

## THE REVEALING OF THE *TÁIN BÓ CÚAILNGE*

There are several legends of how the *Táin Bó Cúailnge* (“Cattle Raid of Cooley”), the central epic of the Ulster Cycle, was lost, and had to be recovered or reconstructed. This one comes from the Book of Leinster (c. 1160), and the text has been dated to the 9th century.

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### Sources:

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DO FALLSIGUD TÁNA BÓ CUALNGE

THE REVEALING OF THE TÁIN BÓ CÚAILNGE

Concomgarthá trá filid Herend do Senchán Torpeist dús in ba mebor leo Táin Bó Cualngi inna ógi, agus asbertatar nad fetar di acht bloga nammá. Asbert iarum Senchán ria daltu dús cia díb no ragad ara bennacht i tíre Letha do foglaim na Tana berta in suí sair dar éis in chulmeinn.

Dolluid Emine hua Ninene & Murgan mac Sencháin do thecht sair, iss ed dollotar do fertai Fergusa meic Róig agus sech a liic oc Énloch la Connachta. Suidid Murgein a oenur oc liic Fergusa, agus luid cách úad do chungid taige oiged dóib colléic. Gabais Murgan tra laíd don líic amal bid Fergus fessin adgladad, a n-asbert riss iarum.

Manib do liic luaich-thech malgel ma Róig rofessin fechtaib co n-éicsib imman immanachta laithiu bruidin bé Cuailngi in cech follus a Fergus.

La sodain forrubai in ceó mór imbi connach fúair a muntir co cend tri laa agus tri n-aidche, agus dolluid a dochum iarum: intí Fergus, fo chongraimimm chain .i. brat uanide; léine chulpaitech co nderggintliud; claideb órduirn; maelassai chredumai; folt dond fair. Adfét Fergus dó iarum in Táin uili amal doringned o thossuch co dead (asberat alaili im is do Senchan adchoas iar troscud fri noebu síl

So the poets of Ireland were summoned to Senchán Torpeist<sup>1</sup> to find out if they remembered the *Táin Bó Cúailnge* in its entirety, and they said they knew nothing but fragments of it only. Then Senchan told his pupils to find out which of them would go, in return for his blessing, into the land of Letha<sup>2</sup> to learn the *Táin* which the scholar carried east in exchange for the *Cuilmenn*.<sup>3</sup>

Emine, grandson of Ninene, and Murgan, son of Senchán, went on their journey east, on which they came to the grave of Fergus mac Róich and past his stone at Énloch among the Connachta. Murgan sits on his own at Fergus's stone, and meanwhile each of them went to find a guesthouse for them. So Murgan took to singing as if it was Fergus himself he was addressing, when he said to him then:

Unless your stone is a valuable house, bright, princely son of Róech, I'll have found expeditions with poets, herds being driven, day of contest, woman of Cualnge, each manifest, O Fergus.<sup>4</sup>

At that a great mist comes around him so his people can't find him until the end of three days and three nights, and he came to him then, Fergus himself, his appearance beautiful: a green cloak; a hooded shirt with red embroidery; a gold-hilted sword; bronze shorn shoes; a brown mane of hair. Fergus tells him then the whole *Táin* as it happened from beginning to end<sup>5</sup> (others say it's to Senchán it was

<sup>1</sup> A poet of Connacht, supposed to have lived c.570-617, who is said to have been leader of the grand assembly of poets and chief of all the poets in Ireland.

<sup>2</sup> Letavia, i.e. Brittany.

<sup>3</sup> the *Etymologiae* of Isidore of Seville, an encyclopedia of science and the arts, which was considered the height of wisdom.

<sup>4</sup> This passage is in *rosc* or *réitoric*, an obscure poetic form. My translation is somewhat conjectural.

<sup>5</sup> Tertullian (*On the Soul* 52), quoting the 2nd century BC Greek writer Nicander, says the Continental Celts would spend the night by the graves of heroes in the hope of seeing visions of them.

*Do fallsigud Tána Bó Cualnge*

Fergusa, ocus nibo machthad cid samlaid no beth). Tiagait uli co Senchan iarum ocus adfiadat a n-imthechta dó ocus ba buidechside díib iarum dano.

Is héseo turem remscéla Tána Bó Cualngi .i. a dó déc .i.

- De Gabáil in tsíd.
- De Aslingi in Meic Óic.
- De chophur na da Muccida.
- De Tháin Bó Regamain.
- De Echtra Nerai.
- De Chompirt Chonchobuir.
- De Thochmurc Ferbae
- De Chompirt Con Culaind.
- De Thain Bó Flidais.
- De Thochmurc Emiri.

Atberat dano is di remscelaib de thecht Con Culaind do thaig Culaind cherdda, de gabail gascid do Choin Chulaind, ocus dia dul i carpat. dia luid Cú Chulaind do Emain Macha cosna maccu, acht is i curp na Tána adfiadtar na tri sceóil dedenchasa.

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told after fasting against saints of Fergus's line, and it would not be surprising if it were so). They all go to Senchán then and told him about their travels, and he was pleased with them then.

These are fore-tales of the *Táin Bó Cúailnge* that are told, all twelve of them.<sup>6</sup>

- The Taking of the *Síd*-Mound
- The Vision of the Mac Óc
- The Quarrel of the Pig-Keeper
- The Driving-Off of Regamon's Cows
- The Adventure of Nera
- The Conception of Conchobar
- The Wooing of Ferb
- The Conception of Cú Chulaind
- The Driving-Off of Flidais's Cows
- The Wooing of Emer

Some say the foretales include Cú Chulaind's going to the house of Culand the smith, the taking of arms by Cú Chulaind and his trip in a chariot, and when Cú Chulaind went to Emain Macha to the boys, but it is in the body of the *Táin* these three stories are told.

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<sup>6</sup> I know there are only ten titles given, but that's what it says.