

OLLI, “Celtic Tales Retold”: Introduction

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Myth

- **"Myth is a story that is sacred to and shared by a group of people who find their most important meanings in it; it is a story believed to have been composed in the past about an event in the past, or more rarely, in the future, an event that continues to have meaning in the present because it is remembered; it is a story that is part of a larger group of stories.** (Wendy Doniger, *Other People's Myths* 27)
- [Myths can also be viewed as groups of story-elements that work so well together that they become imaginatively bonded and meaningful in such configurations.]

The Celts: A Distinct Culture by 1000 BCE

600-400 BCE: Western migrations

390 BCE: Attack Rome (bought off)

279 BCE: Attack Delphi (spoils removed to France)

202-190 BCE: Suppressed (incorporated into the Roman Empire after the Punic Wars)

55-54 BCE: Gaul conquered by Julius Caesar (surviving Celtic religious leaders and teachers disperse westward)

Language and Literature in England

Settlements	Celtic expansion and settlement: c. 600 BC-400 CE Saxon Settlements : 5th-6th centuries CE
Religion	Pagan Celtic: 7th centuries BC-c. 400 CE Christianization began in 4th c. for Celts and in 6th c. for Saxons
Literary Sources	Ireland: oral tradition through 6th century CE (MSS date from 6th-7th; the most important from the 12th). Wales: oral tales through 9th-10th? centuries (MSS date from 13th? and later).
Languages	Celtic (Irish, Welsh, Scots, Cornish, Manx, Breton): 10th-11th) Irish (Goidelic/Gaelic): Old Irish before 900 CE; Middle Irish through 17th. Welsh (Brythonic/British): Old Welsh 800-1100 CE; Middle Welsh 1100-1400.

The Irish Literary "Cycles":

The Mythological Cycle (includes *The Second Battle of Mag Tuired*)

The Ulster Cycle (includes the *Táin Bó Cuailgne*)

The Finn Cycle (stories of Finn macCumhaill; sometimes called the Ossianic cycle after Oisín, Finn's son)

The Historical Cycle (assorted legends of kings)

Important Persons of the Tuatha Dé:

Lugh (called Lamfhada or "Long-Armed" and "Samildanach" or "Many-Skilled"). Welsh: Lluch

Nuada (military leader and swordsman)

The Dagda (the "Good God," similar to Lug in his multiple skills, but also associated with fertility and excess)

Lír (and his son Mannanán—both sea gods—waves are called the “horses of Lír”). Welsh: Llyr and Manawyddan

Goibniu (the smith, assisted by Luchta and Creidhne). Welsh: Gofannon

Dian Cécht (a smith, and with his son, Miach, a physician)

Badb/Morrígan/Macha/Nemain (aspects of the warrior goddess; each may sometimes have three aspects)

Cúchulainn, the shape of the hero's career:

Supernatural begettings and births →

Naming after "monster fight" →

Multiple single combats →

Healing by divine father (Lugh) →

Tragic combat with best friend →

Sparing the enemy

(Outside of the *Táin*--a heroic death once his *geas* is violated)