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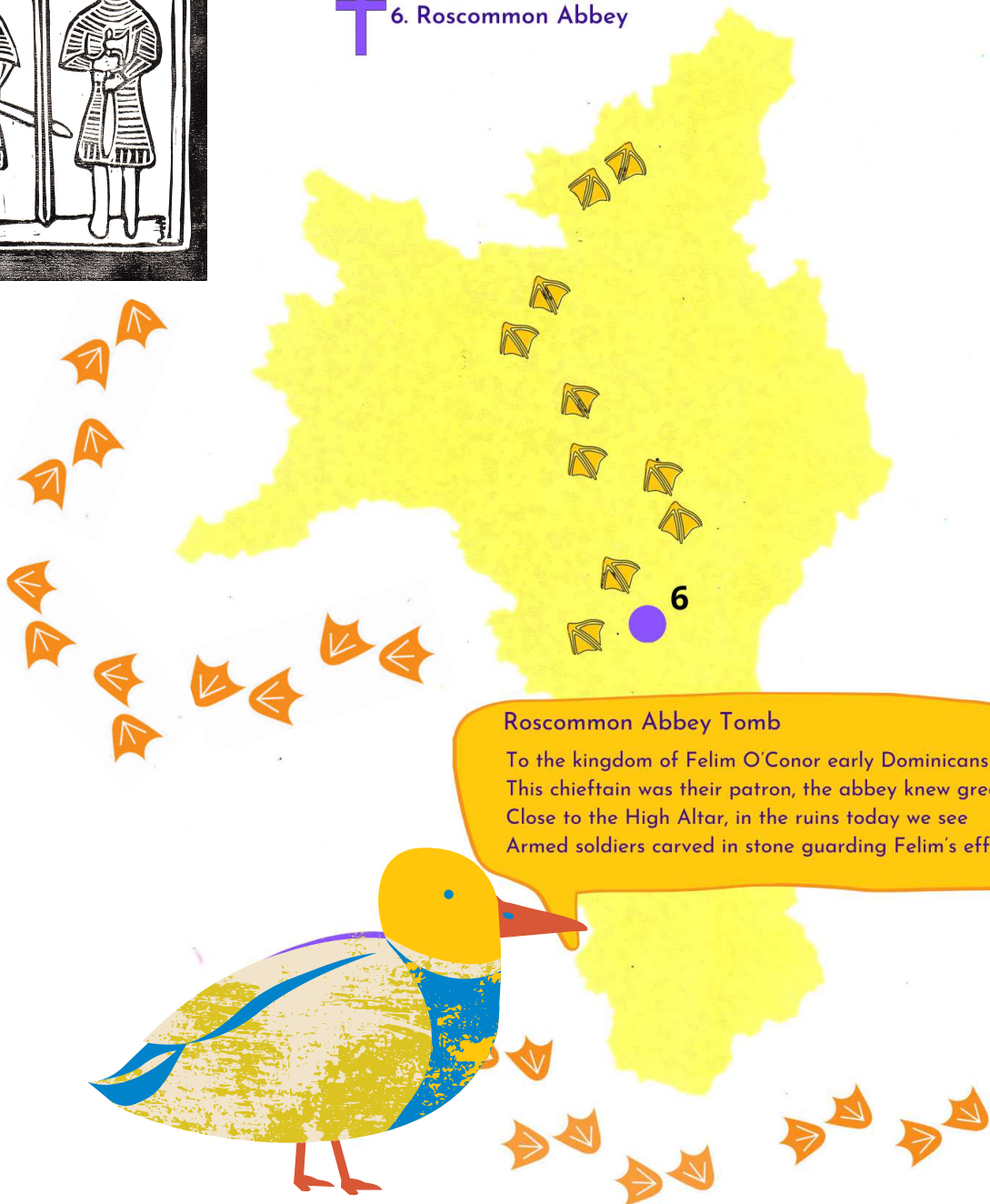
Felim O'Connor's Tomb at Roscommon Abbey

The sculpted stone tomb of Felim O'Connor, king of Connacht, stands close to the High Altar of Roscommon Abbey, illustrating his importance as a generous patron of the Abbey. Sculpted in the 13th century, an effigy of Felim in the long robes and sceptre of an important king lies on top of the tomb, with a sleeping lion or hound at his feet. At the front of the tomb eight armed Gallowglass soldiers are carved in helmets and chainmail, holding axes and swords.



Roscommon Abbey

✚ 6. Roscommon Abbey



Roscommon Abbey Tomb

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Armed soldiers carved in stone guarding Felim's effigy.

Roscommon Abbey Tomb

Roscommon Abbey was founded as a Dominican priory in 1253 by Felim O'Connor, King of Connacht, and in spite of the Anglo-Norman wars and their destruction of the kingdom of Connacht at that time, the building of the church was completed and dedicated in 1257.

Felim O'Connor ruled from his fortified residence on nearby Loughnaneane and still considered himself king of Connacht. Being patron to a new religious order would have been of great importance to him at that time as Gaelic Ireland was aligning with the religious reforms in Western Europe against the wealth and corruption of the Catholic Church. His patronage would also have ensured Roscommon's continuing role as an important centre of religion and learning, a tradition which it had held over the previous five centuries.

The Dominicans monks were sworn to a life of poverty and they were mainly supported through donations from the communities that they served. Early Dominican foundations in Ireland and elsewhere were established beside major population and learning centres and the decision to found a community at Roscommon showed its importance, as well as acknowledging the centre of the O'Connor kingdom.

The highlight of the priory is the tomb of its founder, Felim O'Connor. The altar-like tomb is located in a niche at the church's eastern end.

This position, close to the High Altar, was the most prestigious burial place in the entire church, an acknowledgement of the generosity of its founder.

Felim's effigy, carved in the 13th century, lies on top of the tomb. Felim is portrayed as a king in a long robe, holding a royal sceptre, a crucifix in his left hand, his feet resting on a sleeping lion or dog. This portrayal was meant to show his status as a European king, and the effigy is remarkably well preserved considering its great age. It is known that parts of the tomb have been added over the centuries, and the panel of carvings of armed men at its front were added in the 15th century when the O'Conors regained control of the region and celebrated their family connection.

The armed men on the front panel were professional soldiers employed in the North and West of Ireland who were known as Gallowglasses. They wear helmets and chainmail, and hold axes and swords. The remains of the church are the last evidence of this once large abbey and settlement, and within those ruins Felim O'Connor's Tomb is an outstanding historical monument.

