This is part of an ongoing series of posts about Celtic deities who have been associated with Roman deities. It used to be thought that the Romans forced their choice of Roman deity on the Celtic speaking tribes. Today it’s considered more likely that the Celtic natives often chose which native deity best matched their understanding of Roman ones, as many Celtic deities are associated with more than one Roman deity. The Roman pantheon, so neatly organized by function in the 1st century CE, just doesn’t match the Sovereignty Goddess and tribal chieftain God most common in Celtic cultures.

Perhaps if the Celtic peoples choose which Roman deities were similar to their native ones, they also used the Roman calendar for religious purposes. At the very least, the Empire’s calendar gives the Celtic polytheist (especially those who honor Gaulish and to a lesser extent Brythonic and Iberian Celtic deities) a year of organized festival days. It also allows me to get the word out about amazing, once-famous deities like Telesphorus, Neto, Erecura, Lenus, Sulis, the Matres, Lug, Sirona, Taranus, Abnoba and many others. Steel Bars, Sacred Waters: Celtic Paganism for Prisoners has a strong focus on ALL the Celtic speaking peoples’ and their deities, histories and known ritual activities. Knowing that people in prison can barely afford shampoo and paper, I wanted this giant book to cover everything known about Celtic Paganism so they wouldn’t have a reading list that they couldn’t afford. (And it is gigantic. I feared that it would be refused by prisons on the grounds that it was a blunt object. Not only is it 8×11” and over 550 pages, we used every bit of white space for articles and art and eliminated the waste of blank pages where we could.)
Friends have said that it shouldn't have been so obviously marketed to the 1 in 1000 Americans who are incarcerated Pagans because it is the only book about Gaulish, Brythonic and the new wealth of Celtic deities in Iberia (the possible home of the Celtic languages and known home to more Celtic settlements than the rest of the Western European Celtic world). After all, it's the book which they've been "waiting all their lives" to read. (No pressure there!) Many, disappointed that there were no books on Celtic polytheism aside from Gaelic (and the Gaels are definitely covered in Steel Bars, Sacred Waters), ended up Heathens because of the large amount of Heathenry 101 books. (Also there's a very old, pre-Celtic even, linguistic, cultural and religious connection between the two linguistic groups that continued into the Viking Age.) Celtic Reconstructionist Pagan "homework" is nowhere near as simple as that for Heathenry (the Eddas). The sources for accurate Celtic information are usually found in peer-reviewed journals published almost daily. Important bits are hidden in linguistics, archeology, biased Roman and Greek history, writing by Irish monks determined to make the ogham Biblical and other disparate sources. If you wondered how the Celtic speaking peoples depicted their deities before the Roman influence, what the deal is with all these boars, and why is this mysterious "Old North" of the Britons, Gaels, Angles and Picts that no one explains so important, this is your book. If you wanted rituals based on historical evidence that you can just start practicing, Gullveig Press has you covered.

Why? Because this is the book I wished someone had written instead of just websites complaining about the books with completely inaccurate information. Please, if you research and practice polytheism, consider having both print versions of your writing available for sale to those without Internet access (preferably at a discount for prisoners) and an e-book or pdf for those with ink intolerance, like me. (Our books are available for those with MCS ink intolerance.) I want to read them! (Anything anywhere on Kemetic Reconstruction? Non-fascist, academically researched Baltic Reconstructed Paganism? A respectful collection of Sumerian mythology, the basis for many myths in the Christian Bible’s Old Testament? Reading online really hurts my eyes but I can copy website information, especially if it’s well organized. Contact me!)

No profit is made by Gullveig Press – all money from sales to awesome, intelligent (and might I add quite attractive?) people like you covers the printer’s cost and postage to send free copies directly to inmates or books-to-prisoners organizations. Amazon takes a big chunk of those profits, so please consider buying your jam-packed, incredibly heavy copy directly from here. It’s even less expensive!

Enough plugging of the book and our love for these deities and consistent work supporting Pagans in prison! On with the post!

**Victoria**

On July 17th the Romans made sacrifice to the Goddess of Victory, **Victoria**. The native British Goddess **Brigantia** was associated with Victoria sometimes. However, She’s been covered in this post. (Still, feel free to honor Her today. As the Goddess of the most powerful tribe in Britain, She is used to all the lovin’ you can give! How She probably was brought to Leisurecity by tribes already exposed to Christianity in Briton and became, partially for political reasons, Ireland’s first home grown Saint, **Brigid**, read here.)

**Andraste and Andate**

This leaves us with the formidable Goddess **Andraste** ("indestructible") Who may be the same Goddess as **Andate**, a name meaning “victory.” **Andate** may be associated (at least linguistically) with the Gaulish Goddess **Andarta** Whose name means "well-fixed, staying firm" and was worshipped in Southern France and Bern, Switzerland.
Boudicca/ Boudica

The information we have about Andraste and Andate comes from Roman writing about the rebellion of Britons led by Queen Boudicca of the Iceni. Although the Roman historian Tacitus spelled her name as Boudicca, it may have been Boudica, which means "victory." Among many other things, Tacitus wrote about events in Britain. His father-in-law served the Roman military during Boudicca’s rebellion, so Tacitus probably recorded much of the older man’s memories of battle.

Historian Cassius Dio is our other source of information and he, too, obviously was biased against the Britons. After all, the Romans were at war with the Britons at this time (60 or 61 CE) and like all writers of war, he had to demonize the enemy as "the Other" and probably made up the detailed torture described. (Tacitus never mentioned it.) However, the rebellion was incredibly violent and both sides used torture. Boudicca’s forces did burn down three important Roman cities and massacred around 70,000 Romans and pro-Roman Britons. Red charred debris can still be found 2,000 years later in London, at that time the Roman merchant center Londinium.

It’s speculated that the Southeastern British tribes’ rebellion was meant to be coordinated with that of one led by the Druids from their island of Mona (modern Anglesey) on the other side of Britain. The Roman military was actually slaughtering the Druids when Boudicca led her forces to war. Another tribe who joined in the rebellion was the Trinovantes, whose capitol was taken by the Romans and turned into Camulodunum (modern Colchester). Roman historian Tacitus wrote in The Annals:

“(T)hese new (Roman) settlers in the colony of Camulodunum drove (the Trinovantes) out of their houses, ejected them from their farms, called them captives and slaves ....”

Cassius Dio wrote of the rebellion more than a century after it happened. He has Boudicca speak of history she would not have known for the benefit of his Roman readers. Obviously no one had no electronic recording devices so what she actually said is unknown.

For the Celtic Polytheist

What is particularly interesting for the Celtic polytheist is that: Queen Boudicca speaks directly to Andraste possibly because nobles also had a Priestly function or because Britons prayed to their deities without the Priest middlemen (as noted with Sulis); Boudicca uses a popular form of divination in the ancient world that continued in Scotland until a couple hundred years ago: looking at the movement of animals; female Britons were not only fierce warriors (which we’ve read about the Gauls and some Celtic tribes in Iberia) but were also military commanders; and the Britons held feasts and made sacrifices for deities like in other Celtic cultures.

This is even more helpful for the Brythonic polytheist. During the time when Britain was part of the Roman Empire, Gaulish and other Celtic soldiers in the Imperial military brought their native deities. Most Celtic deities whose names have been recovered in Britain were from the temples and inscriptions made by these foreigners. The groves of native deities do not have stone inscriptions, so Their names are lost to us. Although there was trade between the Britons and Gauls, most of the known deities worshipped in both Britain and Gaul probably were originally Gaulish. In Andate and Andraste we have definite names of native Brythonic Goddesses. Based on the evidence at the sanctuary of Sulis and records by Tacitus and Cassius Dio, we know that prayer was part of ancient religious practice. To honor Andraste a feast and the making of offerings in a grove is suggested.

Sometimes I wonder about worshiping a deity of victory Who failed to deliver, and then I remember our deities are not all-knowing, all-powerful or all-loving. They have greater knowledge and power than I do and a divine ability to love which transcends “reason.”
Andate and Andraste did provide victory to these people most of the time or they would not have been worshipped. We face so many battles against diseases, lookism, racism, misogyny, transphobia, heterosexualism, ableism, faithism, ageism, depression, anxiety, poverty, trauma, hubris, self doubt, violence in the home and streets, echoes from shame-based religions, pollution, self-harming relationship patterns, isolation, the 6th huge planetary extinction, nuclear weapons, fracking, family discord and so much else – surely Andate and Andraste have much to offer if we only return to Their worship.

No deity has ever given human followers everything they wanted or needed. Ever. The forces in motion (Wyrd) may prevent Them from helping, we do not at this time know what we really need, some plan is already in place, astrological transits fight our will, the laws of nature won’t allow our wishes to come true, our prayers interfere with the best course for certain others, possibly we broke an oath to a deity, or some other reason we may not currently understand means we all have to “lose” sometimes. But the deities provide much including comfort, so we honor Them and celebrate the miracles happening every day.

Thank you, Andate and Andraste!

Some Source Material

It’s important to read some source material so you at least understand what modern polytheist writers have to work with. You can also check that the writer knows what they are writing about. It is possible to understand some information in different ways because we all have our own interests and beliefs. Below is part of Thayer’s translation of Cassius Dio:

“(T)he person who was chiefly instrumental in rousing the natives and persuading them to fight the Romans, the person who was thought worthy to be their leader and who directed the conduct of the entire war, was Buduica, a Briton woman of the royal family and possessed of greater intelligence than often belongs to women. This woman assembled her army, to the number of some 120,000, and then ascended a tribunal which had been constructed of earth in the Roman fashion. In stature she was very tall, in appearance most terrifying, in the glance of her eye most fierce, and her voice was harsh: a great mass of the tawniest hair fell to her hips; around her neck was a large golden necklace; and she wore a tunic of divers colours over which a thick mantle was fastened with a brooch. This was her invariable attire. She now grasped a spear to aid her in terrifying all beholders and spoke as follows:

“‘You have learned by actual experience how different freedom is from slavery. Hence, although some among you may previously, through ignorance of which was better, have been deceived by the alluring promises of the Romans, yet now that you have tried both, you have learned how great a mistake you made in preferring an imported despotism to your ancestral mode of life, and you have come to realize how much better is poverty with no master than wealth with slavery.… Why is it that, though none of us has any money (how, indeed, could we, or where would we get it?), we are stripped and despoiled like a murderer’s victims?…

“‘However, even at this late day, though we have not done so before, let us, my countrymen and friends and kinsmen, — for I consider you all kinsmen, seeing that you inhabit a single island and are called by one common name, — let us, I say, do our duty while we still remember what freedom is, that we may leave to our children not only its appellation but also its reality. For, if we utterly forget the happy state in which we were born and bred, what, pray, will they do, reared in bondage?”

“When she had finished speaking, she employed a species of divination, letting a hare escape from the fold of her dress; and since it ran on what they considered the auspicious side, the whole multitude shouted with pleasure, and Buduica, raising her hand toward heaven, said: “I thank thee, Andraste, and call upon thee as woman speaking to woman; for I rule over no burden-bearing Egyptians as did Nitocris, nor over trafficking Assyrians as did Semiramis (for we have by now gained thus much learning from the Romans!), much less over the Romans themselves as did Messalina once and afterwards Agrippina and now Nero (who, though in name a man, is in fact a woman, as is proved by his singing, lyre-playing and beautification of his person); nay, those over whom I rule are Britons, men that know not how to till the soil or ply a trade, but are thoroughly versed in the art of war and hold all things in common, even children and wives, so that the latter possess the same valour as the men. As the queen, then, of such men and of such women, I supplicate and pray thee for victory, preservation of life, and liberty against men insolent, unjust, insatiable, impious, — if, indeed, we ought to term those people men who bathe in warm water, eat artificial dainties, drink unmixed wine, anoint themselves with myrrh, sleep on soft couches with boys for bedfellows, — boys past their prime at that, — and are slaves to a lyre-player and a poor one too. Therefore may this Mistress Domitia-Nero reign no longer over me or over you men; let the wench sing and lord it over
One too. Therefore may this Mistress Domitia-Nero reign no longer over me or over you men; let the wench sing and lord it over Romans, for they surely deserve to be the slaves of such a woman after having submitted to her so long. But for us, Mistress, be thou alone ever our leader.

“Those who were taken captive by the Britons were subjected to every known form of outrage. The worst and most bestial atrocity committed by their captors was the following. They hung up naked the noblest and most distinguished women and then cut off their breasts and sewed them to their mouths, in order to make the victims appear to be eating them; afterwards they impaled the women on sharp skewers run lengthwise through the entire body. All this they did to the accompaniment of sacrifices, banquets, and wanton behaviour, not only in all their other sacred places, but particularly in the grove of Andate. This was their name for Victory, and they regarded her with most exceptional reverence.”

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**Celtic Festival Calender: Belenos, Endovelicus, Neto, Grannus, Maponos & Apollo**

*July 3, 2019 7 Comments*
This is part of an ongoing series where Celtic deities are matched with Festivals in the Roman calendar. I don’t know if these Celtic deities were worshipped on these days back then, but it helps modern polytheists organize a ritual calendar. The Celts were not passive in how their religion changed after being conquered by the Romans, and the Empire didn’t force much on the Celts after killing the politically powerful Druids. Where a Celtic deity is said to be like a Roman one, or their name becomes a new epitaph, or Celtic names are followed by Roman ones, we usually don’t know who made that choice or why. Over a few generations, how anyone understood the relationship between the deities probably was different from shrine to shrine, and maybe even from devotee to devotee. Polytheism is more concerned with right religious action than right beliefs, so different cultures could worship together and have very different ideas about why.

**Apollo** is a Greek God: the bisexual healer, the beautiful eternal youth, the radiant sun, the twin of **Artemis**. The Romans merged **Artemis** with their important Goddess **Diana**, but the cult of Apollo stayed in His name. Centuries before this, southern Gauls adopted two Greek Gods, **Apollo** and **Hermes**. During the Celtic migrations traveling East, we have a well known story of a group of Gaulish warriors fighting their way to Delphi, at that time under **Apollo’s** protection, and stealing all they could. The chaotic weather of the area and other problems caused the Gauls to panic, drop the shrine goods, and die in a messy battle. Perhaps the power of **Apollo** was told to other Gauls who heard the news. When the Romans brought **Apollo** to other Celtic tribes, often with southern Gaulish soldiers, the cult of Apollo grew even greater. Here, I explore Celtic deities who were identified with **Apollo** for Ludi Apollinares (Sacred Games of **Apollo**), a 7 day festival with the main sacrifice on July 13th.

The Roman games of **Apollo** began during the wars with Hannibal in the late third century BCE. By 44 BCE the Festival lasted for seven days: two for horse races and five for theatre productions. In every home, decorated with garlands of flowers, the most important woman led everyone in prayers. The front door was left open and tables graced each entrance during the time of feasting. Was this so Apollo would enter? Or to share with neighbors? We don’t know, only that it was a popular festival.

**Belenos**

The first deity associated with Apollo for this essay will be **Belenos**, if only so mistakes can be corrected. We only know of **Belenos** from the northeastern Italian city of Aquileia, where His name was a Celtic epithet for **Apollo**: Apollo Belenos.

Unfortunately, a popular Gaulish deity with a similar name, **Belinos** (pronounced “beh-LEY-noss”) meaning “bright, dazzling” who was never identified with **Apollo** in any inscription or shrine, was confused by older scholars with **Belenos**. They actually began replacing **Belinos** with Belenos, assuming all translations (the originals of which they never saw) were wrong.

Now scholars have reviewed the original source material and found that inscriptions and shrines across Europe said “**Belinos**” not “**Belenos**.” These are different deities. Only one was associated with Apollo and only in one city. The information is so new that it’s not even mentioned at Wikipedia.

This is a great example of why it’s so important to read current research. There’s thousands of academically sound papers for free at Academia.edu – Just check that a peer-reviewed publication chose their work, that they are a respected name in the field, or the writing has strong sources and doesn’t go into neo-Pagan fantasy. I’ve seen Celtic and Germanic polytheism websites citing books so outdated that their information about the deities is way off. With Academia.edu this is a Golden Age for people interested in Celtic studies.

So much new research over the last decade has completely changed everything we thought we knew. The Bronze Age Celto-
So much new research over the last decade has completely changed everything we thought we knew. The Bronze Age Celto-Germanic words invented before there was a proto-Celtic or proto-Germanic language announced in 2010 as possibly originating in the current Czech Republic now have physical evidence (rock art and stele show the same sun boats and warrior poses for example) of being created in a connected trade culture between Iberia and Scandinavia – amber traded for copper. The basics of both religions is found in these words. Nerthus, Macha, Badb and other deities’ names originate here. Groves with horses, magic performed with string (origin of seidr), prophetic poets, angelica, one-eye, spear and other Woden and Lug related terms plus much more is revealed. (Steel Bars, Sacred Waters has more in depth information.)

Information about Celtic deities and tribes in Iberia is published at an astonishing rate. Ways statues of deities were used is among the completely new knowledge. In the Celtic Iron Age Iberia had more Celtic settlements than anywhere else. The Celtic language may have started in Iberia, where so many versions were spoken. The Phoenician traders had a port in Spain starting in the 9th century BCE. Lug (Lugh, Llew) is honored in a Celtic language in Phoenician script in 6th century BCE east of the Straits of Gibraltar. An entire Bronze Age Atlantic seaboard proto-Celtic culture spanned (due to trade) from Iberia, the French coast, the Low Countries coasts, Ireland, Britain including the Scottish Highlands. All built the same style tombs, used versions of the same proto-Celtic language and similar art designs and symbolism. Hallstatt as the origin of Celtic cultures is falling fast out of favor.

This will shake up some Pagans, who have created a mythology of the sun God Belenos whom a scholar once assumed Beltain celebrates. But those Pagans could have a genuine personal connection to Apollo or an Aquileia version of Celtic polytheism. Both are traditional to Celts at different places and times.

Belinos was a widely popular God in Gaul, Austria, northern Italy, the Alps, and Slovakia. He was even worshiped in Aquileia – nowhere near Apollo Belenos, more proof they are two different Gods. Perhaps He was the most worshipped Celtic God, sometimes paired with a Goddess who may be Belisama. Worship of Him has not been found in Britian, but “the King of the Britons” was Cynobellini, a name that contains beli and appears on coins. Belinos’ name is also found in some place and personal names, like the second half of Llewellyn (probably “Lugus-Belinos”). Belinos has possible sun connections, but none to Apollo, so this would not be His festival. However, it definitely could be the Festival of Belenos.

Endovelicus

Endovelicus (pronounced “en-doh-VEL-ih-cuss” – try it; it actually floats off the tongue) is a solar God of healing. I don’t know if He was ever directly connected to Apollo, but the Romans took such a strong interest in Him, I am going to guess that some did.

Endovelicus was first worshiped by Celts in Portugal and southern Spain, probably as the chieftain God of their pantheon. Endovelicus was the guardian of any town with a temple for Him. The main magical animal of the Celts, swine, were His main sacrifice.

(The importance of boars and pigs is now believed to be from a cult the proto-Celts learned from the native Neolithic culture along the southern coast of the North Sea. These non-Indo-Europeans later moved east into the southern Baltic shore, where the Pagan Estonians embraced the cult of the Great Sow Mother, which was recorded by the Romans. Unfortunately until recently it was believed that the Sow Mother was Germanic and possibly connected Nerthus with Freykr and Freya. Estonian is part of the Finnish language group, not Germanic or Baltic, but one connected to the Bronze Age Celto-Germanic words.)

The Roman Empire was quite taken with Endovelicus. Temples dedicated to Him were very popular. At His sanctuaries a ritual was held and then people in search of healing slept. His spirit or in Roman terms His numen was considered to be present in His sanctuaries, and Endovelicus would give the sleeping pilgrims helpful dreams. Sometimes people came to receive prophetic visions at a temple that filled with hot steam from a hot spring. (Some Iberian Celts had saunas, so they understood the healing and probably the spiritual purification power of sweat and heat.) In the 5th century CE, Christianity worked hard to destroy His large following of devotees.

One way that scholars know Endovelicus is a solar God is because of how He was depicted. Artists gave Him several faces, including an “infernal” one, because the solar God travels underground at night. In the morning He returns to us with renewed healing powers.
If you’ve studied Kemetic mythology some, you’ll notice a similarity.

He was an incredibly popular deity whose worship has returned. This way, there’s a date for making offerings and prayers.

**Grannus**

Grannus possibly “the Warming One” is the first Gaulish God most people would identify with Apollo. Pronounced “GRAN-nuss”, He is a God of healing thermal or mineral springs. Grannus had many sanctuaries. The most famous, Aquae Granni, was in what today is Aachen, Germany. Its hot springs were in a marshy valley. Even during the Hallstatt culture, it became a healing center. His name may be connected to the sun’s heat or possibly a man’s beard. It seems that beards were common on mature Celtic deities. (The clean shaven Roman God Mercury often is depicted with a beard and Celtic epitaph.) At one spa he was called “The one with a piercing or far-reaching look.”

Already ancient, Grannus had a 10-day celebration in the 1st-century CE. A Latin inscription on a fountain in Limoges mentions it. (If we knew when it was or how it was done, there’d be a post about that!) But this shows how long His popularity lasted.

The Goddess Sirona is commonly His partner, who has Her own “Heather’s invented” Festival date, based on that of Salus. Grannus is also invoked with many different cultures’ deities. The list includes Diana, the Nymphs, Hygieia, the Mother of the Gods, Sol, Serapis, Isis, Core, and Mars Sagatus. Frankly, I’m surprised that modern Pagan artists don’t depict Him very often. He was a major deity for so long and flexible enough to work with a multitude of deities. Instead, Sirona gets all the art (although it’s basically the Greek Goddess Hygieia). I understand that drawing women with snakes is sexier, more taboo. But with Grannus, we have great imagery: beard, piercing look, hot springs, sun. I’d love to see people working with that.

According to “The Religion of the Celts” by J.A. MacCulloch, “The god is still remembered in a chant sung round bonfires in Auvergne. A sheaf of corn is set on fire, and called “Granno mio,” while the people sing, “Granno, my friend; Granno, my father; Granno, my mother.”

**Maponos**

Maponos, “the Divine Youth”, is a Gaulish God who became important in the Roman military zone of Northern Britain. At the Clochmabon Stone, offerings were even made by Roman military chiefs. There Maponos was linked to hunting, depicted with a hunter Goddess or a dog companion. He was often associated with Apollo, including one inscription about Apollo the Harper. In Gaul he had a healing spring sanctuary.

He and Mabon of the Mabinogi are often thought to be the same God. Maponos once was as a way of saying “Apollo, young son of Jupiter” while Mabon is once called “the son of lightning.” (Jupiter throws lightning bolts.) Maponos may also connected to the Gaelic Aengus. He generally seems to be a young, typical Celtic God good at everything: battle, healing, hunting and the arts.

**Neto**

Another Celtic God from Iberia, Neto was said to be a combination of the Roman Gods Mars and Apollo. There’s more information about Neto in the post about Celtic deities to be celebrated on March 1st. He can be honored on both days – the Celtic Iberian deities have been left out of Celtic Paganism books for far too long. One might think that only the Gaels had anything known about Celtic religion, when really we have so much more – a continent more – to embrace.

For all of you who want to learn about a lot of Gaelic deities (understanding how fractured the Mythological Cycle is) and study the Celtic deities, religions, culture and history from the medieval Mabinogi to ancient Ukraine, Steel Bars, Sacred Waters was written to do just that. Knowing prisoners could never afford any other books on Celtic Paganism, we crammed in everything possible, making it truly “all in one” (and rather big and heavy). You can buy it here for less than Amazon, and all profits will go towards buying copies for incarcerated Pagans.
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This is part of a series where festivals for Roman deities are matched with the Celtic deities who were associated with the Roman deities. For example, March 1st is the Festival of Mars, and many Celtic Gods were connected with the Protector of Rome. As tribal protectors Themselves, they could have been identified as Mars by the Romans or the Celts.

The Romans weren’t very involved in Celtic religion. After slaughtering the politically powerful Druids (some of whom may have become teachers and philosophers in Rome), the Romans let local cults continue. Southern Gauls already adopted the Greek Gods Apollo and Hermes, and later Gaulish merchants readily brought the cult of Mercury to their towns.

For the sake of convenience, the Romans described other people’s deities as being like their own. In a multicultural society, it made it easier for Romans. However, it appears that Celtic people often had the power to decide which Roman deity was the best fit. As different Celts had different understandings of Roman deities and Celtic deities didn’t fit neatly into $x = y$, a Celtic God could be called Mars in one region and Mercury in another.

As the Celtic polytheists worked with the new Roman ways, I suspect some used the Roman calendar for their Festivals, especially September 1st, when Jupiter (who was identified as Taranus) was honored as the God of lightning and Juno was celebrated in Her Queen aspect. That’s the same Juno aspect...
June 3rd is the Festival of the Sabine war Goddess adopted by the Romans named Bellona. Bellona was considered an aspect of the important Roman Goddess Victoria, Whose Festival date, if She had one, is lost. Wikipedia sums Victoria up nicely: “Victoria was a symbol of victory over death and determined who would be successful during war.”

Brigantia was the Goddess of the most powerful tribe (or federation of tribes) in Britain, the Brigantes. There are 7 inscriptions to Brigantia in Britain. Twice She was associated with Victoria in Yorkshire. An inscription calls her “divine nymph” and at Hadrian’s Wall She is described as “heavenly.” A couple of statues of Brigantia, including one in Brittany, have symbols that belong to the Roman Goddess Minerva. Due to Her association with Minerva, you could also honor Brigantia during the Greater Quinquatrus held between March 19 and 23. I had so much information on Sulis for that Festival, I stayed focused on Her.

Bellona was associated with the consort of Mars, and like Mars Her temple was on the outskirts of Rome. There is a theory that Mars is a border God, called on by soldiers defending Rome and farmers as they ritually circle their land. The idea that Mars was an agricultural God is based on a hymn sung to Mars by farmers in an annual ceremony protecting the edge of their lands, and an archaic rite by His Priests that no one understood.

I prefer the border God idea over the agricultural God theory. It fits with other old Indo-European ideas, especially Vedic, and is logical. The God of Rome guards Rome, from its farmers to its military. Mars stops danger before it can arrive. Temples at the edge of a border allow deities who “go wild” to have access to the wilderness. You don’t want war IN your town; you want to be protected before it gets to the town. Next to Bellona’s temple was the columna bellica, the edge of Rome. The temple and the land on which it stood was considered foreign soil. To declare war on a distant land, a Priest (in a rather Odin-like move) threw a javelin towards the enemy’s kingdom. Generals made offerings to Victoria after winning wars.

What happened on Her Festival was probably sacrifices, prayers, and feasts. At a different festival, the Priests of Bellona cut their arms and legs to offer their blood. Nothing like that is mentioned for today. Bellona had temples in France, Germany, Britain, and North Africa.

Brigantia means “the Most High Goddess” and is pronounced “brig-AN-tee-ah”. There are Goddesses with variations of Her name, all of Whom I would probably consider different Goddesses, like the Welsh Braint, the Matres Brigiacae in Peñalbo de Castro, Brigindona, and Bricta/Brixta, to name a few. All could be honored June 3rd even though they were never associated with a Roman deity, much less Victoria specifically.

The root word brigant- means “elevated, high.” The British Brigantes may have been named for being nobility or for living in the mountains. They were the largest tribe (or possibly a federation of tribes) in Britain when the Romans arrived. They controlled northern England, a territory known as Brigantia (today Yorkshire). Their wealth was based on cattle and sheep, and Brigantia may have been associated with that economy. Allies of Rome, they created an important buffer against the tribes in modern Scotland.

Many British nobles welcomed the Romans, thinking that they were gaining powerful allies. Enraged princes who didn’t become kings sought the help of Rome. At the time it seemed like a smart move.

Cartimandua (“sleek pony”) was the Brigantes’ queen when Rome arrived, and two lavish burials of women with chariots suggest that the Brigantes were used to powerful women. Her husband Venutius, king of the Brigantes, was a top military strategist and also loyal to Rome. In 51 CE Cartimandua captured a probable rival named Caratacus, a popular rebel leader against Rome. In exchange for Caratacus, Rome made Cartimandua very wealthy. Her people’s hillfort grew from 17 to 600 acres in 20 years.

Meanwhile, the royal couple went to war against each other in 51 AD and declared a truce 6 years later, after Cartimandua captured Venutius’ family and Rome sent troops to help her. They divorced over a decade later when she took Venutius’ armor-bearer Vellocatus as her lover. In 69 CE Cartimandua was killed by the rebels she had imprisoned for refusing to cooperate with the Romans.
Vellocatus as her lover. In 69 CE the Brigantes rebelled against her and she was taken to an unknown, safe place by Roman soldiers. Venutius ruled the Brigantian kingdom until 74 CE when Roman forces finally defeated him, wanting total control of Britain.

Although loyal and very helpful to Rome Cartimandua was portrayed harshly by the Romans, perhaps because she was everything a Roman woman should not be. Cartimandua obviously was a bold and savvy politician and enjoyed her sexual freedom. She and Boudicca are often used by Pagans and scholars alike as examples of the power held by the Celtic Queens of the Britons, something we don’t read about other Celts.

Ptolemy wrote that there was also a tribe named Brigantes in eastern Ireland, and there may be something to that. The Goddess Brig seems to have been brought to eastern Ireland by a tribe allied with the Brigantes and turned into a Saint. Political shifts that the old Pagan ways didn’t support had occurred and to hold onto their power, the new elites found having a Saint in the new religion was a good way to solidify authority. To combat powerful Ulster with its Saint Patrick, Leinster and sometimes eastern Munster had St Brigit. There was almost definitely a Christian community in Leinester before St Patrick ever arrived; Irish raiders who’d settled in modern Wales long enough to learn the new religion of Rome had returned home. There’s more about this in the post on February 2nd.

The root of Brigantia’s name appears in the names of towns in Portugal, Spain, France, Hungary, England, and Austria, and Strabo wrote that in the Alps lived a Celtic tribe named the Brigantii. The ancient name of Bragança in Trás-os-Montes, Portugal, was Brigantia. Its inhabitants today are still called brigantinos. Two cities in present-day Galicia, A Coruña and Betanzos, were named Brigantia and Brigantium. A prominent Bronze Age meeting-place for British tribes was on the shores of a river in a place called Brentford.

Brentford is connected to “prestige” in modern Welsh, coming from the same root as the Welsh word for King, brenin. Scottish Gaelic brigh and Manx bree translate to “power” while Irish Gaelic bri translates as “energy” and in Welsh, Cornish and Manx bre means “hill.” It’s easy to understand why so many places and Goddesses’ names derive from bri- and bree-.

The most famous Goddess linked to Brigantia is the Gaelic Goddess Brig, and Her incarceration as Saint Brigit/Brid. Brigit’s sacred fire was (and again is) in County Kildare, which is now part of the eastern province Leinster. An old Irish poem calls Brigit the sovereign lady who rules over the Kings of Leinster. The poem, when needing Her protection, calls for Brig, the name of the Goddess in the Mythological Cycle. Brig is sometimes confused with other powerful Goddess of the Tuatha De Danann in the different versions we have of Gaelic mythology.

In the Lebor Gabála Érenn (The Book of the Taking of Ireland), the Gaels descend from Noah (himself a descendant of Adam) of the Bible. Like the Israelites, they suffer many ordeals, until conquering Spain. Breogán founds the city Brigantia (perhaps A Coruña) and builds a tall tower, from which his son sees Ireland. Many of the Gaels stay in Iberia, but some sail to Ireland and successfully fight off the Tuatha De Danann. As the Lebor Gabála Érenn is our main source for the Mythological Cycle and has different variations, Irish mythology is rather messy. But Breogán’s name and the city he supposedly built again return to bri- and bre-.

Ireland and Iberia were part of an ancient shared culture before and during the Bronze Age, trading metals and other goods along the Atlantic coast, including all of Britain to the farthest Scottish islands, Brittany, France, and possibly Holland and Belgium. Sweden was at one time briefly connected. The Phoenicians became involved by the 9th century BCE. During the 10th century BCE at the latest they’d set up a large port town in Iberia. In the most southwest corner of Portugal a stone tablet was discovered, engraved in a Celtic language using the Phoenician alphabet. It thanks the pan-Celtic God Lug, and dates from 6th century BCE. Our understanding of how the Celtic languages and culture developed is moving quickly away from Hallstatt and looking towards the Atlantic coast.

In the 6th century BCE there was a large power shift in the Mediterranean. The Greeks began competing for the Atlantic coast, as Phoenician ports slowly disappeared, city by city, for several reasons. The Atlantic coast of Portugal and southwest Spain appear to have become part the trade routes of the Mediterranean, while Britain, Ireland, Brittany, and some of the French coast traded amongst themselves. Iberia spoke many different Celtic languages, brought in at separate times. Some near Galicia lived very similar lives as the Pagan Irish, moving twice a year with cattle and building hillforts. The Lebor Gabála Érenn may retain a memory about
when those in Spain spoke the same language as the Irish, explaining it in a way that fits with Judeo-Christian mythology.

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Celtic Festival Calender: Mercuralia & Lugus

May 8, 2019 17 Comments
As Celtic people conquered by the Romans adapted their religion to that of the Empire’s, I have begun using the Roman calendar as a guide for when to honor Celtic deities. There’s no real way to make direct correlation between the two pantheons; Celtic Gods tend to be tribal hero kings (and possibly first ancestors) who are great at everything, and Celtic Goddesses often hold power over the fertility and death of the tribe’s land, water, livestock and human members, especially the king. However, to unify the Empire, other peoples’ deities were called by Roman names much like the Greeks once did. It’s now thought that the Celts had more power in deciding what Roman deity to choose than formerly believed. The Celts transformed aspects of Roman religion to fit their own cosmology and over the course of a few generations new versions of Celtic religion appeared.

Rosmerta by Alexandra Rena

As Celtic people conquered by the Romans adapted their religion to that of the Empire’s, I have begun using the Roman calendar as a guide for when to honor Celtic deities. There’s no real way to make direct correlation between the two pantheons; Celtic Gods tend to be tribal hero kings (and possibly first ancestors) who are great at everything, and Celtic Goddesses often hold power over the fertility and death of the tribe’s land, water, livestock and human members, especially the king. However, to unify the Empire, other peoples’ deities were called by Roman names much like the Greeks once did. It’s now thought that the Celts had more power in deciding what Roman deity to choose than formerly believed. The Celts transformed aspects of Roman religion to fit their own cosmology and over the course of a few generations new versions of Celtic religion appeared.
Cosmology and over the course of a few generations new versions of Celtic religion appeared. Whether or not any Celtic people worshiped their tribal deities on dates of Roman Festivals then, Celtic polytheism is still adapting. Most Celts would have known the deities of their tribe and (if in one) their larger federation. These were personal, connected to place and ancestry, and a large part of one’s identity. Today we don’t know a lot about the majority of Celtic deities (although we have over 400 names), but most modern Celtic polytheists have their own pantheons of a larger geographical region and period of time. Even a Gaelic polytheist worshiping the Tuatha De Danann is doing something quite modern, as tribes worshiped the deities of their territory of Ireland. It was one way tribes in power stayed in power, until big changes in the ruling tribes led to adopting Saints to justify their new power.

The Roman calendar is an easy way to plan rituals for those Gaulish, Iberian and Brythonic deities who were matched with a Roman deity. I began this with the most popular Celtic God most people have never heard of, Telesphorus; then Lenus, Neto, Rudianos, Cocidius, and Nemeten March 1st; and last month Ataegina and Erecura. The only Celtic deity known to have His own Celtic Festival is Erudinus of northern Spain, but I have found matches for Ogma and Ogmios, the smith deities and the “native” Venus, Sirona, Sulis, Andraste, Brigantia, Grannus, Abnoba and the Celtic understanding of Diana.

On May 15, or the full moon of May, Roman merchants honored the God Mercury with the Mercuralia festival. An interesting thing about Mercury is that the Gauls worshiped Him even more ardently than the Romans. He was easily one of the most popular, if not the most popular, deities in Gaul. He was sometimes associated with a Celtic God, but in general the Gauls embraced Him as Himself.

There are records of Gaulish merchants hiring Roman artisans to make large statues of Mercury. It may be that these merchants brought the cult to their own communities. How Mercury was understood and worshiped at this time would have probably been a very Gaulish way. Some knowledge of the God didn’t mean that the merchant had a great wealth of information about Roman religious practices or mythology. Mercury was most likely growing into a Gallic deity while around them the world of the Gauls grew more Roman. Gaul was thriving with import-export business, and tribes who controlled major rivers were in a powerful position. Trade with Britain was not new, as goods crossed the Channel to and from southeast England to the Rhine River. The Romans built cities like London and their famous roads which made markets and transportation to other parts of Britain (including troops stationed at Hadrian’s Wall) much easier. One reason why Julius Caesar was so eager to conquer Gaul was to get their precious metal mines. Celtic fabric quickly became popular in Rome.

Mercury as the God of not only commerce but also transportation, was the backbone of the strength of Gaul. Yet, to the Romans, He was generally viewed as primarily the messenger of the deities.

Most scholars associate Mercury with Lug/Lugus, who was widely worshiped by many Celtic peoples: the Celtiberians, the Luggones of Spain, the Gauls, the Gaels, and the Britons. The oldest mention of Lug is from a 6th century BCE engraving written in a Celtic language using Phoenician letters discovered in Southwest Portugal. His worship stayed very strong in Iberia.

Lug and Odin seem to have an ancient connection, going back perhaps 4,000 years to a group of Indo-European people possibly in or near the Czech Republic who would later become the Germans and the Celts. Currently, archeological evidence of Bronze Age Scandinavia and Celtic Iberia and the Celto-Germanic language is being studied by scholars such as John T Koch to prove the ancient shared roots. To learn more read here.

Linguistically the two Gods have quite a lot in common at this point from the spear to having or closing one eye. Also Lug’s mythology from Ireland and Wales (as Lugh and Lleu) has strong connections with myths about Odin, such as taking eagle form. (Steel Bars, Sacred Waters has more in depth information.)
Starting with **Lugus** (pronounced “LOO-guss”), His companion **Rosmerta** and another Celtic deity associated with Mercury named **Cissonius** (pronounced: kiss-SOH-nee-us) the carriage driver are described. As we don’t have much information about the Mercuralia, use your imagination while working with knowledge of Celtic ritual.

From Steel Bars, Sacred Waters:

"**Lugus** was worshiped by the Gauls but rarely by that name. When first describing the deities of the Gauls, Julius Caesar wrote in De Bello Gallico that the Roman God **Mercury** was their most important God. (When the Romans wrote about other peoples’ deities they used the names of the Roman ones that best matched the local deities. It helped hold a multicultural society together.) Important Lugus became so strongly associated with the Roman God Mercury that Mercury actually did become the most popular deity for the Roman Gaulish people! Mercury rules over trade, travel, communication and commerce, plus he invented the arts. The Southern Gauls actually had accepted **Hermes**, the earlier Greek version of Mercury, into their culture centuries before Caesar visited, so in a way **Mercury** was not really a new God to those Gauls.

"Some Gaulish Mercury statues showed him with three faces (which happens with other Gaulish Gods, signifying great strength) and three phalluses. Sometimes he is portrayed bearded and older than the Roman Mercury. Armed with a spear, he was often with the Celtic Goddess **Rosmerta**. His symbols are a herald’s staff and a money-bag; his animal familiars are goats, sheep and roosters, all of which became new popular animal sacrifices. He sometimes appears with the horned serpent, normally associated with **Cernunnos**.

"His name is found in Western European city names: Lugdunum ("fort of Lugus"), which was the capital of the Roman province of Gallia Lugdunensis (today Lyon, France); Carlisle, England, which was once Luguvalium; Loudoun in Scotland; Leiden in the Netherlands; Dyffryn in Wales; Lathian in Scotland; and Lugo in Spain. That was once in the territory of the Lugones, one of the..."
“Lugus was also popular with the Celtiberians, especially in the mountains. Three inscriptions of a plural version of his name the **Lugoves**, were found in Spain. One inscription, “L. L. Urcico dedicated this, sacred to the Lugoves, to the guild of shoemakers,” interests many scholars because the Brythonic God **Lleu** in the Mabinogi was a shoemaker. Lleu and the Gaelic **Lugh**, who has all the skills, are believed to be connected with Lugus.

“The Gaulish Mercury had mountain tops dedicated to him. They were called Mercurii Montes and included Montmartre, the Puy de Dôme, and the Mont de Sène.”

From Steel Bars, Sacred Waters:

**Rosmerta** (“the Great Provider”) is the Celtic companion of the Roman God Mercury. Celtic religion required the pairing of a God with a Goddess, but they did not have to be married. Rosmerta, being older, may have been considered Mercury’s mother. She is a mature Goddess who was worshiped in all the Celtic lands in the Roman Empire, being most popular in northern and eastern Gaul. She shared Mercury’s symbols – a winged staff with snakes, a purse, a winged diadem (instead of his winged hat), a rooster or ram – but she also held cornucopias and offering dishes. Her dress is modest and her face serious. She may have a connection to prophecy, but her worshipers knew her best as the provider of material well-being.”

(Viducus Brigantici filius has a beautiful monthly ritual honoring Rosmerta in Steel Bars, Sacred Waters.)

From Steel Bars, Sacred Waters:

**Cissonius** is a Gaulish God of trade and protecting travelers. Cissonius was the second most common name for the Gaulish Mercury. In Switzerland, southern Germany and France 17 inscriptions of his name have been found. Cissonius had two different forms. One was typical of Mercury: the young man with the winged helmet and staff. The other was as a man with a beard wearing a helmet who rode a ram while carrying a cup of wine.”

Senobessus Bolgon offers more on the role of Cissonius in Gaulish Reconstructionist Paganism, as well as another deity commonly associated with Mercury, **Visucius**.

I personally wonder about the influence of **Hermes** on the Gaulish understanding of Mercury. Early writing about the Celts said they were master magi, nearly obsessed with magic, and Hermes has a strong history as a God of magic. Sorcerer (and master of everything else worth doing) **Lugh** performs the one eye Crane Position. **Lleu** is the maternal nephew (or son) of the greatest sorcerer of Wales **Gwydion**, Himself the maternal nephew of **Math**, King of Gwynedd and another fabulous magician.

More on Lugh here.

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**Selected Bibliography**


As part of a way to coordinate a Celtic polytheism festival calendar, I have been researching festivals in the Roman Empire. The Celtic people conquered by Rome merged their own local religious practices with what they learned of Roman religion. At the same time, the Roman Empire had a policy of interpreting the deities of other cultures by comparing them to their own. I suspect some Celtic people adapted the Roman Festival Calender to their own tribal ceremonies. There have been three Festivals already posted since the start of 2019, so be sure to check those out. More have been already researched, written, posted and scheduled, so please follow if you are interested.

Sulis Minvera is a great example of how a Roman deity and magico-religious practice were changed by local Britons to fit their cultural needs. But first let’s learn about the Greater Quinquatrus held between March 19 and 23.

The Greater Quinquatrus was a festival dedicated to the Goddess Minerva, who ruled over all the arts. Like with the Celtic people, arts meant more than painting, music and poetry. Arts included all the important skills needed for a people, like medicine, weaving and education. (Steel Bars, Sacred Waters: Celtic Paganism for Prisoners delves into the arts more deeply and you can buy it here for less than at Amazon. All profits go to sending free copies to incarcerated Pagans!)

"Let girls learn how to card the wool and work the distaffs. Minerva also teaches us how to weave on the upright loom warp with a shuttle. She tightens the loose threads with a comb. Worship her, you who
want to remove stains from your clothes. Worship her, you who dye the wool in large bronze kettles. Cherish her, you who carve and sculpt in stone, or you who paint brightly colored pictures. Minerva is the Goddess of a thousand works. Surely, she is the Goddess of poetry as well.” (Ovid Fasti 3.811-34)

The first day of the Greater Quinquatrus was called *an artificium dies*, meaning “day of the arts.” Teachers, students and doctors made sacrifices to Minerva.

In the opinion of Julius Caesar, Minerva was the Goddess most popular with the Gauls. Celtic deities tend to be great at everything. The Gaelic Brig is a great example of a Celtic Goddess of the arts, celebrated on Imblog, and the Sovereignty Goddess of Leinster, its wartime protector, and honored for her fertility around August 1st. Minerva has a powerful connection with the Greek Athena who rules over the city of Athens the way Brig protects Leinester. To learn how Brig became associated with Leinester and why her followers made her a saint, read this post.

Sulis Herself is an enigma. In Britain the Romans built a temple over the thermal spring at Bath (now Somerset) dedicated to Sulis Minerva. Sulis may have been a Goddess native to the Britons or their name for the Goddess of the thermal spring may have been different. The name Sulis may also have associations with a Celtic word for the sun or the eye, but scholars can’t be sure. There’s a possibility that Sulis could have been created by Romans for Minerva at this sanctuary. The name Sulis Minerva may mean “the eye of Minerva” which would probably be a reference to Athena.

Other scholars believe Sulis comes from The Suleviae, the protective Goddesses “the good guides” brought by Gaulish soldiers. The native British Celtic sanctuaries rarely had inscriptions for the deities worshiped. Most of the names of deities honored in Britain actually come from the Gaulish, German, and Roman soldiers stationed in Britain. Whatever the case, the hot springs would have had a local deity name even if it was not Sulis.

Fresh water had always received offerings in the British Isles – large, grand ones for the good of the entire tribe. Things changed in the Roman era. Offerings were mass produced, cheaper and sacrificed by individuals.

Another change is the construction of the temple. In Bath the Sulis Minerva sanctuary does not have the usual Celtic procession circle around it for ritual walking or perhaps dancing. Instead Bath was a very traditional Roman-style bathing sanctuary.

Although it was a healing temple, around a hundred and thirty curse tablets were also found in the sacred spring. Curse tablets were something brought from Rome. Romans usually had professional scribes write their curse on lead*, sometimes with magical words, and then fold the curse and hold it closed with a nail. The curse tablets often were put in cemeteries, which did not happen in Britain. The tablets of Romans were about a broad range of topics such as love or lawsuits.

What the Britons did differently is that they wrote their own curses and signed their names. They seem to have felt it was best to directly talk with Sulis themselves. Another change is that almost every tablet describes an item that was stolen, nothing about love or law. Sulis is usually asked to make the thief suffer physically until he or she returns the object missing to its owner or offers it to Sulis Minerva Herself. It seems that the point is not necessarily to get the stolen item back, but for the justice of the thief to physically hurt until they do the right thing.

The actual Roman members of the community did not make these curses, indicating that the Britons probably did not go to the local law for theft. Evidently to the Britons theft was a divine issue. Theft breaks the Celtic virtues of honesty and hospitality which hold tribal cultures together. People wrote the curses for thefts of all types of belongings, both inexpensive to expensive, showing that any theft was considered a violation and deserving of divine punishment. Many of the thefts were of clothes and shoes as people bathed. If bathing in the sacred hot springs was a traditional Celtic religious activity, these thefts would have broken more Celtic virtues, making the thief even more accountable to Sulis.

Britain may had its native political structure of independent tribes torn apart, but at Bath people continued to appeal to the Goddess of the thermal waters when old community values were broken. They adapted a new Roman way to their tribal beliefs.
From Steel Bars, Sacred Waters:

"Invocation to Sulis" by Heather Awen

"Sulis, praise be to you, Grand Goddess of the hot spring spa
Where many were healed
And many were helped.
Your strength is like the eye of the sky
Rolling across the heavens,
Watchful of any wrongdoing
In the body or in the community.
Many are the reasons I praise you,
May you hear them all."

Sulis may have been considered an aspect of Minerva or Athena to the Romans, but She appears to be a Goddess of healing the individual and the community to the local Britons. I say the community because She maintained the right rules of tribal living. Tribal deities were treated like tribal chieftains, and a chieftain or King often heard the complaints of the people and made legal decisions. Whatever Her name before the Romans, Sulis is a Queen to the Britons. Although She may no longer be able to defend Her devotees from invasion and war, She still protects their health and maintains some old ways to care for the community.

For your own festival of Sulis Minerva, you could focus on the Roman attention to the arts. The Celts did expect their deities to have mastery of all the arts. Weaving was a skill greatly valued, and anyone especially interested in fiber arts might want to make an offering. Healers should honor Sulis Minvera on March 19, along with students and teachers, including students and teachers of Celtic polytheism.

Along with gratitude for the skills the deities have shared with mortals, you could focus on the obvious healing aspect of Sulis Minerva. A hot bath, steam room or sauna can be turned into a holy experience. You can also make an appeal to Her for safety and honesty in your community. This could be where you live, extended family or an online organization. If you have been the victim of theft, you can ask for Her to replace the stolen goods and that the thieves are healed from whatever it is that made them steal, whether addiction, poverty or compulsive behavior. Their healing will make your community better and improve your life.

Whatever you do, don’t forget to make your offerings, preferably biodegradable materials into a river.

(Much of the information in this post is from Steel Bars, Sacred Waters: Celtic Paganism for Prisoners.)

* Lead is incredibly toxic, even in trace amounts. It is proven to cause severe health issues for children and according to the New York Times is linked to gang violence in the years before unleaded gasoline. It actually does make people enraged and very ill. As there is so much lead in our water and land already from lead paint chips left in yards to factory pollution, NEVER use lead in ritual especially throwing it in water! You can write the alchemist’s symbol for lead or the planet Saturn’s symbol, the planet associated with lead on blank recycled paper for the same effect.

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As the Celts conquered by the Romans adapted their religion to that of the Empire’s, I imagine that Celtic deities associated with Roman ones would be celebrated on the days of their Roman counterparts. I’ve already discussed Telesphorus and the Matres, and more will explored in upcoming posts already scheduled. Even if no Celts did this (which is hard to believe) at least it gives those who worship the ancient deities of the Celtic tribes ritual dates with which to work.
March originally was the first month of the Roman year, in honor of the God of war Mars, the protector of Rome. His Priests were the Salii or "leapers," twenty four young patrician men whose parents were living. The Salii led processions throughout Rome, wearing archaic military armor, carrying a copy of a shield that was said to have fallen from the sky. On March 1st (probably the new moon originally) the Salii would beat their shields and sing hymns to Mars Gradivus about fertility, while performing a leaping dance. The dance was probably meant to scare off evil spirits during this liminal time of beginnings. Some believe that the dance was to show the crops how high to grow.

Mars was associated with several Celtic deities, including ones associated with Mercury in other places. This is common, because many Celtic people chose which Roman God fit with their own, as opposed to the Romans deciding. Roman deities usually had a special “function” or aspect of life they ruled, while Celtic deities were more about the welfare of the tribe and served in whatever way was needed. Making a direct correlation between the two pantheons is rarely easy, but within a few generations, both Celts and Romans probably began to understand these Romano-Celtic deities in a new way.

The protector of the tribe fit well into Celtic thinking about the deities. Lenus of the Belgic tribe Treveri became Lenus Mars and a very large and important temple complex was built in Trier. Being on a river, it was considered a healing sanctuary where pilgrims could sleep and pray for a message from the God. Many other deities were also worshiped there, and theater taught the myths and values of Rome. (See this post to learn more about the Treveri, Lenus and photographs of Trier including a Roman bridge and bath.)

Another God associated with Mars is described in Steel Bars, Sacred Waters: Celtic Paganism for Prisoners:

"Rudianos is a Gaulish warrior God who became associated with Mars. His name means the color red, which is typically connected to battle. A stone from the 6th century BCE at Saint-Michelde-Valbonne, a place where Rudianos was later worshipped, depicts a warrior God on horseback. The Celtic cult of the head is shown by the God’s giant head and the five severed heads being trampled under his horse. Rudianos also has inscriptions at Saint-Andéol-en-Quint and Rochefort Samson (Drôme)."

For British Celtic Pagans, Cocidius (koh-KEED-ee-us) was worshiped in England. However, it’s important to remember that these temples were for the deities that Gauls in the Roman military honored and probably not native to the Britons. (Native shrines left no writing.) Steel Bars, Sacred Waters tells us more:

"A God of soldiers, Cocidius was popular at the dangerous Roman frontier in northern England, Hadrian’s Wall. His major center of worship was Fanum Cocidii (the Temple of Cocidius) located near the Solway Estuary. He was associated with Roman war God Mars.

“23 stone altars and 2 silver plaques have been discovered dedicated to Cocidius. Most are military altars. The plaques show him with a spear and shield and wearing a short cape. A carving depicts him with arms opened wide, a sword in the right hand, and a shield in the left, with his feet stable on the ground. Some believe his statues were painted red. He is called sanctus (holy) six times. One inscription is to Cocidius Vernostonus ("Cocidius of the alder tree"). Many images are of him hunting the traditional Celtic animals of boars, hares and stags found in later legends."

The alder tree, which makes a red color, is later associated with the Brythonic crow king God Bran the Blessed who we know mostly from the Mabinogi. Roman artisans usually depicted Celtic Gods with a spear and shield, based on their knowledge of what Celtic warriors and kings wore, and their simplistic view of Celtic deities.

From Steel Bars, Sacred Waters:

"Invocation to Cocidius by Heather Awen"

"Friend of soldiers, red of alder,
Hunting the boar and defending the land,
Cocidius, welcome to you,
Crimson warrior!
Holder of spear, your temple
Where salt water meets fresh,
Cocidius, companion in battle,
I call to you, to you, holy God, I call.”

“Prayer to Cocidius for Safety by Heather Awen

“Red warrior, friend of those in battle,
Cocidius, I speak to you,
Guardian to guardian.
In this fight, please keep my back,
Please make sure I get out of here alive and unscathed.
Whatever battles rage around or within me,
Guard me with your wisdom and loyalty.
Fight the fights I cannot
For my freedom, for my safety, for my humanity.
Wisely lead me through every battle I cannot prevent,
Guide my movements, my decisions,
And keep me out of trouble.
Thank you, defender, for with you on my side
I promise to not start the trouble, *
Only to leave it.
“You actually have to keep your vow.”

I have a great fondness for the Iberian Celtic deities, perhaps because modern scholars are revealing the huge importance of the Atlantic coast in the creation of the Celtic languages. New evidence suggests that Iberia actually had more Celtic settlements than France or the insular Celts living in Britain and Ireland. To see 6th century BCE Celtic language written in Phoenician script found in the most southwest region of Portugal visually fills in once missing gaps of history.

The deities of these Iberian Celtic tribes are discussed in recent academic journals but rarely mentioned in pop culture Celtic Paganism books. In writing Steel Bars, Sacred Waters I worked hard to make these once well known deities well known again. They deserve the same devotion as other deities.

Associated with Mars is Neto, pronounced “NET-oh” and “NAY-toe.” From Steel Bars, Sacred Waters:

“In his Saturnalia writing Macrobius says Neto is like Mars and Apollo, the Roman God of war and the Greek/Roman God of the Sun. His name, like that of so many Celtic Gods, may be connected to passion. He is generally accepted to be a warrior God. However, Celtic war Gods tend to be defenders of tribes, which includes defending them from illness. Apollo is also a God of healing, which makes the connection to protecting the tribe’s health as much as their homes and livestock even stronger. Neto, like so many Celtic Gods of passion, is probably an all-round guardian.

“Invocation to Neto by Heather Awen

“Hail, Neto! A warrior of blood and light,
You fight with passion, champion of most terrifying tribes.
Leading the way, you guard against every possible attack
On livelihood and lives, on cattle and castros.”

Associated with Mars is Neto, pronounced “NET-oh” and “NAY-toe.” From Steel Bars, Sacred Waters:
On livelihood and lives, on cattle and castros*.
The heat of the sun boils every edge of you,
Purifying your troops of all hidden treachery,
For you are the honorable warrior,
Guided by great desire to protect what is innocent and must not be corrupted.
I honor you, Neto, guardian who keeps the people free,
I honor you.
* A castro is an Iberian hill-fort."

Research suggests that the Celts in general believed that for a God to have power, He must be paired with a Goddess. One example is Mercury and Rosmerta (discussed in a few months on the Merculia). Another is how Jupiter is almost always seated by Juno Regina, Juno in her aspect as Queen, on Gaulish Jupiter columns. (This will be discussed more in the August post about the September 1st Festival of Taranus.) And another is Mars and Nemetona, "Goddess of the Sacred Grove" pronounced "nem-eh-TONE-ah."

"Nemetona was paired with the Roman God Mars by the Gauls. This is one way Gallo-Roman religion differed from Roman religion: Gods needed to be in couples with Goddesses. She was also worshiped at Bath in Britain. There an image depicts her seated holding a scepter by a ram and three little hooded figures. Those hooded figures are called genii, and considered to be land spirits.

"It is difficult to know exactly how wide her worship spread. Many place names in Gaul may be connected directly to the Goddess – or to the groves where Druids led some rituals and taught, called nemetons. (The leaders of the Galatians in Turkey gathered at Drunemeton.) This word is perhaps 4,000 years old. Nemetona may have been considered the Goddess of all sacred groves, or just the ones near Bath. Two tribes are recorded whose names come from nemeton – the Nemetati, a Celtic tribe in Iberia, and the Germanic tribe of Nemetes living by the River Rhine, not far from where Mars and Nemetona were most popular. The northern and Atlantic regions of Iberia where Celtic tribes settled were not warm Mediterranean climates, but temperate regions with forests. In continental Europe the sacred grove was normally oak trees.

"Some modern Druids visualize a sacred grove or nemeton within themselves. After grounding and centering they will journey in their minds to their own private nemeton. There they can focus on the sacred center within and retreat from the busy world."

In a paper by Hyllested, exciting new linguistic evidence shows a change in Indo-European language probably in the Czech Republic about 4,000 years that directly impacted the religion of both the Celts and Germans – before their own languages existed! The name of Macha’s husband Nemed (and Macha Herself) is believed to come from this time. Nemed is God of the nemeton, the sacred grove with the sacred mare (Macha) which are crucial aspects of both early Germanic and Celtic ritual. That a German tribe in Belgae and Celtic tribe in Iberia also come from nemeton adds to the idea that nemeton is a Celto-Germanic word. Hyllested doesn’t mention Nemetona, but that Her name is directly from nemeton, a Celto-Germanic word, would suggest She is an ancient Goddess.

To learn more about the other ancient words that directly impact Celtic and Germanic religion, buy Steel Bars, Sacred Waters, offered for a less expensive price here than on Amazon, and support sending copies to prisons!

**Selected Bibliography**


Throughout the year you’ll find blog posts that connect Celtic deities to festivals in other cultures when there is a historical reason to do so. Most of them are based on the Roman deities’ festivals that correspond to the Celtic deities associated with them, like Minvera and Sulis, or Mercury and Lug. This one is a bit different. My hope is that it will encourage people who want to be Gaulish, British and Iberian Celtic polytheists to do SOMETHING to honor those deities. A simple offering, chanting Their name, visualizing Their culture, reciting invocations by Hester Butler-Ehle and me from Steel Bars, Sacred Waters – whatever works to make the first move. We may not have mythology for These deities, but we know quite a bit about their temperaments and importance. The rest will come if we ask for it. Deity names are in bold so you can scan for ones who interest you.

The old calendar of the Norse doesn’t line up with our current calendar. This is a problem with finding proper dates for any ancient festivals. Either they used the Julian Roman calendar or had a lunar-solar calendar, and solved the problem of extra days in their...
own ways, like the way we add a day every 4th year or “Leap Year.” Even though the Swedish Disirblot was in the month similar to March, it appears that the Sacrifice for the Divine Mothers was held in February.

Some scholars believe that the Disir come directly from the Matres, meaning “Mothers” and pronounced “MAH-tress,” and the Matronae, pronounced “mah-TROH-nee” meaning “matrons.” They were worshiped in northwest Europe from the 1st to 5th century CE, with over 1,100 inscriptions and depictions of them. There’s quite a lot of information about the Matres in Steel Bars, Sacred Waters: Celtic Paganism for Prisoners (available here for less than Amazon), so I won’t explain who They are beyond this:

Like many deities in the Roman Era of Celtic polytheism (and probably before, but we have no written inscriptions from then), the Matres were honored by both German and Celtic people. The two cultures were not very different, especially in the Belgae region of modern Holland and Belgium, which appears to have been a Celto-Germanic transitional region. Many Germans served in the Roman military with Gauls, often stationed in Britain together, creating more religious bonds.

The first difference between most Indo-European religions and those of the Celtic, German and Finnish/Estonian linguistic groups had already formed about 4,000 years ago, before there even was a proto-Celtic language. Some basic cosmological elements and many ritual practices were firmly established in those similar cultures. And almost all Indo-European cultures have triple Goddesses of destiny, either as mothers/ helpful guides or hags cursing men heading to battle.

The Matres were worshiped as the Mothers of a place, tribe or function. About half of Their many inscriptions and shrines are German. The Mothers usually have scarves wrapped around their heads with the long ends twisted to make a wide brim, sometimes with a veil covering the neck. Iron Age Germanic and Celtic women wore these same head dresses, with slight regional differences. Sometimes one has Her hair down, showing that She is not married. The Matres are the most popular deities on record. For the Celts, They survive in the Welsh Mabinogi as Modron. For the Germanic tribes who returned north, they became the Disir.

(There are examples of Germanic Matres in this post.)

Iceland has its own Disirblot, but it is in autumn, and the Anglo-Saxons have Mothers Night December 24. Ancient Europeans tended to celebrate the solstice (“stand still”) when the sun stopped standing still and began its movement in the other direction. Christmas and St John’s Eve (Midsummer) took the place of any native Celtic solstice festivals. We only know the name of Mothers Night, not anything about what it meant or what people did. The Saxons, perhaps the last Pagan Germanic tribe in German Europe, would have known the Matres. The Angles probably did as well, with modern Denmark bordering the Belgae territory, and some of the North Sea Germanic tribes involved in Celtic politics and possibly shared rituals. After all, the Alci, long assumed to be Germanic deities on the North Sea, are linguistically Celtic and are found in Celtic Iberia as well.

If we remove the history of the incredibly popular Matres, it would seem as though the Disir come out of nowhere. In general, modern Heathens and Northern Tradition Pagans believe them to be the female ancestors. Many “soul parts” or qualities are passed down by ancestors in Germanic cosmology, including luck, so the Disir have many roles. In some ways they are similar to the personal Norns we are said to have. Some Pagans include Goddesses in the Disir, and if you are spiritually part of a culture that believes it descends from their deities like the Norse or Japanese (and possibly some Celtic tribes), especially the ruling class, honoring Goddesses as your mothers makes sense. Freya is called Vanadis, “ancestor/mother of the Vanir” or perhaps “matriarch of the Vanir” better describes Her role. The Yngling dynasty, some of my ancestors, descend from Ingvi-Frey, Iron Age Germans understood that they all descended from the three sons of (very proto-Indo-European named) Mannus, Ing (Ingvi-Frey), Herman (Odin) and one whose name and myths are lost to us. (Mannus we can learn all about in the pieced together PIE myth of the first ancestor and first Priest.) Rig (Heimdall setting the people into the class system and bringing the runes to the ruling class) is considered another father of the people.

The Matres are Mothers and They are Goddesses, so again, there’s really no difference between female ancestors (or at least some of the most powerful who chose to stick around, looking after their kin) and deities. Who you choose to honor as your female ancestors is a personal choice. If you have given yourself to a Goddess to serve, She may be a Mother, depending on your relationship. Some Goddesses I will naturally call “Mother” or “Mom” usually before Their names, as is common in some types of Africa Diaspora...
You might wonder why a patriarchal society doesn’t have any records of a holy tide for the male ancestors. The most common theory seems to be that like troll, alf (elf) is a very versatile word. Snorri has them organized in 3 Heavens like the Christianity of His time did with angels. Mythology just tells us that, like Vanazea, the world of elves was not created by Odin and His 2 brothers/ aspects of Himself. The elves are ruled by the Vanir God Frey who received their world as a gift to celebrate when he got teeth, which would have been before He met the Aesir.

Frey in His mortal form ruled over a time of peace and prosperity and was buried in a mound. People kept paying their tribute/ taxes to the mound. The Alfar as Anglo-Saxon elves are associated with the land; important men were buried in mounds on family land so their descendants could claim it; Frey rules the Alfar; Frey as the best king was buried and offerings were still paid in tribute to his grave mound – and so the Alfar can mean the male ancestors as well as the species of Otherworldly beings brought to the Tree of the Worlds by the Vanir. While the male ancestors stay and defend the family land which is their gift to their descendants, the Disir are able to travel with their descendants.

Of course, 1/4 to 1/3 of Norwegians during the Vikings Age were slaves and did not inherit anything from their fathers, so perhaps that added to the importance of the Mothers. Also, many Swedish people were traveling east along the Baltic, even down the Volga river into Russia, named for their red hair, and to the Byzantine Empire where they became Christian mercenaries. These people would rarely or never see their family land again and so the Disir would be especially important.

Originally it seems that the Swedish festival was a couple weeks long. People would have traveled to it, including merchants, and along with animal sacrifices to the Disir, there would have been much socializing. These festivals were a rare opportunity to meet potential spouses outside of your tiny village. Today there is still a Disir market held for a few days.

It’s a good time to honor the Matres if you don’t follow this Norse custom. The Vikings who settled Dublin became Gaels very quickly, while the ones who settled the Scottish Islands changed the Gaels into the Norse. Scotland is an exciting mixture of both cultures. Many Norse words, especially about sailing, joined the Scots Gaelic language. Fairy mythology changed – instead of the Fairy Kingdoms of Ireland, Scotland had Elf Queens. A group of Scottish Fairies battled the Helka Faeries over the ocean, to help sailors.

Helka is the main active volcano in Iceland. In the early medieval era, Helka blew so much lava over the land and smoke into the sky, people across Europe considered it the gateway to Hell, which is how it got its name. There are Heathen Era images of Thor with the water serpent, an ancient proto-Indo-European myth, but the fires consuming the world, years of dark winter, and brother turning against brother – that’s Helka the volcano, who had (and still has) a history of destruction by fire and skies dark, causing the starving and homeless to fight for resources. The sudden change in Loki’s role as ultimately helpful trickster and doer of Odin’s dirty work (stealing Freya’s necklace, for example) to bringer of death and destruction in Ragnarok may be explained by the addition of the devastating volcanic eruptions to Icelandic life. Ragnarok may be a modern myth. Certainly there were no volcanoes in Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Germania or the other lands Germanic language speakers settled (often marrying into families of the place and losing their Norse culture, so they weren’t ever ethnicity obsessed xenophobes).

Centuries earlier, the Romans were holding rituals for their own ancestors in February. It’s not connected to the timing of the Swedish Disirblot, but Celts and Germans living in the Roman Empire may have also honored their ancestors, perhaps the Matres. February 13 to 21st was the Parentalia, a private rite to appease the dead. Temples were closed, marriage was not allowed, and no altar fires burned. A Vestal Virgin started the Parentalia by pouring a libation to the dead. Families gathered at the family tomb to perform private rituals and make offerings.

“The tomb is honored. Placate the souls of your ancestors and bear small gifts to the tombs. The Dark Shades seek little, they prefer devotion over a costly gift, the spirits who live below are not greedy.” (Ovid Fasti 2.537)
While the Parentalia was private, the Feralia on February 21 was public. Temples were still closed so people could focus on the dead. Ovid instructed, “And the grave must be honoured. Appease your fathers’ Spirits, and bring little gifts to the tombs you built. Let the altars be free of incense, the hearths without fire. Now ghostly spirits and the entombed dead wander, Now the shadow feeds on the nourishment that’s offered.”

Then on the 22nd the Cara Cognatio, or the Festival to Caring Kin, honored the living family and household deities. It was like a potluck dinner, where the family restored the peace between its members.

“Our ancestors established a ceremonial feast and called it the Caristia, to which nobody but relatives and in-laws is invited, so that, if any quarrel had arisen among the kinsfolk, it might be resolved at the sacred rites of the meal, and harmony was established among those in the company fostering harmony.” (Valerius Maximus 2.1.8).

The household deities received offerings of grain, honey, cakes, wine, grapes, incense and flowers. Together the family prayed for peace among them, while praising the deities.

As the Matres were part of Roman Celtic and Roman Germanic culture, perhaps the Matres were honored during February.

Whatever your tradition, the collective energy of Disirblot and the Parentalia built up over centuries makes this a great time to honor your female ancestors and Goddesses or other spirits who are your mother(s) as well. As the Matres (and Modron) have no known date for their worship, perhaps now could be that time.

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During the first few weeks of January, Telesphorus is the focus of the Celtic Pagan who worships deities who were honored in lands conquered by Rome.
In the spirit of “indigenous interpretation” in which peoples conquered by the Roman Empire reinterpreted their native religion to fit the Roman world, I have found many dates work for honoring the Gaulish and Brythonic deities. We start the year with the Festival of the Roman deities Aesculapius, his mother, Coronis, and His daughter Salus (similar to the Greek Hygieia), as the time for honoring the important and ancient Gaulish God Telesphorus and the Gaulish Goddess Sirona.

The Roman festival was held during the first weeks of January, but worship of these Gods began with the ancient Greeks Asklepios is the Greek name of Aesculapius, the son of Apollo. The staff with a snake wrapped around it that is still used as a symbol for medical professionals was originally that of Asklepios. He was part of the quest for the Golden Fleece and a student of Chiron. According to the Romans in 291 B.C.E., the healing God moved to Rome in the following manner:
“The Romans on account of a pestilence, at the instructions of the Sibylline books, sent ten envoys under the leadership of Quintus Ogulnius to bring Aesculapius from Epidaurus. When they had arrived there and were marveling at the huge statue of the god, a serpent glided from the temple, an object of veneration rather than horror, and to the astonishment of all made its way through the midst of the city to the Roman ship, and curled itself up in the tent of Ogulnius... And when the ship was sailing up the Tiber, the serpent leaped on the nearby island, where a temple was established to him. The pestilence subsided with astonishing speed.” (Anon, On famous Men 12, 1–3 L&R)

The worship of Aesculapius made its way to Britain where six inscriptions have been recovered. They are evenly distributed in the northern and southern regions, with two written in Greek. Even in the 11th century medical manuscript Medicina de Quadrupedibus an image of Aesculapius survived.

If we follow the Roman calendar, Sirona should be properly honored on March 30, the festival of Salus (meaning “salvation”), but as Sirona and Salus both have the imagery of the Greek Goddess Hygieia, Sirona definitely could be worshipped today by Her devotees. I personally can never get enough of Sirona!

However, our main focus is on the once hugely popular Telesphorus. From Steel Bars, Sacred Waters:

“Telesphorus is a very old Celtic God brought to Anatolia (Turkey) by the Galatians in the 3rd-century BCE. Statues of him as a dwarf in a cloak with a pointy hood have been found along the Danube River and in Anatolia. Pointy hood hats were typical male Gaulish clothing. Telesphorus was associated with the Greek God of medicine, Asclepius, and became the brother of the health Goddess Hygieia. Telesphorus is the God of recovery from a disease. He was brought back West with the Roman Empire in the 2nd-century CE.”

Telesphorus means “the Accomplisher” as He will not stop until the healing has been accomplished. We have so little information about the deities worshipped in Galatia, this knowledge is a real find. If Hygieia was His Greek sister, it wouldn’t be illogical to consider Sirona His sister as well, although the two were never associated in the Gallo-Roman world as far as I’m aware. Little metal statuettes of a gnome with a pointy cap have been found in the Gallo-Roman era. They actually are made in two pieces: the Telesphorus-looking man is lifted to reveal an erect penis with legs. Are these later Roman images of the Accomplisher?

The southern Gauls had chosen to adopt parts of Greek culture including the deities Apollo and Hermes. I’ve often wondered if the worship of Hermes is why the Gauls so readily took to the worship of Mercury, a Roman God even the Romans did not worship with such passion. Was Hermes already firmly established in some Gaulish communities as the God of magic, that the Gaulish Mercury – more as Hermes – was naturally understood as another title for Lug? Then Mercury became more... Mercury over time? Apollo was later adopted by the Romans during a plague, when Telesphorus was already adopted by the Greeks.

Telesphorus is a wonderful reminder that trade of goods, ideas and deities was never a one-way exchange. An ancient healing God of the Gauls, He went with them on their eastern migration. He was almost definitely worshipped in Eastern Europe and the Balkans. The healing powers of Telesphorus must have been so consistent, He was constantly called upon by the ill and injured as well as their healers. His fame brought Him to ancient Greece, where He was fit into the primary family of the deities of healing. While still being worshipped by the Galatians and eastern Gauls, the Romans took up His cult and carried it back west. It went even further than in the past, arriving on the isle of the Britons, where the multicultural Roman soldiers in the north and the more cosmopolitan Britons in the south joined in honoring Telesphorus.

If Telesphorus is one of the longest-worshipped Celtic deities and one whose devotees were quite possibly the most wide spread, from across most of Europe and into Asia, why haven’t you heard of Him? People seem to like myths – even if they were written in confusing fragments by Christians with regional political agendas after the formal Pagan religions were gone. Some people seem to think that there’s an actual ancient book called the Irish Mythological Cycle that contains all the full stories of the Tuatha De Danann. Then from that, we find all the information about the Gaelic deities. In reality it’s much messier, with lots of the Bible, bits of Roman era history, and modern commentary about Ireland’s provinces and the Viking invasion revised and woven into the stories so they’d have meaning that the people then understood. Different myths or different versions of the same stories are found in
Humans are storytellers. We create narratives about ourselves, about those around us, about current events, about the past and even the future with our hopes and anxieties, filtered through a cultural and personal lens. We naturally want narratives about our deities. Yet one reason why I feel drawn to the less known Celtic deities is because there’s no one else’s filter between me and the God. **Telesphorus** tells me who He is by telling me what he does: Accomplishes the healing that is needed. Centuries of worship in three cultures (or four, if you don’t include the Britons as Celts because they were never called Celts unlike those tribes in Iberia and Gaul) tells me that He’s good at what he does. His inclusion into the Greek family of divine healers tells me that He works well with other deities. We have a team player who no matter where or when healing must be accomplished, He will do it.

From that, I begin a relationship by making offerings and having conversations that are mostly one sided as I discuss my unhealthy past with medical "professionals" mainstream and alternative who took my money and took me for a hell ride, the effects of multiple misdiagnoses on my sense of identity, gratitude for how it’s made me firsthand aware of other people’s medical and emotional needs in a wide range of disorders, plus I mention my own health concerns, goals and requirements.

Sometimes I meditate on images of Him in copyrighted photos from museums. I imagine the people who came to Him in so many places, their clothes, their concerns, their body language pleading for help. I ask Him to guide my doctor. I visualize Him giving me a physical mostly thinking of the Greek humors, astrology and ideas of diet, fresh air and exercise, but also so much more than any one modality can provide – kind of like my doctor who is a MD and DO, training with a Naturopathic doctor especially in homeopathic remedies and herbs, and work history in pharmacies and health food stores. **Telesphorus** and I work together if the meditation leads to mystical union, a blissful non-me state of nothing and everything, which I owe to years as a girl with a lot of Hindu and Sikh yoga and meditation for my religious training.

**The Ceremony**

During the first few weeks of January, **Telesphorus** is the focus of the Celtic Pagan who worships deities who were honored in lands conquered by Rome. Of course He can be honored by other Pagans, including Gaelic polytheists, and those who worship the deities of Greece and Rome. **Telesphorus** is, like I said, a team player so regardless of what other deities you worship, He’ll join in like a visiting physician, respectful of His colleagues. After all, They all are concerned about their devotee/patient’s recovery, not inter-pantheon bickering. (That seems to be the angry work of xenophobic humans who want to control those they worship.)

Offerings are for you to determine. Grains, fruits, statuettes, wine and more were common offerings in Roman Empire, as was the building of shrines. Celts (and Britons, if we’re going to separate them like some scholars now do) seemed to prefer broken (ritually killed so they are sacred ie sacrificed) art, jewelry and weapons, along with pottery filled with food and drink (wine, ale) wrapped in beautifully woven fabrics. All cultures sacrificed animals, but they butchered all their own meat and were well trained in it. Very few of us have to daily kill our own animals daily so we do not have the skills to do it properly and a poorly performed sacrifice is a very bad omen worldwide. The Celts did not offer wild, hunted animals, but instead sacrificed the domestic ones of their farms. I actually have offered organic animal crackers and found that they were just as appreciated as the boar jerky my mother found. It’s suspected that dairy products were offerings as well, as cheese has been found in bogs where sacrifices were common (although maybe just as a way to preserve it for later), and insular Celtic folklore says to leave out cream for the Good People.

Roman and Celtic festivals had music and feasts, along with Priests reciting prose or poetry perfectly (in Rome if the Priest made a mistake, he had to start over; we don’t know how the Gauls did it) and performing divination to understand the messages from the deities. The rural Roman rites often had peasants dancing and in the city Priests often danced. The Celts typically walked or danced (we don’t know how they moved) in a clockwise circle to start ceremonies, possibly for long times around a pole statue of the deity.
Both cultures met in sacred groves and at rivers and lakes.

I’m currently battling a medication-resistant form of thrush while my hyperreactive immune disorder Mast Cell Activation Syndrome is triggered by work on an apartment in my building and the neighborhood wood smoke that doesn’t let up due to the school break. My mother who also has MCAS is battling the insomnia, fatigue, and brain fog with me, as our toxic loads grow daily. **Telesphorus** will be greatly welcomed into our home!

May you be well!

* If you are interested in scholarly research about Pagan Roman culture and religion (which I find helpful for imaging the world of the Gauls and Iberian Celts), check out the Nova Roma website. It’s where I got my Roman calendar. Their information is also available in books, which I quite like.

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**Domnu: Cornwall’s Underworld Goddess of Mining? (or, Annwn, Celtiberians and Erecura led me astray)**

*November 22, 2018* 2 Comments

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*Minack Theatre near Porthcurno, Cornwall, England*

**Domnu.** Perhaps the most important Goddess in Cornwall yet rarely mentioned. According to famous Celtic scholar John Koch, She is the Goddess of the Dumnonii tribe. In Steel Bars, Sacred Waters (SBSW), I stated: “Dumnonii means “People of the deity of the deep or earth,” with Domnu sometimes considered a Goddess of deep waters or soil – the Celtic Otherworld.” A little common sense has caused me to reevaluate that.

As I wrote in SBSW, “A recent theory suggests that Celtic origins start with the Atlantic Bronze Age. This is around the same time as the Hallstatt culture, but is along the Atlantic coast of Europe. From Portugal to Scotland, we know the coast was linked by seafaring trade and a shared culture. This culture was connected for 6,000 years. They built the same type of stone tombs and decorated them...
Cornwall had tin. All that bronze, and Cornwall had the tin. This is the most important information that we have on the insular Celts from the Greeks. It’s also important information about human history. Without tin, we’d have no Bronze Age.

Celtic Pagans are aware of the great wealth of the Hallstatt culture, which had deep salt mines. Recently I watched a BBC documentary on the Celts that went into these mines. Archaeologists have studied the remains of the famous site for so long, I doubted that I’d learn anything new. Actually, I did – The sort of social history I appreciate that allows me to imagine a culture better. The bone development of the people of Hallstatt revealed men with weak legs and great upper body strength. As miners, the men did not walk long distances, but they did use their arm and torso muscles for hours every day of their lives. Meanwhile the women had an imbalance in their shoulder alignment. All those heavy bags of salt the women carried from the mines caused an imbalance in their bodies’ development, because they apparently never changed sides when carrying the large sacks.

(Whenever people romanticize the Bronze and Iron Age (or any culture, honestly) I wish they’d keep in mind the reality of the culture. "The Golden Age" so many, including myself at times, yearn for is actually the world we need to be creating today. Every religion and political movement has its own “Golden Era” for inspiration, and instead of false nostalgia for things that never were, I would love to see people working on creating those values in themselves and in their relationship with the world. I’d like to be part of ushering in a Golden Age of ecological health, true equality, and the healing of deep wounds that have held my species back.)

Anyway, I’d worked on a bead shrine for Domnu, using some Underworld ancestral and ocean imagery. “Deep” I thought may have been about the importance of the ocean. Cornwall, at least on a map, looks like it is never far from the sea. Also, it was a major Bronze Age port. Its tin was in very high demand, for while copper was relatively easy to find, the other ingredient in bronze was not. The entire economy for many people – not just the Dumnonii, but merchants and artisans along the entire Atlantic coast and along the Mediterranean Sea – depended upon the tin of Cornwall. It and other goods were traded from port to port, perhaps uniting the Atlantic coast in a proto–Celtic language of economics. (I highly recommend reading famous Celtic scholar and Eurasian archeologist Sir Barry Cunliffe’s book “On the Ocean: The Mediterranean and the Atlantic from prehistory to AD 1500” for much, much more!)

Where was this “deep” place Domnu resided? I now believe it was the mines. The deities are responsible for the gifts we humans receive. They push us to evolve. Today we know much more about the dangers of mining especially when it’s mountain top removal or fracking, and I firmly know that the deities don’t want us to continue actions that are destroying our own lives and those of 96% of other species. But at that time, the deities were allowing us to explore. Today we have far better, safer technology available then ever before in history like Living Machine systems, ecological sewage treatment designed to mimic the cleansing functions of wetlands, and the reclaimed ancient science of permaculture. All we need is for them to be funded so we can move into a saner future.
In her own time Domnu was the most prominent deity in Cornwall. The entire tribe was named after She who brought them wealth and prestige. She was the mother of the people, a Queen bestowing tin upon Her faithful followers.

It’s rather obvious, but it took seeing inside a tunnel at Hallstatt to help me understand. Too often we hear Earth Goddess and think of a deity who coaxes the fields to give a generous harvest. Earth to us usually means soil. The Ancients didn’t have a name for a deity of this entire planet. If they did it would probably be an ocean deity, not soil, considering that Earth is a blue planet mostly covered in salt water. Or perhaps something completely synergy related, aware of the plurality of forces at work. Oh, wait, that’s polytheism.

Studying Celtic cultures other than Gaelic (which focuses more on an Other Life filled with islands), “deep” tends to automatically connect with the Welsh Annwn, which the Gauls also knew. From SBSW: “In medieval times the word Annwn meant "very deep" in Welsh. It probably comes from a much older Gallo-Brythonic word “ande-dubnos that literally means Underworld.” To read Koch say Domnu was “a deity of the deep or earth” while submerged in studying the Celtic Underworld, I suppose it was only natural to think “deep = Underworld.”

In SBSW I discuss a group of Underworld Goddess from Spain, the Duillis. “Duillis means "Goddesses of the Underworld. These Goddesses are Celtiberian, worshipped in temperate northeastern Spain, near the Pyrenees Mountains that separate Spain from France. The title comes from a Celtic root word meaning “dark” from an older term “burning dark, dark flames.” It is also connected to the Latin word for “tranquility” and the Old Norse word for “resting place.” These Goddesses probably take care of the peaceful Underworld home of the Ancestors.”

(I would LOVE to see artists depict the Duillis! “Burning dark, dark flames”??? Combined with a tranquil Underworld resting place? Are the flames connected to the pyre, where most dead Celts went after birds had picked the flesh off their bones? Are these Goddesses anything like the Matres? Why do I envision the nine maidens blowing on the flames under the Cauldron of Annwn, like a medieval memory of the Goddesses of the Underworld?)

Plus we have Erecura, so popular in Southern Germany and Slovenia, but also found in Switzerland, Italy, Britain and France. Along both the Danube and the Rhine we find this Goddess, who was associated with the Roman Proserpina. Erecura often appears in statues with the Underworld God Dis Pater, especially in cemeteries. "On a monument from Salzbach, Dispater is accompanied by a goddess called Aeracura, holding a basket of fruit, and on another monument from Ober-Seebach, the companion of Dispater holds a cornucopia. In the latter instance Dispater holds a hammer and cup, and the goddess may be Aeracura. She may thus represent the old Earth-goddess," according to J.A. MacCulloch in “The Religion of the Celts.”

Julius Caesar commented that the Gaulish people believe that they came from the God of the dead. Caesar referred to this God with the Latin name Dis Pater, pater being related to paternal. There have been many guesses as to who the Celtic Dis Pater might be, but the most popular are Cernunnos and Sucellus. It’s entirely possible that both (and other tribal deities whose names we don’t remember) were/are Dis Pater. It’s a basic Proto-Indo-European myth: the first person of the tribe to die becomes the Lord of the Realm of the Dead. When a member of the tribe died, they returned to the Ancestors, watched over by the first. The Irish Donn is a good example.
With all that Celtic Underworld information clouding my mind, the obvious "deep earth = tin mines" was lost. I’d like to apologize to Domnu for overlooking the specifics of Her bioregion and role in history. Of course, She may easily also be an ancestral Goddess in the Underworld. Celtic cultures rarely limited their deities into mere functions. I’ve begun to meditate with Domnu and feel that the importance of the safe ocean voyage was part of Her blessings, but really, what couldn’t a member of the “People of Domnu” pray to Her for?

I’m curious if others have relationships with Domnu. In a world where fracking is the Oil Junkie’s desperate Spoon Wash, causing earthquakes and flames to fly out of faucets, does She have solutions? Is She a Goddess who helps humans with responsible technology? International trade? The Mother of Cornwall still? Is She found in caves? Do miners pray to Her for safety? Does She rule over the metals tin and bronze?

If you are Her devotee, please contact me through the Gullveig Press order form and share your experiences. Debating is a high school class focused on “winning”, not being right or finding the best, long term community solution. Debating means there will be no listening. It’s politicians yelling sound bites and attorneys manipulating the emotions of juries. Discussion is for humans who respect what the other has to say. Your practices matter. I’d like to read about them. I’d like a polytheism where the more educated in certain areas are kind to those seeking reputable information, innocent questions are not taken as threats, gossip is not treated as fact, and personal experiences and belief are not fodder for arguments.

adrienne brown in “Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds” constantly reminds us that in any group of people there is an important conversation that no one else could have, if we’re willing to have it. All religions have sects who demonize each other. Let’s move into something better.

“A system of design that provides all of the needs for humanity in a way that benefits the environment”

Coit Lawton
When researching for Steel Bars, Sacred Waters, I noticed that in Celtic Roman Britain the temples were all built with a southwest entrance. Future research may of course find others with a different orientation, but this is a large, consistent pattern and obviously not random. This seemed to have important implications for Brythonic polytheists, and perhaps other Celtic Reconstructionists. In the book I didn’t have time or space to delve deeper into this, but hoped those who read it would notice and put the information in context with current, fashionable theories about how the Celts adapted to Roman religion. Here I bring the ideas together and perhaps may add something to the practice of Celtic Reconstructionists. (If you have read Steel Bars, Sacred Waters, then you know much of this, often in greater detail, but the orientation of Brythonic polytheist ritual space was never “spelled out” directly.)

The Romans did not just appear and take over the local religious cults. They had uprisings, political intrigue and road building keeping them busy. Except for the Roman Civic Cult that united all Roman citizens, the Romans didn’t really get involved with the local religion. The stone statues of Celtic deities look like Roman deities because Roman craftsmen were hired to make them. (As Thracian artisans put animal designs on most art, the importance of the cauldron image most Pagans use for Cernunnos – and from that image of him surrounded by animals have wrongfully named him “Lord of the Animals” – should be carefully reviewed. The many Celtic images of him with the snake are a better way to study him. All the Celtic deities on the famous cauldron have animals surrounding them!)

In one British region a Celtic God may have been associated with Mars, in another with Mercury. This is true in Gaul and Iberia as well. Celts seem to have often made that choice, not Romans. Or, based on different Celtic ideas about the same deity, Romans in different regions choose the Roman deity who seemed to fit best what that particular Celtic person was saying. With Celtic religion being so decentralized and tribes having their own ancestral and bioregional deities, no group of Celts was instructing the Romans. The Druids had already been destroyed, but they were not religious leaders then, as much as an educated, powerful elite in a culture that did not separate religious from secular life.

In the same spirit, there were no Roman Priests running about trying to control Celtic religion. For the most part, the Romans didn’t bring Priests with them. Much of Roman religion is actually quite bioregional to the city of Rome. What the Brythonic people learned about Roman religion came from discussions with whatever Romans they met (like a merchant, a Syrian or Gaulish soldier, or a Roman official, ranging from a tax collector to a General) and what Brythonic people who had actually been to Rome reported. This is like asking random Christians of many denominations in the world and someone who visited Vatican City for a week on business “How do you/they do Christianity?” A Utah Mormon, Nigerian Pentecostal Christian, Scottish Presbyterian, Haitian Catholic, Greek Orthodox, etc are going to answer differently, not only because the form of orthopraxy (how you do religion) is different, but because each person has a different level of official education and training.

Due to this, Celts in different regions learned different parts of Roman religion and mythology, just like southern Gauls did centuries earlier with Greece. Those Gauls were not conquered by Greece and maintained their independence. They just saw the Greeks had some good ideas and powerful deities they included in their culture, like Apollo, sometimes Hermes, which may explain the ease in which the Gauls later took to Mercury. During the start of the Roman occupation, it was obviously much more traumatic, with war and chaos everywhere, and freedoms lost. The Celtic people were struggling with where they fit into the new world. A new political structure was forced upon them, but it did not directly affect the native religion. The ideas about religion, especially the Civic Cult, were suddenly available and the Celtic people had a tendency like any other people to love imported goods. (Like the Swedish woman buried in the 10th century with many luxury items, including a statue of the Buddha. Did she know anything about the Buddha?)
At least in the beginning, Celtic leaders were making choices about what from Rome would be paid for and included in their own tribe’s religion. A Gaulish merchant in the new Roman Empire may have commissioned a large statue of Mercury, thus creating the religious center of a local Celtic Mercury cult – whatever that looked like! These local “mish mash” cults were one important way Celtic people were choosing what from Roman religion to incorporate. Celtic cultures seem to have always been flexible and open to considering changes, within reason. An important example is art. They were always introducing different art styles into theirs, and art until recently was always religious. The Southern Gauls adoption of Apollo and Hermes/Mercury show that the Celts were never against the deities of other cultures.

At the same time, a new cult of the Hero Ancestor with self-consciously Brythonic Iron Age religious elements briefly appeared. Folly’s Lane, described in the book, is a wonderful example of how Brythonic religion changed over the years of Roman occupation.

Three generations later, Britons probably had a better understanding of Roman religion, as it developed where they lived. Temple theaters produced Greek and Roman plays that focused on mythology, and scholars and merchants learned Latin. Gradually, the Brythonic people, especially in the southern areas of Britain, began to think more like citizens of Rome. Ideas long accepted by Gauls such as cities are for living, not just trade, never really were accepted and of course the Brythonic languages continued. As language contains a way of thinking that can’t ever be easily translated, Celtic concepts stayed alive with phrases and also traditional folk tales.

For some, especially in the northern parts of what we call England, life, including religion, probably didn’t change very much aside from who collected their taxes. Hadrian’s Wall, where many Gaulish and German soldiers were stationed had several temples and gives us many names of Gaulish and German deities, was in that area. When not fighting natives or trying to stop their cattle raids, these soldiers traded with the locals, sometimes even marrying them. (That was not formally allowed but we have records of a Syrian soldier marrying a British woman. Obviously no xenophobia.) So, even in remote areas there still was interaction, which much of Briton came to economically depend upon for survival. When goods are traded, so are ideas.

Some may say “The Romans killed the remaining Druids because they were so powerful.” That’s true, but let’s remember what the organized Iron Age Druids did. Those Druids were far more than Priests. Remember that they were the PhD elite who guided society, including the Kings. Judges, historians, astronomers, mathematicians, political advisors and much more, the term wasn’t specifically about magic until medieval Irish law and other writing like the Mythological, Ulster and Heroic cycles centuries after any organized Celtic Pagan religion existed. (The Anglo-Saxons took to word Druid and made it their word for sorcerer, the common meaning at that time in Ireland.) The Romans were dealing with political leaders who would not comply with Roman rule, and Druids were part of that political resistance. Many Celtic leaders did comply, happy to have a strong ally against enemies like other Celtic tribes. (Germanic tribes sometimes did the same.)

As all this kept the Romans very busy in Britain, a lot of the religion seems to have been brought over by Gaulish soldiers. The two cultures, plus the Celto-Germanic Belgae territory, had been trading goods and ideas for some time before the Roman invasion, but these deities were brought specifically by Gaulish Roman warriors. To say that Britons worshipped Maponos is not exactly true. Maponos was worshipped by Gaulish soldiers stationed at Hadrian’s Wall. This is something that Brythonic polytheists need to consider. For example there is nothing Celtic about the design of the temple at Bath for Sulis Minerva. Some scholars believe that her name is a reference to Athena as “The Eye of Minerva” and whatever original deity was worshipped there (if any) has been long forgotten. Because the local people adopted the Classical curse tablets to Sulis in such large numbers, while the Romans did not, we know she at the least became important to the Britons. Their changes to the curse tablet structure (all of this is covered in Steel Bars, Sacred Waters) give a fine example of Celtic people making new Roman ideas fit a Celtic cosmology. The Celtic British temples that have been discovered that were native without any known outside influence (although we can be sure new ideas did spread) have no names of deities.

As the Britons were hiring Romans to build temples, it’s odd that they don’t have the doors where they’d be in Rome. Depending on the type of temple, Roman temples had different orientations. In Indo-European religions the deities (“shining Celestial ones”) are in
or come from the East, so we face East to welcome them. Statues of them look at us, facing West. If you watch the sun and night sky, all the lights in the Heavens appear over the Eastern horizon, moving across the sky in a Southern half circle, with all of them setting in the West. This changes in different linguistic “daughters” of proto-Indo-European culture, but generally is still found as a rather common orientation for temples and ritual movement. Deities about death or the Underworld often have a different orientation.

All the Celtic temples found in Britain have the person enter from the Southwest, facing the Northeast side of the temple. They already had the usual porch circling the temple, like in Gaul, for walking/dancing the typical ritual circle around the holy object, so we can safely assume that at the heart of the ritual – going face-to-face with the deities – Britons were used to facing them looking Northeast. After all, they paid for these temples. As walking the Celtic circle(s) around the sacred space would have occurred before entering the temple, there’s no reason to assume they did any other movements when in the temple where the deity statues were kept.

I believe other Celtic peoples may have used the same ritual layout. As the Gaulish soldiers were an important part of the stone religious remains that have been uncovered, at least some probably were used to this orientation. Ireland was never cut off from Britain. Roman coins found at Newgrange show that even then Ireland already had a tourism industry. The Irish also were raiding and settling the coasts of Wales and the Gaelic speaking Dal Riada kingdom straddled eastern Ulster and western Scotland. Irish people in Wales probably were the first to bring Christianity to Ireland. And for a thousand years a trade route with similar art, tomb design and language, possibly proto-Celtic, culture connected Ireland with Britain and the Atlantic coast of Europe. There’s a 6th century BCE inscription to the pan-Celtic God Lug written in Phoenician script in southern Portugal. The Celts in Iberia may have also faced Northeast in ritual.

I propose that when setting up a Celtic shrine, especially to deities known to be worshipped in Britain, that it be in the Northeast, facing Southwest. That way when you approach it, you are facing Northeast.

This gives us a framework for Celtic ritual movement and shrine layout:

1. Circle the sacred space if possible. (As the sunwise/clockwise direction is so common in Celtic ritual acts for thousands of years, that would be the correct direction.) Whether walking in a meditative state or dancing, there probably was the sort of ritual droning music as described in Steel Bars, Sacred Waters.

2. Everyone enter the interior space from the Southwest and face the shrine, which would be in the Northeast.

Every bit we recover is a priceless connection to the cosmology of our religion. I hope this helps others in their religious relationships with the deities.
Paganism & Neo-Paganism. The words 'Paganism' and 'Pagan' come from the Latin 'paganus,' meaning 'country dweller. In simplest terms - Paganism is a religion of place, or a native religion, for example the Native American's religion is Pagan, Hinduism is a form of Paganism. All Pagan religions are characterized by a connection and reverence for nature, and are usually polytheistic i.e. have many Gods and/or Goddesses. Paganism is a religion of nature, in other words Pagans revere Nature. Many of the pagan Anglo-Saxon religious festivals were reinterpreted by believers of Christianity, and converted to Christian feast days. Similarly, sacred pagan sites were turned into Christian places of worship. By the 8th century, Christianity was the main religion of Anglo-Saxon England (although paganism briefly returned with the coming of the Vikings). What next? Learn more about the Anglo-Saxons by visiting our resources page. File Under: The Anglo-Saxons.

Responses to Anglo-Saxon Religion: Paganism. Introduction to Paganism. Pagans may be trained in particular traditions or they may follow their own inspiration. Paganism is not dogmatic. Pagans pursue their own vision of the Divine as a direct and personal experience. The Pagan Federation recognises the rich diversity of traditions that form the body of modern Paganism. In a brief introductory booklet, it is not possible to describe each and every one. Pagan is a very loaded term. And its definition has change a lot over time. It comes from the Latin paganus, which means something like 'villager' or 'rural person.' Then the term was used by the… Modern paganism is a very new spiritual and religious movement. When I say “modern” or “neo” paganism, I generally mean people who have revived a ‘dead tradition,’ necessarily adding some level of modern values and thought to that tradition. This also means it is overwhelmingly Euro-centric. 

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