



## Who Were the Tuatha Dé Danann Lesson Transcript

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Who were the Tuatha Dé Danann? Of all the characters of Irish mythology, it is the Tuatha De Danann that attract the most interest, speculation and rumour. We hear them described as being like men, only with godlike abilities. The performers of great feats and deeds. We hear them described as masters of magic with the power to command the weather, summon spectres, the heal, to feed and even raise the dead after battle. They come to Ireland mysteriously.

One account describes magical mist floating on the sky. More sober accounts say that they set their ships on fire to prevent retreat, the smoke being a more rational explanation for the magical mist. But no matter what way we choose to look at the Tuatha De Danann, we cannot escape the altogether mystical and otherworldly nature of this group of beings in Irish mythology.

When they came to Ireland, they first settled on Iron Mountain Sliabh an Irainn, in County Leitrim, and they concealed their presence with a magical mist. They brought four magical artefacts to Ireland from the four mythical island cities of Murias, Filias, Gorias and Findias.

These magical artefacts were Coir na Dagda, or the Cauldron of the Dagda, who was the "good god" and the father god of the Tuatha De Danann. And this cauldron never emptied, no matter how much was eaten from it. There was the Gae Bolga, a magical spear or sleg, which belonged to the god Lugh. No battle could be sustained against it.

It entered the body at one point and made 30 wounds inside and was used by Cu Chulainn when Lugh, in the form of his divine father, appeared to help him defeat the men of Ireland. In the Táin Bó Cúailnge epic. They brought an Claiomh Solais, the Sword of Light, which belonged to Nuada, who was the king of the Tuatha De Danann when they arrived in Ireland.

And finally they brought that famous an Lia Fáil, the Stone of Destiny, which let out a scream whenever a rightful king placed his foot upon it and was housed for a time on Cnoc Temhair, the Hill of Tara, in County Meath, which was an ancient focal point of Irish rule.

There are a few different theories about the meaning of their name, but it is most commonly accepted to mean the "peoples of the goddess Danu", as this was the name used by the



mediaeval, Gaelic literati, to refer to the old prechristian gods. The words Tuatha De Danann have been translated as people from the word tuath of the goddess from the word dé, and Danu from the word Danann. This Danu, sometimes Dana or Anna or Anu, was a primordial murder goddess of the Tuatha Dé Danann.

As far as India and as ancient as the Rig Vedas. We find mention of a primordial goddess of the same name, Danu, mother of a demonic serpent being called Ritra, who kept the waters of the world captive until he was defeated by Indra. Potential links can also be drawn with the Roman Diana, goddess of nature, the hunt and the moon, and the Greek Dion who was an ancient Titanus, a wife of Zeus and whose very name simply means goddess. Further comparisons have also been made to Danu- in River Danube which housed many Celtic settlements along its basin.

All of this which suggests that the Tuatha Dé Danann were a group of early migrants to Ireland and whose knowledge and skill was advanced compared to that of the native inhabitants and it was advanced to the point that they were perceived to be more than men the bringers of order, farming, art and higher civilization.

The following quote is taken from Seamus McManus's story of the Irish Race" "Such a great people were the denim and so uncommonly skilled in the few arts of their time that they dazzled even their conquerors and successors the Milesians into regarding them as mighty magicians. Later generations of the Malaysians to whom were handed down the wonderful traditions of the wonderful people they had conquered, lifted them into a mystic realm, their greatest ones becoming gods and goddesses who supplied to their successors a beautiful mythology. Most conquerors come to despise the conquered, but here they came to honour, almost to worship those whom they had subdued. Which proves not only greatness in the conquered, but also bigness of mind and distinctiveness of character in the conquerors. The De Danann skill in the arts and crafts, in course of time immortalised itself in beautiful legends among the Milesians." End quote.

All this works its way nicely into another interpretation of the name Tuatha Dé Danann. As I just mentioned, the word tuath means "a people," something like a tribe or race or country or in another sense a social order. The word dé means a god or a goddess, or spiritual or divine, but the word Dhanan in this alternative theory has been interpreted to connect to the word dan or dana, meaning poetry and suggestive of skill in art and craft.

From this view the Tuatha, Dé Danann are a group of people who introduced a new advanced social order, the tuath; and spirituality the dé; and art, poetry and craft that is high-culture, the dana, to Ireland. In other places they are sometimes described as the fer dea meaning men of the goddess, the ever-living ones because they were immortal the ace she because they were the people of the hills or of the hollow hills, who are the fairies we



hear of in the Irish fireside stories, they are called the Fer Trí nDia or the men of tree gods, in some of the sagas; and later this same term Fer Trí nDia would come to describe the Christian missionaries who sought to propagate the concept of a Christian religion based on a triune godhead among the native people. And since Danu had only three sons Brían, Iuchar, and Iuchabhar, it is taught that the tree gods in Fer Trí nDia is in reference to these three sons.

The sovereignty of the Tuatha Dé Danann over Ireland would later be challenged and the kingship seized by a new wave of migrants known as the Milesians; who also had druids and magic, poetry and laws, and whose lineages would continue to rule Ireland for years to come. Having landed on the island, the invaders were met by three goddesses of the Tuatha Dé Danann: Eriu, Banba and Fodla, who were the wives of the last three kings of the Tuatha Dé Danann and as goddesses symbolised the sovereignty of the land.

Each one uttered a blessing and asked the Milesians to name the island after herself if they were successful in battle. Eriu became the dominant name up until the current day, where we see Ireland rendered as Éire in Gaelic, but we also find the names Banba and Fodla as affectionate and poetic references to Ireland. The Milesians finally conquered the Tuatha Dé Danann at the Battle of Tailtiu, at a place near the Hill of Tara.

Once defeated, Amarghín, who was the chief druid of the Milesians, had the responsibility of dividing the island between the two factions. He cunningly allotted the land above ground to the Milesians and the land below ground to the Tuatha Dé Danann variant on this tale has the Tuatha Dé Danann assembling at Brú na Bóinne after their defeat, to hold council led by Manannán mac Lir.

Having debated their predicament, they chose Bodb Dearg, the son of the Dagda, as their new king and they decided to scatter themselves to the eternal land of the other world. Under the hills of Ireland, the principal figures of the Tuatha Dé Danann established their otherworldly palaces, or brú, within prominent mounds, many of which still exist to this day. Some of the key characters make appearances as gods and goddesses in both the Ulster and Fenian cycles, sometimes taking the form of a divine parent or appearing to lend guidance or support to a warrior in need.

But it's important to note that they are not worshipped as gods and goddesses in a religious sense in the other cycles. In some cases, human remains have even been found inside the passages of these mounds, leading archaeologists to interpret them as burial mounds, passage tombs or tumulai. Sometimes they are called fairyforts, and they were known as 'sidhe' in the native tongue. The people who lived there were the 'Aes Sidhe' or 'Daoine Sidhe', that is, the 'People of the Sidhe' or the 'People of the Hills'.



Their otherworldly domains are known by the names like the Land of the Young, the Plain of Honey, the Many Coloured Land, the Delightful Plain and The Promised Land. Whatever we can say of these strange characters and the worlds they inhabit, it is from this realm that Ireland draws her deep wealth of fairy, folklore, storytelling and superstition.

While it is almost dead among younger generations, belief in the fairies never really went away. Among a certain type of elderly country people, a sort which is now becoming increasingly rare in modern Ireland, it should be clear by now that these fairies are not the wish-granting, nice fairies. The tinkerbells are fairy godmothers that we see in Disney movies. In fact, the people had a deep fear of the fairies. They held superstitious beliefs about them and would go out of their way not to anger or upset them.

The Reverend John O'Hanlon wrote on the topic of the native Irish belief in the fairy folk in his article titled Fairy Beliefs, Irish Folklore, saying they were regarded by the peasantry to partake of a mixed human and spiritual nature. He continues quote: "Although invisible to men, particularly during the day, they hear and see all that takes place among mortals in which they have any special concern. Hence the peasantry is always anxious to secure their good opinion and kind offices and to propitiate or avert their anger by civil conversational practises. Fairies are always mentioned with respect and reserve. It is also considered inhuman to strain potatoes or spill hot water on or over the threshold of a door, as thousands of spirits are supposed to congregate invisibly at such a spot and would suffer from that infliction. Before drinking, a peasant would often spill a small portion of his draught on the ground as a complementary libation to the good people." End quote.

While we see here that the people sometimes called them an Daoine Maithe, or the good people, this was done so out of fear of the fairies, in case the fairies might be listening and not because they were taught to be actually benevolent. In some accounts it is portrayed that Tuatha Dé Danann, the fairies, hate the men of Ireland for having driven them out of their worldly kingdom into the hills, which draws a parallel with the fallen angels of the Bible and the Djinn of Islam.

Mounds and tullochs were believed to be fairy forts and are still called so to this day. These were the otherworldly and magical domains of the fairies. Strange things are said to happen around them. Animals would not approach them, for example, and people dare not enter near them and farmers dare not level them because of the fear of the wrath of the sidhe dwelling inside.

Perhaps the most well-known of the sidhe is that infamous Gaelic omen, the banshee, which literally means the woman-sidhe or 'woman person of the hills', a 'woman fairy'. Her wailing scream is said to be a portent of death to those who hear it, but traditionally she visits only certain Gaelic families. Following the logic of the word banshee, expert in Celticology and



mythology Peter Berrisford Ellis has speculated that the "fairy" may derive from fear-sidhe, which would mean a 'man sidhe,' or a 'man person of the hills', or a 'man fairy', a fear-sidhe, or a fairy. Incidentally, he considers that the word pixie could similarly derive from a reference to depicts a mysterious Prescottic race in Habit of North Britain who could be picked she's or pixies.

Regardless of what we think of all this, the fairies, which are the minimised descendants of the Tuatha Dé Danann were thought to be real and this had a significant influence on the beliefs and therefore the actions of the people who held to the superstitions. And of all of the fairy beliefs, the belief in the concept of the changeling was perhaps the most chilling and extreme.

There was a deep fear that the fairies would snatch away a child or a relative and replace them with one of their own, an impostor. The belief was so strong and the fear so deep that it sometimes even led to the murder of children or relatives who were thought to be changelings.

In 1895, Bridget Cleary was burnt to death by her husband Michael and others who were convinced she had been replaced by a changeling. Since his true wife had been snatched away and replaced by the fairies, Michael believed he was just killing the evil changeling who had replaced his wife. Michael Cleary was found guilty of manslaughter and spent 15 years in prison. An old Irish nursery rhyme reads: "Are you a witch or are you a fairy or are you the wife of Michael Cleary?" Changelings have been the subject of stories, songs, poems and nightmares for a long time. It was the main theme of W.B. Yeats's poem The Stolen Child.