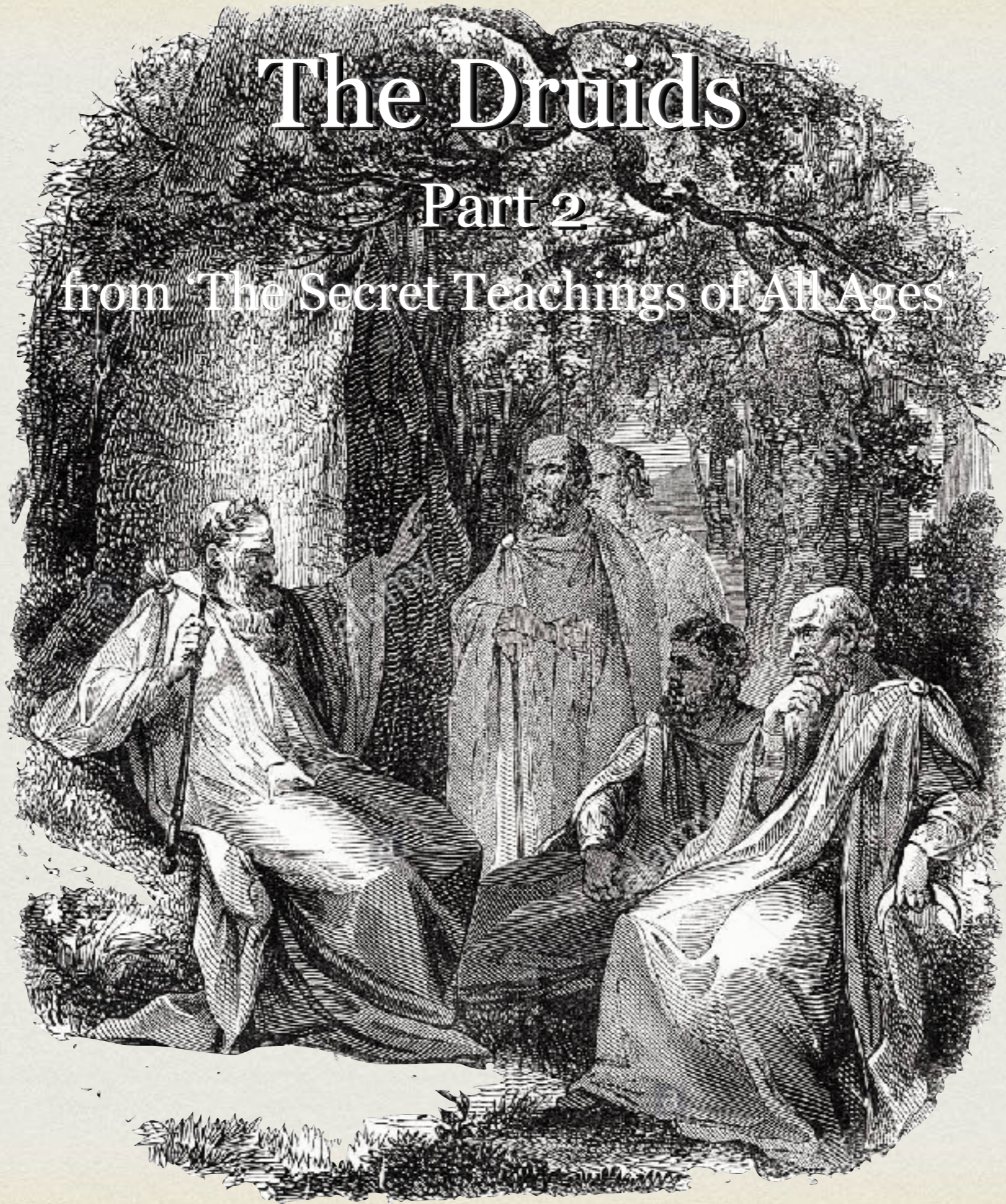


The Druids

Part 2

from 'The Secret Teachings of All Ages'



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The Ancient Mysteries and Secret Societies

Which Have Influenced Modern Masonic Symbolism

XXI

The Ancient Mysteries and Secret Societies Which Have Influenced Modern Masonic Symbolism



WHEN confronted with a problem involving the use of the reasoning faculties, individuals of strong intellect keep their poise, and seek to reach a solution by obtaining facts bearing upon the question. Those of immature mentality, on the other hand, when similarly confronted, are overwhelmed. While the former may be qualified to solve the riddle of their own destiny, the latter must be led like a flock of sheep and taught in simple language. They depend almost entirely upon the ministrations of the shepherd. The Apostle Paul said that these little ones must be fed with milk, but that meat is the food of strong men. Thoughtlessness is almost synonymous with childishness, while thoughtfulness is symbolic of maturity.

There are, however, but few mature minds in the world; and thus it was that the philosophic-religious doctrines of the pagans were divided to meet the needs of these two fundamental groups of human intellect—one philosophic, the other incapable of appreciating the deeper mysteries of life. To the discerning few were revealed the esoteric, or spiritual, teachings, while the unqualified many received only the literal, or exoteric, interpretations. In order to make simple the great truths of Nature and the abstract principles of natural law, the vital forces of the universe were personified, becoming the gods and goddesses of the ancient mythologies. While the ignorant multitudes brought their offerings to the altars of Priapus and Pan (deities representing the procreative energies), the wise recognized in these marble statues only symbolic conceptions of great abstract truths.

In all cities of the ancient world were temples for public worship and offering. In every community also were philosophers and mystics, deeply versed in Nature's lore. These individuals were usually banded together, forming seclusive philosophic and religious schools. The more important of these groups were known as the *Mysteries*. Many of the great minds of antiquity were initiated into these secret fraternities by strange and mysterious rites, some of which were extremely cruel. Alexander Wilder defines the *Mysteries* as "Sacred dramas performed at stated periods. The most celebrated were those of Isis, Sabazius, Cybele, and Eleusis." After being admitted, the initiates were instructed in the secret wisdom which had been preserved for ages. Plato, an initiate of one of these sacred orders, was severely criticized because in his writings he revealed to the public many of the secret philosophic principles of the *Mysteries*.

Every pagan nation had (and has) not only its state religion, but another into which the philosophic elect alone have gained entrance. Many of these ancient cults vanished from the earth without revealing their secrets, but a few have survived the test of ages and their mysterious symbols are still preserved. Much of the ritualism of Freemasonry is based on the trials to which candidates were subjected by the ancient hierophants before the keys of wisdom were entrusted to them.

Few realize the extent to which the ancient secret schools influenced contemporary intellects and, through those minds, posterity. Robert Macoy, 33°, in his *General History of Freemasonry*, pays a magnificent tribute to the part played by the ancient *Mysteries* in the rearing of the edifice of human culture. He says, in part: "It appears that all the perfection of civilization, and all the advancement made in philosophy, science, and art among the ancients are due to those institutions which, under the veil of mystery, sought to illustrate the sublimest truths of religion, morality, and virtue, and impress them on the hearts of their disciples. * * * Their chief object was to reach the doctrine of one God, the resurrection of man to eternal life, the dignity of the human soul, and to lead the people to see the shadow of the deity, in the beauty, magnificence, and splendor of the universe."

With the decline of virtue, which has preceded the destruction of every nation of history, the *Mysteries* became perverted. Sorcery took the place of the divine magic. Indescribable practices (such as the Bacchanalia) were introduced, and perversion ruled supreme; for no institution can be any better than the members of which it is composed. In despair, the few who were true sought to preserve the secret doctrines from oblivion. In some cases they succeeded, but more often the arcanum was lost and only the empty shell of the *Mysteries* remained.

Thomas Taylor has written, "Man is naturally a religious animal." From the earliest dawning of his consciousness, man has worshiped and revered things as symbolic of the invisible, omnipresent, indescribable *Thing*, concerning which he could discover practically nothing. The pagan *Mysteries* opposed the Christians during the early centuries of their church, declaring that the new faith (Christianity) did not demand virtue and integrity as requisites for salvation. Celsus expressed himself on the subject in the following caustic terms:

"That I do not, however, accuse the Christians more bitterly than truth compels, may be conjectured from hence, that the cryers who call men to other mysteries proclaim as follows: 'Let him approach whose hands are pure, and whose words are wise.' And again, others proclaim: 'Let him approach who is pure from all wickedness, whose soul is not conscious of any evil, and who leads a just and upright life.' And these things are proclaimed by those who promise a purification from error. Let us now hear who those are that are called to the Christian mysteries: Whoever is a sinner, whoever is unwise, whoever is a fool, and whoever, in short, is miserable, him the kingdom of God will receive. Do you not, therefore, call a sinner, an unjust man, a thief, a housebreaker, a wizard, one who is sacrilegious, and a robber of sepulchres? What other persons would the cryer nominate, who should call robbers together?"

It was not the true faith of the early Christian mystics that Celsus attacked, but the false forms that were creeping in even during his day. The ideals of early Christianity were based upon the high moral standards of the pagan *Mysteries*, and the first Christians who met under the city of Rome used as their places of worship the subterranean temples of Mithras, from whose cult has been borrowed much of the sacerdotalism of the modern church.

The ancient philosophers believed that no man could live intelligently who did not have a fundamental knowledge of Nature and her laws. Before man can obey, he must understand, and the *Mysteries* were devoted to instructing man concerning the operation of divine law in the terrestrial sphere. Few of the early cults actually worshiped anthropomorphic deities, although their symbolism might lead one to believe they did. They were moralistic rather than religionistic; philosophic rather than theologic. They taught man to use his faculties more intelligently, to be patient in the face of adversity, to be courageous when confronted by danger, to be true in the midst of temptation, and, most of all, to view a worthy life as the most acceptable sacrifice to God, and his body as an altar sacred to the Deity.

Sun worship played an important part in nearly all the early pagan *Mysteries*. This indicates the probability of their Atlantean origin, for the people of Atlantis were sun worshippers. The Solar Deity was usually personified as a beautiful youth, with long golden hair to symbolize the rays of the sun. This golden Sun God was slain by wicked ruffians, who personified the evil principle of the universe. By means of certain rituals and ceremonies, symbolic of purification and regeneration, this wonderful God of Good was brought back to life and became the Savior of His people. The secret processes whereby He was resurrected symbolized those cultures by means of which man is able to overcome his lower nature, master his appetites, and give expression to the higher side of himself. The *Mysteries* were organized for the purpose of assisting the struggling human creature to reawaken the spiritual powers which, surrounded by the flaming



From Montfaucon's *Antiquities*.
A FEMALE HIEROPHANT OF THE MYSTERIES.

This illustration shows Cybele, here called the Syrian Goddess, in the robes of a hierophant. Montfaucon describes the figure as follows: "Upon her head is an episcopal mitre, adorned on the lower part with towers and pinnacles; over the gate of the city is a crescent, and beneath the circuit of the walls a crown of rays. The Goddess wears a sort of surplice, exactly like the surplice of a priest or bishop; and upon the surplice a tunic, which falls down to the legs; and over all an episcopal cope, with the twelve signs of the Zodiac wrought on the borders. The figure hath a lion on each side, and holds in its left hand a Tympanum, a Stratum, a Dinstaff, a Caduceus, and another instrument. In her right hand she holds with her middle finger a thunderbolt, and upon the same arm animals, insects, and, as far as we may guess, flowers and fruit, a bow, a quiver, a torch, and a scepter." The whereabouts of the statue is unknown, the copy reproduced by Montfaucon being from drawings by Ferris Ligorio.



1. The Druids were not a race or ethnic group, but rather an ethical and spiritually oriented mystery school of teacher-priests who lived among the Celts.
2. Though centered in England— this is where their arch-druids lived— they were also active in Ireland and northern France, as well as other areas of Europe.
3. There are many opinions about the source of the word Druid, among them are the Celtic *dru-wid*, which means ‘oak-knower’, the Welsh *Drud*, which means absolver of sins, and the Persian *duru*, which means ‘good and holy man’.
4. Only two sources written as a result of direct contact with the Druids have come to light, one by Julius Caesar, the other, by the Greek philosopher Posidonius. The Druids themselves wrote nothing about their practices.
5. The oak tree was central to Druid sacred practice, including a ritual harvesting of mistletoe by a golden sickle.
6. Scholars hold that the Druidic beliefs were imported, possibly from Carthage, Greece, or India.

Not only was the mistletoe sacred as symbolic of the universal medicine, or panacea, but also because of the fact that it grew upon the oak tree. Through the symbol of the oak, the Druids worshiped the Supreme Deity; therefore, anything growing upon that tree was sacred to Him. At certain seasons, according to the positions of the sun, moon, and stars, the Arch-Druid climbed the oak tree and cut the mistletoe with a golden sickle consecrated for that service. The parasitic growth was caught in white cloths provided for the purpose, lest it touch the earth and be polluted by terrestrial vibrations. Usually a sacrifice of a white bull was made under the tree.

The Druids were initiates of a secret school that existed in their midst. This school, which closely resembled the Bacchic and Eleusinian Mysteries of Greece or the Egyptian rites of Isis and Osiris, is justly designated the *Druidic Mysteries*. There has been much speculation concerning the secret wisdom that the Druids claimed to possess. Their secret teachings were never written, but were communicated orally to specially prepared candidates. Robert Brown, 32°, is of the opinion that the British priests secured their information from Tyrian and Phœnician navigators who, thousands of years before the Christian Era, established colonies in Britain and Gaul while searching for tin. Thomas Maurice, in his *Indian Antiquities*, discourses at length on Phœnician, Carthaginian, and Greek expeditions to the British Isles for the purpose of procuring tin. Others are of the opinion that the Mysteries as celebrated by the Druids were of Oriental origin, possibly Buddhistic.

The proximity of the British Isles to the lost Atlantis may account for the sun worship which plays an important part in the rituals of Druidism. According to Artemidorus, Ceres and Persephone were worshiped on an island close to Britain with rites and ceremonies similar to those of Samothrace. There is no doubt that the Druidic Pantheon includes a large number of Greek and Roman deities. This greatly amazed Caesar during his conquest of Britain and Gaul, and caused him to affirm that these tribes adored Mercury, Apollo, Mars, and Jupiter, in a manner similar to that of the Latin countries. It is almost certain that the Druidic Mysteries were not indigenous to Britain or Gaul, but migrated from one of the more ancient civilizations.

The school of the Druids was divided into three distinct parts, and the secret teachings embodied therein are practically the same as the mysteries concealed under the allegories of Blue Lodge Masonry. The lowest of the three divisions was that of Ovate (Ovydd). This was an honorary degree, requiring no special purification or preparation. The Ovates dressed in green, the Druidic color of learning, and were expected to know something about medicine, astronomy, poetry if possible, and sometimes music. An Ovate was an individual admitted to the Druidic Order because of his general excellence and superior knowledge concerning the problems of life.

The second division was that of Bard (Beirdd). Its members were robed in sky-blue, to represent harmony and truth, and to them was assigned the labor of memorizing, at least in part, the twenty thousand verses of Druidic sacred poetry. They were often pictured with the primitive British or Irish harp--an instrument strung with human hair, and having as many strings as there were ribs on one side of the human body. These Bards were often chosen as teachers of candidates seeking entrance into the Druidic Mysteries. Neophytes wore striped robes of blue, green, and white, these being the three sacred colors of the Druidic Order. --STOAA:22



Mercurius

Posidonius has a great deal to say about Druid and Celt religion but little about the actual gods of Gaul. He does mention, as we saw earlier, the frenzied women near the Loire River, who worship a god like the Greek Dionysus, but he offers no list of Celtic deities or descriptions of their powers. But to our good fortune, we do have just such a list from none other than Julius Caesar. The conqueror of Gaul was surprisingly interested in the religion of the people he defeated—perhaps as a result of his service as a priest in Rome. In any case, his short description of the Gaulish pantheon is the most detailed account of the Celtic gods we possess.

“The chief god of the Gaulish people is Mercury—there are images of him everywhere. They say he is the inventor of all art and a guide for every journey. He is also the protector of trade and business. After Mercury, they worship Apollo, Mars, Jupiter, and Minerva. These gods are in charge of the same areas of life as among other people. Apollo heals diseases, Minerva is in charge of handicrafts, Jupiter rules over the sky, and Mars is in charge of war.”

Our challenge two thousand years later is to look carefully at this passage and try to understand the identity and role of these Gaulish gods using every tool we can muster, such as other classical references, archaeology, and— with suitable caution— later Celtic mythology from Ireland and Wales. —The Philosopher and the Druids:148-9

M. Pictet, of Geneva maintains that the Druidical system of the Irish divinities ascended from the lowest to the highest, by a regular gradation of Gods and Goddesses, till it reached the first great Cause— that they formed a species of chain, by which they were all connected together. The following are the Gods as he gives them, with their Goddesses:

GOD	GODDESS
1. Aesar	Axire, Anu-Mathar, the first Ith
2. Ain.	Eo-Anu, the second Ith
3. Cearas.	Ceara
4. Lute, Lufe	Aedh, Aodh
Geamhar	Cann
5. Dins.	Ceachd
Tath	Bright
6. Neith.	Nath.

Aesar is called God or intelligent fire, *Dia* or *Logh*. Mr. Vallencey says, the word *Logh* means ‘the spiritual flame’. In a vast number of languages, the word *Logh*, standing for some idea relating to fire, is to be found. The word *Aesar*, in Irish, literally means to kindle a fire. In Chaldean, to illuminate. Mr. Selden says, “Although Apollo, Mars, Mercury, were worshiped among the *vulgar* Gauls, yet it appears that the *Druids*’ invocation was to one all-healing or all-saving Power. As fire was supposed to be the first principle of all things, it was also supposed, by a peculiar refinement, to be the destroyer, whence, probably, first arose the idea of the Creator and the Destroyer. –The Celtic Druids:167-8

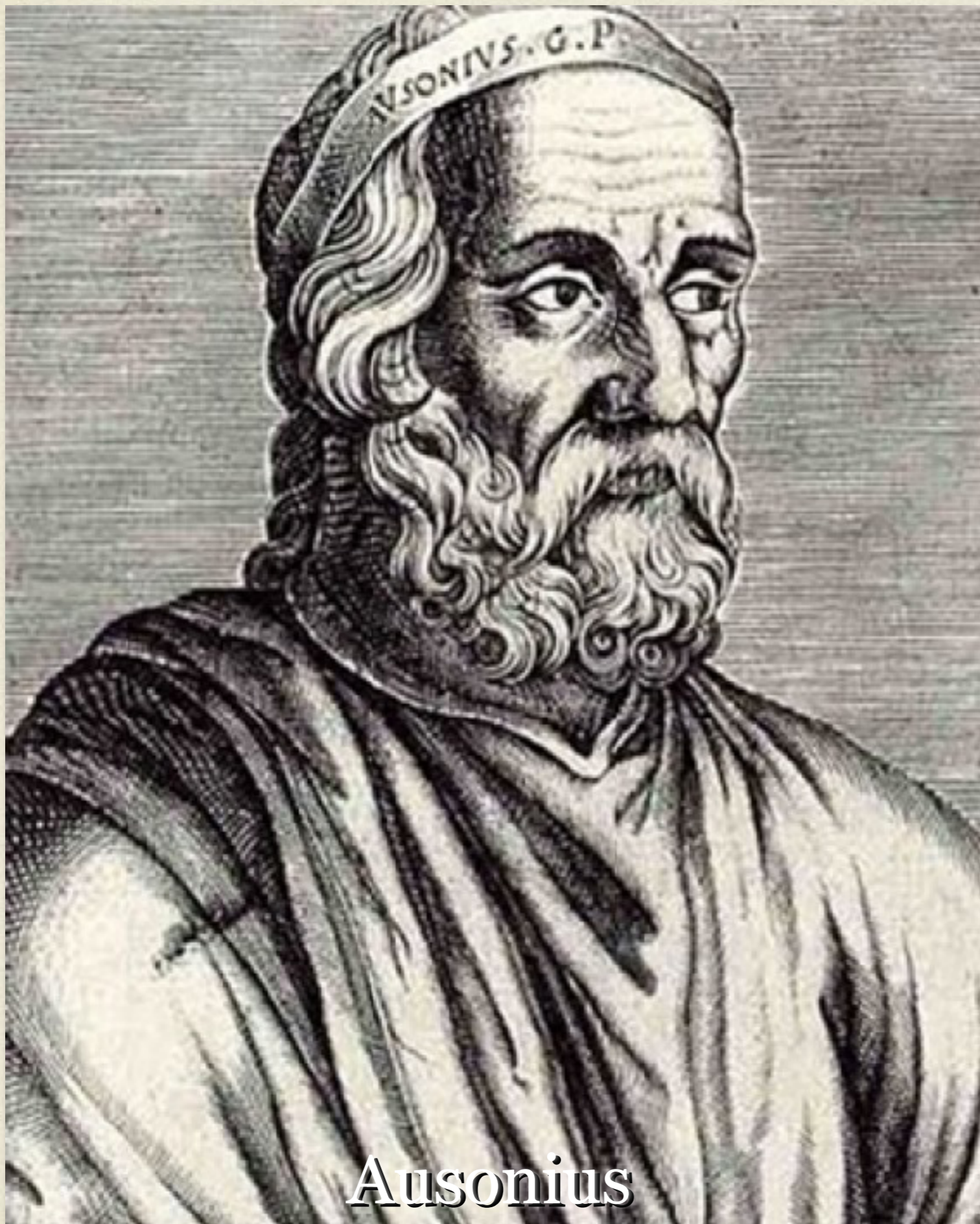


Aesir

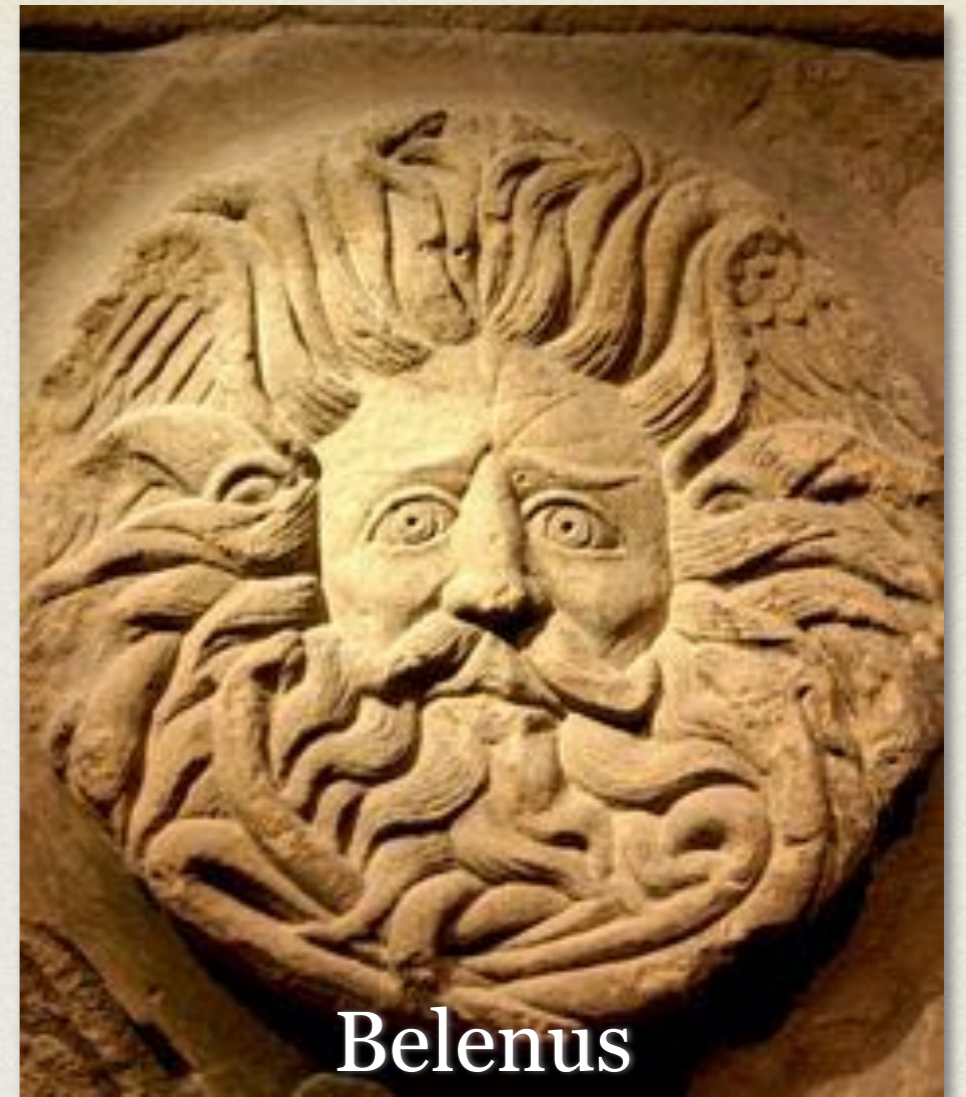
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Ausonius



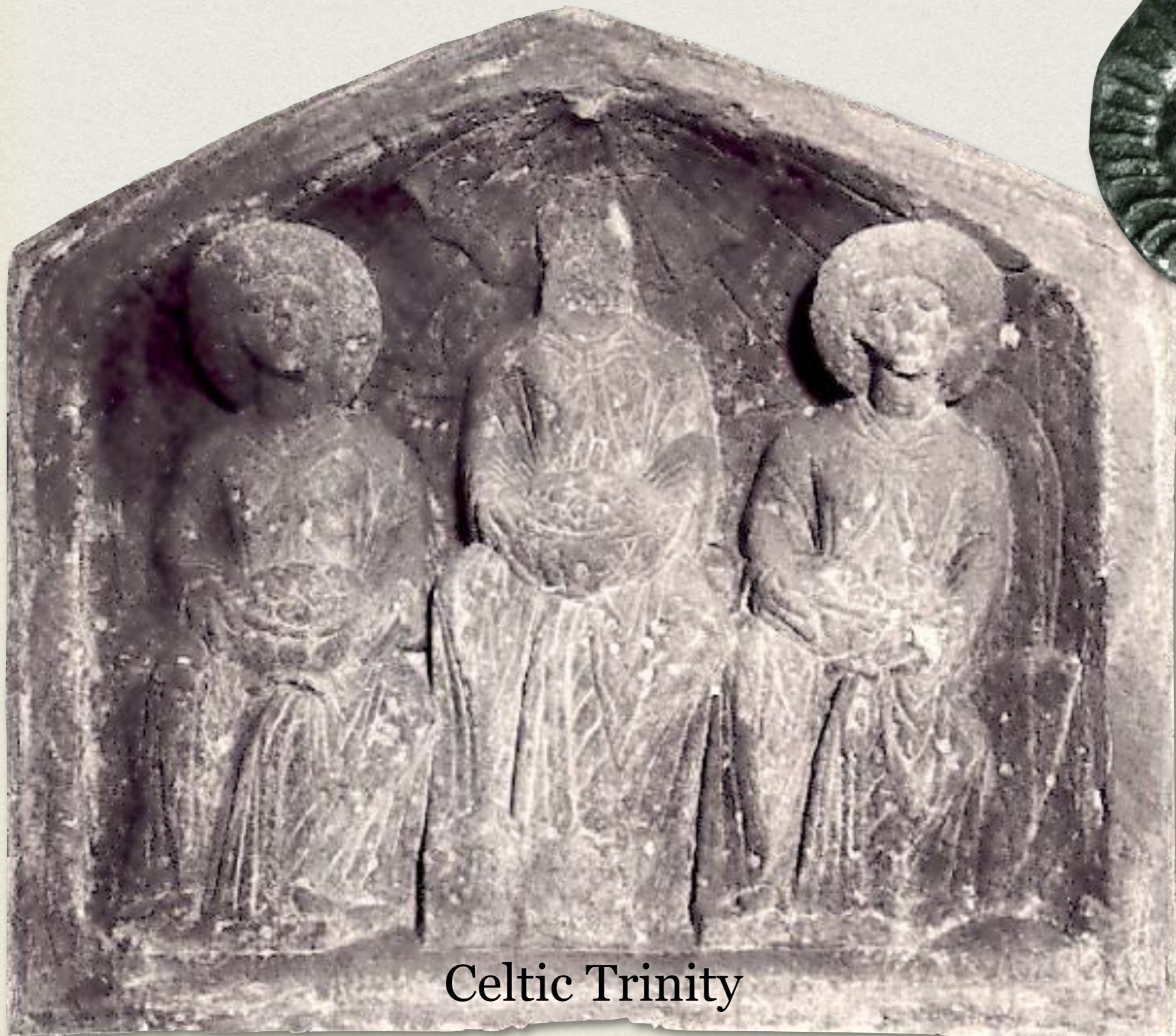
Belenus

“Priest of Belenus, you who count amongst your ancestors the Druids of the Armorican people ... You sprung from the race of the Druids, derive your sacred pedigree from the temple of Belenus, and from thence is your name of Patera, for so the Apollinarian mystics call their ministers (priests).”

—‘Professore’ books iv. and x. by Ausonius,



Belenus



Celtic Trinity



Belenus

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The Ovates were a mixed class, replenished from the ranks of the people. The cultivators of science and art, they occupied no mean position, though from the nature of their employments they drew to themselves less observation. —Taliesin, or, The Bards and Druids of Britain:14

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A Bardic student bore a distinctive title- *Awennydd*. The indispensable qualifications for a scholar, were noble birth and unimpeachable morals. On matriculation, he bound himself by oath not to reveal the mysteries into which he was about to be initiated. He was, however, seldom initiated into anything of importance, until his understanding, affections, morals, and general character, had undergone severe trials. He was closely observed when he was least aware of it; there was an eye, to him invisible, continually fixed upon him, and from the knowledge thus obtained, an estimate was formed of his principles and abilities. An *Awennydd* wore a plaid dress of the Bardic colours, blue, green, and white. The candidate who had passed the ordeal was not immediately invested with the full privileges of the Bardic order; he became an Inceptor, or Inchoate Bard, under the title *Bardd-Caw*, and wore for the first time the band of the order. Not 'til after he had presided at three *Gorseddau* or assemblies, was he fully qualified to exercise all the functions of the office. A full Bard could proclaim and hold a *Gorsedd*, admit disciples and *Ovyddion*, and instruct youth in the principles of religion and morality. The dress of the Bard was uni-coloured, of sky-blue, an emblem of peace and truth. —Taliesin, or, The Bards and Druids of Britain:14-5



Among the Hyperboreans (Druids) were men, priests as it were of Apollo, constantly hymning lyric songs in his praise. Also in that island was a consecrated precinct of great magnificence; a temple of corresponding beauty, in shape spherical, adorned with numerous dedicated gifts; also a city sacred to the god, the majority of its inhabitants harpers, who continually harping in the temple, sang lyrically hymns to the god, greatly magnifying his deeds. The Hyperboreans had a peculiar dialect, and were very friendly disposed to the Hellenes, especially the Athenians and Delians. –Diodorus Siculus, quoting Hecataeus the Milesian, who lived about 500 B.C.



“I am a harmonious one; I am a clear singer.
I am steel; I am a Druid.
I am an artificer; I am a scientific one.
I am a serpent; I am love...” –from ‘The Fold of the Bards’

The third division was that of Druid (Derwyddon). Its particular labor was to minister to the religious needs of the people. To reach this dignity, the candidate must first become a Bard Braint. The Druids always dressed in white--symbolic of their purity, and the color used by them to symbolize the sun.

In order to reach the exalted position of *Arch-Druid*, or spiritual head of the organization, it was necessary for a priest to pass through the six successive degrees of the Druidic Order. (The members of the different degrees were differentiated by the colors of their sashes, for all of them wore robes of white.) Some writers are of the opinion that the title of *Arch-Druid* was hereditary, descending from father to son, but it is more probable that the honor was conferred by ballot election. Its recipient was chosen for his virtues and integrity from the most learned members of the higher Druidic degrees.

According to James Gardner, there were usually two *Arch-Druids* in Britain, one residing on the Isle of Anglesea and the other on the Isle of Man. Presumably there were others in Gaul. These dignitaries generally carried golden scepters and were crowned with wreaths of oak leaves, symbolic of their authority. The younger members of the Druidic Order were clean-shaven and modestly dressed, but the more aged had long gray beards and wore magnificent golden ornaments. The educational system of the Druids in Britain was superior to that of their colleagues on the Continent, and consequently many of the Gallic youths were sent to the Druidic colleges in Britain for their philosophical instruction and training.

Eliphas Levi states that the Druids lived in strict abstinence, studied the natural sciences, preserved the deepest secrecy, and admitted new members only after long probationary periods. Many of the priests of the order lived in buildings not unlike the monasteries of the modern world. They were associated in groups like ascetics of the Far East. Although celibacy was not demanded of them, few married. Many of the Druids retired from the world and lived as recluses in caves, in rough-stone houses, or in little shacks built in the depths of a forest. Here they prayed and meditated, emerging only to perform their religious duties.

James Freeman Clarke, in his *Ten Great Religions*, describes the beliefs of the Druids as follows: "The Druids believed in three worlds and in transmigration from one to the other: In a world above this, in which happiness predominated; a world below, of misery; and this present state. This transmigration was to punish and reward and also to purify the soul. In the present world, said they, Good and Evil are so exactly balanced that man has the utmost freedom and is able to choose or reject either. The Welsh Triads tell us there are three objects of metempsychosis: to collect into the soul the properties of all being, to acquire a knowledge of all things, and to get power to conquer evil. There are also, they say, three kinds of knowledge: knowledge of the nature of each thing, of its cause, and its influence. There are three things which continually grow less: darkness, falsehood, and death. There are three which constantly increase: light, life, and truth." STOAA:22-3



2. A Druid as imagined by Aylett Sammes in a publication of 1676

The Druids were the second order, but it was necessary to pass through the first to reach it. That is to say, a Druid must have been a Bard, though it was by no means required that a Bard should be a Druid. The Druids were priests and judges; this union in their persons of the sacerdotal and judicial functions gave them great weight and authority, and caused their office to be in much request.

The place of meeting of the Druids was called *Gwyddfa*, which was, as the name implies, 'a place of presence', an eminence either natural or artificial, according to the conveniency of the situation. A white robe emblematic of truth and holiness, and also of the solar light, was the distinguishing dress of the Druids. The judicial habit of the Arch Druid was splendid and imposing. He was clothed in a stole of virgin-white, over a closer robe of the same, fastened by a girdle, on which appeared the crystal of augury encased in gold. Round his neck was the breastplate of judgment, said to possess the salutary but uncomfortable property of squeezing the neck on the utterance of a corrupt judgment. Below the breastplate was suspended the *Glain Neidr*, or serpent's\ jewel. On his head he had a tiara of gold. On each of two fingers of his right hand he wore a ring; one plain, the other, the chain ring of divination. As he stood beside the stone altar, his hand rested on the Elucidator, which consisted of several staves called *Coelbrenan*, omen sticks, on which the judicial maxims were cut; and which, being put into a frame, were turned at pleasure, so that each staff represented a triplet when formed of three sides.

—Taliesin, or, The Bards and Druids of Britain: 15-16



The Arch-druid commanded the armies of his country. They were looked up to with the most profound veneration, and the persons of the chiefs of the order were held sacred, so that their power was enormous, and at times when they chose to exercise it, they domineered over both people and kings. The effect of the power of excommunication which they possessed, was attended with consequences as extensive as those of the excommunication of the Roman Church— in the utmost plenitude of its power— a power which, in fact, laid all orders of the state prostrate at their feet. —The Celtic Druids:275



From Wellcome's *Ancient Cymric Medicine*.

THE ARCH-DRUID IN HIS CEREMONIAL ROBES.

The most striking adornment of the Arch-Druid was the *iodhan moran*, or breastplate of judgment, which possessed the mysterious Power of strangling any who made an untrue statement while wearing it. Godfrey Higgins states that this breastplate was put on the necks of witnesses to test the veracity of their evidence. The Druidic *tiara*, or *anguinum*, its front embossed with a number of points to represent the sun's rays, indicated that the priest was a personification of the rising sun. On the front of his belt the Arch-Druid wore the *liath meisicith*--a magic brooch, or buckle in the center of which was a large white stone. To this was attributed the power of drawing the fire of the gods down from heaven at the priest's command. This specially cut stone was a burning glass, by which the sun's rays were concentrated to light the altar fires. The Druids also had other symbolic implements, such as the peculiarly shaped golden sickle with which they cut the mistletoe from the oak, and the *cornan*, or scepter, in the form of a crescent, symbolic of the sixth day of the increasing moon and also of the Ark of Noah. An early initiate of the Druidic Mysteries related that admission to their midnight ceremony was gained by means of a glass boat, called *Cwrwg Gwydrin*. This boat symbolized the moon, which, floating upon the waters of eternity, preserved the seeds of living creatures within its boatlike crescent. STOAA:22



Iodhan Moran

from 'The Celtic Druids', by Godfrey Higgins



"In an Irish fable, Moran was the chief judge of Feredach the Just, an early king of Ireland before the Christian era. The collar is said to have given warning, by increased pressure around the neck of the wearer, whenever he was about to pronounce an unjust sentence." –Thomas Moore "The History of Ireland"



A bog in County Limerick

“[When pulled forth] it was evident that the [object was] the Iodhan Moran. the breast-plate of judgment. It was found twelve feet deep in a turf bog, in the county of Limerick, on the estate of Mr. Bury, and is now in the possession of Mrs. Bury, of Granby Row, Dublin.” –Keating



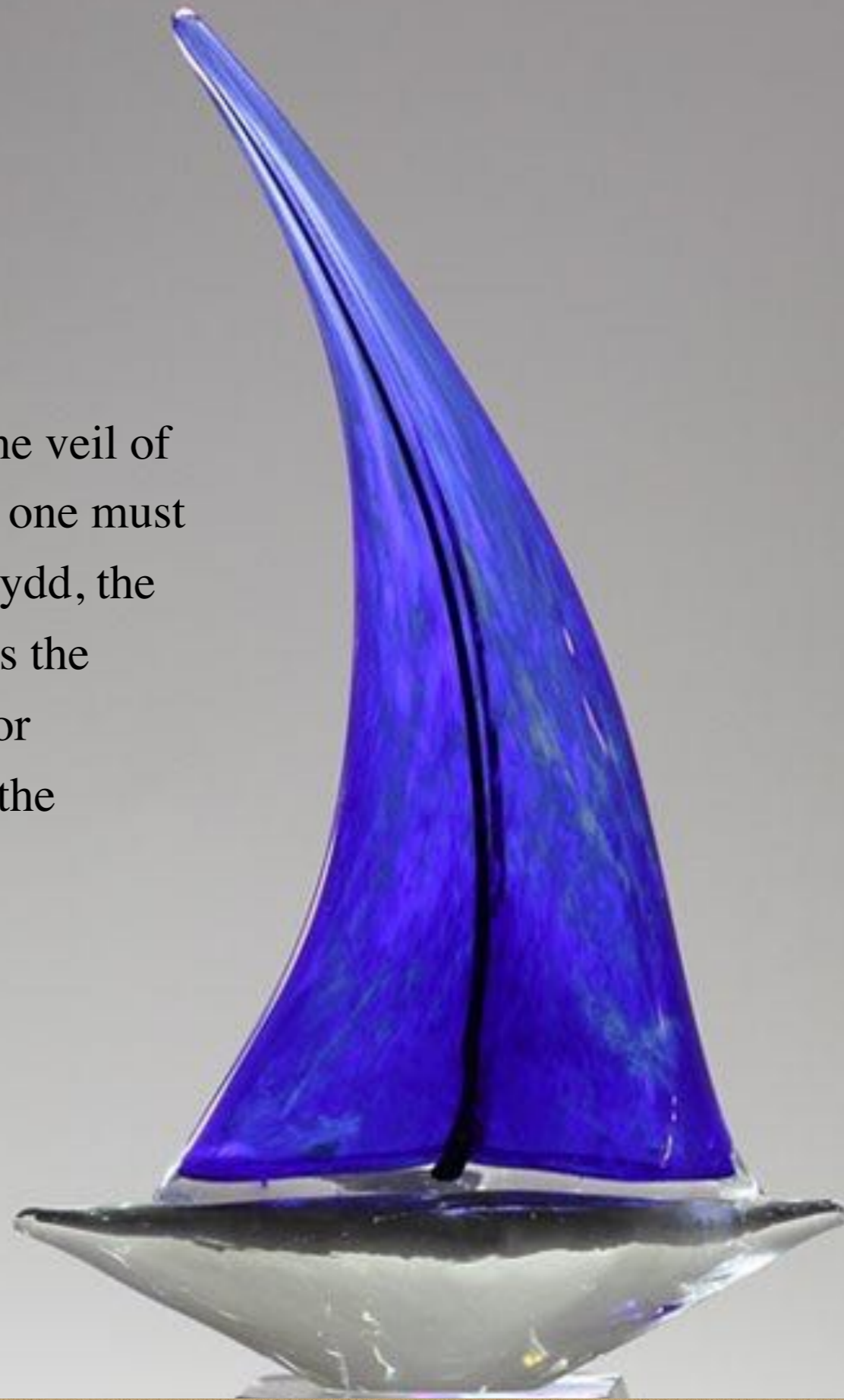
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“...The 2nd [of three initiations] is the veil of Cythraul: *‘the ghost’*, through which one must pass to achieve blessedness in Gwynydd, the world of the twice-born. Its symbol is the *Cwrwg Gwydrin*, the boat of glass, for navigating the in-between realms of the Otherworld.

– The 21 Lessons of Merlyn, by Douglas Monroe





Gavran, Cadwallon, and Gwenddolau, were the heads, we are told, of the three faithful tribes of Britain. The family of Gavran obtained that title by accompanying him to sea to discover some islands, which, by a traditional memorial, were known by the name of ‘The Green Islands of the Ocean’. This expedition was not heard of afterwards, and the situation of the islands became lost to the Britons. The legend is closely allied to the voyage of Merlin and his bards in the boat of glass... It originated from the circumstance of some aspirants being cast away, while undergoing the process of the navicular initiation into the Mysteries. —The Origin of Pagan Idolatry:367

The 21 Lessons of

Merlyn

A Study in Druid Magic & Lore



Douglas Monroe

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In order to reach the exalted position of *Arch-Druid*, or spiritual head of the organization, it was necessary for a priest to pass through the six successive degrees of the Druidic Order. (The members of the different degrees were differentiated by the colors of their sashes, for all of them wore robes of white.) Some writers are of the opinion that the title of *Arch-Druid* was hereditary, descending from father to son, but it is more probable that the honor was conferred by ballot election. Its recipient was chosen for his virtues and integrity from the most learned members of the higher Druidic degrees.

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Eliphas Levi states that the Druids lived in strict abstinence, studied the natural sciences, preserved the deepest secrecy, and admitted new members only after long probationary periods. Many of the priests of the order lived in buildings not unlike the monasteries of the modern world. They were associated in groups like ascetics of the Far East. Although celibacy was not demanded of them, few married. Many of the Druids retired from the world and lived as recluses in caves, in rough-stone houses, or in little shacks built in the depths of a forest. Here they prayed and meditated, emerging only to perform their religious duties.

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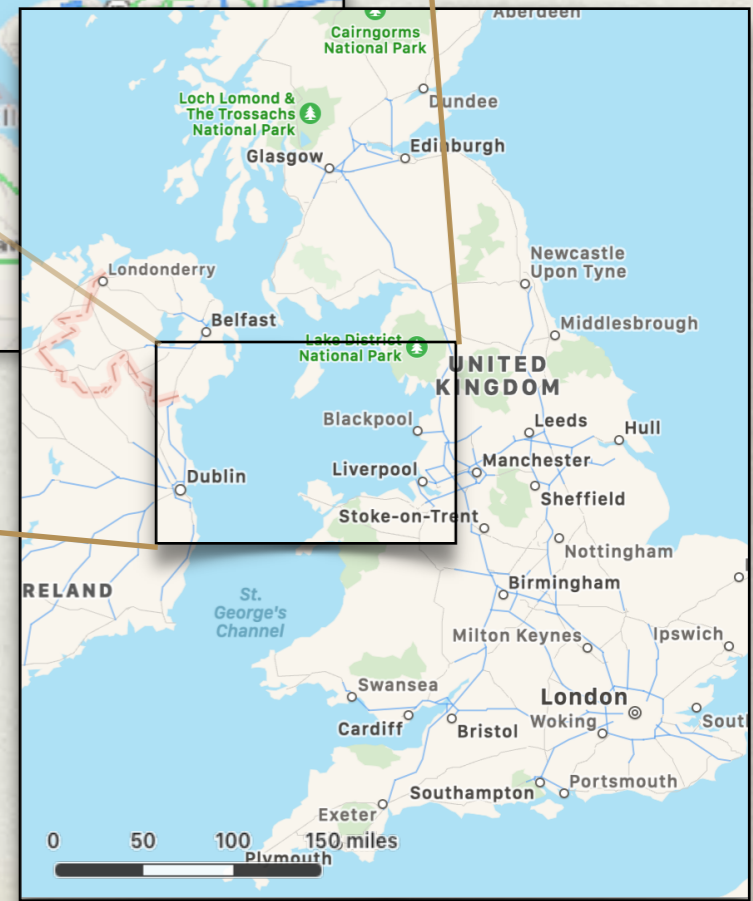
Isle of Man

ISLE OF MAN

Douglas

Isle of Anglesey

Screenshot



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Skellig Michael Celtic Monastery

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Lucan says, that, according to the Druid opinion, the ghosts of the dead descended not to Erebus, or the empire of Pluto, (there to remain in a state of separation from all body, as the Greeks and Romans thought,) but that the same soul actuated another body in another world.¹ Mela declares that the Druids maintained that the souls were immortal, and that there was another life after this, wherein they existed among other departed ghosts; and that they did, for this, reason burn and inter with the dead that suited their rank and inclinations when they were alive. Their moral doctrines seem to have been short and simple: to worship the gods, to do no evil, and to be valiant in battle. This code of moral law is very short, but it is very comprehensive; and it may be a question whether, if every individual in a society acted up to these precepts, the society would not be the happiest of any that ever existed.

¹Mela, the geographer, says, the Thracians held one of the doctrines of the Druids as a common, national persuasion, and it is not improbable that they may have learnt it from them; that souls, after being purified by their transmigration, attained a condition of endless felicity.



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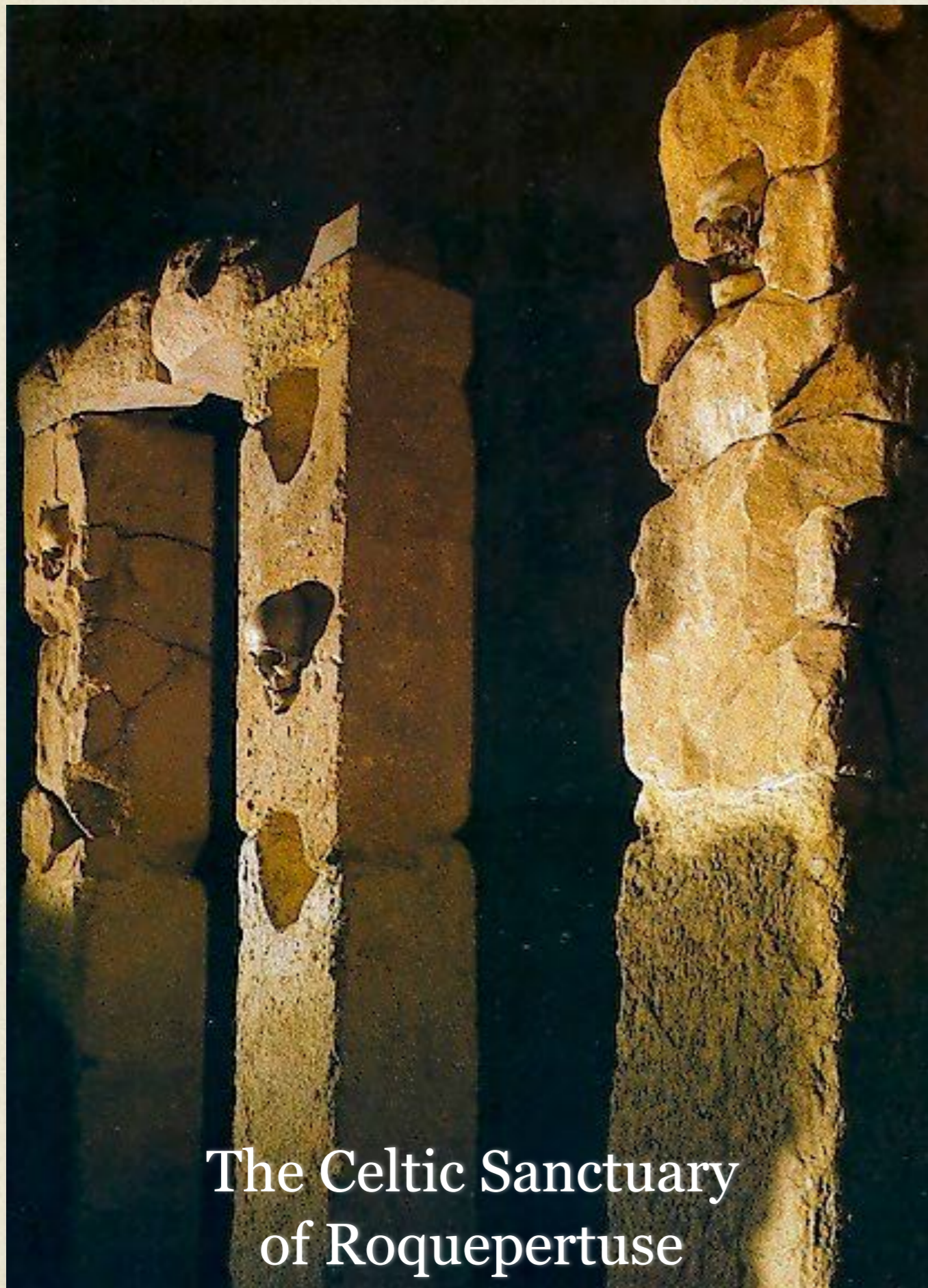
Like nearly all schools of the Mysteries, the teachings of the Druids were divided into two distinct sections. The simpler, a moral code, was taught to all the people, while the deeper, esoteric doctrine was given only to initiated priests. To be admitted to the order, a candidate was required to be of good family and of high moral character. No important secrets were entrusted to him until he had been tempted in many ways and his strength of character severely tried. The Druids taught the people of Britain and Gaul concerning the immortality of the soul. They believed in transmigration and apparently in reincarnation. They borrowed in one life, promising to pay back in the next. They believed in a purgatorial type of hell where they would be purged of their sins, afterward passing on to the happiness of unity with the gods. The Druids taught that all men would be saved, but that some must return to earth many times to learn the lessons of human life and to overcome the inherent evil of their own natures.

Before a candidate was entrusted with the secret doctrines of the Druids, he was bound with a vow of secrecy. These doctrines were imparted only in the depths of forests and in the darkness of caves. In these places, far from the haunts of men, the neophyte was instructed concerning the creation of the universe, the personalities of the gods, the laws of Nature, the secrets of occult medicine, the mysteries of the celestial bodies, and the rudiments of magic and sorcery. The Druids had a great number of feast days. The new and full moon and the sixth day of the moon were sacred periods. It is believed that initiations took place only at the two solstices and the two equinoxes. At dawn of the 25th day of December, the birth of the Sun God was celebrated.

The secret teachings of the Druids are said by some to be tinged with Pythagorean philosophy. The Druids had a Madonna, or Virgin Mother, with a Child in her arms, who was sacred to their Mysteries; and their Sun God was resurrected at the time of the year corresponding to that at which modern Christians celebrate Easter.

Both the cross and the serpent were sacred to the Druids, who made the former by cutting off all the branches of an oak tree and fastening one of them to the main trunk in the form of the letter T. This oaken cross became symbolic of their superior Deity. They also worshiped the sun, moon, and stars. The moon received their special veneration. Caesar stated that Mercury was one of the chief deities of the Gauls. The Druids are believed to have worshiped Mercury under the similitude of a stone cube. They also had great veneration for the Nature spirits (fairies, gnomes, and undines), little creatures of the forests and rivers to whom many offerings were made. Describing the temples of the Druids, Charles Heckethorn, in *The Secret Societies of All Ages & Countries*, says:

"Their temples wherein the sacred fire was preserved were generally situate on eminences and in dense groves of oak, and assumed various forms--circular, because a circle was the emblem of the universe; oval, in allusion to the mundane egg, from which issued, according to the traditions of many nations, the universe, or, according to others, our first parents; serpentine, because a serpent was the symbol of Hu, the Druidic Osiris; cruciform, because a cross is an emblem of regeneration; or winged, to represent the motion of the Divine Spirit. * * * Their chief deities were reducible to two--a male and a female, the great father and mother--Hu and Ceridwen, distinguished by the same characteristics as belong to Osiris and Isis, Bacchus and Ceres, or any other supreme god and goddess representing the two principles of all Being." STOAA:23



The Celtic Sanctuary
of Roquepertuse

One fascinating aspect of this Celtic teaching is that the rebirth of the soul was not immediate. Many years could pass between a person's death and his next incarnation. In the meantime, the soul apparently existed in a spiritual world that could be reached through a portal opened by a funeral fire. The scene is a touching one that must have been witnessed by Posidonius many times. At the end of a funeral, those Gauls who had lost loved ones—children, spouses, parents, friends—walked forward one by one to place their letters on the burning pyre in the hope that their messages would reach the other world.

—The Philosopher and the Druids:162