

Fódla, and our Relationship with the Land

By Linda Costello

Overview

The goddess, Fódla, is one of the three sovereignty goddesses of Ireland, the other two being her sisters, Banba and Ériu. They are the daughters of Emmas of the Tuatha Dé Danann. They are married to the three kings of Tara, who are also sons of the Dagda. MacCecht, also known as 'Son of Plough,' is the husband of Fodla. MacCuill, or 'Son of Hazel,' and MacGréine, or 'Son of the Sun,' are the other two kings and husbands to Banba and Ériu.¹

According to one source, when the sons of Mil came to the island, each of the three sisters wanted their name to be the name of Ireland, and they all exacted a promise from the Milesians that the island would be named after her.² Although Ériu is best known as Éire, the other two names are sometimes used interchangeably.³ Another source says that Fódla was given the honor of choosing the name for Ireland by Amergin, one of the Gaels (sons of Mil).⁴

The Taking of Ireland

The Sons of Mil came from Spain, looking for a land that was related to their own Iberia, believing that the land of Hibernia, which is the Latin name for Ireland, was it. They landed on the southwest portion of the island on May 1st, the feast of Beltane. This occasion has lived on in the words of Amergin, the poet, who sang the following song when he stepped foot upon the land.

*I am an estuary into the sea
I am a wave of the ocean.
I am the sound of the sea.
I am a powerful ox.
I am a hawk on a cliff.
I am a dewdrop in the sun.
I am a plant of beauty.
I am a boar for valour.
I am a salmon in a pool.
I am a lake in a plain.
I am the strength of art.⁵*

After challenging and defeating the Tuatha Dé Danann, the sons of Mil headed out to Tara and came upon the three goddesses, Banba, Fódla, and Ériu, who each received a promise that the island would be named after her. As Amergin was a fili, he knew that Ériu's would be the most prominent name and told her so. As a result, she predicted that the Sons of Mil, later known as the Gaels, would be the dominant people of Ireland for all time.

The Sons of Mil continued on to Tara where they met the three kings of the Tuatha Dé Danann, who also happened to be the husbands of the three goddesses. The Milesians tried to get the kings to surrender the land, but the kings left the terms to Amergin, who decided that the Sons of Mil would retire beyond the ninth wave. However, when they tried to land again, the Tuatha Dé Danann conjured up a druidic wind that kept them from reaching the shore. Amergin, however, was able to talk directly to the land, and cause the wind to be diverted, so that the Milesians could land. They finally defeated the Tuatha Dé Danann at Taitiu, the site of the festival of Lugh.⁶

Sacred Union with the Land

Amergin was the pivotal character in this mythology in the way that he appeased the triad of sovereignty goddesses, and therefore managed to make a claim on the land which he could command when needed. The fact that the three goddesses were married to the three kings of Tara is a direct expression of the theme of the personification of the land as a goddess who is joined in

marriage to her rightful king, and is again echoed in Amergin's ability to unite with the land in a way to save himself as well as most of his people.

Being married to the land in a sacred union is a theme that runs throughout ancient Celtic mythology. The goddess as divine mother and personification of the land is attested in Gaul and may even have preceded the Celts in Ireland. The divine folk, the Tuatha Dé Danann, were said to have descended from the mother goddess, Danu, also referred to Anu, who was the goddess of prosperity, wealth, and fertility. It is apparent that such a goddess would represent the abundance and riches of the land.

There are also goddesses of place with similar roles. For example, Áine had a place in county Limerick and other goddesses were known in other places. Found in Irish tales throughout the centuries, such relationships implied that, with sacred offerings, these goddesses could make the crops to grow and the herds to multiply. These often dominant goddesses were worthy of respect and honor.

In order to uphold this sacred union with the land, we continue to offer grain in a renewal of our pact, so that any assembled folk can remember our shared responsibility of being environmentally aware and maintaining a good, healthy relationship with the land upon which we all live and move and have our beings.

-Linda Costello, March 2007

¹ From Pagan Celtic Britain, by Anne Ross, p. 54

² From Dictionary of Celtic Myth and Legend, edited by Miranda Green, page 100

³ From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/F%C3%B3dla>

⁴ From Encyclopedia Mythica: <http://www.pantheon.org/articles/f/fodla.html>

⁵ From Celtic Mythology, by Proinsias McCana, p. 64

⁶ From Celtic Mythology, by Proinsias McCana, p. 64