

This Is The Cause Of The Expulsion Of The Déssi To Munster And The Violent Death Of Cormac

[1]1. Why was Cormac partially blinded in Tara? It is not difficult [to relate].

There was a fierce man of the Déssi of Mag Breg, namely Óengus Gaíbúaibthech, that is a virulent spear with chains on it [were] three chains [with] three persons on each chain it is on this account he used to be called Óengus Gaíbúaibthech, namely he used to take vengeance for family insults; that is, wherever murder of kindred used to be committed or intolerable oppression used to be inflicted on helpless individuals he would not desist until he achieved revenge.

2. Cellach son of Conaire bore off the daughter of his brother, namely Forrach daughter of Sorath, that is the son of Artchorp. At that time Óengus was avenging a family insult in the province of Connaught. Eogan goes to Óengus.

“Óengus,” he said, “the son of Cormac is too much of a relative for me.”

“Be off with you to your home!” Óengus said. “For I shall not get to him until I accomplish the thing for which I came [here]”.

3. After slaying the band that had perpetrated the murder of kindred, Oengus thereupon came early in the morning, weary [and] hungry as he was, to a woman, while all alone she was preparing food for a gang of laborers.

“A drink and a bite for me, woman,” he said, “since I am thirsty [and] hungry”.

“Your work,” she said, “is not more deserving than is the work of the people whose food this is”.

What Óengus was doing irked the woman.

"Your profession," she said, "is an evil one to be afflicting Ireland and to be forsaking your honor for food". "I deem it more likely," she added, "that you would ravish a lone woman than that you would avenge an outrage to your brother."

Anger seizes him, and he devours the eight loaves. He puts his hands under the pail and raises it, and the woman did not succeed in preventing him. The woman begins to revile him. He lifts the churn and delivers a blow on the woman's head so that he killed her. Wrath and fury take hold [of him], and he comes out. Two javelins happen to be in both parts of his hair so that his hair on his head became dishevelled

4. Thereupon he made for Tara.

"I see," the watchman said, "a rough grey-bearded warrior with big calves and [with] a huge spear on his back, and I observe an angry look on him."

"Óengus is he," Cormac said, "and let heed be taken of him".

Along with Óengus [was] his fosterson, namely Corc Duibne son of Coirpre Múse son of Conaire son of Eterscél . He was in hostageship from among the men of Munster in the custody of Cormac. In the house of Óengus the men of Munster pledged their hostages to his compassion. Óengus went then into the royal dwelling in which Cormac was. Cellach, however, was not unmindful of Óengus. He goes until he was between Cormac and the wall.

"What brings you there, lad?" Oengus said, as he gave a thrust [of the spear] into his breast so that the spear lodged in the wattling on the further side of him. As he drew the spear out of the boy's breast, a link of the chain struck across Cormac's eye so that it split in two in his head. The butt-end of the spear hit against the forehead of the steward, namely Sétna mac Blaí, so that it went back through his head . At the same time, the boy and the steward, namely Sétna mac Blaí, fell, and the eye of Cormac was shattered. Óengus was not apprehended so that he reached his house, and he slew nine of Cormac's champions as they were pursuing him . With him [was] his fosterson, namely Corc Duibne, and he absconded from hostageship.

5. From that time, accordingly, Cormac did not go into Tara, for it is not lawful for a king with a blemish [to be] therein; and in Achall by Tara, where today is Scrín Cholaim Chille, he dwelt. In the following year, moreover, Cormae suffered a violent death in Tech Cletig.

6. Now the Déssi gave seven battles then to Cormac, and the Déssi were defeated. In the end the superior numbers (?) of the men of Ireland with Cormac were stronger. Even so, the race of the Déssi was good, namely the offspring of Fíacha Suigde son of Fedelmid Rechtaid son of Túathal Techtmar. At Duma Dór the women of the Déssi then bade farewell to Tara; that is, they shed tears of blood at parting forever from Tara, namely from their land and from their country. Then the wife of Oengus recited these quatrains:

"Hail to the Hill of Tara

And to the pleasant Boyne abounding in salmon!
Besmirched, my heart breaks
From grief for the Assembly of Tailtiu.

The death of Cellach, its consequence is not trivial,
And the shattering of Cormac's eye,
The death of the steward by the spear,
And the violent death of the nine,

Parting [also] from Tara rich in hosts
And from Cormac of the fair skin.
We shall leave the land of Tailtiu in the east;
Behind us we leave our transgression".

In Mag Inir, then, the last battle was waged.

"This battle is now stern," Cormac said. "Mag Inir shall be forever the name of the plain."

7. Thereafter the Déssi went until they were at Ard na nDéssi in Mag Liphí, whereupon the Leinstermen arose from every side to seize that territory from them. They made a settlement with them, and they took the daughter of the king of Leinster, namely Ethne Úathach, in fosterage. A promise had been made to them that in remuneration territory and land would be accorded to them and that they would settle [there]. Flesh of infants used to be given to her so that by providing sustenance they soon attained possession

8. Thereafter, they were contending against Dúnlang king of Leinster and against numerous other races throughout Ireland, in the course of which their strong men and their champions fell. Many battles indeed Óengus and Core Duibne then waged. Óengus thereupon fell in Leinster [fighting] against the sons of Coirpre Lifechair, namely Fíacha Srobtine and Echaid Domlén and Eochu in Chacaid, [who were intent] on revenge for Cellach [and for the blinding] of Cormac's eye.

The Déssi therefore went until they were in the south of Leinster, that is, Tír Áesa na Immirge. Then they proceeded eastwards over the sea at Miledach, where they built a thousand houses and whence Miledach is named. After that, they went westwards beside the sea until they reached Tech nDuinn beyond Ireland. Core Duibne thereupon recited these quatrains:

"Noble Óengus, let us settle here.
From mighty Tara with [its] ranks of hosts
There was promised, it seems to me,
Long since that we should come here.

The king of bounty Cormac Ua Cuinn
Has expelled you from Tara of the hosts
He has set you naked by Tech nDuinn;
Till death, he has parted you from Leth Cuinn.

It is Donn's dwellings that you see yonder,
Against which the monster of the sea roars.
Bad weather strikes against the sides of Tech nDuinn.
Do not be standing, but sit down".

9. "Here I was reared," Core Duibne said. "Let us dwell here"

For Coirpre Múse son of Conaire, of whom are [descended] the Múscraige of Munster, it is he who had begotten him on his sister, that is on Duihind daughter of Conaire when he was king of Munster. Their crops were the worse [for it].

"The wrongdoing of the prince causes this," Coirpre said "What I have committed is incest(?). Is there aught [that will ensue] therefrom?"

"Yes, two sons, namely Corc and Cormac".

At one birth they were born. One of them had reddened the other in the womb of their mother.

"Let them be burned," the men of Munster said, "so that the disgrace may not be in the land."

"Let be given to me," the druid who was in the encampment said, "that Core there so that I may bring him out of Ireland in order that the disgrace may not be there".

10. Corc was given to him, and he and his hag bore him into an island, and he composed these quatrains:

"O revered Corc, due to you were
The kingship of Munster with great fame
From Coirpre Muse who practiced poetry,
From Conaire, [and] from Eterscél.

May you be valiant [and] heroic,
O Corc, [ruling] over Banba's regions.
Though you have been adjudged to be burnt,
Your brave offspring will be numerous.

O crone, accept in your care
The grandson of the very warlike [and] very noble king.
His hour of victory will be illustrious;
His rewards will be abundant.

Every wood, every forest, every domain,
Every moor, every plain besides native land,
Every man who arises in his goodly residence—
It is to the princely person that it is due".

The name of the crone [was] Boí, and they had a white, red-eared cow . Every morning, while on the back of the cow, Core used to be given an ablution. On that same day a year later, the cow then sprang from them into the sea and turned into a rock in the ocean, for the heathen sorcery of the boy had gone upon her. The name of the rock [was] Bó Boí, and the name of the island [was] Inis Boí.

11. Thereafter, the boy was brought back into Ireland.

“Take your grandson to your bosom, Sárait,” Boi said to the daughter of Conn Cétchathach.

[Sárait replied:]

“O Boí,
So long as lie may be [alive], I will not love the grandson”.

Boí replied:

“Though you might not like it, you shall have The son of your daughter, the son of your son”.

“I say, though you take [him]
Into your bosom, you shall not deem it grievous,
O queen, that you take
The son of your daughter, the son of your son”.

“The son of my son I do not love
On account of intercourse with my daughter.
His legitimacy I do not assume
From my son, though I am much grieved”

“O Sárait, O lovely woman,
Good [is] the deed that Coirpre wrought.
Two sons [he has] by the noble lady.
For the men of Ireland it is [all] the better”.

“Good [is] the infant that is in your care,
The son of my daughter — good is the meeting.
His deeds will be very puissant, so it seems;
I announce and proclaim [it]”.

Then Sárait said to Boí, that is, to the nurse of her grandson:

“My two Sons,
To love them were not right—
Coirpre Muse for going to his sister,
Coirpre Niad for outraging me (that is, as regards the slaying of Nemed).”

For she was outraged by Coirpre Rigfota as regards the slaying of her husband while she was protecting him, named Nemed mac Srobchinn in the battle of Grutine when Ingcél who had been under the protection of Nemed, was killed; and both fell in the battle of Grutine by the three sons of Conaue in avenging [the death] of their father on Ingcél. Their mother was beside Nemed, and Coirpre Rigfota slew [him] while she was protecting him so that on that account she recited these quatrains:

“O Coirpre, I loved you
Until the day that you outraged me.
Not good is your hue
On account of the one whom you have assailed

Your offspring were fit.
Though reproaches might occur
They used not to experience difficulties.
You, O friend, shall not follow their way!”

12. Now it is that Corc who had come from the east with the Déssi. Corc remained in the south. The Déssi were roaming from each place to the next from the time of Cormac to the time of Óengus Nad Fraích. Their druids said to them that they would not get rest except by fostering the daughter of the king of Leinster so that this is why they took Ethne, that is Úathach, in fosterage unto themselves. Flesh of infants used to be given to her in order that it might be the quicker that Ethne, that is the daughter of Crimthann, should grow up.

“Let us remain here,” Core said to the Déssi.

“Dwell here, and we shall go eastwards into the middle of Ireland,” [they replied].

That came to pass. They went until they were at Caisel Na Ríg. Óengus mac Nad Fraích was king of Caisel. He it is who believed in St. Patrick.

“Give me,” Óengus said, “as wife Ethne, namely your fosterling, and I shall give you land for her bridal price, that is king’s land, which is mine among the Osraige to the south of us, and you have permission to extend it at their expense”.

The girl is given to him. They go southwards into the middle of the land; but indeed for them it was not pleasant, for on each side a host was assailing them . Like boars they were among hunting dogs. On account of them, moreover, [there was] violence (?) on each side, battle every day from each side of them, [and] victory gained by them on each side. Every warrior and every robber who had come out of his land, Ethne would give gold and silver to them for assisting the Déssi.

13. Concerning the Déssi, Dil mac Uí Creca from Druim Dil, a blind druid of the Osraige, had prophesied that they would be defeated. He had a haughty daughter. She liked housekeeping. She betook herself to Ethne, [for] she used to pay visits to Ethne. The latter gave her to a man of the Déssi.

“Our consorting (?) is not good,” Ethne said. “Your father is against our family”.

“I cannot indeed do anything about it,” she replied.

“Go for me,” Ethne, namely Uathach, said, “and play a trick on him to see whether it would ward him off from us. Excellent would be your reward for it”.

“Very well,” she answered.

The girl went back to Dil.

“Whence do you come, O daughter?” lie asked.

“From the north, from Caisel,” she replied.

“Is it true that you have been in the company of that defiled Ethne in the north?” [he asked].

“It is true,” she answered.

“Well indeed!” he exclaimed.

“I have come to supply you with provisions,” she said. “For serving everyone I obtained a skin bottle of mead”.

“I shall not take that,” he said.

“I shall kindle a fire for you,” she said. “Consume [the mead] so that I may gain your blessing”.

14. Accordingly, he drinks it copiously. Thereupon he divulges his secrets.

“Evil,” he said, “is the swarm that has assailed you for your land, namely the Déssi. That is a small matter,” he added. ‘At midday tomorrow they shall depart. I am prophecying in regard to the wisp there yonder which is in my shoe that it shall be burnt tomorrow in Indéoin. They shall be on the west side in Ord so that the smoke of it shall be seen . A hornless red cow shall be let go westwards across, [and] they shall kill her at a single shout that they shall raise. They shall depart, and they shall never [again] visit this land”.

“Well,” the daughter said, “sleep when you deem it appropriate”.

Thereupon he sleeps. Meanwhile the daughter carries off the wisp of the shoe and reached Caisel before morning. With the wisp, Ethne betakes herself southwards until she reached the Déssi.

“Let this wisp be burnt,” Etlme said, “and let a hornless; red cow be brought to us”.

The cow was not found.

"Well," a druid of the Déssi said, "I shall go in the guise of the cow eastwards to be slain in return for immunity from the Déssi for my children forever".

15. Thus it is done. The cow is let go eastwards. The Osraige were then at Indéoin.

"What are the Déssi now doing?" Dil inquired.

"Burning a fire and letting a cow go over the ford from the west," the servant answered.

"That were not a lovable thing," he said. "Is the wisp in the shoe?" he asked.

"No," the servant replied.

"That indeed [is] bad," he said. "Let not the men slay the cow," he added.

They let her go past them. The grooms slay her behind his back.

"What shout [is] this, O servant?" he inquired.

"The servants slaying the cow," he answered.

"Woe is me! Fetch my chariot," he said. "From Ord is struck Indéoin. From Indéoin to the Lannin there will be no halt thereto".

That came to pass. The Déssi routed them from the west over to the other side and defeated them in the east. Thence to the Lannín they were harried so that the Lannín remains the frontier forever. Like stags thus they fled. Hence they are called Osraige, and forevermore they left the Déssi in their land.

16. After the partial blinding of Cormac, three pregnant women of Ulster went [back] to their land. These bore three sons in the north. The Ulstermen came with them from the north and they brought [them] according to hereditary right perforce onto their [own] land and onto their own soil. Those are today the Déssi of Tara.

That [is] the cause of the partial blinding of Cormac by Óengus Gaíbúaibthech in Tara.

Finit.

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