

Hidden Treasure-Historical Truth
Grania ny Maille, Celtic Pirate
Part II
By Katherine Bone

Grania ny Maille, Part I, was a fitting tribute to Women's History Month and the celebration of Saint Patrick's Day. To honor America's Irish heritage and the women who've carved a niche in history, the article focused on a woman also known as Grace O'Malley. Gaelic Chieftain's daughter, widow and pirate, Grania's rise to fame made the O'Malleys a household name all along the coast of Ireland during the 1500's.

Johnny Depp's characterization of Captain Jack Sparrow in *Pirates of the Caribbean, Curse of the Black Pearl*, has inspired renewed interest in pirates and so it is only fitting Grania's life be explored. Sworn to avenge her husband's death, this Pirate Queen, with a sea faring lineage dating back to the Viking conquest of 730 A.D., plotted against her enemies, raided countless cargo and then humbled herself before Queen Elizabeth of England for the sake of her sons.

Alas, fame and fortune does not come without price. Grania's quest for wealth, prestige, and revenge, incurred a bounty of \$120,000 upon her head. With a vast armada in her arsenal and men willing to follow her into oblivion, she ruled the western shores of Ireland with a firm hand. Aware of what was at stake; she married her youngest daughter to a chieftain of Corraun named Richard Gurke, also known as *the Devil's Hook*, to secure her hold on the coast. Near or about the same time, Grania exchanged vows with Richard-an-Iarainn, "Richard-in-Iron" Burke, a descendent of Charlemagne who carried the ancestral blood of Brian Boru in his veins. The marriage brought her even greater prestige because Brian Boru, *Boroimhe*, was considered to be the first and true king of Ireland. Once describing himself as the 'Emperor of the Irish', he added his name to the Book of Armagh, a document dating back to 807-808 A.D., which included the confession of Saint Patrick. Killed by a Viking while kneeling penitently saying his Good Friday prayers, Brian Boru's death brought confusion and war amongst the clans.

Richard Burke's clan, on the other hand, held a grudge against the Normans for an incident near Galway and no more surprisingly, harbored ill will against the O'Flahertys, Grania's first husband's clan, as well. In more ways than one, Richard's connections to Brian Boru and marriage to Grania heightened the drama of the day making the marriage all the more satisfying for both.

In 1577, Grania was captured by the Earl of Desmond and placed in a dungeon at the mouth of Shannon. Later, she was sent to the governor and imprisoned for eighteen months at Dublin Castle until she was set free on the condition that she stop Richard's rebellion in Munster. Stopping Richard however was the last thing on Grania's mind. Instead, the two combined forces.

Sometime in 1583, Grania offered three galleys and two hundred men to Sir Henry Sidney's service forming an alliance with the first representative of the English crown in western Ireland. In gratitude, Richard was knighted; thusly bestowing upon Grania the name, *Lady Burke*. It is also during this time that Grania gave birth to another son at sea named, Tibbot-ne-Long, *Toby of the ships*, who became her favorite.

Turkish corsairs attacked Grania's ship one day after she'd given birth. And to the amazement of all on board, after being alerted of the attack by one of her Captains,

Grania raced to the top deck clad in her night clothes with musket and baby in hand, and repelled her attackers quickly capturing captain and crew, who she then hung at Carraigahowley.

That same year Grania was widowed again. She continued to lead her men from Carraigahowley until she was captured in 1586 by Richard Bingham, the new governor of Connacht, who ordered her execution. Her life was spared however by *the Devil's Hook*, who offered himself in her stead. Fortuitously, at fifty-six years old, Grania was free again. Her release however did not stop Bingham's pursuit. He coerced his brother, John, to trick Grania's son, Owen. When Owen unwittingly offered John shelter, John murdered Owen, stabbing him no less than twelve times. In retaliation, Grania hired the gallowsman to meet out justice. Nevertheless, in 1592, she lost her anchored fleet to Bingham's raid on Clare Island and was then forced into Ulster and the snowy Wicklow Mountains, where she took refuge with the O'Neills and Red Hugh of the O'Donnells, who had just escaped from Dublin Castle. Not long after, Red Hugh returned to warring with the English in Connacht leaving Grania safely ensconced in O'Donnell territory.

With nothing to do, Grania began to worry about the safety of her two surviving sons. She penned a letter to Queen Elizabeth requesting a truce and the return of her ancestral lands. The Queen responded with a questionnaire, which Grania completed with savvy gaining an invitation to Greenwich Palace and a cordial welcome. Impressed by 'Lady Burke's' civility, Queen Elizabeth made Grania promise to retire. As a reward, she ordered Tibbot-ne-Long's release from prison and made a proclamation that her son, Murrough, receive privileged treatment.

Given the right to pursue the Queen's enemies by land and sea, Grania couldn't resist roaming again. In 1601, she fought the English sloop of war *Tramontane*, in retaliation for the capture of one of her galleys. No matter how warranted the action, her son, Tibbot-ne-Long, was passed over as chieftain of Ulster as a result. Infuriated, Grania relinquished control of her remaining ships and asked her son to serve the Queen, which he did, defeating Red Hugh O'Donnell at the Battle of Kinsale. Queen Elizabeth honored Tibbot-ne-Long with knighthood in 1603, the same year Grania and the Queen died, and thereafter he became known as Sir Theobald Burke. Another historical source claims one of her sons went on to become Viscount Mayo.

Was Grania a devoted daughter or a grieving widow fighting to rightfully retain her lands? Grania's struggle to maintain a legacy for her sons seems clear and yet one source claims she cut off one son's hand when he tried to climb back on board ship after falling overboard. It is said, he was left to drown because he'd sullied the O'Malley name by falling overboard in the first place. What do you chose to believe?

Four hundred years have passed since Grania ny Maille's death at seventy-four. Hailed as Grace O'Malley in literature and song, her spirit of daring and resourcefulness was not destroyed by fate. In fact, her resilience teaches us to find a galleon of opportunity on the horizon, board it, and grab the helm. For we are all pirate queens reaching out for the prize, doing whatever we can to find the treasure obscured. We may not have castles, a fleet of galleys or Johnny Depp at our disposal, but like Grania, we only need to believe we can get them.