

# THE BIRTH AND YOUTHFUL EXPLOITS OF FIONN

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Thugadh an sgeul seo sìos bho Dhomhnall Mac Phàrlain as Dìscig, Eilean Mhuile air an 26amh la de'n Og Mhios, 1953. Chuala eisean an sgeul bho chionn fhichead bliadhna roimhe sin bho Dhomhnall Mac an Tòisich de mhuinntir Loch Baghasdail an Uibhist a' Chinn a Deas, a bha an uair sin ag obair an tigh-òsta Bhuineasain ann am Muile. Tha Domhnall Mac an Tòisich marbh an nis.

'S e rìch † a bh' ann a's na seann timeannan air ais. Cha ghau(bh)adh e mara(bh)adh ach ann an aon àite: bha sin ball-dòbhrain a bha fo'n chich dheas aige, mar a bheir iad a's a' Bheurla *birthmark*. Is an oidhche a phòs e, bha fear 'ga fhaireadh ris an abradh iad Arc(hc)a Dubh. Is 'n uair a shuair e a chothrom feadh na h-oidhche, thàinig e agus mharabh e e. 'S e Cumhall a bh' air a' rìch. Is nan éireadh a mach gum bitheadh mac(hc) aig a' bhean aige, bha e fhéi' ri mhara(bh)-adh—'s e thigeadh air a' chrùn an àite athar. Dé dh' éirich a mach gu robh mac(hc) agus nighean ann. Am boireannach a bha a' frithealadh air a' bhean thog i leithe 'm balach ann am basgaid agus dh' fholabh i leis gu taobh aibhneadh ann a sin. Agus rinn i bothag dhi fhéi' suas ann a sin is bha i ann a sin leis. Is bha toll mór uisge air bialu na bothaig' is a chuile maduinn, 'n uair a dh' éireadh i, bha i 'ga fhalc(hc)adh ann a sin. Bha e a sin a' snàmh mar gum bitheadh ann ròn. Bha e a' fàs 'na fhomhaire a chuile latha. Bha i seo latha a' dol a staich far a robh a mhàthair, is dh' fhàg i 'n cù a staich leis is thug i cràimh dha-san a bhith 'ga chumail soc(hc)rach gus an tilleadh i. Ach bhuail an iomaguin i gu faodadh an cù tòisinn air a' chràimh a thoirst bhuaidh agus gun gearradh e e. Agus thill i. Is 'n uair a thill i, bha an cù aige air a thoirst 'na cheithir pìosan air urlar na bothaig'.

“*Well, ma ta,*” thuirst ise, “*fola-a tusa liom-s' a màireach agus chì do mhàthair thu.*”

Dh' fholabh iad. Is bha i a' dol seachad air loch ann a sin

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† Final *dh, gh* becomes *ch* after slender vowels in this narrator's dialect.

is bha na sgoilearan a mach air snàmh is chan fhac(hc)aig esan na b' iomachuidh na dol a mach as an déich. Is bha e a' brcith air chùl cinn orra is 'gan càradh fodha is bha e a' cur an eanachainn asta ri *bottom* a' loch. Agus ghlaoich i ris tighinn air tìr cho luath 's a bh' aige, chionn gun tigeadh iad ri bheatha—mhothaich na daoine dha. Thàinig e air tìr is a mach ghabh e fhéi' is i fhéi'. Is bha ise a' fàs sgìth agus rug e air dha lurgainn oirre is thilg e air a ghualainn i agus tharrainn e. Agus bha e a sin a' dol 'ro' choillich agus thug e sùil agus cha robh aige dhith ach an da lorga. Agus thilg e a mach air loch ann a sin iad agus 's e Loch nan Lorgann a th' air a sin gus an latha an diu. Tha sin an àit' eigin mu thuath. Dh' fhaoite gum bi fhios agaibh-se cà bheil e. Co dhiubh, bha e a' gabhail air aghaich a sin agus an t-ac(hc)ras a' tighinn air, agus thàinig e air fear ann a sin agus e ag iasgach bhreac(hc) air abhainn. Agus dh' iarr e breac(hc) air.

“*Well*, chan fhaich thu a' fear seo,” ors esan. “Tha e mór. Tha e mór ach gheibh thu, dh' fhaoite, an ath-fhear.”

Is a's a' bhruidhinn a bh' ac(hc)a, fhuair e fear air an dubhan agus thug e dha e, do Fionn.\*

“Dé tha thu a' dol a dhèanamh ris a nis?” ors esan.

“Tha mi a' dol a dh' fhadadh teine,” ors esan.

“*Well*,” ors esan, “cuir a suas teine,” ors esan, “ach ma leumas spriod,” ors esan, “de'n teine air a' bhreac(hc),” ors esan, “thig mi ri d' bheatha.”

Is bha na biorain a' spriodadh—tha fhios agat agus leum spriod air a' bhreac(hc) agus dh' éirich bolg dubh air. Stob e a chorrage ann agus loisg e i agus chuir e 'na bhial i. Agus fhuair e fiosachd.

“Is tusa,” ors esan, “Arc(hc)a Dubh.”

“Is mi,” ors esan.

“Is tusa a mharabh Cumhall.”

“Is mi.”

“Dé a' seòl mara(bh)aich a rinn thu air?” thuirst esan.

“O, sgiamhadh e,” orsa esan, “mar gum bitheadh muc(hc) agus ròic(hc)eadh e mar gum bitheadh torc(hc)!”

“Seadh dìreach!” ors esan. “Théid a chearst-leithid a dhèanamh or'-sa is cha bhi an ùine fada.”

Chuir e a chorrage 'na bhial a rithist agus fhuair e an ath-fhiosachd, gu robh an claidheamh a bh' aig athair air a thiodhlacadh seachd troighean 'o'n urlar. Agus ghabh e a staich ann a sin agus chladhaich e agus fhuair e an claidheamh.

\* *Sic.*

Agus mharabh an claidheamh sin naoi naoidheannan a null agus naoi naoidheannan a nall, far am bu tiugha iad bu taine iad agus far am bu taine iad bu luath-sgaoilteach iad agus far am bu luath-sgaoilteach iad bu ghoirst-mhara(bh)aicht' iad. Agus mharabh e Arc(hc)a Dubh.

Agus bha cù mór a staich air a robh Bran. Agus 'n uair a chunnaic e an claidheamh, chrath e e fhéi' agus chuir e peic(hc) de luath as gach cliathaich dheth fhéi' agus tharrainn e a mach le Fionn. Is dh' fholabh a fhéi' is Fionn ann a sin. Is thàinig iad ann a sin ann a' comhdhail mhór a bh' ann a sin, móran de dhaoine ann a sin agus iad aig siopair mhór. Chaich esan a staich is ghabh té de na boireannaich a bh' ann a sin *notion* dheth. Is bha beothach sònruichte a' tighinn aig amannan 'san oidhche is dh' fheumadh i duine fhaotainn air son icheadh. Is bha iad ag cur chrann có air a thigeadh folabh. 'S ann aire-san a thàinig an crann an oidhche seo. Ach an té a ghabh a' *notion* dheth, b' fhearr leithe a bràthair a leigeil air folabh na esan. Co dhiubh, thuirst esan:

"Fola-a mi fhìn ma gheallas sibh gun cum sibh Bran air an *t-chain*."

Dh' fholabh e is thug e leis an claidheamh is bha e a' dol ann an aghaich a' bheothaich uamhasaich a bh' ann a seo. Is 'n uair a bha e dìreach a' *stepadh* a staich 'na bial, bhris Bran an *t-chain* is bha e a staich leis, as a dhéich. Reub e 'roimpe gus an d'thàinig e a mach air a' cheann eile dhith is thàinig Bran a mac is cha robh ròine fionnaich air.

Agus thill e agus thuirst e riucha \* car son a leig iad ma réir an cù. Agus thuirst iad nach b' urra dhaibh a ghléidheil.

"*Well*," ors esan, "feuma sibh an dath a bh' air a chur air air ais."

"Dé," ors esan, "an dath a bh' air?"

"Casan buidhe a bh' air Bran

Le da thaobh dhubh agus tarr geal,

Druim uaine cu na seilige,

Cluasan corrach, comhdhearag."

Sin agaibh an dath a bh' air Bran. Co dhiubh a bha a' naidheachd fìor 'us nach robh, sin agaibh mar a tha i agam-s'.

\* *Sic*.

*The Birth and Youthful Exploits of Fionn*  
*English Translation*

The following story was recorded on 26th June 1953 from Donald MacFarlane, Dishig, Isle of Mull. He heard the story twenty years ago from Donald MacIntosh, a native of Lochboisdale, Isle of South Uist, who was then employed at Bunessan Hotel, Isle of Mull. Donald MacIntosh is now dead.

There was a king who lived away back in the olden times. There was only one part of his body where he could be killed and that was a mole that was under his right nipple, a birthmark, as they say in English. And the night he got married there was a man called Black Arca guarding him. And when he got his chance during the night, he came and killed him. Cumhall was the king's name. And if it should be that his wife bore a son, he also was to be killed—he would succeed to the throne in his father's place. It did happen that there was a son and daughter. The woman who attended the wife brought the son with her in a basket and went with him to the bank of a river that was there. And she built up a bothy for herself there and there she stayed with him. And there was a great hole full of water in front of the bothy and every morning, when she got up, she bathed him in it. He would swim there as if he were a seal. As the days went by he grew up to be a giant. One day she was going to see his mother and she left the hound in along with him and she gave the boy a bone to keep him quiet until she came back. But she became worried that the hound might start taking the bone from him and bite him. And she turned back. And when she returned, he had the hound torn in four pieces on the floor of the bothy.

“Well now,” said she, “you will go with me to-morrow and your mother will see you.”

Away they went. And she was passing by a loch that was there and the scholars were out swimming, and he saw nothing better than to go into the water after them. And he caught each of them by the back of the head and sent them under and knocked their brains out on the bottom of the loch. And she called to him to come ashore as quickly as he could, for they would take his life—the people saw him. He came ashore and off they went, himself and herself. And she became tired and he caught her by the two legs and threw her over his

shoulder and away he sped. And he was passing through a wood and he took a look behind him and he had nothing left of her but the two shanks. And he threw them into a loch there and it is called the Loch of the Shanks to this day. It is in some place in the north. Perhaps you know where it is. However, he went on his way and hunger was coming upon him, and he fell in with a man there who was fishing salmon on a river. And he asked him for a salmon. "Well, you will not get this one," said he. "It is large. It is large but perhaps you will get the next one."

And, as they spoke, he caught one on the hook and he gave it to him, to Fionn.

"What are you going to do with it now?" said he.

"I am going to kindle a fire," said he.

"Well," said he, "kindle a fire," said he, "but if a spark of fire," said he, "alights on the salmon," said he, "I will have your life."

And the twigs were giving off sparks—you know—and a spark fell on the salmon and a black lump arose on it. He stuck his finger on it and burned the finger and put it in his mouth. And he got knowledge.

"You," said he, "are Black Arca."

"I am," said he.

"It was you who killed Cumhall."

"It was I."

"What manner of death did you give to him?" said he.

"Oh, he squealed like a sow," said he, "and bellowed like a boar!"

"Indeed!" said he. "The very same will be done to you and the time is not far off."

He put his finger in his mouth again and another piece of knowledge was revealed to him, that his father's sword was buried seven feet under the floor. And in he went there and dug and got the sword. And that sword smote nine nines in front of it and nine nines behind it, where they were thickest they were thinnest and where they were thinnest they were swiftly scattered and where they were swiftly scattered they were sorely slain. And he slew Black Arca.

And there was a great hound within called Bran. And when he saw the sword, he shook himself and cast a peck of ashes from each of his flanks and out he dashed along with Fionn. Away he and Fionn went then. And thereupon they came to a large gathering that was there, many people at a

great supper. He went in and one of the women there took a notion for him. And a certain monster used to come at times during the night and it had to get a human being to eat. And they cast lots to decide who should go. It was to his lot that it fell that night. But the woman who had taken a notion for him would rather that her own brother went. However, he said: "I myself shall go, if you promise to keep Bran on the leash."

He went and brought the sword with him and set out to face this terrible monster. And when he was on the point of stepping into its mouth, Bran broke the chain and in he went at Fionn's heels. Fionn cut his way through the monster until he came out at the other end, and out came Bran and there was not a hair of his coat on him.

And he returned and asked them why they let the dog go, and they said that they could not restrain him.

"Well," said he, "you must restore his colour to him."

"What," said he, "was his colour?"

"Yellow legs had Bran.

With two black flanks and white belly,

The green back of the hunting dog,

Ears erect, each as red as the other."

That was the colour Bran was. And whether the tale is true or not, that is how I have it.

The above is a Scottish folk-version of *Macgnímartha Find*; cf. edition by Kuno Meyer in *Rev. Celtique* V, p. 195 *et seq.* For other Irish versions see *Béaloides* I, pp. 405-10; III, pp. 187-95; VI, pp. 40-3. For references to further Scottish and Irish variants see Duilearga, *Leabhar Sheáin Í Chonail*, p. 427.

I have recorded two other Scottish variants (a) Barra—John MacNeil, Eoligarry, November 1947, (b) Benbecula—John Archie Currie, Ardchuig, February 1950. I also recorded five other variants from Inveran, County Galway for the Irish Folklore Commission.