Trilithon

The Journal of the Ancient Order of Druids in America

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Cover art by Dana O'Driscoll

DRUID CUTTING THE MISTLETOE.

From *English Forests and Forest Trees: Historical, Legendary, and Descriptive*. London: Ingram, Cooke, and Co., 1853.

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Letter from the Editor

Welcome to the second issue of *Trilithon: The Journal of the Ancient Order of Druids in America*. In the spirit of the ancestors of our tradition, our community continues to develop more discussion, practice, and scholarship surrounding the Druid Revival as it manifests in the AODA. This journal has also served as a way to reach members throughout the United States and the broader world—and I thank so many of you for writing to me with feedback and accolades about our first issue.

This year, *Trilithon* showcases original Druid Revival scholarship tracing our historical roots and reenvisioning two of the most important revival texts: the Mabinogion and Iolo Morganwg's Barddas. Our lead article is a manuscript of considerable importance and scholarly achievement by Tracy Glomski, who charts connections between astronomy and the First and Second Branches of the *Mabinogion*. *Trilithon* will be publishing her second and third articles in this series in 2016 and 2017. Our esteemed Grand Archdruid, John Michael Greer, has also produced a brilliant manuscript examining the historical roots of Iolo Morganwg's Coelbren of the Bards, providing evidence of its possible roots and demonstrating its divinatory power.

A running theme in our tradition, and in this issue of our journal, is sacred interactions with nature. Trees have made themselves an informal theme this year, branching through a series of articles. Mark Angelini's compelling discussion of spoon carving as a process of initiation with the trees begins this series of articles, followed by Claire Schosser's experiences in working with elder, Paul Angelini's description of observation and interactions in a variety of landscapes. Finally, we end the tree theme with and my own artle sacred trees in collaboration with Scott Smith, a traditional English botanical artist. In each of these tree and land focused articles, our contributors share their own experiences with trees while also drawing upon the roots of our tradition providing scholarship, inspiration, and a blending of inner- and outer-world knowledge.

Our issue is rounded out with two additional pieces that speak to core of our practices: Jessica Tess's examination of martial arts and its role with the Sphere of Protection and Daniel Cureton's essay on ancestral wisdom.

I hope you'll enjoy reading all of these articles as much as I have, and I encourage you to consider writing essays of your own for our 2016 issue.

I'd like to conclude by taking a moment to acknowledge the fine contributions of our authors and their tireless dedication to the craft of writing (and their willingness to engage in revisions of their work). Karen Fisher has once again been an incredible copyeditor, and I offer much thanks. Scott Smith also deserves accolades for his visual contributions to the journal this year—the inner title page and page footers, as well as the graphics in our collaborative article. Also this year, Paul Angelini worked extensively with me on this edition, offering his services in procuring royalty-free images for many articles, laying out portions of the journal, and writing our

introduction to the "Blast from the Past" selection. I'd also like to acknowledge the AODA Grand Grove for supporting this journal, in every sense of the word. I especially thank John Michael and Sara Greer, who have been exceedingly supportive and who have donated their time and expertise to its development.

I'd like to close by acknowledging the support of the inner teachers of our order and the ancestors of our Druid Revival tradition. Finally, I'd like to thank the living earth from whom all blessings and Awen flow. Please feel free to write responses to articles or any other letters to the editor—you can contact me at trilithon@aoda.org.

Yours in the peace of the sugar maple grove,

Dana O'Driscoll

Chief Editor, Druid Adept, and Grand Pendragon, AODA

Trilithon Credits

Dana O'Driscoll *Chief Editor, Cover Art, Layout*
Dana O'Driscoll is the Chief Editor of *Trilithon: The Journal of the Ancient Order of Druids in America* and the AODA's Grand Pendragon. She is also a Druid-grade graduate in OBOD, a member of the Druidical Order of the Golden Dawn, and a priestess in the Gnostic Celtic Church. Her AODA Druid Adept project explored the connection between Druidry and sustainability. By day, she is a writing professor and learning researcher; by night, a permaculturist, organic gardener, natural builder, mushroom forager, herbalist, community organizer, and whimsical artist. Dana's writings can be found on the web at druidgarden.wordpress.com.

Karen Fisher *Copy Editor*
Karen M. Fisher is an Druid Apprentice in the Ancient Order of Druids in America and has been a pagan for over 30 years, most of which were spent on a Wiccan path. She is a professional freelance copyeditor for several academic publishers. She enjoys hiking and foraging and lives in a big old house in Pennsylvania.

Scott Smith *Inside Artwork on bottom of each page; inner cover; page VIII*
Scott Smith received an advanced certificate in botanical art from the MN School of Botanical Art in 2009. Scott became interested in botanical art because of his family's agricultural background and his interest in gardens, herbs, and medicinal plants. Botanical art was a perfect fit as Scott has a passion for art as well as science, and botanical art bridges a gap between the two. This art form accurately and beautifully describes a plant species with graphite, pen and ink, or watercolor that not only provides rich information but is also beautiful to behold. Scott is a member of the American Society of Botanical Artists and the Great River Chapter of Botanical Artists. Scott is a member of the AODA working on his candidate studies.

Paul Angelini *Layout*
Paul Angelini is a native Michigander, avid wild food and medicine forager, and Druid Apprentice in the AODA. Aside from being a wild food forager, Paul is an aspiring herbalist, having completed a four-season herbalism intensive with noted Michigan herbalist Jim McDonald. He is also a permacultualist, having completed a permaculture design certificate. His other passions include sustainability and appropriate tech, gardening, used book stores, local foods and businesses, farmers' markets, esoterica, home brewing, and cyder making. He also enjoys concocting craft cocktail syrups and bitters for his small startup company, Soda & Sundries (www.sodaandsundries.com).

About the Ancient Order of Druids in America

Founded in 1912 as the American branch of the Ancient and Archaeological Order of Druids, AODA is a traditional Druid order rooted in the Druid Revival of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, offering an opportunity for modern people to experience the teachings and practices of Druidry in today's world. We don't claim direct descent from the original Druids—the priestly caste of ancient Britain, Ireland, and Gaul, which went extinct around 1,200 years ago—and to be honest, we're skeptical of any group that does make that claim. Instead, like other modern Druid groups, the AODA evolved out of a 300-year-old movement, the Druid Revival, that found the fragmentary legacy of the ancient Druids a powerful source of inspiration and insight, and drew on a wide range of sources in shaping a nature spirituality to meet the challenges of today.

AODA understands Druidry as a path of nature spirituality and inner transformation founded on personal experience rather than dogmatic belief. It welcomes men and women of all national origins, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and affiliations with other Druidic and spiritual traditions. Ecological awareness and commitment to an Earth-honoring lifestyle, celebration of the cycles of nature through seasonal ritual, and personal development through meditation and other spiritual exercises form the core of its work, and involvement in the arts, healing practices, and traditional esoteric studies are among its applications and expressions.

Its roots in the Druid Revival give the AODA certain features in common with esoteric societies such as the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. It offers an initial ceremony of reception into the order, followed by three degrees of initiation—Druid Apprentice, Druid Companion, and Druid Adept—which are conferred upon completion of a graded study program. Its members have the opportunity to meet in local groups of two kinds, study groups and groves, and a Grand Grove oversees the order, charters study groups and groves, and manages the study program.

In keeping with the traditions of Revival Druidry, the AODA encourages its members to pursue their own spiritual directions within a broad common framework, and its approach to spirituality is personal and experiential rather than dogmatic. The initiation rituals and study program are prescribed, and AODA members are expected to keep four traditional Druid holy days, the solstices and equinoxes. Creativity and the quest for personal Awen—the inner light of inspiration—are among the AODA's central values.

The Gnostic Celtic Church (GCC) is an independent sacramental church of nature spirituality affiliated with the Ancient Order of Druids in America (AODA), a contemporary Druid order. Like many other alternative spiritual groups in American society, AODA—which was originally founded in 1912—developed connections with a variety of other compatible traditions over the course of its history. One of these connections was with the Universal Gnostic Church (UGC).

For more information about the AODA's study program, please visit:

http://aoda.org/curric.html

How to Join the AODA

The Ancient Order of Druids in America welcomes applications for membership from men and women of all spiritual, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds, age eighteen or older, who wish to create and follow a personal path of nature spirituality in the traditions of the Druid Revival.

By Mail: Send a letter of application to AODA, PO Box 996, Cumberland MD 21501 USA. The letter should include your legal name, Druid name (if you have one), postal and email addresses, date of birth, an outline of your previous Druid studies if any, and anything you may want to say about why you wish to join AODA and what you hope to get out of it. Include a check or money order for US$50, payable to AODA.

Electronically: Please send a letter of application via email to info@aoda.org. The email should include your legal name, Druid name (if you have one), postal and email addresses, date of birth, an outline of your previous Druid studies if any, and anything you may want to say about why you wish to join AODA and what you hope to get out of it. Your membership fee of US$50 may be paid via PayPal; please have payment made to payment@aoda.org.

How to Contact the AODA

Trilithon Journal

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Mabinogi Skies: Astronomy of the First and Second Branches

Tracy Glomski

Tracy Glomski has three decades of stargazing experience under the wide-open skies of Nebraska. She has assisted with public programming at the Sachtleben Observatory of Hastings College since 1994 and has served as the treasurer of a regional club, the Platte Valley Astronomical Observers, since 2002. Tracy taught at the J. M. McDonald Planetarium from 1989 to 1994 and presented the paper "A Systematic Approach to Meteor Observations" to the Nebraska Academy of Sciences in 1991. A past Grand Pendragon of the Ancient Order of Druids in America, she welcomes comments at tracyglomski@gmail.com.

Introduction

A Curious Venture Begins

At some uncertain date, roughly between the mid-eleventh and early thirteenth centuries, an enigmatic cluster of Welsh tales began to come together. The material has survived to modern times primarily through two copies compiled in the fourteenth century: the White Book of Rhydderch (Peniarth MS 4, c. 1350) and the Red Book of Hergest (Jesus College MS 111, 1382–c. 1410). Eleven of these stories are now permanently grouped under a title that first gained popularity in the nineteenth century: the *Mabinogion*.

The core of the *Mabinogion* consists of a quartet of legends, properly called the Four Branches of the *Mabinogi*. At first glance, these consist of a miscellany of euhemerized mythology, loosely linked by the fluctuating presence of a protagonist whose very name means "trouble." The Four Branches are riddled with wordplay, spiked with wily humor, and punctuated by outbursts of sadistic violence.

As a teaching text, the *Mabinogi* has a lot to recommend it.

In the AODA, the *Mabinogi* is part of the required reading for the second degree study program, and for good reason. There is more in this material than an initial, cursory reading might suggest. The entire work is astonishingly rich in multiple layers of meaning. Within the AODA tradition, these layers are classified into three types: Bardic, Ovate, and Druid (Greer & Guest, 2009a). These categories correspond to the literary, scientific, and philosophical-spiritual dimensions, respectively.

Through my explorations of the Ovate layer, I have come to believe that a wealth of historical astronomy is embedded in the *Mabinogi*. I would like to invite you on a hunt for this buried treasure. This dig will go to some depth, but for those who are new to astronomy or the Four

Branches, I promise there is also silver near the surface. It seems sensible to start at the beginning. The aim of this article, the first in a short series, is to discover what lies in the First and Second Branches.

As we gently blow off the dust and hold these finds up to the light, we will encounter a number of astronomical concepts that might or might not be familiar. The important terms are highlighted in *italics*, and I offer a brief definition for each. To anyone who has not yet checked out the *Mabinogi*, though, I recommend at least a quick browse through that material. The stories are entertaining and not particularly long—the First and Second Branches combined are only a little longer than this article. A basic familiarity with the plot will provide considerable advantage in understanding the following analysis. Free translations of the *Mabinogi* are available at several websites, including Mabinogi.net (Parker, 2005) and the Internet Sacred Text Archive (Guest, 1877).

Astronomy? How'd That Get in There?

Before proceeding further, I would also like to provide a brief overview of the history of *astronomy*, which may be defined as the study of all celestial phenomena, including the positions and motions of objects beyond the Earth's atmosphere. This context is indispensable, if we wish to discern the conceptions of astronomy that might have been present in the Welsh author's mind, the origins of those ideas, and the meanings they ultimately express in the *Mabinogi*. In addition to astronomy, this section will address a bit of astrology, which may be understood as the interpretation of any influences that celestial bodies exert, through position and movement, upon terrestrial affairs. Modern scientific minds tend to draw a hard line between astronomy and astrology, generally dismissing the latter, but no such conflict would have existed for the author of the *Mabinogi*. Medieval thinkers normally regarded astrology as a natural, practical application of astronomy.

The Middle Ages were a difficult era for both astronomers and astrologers in Europe. Western astronomy had reached a pinnacle of development many centuries earlier, among the ancient Greeks, whose achievements were then transmitted to the Romans. Much knowledge was subsequently lost in the fall of the Roman Empire and its aftermath. Fortunately, Arabian scholars were able to salvage a portion of this Greco-Roman heritage before it vanished irrevocably. One of the works rescued by the Islamic world was the *Almagest*, a monumental second-century treatise by Claudius Ptolemy. Empirically derived and mathematically precise, the *Almagest* supplied a comprehensive theory of stellar and planetary motions. While Arabian scientists were busy exploring and refining various principles they encountered in the *Almagest*, astronomy in Europe suffered one setback after another, largely due to political turmoil and religious dogmatism. An early burst of renewed interest occurred at Charlemagne's court, during the Carolingian Renaissance of the late eighth and early ninth centuries. By the late tenth century, a syncretic style of astrology gained ground in Islamic Spain. A useful instrument for astronomical measurement, the astrolabe, reached France and Germany in the eleventh century (Evans, 1998). A translation of the *Almagest* into Latin, the scholarly language of Europe, was achieved in 1160. The *Almagest* nonetheless

languished in obscurity until Gerard of Cremona completed another Latin translation in 1175. Ptolemy's astrological text, the *Tetrabiblos*, had jumped into Latin several decades earlier, with Plato of Tivoli's 1138 translation. It was generally only after the twelfth century, however, that universities provided mathematical instruction adequate for the construction and interpretation of horoscopes (Kanas, 2007).

Due to the challenges of the era, it would be improbable that the Welsh author of the *Mabinogi* read astronomical works directly in Arabic or Greek, or that he (or she) had access to the *Almagest* in Latin prior to the late twelfth century, if at all. So, what other resources for learning about astronomy might have been available?

A majority of the astronomical content in the First, Third, and Fourth Branches of the *Mabinogi* corresponds well to a single, significant work that was composed more than a millennium earlier: the *Phaenomena* by Aratus of Soli. The *Phaenomena* was a popular, widely translated, 1,154-line poem about the Greek constellations and related star and weather lore. Penned in the third century BCE, and based upon an identically titled Greek astronomical text written by Eudoxus of Cnidus in the fourth century BCE, the *Phaenomena* continued to be read and enjoyed even during the darkest times in Europe.

For my research, I examined scans of two separate Latin translations of the *Phaenomena*: Harley MS 647 and NLW MS 735C. Harley MS 647 was copied in the ninth century at the Carolingian court at Aachen and is now archived at the British Library (Harley MS 647, c. 820–850). Along with the text of the *Phaenomena*, Harley MS 647 features fanciful artwork incorporating extracts from *De Astronomica*, a collection of fables dubiously attributed to Gaius Julius Hyginus and more likely composed by a pseudo-Hyginus in the second century. Regardless of authorship, these quotes do convey a bit of additional information, including at least one myth that dovetails particularly well with a passage in the Third Branch of the *Mabinogi*. That same myth surfaces in Ovid's *Fasti*, a first-century poem studied in the curricula of twelfth-century European schools (de Weever, 1996). Harley MS 647 also contains one of the ten known medieval European *planispheres* that have survived to this day. The planispheres are whole-sky maps that were drawn from celestial globes, and they show the relative positions of nearly every constellation recognized during the Middle Ages. Scholars believe that Harley MS 647 reached St. Augustine's monastery in Canterbury by the end of the tenth century. The planisphere, which was not originally part of the text, was likely already appended to the manuscript prior its arrival in England (Dekker, 2013).

NLW MS 735C was copied in the eleventh and mid-twelfth centuries and is housed at the National Library of Wales (NLW MS 735C, c. 1000–1150). It was made in France and received into Welsh hands at an unknown date. NLW MS 735C sports helpful seasonal charts for the winter and summer constellations (f. 3v, f. 4r, f. 5r) in addition to a planisphere (f. 10v).

The *Phaenomena* predated the *Almagest* by roughly four centuries, and it does not contain even remotely the same level of technical content. But because the two works drew upon shared traditions that were passed down through Greek civilization, they portray the constellations in an

approximately similar manner. Thus the *Phaenomena* provided an avenue through which Europeans could gain some knowledge of all but one of Ptolemy's forty-eight constellations, even during an era in which the *Almagest* was lost to them. This does not mean the author of the *Mabinogi* relied solely or even primarily upon the *Phaenomena* for his inspiration. The content of the Second Branch, in particular, demonstrates far greater expertise than was present in Aratus's poetry. However, if the medieval audience of the *Mabinogi* included members who were educated in astronomy, the *Phaenomena* almost certainly would have been familiar to them. The author would have been aware of that, and he would have written with them in mind. Their ears were probably more attuned to the Ovate meanings than our own, in fact, since relatively few students read the *Phaenomena* today.

While medieval Europeans gleaned their astronomy from the ancient Greeks, the Greeks themselves borrowed some of their astronomy from the ancient Babylonians. One important concept that the Babylonians had formulated by the seventh century BCE, and that the Greeks either mooched or discovered for themselves in about the fifth century BCE, is called the *ecliptic*. The ecliptic is the great circle that the Sun appears to take around the sky, against the starry background, over the course of each year. To either side of the ecliptic, extending about 8–9 degrees to the north and to the south, is a band of sky called the *zodiac*. The zodiac originated with the Babylonians, who by the end of the sixth century BCE had divided the sky into twelve zones of equal size, each occupying 30 degrees along the ecliptic. The zones are each represented by an astrological sign and a related constellation. Around the end of the fifth century BCE, the Greeks fully embraced the Babylonian zodiac. It has been a prominent feature of Western astronomy and astrology ever since. Allusions to the ecliptic, the zodiacal constellations, and the astrological signs appear quite frequently in the *Mabinogi*.

The twelve zodiacal constellations, along with the thirty-six additional constellations described in the *Almagest*, were eventually incorporated into the larger catalog of star patterns that astronomers use today (Ridpath, 1988). Although novices may beg to differ, it is not excessively difficult to learn the general shapes and locations of the forty-eight Ptolemaic constellations, the same constellations that the author of the *Mabinogi* would have known. Planetary paths are a different story. An understanding of planetary motion, particularly at the level of sophistication displayed in the Second Branch, requires appreciable skill. The elusive *Almagest* contained the necessary theory. But even for those lucky astronomers who had knowledge of that work, it was often more convenient to turn to one of the handbooks derived from it: a *zīj*, in the Arabic tradition. The zījes offered tables for determining planetary positions, lunar phases, eclipses, and other important calendrical data. The tables arrived in Europe sooner than the *Almagest*. A zīj written by Muḥammad ibn Mūsā Al-Khwārizmī and revised by Maslama al-Majrītī was already accessible in Latin during the early twelfth century, via the translation of Adelard of Bath (Kennedy, 1956). Later in the twelfth century, the more accurate Toledan Tables would become available.

Still, as physicist James Evans (1998) has explained in his textbook, *The History and Practice of Ancient Astronomy*, "Planetary theory was an arcane art. Understanding the use of tables separated

the master from the dilettante." In this article, I examine a substantial body of evidence that the author of the Mabinogi was not a dilettante. On the contrary, he crafted a cycle of legends that brilliantly integrates a systematic, allegorical description of the motions of the heavens, and he accomplished this with sufficient detail to permit identifications of historical celestial alignments—primarily conjunctions and eclipses—appearing within his narrative.

A Few Words on My Methods

My researches have employed greater technological aid than the author himself would have enjoyed. While investigating possible planetary alignments in the *Mabinogi*, I often turned to a program called Stellarium (Chéreau et al., 2009). Stellarium is planetarium software that allows the user to input a variety of parameters such as location, date, and time. This enables accurate simulations of the skies over medieval Wales. This is necessary because different constellations are visible above different latitudes on Earth, and because a very slow shift in the orientation of the Earth's axis alters the positions of the constellations over the centuries (a phenomenon called *precession*), and because the planets are continually in motion. Other programs are available, but I rate Stellarium highly for both its dependability and its ease of use. Downloads may be obtained for free at stellarium.org.

I have cross-checked my ideas via three separate translations of the *Mabinogi*. Except where otherwise cited, all translations of proper names that appear in this article were drawn from the carefully updated and usefully annotated Dolmen Arch edition of Lady Charlotte Guest's historic work (Greer & Guest, 2009a, 2009b). The two other volumes that I have consulted regularly have been those by Sioned Davies (2007) and Will Parker (2005).

Because I am not an astrologer, I have not attempted any detailed astrological interpretations. In the discussion of the Second Branch, however, I do include a few remarks on the strengths and weaknesses traditionally recognized for planets within specific signs. These essential dignities and debilities—rulership, triplicity, exaltation, detriment, and fall—jibe well with the behavior of key characters in multiple scenarios. That discovery caught me by surprise. I was not originally seeking such correspondences, and by the time I stumbled across them, they startled me by falling neatly into a model that, up to that point, had been primarily astronomical in nature. The system of dignities described in *The Encyclopedia of Natural Magic* helped to orient my thoughts while coming to grips with these concepts (Greer, 2005). The dignities can be found in the work of Ptolemy, and my understanding is that the system has remained consistent enough over time that this approach would be valid.

I am not the first person to examine historical astronomy in the *Mabinogi*. At least two other writers have published on this subject within the past three years. The ideas presented in this article have been under independent development since 2011, however, and they do differ in significant ways from those expressed elsewhere. These differences become increasingly important

in the later parts of the *Mabinogi*. In the second article of this series, forthcoming in the *Trilithon* issue of 2016, we will begin to take a closer look at them.

Meanwhile, the model introduced in this article has arisen from my own efforts to perceive and understand, as well as I possibly can, the Ovate meanings tucked into the *Mabinogi*. During this process, I have developed not only great respect but also true affection for the author of this work. So I am hopeful that this model provides a tolerably accurate representation of meanings he genuinely intended. I nonetheless encourage interested readers to seek out, consider, and develop alternative models, with the goal of discovering even better refinements. Dedicating deep thought to this fascinating material is the surest way to advance our understanding of it.

The First Branch

Introduction to *Pwyll Prince of Dyfed*

The astronomical meanings that I have found in the *Mabinogi* build along a logical line of ascent, from the Earth, through the solar system, and onward to the stars. This threefold pattern manifests through three sets of characters who associate into distinct family groups: the children of Annwn, the children of Llŷr, and the children of Dôn.

The study of planets and stars is astronomical by definition, but where may astronomy be found on Earth, or even below ground? As it turns out, a key project of the First Branch is the establishment of a basic topography of the heavens. The story of Pwyll presents several celestial habitats that receive repeat visits throughout the *Mabinogi*. These include the forest, the sea, and the mound.

Arawn and Pwyll in the Forest

The most famous star pattern of all is the Plough or, as Americans like to say, the Big Dipper. But Orion the Hunter is not far behind. This striking wintertime constellation boasts two bright stars for the shoulders, two bright stars for the legs or feet, and a row of three bright stars for the waist. Orion's hunting dogs, Canis Major and Canis Minor, accompany him across the sky. Aratus described Canis Major as "flaming," since he features a star "that keenest of all, blazes with a searing flame" (Mair & Mair, 1921).

Another hunter, named Arawn, rides into the opening scene of the *Mabinogi*. He is king of Annwn, an otherworld sometimes characterized as the land of the dead. The etymology of Arawn's name is uncertain, with several translators suggesting "silver" as the meaning of the first syllable (Jones, 2005). It could be a coincidence that the pronunciations of *Arawn* and *Orion* are similar. It would be an odd coincidence, though. Not only is Orion a hunter, he is also among the dead. The story of Orion's demise appears in the *Phaenomena*. Even the dogs of the two hunters sound a bit alike—Arawn's are described as having shining white hair and glistening red ears. John Toffee Davies (2014), the author of the blog *Mabinogion Astronomy*, has conducted an independent analysis of this First Branch passage and arrived at similar conclusions.

Arawn appears in a glade, and Orion, who faces off with the constellation of Taurus the Bull, can be easily visualized in a field. In the Ovate layer of the *Mabinogi*, this represents an opening in the woods where otherworldly beings and things are occasionally encountered. As we proceed through the full story cycle, we will see this idea reinforced several times.

Determining a constellation for Pwyll, the hero of this tale, is trickier. The narrative explains that before Pwyll runs into Arawn, he travels some distance, resting at a grove and entering a valley. This implies that Pwyll's constellation is not especially close to Arawn's. Pwyll's name can be translated as "perception." For one of the constellations in the *Phaenomena*, Aratus employed a comparable poetic name: Phantom, which derives from *phantazein*, or "make visible." The Phantom is fainter than Orion, but their bearings and builds are similar. In the *Mabinogi*, Pwyll and Arawn also come to resemble one another, enough so that they are able to trade places without raising any suspicion.

For several centuries after the *Phaenomena*, the identity of the Phantom fluctuated. Eventually, he secured his more permanent Roman name: Hercules. In illustrations, Hercules typically strikes a pose that is inverted but otherwise virtually identical to Orion's (figure 1). Like Hercules, Orion

Figure 1: Orion and Hercules are constellations that correspond well to Arawn and Pwyll. Hercules is normally regarded as upside-down. On all-sky maps, Hercules and Orion can be seen orienting in the same direction along the Milky Way (see figure 6). Public domain images from the 1824 card set, *Urania's Mirror*.

normally carries a club and lion's pelt, a depiction found in the work of Ptolemy (Ridpath, 1988).

On Calan Gaeaf—the holiday of November 1 that traditionally marks the first day of winter in Wales—Hercules would start the evening in the west. Due to the Earth's rotation, he would then proceed in a gradual counterclockwise motion around the northern sky. Close to midnight, the star marking Hercules's head would sink below the horizon. Simultaneously, Orion would finish rising in the east, beginning a nighttime trek that would continue along a westward path across the sky. By 2:00 a.m. local time, Hercules would be largely obscured from view, submerged below the horizon at due north. Meanwhile, Orion would be *culminating*, or reaching his highest altitude in the sky, at due south. In the predawn hours, Hercules would complete the process of rising, reemerging into full view in the northeast. Orion, on the other hand, would be half sunk into the western horizon by sunrise. It is as if the two are engaged in a swap of realms, above and below, just like Arawn and Pwyll. This scenario was, and still is, easily observable throughout the night, at northern latitudes during the hunting season.

An astronomer would describe this type of movement as *diurnal*—a motion of the heavens that occurs within the span of a day, due to the Earth's rotation on its axis. As the story of Pwyll and Arawn progresses, we also learn about a seasonal shift. The term for this second type of movement is *annual*—a change in perspective that occurs as a result of the Earth's orbit around the Sun.

According to the Greeks, Orion died when a scorpion stung him. Afterward, the gods placed these enemies on opposite sides of the sky. When one is rising, the other is always setting. As a result, the mighty hunter strides above the nighttime southern horizon during the winter months, whereas the constellation of Scorpius lurks there only during the summer.

Arawn's opponent in the *Mabinogi* is Havgan, whose name translates as "summer white." Arawn assigns the task of dispatching Havgan to Pwyll. Pwyll's instructions are to meet Havgan one year later at the Ford and to deliver a single fatal blow. Pwyll accomplishes this during a joust.

Two constellations, Lupus and Centaurus, lie immediately southwest of Scorpius. Lupus's present identity as a wolf solidified during the Renaissance. Prior to that, he was treated merely as a generic beast. Centaurus, on the other hand, has been pictured since classical times as a creature with the upper body of a man and the lower body of a horse. The Romans liked to portray Centaurus and Lupus as a centaur impaling an animal on a long pole.

With a little extra imagination, they can be seen instead as a mounted knight, a lance, and the upended horse of an opponent. The First Branch describes the defeated Havgan as "borne to the ground an arm's and a spear's length over the crupper," meaning he has gone over the back end of his saddle (Greer & Guest, 2009a). Scorpius's position with respect to Lupus is identical to that of Havgan with respect to his own horse (figure 2).

While medieval astronomers certainly knew of the beast and the centaur—NLW MS 735C and Harley MS 647 both depict them—very little of these southern constellations could have been seen directly from Wales. Scorpius was a more familiar sight, due to his slightly higher position at the horizon. And most importantly, at any time Scorpius could be observed, Hercules was also always visible, whereas Orion was not. In other words, Pwyll would be in a better position than Arawn to do something about Havgan. During the summer, when Scorpius climbs to a modest altitude, Hercules adopts a posture of dominance far above him. When the year is up, on Calan Gaeaf and about an hour after midnight, Hercules and Scorpius are both underground at the northern horizon. And the strongman knocks the scorpion as far down as he can ever go, toward the nadir.

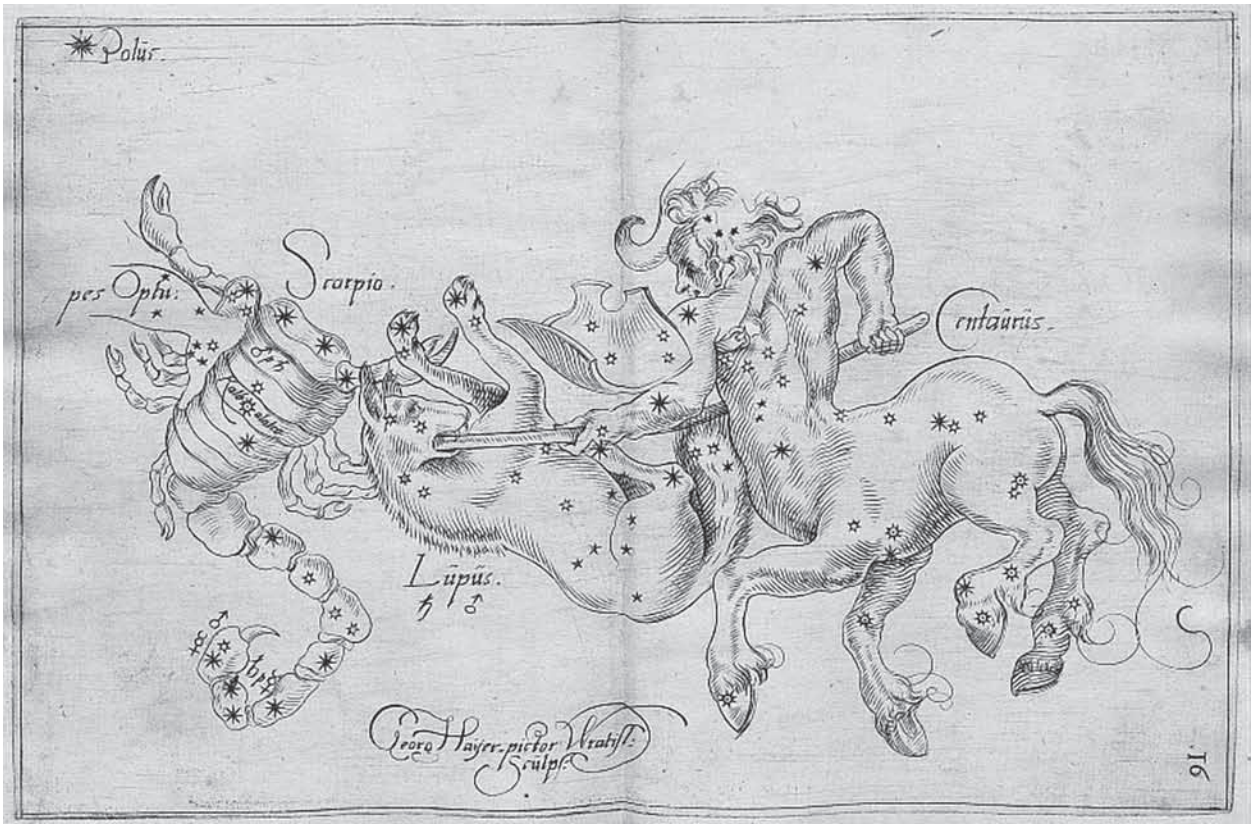

Figure 2: In a cosmic duel with the centaur, the scorpion would be the loser. For medieval spectators at the latitude of Wales, this joust would never rotate into full view above ground level. It took place in a hidden realm, the otherworld. Public domain chart from a 1596 copper engraving by Zacharias Bornmann.

The Greek seasonal tale addressed the relative positions and motions of two constellations: Orion and Scorpius. The corresponding legend in the *Mabinogi* conveys information about at least five. This rewrite, the first of many in these tales, suggests that the author was not merely reverencing the classics. He was retooling them, making them more complete. In an era when the classics were often treated as authoritative, these were ballsy acts of creativity. I often prefer this author's ingenious adaptations to the original star lore.

The Ford in this passage is located adjacent to the constellation of Scorpius, and we will visit it again in the Fourth Branch, when a woman made of flowers flees across the sky, and the maidens who accompany her drown. Through that tale and others, the author will develop a more complete system for remembering seasonal constellations. Before those currents sweep us away, perhaps we should acquaint ourselves with the sea.

Pryderi and Rhiannon by the Sea

In the First Branch, Pwyll fathers a son, Pryderi. They are not close. Pryderi is kidnapped as a newborn. When Pryderi is later returned, Pwyll immediately fosters him out again.

Pryderi's name means "trouble," and part of the trouble with Pryderi is the complexity of his identity. Over the full trajectory of his life, as he passes through different stages in his development, Pryderi will resonate with more than one celestial symbol. The first of these is a seaside constellation that emerges from the daytime sunlight and rises in the morning sky during the spring.

In Greek thought, the sea encompassed eight constellations: Aquarius, Capricornus, Cetus, Delphinus, Eridanus, Hydra, Pisces, and Piscis Austrinus. Seven of these cluster together in one big pool, with Delphinus the Dolphin leaping playfully above the water's surface. Hydra is positioned opposite the main group, winding through a part of the sky that would otherwise be dry. This constellation was originally conceived as a water snake, but the *Mabinogi* repurposes Hydra several times as a river. In the topography of the First Branch, Hydra flows near Orion along a low-lying, horizon-hugging route, implying that it is the river for Glyn Cuch, or "scowl valley." A path from Hercules to Hydra would first pass through the constellation of Virgo the Virgin. That would presumably represent the site of Pwyll's initial stop: Llwyn Diarwyd, the "grove without vice."

The name of Pryderi's rescuer and foster father, Teyrnon Twryf Vliant, translates as "monarch of the host of the sea." In the sky, Teyrnon associates best with the sign, constellation, and Tropic of Capricorn. The constellation of Capricornus the Sea Goat is at the westernmost boundary, or leading edge, of the celestial sea. It is among the twelve zodiacal constellations, suggesting a special rank that would be commensurate with Teyrnon's nobility. It might seem strange to think of the Sea Goat as Teyrnon's emblem. The name of his territory also supports this concept, however. Gwent-Ys-Coed means "Gwent below the forest." This was an actual place in early medieval

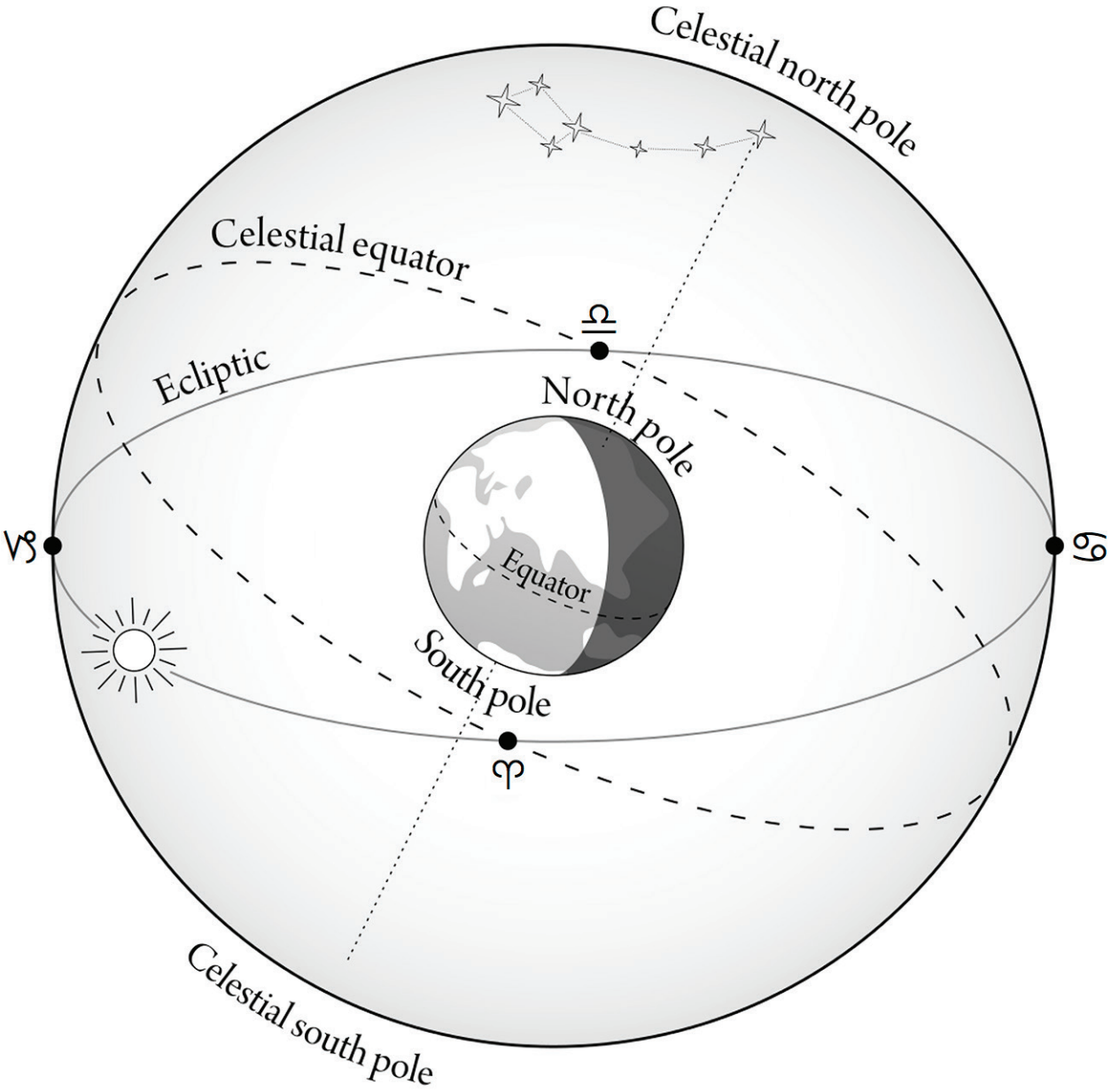

Figure 3: During the course of a year, the Sun follows an apparent path called the ecliptic. The March equinox—a date of equal daylight and darkness—occurs at ♈, the vernal point; the June solstice occurs at ♋, on the Tropic of Cancer; the September equinox occurs at ♎, the autumnal point; and the December solstice occurs at ♑, on the Tropic of Capricorn (Cesa, 2011; solsticial labels added by T. Glomski).

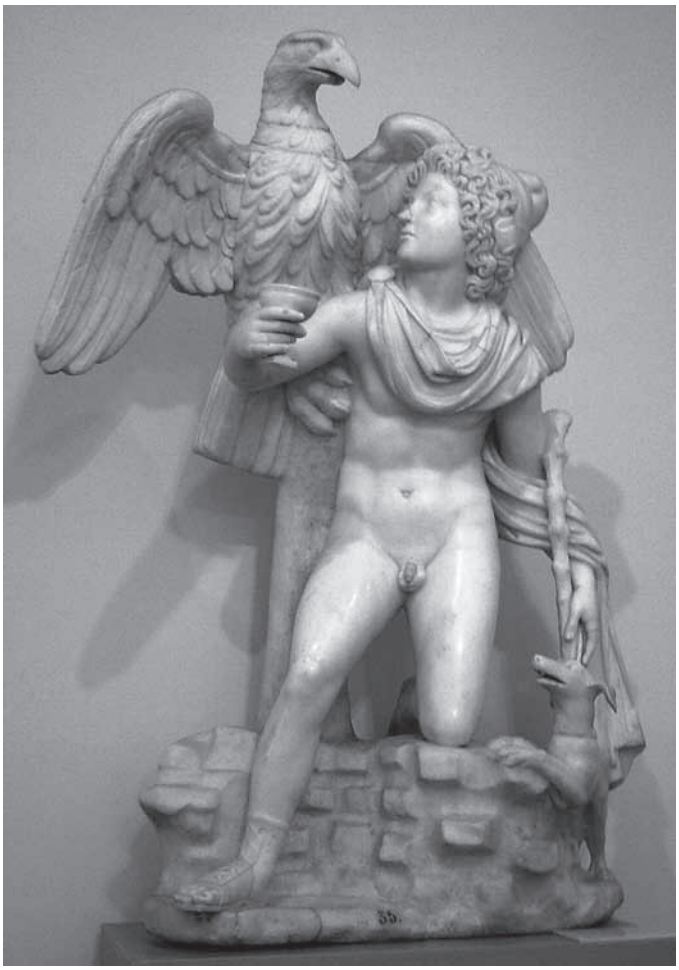

Figure 4: This statue depicts Ganymede as a youthful cupbearer and Zeus as an eagle. Sculpted c. 160–170 and currently residing at the Museo Nacional del Prado, this Roman work emulates Hellenistic iconography of the third century BCE (García, 2006).

Wales, but it also has a different, important meaning in the *Mabinogi* universe. To understand what that is, we need to take a closer look at celestial coordinates.

It is often convenient to picture the Earth as a tiny, stationary globe resting at the center of a gigantic ball of sky, the *celestial sphere* (figure 3). One of the great circles on the celestial sphere is the ecliptic, the path that the Sun traces over the course of a year. At an oblique angle to the ecliptic is another circle, the *celestial equator*, which lies directly above the Earth's own equator. About 23½ degrees south of the celestial equator, there is an additional, smaller circle called the *Tropic of Capricorn*. At the winter solstice, the shortest day of the year, the Sun descends that far southward, and only that far, before turning and climbing northward again, born anew. The *Phaenomena* pinpoints the position of the Tropic of Capricorn with respect to several constellations, specifying that "on it is the Hare" (Mair & Mair, 1921). Lepus the Hare is situated beneath Orion's feet. In other words, the Tropic of Capricorn—the land that Teyrnon rules—ranges below the forest of Arawn.

The zodiacal constellation that follows close behind Capricornus, much like a strapping young lad keeping pace with his dad, is Aquarius the Water Carrier. The upcoming Third and Fourth Branches provide additional links between Pryderi and Aquarius. For now, it is worth noting that the Greeks associated Aquarius with the myth of Ganymede. Ganymede was a radiantly attractive child. A smitten Zeus adopted the form of an eagle to snatch the boy, and Ganymede subsequently became a cupbearer to the gods (figure 4). In the sky, Aquila the Eagle hovers over a little horse, Equuleus, whose head is above Aquarius's head (figure 5). It is entirely possible that the author of the Mabinogi imagined Aquila as the clawed abductor whose botched attempt at stealing Teyrnon's colt instead delivered the infant Pryderi to Teyrnon's

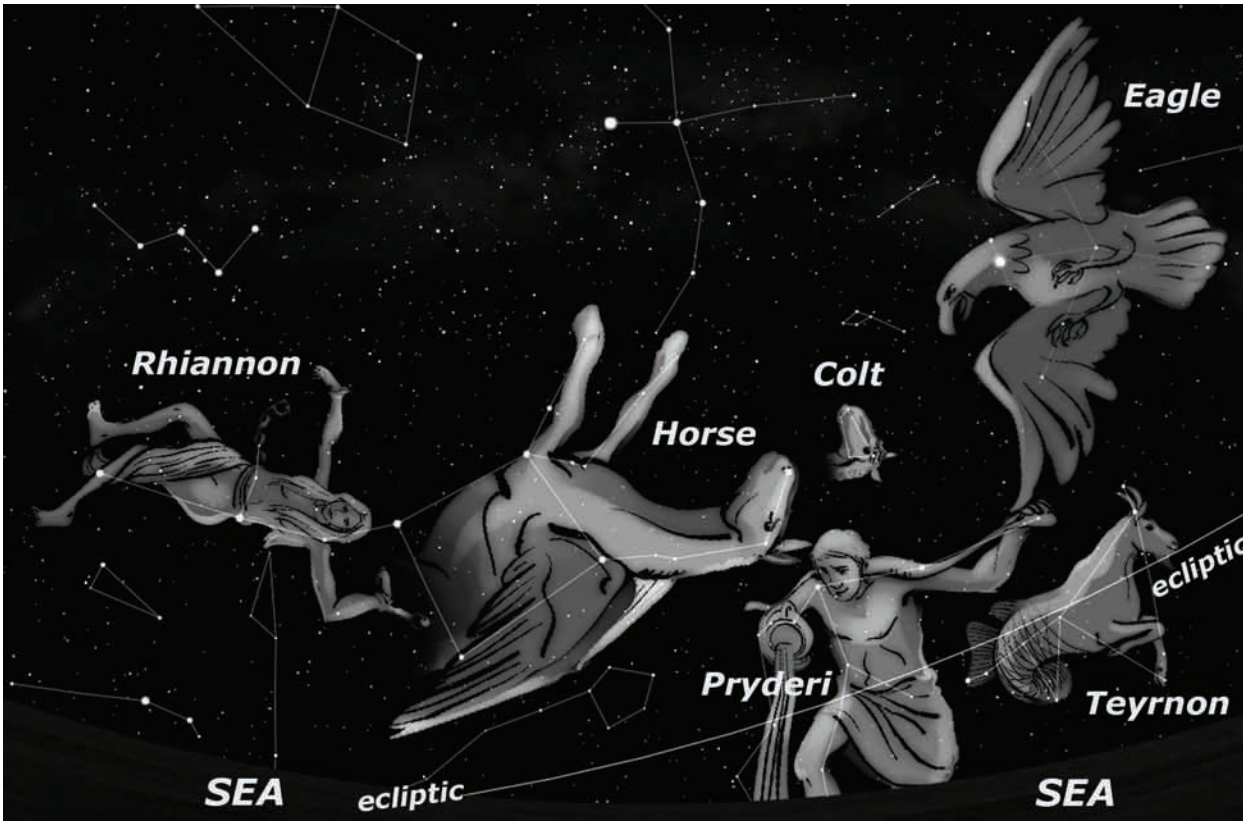

Figure 5: An hour and a half before sunrise, at Calan Haf on May 1 in medieval Wales, the figures lining the eastern horizon would express much of the story of Pryderi's childhood. Above the ecliptic, from left to right, the official astronomical names for the constellations are Andromeda, Pegasus, Equuleus, and Aquila. On the ecliptic, the two zodiacal constellations are Aquarius and Capricornus. Illustration by the author, incorporating images from Stellarium (Chéreau et al., 2009).

door. If so, then the author did not rely upon Aratus alone for his knowledge of constellations. The little horse is the one constellation, among the Ptolemaic forty-eight, that fails to appear in the *Phaenomena*. The text of Geminus of Rhodes's *Isagoge*, written in the first century BCE and translated into Latin by Gerard of Cremona c. 1170, implies that the Greek astronomer Hipparchus invented Equuleus in the second century BCE, after Aratus. Ptolemy later agreed with this addition, and he included the little horse in his own list of constellations (Evans, 1998).

An astronomical identity for Pryderi's mother, Rhiannon, is easier to guess. There is an uncomplicated match for her among the constellations: Andromeda. Rhiannon's close relationship with horses is emphasized repeatedly in the *Mabinogi*, and the constellation of Andromeda connects directly to the winged horse Pegasus through the star at her head (figure 5). Andromeda is a

chained princess, and Rhiannon endures a couple of confinements. We will hear more about this, as well, in the analysis of the Third Branch that will appear in next year's article.

Pwyll and Rhiannon at the Mound

Pwyll first encounters his bride, Rhiannon, at a place called Gorsedd Arberth, the "high seat of Arberth." Gorsedd Arberth is a mound that notoriously dispenses either wounds or wonders to whoever sits upon it. This mound is positioned alongside a road. To find this site, it is not sufficient to be familiar with the stars. One must also know the fount of poetic inspiration.

In Greek mythology, Mt. Helicon was the location where an exuberant Pegasus struck a rock with his hoof. A sacred spring, the Hippocrene, gushed forth, to the eternal delight of the muses. While no bright stars shine at the forefeet of the celestial horse, this place would be a splendid location for the mound. It is between Hercules and Andromeda, on a strip of sky adjacent to the river of the Milky Way, where a road might run (figure 6).

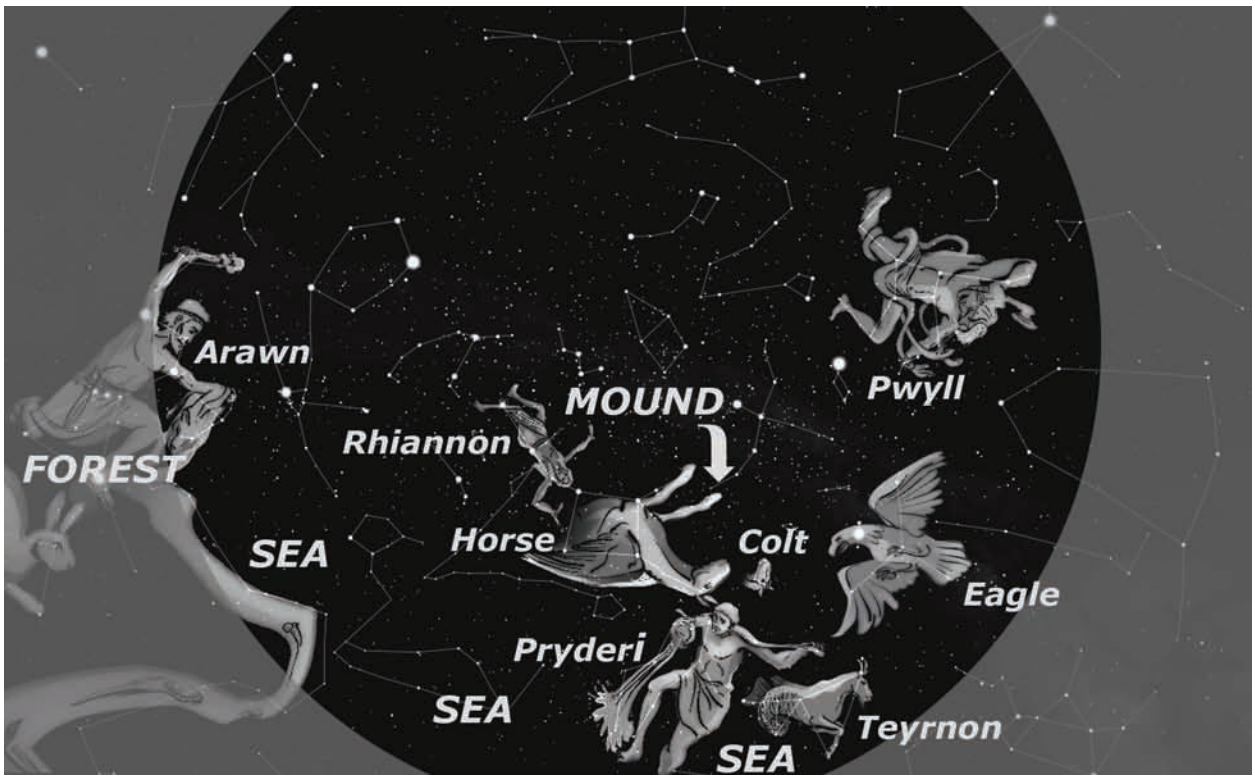

Figure 6: Three hours after sunset, every year at Calan Gaeaf, First Branch characters filled the southern skies of medieval Wales. The areas of forest, sea, and mound are indicated. The northern sky is toward the top—can you identify the Plough, an excellent symbol for the inspiration planted in this tale? Illustration by the author, incorporating images from Stellarium (Chéreau et al., 2009).

The relative positions of Hercules and Pegasus would account for Pwyll's difficulties in catching Rhiannon, as she flies by Gorsedd Arberth on her white horse. As seen from Wales and other northern latitudes here on Earth, the stars in the northern parts of the sky require longer periods between rising and setting than the stars in the southern parts. Hercules is a more northerly constellation than Pegasus. For a Welsh observer keeping time during the twelfth century, the star marking Hercules's head would take 14¾ hours to travel from one horizon to the other, whereas the star marking Pegasus's head would speed across the sky in only 12 1/3 hours. So Rhiannon's horse would naturally win those races, by more than a nose!

The mound is also on a celestial feature called the *Tropic of Cancer*. This tropic is named for Cancer the Crab, the sign in which the Sun attains his highest altitude, at about 23½ degrees above the equator, on the summer solstice. The Tropic of Cancer passes through the upper body of Hercules, and thus would be a legitimate extension of Pwyll's territory. While the tropic is a perfectly comfortable place for Pwyll, it is a much more challenging site for the Sun, who finds his northernmost limit here on the longest day of the year. This positioning poses specific difficulties for the Sun, bringing him to a standstill and reliably knocking him down. Hang onto that thought for the Third Branch, when Pryderi will climb the same hill as Pwyll, only to find himself stuck in place next to a fountain.

Meanwhile, the source of wonders is at a secret spot, best recognized by those who love mysteries and old lore. Shhh. Don't tell.

The Second Branch

Introduction to *Branwen Daughter of Llŷr*

The Second Branch spotlights the stories of five characters who are kin to the god Llŷr. These include three of Llŷr's own grown children—Branwen and her brothers Bran and Manawyddan—plus their half-brothers Nisien and Efnisien. Echoes of this family structure will be heard again in the Fourth Branch, with the progeny of the goddess Dôn. The sister in that latter tale will be Arianrhod, and her brothers will be Gwydion, Gilfaethwy, Eneyd, and Gofannon.

Five planets are visible to the unaided eye. Nowadays, we know them by their Roman names, but they have been recognized in various ways by all stargazers throughout history. In the *Mabinogi*, the planets take on Welsh names, with each sibling in Llŷr's family mapping straightforwardly to a Roman planetary counterpart.

- ☿ Manawyddan is Mercury, the god of eloquence, travelers, trade, and trickery. Manawyddan serves as one of Bran's messengers. His name means "loremaster of the land," suggesting that he is an accomplished communicator, just like Mercury. Additional qualities of Mercury will come to the fore in the Third Branch, which describes Manawyddan's further journeys, reveals his mastery of skilled trades, and proves he has sufficient knowledge of trickster technique to turn the tables on his enemy's ruses.

• ♀ Branwen is Venus, the goddess of love, beauty, and feminine charm. This pairing is a giveaway, since each of these sets of protagonists features only one female. Even if that were not true, their personalities sit well together. Branwen is dubbed the "fairest damsel in the world," and much of the story concerns her marriage and her loving endeavors to avert hostilities.

• ♂ Efnisien is Mars, the god of war, aggression, and masculine boldness. Efnisien's provocations force a battle that decimates his own troops, along with the entire population of Ireland. It is difficult to imagine that Efnisien, whose very name means "unpeaceful," could be anything other than the god of strife.

• ♃ Nisien is Jupiter, the god of good fortune, heavenly protection, and justice. Nisien's name translates as "peaceful," and he is described as possessing a pleasant, gentle nature. Beyond that reputation, his role in the story is minor. Perhaps if this kindly brother had been allowed more of a voice, less blood would have been shed in the end, eh?

•♄ Bran is Saturn, the god of agriculture, stability, and the Roman festival Saturnalia. Bran is the only sibling remaining. By process of elimination, Saturn must be his planetary assignment. The correspondences between the two are arguably less obvious than for the rest of the bunch, so this warrants closer examination.

Before proceeding further, it is helpful to recognize that the Second Branch is divided into three distinct yet closely allied parts. They all involve feasting. Lady Charlotte Guest's translation refers to them as "entertainments." We will begin with the last entertainment and work backward, since the material is slightly easier to understand from that angle.

The Third Entertainment: Bran as Saturn, Manawyddan as Mercury

On July 23, 1094, Saturn and Mercury were simultaneously passing a star called Regulus (figure 7). The planets and star were quite close. If this had occurred at night, instead of in the daytime, it would have been possible to block all three from view by holding up an index finger at arm's length. Definitions of the term vary, but even by the strictest usages, this was a *conjunction*: a close arrangement of two or more celestial bodies that lie in the same direction, or nearly the same direction, as seen from Earth.

Conjunctions are a natural result of planetary motion around the Sun. The word *planet* originally meant "wanderer." That is not a bad metaphor for the drift of planets as seen against the backdrop of stars, since the stars are essentially fixed within their constellations, at least during ordinary human time scales. The wandering of the planets is not random, however. The planets all orbit the Sun in roughly the same plane. So from our perspective, they hew close to the ecliptic, the same track that the Sun follows throughout the year. The planets may always be found within the band of the zodiac. As a general rule, the planets trend eastward along the ecliptic within this belt. Sometimes they appear to reverse and roll westward for a while. This happens, for example, every time the Earth overtakes one of the more distant planets, which are all traveling more

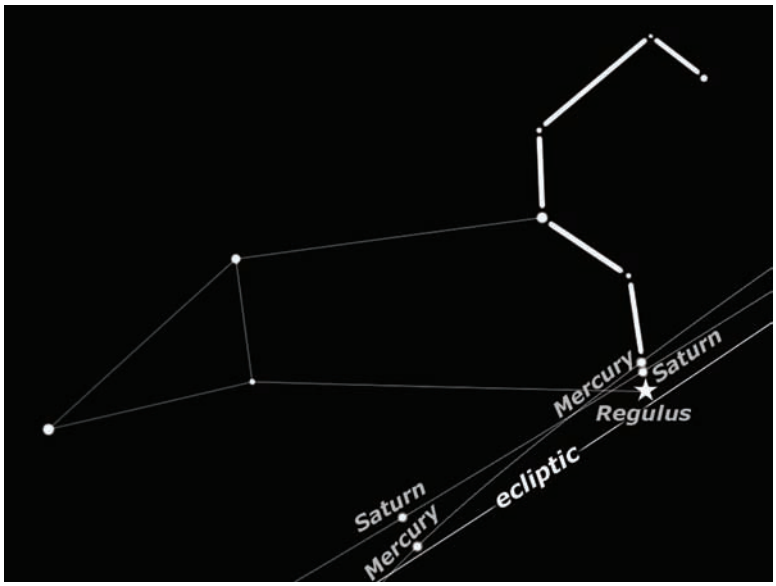

Figure 7: This chart for the constellation of Leo shows the Mercury-Saturn conjunctions of 1094 (right) and 1095 (left). Thick lines indicate the pattern of the Sickle. Illustration by the author, incorporating images from Stellarium (Chéreau et al., 2009).

slowly than our own. An eastward direction of movement along the ecliptic is termed *prograde* or *direct*, and a westward direction is called *retrograde*.

Because the Earth's rotational axis is not perpendicular to the plane of the Earth's orbit, the ecliptic lies at an oblique angle to the celestial equator. The ecliptic and the equator intersect at two places, the *equinoctial points* (figure 3). The *vernal point* is the position that the Sun reaches on the March equinox, the first day of spring in the northern hemisphere. The *autumnal point* is the position that the Sun reaches on the September equinox, the first day of fall. Saturn's sickle has sometimes been imagined as the mythological tool that split the ecliptic and equator, leaving them askew at these two points (de Santillana & von Dechend, 1977).

The constellation of Leo the Lion contains a pattern known as the Sickle (figure 7). This consists of a distinctive curve of five stars that constitutes either the lion's mane or the sickle's blade, and one additional bright star that marks the lion's heart or the sickle's handle. In modern times, that star's name is Regulus. Regulus has been associated with kingly power since at least the days of the Babylonians. It was among the very small number of stars that received a proper name from the Greeks (Basiliskos, meaning "little king"), the Romans knew it as Regia, and the ancient Persians counted it among their four Royal Stars. Regulus lies exceptionally close to the ecliptic, an ideal placement for conjunctions.

The significance that a medieval Welsh astrologer might have attached to a conjunction of Saturn and Regulus is an open question. By the late Middle Ages, Regulus was esteemed as a major benefic star (Greer & Warnock, 2010). The author of the *Mabinogi*, however, flourished during a slightly earlier era. It is less than clear that his interpretation would have been the same. Still, the pairing is sufficiently rich in symbolism that it is perhaps as good a starting point as any for our explorations of the route taken by Bran's head.

The severed head receives a waggish treatment in the Second Branch. At a river crossing in Ireland, Bran is made to foreshadow his own fate with the proverb, "He who will be chief, let him be a bridge" (Greer & Guest, 2009b). The pun has sometimes been lost in translation—the original term, *penn*, meant "head" as well as "chief" or "leader" (Parker, 2005). In the Ovate layer of meaning, this concept is most likely intended as a visual gag, as well. The medieval translations of the *Phaenomena* were accompanied by illustrations that depicted the planets as heads or head-and-shoulder portraits (NLW MS 735C, c. 1000–1150, f. 4v; Harley MS 647, c. 820–850, f. 13v).

A poisoned spear strikes Bran's foot during his subsequent battle with the Irish. He then orders his own decapitation, effectively amputating his body and allowing his head to survive uncorrupted for many years afterward. His companions carry the head back to Wales. The plan is to eventually bury it in London, but first there is a seven-year reception at Harlech, followed by an eighty-year feast at Gwales. Let us see what happened in the heavens, if we envision this passage as originating at the Saturn-Mercury-Regulus conjunction of 1094.

There are two adjacent astrological signs that place Saturn in his detriment, meaning his force is weakened. These are Cancer and Leo. That summer, as Bran moved toward Regulus and beyond, deeper into the sign of Leo, he was vulnerable for an extended time. A severe injury during this period would make sense for a character corresponding to Saturn.

For the week following the conjunction, Venus was in Virgo. Virgo is the astrological sign that puts Venus in triplicity and fall—a condition of amplified but unbalanced energy. She was also approaching the autumnal point. This would be a perfect place for Branwen to look back and forth, between Ireland and Wales. Whenever there is a meeting of the Irish and the Welsh in the Second Branch, it is generally at one of the equinoctial points.

Earlier in the narrative, the area now reached by Branwen was designated a "commot." In medieval Wales, kingdoms consisted of territories called cantrefs, with each cantref subdivided into two or more commots. The literal meaning of the Welsh word for commot, *cwmwd*, is "together-abode." This suggests a site of joining. The points of linkage between the celestial equator and ecliptic, the equinoctial points, would potentially fit this concept well.

If so, the author's choice of place name for this commot was extremely clever. *Talebolyon* is a Welsh pun meaning "payment of colts," but it likely goes beyond that. The autumnal point is located almost exactly opposite to the constellation of Pegasus, the horse who flies over the vernal point. A queue of ponies between the two commots, vernal and autumnal, would connect the equinoctial points along a great circle. In Greek mythology, the Sun made his daily rounds in a horse-drawn chariot. In the opening narrative of the Second Branch, the author appears to have extended that diurnal equine imagery to the annual trail, stocking the ecliptic with a solid supply of fresh horses.

But that happens in the first entertainment, and we are now talking about the third. In this later passage, Branwen and the other Welsh survivors dock in Talebolyon at a specific landing: Aber Alaw, or "river-mouth of song." Hydra, the constellation representing Glyn Cuch in the

First Branch, ends near the autumnal point. In the Second Branch, Hydra becomes conveniently recast as an even more melancholy river. A singing bird, Corvus the Crow, perches darkly on its banks. The shape of Corvus is distinctly trapezoidal, with only four stars that stand out (figure 8). This matches up well with the story, which chronicles Branwen's intense grief in the aftermath of the war, her demise from a broken heart, and her resting place in a four-sided grave.

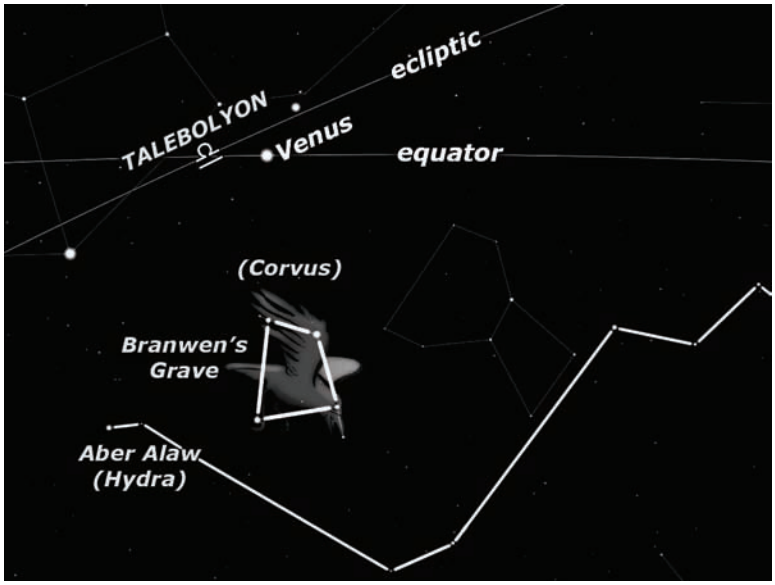

Figure 8: On July 28, 1094, Venus crossed the celestial equator while traveling along the ecliptic, toward the autumnal point ♎. Thick lines trace the constellations of the river and grave. Illustration by the author, incorporating images from Stellarium (Chéreau et al., 2009).

After Branwen's death, Mercury went around and gathered tidings. He was finally conjunct with Saturn again on July 23, 1095. This was exactly one year after the previous meeting at Regulus, although the brothers were now further east (figure 7). With Manawyddan's return, everyone was finally present for the homecoming feast in Harlech.

On December 17, the date that traditionally would have opened the festival of Saturnalia, the planet Saturn was entering a retrograde loop above the constellation of Crater the Cup. For the next several months, Bran would linger over this chalice at the repast. Around May 1, 1096, Saturn then turned prograde, beginning his saunter away from the cup and toward the crow. By this time, his companions had already forgotten their sorrows, including Branwen's death. Perhaps they were a little inebriated. Corvus's song would be easier on the ears, under these altered circumstances.

Three avian constellations are visible from Wales. At sunset on the summer solstice of 1096, all three were up: Corvus in the southwest, and Cygnus and Aquila over the celestial sea in the east. Cygnus the Swan glides near a musical instrument, Lyra the Lyre. Aquila was the baby snatcher of the First Branch. After learning a hard lesson from a sea goat's sword, the eagle presumably gave up thieving and entered a less risky career as a one-legged minstrel. In the Ovate layer of the *Mabinogi*, these three are the famed birds of Rhiannon, whose singing enraptured the group. They also turn up in *Culhwch and Olwen*, a separate tale of the *Mabinogion*, which credits them with the

power "to wake the dead, and send the living to sleep" (Davies, 2007). I like to imagine the partygoers nodding off at dawn, after a long night of entertainment and carousing, while Bran, their recently deceased yet wide-awake ruler, continued to exercise his planetary sway.

In the autumn of 1097, Saturn shifted into the sign of Libra. Astrologically speaking, Saturn is exalted in Libra, meaning that his force is well balanced and at its best potential, and in his triplicity, meaning that his energy is amplified. This was the peak of the party, lasting a couple of years.

By the summer of 1102, seven years after the arrival at Harlech and with the initial festivities petering out, the group sought a new venue. They moved to an enchanted banquet hall on a small island at the westernmost point of Wales. The building had three doors. The door facing Cornwall was to be kept shut. That meant no one could glimpse the skies to the south, where the seasonal constellations parade and the meridian marking local noon may be found. Unsurprisingly, everyone lost track of time.

Saturn's ongoing journeys also became concealed to them during this period. His friends would have no way of knowing that on December 31, 1102, Bran's late sister caught up to him in the sky. The two siblings were venturing into Sagittarius. At this location in the heavens, the ecliptic intersects the Milky Way, the softly glowing band of our galaxy. During the Middle Ages, the Milky Way was envisioned as the route of angelic ascent and descent (Staal, 1988). Saturn and Venus arrived together at this critical spot only a few months into the eighty-year feast. If Bran was previously in denial, the full awareness of his death likely hit him here. He would enter into a dual existence, remaining as an influence among the survivors on Earth, while simultaneously plying a veiled realm.

Then as now, each circuit of Saturn around the sky required more than twenty-nine years. The first such circuit would be followed by a second, and then another. Bran had nearly reached his third pass of Regulus in the summer of 1182, when someone below opened the south-facing door.

The full truth of the situation dawned on the grief-stricken contingent. As they turned their attention east, toward London, Mercury could already be seen running ahead. In Lady Charlotte Guest's translation, Bran had forewarned that they "may no longer tarry" (Greer & Guest, 2009b). His sole surviving brother, the fleet psychopomp god Mercury, took this seriously. Mercury was the closest of Llŷr's family to the Earth, in the geocentric model of the solar system that won out during the Middle Ages. Thus it would be natural for the task of burial to fall to Manawyddan, as opposed to any of the other siblings. By mid-August 1182, Mercury was approaching *maximum elongation*, the farthest apparent distance he can be from the Sun. He skid just a skosh past Regulus before executing a sharp U-turn. Mercury, Saturn, and Regulus finally achieved a snug conjunction again on August 23, 1182, a good date for the interment.

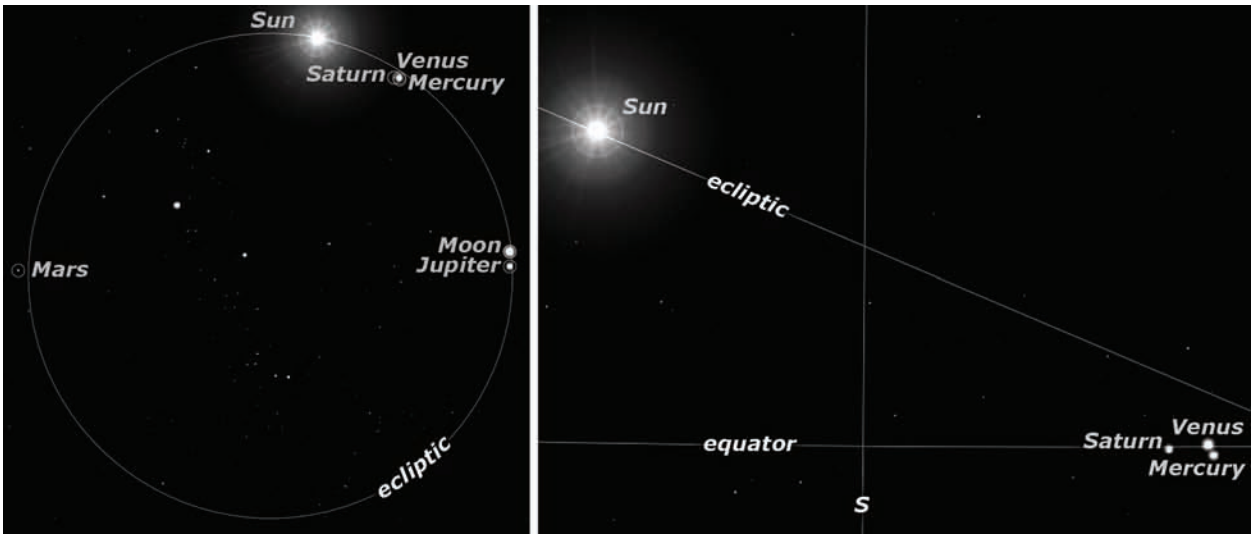

Figure 9: On April 10, 1143, the tables were set for the second entertainment. The charts show the planets at about a half hour before local noon—typical timing for the day's biggest meal in medieval Europe. All planets were above or at the horizon, with Jupiter setting in the southwest and Mars rising in the northeast. Due to the Sun's ordinary daytime glare, this configuration could not have been directly observed. It would have to be worked out on parchment. Illustrations by the author, incorporating images from Stellarium (Chéreau et al., 2009).

This conjunction would have been discernible, for observers with unobstructed views to the east, shortly before dawn. The Sun then rose, arriving at the funeral to mourn the passing of Bran, but also to forge onward into a new day. The Sun is the celestial body that Pryderi is becoming, in the broader story arc of the *Mabinogi*. The Third Branch elaborates further on the shared travels of Manawyddan and Pryderi.

In the celestial scenario just described, the time that elapsed between the conjunctions representing Manawyddan's arrival at Harlech in the year 1095, and his burial of the head in 1182, would total eighty-seven years and one month. That equals the period that the dying Bran predicted for both feasts together, plus a few weeks for the journey between Harlech and Gwales.

The Second Entertainment: Branwen as Venus, Efnisien as Mars

Because Venus's orbit nestles inside the Earth's, Branwen is constrained from ranging as freely across the heavens as Bran. From our perspective, she always appears in the west as the evening star or in the east as the morning star. Venus is the third brightest light in the sky, surpassed only by the Sun and Moon. Branwen's name, which means "white raven," is truly apropos. Just as Llew's spirit will be represented by an eagle in the Fourth Branch, Branwen's starling symbolizes some of her spark in the Second Branch, embodying the split in her heart between east and west, and her yearning to communicate with both.

The motions of the goddess of love, and also the god of war, hold special significance during the second entertainment—the fatal feast at which Bran suffered his wound. To make sense of that, we need to backtrack to the year 1143.

Something striking was unfolding in the heavens that spring. During a period that started three weeks before the equinox and ended three weeks after, three planets passed the vernal point. Saturn went first, on February 22. Mercury was practically right with him, on February 26. The equinox occurred on March 13. Nowadays, it is never earlier than March 19, but on the old Julian calendar that was in use during the Middle Ages, it came sooner. Venus arrived fashionably late, on April 6.

The importance of this threshold probably cannot be overstated. The vernal point is a traditional point of linkage between the head and tail ends of the zodiac. Prior to the battle, Branwen endorsed the construction of a "two-sided" house roomy enough to accommodate all. She knew the uniting of east and west at this point would effectively create a single big structure, a mansion that would encircle the entire girth of the heavens. Her hope was that it might contain everyone in peace.

Unfortunately, Aries is a challenging sign for Saturn and Venus. An astrologer would consider Venus to be in her detriment there, meaning her force is weakened. Saturn is in his fall, meaning his energy is unbalanced, degraded, and brought to its lowest potential.

Four days after passing the vernal point, Venus reached her seat between her two brothers. The trio formed a tight little conjunction on April 10, 1143 (figure 9). Bran was positioned to the east of his sister Branwen, and Manawyddan was positioned to the west.

While Llŷr's offspring were all dining together, their two half-brothers were elsewhere in the sprawling manor. Nisien was in Aquarius, near the Moon. Efnisien, ever the surly one, sat as far away from them as possible, on the other side of the sky in Leo. This type of alignment is called an *opposition*. From an astrological perspective, Mars opposite Jupiter presages religious disputes, broken treaties, extravagance, or public excitement toward war (J. M. Greer, personal communication, November 24, 2014).

In this perilous situation, Branwen's boy Gwern innocently set about greeting each of his uncles in turn. In order, they were Bran, Manawyddan, Nisien, and Efnisien. On April 10, 1143, the pattern of planets along the ecliptic, from east to west, followed the exact same sequence: Saturn, Mercury, Jupiter, and Mars (figure 9). The next celestial body along that clockwise path was the Sun. Instead of passing Gwern back to his mother, Efnisien tossed him into that fire. Bran, who sat very close to Branwen but between her and the Sun, intercepted his sister as she leaped toward the flames herself.

Perhaps not coincidentally, the sign that Efnisien visited right before these events was Cancer. The Crab is a sign of both triplicity and fall for Mars, putting him in a condition that is strong yet unbalanced. Crabs are armored creatures with pincers. The story relates that, prior to the feast,

Efnisien single-handedly crushed the skulls of 200 Irish men-at-arms, squeezing each of their heads "until he felt his fingers meet together in the brain through the bone" (Greer & Guest, 2009b). Perhaps the Crab lent some of its grip strength to the god of war. The Crab may have also transmitted some poetic inspiration, presumably through its tropic, since Efnisien recites a triumphant verse immediately after accomplishing this feat of violence.

If the journey of the head elapsed between 1094 and 1182, a date of 1143 for the battle with the Irish would be nonlinear. That is untidy, but hopefully not fatal to the model that I am presenting. The author probably considered the alignments within each entertainment to be important enough that he was willing to sacrifice perfect linearity for a compelling presentation. To better understand the connections between the entertainments, we must next gaze upon the Moon.

The First Entertainment: Matholwch as the Moon

Matholwch was the Irish king who married Branwen. He went to Wales to fetch her in a fleet of thirteen swift ships. This mode of transport supplies a major clue concerning the identity of Matholwch's celestial body. Every year, the Moon completes a round total of thirteen tropical

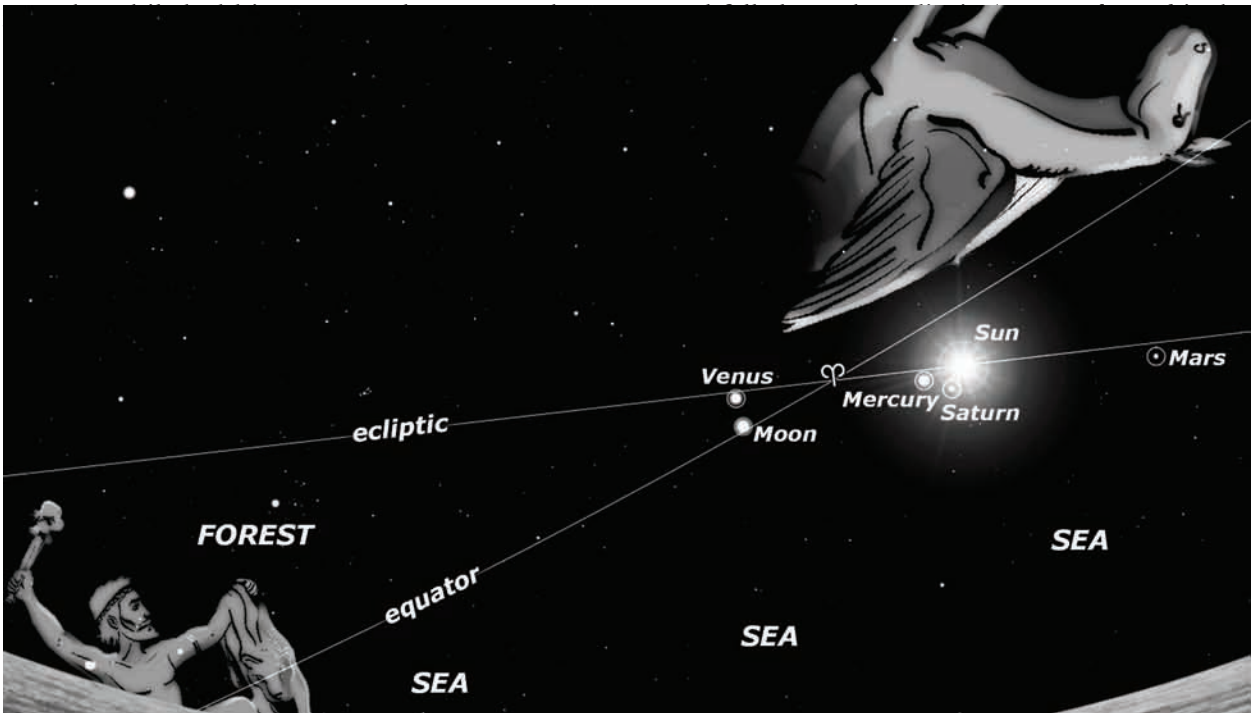

Figure 10: This chart shows the seating arrangement at about a half hour before local noon on March 1, 1142, the date of Branwen's marriage to Matholwch. For the next twenty-six days, Mars traveled prograde under the horse toward Saturn, committing grisly acts of violence along the way. Illustration by the author, incorporating images from Stellarium (Chéreau et al., 2009).

period that elapses between each of the Moon's passages at the vernal point, about 27 1/3 days). The average distance the Moon travels each day is about 13 degrees, as well.

An ideal configuration for Branwen and Matholwch's wedding feast—the first of the three entertainments—emerged on March 1, 1142. Saturn and Mercury were slightly to the west of the vernal point, while the Moon and Venus were slightly to the east (figure 10). The *Mabinogi* characters were identically positioned at their first meal in Wales, before the construction of the big house in Ireland: "And at Aberffraw they began the feast and sat down. And thus sat they. The King of the Island of the Mighty and Manawyddan the son of Llŷr on one side, and Matholwch on the other side, and Branwen the daughter of Llŷr beside him. And they were not within a house, but under tents. No house could ever contain Bran the Blessed" (Greer & Guest, 2009b).

In this particular passage, Pegasus becomes one of Matholwch's horses. The narrative describes Matholwch's horses and attendants as billeted all the way to the sea. Pegasus's position at the celestial sea represents this perfectly. For nearly a month following the wedding, Mars tracked eastward under Pegasus, moving from the head toward the hindquarters. While proceeding through this area of the sky, Mars was in his triplicity in the sign of Pisces. This is the place where Efnisien cruelly mutilated the horses' lips, ears, and tails.

On March 27, 1142, Matholwch met with Bran to accept payment for the damage wrought by Efnisien. The two kings had an unusually close conversation. This was not merely a conjunction, but an *occultation*—an alignment in which one celestial body (in this case, the Moon) passed directly in front of a more distant object (Saturn). By local midnight at the start of March 28, the Moon was at the vernal point, where Matholwch would receive the first of his three compensatory gifts, a silver staff. In the manuscripts, there is a grammatical problem in this passage. A phrase characterizing the staff's thickness appears to be missing. Welsh tribal law would suggest this emendation: "as thick as his little finger" (Davies, 2007). From the perspective of the Ovate layer, that description would make perfect sense. A little finger held at arm's length subtends a visual angle of less than one degree. This would indicate an area of sky that is rather narrow and precise. Thus the silver staff would be a suitable metaphor for the line of ecliptic longitude running through the vernal point.

An hour after midnight on March 29, the Moon passed the Sun, and Matholwch collected his second gift, a plate of gold measuring the breadth of his face. This would be an excellent and straightforward comparison of the relative sizes of the disks of the Sun and Moon, as seen from Earth. And by April 1, the Moon was well into Arawn's forest. This would be a logical place for Matholwch to pick up the third gift: the otherworldly cauldron, which had the power to restore life to the dead. The cauldron would rightfully belong with Matholwch, since the Moon is the celestial body that revitalizes in the most obvious way, waxing after every waning.

Matholwch's son, Gwern, expresses a property of the Moon. Gwern means "alder," a type of tree belonging to the birch family. Alder wood burns hot and fast, but it is also admirably durable when waterlogged. That type of constitution would help Gwern withstand the same

waves that carried his father around the sky, from west to east, every month. Yet, as previously noted, Gwern went the opposite way, from east to west, while greeting his uncles. There is in fact a feature of the Moon that moves in this direction. It is called the *regression of lunar nodes*.

The Moon's path is tipped at a variable angle of about 5 degrees with respect to the ecliptic. Each month, the Moon crosses the ecliptic at two points. One is the *ascending node*, the intersection where the Moon shifts from south to north. The other is the *descending node*, where the Moon shifts from north to south. In medieval astrology, the ascending node was considered benefic, and the descending node was malefic (J. M. Greer, personal communication, December 8, 2014).

The Sun's gravity slightly accelerates lunar motion in the direction of the ecliptic plane. Due to these perturbations, the Moon hits the ecliptic a bit short of the previous month's nodes for each half-orbit, with the net result that the nodes drift westward. If tracked from any given starting position, the nodes eventually cycle back over a period of 18.6 years. Although ancient and medieval astronomers understood the physics differently than we do today, they were certainly aware of this phenomenon. It even received a hazy mention in *Natural History*, an outdated and nontechnical encyclopedia by Pliny the Elder that was popular in medieval Europe (Couch & Wernerian Club, 1848, II.10[56]).

When the Moon passes through a node that happens to fall directly between the Earth and the Sun, a solar eclipse occurs. Gwern's fate very likely alludes to this. The boy does not pass safely to either side of the flames, but goes directly into them. Did a solar eclipse actually occur on April

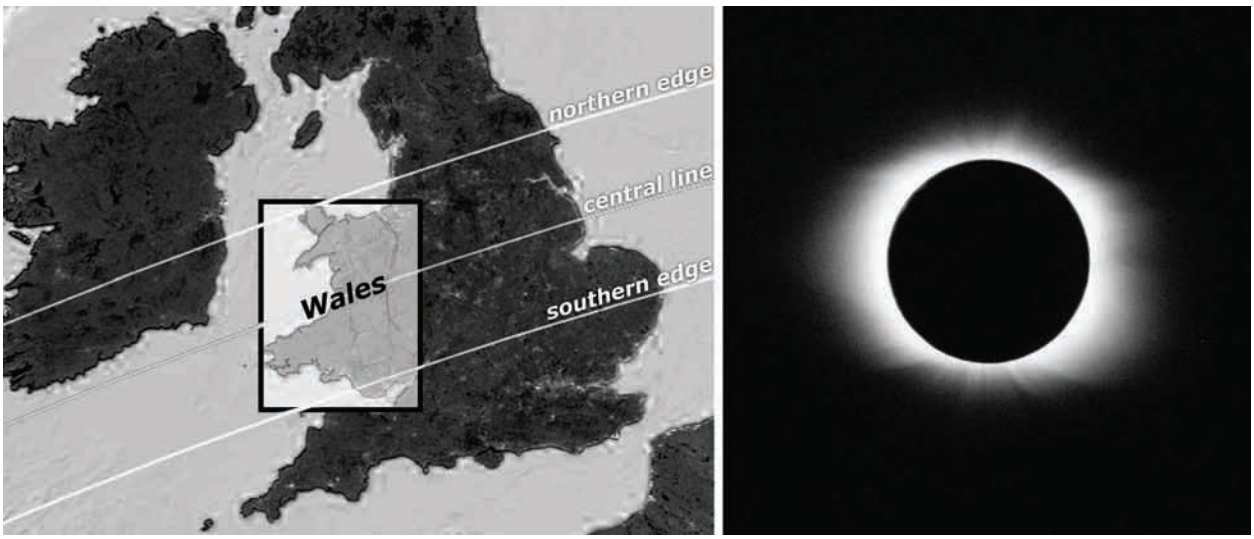

Figure 11. At left, the eclipse of March 20, 1140, was total for observers between the path's northern and southern edges. Along the central line through Wales, the Moon completely blocked the Sun for about 3 minutes and 43 seconds. Illustration by the author, incorporating data from NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center (Espenak, 2013). At right, total solar eclipses—like this one off the shore of Aruba—have engendered awe throughout history (photo by Dan Glomski, February 26, 1998).

10, 1143, the date of the battle and the boy's immolation? No. The Moon was well to the west of the Sun (figure 9). But it is probably not a coincidence that the Moon was smack on a node at local midnight at the start of that day. It was the first descending node in the wake of the three-year anniversary of the total solar eclipse of March 20, 1140. If this 1140 eclipse and the subsequent 1143 planetary configuration were linked in the author's mind, he might have attempted to resolve the gap by introducing the device of the three-year embargo, during which Matholwch seized control of ferry traffic.

In any case, the 1140 eclipse would have been of great interest to anyone living in Wales at the time. Virtually the entire region experienced it as total (figure 11). Like all total solar eclipses, it would have been a dramatic event. And it, too, occurred on a descending node, which would have made it seem even more ominous. It was unquestionably noticed. It was the first eclipse of any kind to be recorded in the annals of the *Brut y Tywysogion*, the Welsh *Chronicle of the Princes*, since the year 830. Another would not be noted until 1185 (Jones, 2008).

Part of the message in this passage might simply be that Gwern's lot was "written in the stars" from the time he was a twinkle in his father's eye. Sometimes the smallest details provide the greatest inspirations. And so, in the end, it is possibly the littlest character who exercises an outsized influence on the Ovate meaning of the Second Branch.

Discussion: De Profundis ad Astra / From the Depths to the Stars

In the First Branch, the author began the work of mapping the *Mabinogi* universe. In this task, he did not limit himself to the biggest and brightest star patterns. He incorporated lesser-known constellations into his stories, as well. Lupus and Centaurus are too low in the sky to be seen well from Wales, and Equuleus is a frequently overlooked pipsqueak. The author also devised creative metaphors for a variety of features of the celestial sphere. The two tropics—Cancer as an extension of Pwyll's territory and Capricorn as an extension of Teyrnon's territory—constitute an excellent pair of examples. In next year's article, as we continue our adventures in the *Mabinogi* skies, we will see mounting evidence that the author's approach was not pure whimsy. Taken as a whole, the Ovate layer of the *Mabinogi* offers a comprehensive, well-integrated mnemonic system, facilitating recall of a whole sweep of constellations and celestial motions.

The emphasis of the Second Branch fell upon sequences of celestial alignments that occurred historically, particularly during the years 1140–1143. The broadest segment ran well beyond that time frame, but it did so symmetrically, starting a bit over four decades prior and ending four decades after. What would cause an author to take such a keen interest in the early 1140s that he might write allegories concerning planetary configurations during those years?

Any answer that can be offered is conjecture. A heightened focus on the 1140s does not necessarily imply that the material was written at that time. The composition might have occurred some decades later, for example. The odds possibly even favor this, due to the increasing availability of astronomical resources during the latter half of the twelfth century. A late period of composition would agree well with the 1170–1190 date range proposed by Welsh writer and historian

Saunders Lewis (Charles-Edwards, 1996). It would disagree with the more broadly accepted yet still uncertain scholarly consensus of 1060–1120 (Davies, 2007). If the author was in fact writing in the 1140s or later, he may have personally remembered the big eclipse, or perhaps he later received astronomical or astrological records that he found intriguing, or he might have been interpreting events in the life of a patron. Possibly he was a teacher who regarded these alignments as ideal puzzles to test students' comprehension. As a student of this work, I have certainly received them in that way. These ideas represent my own speculations, though, and they are just that: guesses. The overall quality of writing in the *Mabinogi* intimates that the author enjoyed the advantages of a literate education, impetus to reflect, and time to record his thoughts. But the exact nature of his position probably cannot be identified from the Ovate layer of meaning alone.

The *Mabinogi* is a complex and nuanced piece of literature. There is more than one way to read these tales, and to explore the author's possible motivations. So it is ultimately up to each reader to decide.

Still, for those of us who enjoy astronomy, there is more to come. In the analysis of the Second Branch, I counted down the entertainments: three . . . two . . . one. Hold on to your nemysses. The next installment in this series will launch into the Third and Fourth branches, taking us further into the discussion of the solar system and beyond to the stars.

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The Coelbren of the Bards: A Practical Introduction

John Michael Greer

Born in the gritty Navy town of Bremerton, Washington and raised in the south Seattle suburbs, John began writing about as soon as he could hold a pencil. SF editor George Scithers' dictum that all would-be writers have a million words of so of bad prose in them, and have to write it out, pretty much sums up the couple of decades between his first serious attempt to write a book and his first published book, "Paths of Wisdom", which appeared in 1996. These days John lives in Cumberland, Maryland with his spouse Sara; serve as presiding officer -- Grand Archdruid is the official title -- of the Ancient Order of Druids in America (AODA), a Druid order founded in 1912; and writes in half a dozen nonfiction fields, nearly all of them focused on the revival of forgotten ideas, insights, and traditions of practice from the rubbish heap of history.

That astonishing figure Edward Williams (1747–1826), better known then and now by his Bardic nom de plume Iolo Morganwg, bequeathed a diverse and contentious legacy to the Druid Revival. Like many other innovative figures in the history of alternative spirituality, he found it advisable to wrap his creations in the borrowed garments of a spurious antiquity, and did this so skillfully that some of his inventions were not recognized as such until well over a century after his death (Constantine, 2007). At the same time, historians have gradually been forced to admit that Iolo was far from the mere forger that the fulminations of an earlier era of scholarship liked to portray (Jenkins, 2005), and there is evidence that Iolo's Bardic synthesis incorporated, in and among his inventions, scraps of genuinely ancient and medieval lore that are not attested elsewhere (Greer, 2014).

Among the elements of Iolo's legacy most often condemned by scholars as blatant forgery is the Bardic alphabet he called the Coelbren y Beirdd, the Coelbren of the Bards. The website of the National Museum of Wales (2014), as of this writing, even labels it a "false alphabet." Such a comment is typical of the modern scholarly treatment of Iolo, in that it takes its condemnation a good deal further than the facts permit.

The Coelbren, to begin with, is certainly not a false alphabet; if that phrase means anything, it would be something that looks like an alphabet but isn't actually one. The Coelbren, by contrast, is an actual alphabet, that is, a series of signs denoting individual phonemes that can be used for writing a language. If it was created by Iolo Morganwg, as seems likely, that simply puts it in the already substantial category of writing systems with a known inventor; no one calls Japanese kana false writing, for example, because it was created by the Buddhist monk Kukai in the ninth century CE, nor is the Cherokee script dismissed as a false syllabary because it was invented by Sequoyah in 1824. The Coelbren deserves the same status, for it is not merely a theoretical alphabet; in Welsh

Bardic and nationalist circles through most of the nineteenth century, it was routinely used for poems, inscriptions on gravestones and other monuments, and an assortment of other writings.

Now of course the point the National Museum of Wales website attempts to make, however clumsily, is that Iolo's claims about the origin and antiquity of the Coelbren are rejected by nearly all scholars these days. That consensus deserves to be taken seriously. For example, I know of no inscriptions in the Coelbren that definitely date from before Iolo's time; the first significant discussion of the Coelbren in print I have been able to locate dates to 1848 (Williams, 1848, p. 618-23), after Iolo's death, and references from before that time that clearly deal with an alphabet all appear to come from Iolo's busy pen. It remains possible that he salvaged his Bardic alphabet out of one of the old Welsh documents he is known to have studied, but until and unless hard evidence surfaces showing that the Coelbren was in use before Iolo's time, the most likely explanation for its origin is the one currently accepted by scholars: that is, that Iolo created it.

As already noted, though, that consensus doesn't deprive the Coelbren of its potential value or interest. An entire category of writing systems known to linguists and epigraphers, often termed ethnographic scripts (Senner, 1989: pp. 10-21), are the creation of individuals. In a remarkable number of cases, the inventors of ethnographic scripts are visionaries who belong to a native society struggling for survival against a politically and economically dominant foreign power. That Iolo and many of his fellow Welsh nationalists saw the position of Wales relative to the Anglophone culture of Great Britain in exactly these terms is an interesting parallel, if nothing more.

"An Arch Druid in His Judicial Habit" from *The Costume of the Original Inhabitants of the British Islands" (Meyrick & Smith, 1815)*

More broadly, in a study of another controversial body of writing, the don Juan tales of Carlos Castaneda, Richard W. de Mille (1980) has pointed out that there's a significant difference between authenticity and validity. Authenticity has to do with whether a given set of teachings has the origins its author claims for it; validity has to do with whether a given set of teachings yields the results it claims for itself, by providing a workable philosophy of life, for example, or by facilitating desired psychological and spiritual changes in those who practice its disciplines. A great many writings on spirituality from before the modern era are, by modern standards, inauthentic—that is, they were not written when, where, and by whom the title page claims—but valid—that is, those who put their teachings into practice reliably achieve the results they describe. Castaneda's don Juan stories, de Mille argues, fall into that same well-tenant-

ed category, and a strong case can be made that those parts of Iolo Morganwg's Bardism that were his own invention deserve the same classification.

It's in this spirit that this essay approaches the Coelbren of the Bards. The Coelbren is part of the heritage of the Druid Revival. The questions surrounding its origin and early history, though these are worth study in their own right, have no bearing on whether it may be used by today's Druids, who are after all among the inheritors of the Druid Revival to which Iolo contributed so richly. Those of today's Druids who, as I do, find the Coelbren of interest are thus wholly justified in taking up the study of this remarkable Bardic alphabet, as a product of our own history and as a symbolic alphabet of the sort used by so many other spiritual traditions—a role for which, as I hope to show, the Coelbren is very well suited indeed.

The Traditional History of the Coelbren

The great majority of invented alphabets are presented by their makers as finished products set out once and for all. There are, however, exceptions, and the Coelbren of the Bards is among them[1]. As it appears in Iolo's manuscripts and the collections of Bardic lore derived from them (, 1848; Williams ab Ithel, 1856, 2004), the Coelbren alphabet is the product of a complex history extending over many centuries, involving innovations and adaptations by a variety of legendary and historical figures. Whether or not that history is a product of the creative imagination, it provides the best available introduction to the Coelbren and its uses.

According to Iolo's account (Williams ab Ithel, 2004, pp. 39, 47–53), the Coelbren had its origin at the beginning of the world, for the three rays of light that brought the world into being in the Bardic creation myth were also the original letters of the Coelbren. According to that myth, Einigan Gawr (Einigan the Giant), the first created being, carved the wisdom he obtained from the three rays of light in letters onto three staves of rowan wood. This established a pattern that would be followed throughout the history of the Coelbren of the Bards.

The Coelbren is in fact well designed to be scratched or cut onto wooden or stone surfaces, rather than written on paper; it shares this mode of use, interestingly enough, with the two other historically attested indigenous scripts of northwestern Europe, the Germanic and Norse runes and the Irish Ogham alphabet. The letters of the Coelbren are composed entirely from the vertical and diagonal lines that represent the original three rays of light, / | \. This has symbolic importance, but it's also highly practical for an alphabet meant to be carved into wood: the Coelbren lacks curves, which are difficult to make quickly and cleanly with a knife, and horizontal lines, which would tend to split wood along the length of the sticks that were used, in Iolo's account, as writing surfaces for Coelbren in its earliest days. It may be worth noting that the Germanic runes were also composed entirely of vertical and diagonal lines, with no horizontals (Williams, 2004, p. 267).

1. Another is the Tengwar script invented by J. R. R. Tolkien (1965) for the Elves of Middle Earth, for which he created a detailed history, full of the same sort of changes to which other writing systems have historically been subject (pp. 492-500).

The number of letters in the Coelbren varied over the course of the history described in Iolo's documents. While the three rays of light were the first Coelbren, the first practical form consisted of ten letters, which were equivalent to ABCEDILROS or APCETILROS. This may seem inadequate for a writing system, and in many other languages it would be. Welsh, however, shares with its sister languages of the Celtic family a great deal of fluidity in consonant sounds.

In Welsh, the sounds represented by the letters P, B, Ff (equivalent to English F), F (equivalent to V), and M are, if not quite interchangeable, then closely related, and they can flow into one another under certain circumstances without changing the meaning of the words in which they appear. Depending on its place and grammatical function in a sentence, for example, the name of the god Bran can be pronounced Vran or Mran, and the name of the hero Pryderi can turn into Bryderi, Mhryderi, and Phryderi. The same flexibility connects T, D, Th, Dd, and N—in Welsh, Dd sounds like the "th" in "these clothes"—and C, G, Ch, Gh, and Ng. In the original ten-letter Coelbren, one letter did duty for each of these three clusters of related sounds.

The ten-letter Coelbren, called Abcedilros after the letters composing it, was attributed in Bardic legend to Menw the Old, who discovered the rowan staves carved by Einigan. A slightly later version of the alphabet added M and N as independent letters, and was called Mabcednilros. The exact forms of the primitive Coelbren of ten and twelve letters were among the secrets of the Bards, according to Iolo, and they may have that status even; the Gorsedd Cymru, the premier organization of Welsh Bards, still uses the rituals and symbolism Iolo created for them, and the primitive Coelbren may well remain among the secrets of that body.

Iolo's history of the Coelbren continues from there to the figures of Dyfnwal Moelmud and his son Beli the Great, two legendary figures from late pre-Roman Britain. One of these rulers—different accounts disagree about which one—established a new Coelbren of sixteen letters, which was not a Bardic secret but came into general use in Britain. There are several versions of the Coelbren of sixteen letters in Iolo's papers; the most common is shown in figure 1.

According to the traditional lore, the Coelbren was almost forgotten after the Roman conquest of Britain, when writing with ink on parchment became standard and Latin letters were in

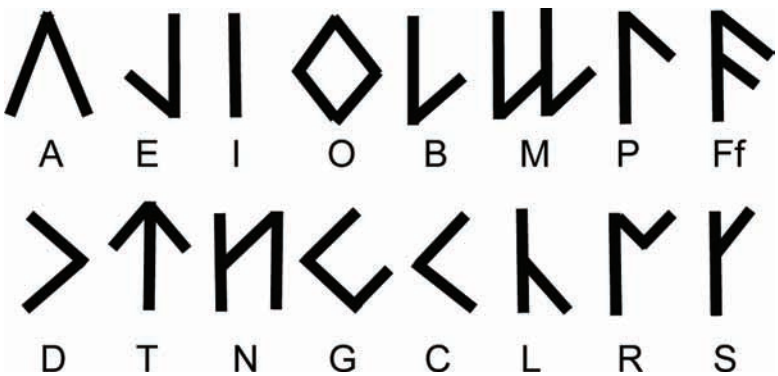

Figure 1. Sixteen-letter Coelbren

common use. After the Roman legions departed and parchment became an expensive luxury, the Coelbren was again needed, and the Bards Talhaiarn and Taliesin revived the Bardic alphabet and added two new letters—again, the documents disagree as to which those were, but the best candidates are H and W (figure 2).

Later, Ithel the Tawny added two more, probably U and Y. According to Iolo's documents, the twenty letters that resulted were said to express the complete set of primary sounds in Welsh (figure 3).

Figure 2: 17th and 18th Coelbren

Figure 3: 19th and 20th Coelbren

Finally, in the time of King Hywel the Good (reigned 920–950), Geraint the Blue Bard added four more letters representing compound sounds common in Welsh: Ch, Dd, F (pronounced V), and Ll (figure 4).

After Geraint's time, many other compound letters were proposed by Bardic grammarians and came to be included in scholarly documents in the Bardic tradition, but by all accounts they were not used in practice.

The Practicalities of the Coelbren

As already mentioned, the letters of the Coelbren alphabet were written on wooden sticks with a knife. According to the tradition, this was the original medium of writing among the ancient Celts. As noted earlier, this parallels the use of runes and Ogham, the two historically

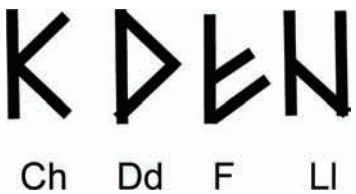

Figure 4: Four Compound Coelbren

attested indigenous scripts of northwestern Europe; it also has a more distant parallel in ancient Chinese, which was normally written on lengths of wood or split bamboo until the invention of paper in the second century BCE (Bagley, 2004). The traditional account goes on to say that writing with ink on parchment was introduced to Britain just before the Roman conquest, but the older form of writing came back into use whenever parchment became too expensive or difficult

to obtain, notably during the revolt of Owain Glyndwr in the fifteenth century, when the English embargoed sales of writing materials to Wales.

The Bardic literature includes a great deal of detailed information about how the wooden sticks were prepared and used. Long straight branches of the appropriate size were harvested from trees in winter, before the sap rose. Hazel was the easiest wood to use for writing purposes; oak was the most enduring; and willow, alder, birch, plum, hawthorn, and apple were also common sources. The Bards preferred rowan, however, because the wood resists rot and has the traditional power to drive away evil spirits and enchantments.

To prepare the wood, clean straight branches were cut into rods the length of a cubit (around eighteen inches); each rod was then divided into four lengthwise, producing four long thin billets, which were allowed to dry. The wood was then planed with a sharp knife so that each billet had a square cross section and four flat sides, each about half an inch wide, and the corners were trimmed down by a tenth of an inch, so that cuts made on one side wouldn't cross onto another. The ebill, as the billet of wood was called, was then ready for use.

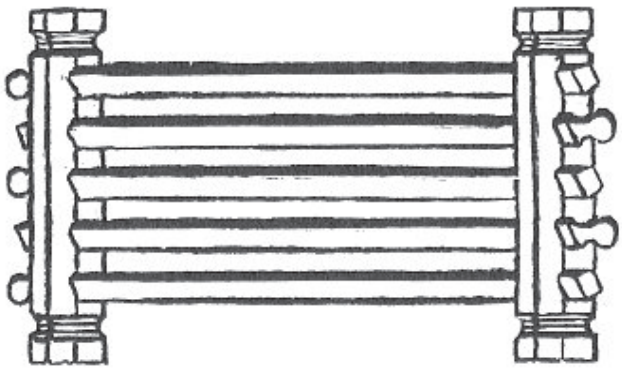

Figure 5: Pllwydd from *Barddas*

Cutting the letters into an ebill requires the same skill and attention as any other kind of calligraphy. "And on this stave or ebill the letters are cut with a knife," according to Barddas, "in small grooves the thickness of a leaf or small straw in depth, and as wide as a slender stalk of hay. Let every groove be cut fair and clear in its cutting" (Williams ab Ithel, 2004, p. 145). When it was desired to make writing more legible than ordinary knife-cut grooves could manage, a plant-based dye such as woad was rubbed across the face of the ebill before letters were carved into it, so that the letters stood out white against a colored surface. Once the text had been written on it, the ebill could be warmed, smeared with beeswax, and lightly roasted by the fireside to make the wax penetrate the wood, as a further protection against decay.

A single ebill could hold four lines of poetry or an equivalent amount of prose; each side was marked with a number on one end so that readers could tell the order in which to read the sides. If a text required more than one ebill, they could be pierced at both ends with an iron auger heated in the fire, and strung together on two strong cords, or inserted into a wooden frame that was lashed together at top and bottom. A frame of this sort, called a peithynen, normally held ten ebillion, or forty writing surfaces, enough for a substantial poem or a short tale; some frames are said to have held up to thirty ebillion.

No peithynen survives from before Iolo's time, though it's only fair to note that neither the climate nor the history of Wales are well suited to the preservation of fragile wooden objects

tarred with the memories of a troubled past. For most of a century after Iolo's death, though, peithynenau were a common sight at Bardic events in Wales and elsewhere. For that matter, the same National Museum of Wales website mentioned earlier in this essay has a photo of a peithynen bearing a poem commemorating Iolo Morganwg.

Ebillion carved with a knife were said to be the most common medium for the Bardic alphabet, but certain other media were used as well. In the time of Llyr Llediaith, the father of Bran the Blessed of Mabinogion fame, the Bards were said to have devised a system in which heated iron stamps were used to burn the Coelbren letters into wood; if this story has any historical validity, that process would count as one of the earliest forms of printing. There were also small ebillion, the size of a finger, that were used by the Bards to communicate their secret teachings; there were wooden cubes like dice, which had a letter carved onto each face, so that four of these cubes comprised the alphabet of twenty-four letters; there were also small pieces of wood with individual letters on them. The Bardic literature claims that these latter two were used by Bards for secret communication; there is at least one other possible use for them, which is discussed below.

The same symbols could also be scratched onto stone with a sharp steel point. In this context they were called Coelfain rather than Coelbren (with maen, stone, in place of pren, wood). Stones bearing individual letters, or the "marks of mystery" (whatever those may have been), filled the same roles as the small ebillion and individually lettered pieces of wood mentioned above. On a larger scale, the laws of King Hywel the Good were said to have been originally written on pieces of slate that lined the walls of his royal hall, and King Arthur was said to have had the laws of the Round Table and the praiseworthy deeds of its knights written on plates of tin and brass at his three principal courts, at Caerleon, Celliwig, and Penrhyn.

The Symbolism of the Coelbren

One curious detail of the Coelbren lore in Welsh Bardic literature of the nineteenth century is that it includes a dimension more commonly found in ancient alphabets than in modern ones, invented or otherwise: a symbolic meaning assigned to each letter. Those readers who are familiar with the Norse or Germanic runes, the Irish Ogham alphabet, or for that matter the Hebrew alphabet in its Kabbalistic applications will be familiar with the way a letter in any of these scripts serves as an anchor for a cluster of images and meanings.

Each of the sixteen ancient letters of the Coelbren similarly has its own distinct meaning, but there's an important difference. In the runes, the Ogham, the Hebrew alphabet, and most other examples of letter symbolism, each letter has a name that is a meaningful word, and the symbolic meanings of each letter are linked to the letter name. The Coelbren have letter names: the vowels sound their own names, and the names of the consonants consist of the letter followed by I, such as bi, ci, di, and so on.* Some of these have symbolic meaning, but the core meanings

of the letters are instead linked to the quality of the sound represented by each letter and the way that the mouth and tongue are held and moved to make that sound.

There are, as it happens, other writing systems that derive their symbolic meanings in the same way. Kotodama, the Japanese system of esoteric phonology and script symbolism, takes its meaning from sound values instead of letter names (Gleason, 1995), and certain schools of central European occultism worked out similar systems using the sounds of the German language (Bardon, 1971; Lomer, 1997). Still, it's an uncommon approach to letter symbolism, rendered even more remarkable by the way that the Bardic lore draws the meaning of each letter from a sort of vocal gesturing, which, nineteenth-century Bardic authors suggested, preceded verbal language at some very ancient point in the emergence of humanity.

The idea that language descends from some form of natural gesture is an old one, dating back at least as far as Plato's Cratylus, and was part of the common parlance of scholarship in the eighteenth century, playing an important part in the writings of Giambattista Vico (1948), among others. In linguistics today, by contrast, this way of thinking about the origins of language—usually termed "sound symbolism" (Hinton, Nichols, & Ohala, 1998)—is generally rejected, in favor of the claim that the relationship of words to their meanings is entirely arbitrary (e.g., Saussure, 1966).

The example of the Coelbren serves as a reminder, though, that whether or not sound symbolism played any role in the origin of language, it has certainly been put to work after the fact in a range of cultural contexts. Just as kotodama has had a significant role in shaping aspects of Japanese thought and practice concerning language, the sound symbolism of the Coelbren may well have helped shape nineteenth-century Welsh poetry, and of course it also has potential applications in the work of Druids today.

The traditional meanings of the sixteen ancient Coelbren letters are as follows. I have based the paragraphs below on the commentary in John Williams ab Ithel's Dosparth Edeyrn Davod Aur (Williams ab Ithel, 1856, pp. 13–20).

A

This power is uttered by opening the lips, and the interior part of the mouth, moderately and evenly, and breathing firmly, freely, and steadily from the larynx, while the tongue rests in its natural situation, at the bottom of the mouth. By this oral gesture, and this open, uninterrupted sound, men may be conceived naturally and spontaneously to have expressed the ideas of a tendency forward—positive continuance in a uniform state, whether of motion, action, or rest. Its Bardic name is A, which in Welsh means "and," suggesting continuation.

E

Let this power be uttered immediately after, or alternately with, an open A, and it will be found that all the organs of speech retain the same position, except that your tongue is now bent forcibly toward the root of the palate, as if it were intended by nature to arrest or check the egress

and free passage of breath. It is therefore diametrically opposite to A. Instead of representing uniform and free continuance of motion or agency, a direct and positive state or tendency, it seems naturally to express a sudden check, motion, or act interrupted or broken, an indirect, distorted, or negative state or tendency. Its Bardic name is E, which in Welsh is a prefix that reverses what comes after it; for example, ang is "narrow, confined," but eang is "open, spacious."

I

In uttering this tone or sound, the tongue is thrust forward till it rests on the lower teeth, at the same time as it closes the whole interior of the mouth, except a confined and a direct passage for breath along the middle of the palate. By this oral gesture and the sound it produces might be naturally described the application or direction of a thing to its proper object or place: a being or becoming appropriate or internal, or that which approaches, or is applicable, subordinate, or inherent. Its Bardic name is I, which means "to" or "into" in Welsh.

O

In uttering this power alternately with the preceding, the organs of speech entirely reverse their position. The tongue which, in pronouncing I, advanced to the teeth, almost closed up the mouth, and confined the breath to a direct and narrow passage is now retracted; it retires from the palate, and leaves the way open. The lips at the same time are forcibly projected outward, with a large and circular opening. The whole mouth is thus adjusted, as nature itself would dispose it, for the act of vomiting, or casting forth. By this gesture and its correspondent sound, an idea diametrically opposed to that of I would be spontaneously expressed—a casting, yielding, or putting forth—an emanation or projection from a certain thing, instead of application, direction, or relation to a particular object. Its Bardic name is O, which in Welsh means "from" or "out of."

B

This articulation is formed by an easy and natural opening of the mouth, without any forcible impulse of breath, or protrusion of the lips or any other vocal organ.[2] It may therefore be naturally applied to express the idea of simple perception—the being of any thing in a quiescent state or condition, and hence receive the following appropriations—being, to be, thing, or what is, condition, or state of being. Its Bardic name is Bi, which in Welsh means "will be."

C

This letter is pronounced by fixing the root of the tongue firmly against the root of the palate, so as entirely to fill and close up the interior part of the mouth, until breath forces its way with strong impulse. Such an oral gesture and its correspondent sound naturally attend every effort to hold or contain a large mass with both arms, and also to catch, reach, or touch a distant object. This term, therefore, is not limited to the expression of one simple idea, but naturally describes a holding, containing, or comprehending—a reaching, touching, or catching—attaining to, or ap-

2. This is less true in American English than in Welsh, as most American speakers tend to aspirate B—that is, let out a puff of air when saying the B sound.

prehending. Its Bardic name is Ci, which in Welsh means "dog," in reference to a dog's aptitude to catch and hold. (This is pronounced "kee," not "see"—C in Welsh is always pronounced like K, never like S.)

D

The articulation of this letter is formed and uttered by closing the edges of the tongue to the upper gums throughout their whole extent, and suddenly laying it open. We may, therefore, consider this power as descriptive naturally of expanding, spreading, unfolding, laying open, distribution, or division. Its Bardic name is Di, an old term for deity, also for day—what unfolds, lays open.

G

In hugging a substance with the arms, and as it were forcibly adhering to it, we acquire additional power by placing the tongue in the same position as that in which the letter C is pronounced, but as this action is of a less protrusive nature than that of catching or holding, breath is not propelled with new force, and the sound of G is produced. It may then be considered to have a natural aptitude to describe the ideas of appetite, a grasp, adhesion, mutual attachment, compensation. Its Bardic name is Gi, which means a sinew or tendon—the cause of connection and cohesion in the joints. (G in Welsh is always pronounced hard, as in "give," rather than soft, as in "genius.")

L

This power, whether expressed as in English words, or aspirated, as in the Welsh Ll, is formed by fixing the tip of the tongue against the upper gums, while both sides of it hang open, suffering the air to be poured out and equally dispersed through all the extremities of the mouth. Such an act of the vocal organs naturally accompanies the act of throwing open the hand and the arms, to describe solution, effusion, evanescence, open space, gliding, softness, smoothness, lightness. Its Bardic name is Li, which conveys the ideas above specified, as in the Welsh word lli, "flood, stream."

M

If it were attempted to describe naturally, by means of the organs of speech, that one substance was entirely shut up, enclosed, and comprehended in another, the lips would close together, the cheeks would swell moderately into the imitation of capacity, and breath would endeavor to attract notice by sounding the power of M through the nostrils. M is therefore a natural expression of comprehending, embracing, or surrounding. Its Bardic name is Mi, that which is in, or identical to, myself.

N

When we put forth the hand, or extend the finger, to discriminate a simple or minute object, the eye is naturally directed the same way; we look steadfastly at that which we wish another

to observe. The tongue at that same instant spontaneously mimics the action of the hand and the eye, by thrusting forth its point in the same direction till it rests against the upper gums. The breath, being denied a passage through the mouth, tends toward the same spot, through the nostrils, with the sound of N. This sound is then a natural interjection for "Look!" or "Lo there!" and is naturally answered by M, "I observe or comprehend." We may thus regard the power N as a natural expression of an object, subject, thing produced or new, discriminated or simplified—the selfsame, simple, and small. Its Bardic name is Ni, which primarily means a particular thing.

P

A person desirous of communicating the idea of pushing would place his body in an inclining posture; his hands would be protruded, his lips pressed together and forced outward, as in the very act of the impulse described, and the puffing sound of P would be uttered. The most obvious gesture also to convey the idea of plumpness, protuberance, or convexity, is to swell and puff out the cheeks, till the articulation is produced. P may therefore be regarded as naturally descriptive of springing, putting forth, pushing, penetrating, prominence, convexity. Its name in the Bardic alphabet is Pi, which signifies the magpie. It is the root of the Welsh words pic, "dart," pig, "beak," and pid, "point."

Ff

In uttering this sound, the organs of speech are not put into complete contact at the point of articulation, as in the case of P. Some portion of breath escapes, and vibrates in the interstice. It accordingly expresses ideas of agency or cause, of like nature with, but less powerful than the preceding. Its Bardic name is Ffi, which signifies the act of casting off or putting forth.

R

This sound is produced by fixing the sides of the tongue firmly against those of the palate, and forcing out the breath in front, so as to cause a rough and strong vibration between the tip of the tongue and the upper gums. Its mechanical production is a direct contrast to that of L. By this energetic power the first linguists would naturally describe force, prevalence, or superiority; a motion or action performed by main strength—rubbing, tearing, pervading, breaking. Its Bardic name is Ri, which implies a king, a chief, a ruler. Taken too far, it implies the Welsh word rhy, which means "too much, excess."

S

When someone designs naturally to point out some particular object so as not to attract general observation, the point of the tongue drops downward and rests against the lower teeth. The upper teeth close over it, as it were, to conceal the unavowed design, and the low, insinuating, hissing sound of S is produced. This power is therefore naturally descriptive of secret discernment, insinuation, a private marking, and distinguishing. Its Bardic name is Si (pronounced "she"), which appears in such Welsh words as siarad, "talk," and sibrwd, "whisper, murmur."

T

In tugging or drawing a line forcibly, the tongue is applied firmly and spontaneously to the forepart of the palate or upper gums, and forces out a vehement articulation of T. This power therefore naturally describes tension, drawing, or straining, in whatever manner; extension, stretching, or drawing out; intension, or drawing tight or close; drawing a line or bound around anything—confining, straitening, limiting, circumscribing. Its Bardic name is Ti, which occurs in Welsh words such as tid, "chain," and tidaw, "to tether, tie, or confine."

The Uses of the Coelbren

Barring a prolonged paper shortage, it's unlikely that the Coelbren of the Bards will ever again be necessary as a writing system for everyday use. The potential value of a symbolic alphabet, however, is not limited to such quotidian tasks. Many systems of esoteric spirituality rely on symbolic scripts of one form or another for a variety of theoretical and practical purposes; the use of the Hebrew alphabet in the Cabala and the runes in Norse and Germanic spirituality will be familiar to many readers. The Coelbren of the Bards, with its sound symbolism and its close links to the traditions of the Druid Revival, can serve similar purposes in today's Druidry.

It might be noted that the modern Druid tradition already has one symbolic alphabet, the Ogham letters of medieval Irish tradition. The Bards of nineteenth-century Wales were familiar with the Ogham and its symbolism, and one source from that period suggested that the tree symbolism in Taliesin's poem "Cad Goddeu" was a reference to the Irish alphabet (Williams ab Ithel, 1856). Both scripts, along with others such as the Alphabet of Nemnivius (Williams ab Ithel, 1856), seem to have had a place in Druid Revival symbolism in the nineteenth century.

There is, after all, no law restricting a spiritual tradition to only one symbolic alphabet. Many branches of Japanese esoteric spirituality, for example, use both kotodama—the system of occult phonology mentioned earlier, which is based on the fifty-character kana syllabary—and the Siddham script introduced from Indian sources as part of Buddhist lore; each of these fills a different role in the broader context of Japanese esotericism. The Ogham and Coelbren have very different styles of symbolism; the Ogham derives its meaning from the phenomena of the natural world, the Coelbren from basic conceptual categories represented in sound symbolism. A case can be made that the two are thus complementary, and both have their place in modern Druidry.

Mention a symbolic alphabet in alternative spirituality circles these days, and the first thought that comes to many minds is whether it can be used as an oracle for divination. Not only can the Coelbren be used in this manner, there's some reason to believe that it was so used. The word coel, which forms the first half of Coelbren and Coelfain, means "belief, trust, confidence" in modern Welsh, but its meaning in the medieval Welsh that Iolo and his fellow Bards studied so closely was something rather more specific: "omen." The Coelbren are, strictly speaking, "omen sticks," and circles used stones or piecs of wood marked. I hope to contribute to this process, and welcome other efforts along these lines.

Thus it's at least possible that nineteenth-century Welsh Bardic circles used stones or pieces of wood marked with the Bardic alphabet to cast divinatory readings, along something like the same lines as a modern rune reading. The meanings of the sixteen ancient letters given above provide a good starting point for work with the divinatory Coelbren, and the meanings of the eight remaining of the twenty-four letters of the modern Coelbren can be worked out from first principles following the examples given above.[3] In much the same way, the Coelbren can be applied to other forms of practice appropriate to contemporary Druid spirituality, given the necessary investment of time and effort. I hope to contribute to this process, and welcome other efforts along these lines.

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3. A book-length work along these lines is in preparation as of this writing.

Training the Connection between Body and Spirit: Insights from Martial Arts in the Sphere of Protection

Jessica Tess

Jessica is a Communications and Social Media Specialist for MSU Extension. She is a martial artist, aspiring gardener, animal lover, and activist. The willow and white pine are her old friends and she considers herself a life-long student of the world. She spends her free time reading, writing, painting, cooking, and taking long walks on dirt roads. Jessica is a candidate in the AODA.

Roughly six years before I joined AODA and began my study and practice of Druidry, I became a practitioner of Eastern martial arts. Upon beginning my studies of Hakuho-ryu aiki-jūjutsu at age eighteen, martial arts or budo (meaning "martial way" in Japanese) quickly rooted itself in my life as much more than a pastime, hobby, or workout routine. Then and now, when I practice budo, while on the surface I learn and become proficient in techniques of self-defense, more deeply and throughout I am seeking balance in my spirit.

This awareness and attention to one's spirit is something Greer (2007, p. 10) notes as a foundational aspect of both Eastern martial arts and systems of spiritual practice as well as Druidry in *The Druid Magic Handbook*. In this article, I describe three physical training aspects of Hakuho-ryu aiki-jūjutsu as a martial art that facilitate moments of learning to gain awareness and balance energy. Then I share three specific lessons I have learned about energy and how they have helped my practice of Druid magic in the Sphere of Protection (SOP).

Given my proclivity for this art from the East, perhaps it is little wonder that over the past year of my introduction and initiation into AODA, I have felt that Druidry, a Western practice with many shared principles, so naturally belonged in my life. It seems I've been unknowingly honing pieces of my Druid work for the past six years.

Although I will be describing a very personal example of how principles of martial arts practice have fostered a stronger Druid practice in my life, I want to make a wider argument that when Druids engage in a variety of hands-on or physical activities that deal with energy, they bring themselves into fuller presence and awareness in their bodies. This is important for many reasons, but also specifically because modern first-world living tends to overemphasize the mind and intellectual thinking. Take a moment to picture of all the people who live a generally sedentary lifestyle, spending a majority of their time at their jobs and at home sitting in front of screens. According to a study done by the Centers for Disease Control, in 2010, 52 percent of women and 43 percent of men lived completely sedentary lives (Ladabaum et al., 2014). This kind of lifestyle forces us to live in our heads, always in a partial-body experience. When we become fully present

in our bodies the bridge between mind and matter is strengthened and we as Druids are better prepared to refine our magical abilities, along with a host of other benefits. These moments, when we learn about energy via this mind-body connection, can be full of magic.

For example, it was in a martial arts dojo (room where martial arts are practiced) that I realized that studying a physical art was also a way to train my spirit and that the spiritual and physical are undeniably linked at all times. Let me pause and clarify that when I say "spirit," I do not mean the soul of theology, supernatural beings, or even my emotional mood. I mean the fundamental, activating principle of the self. Greer (2007, p. 8) defines this life force as the bridge between mind and matter, or nwyfre. It is also known as *ki* in Japan, where my martial art originates.

While training two to three times a week, I was also living the life of a typical college student, taking classes and working some of the time. I naturally experienced times of spiritual adversity and times of spiritual joy. My budo teachers or sensei quickly pointed out that we bring all the energy from our lives beyond the door with us into the dojo and continue experiencing it in our training. The state of my spirit energy is always reflected in my practice. Often, I notice it most when, despite my strongest intentions to have a certain kind of energy, another dominates the session. The true energy of one's spirit is difficult to mask. I'll return to this point and how it applies to Druidry below when I talk about the SOP.

Principles of Hakuho-ryū Aiki-jūjutsu

For my entire martial arts career, I've been training in Hakuho-ryū or White Phoenix School, which is a classical (*koryu*) Japanese martial art whose lineage comes directly from Daitō-ryū (or Great Eastern School) aiki-jūjutsu. Daitō-ryū was founded by Takeda Sokaku, who was one of the last to be trained in the samurai curriculum before the samurai class was disbanded in the 1870s during the Meiji Restoration. The hand-to-hand (or empty hand) techniques were derived from movements in sword combat, since this was the samurai's primary weapon. Takeda's best-known student was Morihei Ueshiba, the founder of modern-day aikido. Daitō-ryū and Hakuho-ryū emphasize efficient movement by utilizing gravity and good mechanics via joint locks and throws.

The following are three physical training aspects of Hakuho-ryū aiki-jūjutsu that facilitate learning moments focused on the awareness and balance of energy.

1. What's in a name? In the case of aiki-jūjutsu, the name contains a couple hints about the art's philosophy. "Aiki" means the harmony of energy. "Jūjutsu" can mean "sound system" or "soft system"; thus, aiki-jūjutsu loosely translates as the "sound system of the harmony of energy." When practicing, the martial artist attempts to receive all attacks with aiki. This means blending and harmonizing one's movement with the opponent's in an attempt to use his energy against him. This is in contrast to other martial arts styles such as karate, which emphasizes force against force. For example, a student of karate responds to a strike with a hard block, attempting to obliterate the original force, while the student of aiki-jūjutsu makes blending contact with the

strike in order to alter the trajectory of force to his or her advantage. Of course, harmonizing with an opponent's energy can begin much earlier than when strikes are being thrown. Takeda Sokaku has been quoted as saying, "The secret of aiki is to overpower the opponent mentally at a glance and to win without fighting" (Draeger, 1996). We choose this style because of its efficiency and because it allows people of all strengths, body types, and ages to be successful, rather than the few who are young and in top physical condition.

2. Students of aiki-jūjutsu learn to move with *hitoimi* or "body in one line." What this comes down to is not isolating body movements or leaving segments of the body behind. Twisting is a good example of a movement to be avoided. If an opponent grabs the martial artist by the shirt lapel and the artist reacts by twisting the upper body in an attempt to break the grip or pull the opponent over, the martial artist is limited by the strength of the muscles in the shoulders and chest. However, if the martial artist takes a step, turning the upper and lower body at the same time, the strength of the whole body and bones will support the movement, and heor she is more likely to succeed. Similarly, if the martial artist reacts by leaning back in an attempt to avoid being pulled forward, there is very little strength in this movement. Now that the martial artist is leaning back, the opponent can simply push him or her over backward in an instant. Taking a step backward with the shoulders squarely over the hips will pit the entire body against the opponent's grip. Even the largest or strongest of opponents will have difficulty holding a small person's full body weight with the grip of the arm and hand. Thus, by moving with upper and lower body in line, laterally and vertically, the opponent is forced to struggle against the strength of the martial artist's entire body instead of isolated muscle groups. Hitoimi teaches superior balance, and there is great strength in balance compared to energy that is divided.

3. In order to sense and blend with energy, a martial artist must intentionally develop sensitivity. For this, in the dojo we practice a number of breathing and meditation exercises or techniques to activate the senses, with the goal of incorporating this sensitivity into everyday life and movements. For example, we visualize light moving throughout the body in certain patterns with the breath or with the vibrations of verbal sound. There are nine distinct Hakuho-ryū exercises in total that share much in common with breathing and meditation exercises from other Eastern systems of spiritual practice. Therefore, I won't take time to describe them all here. Thus, while I have the least to say in describing this aspect of training, it is highly important.

Lessons on Energy and the Sphere of Protection

I have discovered some broader lessons about energy by practicing in an environment where I am constantly grappling with energy in the form of physical force and a desired outcome, like a martial arts dojo where I want to avoid getting hit. While none of these discoveries are original to my experience, the discovering of them for oneself is powerful. I'd like to share three lessons aiki-jūjutsu has taught me and give examples for how they apply specifically to my work with the SOP, which I've been learning and performing throughout my candidate year. The SOP is done through physical movements and direction of energy, very similarly to the practice of martial arts.

1. As I mentioned in the introduction, the performance of my martial arts practice is a mirror, a manifestation of my true energetic state. How I perform during one session can be very different from the next, even if my level of knowledge and experience with the material change very little between those sessions. I've noted that periods of especially irregular performance tend to happen when I'm experiencing significant confusion in some part of my life. This could be due to a work, school, or relationship problem, or anything that takes some time for me to work out. During such a period, even if I come to training in a happy mood each time, in some of those sessions I will perform with ease and confidence, having success with more difficult techniques even when I work with students senior to me. In other sessions, despite all of my best efforts and patience, I will struggle with the most basic principles even when working with students far junior to me. This can be quite humbling, especially when my thought was, "Finally, I can forget about this problem I'm struggling with for a couple of hours and do something I'm good at." There is no separating ourselves in such a manner. The full truth of one's energy will reveal itself. It is usually when I own up to these circumstances that I can reduce the difficulty and have better success.

Figure 1: A Hakuho-ryū exercise

As I've spent time over the last year learning and refining the SOP, I have found the same to be true. While I perform the Sphere seeking balance and protection, I need to own my energetic state, no matter what I might bring in that moment. To try and leave pieces of myself behind while I call and banish each gate not only is insincere, but also has presented countless instances of confused disappointment when I have poor results. By taking full note of my energetic state and its effects on my performance of the Sphere, I've been able to continue to strengthen it over time.

2. Tension and rigidity are limiting, while relaxation provides endless ways to proceed. When preparing for an attack in the dojo, if I tense my muscles, bracing myself in anxiety, it will be very difficult for me to be sensitive to the energy my opponent and our environment provides in order to blend with it. There might be a thousand ways I can respond to being grabbed, but numb, unfeeling tension will block off many of them.

This is true in a lot of our Druidry as well. One use of the SOP is in attempting to heal land where humans have previously done damage. Driscoll (2014) wrote about this use of the SOP extensively in her 2014 Trilithon article, "Learning and Using the Sphere of Protection." A forest that has been cut down to place a tar sands oil pipeline, a fracking site, or otherwise disturbed wildlife habitat are a few examples of the kinds of places Druids are called to doing healing. Examples of damage like this can be infuriating to those of us who take great offense at seeing the land treated as a commodity and abused. While justified, this anger and other emotions create a lot of tension in us that can prevent healing to the space. Even if we begin by performing the SOP, how can we sense what the land truly needs through such tension? If we perform the Sphere with receptive calm, the voices of the land and life around us can make their needs more clear and many potential avenues of healing may begin.

3. Speaking of having options, my work in the dojo has taught me that visualizing a particular avenue will always be less successful (example: I will win by countering an attack with technique X) compared to focusing on a deeper intention (example: I will not let myself be taken off balance). Being determined to have a specific response to one's opponent before he or she acts creates a strong risk of one's energy running counter to the opponent's and having great struggle. How do I know that response X will be the right one? It could be response Y or Z. Whereas focusing on the intended outcome but remaining open to various responses to get there promises greater ease. Instead of trying to guess between response X, Y, and Z, I will intend to absorb my opponent's energy and subdue him or her. Response X, Y, or Z will happen naturally if the energy is right to use them.

This concept is useful to consider for the SOP, especially if one is using the Sphere to transform oneself or the world around us. On the topic of formulating and meditating on intentions for creating such transformations, Greer states, "Remember, you're not trying to force the universe to do what you want; you're simply formulating a pattern into which currents of nwyfre will flow" (2007, p. 132). Thus, if, when I perform the SOP, I am determined to visualize the element of water as rain, or that I will feel the energy of each element run from head to toe, I am attempting to force some very specific things from the SOP. But if my goal is simply to facilitate and feel the Sphere become complete, whether I see the element of water as rain, a river, the ocean, and so on, or whether I feel the energy burst from my chest to the tips of my limbs or melt from my crown down my back, it will happen naturally. In regard to the part of the Sphere where we transform ourselves or the world, it is the difference between setting a specific intention at each gate such as "trees will grow here," versus "the land is healthy."

These are lessons that often repeat. After training in budo six and a half years, I return to them time and again, surprised to find new things after thinking I'd fully absorbed them. Watching my senior students and mentors experience them in much the same way proves that this process can be endlessly abundant. Each iteration of these lessons underlines our goal as practitioners—

achieving balance, physically and spiritually, in all moments. Thus far, in my Druid studies these concepts are just as true.

Broader Paths for Other Druids

As I mentioned earlier, I don't intend to assert that Eastern martial arts or even martial arts generally are the only useful method becoming physically present and achieving balance in the bridging of mind and body energy or nwyfre. Those who do yoga, dance, swim, or run often have similar intent. However, to think only of activities that fit easily in the category of physical exercise would also be quite limiting. Additionally, many Druids engage in this physical awareness and energetic learning through the Bardic arts, some examples being singing and playing instruments, painting and drawing, knitting, crocheting, and crafting. Many of the ways we work in harmony with the land are also wonderful channels, such as gardening, orcharding, foraging, raising livestock, natural building, cooking and food preservation, and homesteading. Indeed, possible methods are limited only by one's imagination, providing the pursuit is something that teaches lessons of an energetic nature and strengthens our connection between physical and spiritual.

The three lessons on energy I mentioned and applied to the SOP are good guiding principles to keep in mind for strengthening and balancing *nwyfre* energy: (1) look at physical-spiritual performance as a mirror of energetic state; (2) ease any tension that will be limiting; and (3) remain focused on deeper intentions. However, the principle I advise most enthusiastically to support these efforts is first and foremost to develop a sensitivity to both one's own energy and the activity one is engaging in. I mentioned this earlier as a foundational aspect of Hakuho-ryū aiki-jūjutsu. Sensitivity. Receptivity. Without them, essentially one is energetically blind and unable to create balance.

Activities like I mention above fulfill us and our relationships with the world in many ways, and deeper physical-spiritual connection is just one among them. But the more we consider and integrate the balance of mind and matter throughout our day, I assert the more we allow the magic within and around us to freely flow, with enchanting results.

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Carving Away: An Initiation of the Trees Through Spoon Carving

Mark Angelini

Mark has been carving spoons by hand since 2011. He is fascinated, inspired, and driven by the subtleties of working with one's hands and the trees, to preserve traditional knowledge and skills in the context of the modern world. He also works as an ecological landscape designer, educator, forest farmer, homesteader, and more in the beautiful Great Lakes bioregion, forty miles northwest of Detroit, Michigan. Mark sells spoons and writes about his spoon carving and green woodworking journey on his website, www.markangelini.com. Mark is a candidate in the AODA.

For as long as I can remember, I've been inspired and humbled by the power of trees—the excitement of climbing their expansive limbs, the charm of the fallen dried leaves piled high, or the pure joy of manipulating their wood. I have continually experienced all of these relationships with trees to varying degrees throughout my life, many times passively, many times with contemplation and awe. Struggling to climb the twisted limbs of the elder oak in the light of the full moon; raking pile after pile of oak leaves into the compost pile; carefully building boxes and birdhouses in the woodshop with my grandfather—and I've loved every minute of it.

More recently, I've deepened my relationship to trees. I've fallen more in love, if you will. How? By committing to the path of a craftsman—a woodworker—or, more specifically, a spoon carver. The inspiration hit me seemingly randomly, as I perused the Internet. I came across a video of British bowl turner and spoon carver Robin Wood. The videography was beautiful and it struck me—the stark simplicity of his tools, the humble nature of his workshop, and the richness of his handmade bowls and spoons. However, as I watched and listened, it was something Wood said that resonated with me in my core, striking a chord I had not felt before. He said something about the tangibility of his work, elaborating that he doesn't have some fancy name for what he does, that he can simply tell his children or a person in the street that he makes and sells wooden bowls and spoons. It was that bare and simple, no questions asked. It was at that moment that I realized I needed to be making things from wood, living that way. So I quickly acquired some basic tools and have spent the last four years since then insatiably carving spoons.

For me, carving spoons was at first a fascination, an obvious choice. I work with trees all the time: planting, tending, harvesting. Why not carve with them? So I did. I made all sorts of spoons. I learned about the tools and how to sharpen them. I learned how to properly work the wood, to use the axe and knife safely, to work ergonomically and to leave a nice tool finish. I then went a bit further, looking at the spoon more critically—how to work with the wood to get strength, and how to shape the spoon so that it functions well, is beautiful to the eye, and is durable for

the long haul. Each succession of depth of work took me further and further from the simple act of carving spoons as a way to pass time, and past the threshold of hobby into that of craft. It's difficult to describe, as the lines are quite blurry and we are short on craftspeople in today's world. As I see it, the craftsperson is at once infatuated with a process, of carefully and skillfully producing something over and over, preserving skills and techniques, while inevitably striving to reconcile an inner chase, if you will, toward an ideal or harmony.

In this chase of achieving a harmony, I have uncovered intriguing revelations about the power not only of making things with my hands, but of the mundane profundity that awaits the dedicated craftsperson, who commits to learning and perfecting a set of tools, materials, and skills—the craft. This mundane profundity, as I will explain, is not at the end of some tunnel—a dangling carrot—but a subtle and rich reward for the committed individual who puts his or her nose down, gets to work, and relaxes into the process. To this individual, I believe a special magical space is available. I invite you to consider both the practical aspects of the craft of spoon carving and also the deeper and more esoteric elements of handwork in general that, as a practice, act as a sort of meditation, a practical meditation if you will. Spoon carving requires minimal tools and space—you simply need a comfortable place to sit and catch wood shavings. Best of all, the raw materials (depending on your biome) are readily available all around you.

Craft as Initiation

To many the idea of craft is almost trite, as the term is used so frequently to describe and market various things: craft beer, handcrafted cheese, craft free-range printer paper, or what have you. As I've learned, on the other hand, craft is the by-product of a certain disposition and merit. It's not merely "an activity involving skill in making things by hand," as defined by Merriam-Webster, although it surely does involve skill. What I've found is that craft is in itself a mundane sort of initiation; "an activity involving skill in making things by hand," the very description that could define most of human history and innovation, is perhaps the earliest sort of spiritual work humans conducted. The repetitive motions of the activity—with the intersection of human, material, and tool—and the work itself all meld together into an intriguing and subtly mysterious fusion of utility and grandeur. The craftsperson immersed in work not only produces things of great use (and thus beauty), but also chases some higher ideal, translating the realm of the imagination out through the materials at hand. In the haze of the repetitive use of the body and the tools as the wood changes form, small, inconspicuous revelations are presented to the maker—from the tree/wood, the tools, the greater collective consciousness of the craft's heritage, and the absolutely practical forms of the work. These small, but by no means insignificant, details form an intuitive and hidden type of initiatory working. Without the commitment to the ideals, perseverance, and reverence that drive the craftsperson, these workings remain secluded and untouched.

What makes the idea of craft as an initiatory process rather difficult to explain seems to stem from the fact that, on the surface, the work of the craftsperson is purely physical. Grow or mine the raw material; harvest the material; make the tool; manipulate the material with the tools and hu-

Figure 1: The Author carving

man energy; then use the finished product in such a mundane way as to overlook its somewhat elaborate birth. As soon as the human becomes involved, it would seem that, from the outside, the whole experience is rather mechanical and straightforward. However, what I have learned is that beyond that point, there is a magical and even religious aspect of craftwork, which I believe many craftspeople struggle to communicate. This is the aspect of craftwork I have increasingly found to be the most satisfying.

This brings me to a man named Martin Hazel, with whom I've become acquainted virtually through, yet again, the online spoon-carving community. Martin is a monastic Catholic and has carved spoons for about fifteen years. Consequently, he has spent much time in contemplation of the craft of the spoon carver, specifically through his monastic lens. He brought to my attention the work and life of St. Peter Damian, the patron saint "in waiting" of spoon carvers. Though little is known about him, Peter Damian was an Italian monk that lived circa 1000–1073, according to Martin, who spent his life in service to God through the Catholic Church. He spent the majority of this service carving spoons, hence his "in waiting" holy status. This in itself was fascinating to me when I first learned it, mainly because anything relating spoon carving and religious experience is hard to come by. My fascination was driven by something Martin said about Peter Damian (emphasis my own): "St. Peter Damian said that making wooden spoons was practical, humble and revelatory (Martin, 2014). When you split that log, you never know what is inside; no one has ever seen that wood before. In an act of co-creation you cut away the parts that are not a spoon, to reveal that which God made, for you to find and make useful for mankind" (M. Hazel, personal communication, March 2, 2015).

I am aware that to the layperson, the act of splitting a log open is perhaps mundane. Surely, as Druids, we may be inclined to see so much more. And to the craftsperson, not only is splitting into the log exciting—for half the joy of the work is the exploration of the material itself—the fact that the finished work itself is lying still within that log, awaiting only the perfect strike of the axe and swipe of the blade, is, in a small way, ecstatic. The act of doing the work manifests as a collaboration between the tree and the craftsperson, bringing to life something that could not exist of human or tree alone. And the inside of the log is a realm that prior to the working of the craftsperson lay hidden and distinct, enclosed within the womb of the bark, each twist, knot, and

cell a mystery. To quote Martin's recollection of Peter Damian's work again: "When we use an axe to split open a log we see something which has never been seen before; we reveal it to the World and mould it to our desired shape but fundamentally, it already exists. Making a spoon in this act of co-creation can be a prayer and an encounter with the sacred"

Along these lines of insight, I'm learning that by partaking in this craft, I am in one sense preserving skills, knowledge, and culture that are, at present, in grave risk of becoming extinct—although, thanks to a rising tide of interest in old skills, knowledge, and craft, this may be changing. In another sense, I am also partaking in a quiet initiation, not simply into the life and work of a craftsperson, but into a collaborative sort of magic that exists behind a thin veil, one where the tree and the craftsperson partake in a ritual of refining both the wood and the woodworker, achieving a state unreachable without the joining of these two. And through this union in the sacred, the craftsperson and the tree are liberated to a new realm of existence, while the spoon itself lives on in humble profundity, subtly influencing all who encounter it.

The Physical Work of Spoon Carving

While all of this is quite a specific and probably personalized take on the work I do, of course the absolutely practical aspect of the work must also be understood. Thus, let's explore the physical work involved.

First, I start by harvesting the timber. This occurs with an integrative ecological perspective, wherein I purposefully manage orchards, woodlands, and forests to harvest the materials I work with, while also maintaining an eye toward the future health, diversity, and prosperity of the whole system. One of the most beautiful aspects of working in the medium of spoon carving is that I have a very broad range of material to work with. I am free to utilize small-diameter prunings, twisted limbs, and crooked branches, as well as smaller-diameter saplings that in the forestry trade are commonly looked upon as having low value, if they have any value at all. Perhaps even more

Figure 2: From left to right: A) A sawn section of the log is called a bolt. B) The cleft bolt produces several billets. C) The billet is axed out into the rough spoon outline or blank. D) The blank is refined with the knives into a usable spoon.

beautifully, I can work with the natural shape of the tree—the crook of a branch, for example—to produce a spoon whose profile follows the inherent shape of the crook. The timber is harvested mindfully with a chainsaw or pruning saw, either thanking the tree for its life or assuring it that the cuts will improve its life over time. In some cases, an entire tree is felled in an act of reinvigoration of the root system to resprout many new trunks for future growth and harvest, under a tree management system known as coppicing.

Now, I work primarily with green wood—wood that is freshly harvested or has been stored for up to eighteen months—that has a high moisture content, which makes working with it a breeze and a joy. Therefore, I harvest wood as needed and in small quantities and usually get straight to work. I split the log open, in awe as St. Peter Damian described, to have a look. From there, I use a very sharp axe and chop away at the wood, revealing the profile and shape of the spoon I venture to make, with a mind toward grain orientation, form, or other surprises found in the wood. This produces what we call the blank—a roughed-out shape of the final spoon. With this blank, I move on to a set of various duty-made carving knives that are razor sharp and sleek. I slice away at the rough blanks with equally sharp focus and attention to the wood, my body, my breath, and to those vaguely tangible ideas I described earlier as "the chase." I work from low to high resolution: cutting, then looking at the wood, twirling the work in front of me, and refining more and more, one decisive knife stroke after the next. After some short time, the timber is transformed from its raw state into a beautiful and functional tool.

Carving and Being Carved

In very plain terms, each chop, cut, and slice is removing wood from the blank; in more subtle terms, I am removing what is not the spoon. Now this is the aspect that is quite subjective from a philosophical standpoint, where I begin to ask myself, "Am I carving the spoon or is the spoon carving me?" Somewhere in this haze of distinctions lies what I find to be the most mundanely profound paradox—a simple tool doing its work and a humble worker doing his job. Yet a mysterious energy is at play, and deep in the sharp focus of my work, I disappear, emerging only when the knives are set down and before me is a spoon. In this meditation that I've come to know as the craft of spoon carving, both parties have a say. The craftsperson wields the tools, harvests the wood, and, to a large part, determines the physical outcome. The tree determines the quality of the fiber, the orientation of the growth rings and the grain, and thus the strength and beauty of the final product. But it is also the trees whose strength, steadfastness, and grandeur hold the mystery of the craft deep within their cells, hidden from the world until the craftsperson splits them free into the world, releasing them into new form. From here the tree lives on, in the hands of cooks in kitchens, a subtle warmth and unexplainable spirit imbuing the kitchens or tables they grace.

Beyond the practicalities of making spoons and the mysteries of the workings of the craft in practice, words seem to fail me. It is not simply spoon carving that holds these virtues, either. I have found all woodcraft to be filled with similar notions and experiences, subtle mysteries of

Figure 3: Carver's tools.

human, tool, and trees. What is certain is that the tools produce results. The heritage and culture of the craft build a foundation for the work to continue. The craftspeople that have come before ground the work in relevance. The craftsperson's interpretation of the work informs his or her philosophy, process, and aesthetic. The utility of the spoon or craft solidifies its economic importance. But it is in the orchards, woodlands, and forests—with the trees—where I find that the core of the work is done. It is there not only that wood grows to eventually become a spoon, but where the spirit of the work is rooted. For it is not the carver who has miraculously manifested the fibers of the wood, nor the craft in and of itself. It seems increasingly clear to me that every expression of the craft is thanks to the trees themselves, for without their work, this act of cocreation cannot be. For without the trees, there would be no force to carve away at me.

Spoon Carving Resources

Books

- Willi Sundqvist, *Swedish carving techniques*. Great beginner book with info on knife grips, sharpening, and fun start projects, including spoons (and it just got reprinted after 20 years).
- Drew Langsner, *Green woodworking* and *Country woodcraft*.
- Mike Abbott has a few good books as well.

Videos to Learn From

- Niklas Karlsson, expert Swedish spoon carver and green woodworking ninja (check out his other videos): Carving spoon, Youtube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SPeM-hHuo-14.
- Jarrod Stone Dahl, Wisconsin-based green woodworking wizard (note his "spoon mule" carving device): Spoon carving, Youtube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cdB_Tr3eX1w.

- Anna Casserley, badass British female spoon carver: The woodcraft series—spoon carving, Anna Casserley, Youtube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JJADvznTk_Y.
- Barn Carder, aka Barn the Spoon, iconic British spoon carver. Watching his videos will give you subtle insights: The man who makes his living whittling wooden spoons, Youtube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jY2t5bIzHDY; Spoon talk, Youtube,https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=acKcNpDz_Vw; Eating spoon MP4, Youtube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rmMVi_1WRU0.
- Ion Constantin, deceased gypsy spoon carver and masterful green woodworker: Romanian wooden spoon carver, Youtube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D7yipq2xd7o.\
- Old Swedish Spoon Carver, another repeat view to observe the subtlety and ease of a master: Swedish spoon maker, Youtube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JW1YzoRmvUo.
- Ben Orford Tutorials: How to carve a spoon with Ben Orford, Youtube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KW2DN46lrqk;How to use a knife, Youtube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-u6Kqmvs4TU&list=UUlMEnHqmmxP3QRnMF4fAZdg.

Tools

A basic green woodworking kit for making spoons, cups, axe or hatchet hafts or helves, or other small wooden pieces:

- A thin profiled single-beveled straight knife (also referred to as a sloyd or slojd knife)
- A hook knife
- A sharpening kit with at least two different grits of sharpening stone and a strop for honing

A more extensive kit may contain (in no particular order):

- A drawknife
- Several lengths of straight knives
- Several hook knives of various radiuses
- Various gouges
- An adze or two
- A few hand axes of various weights and cutting edge lengths
- A froe for splitting and riving wood

All of this being said, start with the smallest number of tools—master those and then think about adding more. It's common to get tool lust and spend all sorts of money on various tools and kit, just to have it sit around unused, rusting, or collecting dust. So buy as little as possible up front, get the hang of those tools, then assess if more will make work more enjoyable. Of course,

if you want to collect tools, that's a whole 'nother topic (or problem . . . chronic tool acquisition syndrome).

Sources

My favorite tools so far come from the following fine makers. If you are going to put out hard-earned cash, don't waste it on cheaply made tools that will most likely break, not hold an edge, or be of inferior design. Also, used tools can be had cheaply at flea markets, yard sales, and on eBay with a little bit of research and some elbow grease or creativity to get them in working order.

Axes

- Read this article first: Robin Wood, Which is the best axe for carving, bushcraft, general use? July 25, 2010, blog, http://www.robin-wood.co.uk/.
- Robin Wood just released his low-cost carving axe, which is probably a wonderful place to start: http://www.robin-wood.co.uk/shop/the-robin-wood-axe/.
- I have used and recommend the Gränsfors Bruk wildlife hatchet, mini belt hatchet, and especially their carving axe.
- My main axe is one custom forged by Dan Roesinger of Stark Raven Studios in northern Wisconsin—his Scandinavian carving hatchet: http://www.stark-raven-studios.com/raven-tools/.
- Wetterlings is another Swedish, hand-forged maker that is comparable to Gränsfors Bruk. Again, their wilderness hatchet is going to be the most well rounded for carving and other uses. Available from Ben's Backwoods, http://www.bensbackwoods.com/wetterlings/.
- Bahco makes, from what I hear from other carvers, a very good low-cost alternative to Scandinavian steel. Also available from Ben's Backwoods, http://www.bensbackwoods.com/bahco/.

Knives

Read these first:

- Robin Wood, What is the best knife for wood carving and whittling? November 29, 2010, blog.
- Robin Wood, Which is the best spoon carving knife, hook knife? January 29, 2013, blog.

The best all-around knives, at bargain prices, are Eric Frost's from Mora, Sweden. They make some of the best knives around, period, regardless of how incredibly affordable they are. I use Frost's Mora Laminated Carving Model 106 as a mainstay—it is nice and long and good for most work. Frost's Mora Laminated Carving Model 120 is also good—short and maybe a good

entry level. I do not recommend any of the Mora hook knives. They are pretty bad. Spend $20 more and buy a Del Stubbs hook knife.

I also use Del Stubbs's knives, perhaps religiously (http://www.pinewoodforge.com/catalog.html). They're impeccable. Start with his regular sloyd, and his regular 1-3/4-inch hook. I also use his two other open sweep hooks for various bowl sizes, and so on.

Sharpening

I use three grits of DMT Dia-Sharp diamond hones plus a strop for pretty much all tool maintenance.

Del Stubbs sells a nice kit on his site—you get three DMT hones plus a strop with compound for $112 (http://www.pinewoodforge.com/new_items.html).

Sharpening Tutorials

- Ben Orford, How to grind an axe, Youtube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zGC-cGCAOe68&list=UUlMEnHqmmxP3QRnMF4fAZdg.
- Ben Orford, How to sharpen an axe, Youtube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AKJhhz-643k&list=UUlMEnHqmmxP3QRnMF4fAZdg.
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Uncovering the Esoteric Nature of Trees Native to the Americas: Sugar Maple and Eastern White Cedar

Written by Dana O'Driscoll
Illustrated by Scott Smith

About the Author: Dana Driscoll is the Chief Editor of Trilithon: The Journal of the Ancient Order of Druids in America *and the AODA's Grand Pendragon. She is also a Druid-grade graduate in the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids, a member of the Druidical Order of the Golden Dawn, and a priestess in the Gnostic Celtic Church. Her AODA Druid Adept project explored the connection between Druidry and sustainability and how to use permaculture design principles and community building to engage in Druidic practice. By day, she is a writing professor and learning researcher; by night, a permaculturist, organic gardener, natural builder, mushroom forager, herbalist, community organizer, and whimsical artist. Dana's writings can be found on the web at druidgarden.wordpress.com.*

About the Illustrator: Scott Smith received an advanced certificate in botanical art from the MN School of Botanical Art in 2009. His primary areas of interest are the flora of prairie communities, the changing woodlands of northeastern Minnesota, and all trees. Scott became interested in botanical art because of his family's agricultural background and his interest in gardens, herbs, and medicinal plants. Botanical art was a perfect fit as Scott has a passion for art as well as science, and botanical art bridges a gap between the two. This art form accurately and beautifully describes a plant species with graphite, pen and ink, or watercolor that not only provides rich information but is also beautiful to behold. Scott's method follows traditional English botanical illustration. Scott is a member of the American Society of Botanical Artists and the Great River Chapter of Botanical Artists. Scott is a member of the AODA working on his candidate studies.

One of the challenges in adapting revival Druidry from its origins in the British Isles to North America is the sometimes stark difference in ecosystems. While many American Druids may feel a sense of disconnection from the traditional lore of revival Druidry due to these differences, part of the work of an American-based order like AODA is to allow us to develop and adapt our traditions to our unique local contexts and settings. One way that we might think about adaptation is through examining the trees and plants in a variety of ways: magically, medicinally, ecologically, historically, and through locally based lore.

A common approach to working with sacred trees and plants in druidry is the Ogham. The Ogham, also known as the Celtic sacred tree alphabet, is one of the tools Druids use for

divination, magic, and meditation (see John Michael Greer's *Druid Magic Handbook* for one such approach to the Ogham as a Druidic magic system). The challenge with the Ogham, of course, is adapting it to our local bioregion, as Wiyninger (2014) suggested in *Trilithon*'s first volume. Because so much of Druidry is about a deep personal connection with nature, I have found it personally challenging to work with Ogham trees that I have not met—never meeting blackthorn or spindle means that I don't know them, their energies, their appearance in the landscape, their changing appearance throughout the seasons, or their fruits, foliage, or wood. And some of the trees that are my closest allies, like sugar maple, eastern hemlock, sassafras, or staghorn sumac are not represented in the traditional Ogham. While I think Ogham is a fantastic way to begin to work with trees, I think it's important to develop and expand our lore to trees dominant throughout our own landscape. The information in this article can be used to adapt or supplement existing Ogham or work with the trees in other ways.

This article represents a collaboration between the author (Dana O'Driscoll) and the illustrator (Scott Smith). The two of us worked together to select the trees; Scott illustrated the two trees in incredible detail (see the section English Botanical Art, p. 73-74) and Dana worked to research the trees in depth. The article begins with a discussion about Dana's approach to researching trees and then presents information and illustrations on two dominant trees throughout many parts of North America: the sugar maple and the eastern white cedar.

Discovering the Magical Nature of the Trees

It can be quite challenging to understand the magical nature of a tree without a rich historical tradition. When we move beyond the Ogham trees, the magical lore is quite thin in places. So, in order to understand the magical qualities of our American trees, I have been using a hybrid approach of traditional research, the doctrine of signatures, searching for themes in stories and lore, engaging in direct interaction, observation, and meditation with the tree, and listening to the tree. My goal with this research is to have some kind of comprehensive understanding of what others have said about the tree and to combine that with my own experience and what has been conveyed to me by the trees themselves. This ongoing process of tree study is a very long one, requiring months or even years for each tree, but is rewarding and fruitful. The following is my process.

1. Observation, Reflection, Meditation, and Interaction with the Tree

The principle of observation and meditation in the natural world is central to the AODA curriculum; these practices are the foundation of my tree research. I have found that the most important thing one can do in learning about trees is to spend as much time with them as possible. I observe the trees in different seasons, sit with them daily if possible, hug them, meditate with them, and listen on many levels.

I spend a lot of time listening and reflecting on what I hear. I listen to their summer stories and hear the song of the winds rustling through their leaves or needles. Likewise, I listen to the winter tales told by the banging of bare branch upon branch in winter. I take notes on these ex-

periences, often taking my journal with me to the tree. I hear their stories tucked deep within the roots.

I also try to harvest and eat their fruits, leaves, nuts, sap, roots, or whatever they produce (if they are edible—and many that you wouldn't expect to be actually are). Taking the tree internally helps me better understand their energies. I also make crafts with them—I work wood that is gifted to me (for example, if the tree drops a branch or a branch comes down in a storm); I make incense with their resin, branches, or roots; and I study and learn about other uses.

I trust my intuition, see how I am feeling and what trees I am drawn to as part of those feelings. If I'm having a bad day, I use my intuition to sit beneath the tree that gives me strength (hickory is my favorite) or that opens up my mind (maple does well for this). I like to do this observational and interactive research well before I do research in other ways for a specific reason—I am not influenced by what others have read, experienced, or said about the tree species.

2. The Magical Doctrine of Signatures

One of the ways of understanding plants and trees through intensive study and observation comes out of an old principle known as the doctrine of signatures. In the absence of substantial amounts of traditional lore about trees and plants native to the Americas, I have found the doctrine of signatures particularly useful to understand the magical qualities of plants and trees. Just by observing trees in their natural environment, their role in the ecosystem, and their effects upon the landscape and ourselves, we might come to understand at least some of their magical qualities. That is, a plant's physical characteristics can gives us its magical meaning. For example, the hawthorn, with its protective thorns, suggests a protective, defensive quality. These direct experiences and observations can provide a good beginning, although many other methods can help us discover and uncover more of the sacred magic of the trees of our landscape.

3. Research and Study

Studying the ecology and biology of trees. I found that reading as much as I could find about a particular tree helped me begin to have an understanding of its magical nature. This includes reading about the tree in an ecological and biological sense—where it grows, what role it plays in the ecosystem, who uses it for habitat or food, how long its life cycle is, how susceptible it is to pollution, what names it goes by, and how people have used the tree in the past. I combine this study with direct observation and meditations with the trees themselves—and how my localized understanding may be more nuanced than the broad discussion of the tree found in many ecology books.

I also find that more broad reading on ecosystems, biological processes, and so on helps me understand the trees better in general—their yearly cycles, how they produce energy, how they move nutrients, how they communicate.

Reading about the magical qualities of trees. I also research the trees in a variety of magical texts. Unfortunately, material on magical qualities of trees is either nonexistent for many of the dominant trees in the Americas or it is not substantiated or trustworthy, so I often trust my other

methods over this kind of information. What I do find magical texts helpful for, however, is in cross-checking my own intuition and other research. Unfortunately, I have found that authors may rely on a single source (which is unsubstantiated and unreferenced) for the magical nature of a tree, which is repeated almost word for word in various newer publications. I generally disregard such information and instead use other methods for understanding the magical nature of the tree.

4. Stories and Histories

Oral histories. Another window into the nature of the tree can be found simply by talking with people about trees—especially the very old and the very young. Older generations often have experiences with more closeness to the land and working with the trees; the very young have insights well worth understanding. I ask people to share stories from their families or themselves, from what they knew or experienced regarding specific species or individual trees themselves. I write these stories down, if given permission, and treat them as a kind of sacred knowledge.

Studying the lore of trees. I also found it particularly helpful to read the lore of various cultures (especially those indigenous to the Americas). This kind of reading is extremely beneficial given the absence of any other kind of magical knowledge about the tree. I have been using two free, searchable archives: the Internet Sacred Text Archive (2011) and the First People Native American Legends (2014) archive. I perform exhaustive searches for stories that feature a particular tree. I begin by compiling a list of all of the stories initially available in the archives, then go back through all of them carefully, reading and making notes and summaries, and noting where the stories are located (I try to get stories tied to trees primarily in the bioregion where the tree grows, if possible, but sometimes expand outward, especially if there are very similar trees in other parts of the world—as in the case of cedars). From there, I organize the stories into themes with examples, and the themes help me better understand the sacred quality of the tree. Often the themes relate to other discoveries about the tree in some way. They are also often related to the doctrine of signatures and the natural ecosystem of the tree. This whole process can take quite a lot of time, but it provides rich information.

5. Putting It All Together: The Art of Triangulation

In social science research terms, "triangulation" occurs when you have three different data sets (for example, surveys, observations, and texts) and each data set points to the same result. I like to use this approach in my research, especially to understand if my direct experiences and conclusions drawn through the doctrine of signatures are consistent with the different kinds of data I have studied and compiled. This approach is especially useful to compare experiences, intuition, or what has been conveyed by the trees themselves with what others have experienced, written, and understood. In the end, if something doesn't match up, deeper study can often reveal a nuance or bit of information more localized. In magical terms, what I'm doing is an "outer plane check" on inner understandings.

So far, I've found that the approach outlined above has led me to a wonderful and rich understanding of the trees in my area and has allowed me to build incredibly deep relationships with species of trees and individual trees. This "treesearch" has also given me enough knowledge to help others better understand the trees and their importance.

I now present my research on two trees dominant throughout a good portion of the Eastern and Midwestern United States: sugar maple (Acer saccharum) and eastern white cedar (Thuja occidentalis). Some of the lore on the sugar maple can be extrapolated to maples throughout North America, while other parts are likely unique to the sugar maple. The same is true of eastern white cedar. This research is supplemented with the incredible drawings of fellow AODA member Scott Smith, in the English botanical art tradition.

What is English Botanical Art?

A short introduction botanical art from the illustrator, Scott Smith: Botanical art has been around since at least the sixth century AD; the oldest known botanical illustration is found in Dioscorides's *De Materia Medica* from 512 AD. In these early times, scientific plant names hadn't been conceived, and most plants were documented for their medicinal qualities. After many years, plants were organized into groups and given scientific names, and illustration became optional.

It was believed at one time that with accurate naming, illustration wasn't really necessary. However, beginning in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, botanical illustration had a resurgence. The English began extensive exploration of new lands and the plants that grew there—there was always a botanical artist on major expeditions.

Hence, the English lead the way in scientific botanical illustration. Also, at this time there was an increased interest in botanical illustration by amateur botanists, gardeners, and natural history enthusiasts, which created a market for botanical art. As new technology like the printing press spread new information and opened many markets for the general populace, so the appeal of botanical art expanded. The expansion was twofold—it became a part of the scientific community and the art world.

Botanical art was then and likely always will be an art form that settles between the scientific and artistic communities. As such, the artist who endeavors to work in this field must be sufficiently trained, not only in art but in scientific documentation as well.

Training in this art form includes a high level of proficiency in the traditional media of illustration, including watercolor, pen and ink, and graphite. The core curriculum can take years to complete and includes specialized study, which is scrutinized by scientists as well as artists who then choose whether to certify artist.

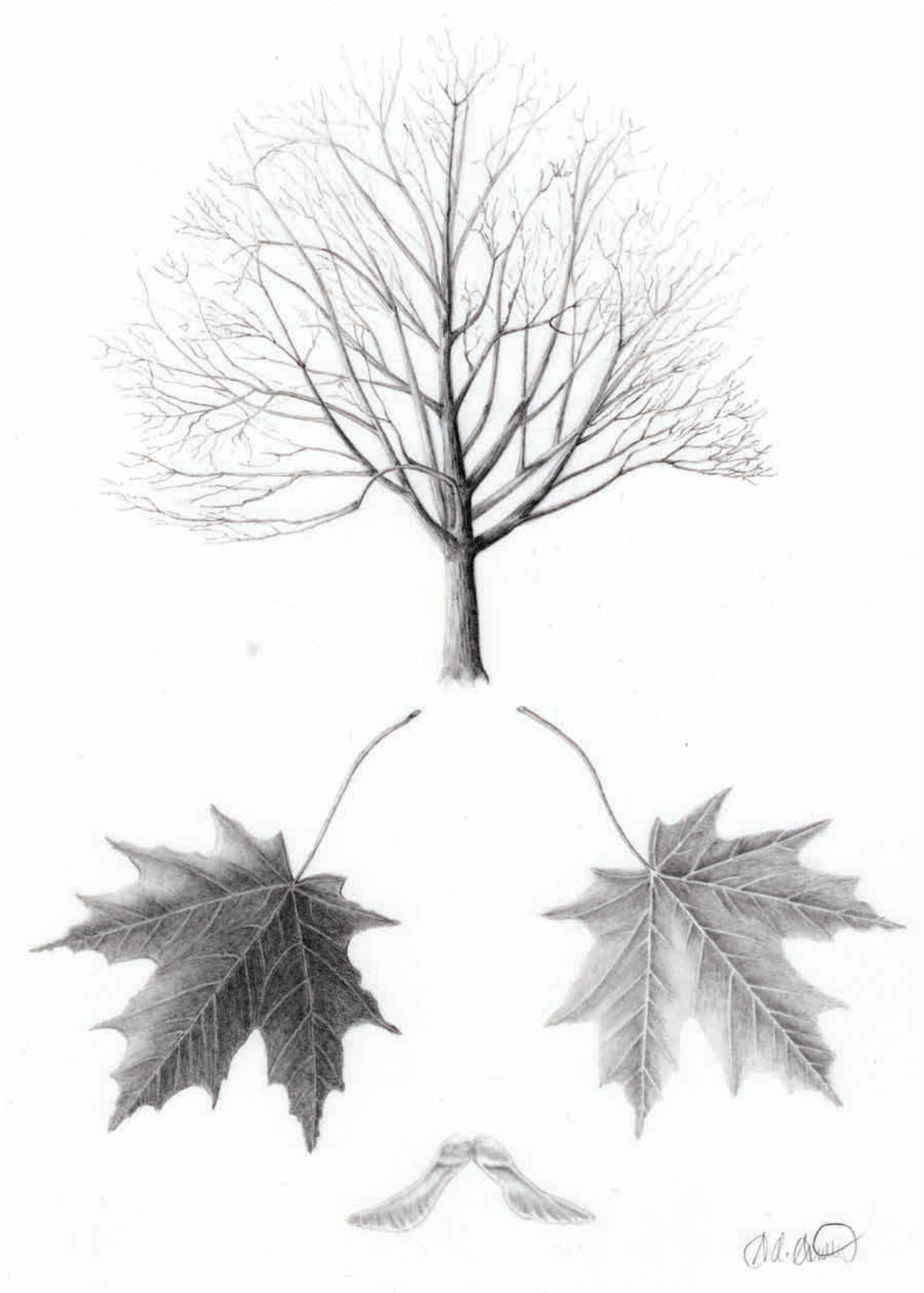
Botanical art itself has transformed over time—currently there are artists who describe themselves as botanical artists, but their work looks nothing like traditional English botanical art. And many currently work in the traditional media of watercolor, pen and ink, and graphite, who do accurate and scientifically correct illustrations, but their work also differs from more traditional composition. All are botanical artists, but not all would pass the test of scientific scrutiny. Traditional English botanical art should provide information; more loosely, it should tell the story of the plant—how it grows, what it looks like under the leaves, what the leaves look like, what the flowers look like, and so on. Depending on the season in which a plant is examined, a part of that plant's story can be told but not always all. It is the job of the artist to tell as much of the story as possible while maintaining scientific integrity.

Sugar Maple (*Acer saccharum*)

Early in the spring, when the snows are still thick upon the ground, the magic of the sugar maple comes forth. When the temperature drops below freezing in the night and rises above freezing in the day, the sap of the sugar maple runs. The sap rises up from the maple's roots bringing sweetness and nourishment to the tree as the sun shines upon its bare branches and trunk. This magical process occurs as long as the right conditions are present—usually for a period anywhere between three and ten weeks in my region (Zone 6a, southeastern Michigan). When the temperature gets a bit warmer later in the spring, the land awakens, and the trees begin to bud, the sap ceases running for the year.

I have had the pleasure of being involved the process of tapping maple trees for the last three seasons, and I can tell you that it is very much an alchemical process. You can drink the sap straight from the tree, and it has a faintly sweet taste and is nutritive. Applying either cold or heat concentrates the sap; in sap frozen in buckets overnight, the sugars are concentrated in what is still unfrozen. If you boil 40 gallons of the sap down, you get one glorious gallon of the most amazing maple syrup (and just like everything else, your own tastes better than anything you can buy). The sugaring (or sugaring off) process itself teaches us much about the magic of the sugar maple: it has many gifts to give, but those gifts must be earned through hard work, diligence, and a bit of discomfort, like being out in the cold.

The splendor of the sugar maple continues throughout the summer, as it produces helicopter-like seeds that spiral to the ground as they fall or are blown about by the wind. These seeds delight many a young child who throws them into the air and watches them spiral down. In the fall months, the maple bestows yet another glorious gift—a stunning display of red, yellow, and orange foliage. One nickname for the sugar maple along the eastern seaboard of the United States is the "fire maple," and this name is well earned. As the leaves drop to the ground, the land



is blanketed with a mosaic of colors like a patchwork quilt. And the winter comes, and the cycle begins again.

About the Sugar Maple

There are approximately 128 different species of maple worldwide; the sugar maple (also known as hard maple or rock maple) is one of the more dominant species in many areas of the United States. Sugar maple is critically important to the health of forests throughout its range, often forming pairings with beech, birch, oak, and ash. A typical sugar maple tree can grow up to 115 feet tall, although it is also quite shade tolerant and therefore also can be found in the understory of a forest. Sugar maples prefer rich, moist soils in the valleys and also do well on rocky slopes.

Unfortunately, sugar maples have been in serious decline throughout much of their range. First, extensive logging does not encourage their growth—they are slow growing, and faster-growing trees, like birch or striped maple, will often come up in their place after a forest is logged. Sugar maples are also not very tolerant of pollution, including soil acidification and acid rain; as such they have difficulty growing near places with substantial automobile traffic or other forms of pollution. While they were found in urban parks throughout the United States in earlier centuries, these trees have a harder time surviving in modern urban areas with the rise of the automobile and associated pollution. Culpepper (1653) calls sugar maple a "gentleman's tree" as it was often found in urban parks during his lifetime. The salt from winter road treatment also damages the sugar maple tree's root systems, contributing to its decline in many areas. This is not to say that the sugar maple is not still a dominant tree—it very much is. You just need to get off the main roads and out of the cities and suburbs to see this delightful tree in abundance.

Edible Nature of the Sugar Maple

The sugar maple's decline in the twenty-first century is a tragedy because the sugar maple is one of the gems of our woodland tree species, providing something that few others can—delicious and nutritious sap. Maple syrup or sugar is our only sweetener native to the regions where it grows other than honey. I also have made a Sacred Trees Brew based on an old Algonquin recipe with maple syrup, crushed hickory nuts, white pine, and birch (see sidebar). It's a fabulous drink, and it brings in the sacred blessings of these trees. The Iroquois and other native peoples also created pemmican by pounding strips of meat with berries and maple sugar and allowing them to dry in the sun; this rich food source was also used extensively by colonists in the frontier areas of the United States. Young maple leaves are also edible, and they are actually quite tasty in early spring as they are just unfolding. I like to eat them in salads or as a trailside snack.

Wood Uses

Maple wood is often used for furniture and flooring; sugar maple is described by Otis (1925) as the most prized tree in the state of Michigan. It has a beautiful light color and I have found it nice to work with for carving and natural building. As I learned in a recent round pole framing

workshop on natural building, the bark of freshly cut maple comes off like butter with a simple draw knife, making maple a favorite of natural builders for its beauty, strength, and ease of use. Maple is also often used for making instruments; I have a beautiful panflute made of maple.

Western Magical Traditions

The maple tree is ruled by Jupiter (Culpeper, 1653); as a planet, Jupiter represents luck, spirituality, knowledge, long-distance travel, and material wealth. Hopman (1994) suggests that maple is used for love and wands, and is also often used as a handfasting herb. Unfortunately, I found very little in the Western esoteric traditions concerning maple, and for much of what I did find, I'm not sure of its original source.

Native American Lore About Sugar Maple

I have found it useful to examine the Native American lore surrounding sacred trees in the Americas and to draw upon it in order to understand magical qualities. This is done in reverence and respect for the native peoples and their traditions. In order to understand the sugar maple in Native American lore, I reviewed numerous legends—the sugar maple features prominently in many tales—uncovering the following themes concerning the sugar maple.

The maple is a gift that takes work. The maple was one of the only sources of sugar for the native peoples, and as such it was seen as a gift from the Creator. While the maple is a gift, the native tales are clear that this gift takes work (in the form of collecting sap and boiling it down to make sugar). In the story "Gluskabe Changes Maple Syrup," the Creator originally made sap flow from maple trees as rich and thick as honey—one needed only to break off a branch and the sap would flow out at any time of the year. However, Gluskabe, whose job was to report back to the Creator, came across a group of people who were fat and lazy, who abandoned their village and instead lay in a maple grove sipping sap all day. Gluskabe was instructed to fill the maple trees with water each day for a full moon cycle, so that people would have to work to have the sweetness of the maple and they would only have it for a short time in the spring to learn the error of their ways. At the end of the story, the people worked to turn the sap into sugar by burning cedar and making white birch buckets (using the magic of those two trees as well). The work of the maple sugar is also found in the Seneca legend, "Woman Who Fell From the Sky," where the maple sap is changed to keep people from living too easily.

Maple as a delicacy. Maple sugar was seen as a delicacy by the Native Americans. In several tales, babies appear sucking maple sugar. In others, it is prepared as a drink with herbs (I wish I knew which herbs—this would make another wonderful tree brew!) In one Ojibwa legend, a maple syrup feast is mentioned.

Maple must be honored in order to be abundant. In order to keep the maples producing sap, Native Americans did maple ceremonies to ensure good sap harvests each year, typically right as the sap began to flow from the trees. In these ceremonies, everyone gathered around the tree, addressing the tree in ritual language and offering the tree tobacco incense. The description of these rituals

reminds me quite a bit of the apple orchard wassailing traditions in the Western world. Perhaps we Druids might explore more tree ceremonies like these to ensure abundant harvests.

Maple as a gentle tree. When talking sticks are made out of maple, they are said to represent gentleness. I have experienced the gentle, welcoming spirit of the sugar maple on many occasions.

The fiery red leaves of maple represent blood. The reason that maples turn red in the fall can be explained by the story "Chasing the Bear," where a long bear hunt ends with the hunters piling up sumac and maple branches and butchering the bear upon the branches, which turns the leaves red. In another version of this legend, "Hunting the Great Bear," the long bear hunt happens each year. The four brothers (who make up the constellation of the great bear) finally kill the bear, and the bear's blood falls down from the sky and turns the maples red.

My Experiences and Insights

The most prominent events in the sugar maple's yearly cycle both occur near the Druid "balance" holidays. Sugar maple's sap typically runs between Imbolc and Alban Eiler (the spring equinox) and the leaves brighten after Alban Elued (fall equinox) and fall to the ground by Samhuinn. I think the fact that these two prominent events occur around the equinoxes is no coincidence, for I have always seen the maple as a tree of balance.

With this in mind, if we think about the relationship between fire and water in the sugar maple tree, we can see that maple also has alchemical connections. The season begins with running sap, which is the water and nutrients of the tree. This "maple water" on its own is delicious and refreshing (especially if you let the buckets partially freeze overnight to concentrate it a bit). As my friends and neighbors spend time at our maple sugaring operation, we often bring mugs and jars and drink the sap all day long. We've also come to the conclusion that maple sap is Michigan's answer to coconut water—it is delicious, nutritious, cooling, refreshing, and local. As I mentioned earlier, the sap requires an alchemical process to refine and process into syrup or sugar. So sugar maple begins the late winter-early spring season with a very watery, cooling, refreshing aspect—one that is driven by fire, with its connection to the rising temperatures of the season.

Sugar maple's watery, cooling nature, however, gives way to the fire of the autumn—she burns early and brightly in the fall season, a stunning tree in the landscape not to be outdone by any other (although sassafras can certainly give the maple a good challenge). The maple's transformation from water (spring) to fire (autumn) very much apparent in the times of balance in the world.

During all seasons of the year, maple is a tree of gentleness. When I was a child, sugar maple was one of my favorite friends. With her smooth, light gray bark and evenly distributed branches, she made a perfect tree for climbing. From the canopy above, I would hide in her embrace, looking out at the world below. I would spend hours in one particular maple tree, sitting on a long, outstretched limb and observing the world around me. I always felt safe and secure in the arms of a sugar maple.

Maple bids you welcome beneath her branches; when in full foliage, she provides excellent shade from the sun. Meditating under a maple often leads one on unexpected journeys through the inner landscape. Sometimes, as I sit by an old maple tree, the tree tells me her story, and I listen and learn. In either case, maple seems to open the way to the otherworld and the inner landscape. So spend time with a maple, learn her stories, drink her sap, jump in her leaves, and appreciate her beauty and magic throughout all of the seasons of the year.

Tree Brews

Four Sacred Trees Brew. This recipe is derived from an old Algonquin recipe. It pays homage to the hickory as its star (with birch, pine, and sugar maple as delightful supporting characters). It is a perfect drink for the winter solstice and the cold winter months. The brew tastes like nothing else you've ever experienced. Slightly piney, slightly minty, very nutty, slightly sweet—all of the good flavors form a kind of "tree chai." I often serve this at our grove's fall and winter celebrations, where it is always very well received. I've also found this brew to be a most excellent energizing, clearing, and grounding drink. If I'm feeling a bit energetically disconnected or frazzled, especially after being out in the materialistic world for too long, this brew helps bring me back to a balanced place. It gives me inner peace and grounds me, healing me. This beverage is particularly uplifting if I'm having a difficult day, am in need of healing, or need to relax. I think it's because it has so many good trees with different energies, and they are very balancing. Nature is a wonderful healer.

You will need to wildcraft this recipe—most of these ingredients are not to be purchased in the store or even online. You might refer to Angelini's (2014) article on foraging in our first issue of *Trilithon* for suggestions about how to safely and ethically forage for wild foods. The four ingredients of this recipe are often found in the same kind of forest. Hemlocks will be found in the cooler parts of the forest, often near water or on a northern slope or ravine. Sugar maples are found throughout a forest of this kind. Hickory nuts can be fun to gather when they begin dropping in early fall, although you will be in for some stiff competition from squirrels. Each hickory tree often produces a really good crop of nuts every two or three years. Hickories are easiest to spot in the fall after they drop their nuts because they have a distinctive golden yellowish-orange-color; some, such as the shagbark hickory, also have distinctive bark. Any hickory nut works for this, and all are tasty (even the pignut hickory, despite its name).

For an eight-cup brew, you will need the following ingredients:

- Eight to ten cups of water (enough to cover all ingredients)
- A handful of white pine or eastern hemlock tree needles; you could also use any other pine or fir needle for this.
- A handful of black birch (*Betula lenta*) twigs (dried or fresh); you can also substitute wintergreen leaves or berries for this. Break up the twigs before adding them to the brew (makes them easier to strain). This is getting at the inner bark, which gives the wintergreen flavor.
- One cup of crushed hickory nuts. To prepare the crushed nuts, remove the green outer husk (turns brown after they drop). Use a hammer to crush the hard nut; throw the inner hard nutshell and nut meats in the pot together).
- Maple syrup to taste—add this at the end.

Bring the hemlock, hickory, and black birch to boil; put the lid on and boil for at least 20 minutes. Strain and add maple syrup to taste. (Please note that hickory is a demulcent nut, that is, it has a coating and soothing action and can get a bit thicker if allowed to cool). You can drink the tea, then do a second extraction of all the ingredients in another batch of water.

Iroquois Maple-Hemlock Tea. This second maple drink recipe was adapted and inspired by a recipe found in Moerman's (2010) *Native American Food Plants*. It is much lighter and more refreshing when compared with the Sacred Trees Brew. You will, again, need to wildcraft these ingredients (and learn how to tap a sugar maple tree—even if all that you do is drink the sap, the tapping process is worth it).

- Maple sap (fresh from the tree; for a sweeter effect, boil down or allow to partially freeze and use what doesn't freeze).
- A handful of eastern hemlock needles (use fresh, young ones, which have the strongest flavor—a piney, lemony flavor). White pine (or other pines or firs) can be substituted, although the flavor will be different depending on which conifer you use.

To make the tea, boil the maple sap until you are happy with the sweetness level (if you are doing this indoors, make sure you have very good ventilation, as the sap that evaporates can still contain a bit of sugar, and boiling too much of it indoors can lead to sticky surfaces). Remove from heat, add a handful of hemlock needles, and brew for 5 minutes. Strain and enjoy!

Michigan "Coconut" Water. A final maple brew is simply maple sap drunk straight out of the tree. Those of us who have been participating in the tapping of maple trees for the last few years have taken to calling it Michigan coconut water because it has the same effect on us that drinking coconut water does (refreshing, nutritious, balancing) but it comes right from the land in Michigan. We fill up jugs of it, freeze it, and bring it out in the hot summer months.

Eastern White Cedar (*Thuja occidentalis*)

The eastern white cedar is native to much of central and eastern North America, although it has been much more broadly introduced, often under the name arborvitae (tree of life). It is found most abundantly around the Great Lakes region in the United States and Canada, although patches of it can be found in other parts of North America, especially where it is grown ornamentally. The tree goes by quite a few names, including yellow cedar, white cedar, and swamp cedar; in the herbal community it is known as just as thuja. However, despite "cedar" in the name, this particular tree is not a true cedar but a cypress tree (Cupressaceae). It is often found in swamps and other wet areas, but can thrive anywhere there isn't substantial competition from other trees. Around the Great Lakes region, it can also be found growing on cliff faces—and some of the oldest specimens of eastern white cedar are located on the cliffs of Lake Superior. It is a fairly short tree (typically growing 33–66 feet) although taller trees (up to 98 feet with a 1.3 foot trunk) have been discovered. Otis (1925) suggests that the tree is particularly useful for hedges and evergreen screening; it was a popular hedgerow tree and can still be found in old hedgerows to this day.

Physical Uses of Cedar

Eastern White Cedar wood is in high demand due to its antitermite/insect properties as well as its antirotting properties. These straight, tall, beautiful trees make delightful log cabins, wooden shingles for natural building projects, and excellent support beams. When cedar dries, it is lightweight, fragrant, and easy to work (although not nearly as strong as oak or hickory). As a beginning woodworker, I have found eastern white cedar very easy to work and enjoy the beautiful white coloring of the wood, especially when some oil is added to the finished piece. Eastern white cedar has a whitish color—it is not intensely red like the red cedar found in the western United States.

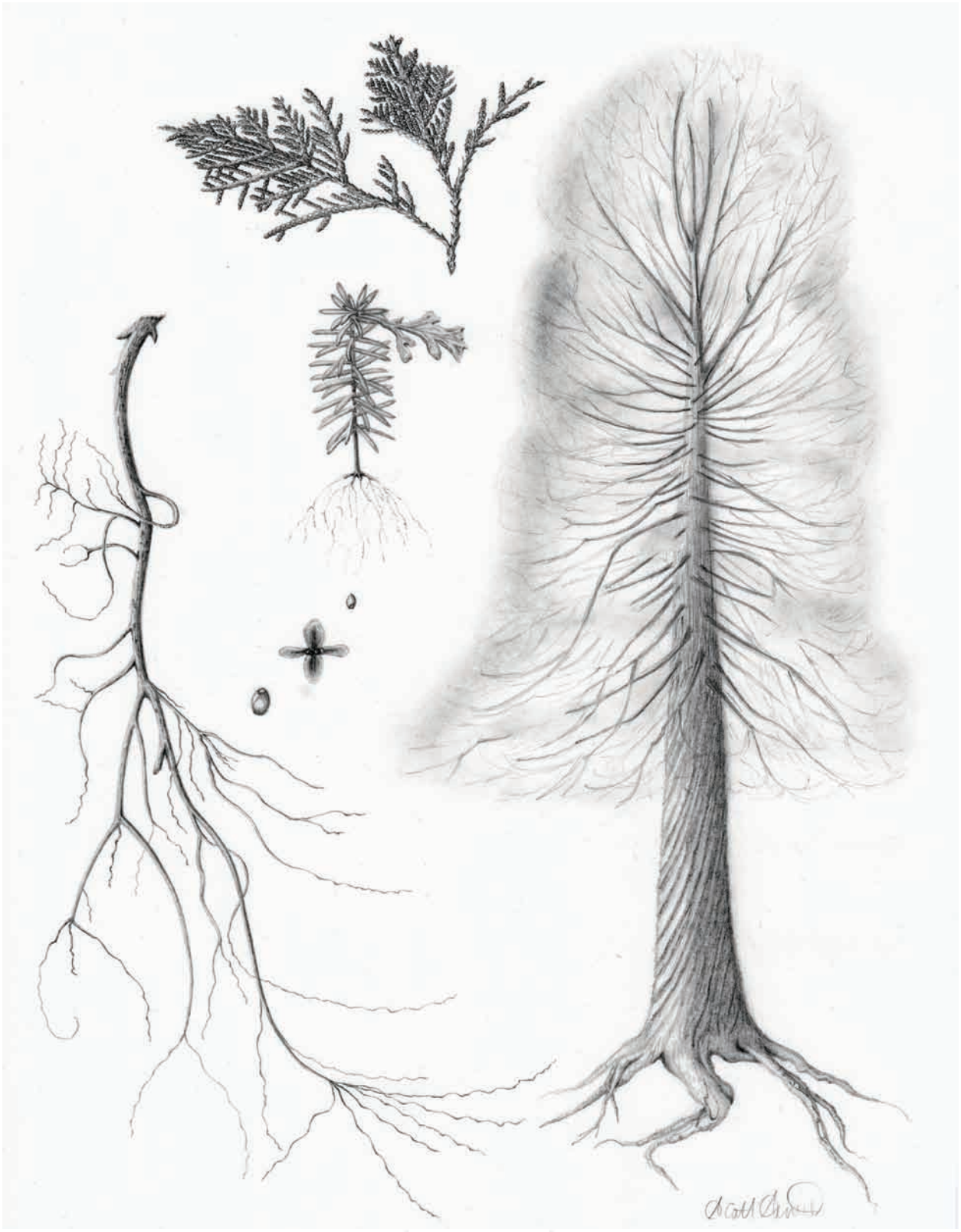
The Tree of Life

Despite its small stature, the eastern white cedar is an incredibly long-lived tree—Kelly and Larson (1997) report that the current oldest living eastern white cedar (found in Ontario on a cliff face) is 1,062 years old, having germinated in 952. They also report finding a dead eastern white cedar whose age was estimated at 1,890 years old; these are the oldest living trees in Canada and eastern North America (and one reason for the very deserving name tree of life).

A second reason that the eastern white cedar is known as the tree of life is due to its extensive medicinal uses; humanity has a very long-standing relationship with this cedar for providing relief and addressing a host of illnesses and conditions (a discussion of which is outside of the scope of this article, but I encourage readers to examine its herbal and homeopathic uses).

Etymology of "Thuja"

Another way of examining the magical quality of the eastern white cedar is by tracing the Latin term to which it is linked—"thuja." The *Oxford English Dictionary* describes "thuja" as being derived from the ancient Greek *thuya* (n), which means "to sacrifice," or *thusia* (n), a burnt offering. Given the uses of cedar as a smudge for protection and clearing, this connection is clear. It is



also striking to me that the uses of cedar throughout the world, which rose independently of each other, have so much in common.

Illustrator's Insights

I'd also like to share Scott Smith's insights regarding his detailed study of the eastern white cedar to draw the images for this article, which give us more clues to its magical properties through the doctrine of signatures: "The white cedar is the most wonderfully complex tree I've ever drawn—there is so much detail! The small branches that lead to the fronds or scales are absolutely amazing if you look at them through a high-resolution magnifying glass. The bark is like an ornate coat of armor—really fascinating." This insight reinforces the eastern white cedar as a tree of complexity and protection—the scales, like armor, reveal a protective quality.

Traditional Western Magical Lore

In the *Encyclopedia of Natural Magic*, Greer (2005) suggests that the cedar is warm and dry in the fourth degree (i.e., extremely fire-based) and is a tree of Jupiter. He reports that cedar has much of the same traditional symbolism also associated with the yew; it was often planted around cemeteries, both for the evergreen qualities of the tree (symbolizing eternal life) and also to keep the spirits of the dead contained. He reports that Native Americans in the Pacific Northwest used cedar bark or needles for purification for those who had contact with the dead. He suggests that it's useful for purifications, banishings or exorcisms, success workings, and magical power workings. Yronwode's (2002) *Hoodoo Herb and Root Magic* suggests that in traditional African American conjure, it is used where "benevolent" power is needed, such as to make someone move out of a house, to draw someone to rent a room, or to draw someone to come with you when you move.

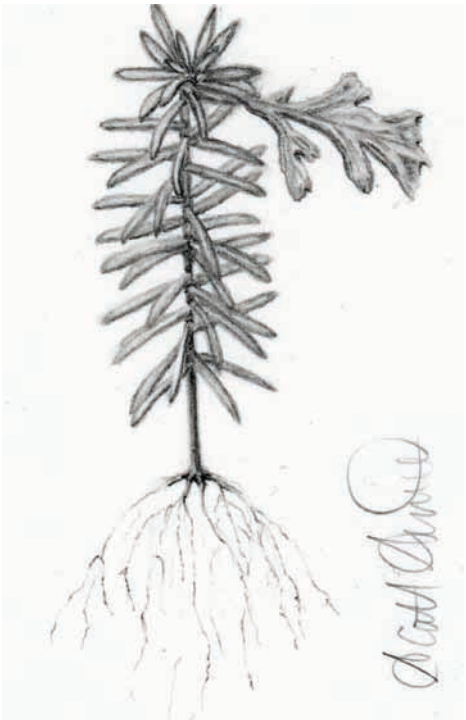
Beyerl (1984) in the *Master Book of Herbalism* reports that cedar wood and resin are both major incense ingredients. My experiences are that cedar produces four distinct smells, depending on what you are trying to make. The wood, ground finely into a powder or chipped, produces a lovely woody, slightly piney aroma. The bark has the richest smell, earthy but with an almost vanilla-like quality. I have found extremely limited amounts of cedar resin on my eastern white cedar trees; they don't produce much resin at all compared to, say, white pine, but when it is burned it is very light compared to other tree resins—lemony, pleasant, and sweet. The eastern white cedar fronds burn citrusy, brighter, with a great relaxing quality. All are wonderful for incense making.

Native American Legends and Uses

I'll start this section with a caveat: the challenge with the Native American lore on cedar is that the legends rarely specify which cedar trees are being used. I've looked at tribal stories and uses originating in the eastern United States, but since so many tribes were displaced over time, it is hard sometimes to know which tree the lore discusses. I'm not able to find details on which cedar is used in many stories (which just say "cedar" without additional description or information), but it seems that the uses of white cedar in the Great Lakes Region are comparable to those of red

cedar in the west. I've seen some indication of that in my review of 1,400-plus tales for discussion of cedar, where tribes from east and west describe similar uses.

Native Americans used cedar of all kinds pretty extensively for practical things—shredded cedar bark was made into canoes, rafts, paddles, and ropes; cedar was also frequently used for making totem poles on the West Coast. Cedar was also used by many tribes, especially in the western United States, for making clothing and baskets—the cedar bark was peeled or shredded and woven in various ways. Where sugar maples grew, cedar was used to make the spouts for the sap to drip from the trees.



Deities that reside in cedar protecting the people. In multiple legends spanning many Native American cultures, the cedar is said to house a deity or powerful spirit that will protect the people. For example, in the Mandan myth "First Creator and Lone Man," Lone Man, who helped First Creator create the world, is born into the flesh. Before he leaves his people, he tells them to erect a cedar pole as a totem and paint it red. This cedar is his body, and it will protect the people from all harm. In another tale, this one from an unknown tribe, Mother-Corn, who was the first ear of corn grown out of the sky, leads her people through many trials and tribulations to come to their lands and to receive the gifts of medicine and magic. When they arrive at their final destination, she transforms into a cedar tree to be with them always.

Human souls can be contained within cedar. In a Cherokee legend, the Cherokee people asked to have daylight always, then to have nighttime always, and the Creator granted them their request. When it became night, many of them died of starvation. They finally beseeched the creator to return the balance of day and night, and the Creator did so. But the Creator was sad for the loss of the people, so the Creator created a new tree—the cedar—and placed the spirits of the departed in the tree. The Cherokee, therefore, believe that their ancestors reside in the cedar. In a Squamish story, "The Lure in Stanley Park," the Creator, Sagalie Tyree, transforms good humans into trees so that they can go on benefiting humans after death.

In several stories of the Passamaquoddy and Micmac peoples, people who are seeking long life are transformed into cedar trees by medicine men or deities (often for making a foolish request—you get what you ask for, literally).

Cedar as creation and transformation agent. In one Cherokee story, "The Beginning of Time," the Great Spirit took a pinch of cedar from his pocket and it turned into the animals. In several stories from the Pacific Northwest, cedar is carved into seals ("Blue Jay and His Companions")

or fish ("Natsilane") and the carvings are transformed into real animals who are able to follow instructions from the one who carved them. The Eskimo people in "Raven's Great Adventure" also describe the extensive use of carved figures and totem poles to help illustrate the history of their people. Whether or not eastern white cedar was used in this way is unclear clear from the stories I reviewed—stories about carvings seem to be set primarily in the Pacific Northwest.

Cedar connected to the element of fire and the sun. It is no secret that cedar has a strong connection to fire; this is consistent between material in the Western esoteric traditions and Native lore. In a Tsimshian legend, "Walks All Over the Sky," the sky was dark until one of the Sky Chief's children made a mask out of cedar in the shape of a ring. He lit the mask on fire and then walked from east to west. When he slept after his journey each day, sparks flew from his mouth, and these were the stars. So in this way, cedar is connected with the sun itself. In several legends, Coyote, a trickster, creates a torch of cedar, which is usually attached to his tail and lights his path, often burning things on the way ("Coyote as a Hunter," Sia legend). Coyote is often found with fire in these tales, either doing tricks or learning to use them ("Bat and Coyote," NezPerce).

Cedar as cleansing, protective, and "the great medicine." Talking sticks can be made out of many woods in the Americas; a cedar talking stick represents cleansing ("Traditional Talking Stick"). Likewise, cedar is used extensively in ceremonial work in lodges and other ceremonies for purification (Indian Prayer on Christmas Day). In a Hopi birth ritual, a newborn is repeatedly washed in cedar tea and rubbed in cornmeal before being presented to the community (Birth Ritual, Hopi). In another story from the Yuchi people, "In the Beginning," in the process of the world being created, a large monster comes and kills many Yuchis. They sever its head, but it returns to life with its head intact and again kills people. They sever its head again, placing it on an unnamed tree so the body can't reach the head. The tree is found dead, the monster has his head back, and he is killing again. Finally, they kill the monster again, sever its head, and stick it on a cedar tree. The cedar is found alive with the blood of the dead monster's head. The Yuchi call the cedar the "great medicine."

Cedar as a transforming agent. In stories from the Sia and Apache ("Fox and the Deer"), the Deer places her fawns next to a cedar fire that is cracking and popping, and the sparks burn the spots on her fawns. Fox, in one story, and Coyote, in the other, are envious of the Deer's beautiful offspring and build large cedar fires and end up burning up their young.

Conifers hold the promise of spring. We see this in the legends of the cedars who hold the souls of the ancestors. But we also see this in the Seneca legend "How the Conifers Show the Promise of Spring," where White Pine and his tribe stand against the winter as the eternal promise of spring. They drink a magical oil that allows them to keep the tribe green throughout the winter—and one of the tribe is cedar.

Magical flutes and ceremonial drums made of cedar. Cedar was the wood for magical flutes of many kinds—a flute made from a "storm struck" cedar was very powerful for wooing women ("The Story of Mink"). In a Sioux tale ("Legend of the Flute") a man is led by a woodpecker to a hollow

cedar branch and is taught how to make a flute, which is also used to woo the chief's daughter. In an Iroquois tale, Okteondon, who is a great hunter, receives a hunting flute that allows him to know what game to hunt and where to find it. Once, he leaves his flute at home and is magically trapped by an evil woman on a cliff; when Okteondon is injured, the mouthpiece of the flute is covered in blood. The cedar tree comes to Okteondon in a dream and shows him how to use a cedar twig to grow a great cedar tree, which he can climb to get off the cliff.

My Experiences and Insights

My experiences with the eastern white cedar began when I was first looking to purchase a house after moving to Michigan six years ago. As I was examining a swampy area on a property, I came across a beautiful fallen tree with peeling bark, intricate leaf patterns, and tiny cones. That tree, which I later identified as eastern white cedar, was returning to the swamp in a most graceful and dignified fashion. Even after it had fallen, it had a powerful presence about it. I sat with the tree for a moment, inspecting its beautiful reddish trunk and soft evergreen fronds, and wanted to know more about the mystery tree. That this tree had power over life and death seemed apparent.

When I finally found the right property to purchase, a hedgerow of eastern white cedars (clearly planted there by someone thirty or so years before) greeted me. Back in the last third of an acre, however, a giant pile of cut cedars (many with trunks intact) also were present—and the land was angry about the cutting. As I learned more about the property and discovered its history, I learned that about an acre of cedars were cut because the previous owners "didn't like the trees." I dug the logs out of the brush pile as best I could and used them for fence posts, carving, natural building, chicken coops, and more. As I used the wood and left other piles of it to return to the land as the land instructed me, the land's anger over the previous cuttings subsided, and my relationship with the cedars grew exponentially. This taught me an important lesson about the eastern white cedar—and all trees. We need to build, and rebuild, our relationships with them—our individual relationships, certainly, but also humanity's relationship with the trees. They will not just automatically like us because we call ourselves Druids or walk into the forest. Rather, we must build relationships with them over time.

Cedar is one of those trees that seems warm at all times of the year. I have found them, in permaculture design terms, to make a wonderful heat trap to catch and store energy—I have a hedgerow of eastern white cedars north of my organic veggie garden. They trap the sun with their thick foliage and warm up the beds closest to them. I can usually plant in the beds closest to those cedars several weeks earlier than the other beds—I was planting carrots next to the cedars while there was still a foot of snow on the beds on the other side of the garden.

Wand crafting and woodworking is another way that I have worked with eastern white cedar. The wood is very soft and workable, and for a new woodworker, quite forgiving. I made myself shower curtain rods and curtain rods for my home from some of the cedar I found discarded on my property. The other thing I made were wands—cedar wands seem to possess great fire energy, energy of making and doing, masculine energy of projection. I used both branches and roots for

this work, and the branches seem to contain more solar energy, while the roots have more telluric energy. All are easy to work with hand tools alone (wood carvers, saws, sandpaper).

Eastern White Cedar Smudges and Fire Starting

An organic farmer friend of mine who specializes in herbs taught me how to make smudge sticks from our local eastern white cedar. If you use the cedar branches when they are fresh or just when they are first dried, they smell wonderful but literally crackle and pop when you burn them due to all of the volatile oils—which is a bit of a fire hazard, but also can kind of be fun depending on how you are using them. However, if you hang cedar in your house for a few months and let it dry, the oils slowly dry out, and then you can make your smudge sticks. The sticks at this point will smoke beautifully and smell wonderful. To cedar smudge sticks, I often add other locally harvested or garden herbs: mugwort, sage, lavender, yarrow, sweet clover, juniper, or rosemary.

Fire Starting Using Eastern White Cedar

Outdoor fires are much easier to start if you have an eastern white cedar nearby. First, the bark itself is fantastic kindling—I often peel off and make a small nest of cedar bark that I can throw a spark into (using traditional methods) or light with a match (using more conventional methods). The nice thing about using cedar bark as kindling is that it is nearly always dry on at least one face of the tree.

The other aid that eastern white cedar gives us in terms of fire is the high amount of volatile oils present in the fronds, branches, and wood. Cedar fronds—even ones that are picked right from the tree—will generally burn with ease. If you can find some dry branches and fronds, put them on your fire as it is getting going, and the fire will roar, crackle, and pop, and will be extremely hot. Like all things that burn that hot, they do not burn long, so you'll want to keep that in mind when feeding the fire.

As a reminder, any evergreen trees should be burned in outdoor fires only, as the saps can build up dangerously in a chimney and cause a chimney fire.

Conclusion: Working with the Magical Trees of the Americas

This article has only scratched the surface of researching the sacred trees in the Americas. We can cultivate relationships with trees as part of our AODA daily and weekly practices in many ways. While the information above can get you started, there is no substitute for direct experience

and developing your own relationship with each species and each individual tree. Planting young trees (another AODA practice) also allows us to deepen our connection.

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Walking the Earth, Sun, and Moon Paths with Elder

Claire L. Schosser

Claire Schosser is a gardener and home herbalist as well as a Druid Apprentice in the AODA. She and her husband, Michael Gaillard, live on an acre of land a few miles from the confluence of the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers. When she's not gardening, doing her Druid practices, or living the rest of her life, Claire blogs as SLClaire at Living Low in the Lou (http://livinglowinthelou.blogspot.com/).

Druids within the AODA tradition follow three paths: the Earth Path of studying and working with nature as she expresses herself where we live; the Sun Path of celebrating the seasonal cycle; and the Moon Path of meditation. These paths connect at different points. Working intensively with a particular plant—in my case, elder—offers an opportunity to walk down each path and appreciate where they connect, and where each connects with us. In this article I describe how I have walked with elder, as a model for how you might walk with it or with a plant or animal of your choosing to deepen your understanding of the Paths and the connections between them and with yourself.

Elders are one of my favorite plants. I appreciate their beauty, their ecological role, and the flowers and berries they provide for my household and other inhabitants of this land. Through elder's association with the Ogham few Ruis, it resonates with those of us who practice Revival Druidry. Much folklore surrounds elders and they are included in the herbals of many places where they grow. An excellent wine can be made from their berries, which I use in my seasonal celebrations.

If you live in a temperate or subtropical climate, there is most likely at least one species of elder that grows in your area. You can develop a relationship with your local elders in many ways, some of which I describe below.

Ecological Elder

The elder species I walk with is *Sambucus canadensis*, American elder, found in eastern North America and west to about the Central Plains states (Thayer, 2010). It bears black fruits in flat-topped clusters (Kurz, 1997). Some botanists consider American elder and other black- and blue-berried species to be subspecies of European elder, *S. nigra* (Sambucus, 2015). In western North America you are more likely to find the blue elder, *S. cerulea*, from this species complex (Sambucus, 2015; Thayer, 2010). It has dark blue fruits with a white bloom.

Another group of elder species has red fruits. In North America, two such red-fruited species are *S. callicarpa* and *S. pubens* (aka *S. racemosa*). Thayer (2010) notes that the red-berried species must be harvested and prepared differently from the black- and blue-berried species. Please check his excellent treatment for information on safely preparing and eating both kinds of

elder, especially if you will be working with a red-berried species.

Britton, N.L., and A. Brown. 1913. An illustrated flora of the northern United States, Canada and the British Possessions. 3 vols. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York.

Most of the elders, including the American elder that I walk with, express themselves as large deciduous shrubs or small trees. In my home state of Missouri, elders can grow up to 8 meters (about 26 feet) tall (my two plants are about 3 meters, or 10 feet, tall) and are common across the state (Kurz, 1997). I see them most often in moist places, especially in ditches next to roads and railroads, but they grow in open woods, thickets, and prairies and next to streams as well. In Missouri they are a characteristic shrub species of streambanks and riverbanks (Nelson, 2005). They bloom as early as late May but more usually in June, later than most other shrubs and trees bloom in this area. For me elder is one of the defining flowering plants of Alban Heruin, the summer solstice, when it is in bloom most years. The flower clusters serve as a specialist nectary for beneficial insects (Jacke, 2005). The berries ripen to a reddish purple or reddish black in color. Ripening usually occurs during the first half of August in my garden, but plants in the wild may ripen their berries later. The berries are eaten by about forty-five species of birds as well as raccoons, squirrels, and humans (Kurz, 1997).

Older references place the elders in the family Caprifoliaceae, a family among whose other members in Missouri are the honeysuckles and viburnums (Yatskievych, 2006). Recently elders and viburnums have been reclassified into the Adoxaceae family based on morphological and biochemical analysis (Adoxaceae, 2013).

To develop a relationship with the ecological aspect of elder, you could research the elder species that grow where you live, which can be part of your Earth Path work. Learn how elders look, when they flower, and when they fruit. Look for them during the time that they flower, when they are most conspicuous and beautiful. Once you find them, take some time to stand nearby or

under them. Smell the flower clusters. Note what insects can be seen within the flower clusters or flying around them and what birds or other animals might be using the plant as shelter. Come back later in the year, when the berries are ripe. Note what birds and animals are feeding on the berries. Watch the elders at different times during the course of a year to learn who their companion plants and animals are and how they interact with each other. This kind of study can be part of your weekly nature observation as you walk the Earth Path.

Druidic and Folk Elder

In Revival Druidry, elder is the tree associated with the Ogham few Ruis (Greer, 2006). This few's association with healing fits well with elder's herbal uses, which I discuss in the next section.

Mrs. Grieve (1931) recounts many folk beliefs about elder in her book *A Modern Herbal*. Elder was supposed to ward off evil influence and protect against witches, among other beliefs. In many countries, particularly Denmark, elder was intimately connected with magic. In Denmark, one could protect oneself against the devil on January 6 by making a magic circle and standing at the center while holding elderberries gathered on the previous St. John's eve (June 23). A dryad or female tree spirit, Hylde-Moer, the Elder-Tree Mother, was believed to live in the elder, watching over it and protecting it from harm (Grieve, 1931). A belief still current among some people in England when Mrs. Grieve wrote is that it is bad luck to cut down an elder or to use it as firewood unless the tree has been asked for and has given her permission first. In medieval Europe, elder was believed to be the tree from which the apostle Judas hung himself in grief after his betrayal of Jesus (Grieve, 1931).

Although elder has a long history of association with people, in the present day few seem to be aware of it. The only popular culture reference to elder that I know of is its role in the play *Arsenic and Old Lace* (2015b) by Joseph Kesselring, written in 1939, and the film of the same name (*Arsenic and Old Lace*, 2015a) that was adapted from the play. In the play and film, two spinster aunts of the main character, Mortimer Brewster, murder lonely old men with a glass of homemade elderberry wine laced with arsenic, strychnine, and a pinch of cyanide. Wikipedia's entry on the play mentions that the murderous aunts may have been based on a real-life murderer, Amy Archer-Gilligan, who was convicted of poisoning one patient in the nursing home she ran and who probably murdered an unknown number of other patients as well (*Arsenic and Old Lace*, 2015b). Elderberry wine may have been used as the murder weapon in the play because it was commonly made and drunk at the time or had been within the memory of many people and because it has a strong flavor that could conceivably mask the bitterness of the poisons.

Those of you who wish to develop a relationship with the Druidic and folk aspects of elder might search the phrase "elderberry folklore," which will turn up many websites. You could meditate on the various aspects of Ruis and perhaps connect them to what you notice about elder's role in the ecosystem (this can be part of your Moon Path work). Asking family members and friends if they have heard of folk beliefs or superstitions concerning elder might turn up something in-

teresting. You could also watch the film *Arsenic and Old Lace* or a theater production of it to learn something of elder's role in pop culture.

Gardening Elder

I enjoy growing plants, a classic Earth Path activity, for many reasons: for the joy of it; to increase the diversity of our land and the ecosystem surrounding it; and to provide food and herbs for our use. Elders are among the easiest shrubs to grow. They can be established from wild suckers or purchased plants. They can handle a wide range of soil conditions and light levels. They require little care other than light pruning and removal of suckers when they pop up someplace where you don't want them, and they seem to thrive in close association with humans, in a hedgerow or as dooryard plants. Our elders grow near the sidewalk from the driveway to the door we use most often and where I can see them and their companion animals as I wash the dishes. In this position they guard our patio from being seen from the street and stand guard over the herb bed next to the patio as well. My sense is that elder would welcome more people to use her near their houses, in accordance with her ability to act as a source of magical protection when planted in that way (Greer, 2000).

You'll need two genetically different plants to obtain berries, as elders require cross-pollination to set fruit. Named cultivars such as 'York,' 'Adams,' and 'Johns' will pollinate each other and may offer larger fruit or earlier ripening compared to wild plants. If you can find wild plants in the right area, however, you can obtain plants for free. My two plants began life as suckers from patches growing in a shallow ditch along the railroad a few blocks from our house. One spring day in 2004, as I was walking along the path next to the ditch, I noticed that the ground was the right moisture level to allow me to pull up some suckers. I removed five suckers, walked for the fifteen or so minutes back home with the suckers' roots out in the air, and as soon as I could upon returning home, dug the plants into a patch of soil where I could keep an eye on them. I did nothing else, trusting in their will to grow. Two of them did, and those two plants have fruited every year for the past several years, with no further attention beyond pruning, sucker removal, and some watering during the severe drought of 2012.

If you want to develop a personal relationship with elder, adding it to your garden is one of the best ways to do that. Planting elder might qualify for your tree-planting requirement for AODA's Degree of Apprentice, or you might plant it as you continue studies for higher degrees and throughout your Druidry practice. Watching your elder grow, flower, and fruit could offer many opportunities for nature study and contemplation for your degree work and throughout your life.

Eating Elderberries and Making Elderberry Wine

You'll need to correctly identify any elders from which you harvest flowers or berries and know how to prepare and use them properly before using the flowers or berries as an ingredient in foods or drinks. This is itself an expression of the Earth Path, as Paul Angelini (2014) notes, and

will heighten your awareness of the world around you, how it works, and how you can work with it. I use the American elder, so all the information I give below pertains to this species.

A friend of mine makes elder flower fizz (a slightly fizzy drink) from fresh elder flower clusters. It has a mild floral taste that I enjoy. Check cookbooks or the Internet for recipes—I have not made any of this myself.

Years ago I ate some raw berries from my plants; they were edible but not tasty. I have not eaten any raw berries since then. Cooking the berries renders them much more palatable. I have added elderberries to muffin batter and replaced the zucchini in a zucchini bread recipe with an equal quantity of elderberries, both to good effect.

To my taste, the best use of elderberries is to make wine from them. The wine is delicious and it should offer activity similar to elderberry juice for herbal purposes. I prefer the wine because it lasts several years in household conditions and it tastes better as it ages. If you prefer to avoid alcohol, you can make juice from elderberries using a recipe from Cech (2000) or Buhner (2013).

Producing and drinking elderberry wine is a part of both the Earth Path and the Sun Path for me. When I drink wine made from our elders, I am incorporating a bit of the land I live on into myself, a very concrete expression of the vital connection between the land and me. I especially enjoy drinking our homegrown and homemade elderberry wine during seasonal rituals for this reason.

Terry Garey's (1996) book *The Joy of Home Winemaking* provides an excellent introduction to the art as well as many recipes and is a delight to read. I recommend Garey's book to anyone who wants to make elderberry or any other homemade wine for these reasons. I will describe Garey's winemaking process briefly, highlighting the places where my husband, Mike, our household's principal winemaker, has made changes to better use what we have on hand and to minimize newly purchased equipment. This is itself an aspect of the Earth Path (Greer, 2006). I joined Mike in making wine from the 2014 crop of elderberries and bottling the 2013 vintage as I wrote this article. For Garey's actual wine recipe, you can refer to his book (due to copyright restrictions).

In order to make a gallon (about four liters) of wine from whole fruit such as elderberries, you'll conduct two separate fermentations. In the primary fermentation, wine yeast eats most of a sweetener that you add to the elderberries, producing alcohol and carbon dioxide in the process. Like all fruits other than wine grapes, elderberries do not have sufficient natural sugar to produce enough alcohol to keep the wine from spoiling prematurely. We must add a sweetener, usually sugar or honey, to produce enough alcohol to make good wine.

After about a week of primary fermentation, when most of the sugar or honey has been consumed, you'll drain the wine off the mass of fruit and dead yeast at the bottom of the container, transferring the wine to a gallon jug. Now the wine undergoes further fermentation, in which the remaining sweetener is consumed and other reactions take place that result in a better-tasting

wine. After about a year in the gallon jug undergoing secondary fermentation, you'll drain the wine into bottles in which the wine is stored until you drink it.

Garey suggests using a large plastic container with an air lock for the primary fermentation. After many batches of wine, Mike has found that a three-gallon stainless steel stockpot with a stainless steel lid works as well as a plastic bucket with an air lock for the primary fermentation container. I think a three-gallon ceramic pot with a glass lid would also work as a primary fermenter. You cannot use an aluminum pot to do the primary fermentation, because wine is acidic enough to eat holes in aluminum. You must also avoid using an enameled pot because the wine will corrode the metal anyplace where the enamel coating is not intact.

Garey suggests using Campden tablets (sodium metabisulfite) for sanitizing the equipment, fermenters, and bottles, to ensure that nothing besides the yeast tries to eat the sweetener or elderberries or can get into the finished wine to spoil it. We prefer to use a solution of household bleach in water, due to its ready availability. You must rinse everything that is sanitized with bleach thoroughly with tap water so your wine will not taste of bleach.

You'll need some specialized equipment and supplies for winemaking, as Garey describes. The minimum in specialized equipment is an air lock for the secondary fermentation; a bung (a stopper that fits into the gallon glass jug with a hole through the center in which the bottom end of the air lock may be inserted); a bottle brush for cleaning bottles and gallon jugs; a nylon straining bag to hold the fruit during the primary fermentation; a siphon tube (clear plastic tubing about three feet [one meter] long) to transfer the wine; a packet of Montrachet yeast; and the smallest amount of acid blend, yeast nutrient, and pectic enzyme that is available for purchase. All of these can be found at local or online vendors of home winemaking equipment and supplies.

Finally, you'll need a gallon glass jug for the secondary fermentation and enough bottles to hold the finished product. With a little effort you can obtain them for free if you don't already have them. If you or someone you know buys fruit juice in gallon glass jugs, you can clean and reuse the jug for the secondary fermentation. You can reuse wine or liquor bottles with screwon caps to store your wine. You might want to jot down notes as you make the wine (your Druid journal would be a good place to keep notes, or you can use a separate notebook, recipe card file, or electronic device for this purpose). Having notes will help you troubleshoot if something goes wrong, although it most likely won't if you follow the recipe and directions and properly sanitize all the equipment you use.

You'll need three pounds (about 1.4 kilograms) of ripe elderberries to make one gallon (about four liters) of wine. Follow the usual precautions when you are gathering wild foods for your consumption (Thayer, 2010): make sure you are actually harvesting elderberries; make sure they are ripe; and make sure they are safe (don't gather next to well-traveled roads or other places where pollutants might contaminate the berries). You'll also need permission to gather berries on that

Basket of freshly picked elder flowers. Photo by Dana O'Driscoll

land. If it's private land, ask the landowner. If it's public land, find out which entity owns it and check the regulations for the site to determine if it is legal to gather wild foods there.

In the right place at the right time, you'll have no trouble gathering three pounds of berries. My two plants yielded more than six pounds this year and have given over nine pounds in previous years. The berries ripen unevenly during a two- or three-week period. If you have only a few hours to pick berries, find a place with lots of plants that have ripe berries on them. A five-gallon bucket makes a convenient container to hold berry clusters (Thayer, 2010).

Then you'll need to remove the berries from the stems. Mike and I do this by hand, but if you have enough freezer space, try Thayer's trick of freezing the clusters and then rubbing them between your hands over a large bowl to catch the berries. You can freeze the berries in a plastic bag until you are ready for them.

When it is time to make a gallon of wine, follow Garey's recipe (Garey,1996, p. 99).

Follow Garey's instructions for making wine from whole fruit (chapter 5), using a stainless steel stockpot or ceramic pot for the primary fermentation. You should begin to see fizzing or foaming one to three days after you add the yeast, depending on the temperature in the room where you keep the fermenter. If your pot has a glass lid, cover it with a large paper bag to keep out light.

After a week or so has passed and the fermentation is slowing down, transfer the fermenting wine from the pot into the gallon glass jug using the clear plastic tube to siphon the wine from the pot to the jug. We don't start the siphon by sucking on the tube, as Garey suggests. Instead, fill the (sanitized and rinsed) tube with tap water and hold it shut at both ends with clean thumbs. Put one end into the pot containing the wine, remove that thumb, and hold the end of the tube

below the surface of the wine with that hand. Lower the other end of the tube into the gallon jug, removing your thumb once the tube is below the top of the jug. The wine should begin to siphon into the jug. Keep watch on the end of the tube in the pot, moving it as needed so it stays below the surface of the wine but above the sediment at the bottom. Stop siphoning when you are about to siphon sediment as well as wine. After you've transferred the wine and added the bung and air lock to the gallon jug, you can pour off the remaining wine and the sediment into a glass jar, allow the sediment to settle, and pour off the wine into a cup and try it. (It will taste better after the secondary fermentation.) Also be certain to clean the pot in which you did the primary fermentation and the siphon tube as soon as possible, before the sediment dries on.

Store the gallon jug of wine in the darkest, coolest place available where you don't store anything that could contaminate the wine. We keep ours in a small closet in our basement that we call, rather grandly, the wine cellar. If the location is not dark most of the time, cover the jug with a paper bag to exclude light. Make a note to check the level of water in the air lock a minimum of once a month. Add more water if it gets low.

After about a year, bottle the wine by siphoning it into clean, sanitized bottles and storing them under the same conditions as you stored the wine during the secondary fermentation. We store the bottles upright rather than on their sides as Garey suggests. As soon as you finish bottling the wine, clean all the sediment out of the gallon jug, clean the siphon tube, and empty and clean the air lock so they are ready when you want to make another batch of wine. You can begin to drink the wine now; it will improve as it ages.

Elderberry wine has a beautiful deep red color and a strong, somewhat tannic flavor that appeals to people who like similarly flavored red grape wines. As elderberry wine ages, the flavor continues to mellow. Someone who thinks one-year-old elderberry wine is a little too harsh might well enjoy it once it is two years old. Three-year-old elderberry wine is even better!

Garey includes recipes for making wine from a wide variety of fruits and some vegetables and herbs as well. Any of these wines could become part of your Earth or Sun paths. We have made wines from peaches, Nanking cherries, rose hips, Concord grapes, and spearmint as well as elderberries. While we find that our rose hip wine is best used for cooking, all the rest have distinctive and delicious flavors.

If you enjoy making wine, you can scale up to making a few gallons at a time by obtaining larger stockpots and by doing the secondary fermentation in two-, three-, or five-gallon glass carboys or in as many gallon jugs as are needed. We have found glass carboys at thrift stores and yard sales, though they are not a common item. You can purchase them new from retailers of home winemaking equipment. We don't make more than two or three gallons of wine at a time because we don't want to handle anything that holds more liquid than that. Each gallon of wine weighs over seven pounds and the carboys are heavy too.

An excellent alternative to the nylon straining bag is a steam juicer, which we've used for making wine the last few years. We load clean fruit into the juicer basket, add about half of the

sweetener, steam out the juice according to the instructions that come with the steam juicer (it takes about two hours using our juicer), drain the juice into a sanitized stockpot for the primary fermentation, add enough tap water to make the right amount of gallons of wine for the weight of fruit we juiced, add the remaining sweetener, and stir till all the sweetener dissolves. The rest of the procedure is the same. The steam juicer, as its name implies, is a multipurpose tool, good for much else besides making wine.

Choosing A Plant Or Animal To Walk With

Suppose you would like to walk the paths with a particular plant or animal but are unsure how to choose a candidate. You could begin by considering any plants or animals you had a connection with as a child. Many of us played with dandelion flowers, for instance. Did you pick the flowers and rub them under a sibling's or friend's chin or pick off the flower petals while saying a verse? Did you blow off the seeds when they developed? You already have some notion of the folk uses of dandelion. Now you can learn about dandelion's ecological role, culinary and herbal uses (dandelion flowers may be made into wine), and properties as a garden plant. Or go on a hike in a natural area or on a walk through a nearby park or public garden and pay attention to the plants or animals you see; perhaps one will stand out to you or call your attention to it in some way. If you don't already know what it is, see if you can identify it and then research it as I did with elder. If you have a garden, you could include a plant that you have connected with, or try to develop the garden so it attracts an animal species of interest. Or you could use the Ogham fews as a starting point, especially if you are developing a version of the fews for the place where you live (Wiyninger, 2014). It may be that one of the plants you research seems to resonate with you; if so, you can work with it in the ways suggested above. However you choose or are chosen by a plant or animal, happy walking.

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Traversing the Earth Path: Impressions and Reflections from the Landscape

Paul Angelini

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"Reading about nature is fine, but if a person walks in the woods and listens carefully, he can learn more than what is in books, for they speak with the voice of God."—George Washington Carver

"If thou but settest foot on this path, thou shalt see it everywhere."—Hermes Trismegistus

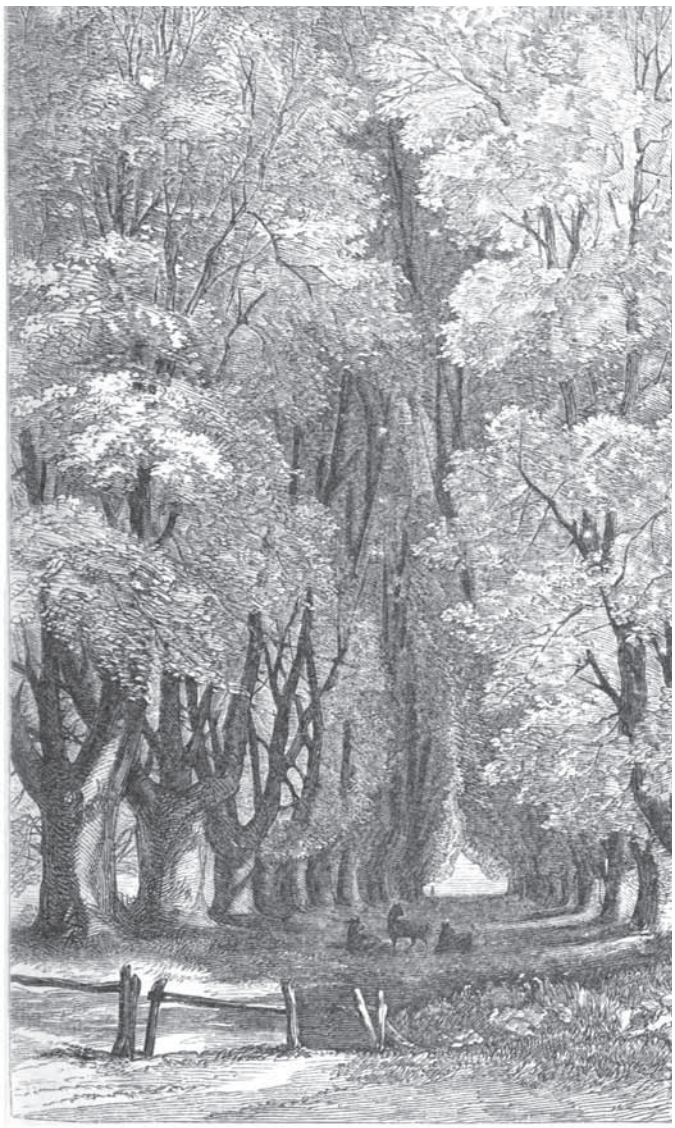
Opening Meditation

Imagine yourself deep within a lush old-growth forest. You are surrounded by countless trees of immense girth and height towering overhead. An earthy and faintly sweet aroma permeates the air all around you: it is the fresh, enlivening outbreath of the wise old forest. The whole environment you find yourself in is teeming with life, from the depths of the dark, rich soil to the tops of the majestic, ancient trees; life is everywhere all around. You suddenly find yourself drawn to an old oak tree a few yards ahead of you, silently beckoning you to it.

As you draw near, you glance up and notice a mighty hawk flying high in the clear, blue skies above the treetops. Inspired by this sight, you arrive at the base of the wise and mighty oak, who greets you as a gentle breeze rattles its leaves. In a state of awe, you seat yourself on the spongy forest floor near the base of the tree and gaze up at this majestic and wise elder of the forest. You are enlivened by the vitalizing energies of this incredible living being who has witnessed many things. It has lived longer than all humans alive on this planet, and it will long outlive us again. In this state of stillness, the forest speaks to you, transmitting secrets ordinarily concealed from the average hiker.

You now become aware of moss growing along the bark of this wise old tree, as you focus your attention on it. A beautiful array of patterns on the bark of the tree captures your attention. After a few moments, you notice tiny insects crawling across here and there, weaving in and around the gaps in the bark, thus reminding you of the interconnectedness of all living things. Your eyes then meet with the infinitely patient moss, who in its own time grows across the surface of the oak ever so slowly, weaving a living green canvas of remarkable beauty like a beard adorning the tree.

Enchanted, you reach a profound realization or state of gnosis: the Earth is a living, breathing, sentient being, and host to an infinite array of life-forms, unfolding in an infinite number of processes, and expressed through an infinite variety of forms and functions—including you. After some time passes, you bow and thank the mighty oak for imparting its wisdom when, from high up, it drops an acorn in front of you, which you receive as a consecrated token of this transmission, and make your return to the mundane world. From this journey into the ancient forest, your inner world has subtly, yet powerfully transformed, as you have been made privy to some of the mysteries of nature in the depths of the woods, in a mystical grove where the Secret Chiefs live on.



LIME AVENUE NEAR BRAMBRIDGE.

From *English Forests and Forest Trees: Historical, Legendary, and Descriptive*. London: Ingram, Cooke, and Co., 1853.

Green Wisdom: The Earth Path of the AODA

In the AODA, all candidates practice the Sun, Moon, and Earth paths. The first portion of the Earth Path requires one to spend at least 15 minutes or more each week in direct contact with the natural world, in a place such as a park, garden, overgrown vacant lot, or wild place (forest, seashore, etc.). One is to spend a portion in a state of stillness, sitting and keeping one's mind free of thoughts or distractions and being wordlessly aware of one's surroundings. The remaining portion is to be spent in a state of focus, which involves detailed attention to some specific thing, such as a wild plant, a tide pool, living things in a six-inch-square patch of grass, and the like.

In my previous article, "Finding the Awen in Field and Forest: Foraging and the Earth Path of the AODA" (Angelini, 2014), I used my background (or shall we say obsession) in foraging as a vehicle for enacting this first portion of the Earth Path. The purpose of the current essay is to further illustrate and describe Earth Path

connections in several ways. I provide descriptions of various natural landscapes, along with my own impressions and reflections. I also discuss the magic of the natural world and various ways we might reconnect with our landscape.

The Natural World: Her Magic and Mysteries

"We can assert with certainty that the universe is all centre, or that the centre of the universe is everywhere and its circumference is nowhere."—Giordano Bruno

Nature is everywhere and in everything. It is as much the phenomena of the farthest reaches of our known multiverse as it is the fish swimming in the stream. In outer space we have seen, with the aid of satellite imagery, the astounding expanse of the cosmos, its beauty and mystery. Images of the Milky Way, nebulas, and spiral galaxies evoke powerful emotions and questions about the nature of the universe. And yet there is something else there, something all around us that we can sense when looking into the heavens or walking into a forest. It is a force, an energy, a feeling that has captivated the attention of humans since the dawn of time, and has been the study, practice, and tradition of all peoples across the whole world—magic.

Since ancient times, humanity has long observed, pondered, and emulated the heavens above, like architects using a magical cosmic blueprint. At nightfall, while sitting around the fire, our ancient ancestors looked up with wonder into the vast and mighty heavens, their whole visual field encompassed by a profoundly beautiful view of the cosmos, free from the so-called light pollution that obscures our view of the heavens in this current age. As they sat there in stillness gazing up into the celestial canopy above, they took in the grandeur of the immeasurable beauty of the night sky, peppered with innumerable stars, a mysterious milky band stretching across the sky, and an equally mysterious, often luminous silver disc that hovered close to the Earth. They shifted their attention, and began focusing on specific groupings of stars, eventually mapping the phases of the Moon, the transit of Venus, and conceiving the zodiac and its associated myths and powers, among other things. The mysteries of the Sun, too, were similarly gleaned through careful methods of observation by early humans, as we see illustrated, for example, in the position and arrangement of sacred architecture across the globe, which in many cases, with great accuracy, maps out the position of our "heavenly father" during the solstices and equinoxes.

Equipped with the secret knowledge of the solar and lunar currents, our ancestors conceived and transmitted the mysteries from adept to neophyte in temples erected on Earth, often in certain places where the telluric, or Earth, energies coalesced. In these sacred temples, where the telluric currents were concentrated, candidates were initiated into what is known in the esoteric traditions as the Mysteries, wherein they were instructed in, among other things, the use of certain techniques for changing consciousness according to will, or magic. These magical techniques were formulated to produce certain effects on the mind, and in turn, the environment, and to this day, ancient energetic remnants still persist in many places.

All of this is to say that regardless of what tradition or current the Mysteries drew upon, all of the magical practices were conceived and employed on Earth. And on and around the Earth

below them, the ancients saw the same magical forces that animate the starry decked heaven manifesting and reflecting on Earth in all of its expressions, from mineral to vegetable, animal, and human, mankind being the microcosm, or complete multiverse in miniature. It is here on the terrestrial plane that our journey takes place.

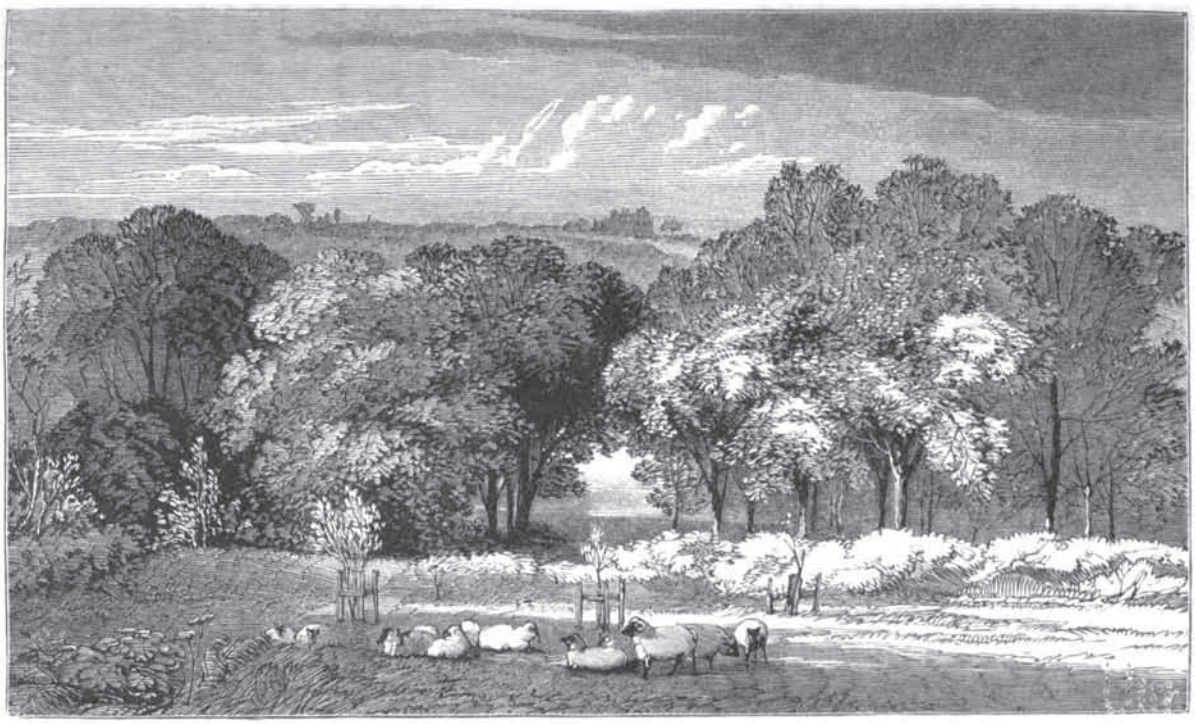
Planet Earth is our host and home, our very source of life, and we humans have been living upon on it for some considerable time, learning to adapt to a wide range of circumstances and environmental pressures that have influenced our evolutionary patterns and thus our consciousness. From another perspective, we have also been acting as the eyes and ears of the divine, enabling that invisible source which animates our corporeal form and all other life to experience itself on the physical plane of manifestation. We are as much a part of this planet as worms in the soil or the fish in the sea—yet we are more than just another resident sentient organism. The witty late philosopher Alan Watts (1960) illustrated this point when he wrote, "Look, here is a tree in the garden and every summer it produces apples, and we call it an apple tree because the tree 'apples.' That's what it does. Alright, now here is a solar system inside a galaxy, and one of the peculiarities of this solar system is that at least on the planet Earth, the thing peoples! In just the same way that an apple tree apples!" With this notion in mind, we may arrive at a better sense of place and belonging here on this planet and the magic within it.

From this terrestrial plane, humankind has also been witness, participant, and creator of innumerable magical rites and mysteries, conferring the secrets and wisdom of the ages in a wide variety of places such as caves, groves, and buildings. In fact, all systems of magic have their origins on this planet, even if the particulars of the system focus on powers celestial, astral, and so on, demonstrated by the simple fact that when we work magic, we are working it here on Earth and not, say, on the surface of the moon.

Now, not all magic need be ceremonial, done in full regalia with wands, smoking censers, athames, crystal balls, or obsidian mirrors. The magic of the natural world is all around us, from the dandelion seed floating through the air to the tiniest weed sprouting from a crack in the pavement, up to the tallest sequoia growing in the forests of California, and right down to the microscopic critters that make up soil biota. Many may not be able to see the magic unfolding around us, yet I believe that we may reawaken our magical sense of awe and wonder by traversing the Earth with a new set of eyes, so to speak, which I now explore.

Through Weaving Paths and Winding Rivers, Dusty Trails and Sandy Slopes

Many of us live within walking or driving distance of a natural landscape, be it a forest, park, river, ocean, stream, or our own backyard. For those living in urban environments, these natural places may be a city park or trees planted along a sidewalk. In these natural places, we can travel to and participate in Earth Path activities, and learn new ways to comprehend and appreciate the natural world. While the climate, terrain, flora, and fauna may differ greatly from place to place, a



VIEW IN HAINAULT FOREST.

From *English Forests and Forest Trees: Historical, Legendary, and Descriptive*. London: Ingram, Cooke, and Co., 1853.

common thread of experience ties them all together—that of magic and enchantment. The awe and of beauty of nature speaks through the whole of nature.

Amid the fast-paced American culture that surrounds us, with its fast "food," high-speed Internet, social media, texting, and selfies, we may provide ourselves solace by committing fifteen minutes of our time each week to engage in focus and stillness in one of our local natural places. A great majority of my Earth Path meditations have taken place in the ecologically diverse wild places of southeastern Michigan, although recent travel has afforded me new experiences in unfamiliar territory such as Colorado and Arizona. In the following pages, I explore some of the various environments of the United States and their basic features, along with my own energetic impressions.

Forests

Forest environments, like other ecosystems, are an invaluable feature of our planet and are home to countless life-forms, both macro- and microscopic, vegetable and animal. Forests comprise roughly 33 percent of the total land area of the United States (Hooke & Martín-Duque, 2012), and the resident trees in a forest provide humans and countless other animals and life-forms with a component essential to their continued existence—oxygen. Different types of forest

have particular features (e.g., tropical, temperate, deciduous, evergreen) and therefore their own particular energetic signatures.

I have found myself drawn to older and old-growth forests where the trees have been around longer than any person alive. The presence, or energy, of these places is deeply rejuvenating and healing for me, and I often feel renewed from the experience of being among the wise elders. For example, I recently had the great pleasure of visiting a remarkable old-growth hemlock forest in western Pennsylvania with great company. A beautiful stream flowed along the forested pathway leading up to the place where the wise ones reside, which was most welcoming. Upon entering the hemlock grove, I was immediately enchanted by the mighty trees that towered overhead. The forest smelled of vital earthiness and was positively charged with magic and mystery. There was so much beauty to behold everywhere and it proved to be a wonderful place to meditate.

Deserts

Often characterized by barren soil and sand, and populated by shrubs, bushes, occasional trees and grasses, deserts are hostile environments for animal and plant alike. The mind conjures images of thorny cacti dotting the landscape under the dry heat of the afternoon sun as a tumbleweed rolls across red soil. In this environment, conservation of water is critical, as annual precipitation is minimal, hence the adaptation of the flora and fauna to such conditions. In these barren landscapes, the element of fire manifests prominently in the landscape. Amid the searing heat and dry winds, there is great beauty to be found in the variety of life-forms who call these places home.

In my travels through Arizona, I spent a week camping in the deserts of Sedona, on a roadside campsite a few miles outside of the New Age–saturated town. I was amazed by the number of colorful, often strongly aromatic desert flowers found growing there, showing that life still prevails even in the most inhospitable of conditions. Each morning, before sunrise, I would make my way behind our campsite and walk a few hundred yards or so to an area that was out of view of the road and other campsites to perform the Sphere of Protection and other rituals. Along the way, I was greeted by these attractive flowers, which seemed to glow against the backdrop of the arid soil, and I would stop and spend time simply appreciating their presence. After my morning rituals, I would stand and take in the desert landscape in all its vast, thorny, and scorched beauty. The hot, active element of the Sun was prevalent in the environment, as it expressed itself through the dry, searing heat, thorny plants, and parched soil. Despite the high temperatures, for the most part, I found the experience quite enlivening and felt like I was able to absorb some of the fiery energy manifesting all around me.

Grasslands

Grasslands are areas in which the predominant vegetation is grasses of varying heights and may also include plants from the Juncaceae (rush) and Cyperaceae (sedge) families. They are found on all continents, with the exception of Antarctica, while some of the largest are the African savannas. Many of us are familiar with the sight of grass-loving animals such as cattle or horses,

grazing on green pastures, and have enjoyed seeing such sights while driving through rural countrysides. These often fertile environments present excellent opportunities for agriculture, with a great deal of the North American prairie being dedicated to such purposes, albeit recently often using an industrial model.

In these fertile grounds, I have spent a great deal of time foraging year-round. There is a magical polycultural grassland environment close to my home where I have spent many hours foraging for food and medicine and meditating in the process. I have generally found the energy of such places to be invigorating, calming, and grounding, with a strong presence of the element of air, illustrated plainly by stalks of grass swaying in a gentle breeze. In these places, I have found many enjoyable opportunities to sit and be still, quietly gazing at a sea of brambles and grasses, punctuated by glorious patches of yarrow, goldenrod, and St. John's wort. In the grasslands, the richness and fecundity of Earth is stirred to movement by the element of air.

Mountains

Resulting from a variety of geological processes involving plate tectonics, these mighty, venerable land formations have both fascinated and frightened human beings for all of recorded history, as noted in the myth and lore of Mt. Shasta, and records of the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius. Mountains have long attracted wayward mystics, thrill-seeking rock climbers, archaeologists, scientific researchers, and so on. While not always conducive to agriculture, many mountain ranges have proven to be excellent environments for raising livestock animals, such as goats, and for growing a wide variety of food crops.

While in the beautiful little ski town of Crested Butte, Colorado, I had one of my first encounters with the mighty, expansive Rocky Mountains. While circumstances did not permit me to hike up any of the mountains, I spent a great deal of time meditating upon them on a daily basis. Staring up at the Rockies, I felt as if I was at the feet of great masters who are wise as they old (and large, for that matter). The energy I sensed from them was positively grounded and solid, accompanied by a sense of focus or concentration, much like the crest of a mountain, which I would attribute to the air element. I also felt a certain distinct energy contained within the mountains, an active inner spirit that makes not just masses of rock, but living stones.

Aquatic

Water is an abundant element on our planet, as our oceans contain 97 percent of the Earth's water (NOAA, n.d.), with the remaining water on or below the surface of the continents. It's worth noting that of the available fresh water on the planet, a surprisingly small percentage of that is potable, or suitable for humans to drink. Aquatic environments manifest in a wide variety of forms, from ocean shorelines to lakes, rivers, streams, springs, swamps, bogs, and puddles. The element of water is the defining feature of these environments, which are host to a stunning diversity of life-forms, from massive humpback whales to tiny tadpoles. Some of you may recall from the writings of Paracelsus on the Elemental spirits (Paracelsus, [1536] 1894) that of the four

elements, the Undines, or water elementals, are said to most closely resemble human beings (and some very curious tales about them have been recorded throughout history).

A few years back, while on a visit to San Francisco, California, my dear friend and host took me to place near Ocean Beach, where we walked along the shore. We waded between two large masses of rock where the waves flowed in and out, taking in all of the magic of this remarkable place and its fascinating residents, such as sea cucumbers and starfish. The continual movement of the seawater, with its crashing waves, was very invigorating and gave me a feeling of incredible vastness. I contrast this to my countless experiences wading through Michigan swamps, where the energy is still quite active, but decidedly more grounded.

Urban

Whereas in other environments the resident flora, fauna, and terrain influence the flow, form, and function of the landscape, urban environments are largely defined and influenced by human activity. Today in America, urban environments are home for some 80.7 percent of the total population (US Census Bureau, 2012)—a remarkable figure, but certainly no surprise when we take into consideration that many jobs are based in cities. In creating these environments, the land's native vegetation is often sequestered in city parks, or in contained areas like sidewalks and street corners. While often being both the source and the sufferer of environmental pollution (think LA smog), urban environments may impose unique strains on those dwelling within them. They are, however, as much a part of nature as a forest (despite how unnatural they may appear to a country bumpkin), in that they rest upon and were built from raw materials of the Earth. While strolling along a city sidewalk, you may see evidence of those vital forces of the Earth rising up through the cracks in the form of so-called weeds, such as the majestic dandelion.

Generally speaking, I find many cities to be busy, dissonant, places that can be ungrounding and disruptive to one's health, mentally, physically, and spiritually. I would attribute this in one sense to the environmental degradation that results from their construction. In another sense, I would also attribute this to environmental pollution, both physical and spiritual, that those who live there consciously or unconsciously participate and live in—which, of course, is not exclusive to city dwellers, as evidence literally mounts in the form of garbage dumps built by the continual contributions of "waste" by city dweller and non–city dweller alike. It seems that city dwellers may be afflicted by a prevailing state of consciousness that creates a perceived envelope between themselves in the city, and the rest of the planet, as if they and their activities therein are somehow separate from the rest of the biosphere. By the same token, urban environments, with their innumerable rooftops and blacktop, hold the potential to become places that can produce a surprising amount of practical, useful goods and services and not consumer junk, such as city-grown produce, dairy, and honey, bike-powered taxi services, rooftop solar panel arrays, and hubs for community building.

While visiting a dear friend last year in Denver, Colorado, I had some remarkable experiences in a rather unlikely place. A few blocks from my friend's apartment, two-lane roads run along

residential blocks of homes, divided by a relatively densely wooded median. In these medians, we discovered a stand of hawthorn trees full of clusters of plump, ripe red fruits. Inspired, I returned to this place on several occasions while my friend was working and meditated in this beautiful natural corridor. In contrast to the bustling city life all around, I found the place to possess a protective quality and felt rejuvenated simply by standing beneath the numerous old, well-established trees. Along the sidewalks, also, I found many trees that I would stop by and appreciate while walking along, including several apple trees loaded with ripe, delicious fruits.

Blight of the Land, Plight of the Mind: Remedying the Disconnect from Nature

In the previous section I discussed a variety of environments on our living green planet where we can explore and enact Earth Path meditations, along with my own personal energetic impressions and reflections in such places. In this section, my focus shifts from the meditations of the Earth Path to issues that we are faced with today in our present age of disconnection from the earth, resulting in diminishing natural resources, dwindling fossil fuels, and a nation in the midst of its long descent into the age of industrial decline. I discuss a number of the problems that many of us contend with on a personal and collective scale, and explore a few of countless creative ways in which we can remedy the maladies of yesterday's empire and help plant seeds of hope for a better today and a more sustainable tomorrow.

Today, more than any earlier period in recorded human history, people are spending more time indoors than out. We've effectively boxed ourselves in—we live in boxes, drive our box to another box where we work, and drive our box back home, stopping at the big box store to buy food in boxes, and return to our box to unwind in front a box that broadcasts messages specifically formulated to reinforce the box-dwelling, box-thinking lifestyle. In fact, many modern Americans often interface with the natural world only when they begrudgingly mow their lawns, destroy "weeds," or fetch the mail, and the outdoors for them serves only as midway point between mailbox and house, or car and store. Even the political system is boxed in, with its left wing–right wing binary box designed to box people into a certain portion of the political spectrum (and state of consciousness, for that matter).

This box-dwelling, sedentary nature-deficient lifestyle comes with great cost not only to our bodies, but to all other levels of being, particularly our minds and spirits. There is now even a term that I find convenient to describe this rampant problem: nature-deficit disorder. The term was coined by American nonfiction author, journalist, and Audubon medal recipient Richard Louv in his 2006 book, *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder*. The term, while not officially recognized in the medical community, is a hypothesis that people, and most importantly children, are spending less and less time outdoors, which seems to be linked to a host of behavioral problems.

While some argue that Louv's theory is a misdiagnosis, I believe frequent interfacing with the natural world has a direct correlation to mental and physical health in humans. Much evidence

suggests that our immune systems are strengthened by taking in microbes from the soil and air, particularly for children who are quite fond of playing in the dirt. After all, everything we use and ingest comes from the outdoors. From the food we eat to the water we drink and the air we breathe, it all has its origins in the natural—even the raw materials used to manufacture plastics and electronics were sourced from the Earth.

What I personally think this all speaks to is a greater problem of industrialization on the societal scale, and we are now seeing its effects manifested more and more on the personal level, with individuals exhibiting various symptoms that arise from a culture and society disconnected from its roots and deprived of its nourishment. However, one way I believe we can remedy this problem is to establish new roots in the ancient Earth by getting outside and spending time in our local natural places and in connecting to the magic of the world (as described above). Also, while it's not the purpose of this article to discuss healing plants, it is interesting to note that many wild plants that grow in natural places have long been used by humans for food and health, particularly in disturbed areas, where we find plants such as dandelion and burdock growing.

FOREST SCENE—SUNSET.

From *English Forests and Forest Trees: Historical, Legendary, and Descriptive*. London: Ingram, Cooke, and Co., 1853.

Whereas some regions are more rich with natural resources such as state parks and wild places than others, there are often other ways folks can interface with the Earth. South-facing windows, for example, with an open view of the sun can provide a place to grow plants indoors, such as bamboo and even culinary herbs such as basil. Many plants require very little light and can fare quite well with just the light from lightbulbs, such as the *Sansevieria trifasciata*, commonly known as the snake plant. These little life-forms can give us a way to interface with nature directly in the comfort of our own dwelling space, along with providing a sense of responsibility for nature, albeit in isolation.

Many places in the United States today have numerous nature-oriented clubs and Meetup groups that sponsor group activities including wild food and mushroom hunting, hiking, kayaking, gardening, and the like. These groups can be discovered by simply searching the Internet or by talking to people at libraries, farmer's markets, and other places where people gather. In addition to skill building, these groups offer many other advantages, one of the greatest being the opportunity to network with like-minded individuals. By spending time with like-minded people, we may forge new bonds and befriend strangers, which in turn enrich our lives and deepen our commitment to what we've set our minds to.

From firsthand experience, I can extol the virtues of such groups, having for nearly three years, along with our own editor in chief and Druid Adept, Dana, and others, helped organize a Meetup group based around permaculture design, a design science originally developed in the 1960s by Bill Mollison and David Holmgren which is rooted in the observation and emulation of nature and natural processes, and applying those principles in all aspects of life, from managing a business, to organizing a room, to designing gardens and human settlements, and so on (see Mollison & Holmgren, 1981). Each month, we gather at the homes of various members, where a member shares or demonstrates a skill set that people may try on their own, such as vermicomposting (composting with worms), grafting fruit trees, seed starting, and much more. Afterward, we socialize, enjoy a potluck meal, build new connections, catch up with friends in our microcommunity, and generally enjoy one another's company. We also engage in what we call "permablitzes," which are effectively work parties where, for example, someone needs help installing and planting raised beds, and members come and lend the energy to help people accomplish these goals. Each and every month, I excitedly anticipate the next Meetup, the knowledge I will gain, and the wonderful experiences I will share in the company of my tribe of like-minded people.

Some of our greatest agents for lasting change are our youth, and I think one very effective way to provide them with an understanding of nature and natural processes is through gardening. School gardens in particular may provide a great foundation for our youth who are often raised in an environment that is inhospitable toward, if not actually warring with, the natural. When we account for the fact that our youth will not only inherit the Earth as we left it, they will consciously or unconsciously be managing it, then I feel it is all the more important to educate them about ecology and their impact upon it. I can think of no child who would not delight in eating a freshly

picked strawberry from a patch that he helped plant and tend into maturity. And what's more, in a garden, children can bear witness to all of the wondrous, magical processes that unfold in such places, from the earthworms churning the soil to the butterflies fluttering above, and everything in between. In this sense, gardens may be seen as the ultimate classroom of ecological education, as no textbook can possibly contain all of the details nor richness of such an environment.

From Whence We Came: Returning from Our Travels Along the Earth Path

All of these Earth path activities and meditations are but a few of the many ways we humans may remedy some of the problems of a culture pulled up by its roots, as it were, and transplanted into unnatural habitats, which are today's modern industrial societies. Through regular practice of Earth Path meditations and connecting with the natural world, one may cultivate a deeper sense of place and belonging on this vast and majestic planet. Further, we may use the insights we glean from these meditations to help us conceive creative solutions to the problems placed upon us by today's world, and help make our mark upon it for the benefit of future generations to come. And by living in accordance with the unwritten principles of nature and nature's law, the highest principles that we may strive for on this plane, we may be better able to inspire others to do likewise by merit of our actions, and not by words alone. May your journeys on the Earth Path be fruitful, and may you find the Awen everywhere you travel.

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Ancestral Wisdom in Contemporary Druidry

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Depending on the Druid tradition, the role of the ancestors can be vital, interconnected, and critical to one's ceremonies and meditations. In other traditions, the ancestors may not be mentioned or honored at all. Each tradition is valid although it may be different for each person. What is an ancestor exactly? Ancestors do not necessarily have to be the direct blood kin of an individual, but can be adopted local spirits or those who occupied a space prior to us (Orr, 1998). This includes not just humans, but animals and plants. This view of who can be an ancestor really opens up the paths in which we can work and the various forms of wisdom we can access. We are not limited to just our own family members, but can discover animal wisdom and plant mysteries.

Ancestral practices vary far and wide the world over. Humankind has a long history of varying practices of care for the dead, the roles of spirits, and the place ancestors occupy in the lives of the living. In 2015, we have our own contemporary forms of Druidry. While it's nice to consider the origins of the Druid Revival of the eighteenth to twentieth centuries and where that fits in (Greer, 2011), each of us has our own contemporary path of Druidry we walk. This may consist of strict adherence to the outlines in the manuals and training program, or we may simply acknowledge the path of the sun and orbit of the moon while digging our toes into the Earth's soil. Either way, the ancestors can have a place for each one of us.

Funeral and Burial Rites

Ritual burial is perhaps the oldest form of acknowledgment and significance given to the honored dead and ancestors. The examples in this section serve, in part, to demonstrate how ancestral practices predate modern humans and recorded history. The oldest known intentional ritual burial dates from around 50,000 years ago, a Neanderthal skeleton that was found in a cave in southwestern France in the early twentieth century (Than, 2013). This substantial find indicates that early humans had turned their minds to the ancestors long before cities, writing, and domestication of animals took place. Other examples of ritual burial can be found in the Valley of the

Kings of Egypt, the barrow mounds of Europe, the Caves of Petra, the hanging coffins of China (Riddle of the hanging coffins, 2013), and the Taj Mahal of India.

For example, Hindu culture in Odisha, India places broad importance on the burial rites of the dead for several reasons. As the oldest Hindu scriptures, the Vedas outline the rites that should be performed for the dying and the dead for these reasons:

1. They display honor for the deceased and help the departed soul make a smooth transition to the realm of the ancestors.
2. They provide the grieving family members and relatives of the deceased time to mourn and show their grief in a certain way.
3. Highlighting the interconnectedness between life and death, performance of funeral rites not only eliminates the fear of death in the mind of the performer, but also encourages virtuous living (Sahoo, 2014).

In some ways, funeral rites are more for the comfort and edification of the living than for the dying. Besides the transitory process, the rites console the living relatives or kin and help them turn their minds to bettering their lives and considering what kind of legacy they would like to leave behind once they pass on.

Objects

The origins of formal ancestor rituals may date as far back as 7000 BCE. In May 2014, a collection of spirit masks went on display at the Israel Museum of Jerusalem dating from this period.. Dr. Debby Hershman, one of the experts working on the exhibit, believes the masks were "used as part of an ancestor cult, and that shamans or tribal chiefs wore the masks during a ritual masquerade honoring the deceased" (Zion, 2014). Other examples of masks of the dead can be seen in museums, including important historical figures such as K'inich Janaab' Pakal from the Maya polity of Palenque, the death mask of Immanuel Kant at his tomb in Kaliningrad, Russia, and, most famously, the death mask of Tutankhamun from ancient Egypt.

Connecting ancestors with objects such as masks is not a new concept or practice. In Africa, reliquary forms of masks and dolls are a specific, directed way that some cultures use to strengthen and build bridges to the realm of the ancestors to gain their wisdom (LaGamma, 2007, p. 34). Voodoo dolls sometimes contain spirits of the dead (Alvarado, 2009, p. 41). The use of dolls can also be seen in the Russian folk tale "Vasilisa the Beautiful," which includes the famed crone Baba Yaga. Vasilisa has to perform house, farm, and other chores while with Baba Yaga. In the process, "she learns how to worship and take care of the ancestral spirits and stand vigil for the well-being of the family. . . . Like the goddess she [Vasilisa] represents, she traveled alone, without the need of a mate, accompanied only by the amuletic power of the ancestral spirit doll" (Hubbs, 1988, pp. 49, 51).

Caring for Shrines and Spirits

Working with the ancestors includes duties of caring for ancestor spirits, shrines, and holy sites. Sometimes simple honoring of the memory and death dates takes place. At other times, elaborate rituals and altars are necessary for specific cultural practices for the dead to properly perform their functions (in some cultures, the dead help the living in various capacities). In ancient Rome, Christians participated in ancestor worship: "The dead in their resting place were worshipped also, conceived of as minor deities—the divine Manes." Offerings varied, but most often alcohol was the preferred choice. Various foods were given as well along with the alcohol, which served to help the dead have a "tranquil existence in the Beyond" (MacMullen, 2010, pp. 602–603). The living wanted to appease the dead to help them to rest well, so that they would leave the living alone. Such practices were done out of respect and consideration that one day, the person now caring for the ancestors would join them. By passing the tradition down among the living, the next generation would help the newly dead to rest well.

Feeding the spirits was also commonplace across cultures. The practice not only was ongoing in ancient Christian Rome, but China, in Africa with voodoo dolls (Alvardo, 2009, p. 41), and in Santeria (see Wippler, 1992)).

Role of the Dead

The dead have played important, sometimes deified roles in the lives of people depending on the culture. "Throughout equatorial Africa, exceptional ancestors were selected as effective advocates to the divine on behalf of their extended families. Relics intimately connected to those individuals were held in a vessel whose contents were the focus of acts of devotion" (LaGamma, 2007, p. 34). This idea resembles the veneration of Christian saints, who received sainthood for various special reasons, usually involving some divine act or way of life or death. These saints act as intermediaries between humans and the divine. The Orisha Chango is found in this same position of elevation. Originally a warrior king, he was deified and became one of the major ruling Orishas of Santeria (Wippler, 1992, pp. 72–73).

Importance of Ancestor Worship in China

Ancestor worship continues to be an important part of social structure in southeastern Chinese society: "the idea of ancestors and the worship of ancestors constitute an important basis for the perpetuation of Han Chinese social structure through the clan" (Gouqing, 2005, p. 57). Though the worship is central in many areas to the culture, it isn't necessarily approached as official religion. Debates about the place of ancestor worship continue among Christian Chinese. These two seemingly opposing practices combine in a syncretic dance of Chinese culture and heritage.

Lung-Kwong Lo (2003) identifies ancestor worship in China as a "diffused religion," that is to say, it "is considered as 'a religion having its theology, cultus, and personnel so intimately diffused into one or more secular social institutions that they became a part of the concept,

rituals, and structure of the latter, thus having no significant independent existence." This takes the form of things such as superstitions and beliefs on a daily basis that people practice. They may or may not be aware of their origins because these origins are hidden in the structure and fabric of everyday life around them. Lo (2003, p. 35) continues, "in other words, ancestral worship has all the primary qualities of religion diffused into the institutional structure, including belief in the souls of the dead, their power influence the living morally, physically, and the need for perpetual sacrifice by the descendants." (p. 35).

So far, examining Chinese, Hindu, and African traditions about the ancestors reveals a common theme of guidance, support, and wisdom being handed down from the dead. The role these ancestors play can be loosely or tightly woven into the structure of ritual, extending from proper burials to full shrines dedicated to the dead family members. We now turn to examinations of ancestor practices within Druidry.

Ancestor Worship in Ancient Druidry

Closer to home, there is no historical evidence that the ancient Druids practiced ancestor worship, though speculation exists. Ronald Hutton, discussing the work of William Stukeley, a major forerunner of the revival Druidry movement in the eighteenth century, mentions ancestor worship in Continental Europe (Stukeley's interpretation of idolatry), but Hutton (2009, p. 92) states that Stukeley admitted that the Druids never practiced it. Even so, Stukeley never produced historical evidence. Ross Nichols claimed that the Long-Barrow people lived with their dead in the barrows around ancient Britain: "the realm of the spirits of the ancestors, which was cultivated rather more by the earlier long-barrow people, who revered and lived with them as it were, with the great burial-earth temple open" (1990, p. 201). In such a case, anyone living near a grave could be seen as living with the dead.

Though we have no documented connections to ancestor veneration or worship among the ancient Druids, a certain amount of influence would come from the culture. With teachings and myth heavily based in oral tradition, each generation passed down the knowledge from the teachers and those gone before, forming a link to the current generation who were living. This unbroken link would have been a vital but fragile component of the oral traditions and memory of the culture. Any interruption, such as happened later in history, would break the link, dissipate the memory, and subvert the tradition.

Connecting with Ancestors

Even though we have little evidence of the ancient Druids' work with the ancestors, many modern Druids and Druid orders engage in this work. Connecting with the ancestors harkens back to a simpler way of life in respect to technology, but more difficult in terms of survival, yet a way that is more interconnected to the world around us. It is common for those approaching

ancestors or their veneration to feel the call of the kin or of the blood. This feeling or calling is rooted deep inside, almost coming from the very DNA that makes up an individual.

This call pushes people to explore other sides of themselves, other cultures, and ways of viewing the world. The call positions people to reexamine their current values and ways of living, and guides them down the path toward a more centered life. It leads them away from prevailing social structures that often teach dominance over nature, and into individuality, local movements, and ethnic pride (Carr-Gomm, 2002, p. 44).

Once we gain access to the realm of the ancestors (which is our right) and to their stored wisdom, the wisdom of the universe, we have a responsibility to follow what is given to us. Otherwise, what is the point of going to the honored dead and seeking their advice, if we then don't follow what they say? Usually when we are given advice or if theyintercede on our behalf, it is for the highest good and benefit. In this way, we become the wisdom keepers of the ancestors (Mann & Sutton, 2000, p. 69).

Connecting to the ancestors can come in many ways. The dead are often connected to objects. A doll, mirror, chair, ring, or any other item that was special to them can contain their energy and imprint after death and are perfect for ancestor shrines and altars. They can create direct connections to those who have passed on.

Setting Up an Ancestor Shrine

Thus far I have discussed history, culture, and practices to begin laying a good foundation of importance, context, and applications of cultural practices. Now that you have the information, what do you do with it? One way you might use it is to build an ancestor shrine. How do you build the shrine or altar? Where do you place sacred items on it? How detailed should rites be, and how often should you conduct them? The answer to all of these is that it is up to you. The basic definition of a shrine is that it is a place where the ancestors are honored and remembered. It does not usually contain any practical workings such as a ritual, but rather is a place to go, see their items, look at their pictures, and give thanks or communicate with them, much like a public memorial of an important figure. An altar, on the other hand, is a bit more involved than a shrine, a place to conduct magical rites or workings to accomplish a goal. While an altar will have similar things such as pictures, objects, statues, and so on like a shrine, the altar goes a few steps further toward accomplishing one's will (Greer, 2014, p. 53). Sara Greer's article "Devotional Practice" (in volume 1 of *Trilithon*) is an excellent source of information for developing your own practice.

The following are some suggestions for building a shrine or altar and getting into the practice of working with the ancestors. Depending on the time or space available, a shrine may be the only option. If you have a dedicated space for ritual, setting up a working altar could be the better choice, especially if you plan on actively working with the ancestors to accomplish a goal. It is up to you to decide how much time to invest in conducting rites or remembering the honored ancestors.

- A simple design for a shrine or altar may include the following items:
- A skull to represent the ancestors in general.
- Personal objects from those you seek to honor or work with.
- Stones such as moonstone, emerald, quartz, fluorite, and others that enhance psychic ability.An offering plate and cup for libations and food offerings.
- A jar of Earth representing the living Earth from which all come and to which we all return.
- A glass of water to represent psychic forces and the water of the womb and body.
- A candle of memory or one to light when you conduct workings.
- A wand or dagger for directing energy.
- Incense to cleanse the space and carry your thoughts.

A statue of a deity like Ceridwen, Arianrhod, Osiris, Anubis, or Ereshkigal, who are associated with afterlife and the dead.

Ancestors and Meditation

After this setup, a simple meditation or journey usually opens the gate of the already established bridge that we have with them as our ancestors. Follow any steps you have to prepare for meditation such as candle lighting, space cleansing, incense lighting, relaxing techniques, or Druid breathing exercises (Greer, 2006, pp. 213–217). This relaxed, centered, and grounded state is necessary to achieve optimal experience and not to lose focus when trying to talk with the ancestors. Meditating with an ancestor's personal object is a great way to add extra connectedness to a specific ancestor when you are trying to establish a connection for the first time.

If you have never meditated or done journey work (e.g., path workings or guided visualizations), it takes practice, but with dedication, this approach can yield strong results. Some people connect more easily and faster than others. Do not be dismayed if you do not see or experience anything on the first few tries. This is common, especially if you are doing a journey alone and are new to the whole experience. You will improve as you go through the first degree curriculum, as meditation is required on the Moon Path (AODA study program, 2015; Greer, 2006, p. 249).

Simple Ancestor Meditation

Here is a meditation I use frequently and that I have found works quite well. First, get comfortable in a nice position (sitting or lying) before you begin. Next, state what your intent is, such as to see the ancestors, seek their wisdom, meet them, and so on. Once you get to that point of comfort, visualize yourself going within to your mind, into yourself, into the Earth, or into a new space specifically set aside in your mind for the ancestors. This can be accomplished with a few

deep breaths in and out at a regular pace and feeling yourself go down into the Earth or into your mind.

Envision yourself walking down a path that leads to a cave. Go inside the cave and see the light dissipate the deeper you go. You have a candle or light of a cell phone (twenty-first-century meditation). You know you are safe and that what awaits you at the deepest depths are the ancestors. You see the life that lies in the cave without the sun, such as fungi, spiders, blind newts, and bioluminescent plants. At the end of the cave is a door of elaborate design, carved with words and images. You know that behind the door awaits the stores of knowledge of the ancestors that you have the right to access.

With a quick turn of the handle, you step through and into a room. This could be a library, a comfy room with chairs, a conference table, a park with a bench, or any other scene in which the ancestors choose to appear. Take time to announce your intent and what you are there for and to invite those who wish to help you in a positive way to come in and join you. Ask those spirits who wish to be negative to just walk on by.

You will have any number of experiences, emotions, and feelings. You may find that animals, insects, or plants come to you—plants and animals you once cared for and whose lives you shared, or local spirits you may have passed by on the way to work or when walking in the woods. With people, do not expect those who have died that you know to be exactly the same in death. Often a shift in personality is common, as these spirits are wiser and have gained new experiences while out of this incarnation. Once you are finished there, travel back the way you came. Walk back through the door, out of the cave, passing all the life, and see the light of the sun increase. Continue back down the path to the waking world, and return to the grounded state.

Ancestors Through Rites and Memory

If you choose not to conduct a meditation, you can simply call on ancestors during rituals and rites, or honor their memory at a shrine. This is a different experience. This sets the tone for a general ancestor presence instead of a directed goal or with specific beings. In either case, you may experience recent or long-forgotten ancestors, the untraceable ones who existed long ago or far away. On a rare occasion you may even meet one from another life or planet you existed on, a more transcended connection from across the universe. Both methods are equally powerful and valid.

If you are working with a specific ancestor, preparation of their favorite food, such as you would prepare for a deity or yourself, is the best practice for honoring the ancestors and making them happy. This extra effort shows dedication and intent that you are serious about having a healthy relationship with them.

You can conduct ritual or honor ancestors at shrines in many ways. Sometimes they will tell you how they would like to be honored; sometimes they leave it up to you how best to express yourself. Whether we sing, drum, play an instrument, offer food, drink, or cigars, read poetry, or

dance with them as in the Día de los Muertos celebrations of Latin culture, our lives shift when they come in, and we understand our place in the universe a little more.

Once this relationship or practice is established, how do we fit it into our degree work? AODA's literature contains no formal rites for ancestor workings (besides Samhain rituals). This does not mean one cannot adopt a practice for one's own Druidry and degree work. One way you can incorporate ancestor work is through meditation as part of the Moon Path in the first degree curriculum, as it focuses and directs your attention, which is necessary for it to qualify for the curriculum. You may also use ancestor rites to explore spirituality, ritual, and mysticism as part of a Druidic exploration, also found in the first-degree curriculum (AODA study program, 2015).

Conclusion

There is a great benefit to working with the ancestors, as Brown suggests: "The ancestors teach us about both the tenacity and fragility of life. Working with them invites us to look at ourselves anew, and with wonder. It gives reason to appreciate life as a precious sacred force and to respect it" (2012, p. 84). Each of us can work with our ancestors and access their stored wisdom; it is our right as living beings that have ancestors that preceded us. Whether you choose to make it part of the curriculum or just part of your personal Druidry, the ancestors will be there to guide you and give you the wisdom of the universe.

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Blast From the Past
Selections from The Light of Brittania

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Introduction

The following excerpt from The Light of Britannia by Owen Morgan presents an assortment of curiosities, including solar attributions of the apple, along with some of the lore related to plants and trees thought to be held sacred by the ancient druids. While not historically accurate in its content, *The Light of Britannia* is a very early work in the druid revival and has served as a source of inspiration for numerous other revival texts, many of which have helped to shape some of today's druid organizations, including the AODA. May this text serve as a unique inspiration for our own druidic paths and practices—and, if nothing else, give us an esoteric understanding of bobbing for apples.

Chapter VI

One of the most remarkable of the solar myths of our Druidic ancestors, which popular customs have preserved for us, is associated with the apple. It is certain that the name Hâv, now used for summer, was anciently one of the Druidic titles of the sun as a fertiliser. An apple is called Haval (Aval is clearly an erroneous mode of spelling the name). Haval, apple, is compounded of Hâv (sun), and mal (like), and signifies: Like the Sun as regards its shape. In the sun's annual journey the sun, in three stages, was symbolised also by three apples in the Druidic circular "church." Those three golden apples are those which it is stated Hercules robbed from the garden

of the Hesperides, stationed in Western Europe. Those three golden apples were similar to those seen now as a sign above the entrance into certain shops in England and Wales.

In Wales, Ireland and Scotland, where ancient Celts abound, are preserved three deeply interesting solar customs, in which the apple plays a part. (1) Near the winter solstice, a large tub containing water is placed in the centre of the public room of the house. An apple is then thrown into the water in the tub, and a competition takes place between the members of the household as to which of them can, while blind-folded, and the hands on the back, snatch the apple out of the water with his or her teeth. The apple symbolises the sun dropped into the sea of Annwn (Great Deep) at the winter solstice, and snatching it with the teeth, the action of Cêd, Ketos, or Cetus, Latona or Ark, in rescuing him from destruction. The reader will recollect the brazen sea of the temple. (2) On the early morning of New Year's day children, in the said countries, carry from door to door an apple dressed with evergreens, and holly with red berries. A wooden skewer, which serves as a handle, is thrust into the side of the ornamented apple. Underneath the apple, and thrust into it thus are three other skewers arranged like a tripod, Oats are thrust all over into the apple. Each child carrying the apple is accompanied by a small group of other children, and as soon as the little party reach the entrance of a house they sing a joyful song, concluding by wishing the household a happy new year. The apple is a sun symbol, and implies the sun's safe return from the realm of Pluto, or Darkness, called in Welsh, Avagddu, and signifying, literally, the Evil Nursing Place. The oats scattered all over in the rind of the apple symbolise fertility. The three pegs beneath symbolise the triune Word or the Druidic trinity in unity in the sun, and as attributes transmitted to the earth during each solar year. The evergreens symbolise the perenniality of the vital force in the sun.

The following are other of the solar rites relating to the sun as an apple in the cauldron of Avagddu, or Pluto (the sea of the great deep or Annwn) at the winter solstice :— "In Herefordshire, under the name Wassailing, the following rites are observed : — At the approach of the evening of the Vigil of the Twelfth Day, the farmers, with their friends and servants, meet together, and, about six o'clock, walk out to a field where wheat is growing. In the highest part of the ground twelve small fires, and one large one, are lighted up (the sun and the twelve signs of the Zodiac). The attendants, headed by the master of the family, pledge the company in old cider (juice of the apple), which circulates freely on the occasion." This reminds us of the conduct of the Corinthians in converting the Holy Communion into a festive banquet. "A circle is formed around the large lire, when a general shout and hallooing take place, which you hear answered from all the adjacent villages and fields. Sometimes fifty or sixty of these fires (groups of) may be seen at once. This being finished, the company return home, where the good housewife and maids are preparing a good supper."

A large cake is always provided, with a hole in the middle. After the supper, the company all attend the bailiff or headman of the oxen to the wain house, where the following particulars

are observed : — The master, at the head of his friends, fills the cup, generally with strong ale, essence of barley, and standing opposite the finest ox (Bull meant), pledges him in a curious toast. * * That being finished, the large cake is produced, and, with much ceremony, put on the horn of the ox, through the hole above mentioned."[1]

The ox in the foregoing signifies the sun in the zodiacal sign of the bull, and the sun rising in that sign in spring, 200 years before the Deluge, according to Archbishop Usher's calculation as to the time that disaster occurred. The round loaf is the round earth, and the bull's horn is the sun's rays opening the earth in the springtime. Some- times the same idea is symbolised by the bull's horn breaking open an Easter egg.

In the *Gentleman's Magazine* for February, 1784, p. 98, it is stated that, near Leeds, Yorkshire, it was customary for many families, on the Twelfth Eve of Christmas, to invite their relations, friends, and neighbours to their houses, and to partake of supper, of which mince pies ('cakes of the Queen of Heaven') were an indispensable ingredient. After supper, was brought in the wassail cup or bowl, of which every one partook, by taking with a spoon, out of the ale in the bowl, a roasted apple — essence of the apple and barley mixed here — and eating it, and then drinking the health of the company out of the bowl, wishing them a merry Christmas and a happy new year. The ingredients put into the bowl were ale, sugar, nutmeg, and roasted apple, and they were usually called Lamb's Wool. In the first narration we seem to have a springtime rite dragged out of its place and transferred to Christmastime, unless the bull's horn passing through the cake, implies the sun opening the barrows, or round graves, at the resurrection. In the last narration we have the sun as an apple roasted in the cauldron of Avagddu or the devil, and the worshippers eating it in the same way as Typhon of Egypt is said to have given the body of Osiris to be eaten by his murderous followers.

In a future page we point out that the wren's feathers symbolised the sun's rays in a solar ceremony in the Isle of Man on every December 26th. In the "Lamb's Wool," we have the juices, implying the sun's rays in the concrete, referred to as the "wool" of the sun in the sign of the Lamb Ram of the Zodiac. The sun ceased to rise in spring in the sign of Lamb Ram about 125 B.C. or 389 B.C.

Ale, as the essence of barley, and cider, as the essence of the apple, both being indigenous of Britain, are used in Britain in the same sense as representing the sun's rays or essence, as the essence of the grape was used in vine-growing countries by the worshipper's of the sun's emanation, as Bacchus, and under other titles.

Does not the wassail bowl and its liquor remind the reader of the Holy Greal and its contents? And is not the whole of the island of Britain the real Insula Pomorum or the Island of Apples? Is not Glastonbury supposed to be Avalon? and does not that name signify in the Welsh language the Everlasting Apple? Moreover, the As. Res. states Britain was the original island of

Delos, which floated, symbolically setting forth that the earth was loose on the ocean. Another symbol of Cêd's belly.

The Sacred Trees and Plants of the Druids

The Oak. — The female oak is called Derwen in Welsh, and the male oak is called Darwen in that language. The "wen" termination, in both instances, signifies Holy, and therefore Derwen signifies Holy Der; and Darwen, Holy Dar. Der is an abbreviated form of Daear, the Welsh for Earth; the tree as the producer of the sacred symbols, cup and acorn, is sacred to the feminine principle pervading the earth — the Anima Mundi. Dar seems to be identical with Daronwy (Thunderer), a title of the Deity. Reading is called Dar-llen in Welsh from Dar and Llen (learning, scholarship, erudition). Dar-ogan from Og (swift), and Cân (chant); the compound is used in the sense to foretell or to prophesy, no doubt in allusion to the practice of the Druids of chanting their teachings among oaks. The female oak is also called y Dderwen Fendigaid, which signifies the Blessed Holy Earth.

The Mistletoe (Viscum Album). — This eminently sacred shrub of the Druidic religion bears several names in Welsh, viz., Uchel-lawr (high stationed), Uchel-wydd (high shrub), and Pren-awyr (the tree of the air). As is well known, this shrub was eminently sacred among our Druidic ancestors. The ancient custom of the sexes kissing under it at the festive season of Christmas proves two things, namely, that the shrub was associated in the olden time with the winter solstice, and with the relation of the two sexes to each other. Now in spring, summer, and autumn, the produce of the earth were associated in the Druidic system with the sun under his various poetical titles; and with the earth under her various poetical titles. At the winter solstice the old sun was poetically said to be unable any longer to fertilise (in Britain) the seeds of the earth, and the surface of the earth herself, under the title of Dyr-raith, was regarded as old and withered. But the mistletoe, in the midst of the general decay and death of vegetation, manifests vigorous life, and that, too, between the aged earth and the aged sun. It attains blooming perfection at the winter solstice. For these reasons, the mistletoe was sacred to Celi(Coelus),and Cêd (Cetus), the Divine Father and Divine Mother of the sun and the earth. The kissing under the mistletoe at the winter solstice was performed as a loving symbolical act, perpetuating commemoratively the affectionate relationship eternally existing between Celi and Cêd, the universal parents.

The Holly. — This tree is one of the shrubs with which all Celts decorate their habitations with its branches and crimson berries at the winter solstice. In Welsh the tree is called Celyn : Cêl (concealed) yn (yni—energy) — Concealed Energy. The allusion is to the source of perennial energy, viz., Celi, and Cêd, though concealed in Britain at the winter solstice. The English word Holly signifies Holy.

The Ivy. — In Welsh ivy is called Iorwg, which name signifies the (Green of the Leader Lord, implying the earliest creating attribute of Celi or Cêd, directed to operate on the atomic particles of matter, and thereby commence the work of creation. The ivy, too, seems prone to clothe things inclined to fall into decay and ruin, and to support things tottering on their foundation.

"The women" (of the British Isles), "crowned with Ivy, celebrated his (Bacchus) nocturnal rites upon the shore of the Northern Ocean." — Dionysius the Geographer I., p. 170. Kissos or Ivy is a Greek title of Bacchus. The extreme fondness of Goats for Ivy is well known. Doubtless, this is the reason why the Ivy became a sacred plant among the Druids. It is similar to the reason why acorn eating swine became sacred among them.

The Leek. — This is called Ceninen in Welsh. It is a symbol of verdure and the light of the sun. Its roots symbolise the sun's rays, and should be always worn with the root uppermost. We are inclined to believe the old Druidic name is a compound of Cen, as in Cenad (an Ambassador), and yni (Energy), with the "i" at the end omitted, and "yn," alone, standing for a plural sign. Cenynan is the name singular, the "an" termination being a diminutive sign. Some may suppose Cén signifies the skin of anything; but the terminations "yn" (plural) and "an" (singular) militate against that supposition.

Birch -- This is called Bedwen or Holy Bed in Welsh. According to tradition it was with a bough of this tree the Druids lustrated their disciples with dew held in a boat- shaped vessel, hence bed, here meaning boat, symbol of Céd as the Ark of the sun called the Llong Voel (Naked Ship). It is with a bough of this tree the Welsh mothers still chastise their children. Using the sacred bough implies the chastisement, though painful, is an act of love. The maypole was always one of these trees; and the birch was invariably used in the construction of the gallows.

The Emblems of the Druids

At the Vernal Equinox — The Shamrock.

At the Summer Solstice — The Blessed Holy Oak.

At the Autumnal Equinox — Ears of Wheat.

At the Winter Solstice — The Mistletoe.

[1] Brand's *Popular Antiquities*, vol. i. p. 30.