

Imbolc 2008

Welcome to the Imbolc edition of EOLAS, the magazine of Ord na Darach Gile - the Order of WhiteOak.

With the bitter cold of winter still all around for many of us, Imbolc brings a light to the darkness, and warmth to our hearth and homes. Imbolc is a time of birth and rebirth as the increasing light marks the changing of the seasons, the ending of the harshness of winter and the beginning of spring. Many people have had a very hard time over the winter months, and I would ask you all to remember others as you light your candles this year. May the blessings of Brighid be upon you.

If anyone would like to contribute to future editions of EOLAS, please send your contributions to membership@whiteoakdruids.org

Within the peace of the Oaks,
J Craig Melia – February 2008

Visit our Virtual Shrine

The Virtual Shrine Of The Goddess Brighid is dedicated to all people who are suffering and to their loved ones who are in need of help. It is also a place to celebrate and commemorate significant life passages. It is intended for the use of all People of Faith, here you may offer prayers, give thanks or write petitions within our Messages area.

We take our lead from the ancient and sacred places used by our Ancestors, those Ancient Shrines and Holy Wells that dot the landscape, allowing the traveller to give thanks and to make offering for safe journey and good fortune.

Our Blessings and Remembrance sections offer words of wisdom and prayers from many traditions, not just Celtic but also Northern Traditions, Hinduism and Buddhism.

The shrine can be viewed at www.celticheritage.co.uk/virtualshrine



The Order of WhiteOak has instituted a teaching program and system of fostership. For more details visit our website at www.whiteoakdruids.org or email us via membership@whiteoakdruids.org

Gaels and the Solstices - Sean Harbaugh

The Gael myth tells us of the four major festivals in the Gaelic year—Oimelc, Bealtainne, Lughnasadh, and Samhain. There is virtually nothing mentioned in the lore about the solstices and equinoxes, and whether these days of the year held significance to the pagan Gaels. Yet, with a little digging we can discover trace evidence that the solstices held some importance among these people. We can conclude through physical findings and filter through fragmented stories that these holidays were at least observed by local Gaelic tribes, and that the remains of these celebrations exist today.

Winter Solstice

The Irish Mythological Cycle is full of stories regarding the mounds on the Boyne (there are three by the way). Aengus Og was a featured character in these tales, especially regarding his house at Newgrange, the largest of the three. It was originally Dagda's house until Aengus, Dagda's son, tricked him out of it. The outside of this magnificent mound is covered in quartz, the inside chamber is full of inscriptions from the Bronze Age, and the interior lights up on the day of the winter solstice in brilliant fashion for only a few moments.

Myth tells us Aengus was born in this mound from an affair Dagda had with Boann. Boann, the river goddess, conceived of Aengus Og, and gave birth to him in Newgrange all in the same day—the winter solstice. One poem even describes the inside of Aengus Og's home/palace as an elaborate ensemble of gold and riches where elaborate celebrations were held. And of course, the Tuatha Da Danaan retreated to the three mounds by the Boyne River and lives on as the Sidhe. (1)

Charles Squire tells how the Irish were inside Newgrange during the Iron Age:

"The most famous of such fairy hills are about five miles from Drogheda. They are still connected with the names of the Tuatha De Danann, though they are not called their dwelling places, but their tombs. On the northern bank of the Boyne stand seventeen barrows, three of which—Knowth, Dowth, and new Grange are of great size. The last named, largest, and best preserved, is over 300 feet in diameter, and 70 feet high, while its top makes a platform 120 feet across. It has been explored, and Roman coins, gold torques, copper pins, and iron rings and knives have been found in it; but what else it contained will never be known, for, like Knowth and Dowth, it was thoroughly ransacked by Danish spoilers in the ninth century." (2)

A quote from a study that was performed that indicated that the light from the Winter Solstice was intended to shine into Newgrange:

"The mound itself has a diameter of 80 meters, with a height of 15 meters. The materials used to construct it weigh approximately 200,000 tons, at least three times the amount of materials used at the largest British sites. The passage is 19 meters long and slopes upward, containing 43 standing stones at approximately 1.5 meters in height. The chamber at the end of the passage is cruciform in shape and is 6.5 meters wide, and the corbelled roof consisting of 17 stones rises to 6 meters in height. This chamber has three small recesses, each with a basin stone, and was built in such a way to keep the inside dry, using a natural caulk and by sloping the chamber outward. This passage was also built to allow a beam of light from the rising sun into the chamber on the winter solstice. Expert studies, which began after a hypothesis was made in 1967, have shown that a sunbeam would have entered the chamber at the time of its construction, but at a width of 40 centimeters, unlike the current 17 centimeters of light. The sun will continue to enter the chamber for thousands of years to come.

"Before entering the chamber, one cannot miss the entrance stone. This megalith has five large spirals, two on one half, three on the other, with a vertical groove separating them. Additional carvings of lozenges and nested arcs cover the remaining face of the stone. Above the stone and the entrance is the roof box. This roof box was discovered in 1963 during minor excavations, and it rests on part of the passage roof. Scratch marks still remain on the base of the box, which were probably from two quartz blocks that moved in and out to open and close the slit." (3)

Although the dating of the structure goes back to the Bronze Age, it is obvious that the Iron Age Irish found the chambers significant and important culturally by the artifacts found inside the chamber. The Irish were indeed inside Newgrange and left offerings inside the chambers because of its importance as a seasonal marker--the structure was built to line up with the winter solstice.

Does it matter if the Irish explicitly acknowledged winter solstice in the Mythological Cycle? The answer is no because we can study the artifacts discovered inside the mounds on the Boyne River, and the importance these mounds held in Irish myth. It is also easy to deduce that this yearly event would hold cultural importance to these people, since the growing sun would kindle hope to a people living in the coldest and darkest time of year. There would be no other reason for Newgrange to be so embroiled in the lore.

Another pre-Iron Age marker of the midwinter is found at the stone circle at Drumbeg in County Cork, Ireland. The winter sun sets over the axial stone and shines through the two portal stones at the winter solstice. (4) This is an example of a midwinter marker in the south of Ireland—far from the mound at Newgrange. The Iron Age Irish would understand the significance of this alignment—even if they didn't construct it-- and have relied on this ancient marker of time to mark the coming of the longer days. Summer Solstice Much of the lore regarding the summer solstice or midsummer has been lost through the antiquities of time, yet there are still remnants of the importance of this time of year to the Gaels.

The Isle of Man is associated with the Sea God Manannan Mac Lir. In the Manx tale "Gilaspick Qualtrough" it is explained that Manannan Mac Lir is the patron of sailors and the Isle of Man. (5) Moore explains further that the island was founded by Manannan and "he was the first man that had Mann, or ever was ruler of Mann, and the land was named after him," and that "he reigned many years, and was a Paynim, and kept, by necromancy, the Land of Man under mists, and if he dreaded any enemies, he would make of one man to seem an hundred by his art magic, and he never had any form of the commons; but each one to bring a certain quantity of green rushes on Midsummer Eve - some to a place called Warfield (now South Barrule), and some to a place called Man, and yet is so called." (6) This tells of how people gave sacrifice to the great sea god on the summer solstice at a large hill that is said to be his burial mound. To this day there is a three-day celebration devoted to Manannan on the summer solstice on the Isle of Man every year. (7)

It is said that the first battle of Mag Tuireadh between the Tuatha and the Formorians occurred on the midsummer. In Irish myth the Tuatha under the leadership of their king Nuada defeats the Formorian king Eochaid, but loses his hand in the process. (8) This is a significant event in Irish myth. While there is no lore regarding festivals on this day, obviously this day would hold importance to the Irish. In a mythological sense, the gods of light overthrew the giants that were terrorizing the land on the longest day of the year. Throughout Indo-European myth, the summer solstice is regarded as the day when the hero's strength is at its peak. (9) This day is held to importance to present day Ireland by the tradition of lighting bonfires to commemorate the longest day of the year. This is an obvious throwback to pagan times where the actual reasons are obscured, yet the tradition lives on.

For physical evidence of the summer solstice being an important event, we can look to the stone circle at Lough Gur in County Limerick. The summer sun rose between the two portal stones and stuck the axial stone at the other side of the circle at the midsummer. (10) While this was a Bronze Age megalith built long before the Iron Age Irish, the natives would have realized the significance. The midsummer marked a special time for the harvest,

and the knowledge of when to harvest the early crops was a necessity.

In recent times the midsummer is called Sheathuinn, Oiche an teine chanáimh, or Teine Féil Eóinor, or St. John's Day, in the Gaelic countries. The tradition involves lighting a bonfire "exactly at sunset on the evening of June 23rd, and "watched until the next morning". There are also communal fires lit in local villages, and the locals will light their own home hearths from it. (11) This tradition is a tradition dating back to times of antiquity and later Christianized.

In conclusion, while there is little mythological evidence handed down to the present day, there is enough physical and cultural evidence to conclude that the solstices were considered sacred to the Gaels. The local Irish population would have found the winter solstice event of some importance due to the significant structures in their area. The Irish Celts were smart people. To say that they would go inside the hill at Newgrange, place important artifacts inside, and then ignore the light show every year on the shortest day just does not make sense.

Nor does it make sense that the Gaels would pay homage to Manannan in the lore on midsummer, and then have modern scholars declare the day insignificant to Gaelic myth. There is ample evidence of midsummer tradition being observed today in Ireland and Man, and it is easy to conclude that these traditions are handed down from antiquity.

It can be rationalized that the Gaels did observe the winter and summer solstice as significant events. While the lore is short on specifics, there is enough evidence through handed down tradition and physical evidence to make this determination. While these are some of the examples of Gael lore that I used to argue my point, there are numerous superstitions throughout the Gaelic lands that observe these days with various customs to the present day. The Gaels were keen observers of the sky and position of the sun and stars. They used their observances of the seasonal changes in order to know when to plant their crops and harvest their fields. To dismiss their knowledge of these two important days would be assuming these indigenous people were ignorant of their environment—and this was simply not the case.

Sean Harbaugh is a Dedicant Priest with Ár nDraíocht Féin: A Druid Fellowship. He is a Celtic Reconstructionist who serves as the Librarian for the ADF Gael Kin. He also is also the Senior Druid for the Sierra Madrone Grove in Sacramento, CA and the ADF Northwest Regional Druid.

References and Sources for this article are included as an appendix to this edition of EOLAS.

Poetica

Wandering singer of the forest am I,
In my land where three mountain ranges meet,
Many have called me stranger -
But at length called me a poet!

I have been a recluse and existed within a redwood,
I have traveled and lived in a metal cocoon,
I have dwelt under the winter stars -
For a year and a day, I wore nothing but rags.

I have been a glowing coal.
I have been a hidden mushroom.
I have been the scent of heather.
I have been a goblet of water.

For 30 years in the womb of unawareness,
In state of blindness -
But at length was a poet!

I have seen a hawk carry off a snake.
I have stood within ancient castle walls.
I have dreamed others' futures and pasts.
I have built shelter in the desert.

I am a ten-pointed star.
I am a beginning and an end.
I shall be until the end of Summerland.
And it is not known whether I am song or magick!

Learned Druid,
Can I memorize your words?
Or sing to you of trees?

© Mabyn Wind

Selfhood /\ Reflection

In solitude, I have steadfastly silently searched for sanctuary;
In sanctuary, the explorative excavation of enlightenment;
In enlightenment, the rare ravenous refrain of a raven;
With the refrain of a raven, traversing to true sight;
In true sight, circumspection encircling clarity;
In clarity, the spiraled serenity of a snake;
With the serenity of a snake, bravery;
In bravery, substance of strength;
With strength, tines of a stag;
With tines of stag, power;
With power, triumphant trial;
In trial; winding ways of wisdom;
With wisdom, dominions of a dragon;
In dominions of a dragon, endless energy;
In endless energy, study of systematic science;
With science, based binding believability of the bat;
In believability of the bat, fast, fixed so ferocious faith;
In ferocious faith, channeled crystalline-boated ceremony;
In ceremony, serendipitously surrounding skylines of solitude.

© Mabyn Wind

Lament Mother, For That Which Was Holy Is Gone

A head and a hand from a grand champion.
Cuchalain of ancient lore stands,
Alongside the Duma na Ngiall.
Lonely hostages all,
Witnesses of this sorrowful time.

Away now Lugh, away Macha Mong Ruad,
Fast away from the shaded hills and vales.
Flee from the beasts that would hollow
Your graves and disturb your sacred rest
Far away from the fools of this day.

Cormac gave rise to the thought
That Tara would have no meaning in time.
That the sense of royalty would be lost
That Ireland, precious Mother, would die.
Lament, Mother, for that which was holy is gone.

Away now, with despair, far from the
Greening beauty, fast run ye Champions
Into the Under Regions, the hidden recesses,
Huddled together in dim mockery,
To await the awakening time.

Susan Isabella Sheehan-Repasky
"Art Is The Perception Of An Altered Reality©"
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HAGGIS, NEEPS & TATTIES with WHISKY SAUCE

by Nigel McAuley of Glasgow's Oran Mor

Makes one main course serving

Ingredients:

1 single-portion haggis
3 medium potatoes
1 serving of turnip
dash whisky
400ml/15floz double cream
salt and pepper to season
sprig parsley to garnish

Method:

Place the haggis into a pan of boiling water. Cook according to the size of the haggis.

Boil and mash the turnip. Season.

Boil and mash the potatoes.

Put 150ml/5floz double cream into a hot pan, add the mash mixture and mix to create a creamy mash. Season.

Add whisky to a hot pan. Tilt pan & catch the flame to burn off the alcohol. Add 250ml/10floz double cream and allow to simmer and reduce. Season.

Place a quenelle of turnip mash onto a plate. Add a quenelle of the potato mash. Place the haggis onto the mash and pour over the whisky sauce. Garnish with a sprig of parsley.

Serve immediately.

Haggis

In Scotland Haggis is strictly for tourists, except on Burns Night (see below). I have learned that the secret to really good Haggis is four glasses of Single Malt (before you eat the Haggis).

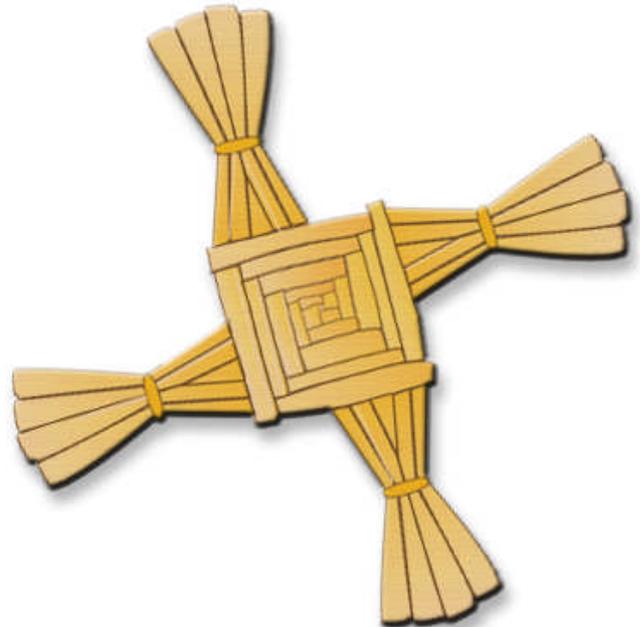
In case you don't know what ingredients go into a Haggis it is best not to ask. For those who do know, here is a "gourmet" recipe that you can try with your leftovers after celebrating Burns Night.

Burns Night - January 25

A celebration of the birthday of the poet Robert Burns in 1759 which features toasts, music, praising of Burns, recitation of Burns' poetry and of course the "piping in" of the Haggis.

The piper leads a procession consisting of the chef who bears the Haggis on a silver platter, the person who recites the "Address to A Haggis", and a third person who carries a tot of whisky so each person in the procession can toast the Haggis.

The Haggis is ritually slaughtered by "trenching its gushing entrails" with dramatic flourish.)



The Druid Plant Oracle

Reviewed by Ellen Evert Hopman, copyright 2007

The Druid Plant Oracle - Working with the magical flora of the Druid Tradition, text and divination deck by Philip and Stephanie Carr-Gomm, illustrated by Will Worthington. Connections Book Publishing Limited, London, 2007 ISBN 978-1-85906-243-2

If you are one of those for whom plants are people, complete with Spirits that are part of the Great Soul of Nature, this book is for you. Lovingly illustrated by Will Worthington, the book and card deck are worthy companions to The Druid Animal Oracle (the two decks can be combined easily as they are both the same size).

Within the text are introductions to traditional British healers such as the Welsh Physicians of Myddvai, and the MacBeth (Beaton) family of healers in Scotland. Celtic legends such as the story of Airmid's cloak and the Cauldron of Cerridwen are covered.

Each individual plant is described by its Gaelic and Latin name, followed by the history of the plant, traditional lore, magical uses, and divinatory meaning. There are little hints for practical uses that Druids will find helpful, such as ritual baths and protective charms. Medicinal properties are mentioned with occasional descriptions of how to make a tea. Noticeably lacking are in-depth descriptions of medical uses of the plants, preparation methods, harvesting tips, cautions (such as high blood pressure, diabetes, pregnancy and the like) and dosages.

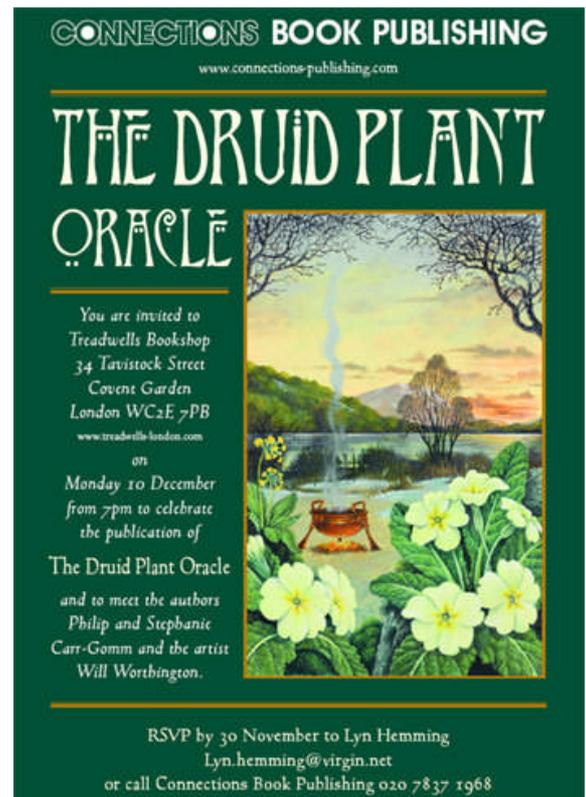
The illustrations are magnificent. As I write this review we are waiting for the season's first serious snow storm and the cards glow before my eyes like a warm summer's day. The paintings are egg tempera (pigment mixed with egg yolk) on wooden panels and the artist has skillfully blended detailed botanical portraits of each herb with views of archaeological sites, ancient villages and mystical Celtic symbols.

In the section on divination we are reminded of how plants have been used for millennia as oracular tools; for example the ancient Chinese yarrow stalk oracle and the plucking of daisy petals ("He loves me, he loves me not."). The authors remind us not to use the cards as predictors of future events, rather as tools for ways to move forward in the context of one's life at this moment.

The text ends with suggestions for further reading and, of course, contact details for OBOD of which Philip is the current Chosen Chief.

I would not recommend this book for the purpose of gaining in-depth herbal medical knowledge of the plants described, but if one's interest is the spiritual aspects of herbs then this book is one of the best. It will definitely stimulate a Druid's ability to feel and know the spiritual natures of our green brothers and sisters, with whom we share this planet. It is a book that every Druid will want to have handy for those times when a particular plant appears prominently in a dream or a vision, or calls attention to itself on a walk in the country.

Highly recommended.



Brigid, Imbolc & the Gaelic Harp - Ann Heymann

The first of February is the Feast Day of St. Brigid. It is also recognized as *Imbolg*—which celebrates the beginning of the Celtic-pagan Spring season. However, what is not generally known is that February 1st marks the conclusion of the ‘*ceremony of the raising*’, a trimester period in which a newly made Gaelic harp was first strung and tuned—with the tension of brass, silver or gold strings causing the soundboard to swell. Calendrical coincidence—or is this February 1st ‘tryst’ something more?

Brigid/Bridhe

The life of St. Brigid, [c. 450-525 BE] is illustrated by numerous stories, and one which involves the harp highlights her role as patroness to poets and musicians: Brigid goes to a king’s residence to seek freedom for a prisoner. The king is away but Brigid sees a number of harps. She asks that they be played for her, but the king’s harpers are away as well. There are however, a number of youths at the residence, and a joke is made that Brigid might bless their untrained hands so that they might play—and this is exactly what she does. Upon his return the king hears flawless harp music and after learning of the miracle, he frees the prisoner. The youths retain their harping abilities for the rest of their lives, and their descendants remain loyal to their kings [translated & paraphrased from *Tertia Vita S. Brigidae*].



It has long been recognized that the attributes of St. Brigid parallel those of her predecessor, the Celtic-pagan triple goddess *Bridhe/Bride*; the written biographies are so intermingled with folklore that it is impossible to confidently separate the two personages. Brigid is perhaps best known for establishing an abbey in Cill Dara (Kildare), where there now stands a cathedral. However, the site it is built on what is reputed to be a sacred site of the goddess Bridhe, the site where the goddess’ Perpetual Flame was tended by nineteen virgins. This was done on a 20-day cycle, with Bridhe herself coming to take her turn on the 20th day. When the Abbey was built, nuns continued to tend the flame—but in 1220 a Bishop declared the practice pagan and the flame was extinguished. In the 1960’s, Vatican II questioned both Brigid’s sanctity and her historical existence, leading to her de-canonization.

At the risk of over-simplification, the historical associations of both Brigid and Bridhe can be grouped into three elemental categories:

1. Water/Nurture/Fertility; holy wells, the transformation of water into milk or ale, miracles of healing & food abundance, herbalist, midwifery & animal husbandry
2. Fire/Skill/Courage; hearth, pillar of flame, silver, gold & blacksmithing, crafts, protector & skill at warfare
3. Air/Wisdom/Holiness; churches, sacred spaces & mountain sites, poetry & music, eloquence & the art of illumination

Imbolc

The standard translation for *Imbolc* is ‘spring’ as it marks the beginning of the spring quarter. However, in Old Irish *i mBolg* translates literally as “in the womb,” and though less specific, the fertility connotation not only is appropriate for the season, but it provides a direct link with the attributes for Brigid and the Gaelic harp’s ‘ceremony of the ‘raising’.

Another possible linguistic connection to Imbolc is *Oimelc*, a term given by Cormac, a 9th century Munster king whose glossary survives in a 17th century manuscript. Here, Cormac defines *Oimelc* as “sheep-milk, i.e., that is the season that sheep’s milk comes”. A ewe comes into milk just prior to lambing—a spring-time event, and an apt connection with Brigid, Patron Saint of dairymaids.

It may be that this intermingling of terminology is due to a strong oral tradition, where layered connections empower the cultural significance. Though one term might have etymological correctness over another, metaphor and symbolism are inherent in oral cultures, so perhaps all three terms, *Imbolc*, *Imbolg*, & *Oimelc* possess a degree of validity?

The Gaelic harp or *cláirseach*

The Gaelic harp or *cláirseach* is native to Ireland and Scotland, where it has long been held in high esteem and used in the performance of syllabic poetry and clan genealogy. The instrument’s oral tradition spans over a thousand years with its earliest definitive depiction being a gilded miniature on the St. Mogue Shrine, c. 1000 CE. Despite its appearance as a lap-harp, the T-shaped forepillar is a structural reinforcement specific to the massive string tension of larger Gaelic harps found some 500 years later. This icon is highly significant because it shows that by this date the instrument had already achieved a highly developed form—a process which would likely have taken several hundred years, placing it firmly into the Old Irish period. The St. Mogue harp would have been known as *crot/cruit*, an Old Irish term that continued to be used even alongside its later name *cláirseach* in the same poem, referring to the same harp.

This later name of *cláirseach* (literally ‘female trough’), which does not appear until the later fourteenth century, is an apt reference to the soundbox. It was carved from a single willow block, and the tremendous tension of brass, or even gold and silver strings caused the soundboard to swell, much like the belly of a pregnant woman. The ‘ceremony of the raising’ began on Michaelmas (September 29) and ended on Candlemas (February 2nd), a four-month time span or a third of a year—a suitable gestation period for an instrument with such tripartite associations. A primary conception of the universe is seen in the development of pronouns, and the Gaelic harp’s triangular frame reflects she, he & it/they in its three interlocking, gendered parts:

1. Soundbox—with a mortise (female socket) at each end;
2. Forepillar—with a tenon (male plug) at each end; and
3. Neck/Harmonic Curve—with a mortise (female socket) at one end, and a tenon (male plug) at the other.

The three musical musics, *goltraighe*, *gentraighe* & *suantraighe* figure prominently in Irish mythology. Their origin story involves the *Dagda* (literally ‘good god’) playing a crot (harp) during the labor of *Boand* (goddess of the River Boyne) and the delivery of their three sons. The first son was named *Goltraighe*, literally crying-music strain, because of the cries of *Boand*. The Dagda continues to play, and the next son is named *Gentraighe*, or laughing-music strain, with the joy of two sons. The Dagda continues playing and a third son is born and named *Suantraighe*, or sleeping-music strain—and they all sleep from exhaustion.

Today these three musics are categorized as laments, dance tunes and lullabies, and though there are plenty of tales in which the sleeping music makes people sleep, there is a deeper interpretation: that *goltraighe* is to relieve and sooth pain, *gentraighe* is music for love and war, and that *suantraighe* is music for the otherworld. A tripartite cosmology begins to emerge:

fertile	sacred	virile
feminine	neuter/androgenous	masculine
she	it/they	he
left	middle/entirety	right
treble stings	na comhluighe	bass strings

treble stings	na comhlúighe	bass strings
soundbox	neck/harmonic curve	forepillar
two mortises	one mortise & one tenon	two tenons
goltraighe/crying	suantraighe/sleeping	geantraighe/laughing
birth/nuture	death/other-world	vitality/virility
silver	findruine/copper	gold
bee/beehive	crane/whale	eel
willow	yew	oak
water	air	fire

Details of these tripartite relationships are beyond the scope of this article, but they do have relevance to cláirseach performance practice. For instance, the orientation of the instrument was such that the player's *right* (male) hand played the bass strings, with the *left* (female) assigned to the treble strings. Indeed, one appellation for the Gaelic harp is “the harper’s wife”, quite possibly because the instrument is positioned on the player’s *left* side.

Na comluighe (lying together), and formerly in Old Irish *coiblige* (co-habitation, wedlock, copulation), both refer to two consecutive strings that are tuned to the same tenor G pitch. This is where the bass and treble meet, where the female and male are united. The rest of the harp is tuned from these two strings. Bees drone at roughly B or B-flat, and I theorize that their drone provided the symbolic pitch reference; that *na comluighe* was tuned so that the bees drone provided the ‘sweet’ third above.

It is interesting that beekeeping in the northern European forests of Britain, Scotland & Ireland involved cutting an access door into a beehive, so as to remove the honey without much disturbance to the hive. Its construction and appearance is strikingly similar to the back access-door of the cláirseach soundbox. Willow is the favored wood for the soundbox, and bees are specifically mentioned as being necessary for willow cross-fertilization.

Saint Gobnait & Bees:

Saint Gobnait has been closely linked to St. Brigid, and many consider them to be the same. Saint Gobnait’s Feast-day is February 11 (Old Calendar) or February 1 (New Calendar). A champion like Brigid, St. Gobnait saves cattle by releasing bees to drive away the invaders. By one account, these bees transform into a bronze helmet, and another account they become a bell. Curiously, both these items are essentially the same shape as a woven bee skep. Bees, bovines, metalwork—just like Brigid.

February 1 is also the day when traditional beekeepers set candles around the beehive to inform the bees that winter hibernation was over. It is interesting to me that “imb” is a Germanic word for bee; could this be another connection with the term Imbolg?

February 2 is recognized by many Christians as ‘Candlemas’ or ‘The Purification of the Virgin’, demarking the time when Mary (unclean from giving birth) could return to the Temple. Brigid has a strong association with candles, and she is commonly referred to as “Mary of the Gael”. One Irish tradition even has St. Brigid accompanying the very modest Virgin Mary to the “marriage house”. It certainly seems that there is additional entangling of candles & virgins, Brigid & Mary, cows & bees...but that is another story!

Ann Heymann is known as 'the pioneer who returned the Gaelic harp to a living tradition'. One of her many achievements is the successful stringing of the medieval cláirseach with gold, silver & brass strings—an idea inspired by her work with Irish mythology. Ann has performed throughout the U.S., Europe and Australia, often with her husband Charlie. Her recent CD features music for the Feast of Saint Brigid and an Old Irish rosc, which the Heymann's theorize is an ancient bee charm. For more information visit www.harporgold.net

A Single Stroke

A simple stroke of pen and ink by simple men who failed to think (or thinking failed to pay due heed to consequence and future need) has left in wake of smile and speech a lesson for our sons to teach of how a leader must not be: all money-mad and moral-free.

For future generations cringe when thinking back upon this binge of glutton-driven money greed so blind to children's children's needs. And every passing douring day, another dreamer fades away as poisoned progress has its way and businessmen decide our fates.

Well mór bhur nair! Mór bhur nair, ye whose pens have brought this fire!

Mór bhur nair! Mór bhur nair, ye who've sold the heart of Eire!

Mór bhur nair ye ministers: who've trampled and dishonored her!

Mór bhur nair ye businessmen: who sold her soul for silver yen!

Mór bhur nair ye Síocháin Gaurds: who've left for dead your sacred charge!

Mór ár nair we sleeping bards: who've withheld aoirs and blunted barbs!

Now's no time for seeing-short, nor money-hoarding last-resorts. These issues of both time and space: of traveling and fair Tara's face; Have and can be swift resolved; this controversy can dissolve: By listening to the people's pleas for future generations' needs. Let conscience lead you, Leaders- Think! A simple stroke of pen and ink

Can open up the Iron Road to carry families safely home, And save that now embattled place, preserving Tara's sacred space.

To do what's right is often hard, for moneyed men will scoff and barb, But heroes never came to be by bowing down to money greed. I beg you, take the rocky road: prove your souls are yet unsold. Save your honor and your name; not for money, power or fame; But simple love of doing right: to end a wasteful, foolish fight; And be, in darkness, yet a Light.

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Arthurtide

Lay thee down,
Lay thee down,
O mighty battle-lord.
Lay thee down,
Lay thee down,
Set by thy shield and sword.

Sail away,
Sail away,
And go on Arthur's tide.
Sail away,
Sail away,
In Avalon to bide.

Three fair queens,
Three fair queens,
Have come across the foam.
Three fair queens,
Three fair queens,
Have come to bear thee home.

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The Owl Rider

She comes clad in cobwebs and seedsilk,
cerulean wings spread out behind her
and white flowers woven in her black hair.
A great horned owl hoots to himself
as she settles herself on his head,
petting his soft-feathered horns.
Oak leaves rustle in the wind.
Behind them, the full moon rises,
round and rare -
a Blue Moon -
spilling magic in the chilly autumn air.

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Priestess of the Forest

Reviewed by J Craig Melia, copyright 2008

Priestess of the Forest: A Druid Journey - Ellen Evert Hopman - Llewellyn Publications, 2008 ISBN 978-0738712628

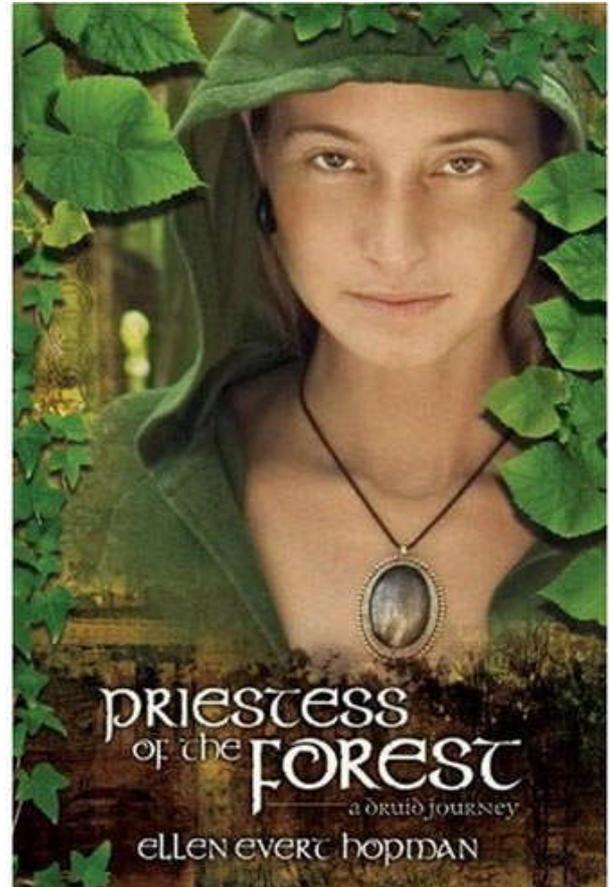
Writing a review for a new book is never an easy prospect, reviewing the work of somebody you know personally adds a whole new level of difficulty. That said, the quality of the writing and the deep knowledge of Celtic Druidism makes my job in this review far easier.

Ellen Evert Hopman's first foray into fiction is a tale of Druids and Warriors and Kings, entitled Priestess of the Forest: A Druid Journey. Comparisons to Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon* would be, and indeed are, obvious, especially between the subject matter and the strong female lead within both books.

The characters are well rounded and genuine, and coupled with the level of detail within their lives and the landscape, is something that really draws you into the story. This level of colour lets your senses taste, smell, hear, view and feel the world of 3rd Century Ireland.

Reading the book as a historical fantasy novel, although equally as valid an approach, only reveals so much. This is very much a book within a book, a story within a story, and as you are drawn deeper into the tale you begin to sense that you are within something that has much deeper levels to it than at first appears to be the case. As the tale grows you realise that you are the silent observer to initiation, and astute readers will recognise the deeper tale encoded within.

For anyone who has an interest in Druids and the Ancient Celts you will definitely love this beautifully written and cleverly crafted book.



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