelic and English, a legacy of the Revivalist nineteenth century in Ireland.

This Revivalist interpretation of the history of Ireland was soon to give way to the final inversion of the continuum I’ve been describing: the scientific analysis of the ancient history of Ireland emerged, alongside a revisionist trend in history, as an attempt to correct the overt and institutionalized cultural nationalism that emerged in the twentieth century. The ideologies that led to both did not disappear, merely reversed their place in intellectual supremacy. It became apparent that even science, and the unbiased analysis it is purported to represent, is based a set of values influenced by dominant philosophies. Objectivity itself was an ideology.

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130 Fáilte Ireland was established later but was constructed in conjunction with the early work of the OPW, established as the protector of ancient sites and buildings in the 1850’s; see their website for further information http://www.opw.ie/en/history.
Chapter 3: Irishness Revised

So far, I have examined the early stages of antiquarian scholarship from approximately 1830 – 1880. The evolution of antiquarian lay researcher to professionals coincided with the shifting dominance of one of two ideologies. The first, aspirational scientific analysis would become revisionism in its final stage, and revivalist cultural nationalism, that would become subordinate, but not disappear. The last stage of the evolution in historical and archaeological interpretation I will discuss was completed in the last decades of the nineteenth century, approximately 1880 – 1922 (see timeline table 1), and continued through the early decades of the twentieth century. During this period, the nationalistic sentiment of the Gaelic Revival would expand and intensify until it would ultimately become institutionalized in the years after the founding of the Irish Free State in 1922. As the dominant intellectual mode of analysis switched from revivalist to neutrality, the institutionalization of cultural nationalism created a backlash within an academic community that had been striving to reconcile revivalist sentiment with unbiased analysis. I will first discuss the trends toward revisionism in Ireland and then the more specific ways in which it affected Irish intellectual life and the interpretations of history. Using the three sites I described before, I will demonstrate the attempts to reinvestigate history and archaeology in an attempt to remove one bias and, in some cases, replace it with another.

The reaction in the early 1900’s by the more scientifically minded historians and archaeologists to a culturally nationalist power structure led to the focus on revision of the history and archaeology in Ireland, and coincided with the professionalization of these fields. In Ireland, the Gaelic League, which promoted a revival or establishment of
“Celtic” drama, literature and heritage, was led by revivalists, including such cultural leaders as Douglas Hyde and Eoin MacNeill, who characterized the third stage of cultural nationalism, which resulted in the eventual intellectual divergence between cultural revivalists and professional archaeologists and historians. The professionalization of the fields of archaeology and history particularly, were also approaching the next phase of the evolution I have been describing, with Thomas Westropp becoming representative of the transition in the revisionist movement in history and archaeology in Ireland. Westropp’s writings demonstrate the evolving relationship between nationalist sentiments and a definitively scientific approach to archaeological research and analysis. Westropp was both an advocate for the preservation of Irish folklore and mythological tradition, and a critic of the use of those writings as authoritative sources. The quest for balance, and the backlash that accompanied it, began in force with the historical community, but, in some cases, the most powerful voices in its nascent stages were self-proclaimed archaeologists. It is through the writings of archaeologists Thomas Westropp, R.A Macalister and others that I will demonstrate the evolution of the basis for the interpretations of the sites from mythic to archaeological and historical research, as well as the final phase of the transition both from antiquarians to historians and archaeologists.

I – Revisionism and History

Revisionism did not begin or end with archaeological interpretation. The professionalization of history ran parallel to the development of a more scientific archaeology. This evolution can be seen in the evolving use and study of myths and legendary stories; no longer were they taken at face value, but examined as another source of possible supporting evidence, but also as a source of cultural representation.
Around the turn of the twentieth century, new scholarly journals and societies emerged that also examined and then re-categorized the tales from past collections. The myths and legends of the past were not jettisoned but examined in a new light, one that would preserve heritage and culture. These stories still were held up to scrutiny by societies interested in both preserving them as well as questioning their historical utility. One such group was the Folk-lore Society, founded in London in 1878 by amateur archaeologist Sir John Lubbock, who was responsible for the Ancient Monuments Protection Act of 1882. It was in this society’s journal that Westropp published several articles on the utility of the folklore of Ireland in the first decades of the twentieth century. In the first volume of the journal, published in 1890, the editors wrote:

As the meaning of the term Folk-lore has expanded, so the relations of the science that studies its manifestations have extended, till it has been correlated with all the groups of organised studies that deal with the Past of Man. Folk-lore, in its investigations into popular belief, gives aid to, and receives help from, the cognate studies of Comparative Mythology and Comparative Religion. Folk-lore, in investigating popular usages, often finds traces of past institutions which are being studied by the new and vigorous science of Institutional Archeology.

Scholars were questioning and analyzing the veracity of the stories. Were myths, legends, and folk tales credible evidence of a larger historical trend, or were they simply romanticized tales with which the “country folk” entertained themselves? Revivalists were interposing questions of historicity and accuracy with the questions of utility and cultural value.

Scholars in Ireland once again followed England’s intellectual example, beginning the process of establishing journals and societies of their own for the

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preservation of the heritage of Ireland. The Folklore of Ireland Society was founded in 1926. The first treasurer of the society was Revivalist Douglas Hyde, and he and his fellow contributors wrote primarily in Irish, while providing essential English translations. Its motto was in Latin: “colligate quae superaverunt fragmenta, ne pereant (Gather up what fragments remain, that they may not be lost,)” printed on its front cover. It says clearly the purpose of the Irish society, that the fragments of ancient history and culture of Ireland must be preserved or lost to the ravages of time. The Irish Folklore Commission, provided an example of the institutionalization of the preservation and dissemination of “Irish” culture, and was eventually incorporated into the society. In 1935, the Irish government established the Commission, providing the basis for the Irish Folklore collection at University College, Dublin. County Clare Folklore Survey cited the writings and collections of Thomas Westropp as one of the bases for the commission’s establishment.

The revisionist trend in history was embodied by figures like Theodore William Moody (1907 - 1984) and other writers and historians who established the Irish Historical Review in 1938. This publication was a journal dedicated solely to historical research, and represented the professionalization of the discipline, along with the waning of cultural nationalist leanings in historical research and interpretation. It was their intention to write a ”purer, more scholarly kind of Irish history.”

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was the more long-standing goal of both Irish historians and archaeologists: research was to be used in the public domain for education as well as to promote further research among prominent scholars. The editors addressed a secondary purpose in the front matter of the first edition of the journal, which was to analyze the efficacy of the past association history with seemingly prejudiced archeological study. The front matter stated that the previous associations dedicated to the history of Ireland, “which did valuable work in encouraging the study of particular branches and aspects of Irish history, usually [was performed] in conjunction with archaeology.”

The parallel trend within archaeology that questioned previous archaeological conclusions and interpretations also resulted in an interrogation of the history that revivalists had created from their findings.

A more direct challenge to the unified revivalist views of Irish history would continue until much later, as highlighted in the career of key figures including Robert Dudley Edwards (1909 – 1988) and R.F Foster (1949 - ). The seed of that challenge was planted in the third phase of the revisionist trend in Irish history that existed within my own re-examinations of the sites. The call for independent and balanced history could still be seen in the late 1980’s with a call abandon “myth-making by Ireland’s manipulative ideologues.” This belief had its own detractors, who claimed that valuable history and heritage was being lost in the process of revising history. The tension illustrated by the evolution of the relationship between nationalism, history, and archaeology was not at a terminus, but simply entering into another phase. Critics of the

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137 Brady, Ciaran, ed. Interpreting Irish History, 9
revisionist trend would claim that the pretense of objectivity displayed by the revisionists in history either buried or distorted the richness of Irish heritage and tradition. The two ideologies that emerged out of the debates were critical to the evolution of the late nineteenth and twentieth century.

II – Technological Advances and New Pressures

As it had at the beginning, increasing investigation into newer forms of scientific analysis, particularly archaeological dating techniques, proved one of the key impetuses in the evolution to a more revisionist trend in archaeology and history. English Archaeologist and Egyptologist Sir William Flinders Petrie (1853 – 1942) is considered one of the pioneers of relative dating techniques, particularly contextual seriation, or dating using the context in which an artifact is located to judge relative age. Petrie published his career-long insights on this method in 1899 with his article in the *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, entitled “Sequences in Prehistoric Remains.” Antiquarian research reached a transition into what would be more modern archaeological techniques in the late 1880’s with innovations made by Petrie, who has been called the father of the modern archaeological method by those in Ireland and others all over Europe. Petrie utilized important techniques like seriation, a relative dating method using comparative chronological data crucial in understanding the development of a culture in situ as well as across numerous sites.

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138 Brady, Ciaran, ed. *Interpreting Irish History*, 10.
139 I have been unable to verify any link between William Flinders Petrie and noted Irish archaeologist George Petrie.
These techniques would become central to the comparison and dating of archaeological finds until absolute dating techniques (e.g. radio-carbon dating) were developed in the mid-twentieth century. This examination and preservation of artifacts led to the reinvestigation of the numerous ruins found over the whole of the island, and resulted in some archaeologists declaring sites around the world far older than previously thought, as was the case with the Hill of Tara (which I will describe later).

Another factor that was integral to the changing interpretations of archaeological sites was the gradual government control of the tourist industry and the pressures that industry presented. Sociologist John Urry described the set of expectations that tourists place on local populations when they participate in heritage tourism as the “tourist gaze.”[141] The expectations of tourists that visit heritage sites are influenced by various webs of signification that are constructed through existing relationships, in Marxist terms, between the modes of production (the production of history through the interpretation of the sites themselves) and the cultural superstructure (represented by the institutionalized Revivalism still found in an Irish politico-cultural structure). What force within a society creates the interpretive processes that allow for the decoding of the messages being sent by the presentation of heritage? The economic effects of this expectation can be seen in the response by the local populations to the tourist gaze: local people reflect back the “gaze” of the expectations of tourists in order to benefit themselves financially, simulating the behaviors, cultural rhythms, speech patterns, etc. that tourists to the site are expecting to witness. This phenomenon is only exacerbated and enhanced by the

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increasing availability and popularity of photography and print media.\footnote{Urry, John. 2002. “Tourism, Culture and Social Unequality.” In The Sociology of Tourism: Theoretical and Empirical Investigations, 115 – 133. Routledge Advances in Tourism 1. London; New York: Routledge, p. 116} Easier access to the ancient sites themselves and visual representations of history provided for a mystique that surrounded those sites, while simultaneously removing the previous nebulous confusion that existed. This phenomenon can also alter or reinforce the manufacturing of an Irish national identity. The tourist audience expects and interprets a native population or ancient sites based on preconceived notions of history or Irishness. The native population and the sites themselves in turn seem to accommodate the expectations of the visiting audience, reinforcing preconceptions and, in some cases, replacing the real with the simulation. This experience is not unlike what occurred with early interpretations of sites like Newgrange, Tara, and Dun Aengus, which I will now address.

**III – Transitions and Dun Aengus**

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries brought a much more scientifically biased delineation between methodologies of historians or archaeologists and the cultural nationalist ideologies within the cultural revival. The divergence between cultural nationalism and historical archaeology continued parallel to the development of antiquarians being supplanted by professional archaeologists, ethnographers, and trained historians. A pervasive and culturally-based imagined community remained, but was, in some cases, also transforming itself into a more politically based representation or “Irishness.” This trend was closely tied to the institutionalization of cultural nationalism manifested by the Irish state’s promotion of an Irish heritage.
The still evolving spectrum of revivalist to aspirational scientific interpretation of archaeological sites can be seen in the emergence of a revisionist turn in Irish history that was evident in evolution of interpretations of the historic sites as I’ve detailed them. The ostensible objectivity of the revisionists obscured the almost religious fervor with which they pursued their goals. The written histories of ancient sites by antiquarians of the nineteenth century were examined for their mythic origins and dependence on revivalist interpretations rather than objective analysis. With that reinvestigation, the perceived legitimacy or historical weight of the sites also changed. The more objective and unbiased view of the revisionists began with a comparatively moderate reexamination of Irish history. Both Thomas Westropp and the Irish Archaeologist R. A. S. Macalister (1870 – 1950) were significant contributors of this transformation. Although Macalister translated key ancient Annals and histories into English, he was dismissive of much of their historical value. "There is not a single element of genuine historical detail, in the strict sense of the word, anywhere in the whole compilation." Like Westropp before him, Macalister believed that the folklore, Annals and texts were valuable for their mythical, literary, and cultural value, but not necessarily for their accuracy.

Archaeologist Thomas Westropp was a revivalist at his core, but was determined to further the conscious and concerted shift to a more scientific approach to the history of Ireland. He represented a transitional figure in the evolution and continuum of ideological tension between cultural nationalists and antiquarians. During this third phase of evolution (1880 - 1922), Westropp and other scholars were continuing to extend their heritage into the darkest shadows of the distant past, while simultaneously debunking current mythology about that heritage as supporting “truths.” In his address to
the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland in 1916, Westropp devoted a good portion of his address to the history of antiquarianism in Ireland and its transition to archaeology, and, more importantly, how the effects of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English antiquarian scholarship affected that of later Irish scholars. He indicated that the lazy and often dismal histories of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had to be eradicated. He criticized eighteenth century antiquaries for their seeming neglect of objectivity.

Westropp claimed that, “if the writer was a church official, [which was the case most of the time] he too often exhibited a minimum of knowledge and a maximum of prejudice, even in non-polemical matters. To this day we have not quite leveled the mountains of detraction heaped on Irish archaeology for its willful inaccuracy and absurdity.”\(^{143}\) The backlash from this sentiment, the arrogance and dismissive attitude towards Ireland’s past, was, in Westropp’s view, a great resentment and a visceral counter-reaction by later nineteenth century antiquarians of Ireland. Westropp claimed that Ireland naturally felt great bitterness and, even worse, “caused a natural, but equally exaggerated, reaction. Exaggerating tidings that never happened, many enthusiasts brought contempt on the true claims of Ireland.”\(^{144}\) Two particular antiquaries, English General Charles Vallancey\(^{145}\) (1731 – 1812) and Irish Reverend Edward Ledwich (1738 – 1823) represented the opposing sides of this argument, and were the recipients of much of Westropp’s acrimony. Vallancey along with Ledwich, represented the early stage of bias, on both sides, in the antiquarian history of Ireland in the eighteenth century, and

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\(^{143}\) Westropp, Thomas J. “The President’s Address on the Progress of Irish Archaeology.” *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, Vol. VI Sixth Series, 46, no. 1 (December 1916): 16

\(^{144}\) Westropp, “The President’s Address on the Progress of Irish Archaeology: 18

\(^{145}\) English General Vallancey was transferred to Ireland in 1770 as part of the early stages of a military survey of Ireland and stayed to study Irish antiquities. He was used as an authority for Mary Cusack’s *Illustrated History of Ireland*
were then examined by Westropp through a cold light of reason. First, Westropp accused Ledwich of “denying to Ireland even the rudiments of civilization,” and Vallancey of being so “jealous for the credit of Ireland and endeavouring to exalt her past till he discredited the cause he most desired to serve.” Westropp claimed that Ledwich “erred in ferocious prejudice and, some think, in dishonesty; at least he was blind to everything that did not support his anti-Irish theories. His methods were simple, very simple: he rejected all early Irish literature and all statements that favoured Irish civilization, attributing all architectural remains, ornaments and weapons to the Danes.”

It was these early prejudices, represented by Ledwich and Vallancey, that were the roots of the tension between Revivalist and scientific interpretations of history; one side attempting to continue Vallancey’s fight for “legitimizing” Irish history by studying his example, and the other countering it using a more scientific method. Both sides can be seen in the antiquarian academies, as I have described. Vallancey was an early member of the Dublin Society that would be supplanted by the Royal Irish Academy. These two societies, as Westropp described, began with the intention of providing scientific analysis of the antiquities of Ireland, but their purpose quickly altered, focusing on more romanticized visions of the Irish past. Part of the problem with early historical accounts was their reliance on the Annals of Ireland. As scholars demonstrated, these collections were translated with less-than precise care or interpreted by those with no knowledge of the Irish tongue. Antiquaries like Ledwich, were resistant to the idea that Ireland had a language of its own at all and attempted to assign to it the status of a mere

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146 Westropp, “The President’s Address on the Progress of Irish Archaeology: 13.
147 Westropp, “The President’s Address on the Progress of Irish Archaeology: 13.
148 Westropp, “The President’s Address on the Progress of Irish Archaeology: 17
colony of Scotland or Spain; Vallancey attempted to link the Irish language to that of the
Phoenicians, thereby establishing its ancient roots.149

Mary Cusack once claimed that the lack of written histories was a result of
disinterest by the people of Ireland for their own history, or embarrassment at their
treatment by the English. Westropp, like Mary Cusack before him, lamented the scarcity
of early Irish-written histories, but claimed a far more balanced explanation. In his
address, Westropp indicated:

All the legends and histories which illumine our path were locked up in an
unknown tongue to the one party [the English] and unexplained by the study of
remains of our older civilization to the other [the Irish]. The few manuscripts
were jealously guarded among Irish scholars; the English writer had to take his
history from prejudiced sources; and the two races were separated by ramparts of
brass (religious, racial, political, and linguistic), so that the historical and
archaeological sides of the question were divided between two warring nations.150

Westropp asserted that this cultural war contributed to the general confusion and
misconceptions about Irish history. Vallancey, an English expatriate, was resoundingly
supportive of a developing Irish national identity; ironically, the Dublin-born Ledwich
was blindly skeptical of all Irish “culture.” This background provides a glimpse into the
fraught academic relationship with this early subjective intellectualism. It highlights a
developing dichotomy between cultural nationalist and revisionist that would characterize
intellectual life in the twentieth century, and parallels the previous tensions of scientific
and revivalist ideology that I have been recounting. Many ancient sites, as I have
discussed, were evaluated according to the dubious histories and interpretations of Irish

Annals, histories and folkloric tales that promoted a biased, and inaccurate, albeit popular, message. Westropp began reevaluating the sites by arguing for the preservation of the folklore and legends of Ireland according to their cultural significance, while simultaneously disproving their use as a source of authority for the contextualization and historicization of archaeological sites around Ireland. He claimed that by the twentieth century, “one great triumph may be indicated - we have abolished the ‘great antiquarian’ despot, who knew a little about everything, and posed as an omniscient dictator.”

Westropp’s 1910 description of the mythological origins of Dun Aengus (image 13) is an excellent example of the attempts to divorce the sites from their less than unbiased interpretations. His first observations address the mythological origins of the fort’s builders. Dun Aengus was described in terms that varied from a religious site to the home of a legendary race of people. Westropp traced the biased interpretations of the earliest accounts of the site. He described a folk tale that attributed the construction of the fort to a tribe of people that early antiquarians accepted as the builders of many of the forts in Western Ireland. The traditional accounts of the fate of this tribe, the Fir Bolg, claimed that they were destroyed after the deaths of four of their fiercest warriors. Westropp questions this account. “Were we even dealing with history, we could not attribute to a short-lived tribal group that 500 forts of Aran and the alleged settlements in Clare…yet such a belief was complacently held by antiquaries from 1840, till wider views arose at the close of the last century.”

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sanguine acceptance of these “histories” when attempting to perform more unbiased and fact-based analyses.

Westropp’s revelations did not completely diminish the status of Dun Aengus as a powerful symbol of a strong and well-established history of Ireland, but the association with mythical warriors was largely discounted. The western stone forts and their architectural construction are still sources of fascination for contemporary scholars. Westropp’s analysis and interpretations have provided the foundation upon which archaeologists like Claire Cotter of the 1992 Western Stone Forts Project based their interpretations of both the fort’s history and the relevance of previous antiquarian accounts.

Westropp’s main point of contention was the apparent attempt at reconstruction of the site by unnamed antiquarians in the nineteenth century in the name of preservation. He makes references to the alteration of the inner walls of the site. “The unnecessary rebuilding and levelling up of parts of the walls and the ‘tidy’ and new appearance thereby produced, show how desirable it was that the work should have been constantly under the supervision and direction of an antiquary who had studied our ring-walls carefully. Left to non-antiquaries and the natives, the work was of course done unsympathetically, like repairing a fence.”153 His frustration at this alteration was evident. Cotter, in her archaeological excavations of the site referenced it this way: “Thomas Westropp did not spare his critical opinion of some of these authors [of the

While the actual restoration work done in 1885 was poorly documented (which is to say hardly documented at all), Cotter, using Westropp’s later analysis of the extant tomb and his critique of prior descriptions and interpretations was able to analyze the construction.

IV– Newgrange revisited

Westropp was only the first to question the mythic aura that surrounded the traditional stories of the builders of ancient sites. Re-examination of past interpretations of ancient sites all over Ireland began at the turn of the twentieth century. The most powerful and symbolic of Ireland’s archeological sites were the first to be put to the test. These sites provided examples of the articulation of collective and singular identity. Newgrange in particular was useful in examining this phenomenon. The site, as the visiting public perceived it in the nineteenth century, was somewhat different from the reality of the tomb’s history. This is, to some extent, what Westropp had been railing against; the “Vallancey school” of antiquarians and scholars of the nineteenth century who were captivated by the imagined reality of the significance of the site, obscuring possible detractions or alternate explanations.

A tourist arriving at Newgrange today is now told that archaeologists are not sure of the original purpose of the tomb, or the possible significance of the sun illuminating the rear of the cruciform passage through a roofbox at the front entrance. This obscuring of original intent is evident in the excavation reports of Michael O’Kelly in 1975 after the

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reconstruction of the tomb was completed. In this report, he noted the astrological and ritual importance of the site, but, as many have questioned, what occurred in the earlier manifestation of the site, was largely destroyed in the excavation and reconstruction. The partisan expectations of antiquarians and archaeologists were superimposed over the site, altering or obscuring any original intent of the builders.

The tomb was excavated and taken down to the ground, then reconstructed to replicate the tomb as it was imagined to have looked when it was abandoned in the third millennium BCE. It was during the major reconstruction work that the monoliths and orthostats\textsuperscript{155} were reinforced with a separate concrete tubing and rebar that surrounded the passageway, presumably to make it safe for tourists. The tomb was then backfilled and topped with the grass-covered dome that is seen by tourists today (image 14 – 17 for a comparative look).

A large field of quartz stones was found in the area of the tomb, and O’Kelly assumed their placement would have been on the face of the structure surrounding the front entrance to the tomb. The resultant representation of the tomb was not without some controversy. The quartz walls have been called a cream cheese pie decorated with currants.\textsuperscript{156} Other more technical aspects for the critique center around the choice of representation itself, citing concerns that only one phase of the tomb’s construction in the complex history of the site is represented. Tourists and the local people alike are shown a sanitized version of this monument that echoes, ironically, back to the carefully crafted Revivalist conceptions of the site in the nineteenth century.

\textsuperscript{155} Orthostats are large stone plinths and pillars line the interior passage of the tomb.
Newgrange represents another instance of the continuing tension between Revivalism and revisionism. One critique of the re-creation of the site in the 1960’s and 70’s considered that the “the major downfall [of the reconstruction] is the adherence to the tomb fabric and lack of contemplation of Newgrange’s social and cultural position in the Neolithic. Much of this is a criticism of the archaeological discipline as a whole,” rather than a direct critique of O’Kelly himself.\footnote{Marshall, Alan. “Newgrange Excavation Report Critique.” Newgrange, Knowth, Dowth, Tara - Boyne Valley, Ireland, October 13, 2014. http://www.knowth.com/excavation.htm.}

Newgrange, managed by the Office of Public Works in Ireland, is an example of still existing cultural nationalist desire to smooth over the rough edges of ancient ruins and present a clean, user-friendly picture of the ideal landscape of history, to market their imagined community to the hungry public who would come to view Ireland itself as a tourist attraction. Irish archaeologists reinvented an ancient site with a fresh façade and new interpretations that would fascinate the public and reinforce an ancient heritage. Archaeologists have modified and polished locations like Newgrange for the tourist gaze, making them difficult to imagine in their ancient, original state, or their intended use.\footnote{Samuel, Theatres of Memory p 282.} It also removes some of the elusive mystique from its antiquity that archaeologists are trying to preserve. These themes are also a part of the broader history of the heritage construction and preservation of Ireland.

In the end, Newgrange represents a pristine, sterile, somewhat overly dramatic, monument to an ancient, unified Irish past, which may or may not have existed, but kept tourists fascinated. The analysis of the site, and the perhaps creatively interpretative nature of the reconstruction can possibly be explained. The power structure that existed
in Ireland during the tomb’s reconstruction was largely geared toward the authentication of the heritage of Ireland by the institutionalized cultural nationalism. It has been noted by some archaeologists, that Newgrange is centered in a politically charged location, the Boyne valley, where the contentious Battle of the Boyne is still fought both culturally and politically.\textsuperscript{159}

### IV – Hill of Tara as an Anticlimax?

The Hill of Tara, a powerful symbol of Irish antiquity in the late nineteenth century, was almost the antithesis of Newgrange by the twentieth century. The site has been taken over by kitschy shops centering on new age religion, specializing in crystals and tarot. This is a representation of a powerful spiritual element that revivalists did not make a primary focus, but remains tied to them by Romantic spiritualism, nostalgia and reverential treatment of the past. The somewhat dismissive treatment of Tara can be seen in some part in the writings of Thomas Westropp. In the overly generous and flowery descriptions of sites like Tara, Westropp indicated that early antiquarians “wrote of such glories of Tara that the hapless persons, who went to see these and found only grassy mounds and a couple of small pillars, came away saying in their haste that all Irish antiquaries were liars.”\textsuperscript{160} The disillusionment with the reality of Tara reflects a failure in their attempts to create it as the center of their imagined community. This abandonment is also, once again, demonstrative of the intermittent, but powerful failures in the mission

\textsuperscript{159} The anniversary of the victory of William over James II still results in sectarian violence in Northern Ireland, most notably in Belfast’s Falls road and Shankill road area, where annuals marches often result in violent riots.

\textsuperscript{160} Westropp, Thomas J. “The President’s Address on the Progress of Irish Archaeology.” Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland, Vol. VI Sixth Series, 46, no. 1 (December 1916): 17
of many revivalists to find a balance between cultural nationalism and professional analysis.

The interpretation of modern Tara is almost nihil, with small spikes carrying modest signs that proclaim areas of interest, such as the mound of hostages (image 18), the King’s seat etc., are scattered around an almost barren hillside. There are gravestones and memorials around the site with little or no explanation or contextual information given. The site has not been forgotten, but rather constructed as a place of spiritual and cultural significance that hopefully would be apparent to all who visit there.

The Hill of Tara is still protected by an institutionalized cultural nationlist machine that continues to exist in the Republic of Ireland. In 2003 a new extension of the M3 freeway was approved that would run near the site of Tara, causing uproar among conservationists and preservationists. In an article published in the *Smithsonian* magazine in 2009, Tara is referred to as an endangered site, and the opening lines of Thomas Moore’s poem ““The harp that once through Tara's halls” is once again quoted. The romantic and somewhat mythologized history of Tara is cited in the text. “The archaeologically rich complex on and around the Hill of Tara is seen by many as the spiritual and historic heart of Ireland. It was the venue for rituals, battles and burials dating back to 4000 B.C. More than 100 kings were crowned at Tara, and St. Patrick is said to have stopped there to seek royal permission before spreading his message of Christianity.” Tara is the one site that was both neglected by twentieth century scientists and retained in the collective memory that continues the nineteenth century revivalists’ goals, labeling Tara as Ireland’s “spiritual heart.” That spiritual heart was

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apparently too valuable to question. The irony of the M3 project is that, according to the *Smithsonian* Article, construction crews have exposed long-hidden Bronze Age burials with cremains and skeletons waiting for discovery. The site was actually far older than previously thought and eventually proved one of the revivalist claims to a long and sustained history. It begs the question why no previous excavation, other than the one performed by the British Israelites in 1899, or further analysis has been done on the site prior to the proposed freeway access: a question that has no satisfying answer. The revivalists were so intent on maintaining the mystique and mystery of the site, particularly in light of the failed British Israelite excavation of 1902, the site was instead left alone, a symbol of a retention of the distant Irish past. Uncomfortable aspects of Irish history, and those that retained the dominant narrative were either ignored or retained as dictated by the dominant ideology of the time. 

V – Clonmacnoise - The Counterpoint?

Clonmacnoise appears to be the exception to the rule. While long held as an important repository of Annals and writings, antiquarians and scholars of every ilk have studied the site and its repository of ancient manuscripts for the last century and a half. Tourists in the form of amateur archaeologists, historians and geologists have written about the site itself extensively in antiquarian journals, travel accounts, and histories. Clonmacnoise represents a site in which the interpretive elements have changed very little, and modern tourist and academic interest has led to an enriching and continuing investigation of the site. One notation indicates that there was restoration work done on

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one of the “temples” on the site in the 1920’s, but little information was recorded. The interpretive center mentions the restoration for purposes of edifying those looking at the site as to the more complete nature of the building in relationship to the ruined state of much of the complex.

Clonmacnoise provides an example of stasis, a form of continuity and stability that highlights the changes in the other sites. Twentieth and twenty-first century excavations have continued, but the meaning and significance of the site has altered very little. One key explanation for this alteration was the trend that I have been describing in the discussions of the texts found at Clonmacnoise, the Irish Annals. The debate over their veracity, as I have illustrated, was centered around some of the texts dealing with Hebraic inscriptions found on the tombs at Clonmacnoise. The discussions surrounding the mythic Hebraic inscriptions coincide with a concerted effort to link Ireland to an early Christian past that extends to Noah, but antiquarian John O’Donovan debunked the attempt very early on. Thomas Westropp once again explored this discussion while studying the architectural interest of Clonmacnoise in 1910, wherein he detailed the crosses and the temples included in the complex. The previous studies of the site have proven to be fanciful according to Westropp. In the introduction of his work “A Description of the Ancient Buildings and Crosses at Clonmacnoise, King’s County,” Westropp stated, “the details of his [antiquarian Henry O’Neil’s] drawings [image 19] prove very fanciful. He evidently did not appreciate the crude accuracy of the photograph which some still think a ruinous charge against antiquarian drawings” in general.\[163\]

\[163\] Westropp, Thomas J. “A Description of the Ancient Buildings and Crosses at Clonmacnoise, King’s County.” The Journal of the Royal Societies of Antiquaries of Ireland, 1908: 282
What has altered slightly is the inclusion and interest of the Irish high crosses to the landscape. Westropp sketched pictures of the high crosses as well as his observations of Temple Conor (image 20), in which he states “Temple Conor, according to Petrie, was built by Cathal son of Conor King of Connaught 1010. It has been used as a Protestant church from about 1780 but was in ruins in 1738.” He noted no recent reconstruction, nor any need for one, which he noted for several other buildings that were extant at the time.

The interpretation of the site of Clonmacnoise appears to be unaffected because of the early alterations already included in the previous descriptions. Antiquarians like O’Donovan had already begun the process of reinvestigating ancient assumptions and sources in what I refer to as the second phase of the transition from revivalist to historian. It demonstrates, then, the nascent stages of the trend toward an attempt at unbiased analysis rather than a more romanticized revivalism.

Clonmacnoise is also unique in that rather than being an ancient, prehistoric site, it represents an early Christian site. This provides both and explanation as well as continuing problems for the Revivalists and later archaeologists or historians. The ecclesiastical records found at the site, as Westropp describes, provide detail that is valuable to the early history of Christianity in Ireland. According to Westropp, the site was in use from its founding in 548 until it was sacked in 1552 by an English garrison at Athlone. The records found there include the problematic early medieval writings that have proven to be at least partially fictitious, as well as the more valuable Annals that

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164 Westropp, Thomas J. “A Description of the Ancient Buildings and Crosses at Clonmacnoise, King’s County.” *The Journal of the Royal Societies of Antiquaries of Ireland*, 1908: 297
were written as daily journals and collections of observances by the people who inhabited the site. The site also had been studied and excavated for a century or more before Westropp published his observations. Westropp bemoaned the fact that skeletons found in the temples were moved or reburied, grave goods had been removed, and incorrect or poor descriptions of the site were recorded. As he did with his address on the state of archaeology, Westropp did go into some detail on the history of the previous descriptions of the site and whether they proved valuable. Westropp’s reflections centered more around seemingly deliberate misrepresentations, or sloppy descriptions or sketches, of the structures themselves rather than on the interpretations of those structures. The relatively recent nature of the history of the site made the one point for debate, the supposed Hebraic descriptions found in situ in the nineteenth century, an easy matter to correct.

The third phase, as I have identified it, is not so much evidence of science and reason triumphing over superstition and myth, but rather a switch in focus and dominance of some historian’s and archeologist’s belief in unbiased scientific analysis overturning the often misguided and culturally nationalist focus of the previous generations. The dominant revisionism prevalent in Irish intellectual tradition currently is still in conflict with a strong thread of romantic revivalism that is maintained through tourism and scholarly detractors to the revisionist trend in history. What is truth? What is Irishness? Both of these terms are under erasure, the definitions under scrutiny, and their interpretations an ongoing part of the discourse surrounding the history of Ireland.
Conclusions

The strong links between antiquarians and cultural nationalism and the resultant influence was ameliorated initially by a strong desire to scientifically analyze the ancient sites of Ireland’s past. The antiquarians may have been overly enthusiastic in some cases, but a strong desire to promote not only an “accurate” history, but also a substantiated one, was present from the earliest stirrings of antiquarian scholarship in the nineteenth century. The scientifically minded antiquarians were sometimes drowned out in the beginning of the Gaelic Revival, in favor of a cultural nationalist trend toward the promotion of an imagined community for Ireland. The strong British cultural narrative seemed to be a constant goad to cultural revivalists to construct, locate and focus an unbroken, unifying and ancient Irish history. This can be seen in the sites I have described, sites chosen as much for their historical, archaeological, and cultural significance as for their age, as many pre-dated English influence. Scientific inquiry and nationalism did not replace one another: rather they switched places in scholarly culture. Revivalist scholars had always used the link between scientific analysis and antiquarianism in a cycle of inspiration and encouragement that both enhanced the antiquarian research and altered it. The tension I have been describing can be seen in the revivalist goals to create a unifying identity for the people of Ireland were constructed to transcend a fractured culture that would inspire some of the antiquarians to further their research. This goal was seen in Ireland in the creation of histories that were associated with their most prominent and archaeologically significant sites. This desire may also have encouraged them to perhaps throw off their caution and utilize sources that have now been proven unreliable. The ancient texts as well as early seventeenth or eighteenth
century histories of Ireland that were generally considered authoritative, were themselves products of a search for accuracy and coherency. Westropp cited examples of antiquarians who insisted that the forts and ruins of Ireland were closely tied to early Greek constructions. “Some only noted this without building much theory upon it; others made it the basis of elaborate inverted pyramids of conjecture; but none seem to have followed up the subject step by step to see whether there was any probable connection traceable.”\textsuperscript{166} This is the crux of the problem as professional historians and archaeologists came to see it: the assumptions made by revivalists often remained unquestioned, if those assumptions fit into the larger narrative of a cultural nationalist history of Ireland. Westropp further states that the resultant theories “appeared too weak and partial for future acceptance.”\textsuperscript{167} The institutionalization of cultural nationalism highlighted these inconsistencies of revivalist interpretations to the now increasingly professionalized groups of historians and archaeologists, and represented the third phase of an evolution I have been attempting to elucidate.

The revivalist authors of Ireland’s history, like Mary Cusack, were attempting to promote an unbroken line of history and authenticity from ancient times to their present. A liberal use of local legends and folk tales facilitated this attempt. The result was a kind of revivalist history that was driven by a variety of influences that included economic/tourist draws, political motivations, discourses of cultural and ethnic purity,


\textsuperscript{167} Westropp, Thomas J. “The Ancient Forts of Ireland: Being a Contribution Towards Our Knowledge of Their Types, Affinities, and Structural Features.”\textit{Transactions of Royal Irish Academy} XXXI (1902): 17
and interest in creating an imagined community. The scientific analysis had already begun buttressing and sometimes debunking revivalist interpretations. The final revisionism and anti-folkloric backlash of the twentieth century demonstrates a reaction to this overwhelming modification of fervently unbiased, or revisionist, interpretation. The legends, myths, and folklore that were so crucial to the early studies of Irish culture and literature were dismantled, examined, and dissected as a general malaise seemed to permeate those cultural fields that were responsible for the construction of a national identity for Ireland. Some revisionists claimed the previous histories were pure myth, others that the resultant history was whitewashed and therefore useless for a true understanding of Irish history. Historians claimed all was the fault of the British government, and then that they were let off the hook with newly revised histories. “Lines of demarcation between historical revisionists and anti-revisionists” were being drawn and would continue into the 1980’s and beyond.\(^{168}\) A newly emerging scientific elite may have shifted to ideological dominance, but ideology and creed still ruled and motivated history and scholarship.

Although the early twentieth century saw archaeologists become more circumspect in their interpretation of ancient sites, the relationship between science and revivalism did not completely disappear. Following intra- and inter-disciplinary criticism of over-flowery interpretations, archaeologists focusing on ancient sites in Ireland have begun the process of self-analysis. Ideology has not, however, disappeared from analysis. One aspect of the ongoing discussion that bears contemplation is articulated by

geographer David C. Harvey (1935-): “archaeological knowledge and understanding are always manufactured so that ‘when you depict another [those in the past], you inevitably end up depicting yourself.’” It has always been so, laments Harvey. This suggests that the multitude of descriptions, interpretations and depictions of ancient sites over the last few hundred years can tell us something about the people who wrote them—their ideas, times and senses of identification more than it can of the sites themselves. The revision of the history of ancient sites seems to stand as evidence to this belief. While this holds true in many cases, I hope that I have demonstrated the reality is far more complex. This assertion neglects to take into account the attempts toward unbiased interpretation and research by many scholars and antiquarians in the nineteenth century. Ideologies shift and change, but rarely disappear.

As some have put it, the value-free nature of revisionist history is itself a myth. Some have admonished, “professional historians have sought to sustain the quite impossible pretension to be ‘value free’. But [sic] an over-simplified version of [one central point remains]… that the founders of modern Irish historiography certainly avowed that aspiration, but willingly or not,” future scholars absorbed their objectives. The removal of bias remains aspirational. Some thought it was perhaps resolved with the professionalization of history, archaeology and related fields. It is indicative that the antiquarian societies and journals did not disappear, but evolved and changed with the intellectual shifts; nor did the global fascination with all things “Irish” to those descendants of Irish emigrants.

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169 Harvey, “‘National’ Identities.” 475
It is important to note the global nature of the phenomenon I have been describing in Ireland. Nations all over the world have been relying on cultural nationalism, and archaeology, to create or substantiate cultural legitimacy and superiority. This is often used in concert with political and civic nationalism to buttress political aspirations and post-colonial goals of reasserting native importance. Valuable examples can be seen in India, Basque Spain, and perhaps most importantly, Israel. In “Structuring the Past: Israeli’s Palestinians, and the Symbolic Authority of Archaeological Monuments,” Neil Silberman described the use of archaeological inquiry in establishing cultural and political power in disputed territories. Silberman states that it is his goal to demonstrate “archaeological monuments in their power relations seem natural, timeless and inevitable…the public’s shared perception of the past is shaped by …reconstructions of destroyed structure, informational brochures and signposts.” The trend of nationalist archaeology remains strong, despite the revisionist trend that was exemplified in Ireland and elsewhere. It is especially strong in nations where the perception that cultural and political survival is routinely threatened is pervasive.

Ireland’s path for historical and archaeological scholarship is still under discussion. Some scholars continue to feel that the revisionist trend continues to strip Ireland of the rich culture that makes it unique, while others insist that the legends and

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myths of the past obscure “fact” and “truth. Underlining this discussion is the romanticization of Irish culture that is being buttressed by popular culture. The purveyors of the almost cartoonish version of “Irishness” can be traced to several factors, the poignant of which is a long history of emigration from Ireland and the nostalgia that seems to have followed it. After the famine and ân Gorta Mór (The great Hunger), the population of Ireland began a process of emigration and settlement that has continued throughout the last one hundred-fifty years. For those like myself whose enchantment is intellectual, Ireland continues to provide a wealth of heritage and historical detail that still begs further analysis. Antiquarian, historical, and archaeological societies, and the journals they print, also evolved to encompass the preservation of heritage and memory, founding museums and local organizations for heritage management and tourism. Teasing out the purpose and history of that ever-changing balance, and shift in goals and ideologies continues to be important.
Appendix 1

Tables

Table 1: Phases of Antiquarianism

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Table 2: Antiquarian Scholars

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<th>Douglas Hyde</th>
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<th>George Petrie</th>
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Table 3: Antiquarian Societies

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- Royal Irish Academy
- Ordnance Survey
- Office of Public Works
- Ancient Monuments Protection Act
- Royal Society of Antiquaries Ireland
- Gaelic League
- Gaelic Athletic Association
Appendix 2

Images

Image 1 – Dun Aengus

Image 2 – Newgrange
Image 5- Brú Na Bóinne Complex - Sketch by George Petrie
Image 6 - Michael O’Kelly scale drawing of Newgrange

Image 7 – Lia Fáil

Image 8 – Croppies Grave
Image 9 – Clonmacnoise Temples – Sketched by Thomas Westropp

Plan of the Central Group of Churches, Clonmacnoise.
Image 10 – Clonmacnoise Tower

(South Cross and O'Lorens Tower, Clonmacnoise.
(From a photograph; panels re-sketched from rubbings.)

Image 11 – Clonmacnoise Cathedral
Image 12 – Clonmacnoise castle keep
Image 15 – Newgrange entrance today

Image 16 – Newgrange side view Late 1800's
Image 20 – Temple Conor side and front, Clonmacnoise
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