

Letter from the Editor

Greetings Everyone,

My name is William Apple, also known as Caerwyn Llewellyn, and I have been blessed with the opportunity of filling the position of Editor-in-Chief for EOLAS Magazine, and I must say that I am extremely excited about the potential of that opportunity.

Previously, EOLAS was run – if it was not known before – by a one man team, which is a feat I have no idea how it was managed. Craig Melia has done a spectacular job of getting EOLAS on its feet, and has provided the future EOLAS Team with a great foundation, primarily by himself. This is my formal nod and acknowledgement to everything that Craig has done to make EOLAS possible and it is my hope that together, with Craig staying on as Production Manager, and the newly formed EOLAS Team, that the vision Craig has had for this Magazine is able to be seen manifest. Thank you Craig for everything.

Currently, there is a great wide range of suggestions and ideas being laid on the table for introduction into EOLAS, and in the coming issues we will be “testing the waters” with these new ideas. Your support would be greatly appreciated by letting us know how you feel about them, as they come out. Any comments, questions, or concerns about the formatting and departments within EOLAS can be sent directly to me at eolas@whiteoakdruids.org

Furthermore, if there are any comments, questions, or concerns about the material presented within EOLAS, we have our “Carnyx” section where you will have the opportunity to present those items to a scholar of all things Celtic; to which they will answer those questions directly and publicly. So please don’t hesitate to make yourself a part of this endeavour. It is our hope that EOLAS is truly an educational and inspirational vessel, and it needs your voice to make that goal a reality.

So, keep an eye out for the new developments, and I look very forward to being a part of the next great phase of EOLAS Magazine.

Much Peace,

Will Apple

If anyone would like to contribute to future editions of EOLAS, please send your contributions to eolas@whiteoakdruids.org - we are also keen to hear from you about your opinions on articles or important matters, so please feel free to write to us at the above email address for our Carnyx section.

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

Druidism and Syncretism - J Craig Melia

Druidism is the umbrella-term used to describe the religion of the 'Celtic' people, and specifically the Priest-Judge Caste of the 'Druids'. Because 'druidism' was an oral tradition, we have no written materials from the Celts themselves. What we know of the religion of the Celts we have learnt from a variety of sources. The main problems we have is in interpreting these sources, especially in separating the facts from the classical and later literary inventions. Archaeological remains show us solid material objects, and although open to personal interpretation votive offerings, burials and inscriptions give us a physical 'feel' of the people.

The Classical Writers, though often with personal agendas, provide us with first-hand knowledge of 'Celtic' peoples. From 'Classical Sources', the main references to Druids is in regards to 'sacrificial ceremonies'. Caesar, Tacitus and Strabo all refer to human sacrifice. Pliny refers to a Druidic ritual in which a Druid cuts Mistletoe before two white bulls are sacrificed. The problem with interpreting the Classical material is that its authors are not a part of the culture that they are describing, much in the way 'Western Culture' has interpreted African or Native American Cultures. Often the dominant culture views them as childlike warriors or as the noble savage, merely caricatures images of a culture.

The Insular Writers, whether Irish Monks, Gildas, Giraldus or whoever, are often heavily tainted by 'Christian' thought. However, without these Dark Age and Medieval Writers much would be lost to us forever, and despite the 'Christianisation' of the Mythologies and Poetry most of what we refer to as 'Celtic' comes down to us from this period.

Finally, there is still much to be learnt from the traditions and folk tales of today's 'Celtic' peoples. Many people are beginning to recognize how much of the customs and traditions of the 'pagan' Celts continued after their christianisation. It can only be by studying the whole that we can learn anything of 'Celtic' Culture.



So, what do we know? The Classical Sources portray the Druids as either great Philosophers, seekers of Knowledge, keepers of Tradition OR blood-thirsty priests, sacrificing, burning, killing in the name of their pagan gods. The Insular Writers, despite their obvious Christian bias seem on the whole rather sympathetic to the Druids. Cathbad, the chief Druid from 'the Tain' is a wonderful figure, as is the Druidess Fidelma, also from 'the Tain'. Though the tales have obviously been embellished they seem to me to be as close as we can get to an accurate description of a living Druid.

We know that they were held in high regard, their wisdom was sought by Kings. We know that they performed rituals and shaman-like acts of magic. We know that they met in Nemeton, places held sacred. We know that there were both male and female Druids. We know that the training to become a Druid was very extensive.

Neo-Druidism, Druidry and Neo-Celtic, are modern interpretations of Celtic religion, and are a very diverse grouping. Many groups who claimed to be Druids or to teach Druidry began but a few hundred years ago. Many were based around Freemasonry, as were a number of other 'esoteric' groups that began around this period. Often very 'Christianized', they made little attempt to be historically accurate. As with most syncretic belief systems, although they draw upon (or sometimes merely refer to) the 'Celtic' past, they haven't really evolved from it. It's like 'the belief system' without the cultural experiences that have moulded that belief system. Sadly, instead of trying to remedy this they just claim 'ancient pedigrees' to cover the cracks.

Although there is much learning in Modern 'Druidry' it can be open to sentimental 'Noble Savage' wish fulfilment. Some Neo-Pagan groups use nothing from Celtic Culture other than deity names, superimposing them on other magical traditions. Some groups are little more than 'Earth-Wisdom' traditions with the label 'Celtic' or 'Druidic' attached. That is not to say that it is all bad, indeed much of the current enthusiasm for 'Celtic Studies' is linked to the growth of Neo-Pagan spirituality. The only danger is that 'New-Age Culture' will be superimposed over 'Celtic Culture', leaving little or nothing of the original.

One broad grouping that are addressing these issues has collectively become known as Celtic Reconstructionism. Not confined to any one Order or Group it is rather like a movement that aims, to varying degrees, to add historical accuracy to the beliefs and practices, as the basis of what can be authentically described as Druidic tradition.

Western Mystical Traditions, and the latter New Age Movement, have long been influenced by Hindu and Buddhist concepts and many within Modern Druidism are not exempt from attempting to show, for example, direct links between the Celtic and Vedic traditions. That these traditions share some common heritage is well documented but given enough time all things converge back to common sources. Seeking to fuse separate pathways together via a pick and mix approach insults and potentially damages the very traditions that are being appropriated.

Cherry-picking beliefs as it suits us seems to follow one of modern Western society's worst traits, that of the need for instant gratification. Salvation-in-a-can sold by karma mechanics is not limited to any specific faith and an argument can be made that if people benefit from it how could it be a bad thing? Anything that reduces the achievement of enlightenment to something as easy as donning a hemp shirt minimalises to romantic psychobabble what should be a life long, life defining process.

The spiritual path of Druidry isn't something that can be attained through sending off your money for a short term course or through simply having an affinity with nature. It is a life long commitment to learning, to mastering your arts, to the seeking of wisdom. All systems of beliefs interact with the place in which they exist as well as the times, all spiritual beliefs evolve whilst at the same time appearing unchanged.

We may, with some justification, ridicule ideas such as Celtic Reiki, but equally as dangerous to maintaining authentic tradition are the actions of many who claim to hold this authenticity as core to their beliefs. Comparative study is always a useful tool, it helps us to view and reaffirm our own beliefs through comparison with contemporary pathways. Seeing connections and patterns within other traditions will always occur, the danger is that we see connections where there are none and force patterns to meet our own agendas and worldviews.

This diminished the very thing that we wish to maintain, it is almost as if they believe that without augmentations from Eastern Philosophies, Shamanism or Native American practises that Druidism isn't a valid enough pathway to stand on its own merits. We are the custodians of tradition, the knowledge, learning and wisdom of our ancestors is our duty to maintain.

J Craig Melia

Weather Wandering: A Meditation for Mabon – Tony the Prof

I was standing on the sand, and I could see nothing but white, the whiteness of a cool mist, it's damp moisture upon my face, and before my eyes, only a white void.

This is a time of change, and I feel that the mist marks the boundaries of one season with another, as the summer is left behind, and I walk beside the tides of autumn. I can hear the sea, the waves breaking upon the shore, and the cry of the gull above, and voices in the distance, unseen.

We are voices of the past, as the year comes to old age
Ancestral memory, the old crone, and the elder sage
Memories of those you loved, mourned with bitter tears
Remembrance whispers softly, time takes away the fears

Now the sun comes out, shining in the mist, and the mist thins, and disappears, and I see the sand and rocks and sea, and I climb the steps leading out of the bay.

It is time to move on, to leave the summer beach, and enter the autumn lands.

There is a forest on the edge of the coast, and soon I am deep inside, beneath the overhanging branches, and I see the sun rippling through the leaves, golden and red alive against the blue sky, and tread acorns underfoot. But the sky darkens, and I see the dark storm clouds above. I catch a glimpse of a white deer, running through the forest, and it is gone.

It begins to rain, and I need to find shelter, but do not know where to turn, and the rain is everywhere, getting strong, and heavier, and I catch the scent of damp leaves as I walk faster through the trees, and then begin to run.

I came to myself in a dark wood, for the straight way was lost. How hard it is to tell the nature of that wood, savage, dense and harsh -- the very thought of it renews my fear!

But suddenly, before me, is a child beckoning me to follow them. A small girl in a white dress. She leads me to a glade, and in and in its midst is a gypsy caravan, a Romany vardo, painted with bright colours. I follow her inside the caravan where I see an old woman, and she has been expecting me; she has a barley loaf and honey cake on a plate, and has prepared a glass of mead to drink. Now she places them on the table, together with a basket of fruit, and gestures for me to sit and enjoy them. Within the caravan, there is a fragrant smell of sweet herbs, of the kind that heal the sick.

Eat of the last fruits, but leave gleanings in the field
Harmony may be seen, and justice in balance yield
That the Spirit may rejoice, in Autumn breezes roam
And call to the poor, to take the last harvest home

Outside there are flashes of lightening, and the menacing rumble of thunder and I hear a loud crack, looking towards the edge of the glade, I see a branch falling from a tree, burning brightly, then quenched quickly as the rain pours down in torrents. But inside, it is warm, and dry, and cosy.

The storm ends quickly, and the sun comes out, and the blades of grass glisten in the sunlight
and I am about to leave the caravan, when the old woman offers you dry gypsy clothes to wear.

Other caravans come into the clearing, pulled along by fine black horses and there is the lively sound of a fiddle and the Romany people are dancing. A cauldron is bubbling cheerfully over a fire. A flagon of cider is passed from mouth to mouth.

On cider days, rejoice, drink deep, and dance away
Be thankful for the harvest, all gathered in this day
And sing, rejoice, embrace, all in the merry meet
And dance away to dusk, with footloose nimble feet

The dancing and music seem to go on for ever but suddenly they are ended, and I sense that the Romanies are going and some enter their caravans, others begin to lead the horses out of the glade, pulling the caravans behind them and you wave farewell. I feel sad that I am not going with them, but my journey lies elsewhere.

Now I begin walking along the old forest path, and I notice that the path is going uphill, and the trees thin out, then stop, and I am at the top of a hill, looking down upon the country spread out below me - trees, fields ripe with corn, and a stream running through the meadows towards the sea.

Then I notice that I have reached, at the summit, a dolmen, a stone age tomb, built in a circle. The sky is red, and as the sun sets, the darkening sky takes a purple hue. It is a clear night, and I can see the full moon and the stars.

Other people join me inside the circle, and one person places four pottery urns around the edge; another follows and lights the wax candles within them. Others people are chanting, a peaceful calm chant, with strange words that seem like a forgotten tongue I once knew well.

Oritur sol et occidit et ad locum
suum revertitur ibique renascens

[The sun still rises, and it still goes down, going wearily back to where it must start all over again.]

For every time there is a season, and the circle turns
And all is born will come to die, and funeral pyre burns
Night falls, yet dawn will come, and we must pray
That we may find the paths of wisdom on the way

I look up, and see a shower of shooting stars, and make a wish.

A lady draws the shape of a door in the air with a silver sickle and I step through it, and, in the twinkling of an eye, I am back in my room, at home, sitting in my chair, and I look behind, and see the gap closing, and in an instant, it is gone. Was it all or dream, or a vision, a glimpse of another world so close to mine?

And I remember the coast, the forest, the rains, and my journey into the lands of imagination and possibilities, and the meaning that lies yet to be harvested as I reflect upon the autumn lands. And I am at peace.

Tony the Prof

Similarities In Iroquois and Celtic Traditions

Sekone' everyone. Many of my friends over the years have expressed a great deal of curiosity regarding various Native American traditions, and how they correlate with other traditions. So I wrote this for them and am passing it on to you for your enjoyment.

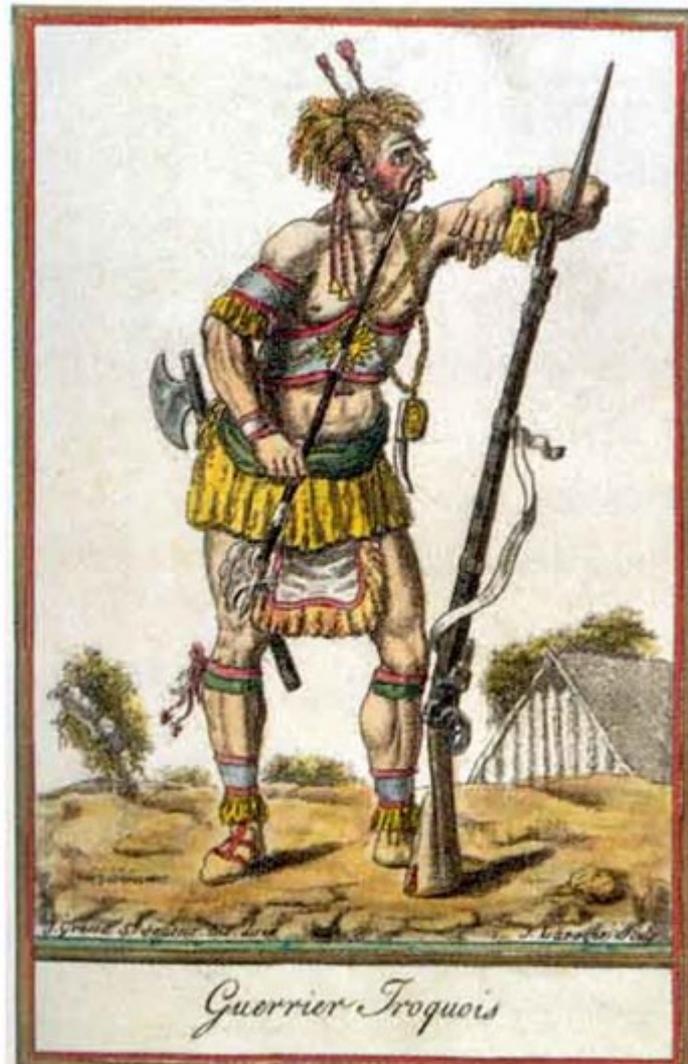
The Iroquois people, their cultural roots, and how they marked time:

The northern Iroquois, the Hadenosionne, and many of the eastern Algonquians, the Muskogee, of the Southeast, and the Southern Iroquoians, the Tsalagee (Cherokee) all share many of the same ceremonial traditions, with a few variations on common themes. They were, and often still are, agriculturalists, and they are the cultural and physical descendants of the ancient Moundbuilder Cultures of the Mississippi Valley and the East Coast of North America. Today, the consensus of opinion about the oldest Mississippi Moundbuilder traditions is that they developed approximately two thousand years ago or more, and they developed independently of the Meso-American traditions for nearly one thousand years. They had their roots in the even older Crown Point peoples on the Southern Mississippi River who were an agricultural, mound/pyramid building, urbanized culture that PRECEDED the Olmecs of Mexico and all of the subsequent Meso-American civilizations by about two hundred years.

The Crown Point civilization was later joined by the rise of the Adina/Hopewell Culture in the Ohio Valley a few hundred miles up river, about two thousand years ago. The crown point peoples were absorbed into the Adina/Hopewell Culture, and it literally exploded in all directions, spreading from the Great Lakes to the Atlantic, to the Great Plains, and down to the Gulf of Mexico and collecting many different language groups of people into a brilliant new society that thrived for centuries.

Then, about a thousand years ago, the Adina/Hopewell were finally joined, and then replaced, by the Mississippian Culture, which WAS strongly linked to, and influenced by, the cultures of Meso-America (Mexico), and was centered farther south in the Mississippi Valley. In the north the Adina/Hopewell cities were eventually abandoned, but many of their culture's traditions continued among the midwestern and northeastern tribes that had once been a part of the culture, such as the Iroquois.

The modern Midwinter traditions and ceremonies of the Native American tribes of the eastern U.S. are believed to have originated in the Adina/Hopewell traditions. Archaeological remains of celestial observation sites, and even the remains of a wooden "Henge"-like structure at the city of Cahokia in Illinois, show that these peoples once had some sophisticated knowledge of astronomy, at least in terms of the solar and lunar cycles, and the progression of the stars through the seasons, and that they had discovered how to mark that progress.



They never developed any written language, though they did develop the Native American Sign Language used inter-tribal commerce between different language groups. Nothing is remembered in oral traditions of any system for numbering the years, or even the days of each month, but the Northeastern tribes kept track of the seasons by following the moon cycles, marking the winter and summer solstices, and noting the arc of prominent stars and planets in the sky. Years were named and remembered by significant events in each year. The eastern Sioux kept track of these years on painted Buffalo robes called "Winter Counts."

The fourfold and eightfold ritual year of the Iroquois:

The Iroquois see the year in largely the same way as the Celtic year, and their four major festivals roughly correspond to the four major Celtic festivals: Imbolc is the Iroquois "Midwinter," Beltaine is the "Strawberry Feast," Lughnasadh is the "Green Corn Feast," and Samhain is the "Shaking the Pumpkin Feast."

All of the Iroquois ceremonial dates are set on the lunar calendar, and by the positions of stars in the sky. They generally fall five to eight days AFTER the dates that we now celebrate the Celtic festivals, and approximately where the ancient Celts used to celebrate these festivals before the advent of the Roman and modern calendars shifted all of the dates forward. The Iroquois also made lesser note of the two solstices each year, and held smaller celebrations at the equinox's, the "Maple Syrup Feast" in March, and the "Mushroom Feast" in September.

Iroquois Midwinter (near Imbolc): An example of one of the traditional annual celebrations:

The Iroquois Midwinter festival, is called the "Gana'yasta." It is both a Mid-winter and a New Years ceremony, because the Iroquois figure the lunar year from the FULL moon of February instead of the NEW moon of the month like the Chinese do. It was also marked by the highest progression point of the Pleiades in the northern sky. The ceremony lasts for ten days.

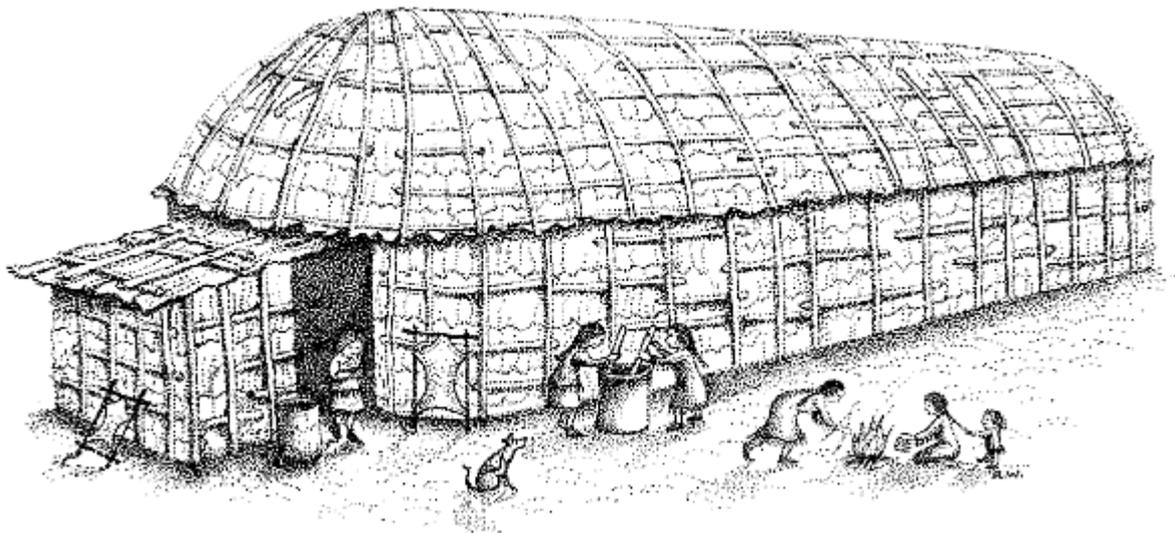
Approximately one hundred and fifty thousand people will celebrate Gana'yasta in homes and long houses and rented halls in Canada and the U.S. wherever there is a sizable Iroquois community, this winter. Even here in Western Washington there are private celebrations and at least one gathering, and there is another gathering up in B.C.

The ritual elements of Midwinter: The Hadowe'saika and the Gajesah saika

Gana'yasta is the setting for thousands of house blessing ceremonies on the fourteen Iroquois Reservations by the Hadowe', the masked "False Faces" societies who represent the fierce and untamed forces of the forests, winds, rivers, and mountains. The Hadowe' literally swoop into the houses like a cleansing wind and banish the lingering evil influences in the home caused by every negative thought, misspoken word, and angry emotion felt in the home during the previous year. This is done with the fierce beating of turtle shell rattles on walls and floors, furniture and windows.

When the masks are done "rattling the house," they lay the first fire of the New Year in a hearth that the woman of the house has cleaned earlier that morning and scrubbed down with Lye water. Then they bless the women of the house by blowing ashes on them which they sweep away with fans made of bird wings, reminding them that they are the heart of the house, and admonishing them to clean their minds and hearts of the ashes of past grievances and to not carry any of them into the new year. Then the Hadowe' begin to howl and hoot and they blow out of the homes and travel on the next house, though sometimes they are paid by the head woman of the home to linger a little longer and perform healing rituals and dances for any sick or ailing in the home. It is believed that in ancient times the Hadowe' were the very spirits of sickness and misfortune, created by the dark twin of the Sun god to wreak havoc in the world. But the powers of Light did battle with the once evil Hadowe' and defeated them, and then put them to work healing the sickness and misfortunes they released into the world. Today it is believed that their healing songs and scary /comic dances chase away illness and can heal spiritual and mental wounds as well.

The Gajesah are another society of masks, but they are woven of corn husks. The Gajesah represent the star spirits that came down from the eastern sky and first taught the ancestors how to farm. In the Iroquois cosmos, the Hadowe' represent the powers of chaos, and the Gajesah represent the powers of order, the hadowe are the spirits of the wild forest, and the Gajesah are the spirits of the cultivated fields. At midwinter the Gajesah also have their ritual and their dances, and they predict the weather and the harvests in the coming year and announce it to the community through a young boy or girl chosen to interpret for them to the gathering.



The New Fire Ceremony:

Central to the visits of the forest spirits in Iroquois homes at Midwinter is the ritual of laying the new fire. In Iroquois longhouses there were usually many hearths and many fires because the Hodenos were communal apartment buildings shared by many families who were all kin through their mother's lineage. Some of these houses, like the 48 by 330 foot long one at the old village of Oak Hill, were truly huge dwellings.

In an Iroquois longhouse two families shared each fire, which were built on hearths in the central isle of the house. These fires served two large rooms, one on either side of the hearth. The fires were all considered sacred and were never allowed to burn out except when they were deliberately put out in the house cleanings prior to Midwinter, and then rebuilt by the Hadowe' in the New Fire ceremony. Even after the Iroquois moved into single family log and milled lumber homes in the early 1800's the sacred fire traditions were still carefully observed. In the Iroquoian language "Those who share a hearth" is the term used for family. It was believed that the fire was the sacred presence of the sun's spirit in the home, and that it dispelled evil. But it was also believed that evil could take residence in the black ashes of a cold fireplace.

At Midwinter a flame or glowing coals from the old fire is saved when the hearth is swept and washed clean for the ritual, and it is that flame or embers that is used again to light the new fires laid by the Hadowe'. The fires are lit by the head women of the houses, who also tends them throughout the year with care and with prayers blessing the home. In another curious parallel to Celtic traditions, clay pots were buried beneath Iroquois hearths containing small amounts of food as offerings to the Earth Mother and for the luck and fertility of the families using the hearths. In a similar way, the smoke

hole and the wood poles that roofed the longhouses overhead were considered sacred to the sun, and offerings of tobacco and prayers traveled through the smoke holes to the gods of the sky.

In a very similar way to the Celtic traditions of the Highlands, the Iroquois house served as a metaphor for the Iroquois family. During the long winters around the eastern Great Lakes Iroquois families huddled around their fires for light and cooking, and for conversations and the chores of weaving baskets, sewing clothes, carving wood, shell, and bone, and later for elaborate beading and embroidery aided by lamps. Copper, and later silver, was also heated in the fires and pounded, drilled, and engraved on anvil stones into metal tools and jewelry. It was around the fires that the people gathered for talk and company, to tell stories (which they did only in the winter, or after dark in the summer lest the "little people," the Johgaoh be insulted and cause misfortune, They would tell jokes, sing songs about work and play, and engage in riddle games which the Iroquois delighted in just as much as the Celts. Good women were likened to the fires that warmed and cared for the family, and good men were likened to the wood poles which held up the walls and the roof of their homes, protecting and sheltering their family.

Other ceremonies at Midwinter:

Gana'yasta is the setting for the Iroquois New Year. For the Iroquois, Midwinter New Years was a time especially sacred to women and to the Mother Earth because it was after this celebration that the earth would begin to quicken and bear life again.

Several women-centered ceremonies such as the official naming of new babies born in the previous year, the renaming of young adults at puberty, and marriages, and ceremonies for the ending of periods of mourning were held at Midwinter. Women were the primary priestesses officiating in all of these ceremonies with a single man appointed by them as a speaker, or Honondiont, to explain the ritual.

Rituals for the dead:

But breaking with the Celtic similarities sited so far, during Midwinter the Iroquois also celebrate their version of the central ceremony of the "Dia de los Muertos," the Feast for the Dead, which most other Meso-American cultures traditionally celebrated around the time of Samhain. On one evening at Midwinter meals are set out for the dead, who are welcomed back into Iroquois homes to share them with their descendants.

While the Iroquois might celebrate a feast for the Dead near Imbolc, at the Shaking the Pumpkin Feast near Samhain they substituted the inviting of the dead into the homes to eat with an invite to the dead to partake in a public dance. The dance is called an Ogiwe' Ceremony, and in it the living relatives take turns calling for singers to sing the favorite dance songs of their deceased relatives, and then they get up and dance to the songs and ask the dead to join them in the ever-circling succession of dances all night long until the sun rises the next morning.

The sun sacrifice:

In the 19th and early 20th centuries there were also sacrifices of a white dog at Midwinter made to the Sun God, and in ancient times the sacrifice was probably human. In today's ceremonies huge bundles of full-leaf tobacco are burned in a fire when the words of offering are spoken.

Public announcements and honors:

At Midwinter veterans are honored, and so are elders, and the coronation ceremonies of the clan chiefs called "Sachems," who are chosen by the assembled mothers of their Clans and then named before the grand council of the Six Nations soon after the death of the former chief, are formally celebrated at Midwinter. New sub-chiefs called Ekenade do'deh, or "Pine

Tree Chiefs," and ceremonial priests called Honodionts, all males chosen by the Clan Mothers to represent the individual clans in the communities, the various tribal councils, and in the high council of the Six Nations. All women who have born a child, and also barren women who have been given a child to raise, are clan mothers, and only they have a vote in Iroquois society. The oldest living woman in a clan is also the Clan Matron and head of the entire family. She names the newly elected Clan Chiefs and expresses the feelings and opinions of the women in the family to the Chief, who then speaks for his family in council deliberations.

The spiral dance in Iroquois ceremonies:

At Midwinter, and at all Iroquois feasts around the circle of the year, there is feasting every night, and also dancing. Every ceremony begins with the spiral dance. Iroquois men and women line up at opposite doors of the longhouses and rented halls and then dance in, spiraling clockwise into the center of the hall around the singers and drummers who sit in the center, forming alternating circles of men and women swirling around together, singing along with the thanksgiving songs. After this convocation ritual of bringing the community together, everyone sits down and the ceremonies of the evening begin.

At the end of every evening of celebration they do the same thing once again, gathering in the opposite doors and spiraling in on the dance, but once everyone is present in the swirling concentric rings of men and women the leader at the center and the leader at the end call out to the people gathered and all the dancers turn around and then spiral out of the hall counter-clockwise and back out of the doors to end the evening's work.

The Great Thanksgiving:

The center of Gana'yasta/Midwinter is the celebration on one of the ten evenings, of the Danondion' go wa'ne, the Great Thanksgiving Ceremony. The Great Thanksgiving is a ritual made up of dances, songs, and short speeches performed to the assembled audience as thanks given to, and for, everything in the universe.

Gana'yasta begins with "Thanks given for ourselves, men, women, and children, our ancestors and elders, and for our unborn children." The speaker speaks the ancient words, "At the beginning of all things our Creator asked us to gather once each year to remember and give thanks...." and then he speaks about the importance of remembering to be thankful for all that we have in one another. Then the singers begin the ancient Stomp Dance, and everyone who can walk or be carried in a parent's arms joins in the circling dance on the floor.

Then comes the "Thanks for our Mother and sustainer, the Sacred Earth," followed by the speech, and then the Shake Dance, symbolizing an earthquake, and all of the women, from grandmothers who can still walk to baby daughters in their mother's arms, the living hearts and heads of all of the matriarchal and matrilineal families, join on the floor in this women's dance.

Then comes "Thanks for all the small plants that provide for us," followed by the speech, and then another women's dance, the Strawberry Dance.

After this there is a lul in the ceremonies as women enter the hall carrying buckets full of mashed strawberry juice saved as dried berries from the previous spring to be soaked in water and shared as a sacrament, the Odjistondas'ha'. In this way, even in the dark of each winter, the tast of the strawberries are the living promise of the spring. As the women go around to every person in the hall, ladles or small cups are offered to all, and every person takes a drink and shouts Nia'we' Ha!, "Thanks is given!"

And so the evening goes on, through the "Thanks for the Waters," "Thanks for the Trees," "Thanks for the Animals," "Thanks for the Birds," "Thanks for the Corn, Beans, and Squash," "Thanks for the Winds," "Thanks for the Thunderers

that bring the Rains," "Thanks for the Fire," "Thanks for the Sun," "Thanks for the Moon," "Thanks for the Stars," "Thanks for the Guardians of the World" (Iroquois Angels), and finally to "Thanks for the Creator of the World who made us."

Usually the whole Gana'yasta ceremony takes at least five hours to perform all the speeches, music and dancing, so it is given a whole day of celebration all to itself, and is then followed by a grand feast.

At every ceremony over the ten days, each morning begins out side at a fire with tobacco offerings and a brief thanksgiving prayer. At every evening gathering the people come together again with the spiral dance that begins and ends the evening's work. This is the Iroquois Midwinter Ceremony.

Synchronicity rather than continuity of traditions between 18th century Iroquois and Celts:

When the first Irish and Scots exiles, soldiers, and colonists came to America hundreds, and eventually thousands of the men, found easy kinships with the Iroquoians. They married Iroquoian women, and occasionally gave up their ties to the English-dominated society they came from. They threw in their lot with the Cherokee, the Tuscaroras, the Mohawks, Oneida, Onondagas, Cayugas, and Seneca.

Most modern historians and cultural anthropologists no longer think that this was just a random accidental phenomenon of history on a frontier with more men and few white women, but rather that there was a well documented pattern of kinship in values that was discovered by both parties; a similarity in values, loyalties, and beliefs that did not so readily exist between the Irish and Scots and their English masters, a kind of serendipity of traditions.

This does not mean that there is some literal historic or prehistoric connection between the Iroquois and the Celts, Saint Brendan and his great voyage aside. There is absolutely no evidence of any such connection.

But the Iroquois and other eastern Native American agricultural peoples in the 18th century were in a very similar cultural development phase to the early Bronze and later Iron Age Celts when the Celtic culture first coalesced and spread across the breadth of Europe.

In the tradition of many of the old Druidic teachings, all of the old wisdom, and all of the old understandings of nature and the spiraling cycles of the year, first came to mankind from the Earth and the Sky itself. I propose that in similar circumstances and in somewhat similar environments, two peoples on either side of an ocean developed some similar wisdom and understanding of life, and from these grew similar traditions.

With so little actually remembered about the ancient practices of the old Celtic Gaels when they were a free and independent peoples, one has to reflect that possibly some of those Iroquois practices, rooted in similar beliefs and similar cultural practices and histories as rural agricultural societies, may have been much like the ancient Celtic ones. At least we know that many a Scots exile in the eighteenth century found it so. And of course the subsequent history of the conquest and occupation of the Iroquois homeland by the cultural offspring of the British Empire, strongly paralleled the fate of the Scots and the Irish, and I believed that the early Scot and Irish settlers sometimes saw this and sympathized with the next victims who would be cleared from their ancient homes.

I hope you enjoy all this,

WolfThorn (who is also Ohstowe hajuks)

"A pilgrimage is a prayer in the shape of a journey to a place where spirit resides."

I was born Charles Edward MacRorie in 1948. My tribal name is Ohstowehajuks. I graduated high school in San Fernando, California, and then earned a BA in fine arts and a BA in education, followed by a Masters in anthropology, an MPA in political science, and finally a PhD in anthropology. I taught art and history in public schools for nineteen years, plus ten years in B.I.A. tribal schools, and was a principal for four years before retiring. I also taught as a part-time adjunct professor for ten years.

I am an Ekinadeh Dodeh of the Hatinyateh Clan of the Nundawaono Hodosionne, and have worked with the traditional Iroquois Gioweo religious community, the Anishnabe Medewewin religious community, and the Coast Salish Seoene community for over thirty years. I also trained with the O.B.O.D. before joining the B.D.O. and then struck out in search for a more authentic Scottish Druidism. I have served on the Board of the TARRA organization in Tacoma Washington, written for the Druidspath web site.

Announcements

CELTIC AND DRUID SPIRITUALITY WORKSHOP

At AwenTree

102 Cottage Street ,
Easthampton ,
MA 01027
413-527-3331
www.awentree.com

November 21, 2010 \$15.00

Meet one Sunday a month with herbalist, Druid Priestess and author EllenEvert Hopman, to learn the basic aspects of Celtic Spirituality and beliefs, Druid ritual form, Celtic history, Druid magic, and any other related subject that the group wants to cover. 3-5 PM (in the event of snow please call the store - since Ellen is coming from a distance there may be snow days).

Ellen has been a Druid initiate since 1984 and a member of several Druid Orders including ADF, OBOD, The Druid Clan of Dana, and The Gorsedd of Caer Abiri. She was Vice President of The Henge of Keltria for nine years and is presently a Co-Founder and Elder of The Order of the Whiteoak (Ord na Darach Gile) www.whiteoakdruids.org. She is the author of A DRUID'S HERBAL OF SACRED TREE MEDICINE, PRIESTESS OF THE FOREST: A DRUID JOURNEY, THE DRUID ISLE, and other books and DVDs. Visit her online at www.ellenevertthopman.com

If there are announcements for your Order, Grouping or things that you may consider of interest to the wider Druidic community please forward them to EOLAS@whiteoakdruids.org for inclusion. We look forward to hearing from you.

An Essay on the Uraicecht Na Riar - Morgan Daimler

The Uraicheet Na Riar is an interesting text that deals with the different grades of poets in Ireland, what background and level of training each grade must have and what the honor price of each grade is. This is an important text to study because it can give us insight into the probable structure of the Druids themselves, and helps us to understand the important social position they held. For modern Druids this piece is useful to help show a viable structure that could be used to divide up different levels of knowledge within Druidism getting away from the standard, but probably less accurate, Bard-Ovate-Druid division.

The Uraicecht Na Riar begins by establishing that there are seven grades of poet and naming all of them beginning with the highest ranked the Ollam. The Ollam has advanced through the other grades, and has 350 compositions representing fifty for each grade of poet, and is a master of genealogy and the law. Because an Ollam has such extensive knowledge and represents the highest grade of poet his honor price of forty sets is extremely high. The text also establishes the proper number of people in an Ollam's retinue under different circumstances.

This passage also tells us that a poet who is the son and grandson of poets has a higher honor price than one who isn't. Such a statement reinforces two things: that the Irish did follow a type of caste system where children were born into the class of their parents, and also that this system was somewhat flexible based on talent. A person born into a family of poets had a higher honor price; however a person born into a non-poetic family could still aim to become an Ollam based on skill and talent, although he will only command half the honor price. In modern terms this teaches us that anyone can become a Druid, but that respect should be given to those who are raised in Druidic families, especially as we move forward and more children are raised in such ways.

Next, and of particular interest, the Uraicecht Na Riar goes into detail on how a grade is conferred on a poet. The aspiring poet goes before the Ollam and shows his compositions, the number based on his grade, and the Ollam declares his grade based on these compositions and also that the poet is guiltless and pure; pure of learning, speech, "hand", body, and guiltless of any crime. Once the Ollam has accepted the poet's work and declared him fit to his grade he brings him before the King who accepts the poet in this grade. This can be adapted to modern circumstances as the ritual acceptance of a new Druid, who should be tested by a senior Druid – preferably of the highest rank – and then presented to and accepted by the community.

The text goes on to describe each grade down from the Ollam, how many compositions and how much knowledge they should each have and what their honor price and retinue are. The next level down is the Anruth who has 125 tales and 25 to 50 stories. Next is the Cli and a third of the poetic art, and fourth is the Cano with a quarter of the tales. Next is the Dos with 1/5 of the poetic art, followed by the Macfuirmid with forty compositions, then the Fochloc with 1/7. Then three more grades are listed as the basest of the bards described as unlettered and fools, equivalent to people with little or no skill and minimal learning. In a modern context we might say that the base three grades are uninitiated students, the Fochloc the newly initiated student and each grade up from that representing a more experienced Druid who has gained knowledge and skill and is advanced beyond the grades below.

The final sections of the Uraicecht look at specific aspects of the poetic art that deal with cursing and magic. The first example is a very blunt death spell, a spoken charm that asks for the target to die and be "under the earth", and includes a caution that such death spells are why the nemed poets are so respected. The next section describes

the proper way to enact a satire, or curse, using a sung or spoken charm, the turning of the moon, and action done against an effigy with a thorn from a Hawthorn tree.

Taken in its entirety this text offers not only a wonderful view of the Irish class of poets, but also some useful ideas for modern applications of the grade system and the use of satire. Even for those who choose not to use cursing under any circumstance studying this aspect of the text is still a good way to gain an understanding of Irish Druidic magic. Although many groups choose to follow a more modern division of Bards-Ovates-Druids within their orders this text presents an intriguing possible alternative that offers a more cohesive system where each Druid moves up in rank over time according to skill in a linear fashion instead of traveling a course through seemingly different focuses.

Review of *Cult of Camulos* - William H. Russeth

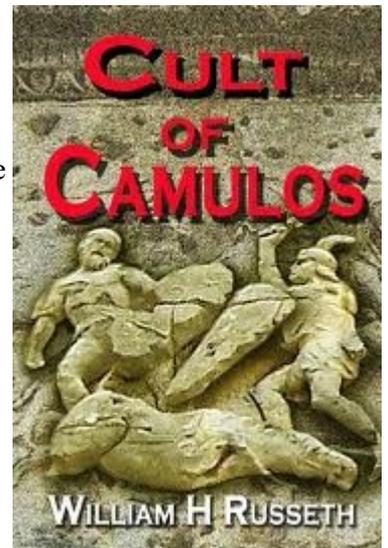
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September, 2010
www.whrusseth.blogspot.com

I am always interested in historical fiction regarding the Celts and so when I heard there was a new "historical adventure novel" set in Celtic Austria and Britain I was intrigued. I am the author of a trio of novels that feature female protagonists so this book was an interesting view from the "other side". It is a swashbuckling tale of warriors, a "guy's book" that will be of interest to men (mostly) who have a fascination with Celtic and Roman battle gear and tactics. Since the protagonists in the story are all males as a female reader it was interesting to read the author's impression of women, written from the male perspective.

There is not much spirituality in the work, the book does mention Druids but not in much detail. Druids butcher lambs to read their entrails, slit the throat of a human sacrifice, dress in dark robes and mostly project menacing personas. The main deities mentioned are Belenos (the Sun), Belissama (Venus), Camulos (Mars) and oddly "Luna" which is a Roman name for the Moon. There are brief mentions of other deities such as Wotan, Lugh, Thor, Taranis, Danu, and the Daghdha.

I did find myself engaged in the story, however, to stay interested I had to overlook numerous typos and anachronisms. For example the author throws in pentagram tattoos and Wiccans, even though Wicca wasn't invented until the 1930's by Gerald Gardner. There is also a Druid prayer that looks suspiciously like a prayer composed by the notorious forger Iolo Morganwg;

Original Welsh
Dyro, Dduw, dy nawdd;
ac yn nawdd, nerth;
ac yn nerth, deall;
ac yn neall, gwybod;
ac o wybod, gwybod y cyfiawn;
ac o wybod y cyfiawn ei garu;
ac o garu, caru Duw.



Duw a phob daioni.

English translation

Grant, God, thy refuge;
and in refuge, strength;
and in strength, understanding;
and in understanding, knowledge;
and from knowledge, knowledge of what is right;
and from knowledge of what is right, the love of it;
and from loving, the love of God.
God and all goodness.

Morganwg (a.k.a. Edward Williams) lived from 1747 to 1826 so its doubtful that this prayer would have been used by the ancients. There are also references to "Shamans", a Siberian term, somewhat disconcerting in a book about the British Celts and Romans.

If you can get past those kinds of glaring anachronisms and if you are interested in Celtic and Roman warrior's dress, weapons and battle tactics, this is a fast paced tale that should satisfy.

Ellen Evert Hopman

Author of the Celtic novels; Priestess of the Forest: A Druid Journey, and its sequel The Druid Isle. (The third book in the series will be out in early 2012)