

## Celtic Mythology and Myth-History

There are more sources, and hence more names, for Irish mythology than for Welsh. Some of the figures are analogous, but the lateness of the Welsh sources obscures what common elements there may have been. There does not exist, in either case, the highly organized body of multiple stories associated with the "gods," nor are Celtic mythical figures as clearly delineated in terms of function as are the Greek, Roman, or Egyptian gods.

In both groups, sacred space tends to be defined by natural phenomena, especially forests and groves. "Fairy" mounds, both natural and artificial also figure in both mythologies. The "Other World," almost always separated from the everyday world by the thinnest of boundaries, can be located either within a mound or across the sea.

### Irish

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)

The Mythical Settlements of Ireland (From the *Book of Invasions*):

- Cessair
- Partholon
- Nemed (progenitor of the next two groups; opponent of the indigenous Fomorians)
- Fir Bolg (fled to the Aran Islands after the first Battle of Mag Tuired)
- Tuatha Dé Danann (fought the Fomorians in the Second Battle of Mag Tuired; retired to the sídh [fairy mounds])
- Sons of Mil (Gaels)

Important Persons of the Tuatha Dé:

- Lugh (called Lamfhada or "Long-Armed" and "Samildanach" or "Many-Skilled")
- Nuada (military leader and swordsman)
- The Dagda (the "Good God," similar to Lug in his multiple skills, but also associated with fertility and excess)
- Goibniu (the smith, assisted by Luchta and Creidhne)
- Dian Cécht (a smith, and with his son, Miach, a physician)
- Badb/Morrigan/Macha (three aspects of the warrior goddess; Macha sometimes has three aspects)
- Ogma (warrior)
- Manannán (son of Lir and like him, associated with the sea)

Otherworld Talismans:

- The Lia Fáil (the stone that proclaimed the rightful king)
- The sword of Nuadu
- The spear of Lugh
- The cauldron of the Dagda

Divisions of the Year:

- Samhain (October 31/November 1, the beginning of the year)
- Imbolg (February 1)
- Beltain (May 1)
- Lugnasad (August 1--also called "Lammas")

**Welsh**

The stories involving these characters are all found in the collection known as *The Four Branches of the Mabinogi*. Other figures such as the bard Taliesin and the seer Myrddin (Merlin) are found in stories and poems in various MS collections.

Figures with mythic associations:

- Bran ("The Blessed" or "Bendigeidfran," son of Llyr)
- Branwen (daughter of Llyr, but her name suggests a doubling with Bran)
- Manawyddan (son of Llyr)
- Arawn (associated with the Other World)
- Rhiannon (associated with the Gaulish Epona, goddess of horses and fertility)
- Math (son of Mathonwy, chthonic order?)
- Govannon (smith)

These characters display some much attenuated mythic qualities:

- Aranrhod
- Gwydion (a wizard or trickster)
- Lleu (possible analogue to Lugh)

Of the divisions of the year, the Welsh maintained the major divisions of Samhain and Beltain.