

# pentagram

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The **Pentagram** no. 4 of this year takes you, the readers, along to the world of the Celts, who inhabited the whole of Europe during the millennia BC, although they did not have a common form of state or government.

Our journey gives an impression of a mysterious region that has sunk deeply back into the mists of time. It is like a painting with many colours and hues, with here and there spots of light, with beautiful areas and interesting excursions into history, obviously without pretending to be exhaustive.

On the following pages, you will find what inspired us. We were particularly struck by the ease with which the liberating insights of the early Christians found resonance with the Celts in France, England and above all in Ireland. It is as Taliesin, the last bard of the fifth century sang:

'Christ and the word of the beginning were our teachers from the outset, and we never forgot their teachings. Christianity may perhaps have been new in Asia, but there has never been a time that the Druids of Brittany did not propagate its teachings.'

## content

heap of stones of the testimony	2
mystery knowledge is timeless	6
the celts and holy places	8
a field that reflects pure values	14
landmarks on the horizon	18
celtic christianity	21
eiré, independent, magical, invincible	26
a true knight	30
johannes scouts, an irish freethinker	37
the grail of the light	
the ancient legends of the grail in celtic tradition	42
the poet's irish heart of w.b. yeats	48

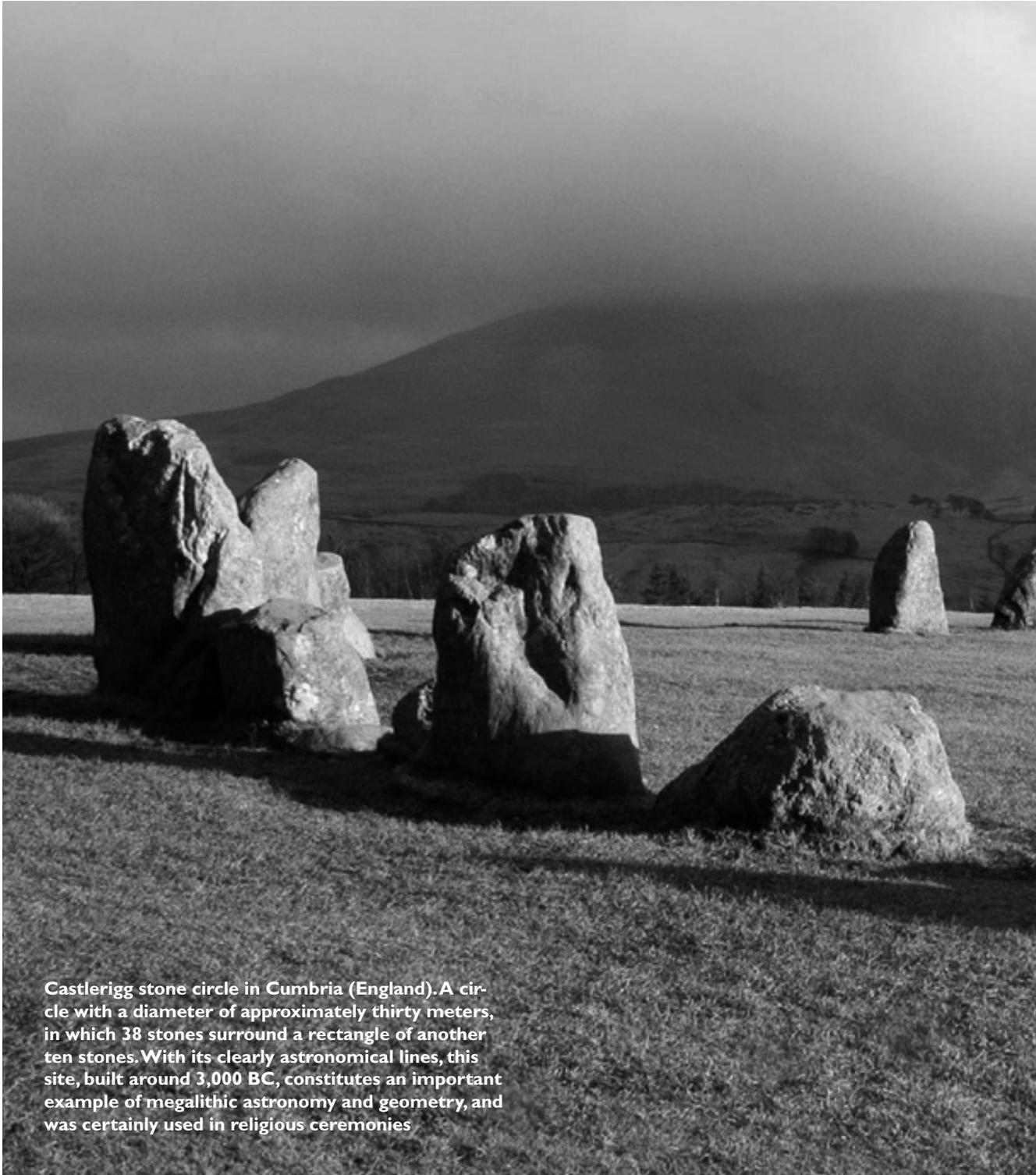


Cover: A representation of The Holy forest of the druids. Engraving from the opera Norma by Vincenzo Bellini (1802-1835). French School, 19th century. Bibliothèque de l'Opéra Garnier, Paris, France/The Bridgeman Art Library

# heap of stones of the

A **Pentagram** about the Celts – but the Celts never existed.

A **Pentagram** about Ireland – but there is more than one Ireland.



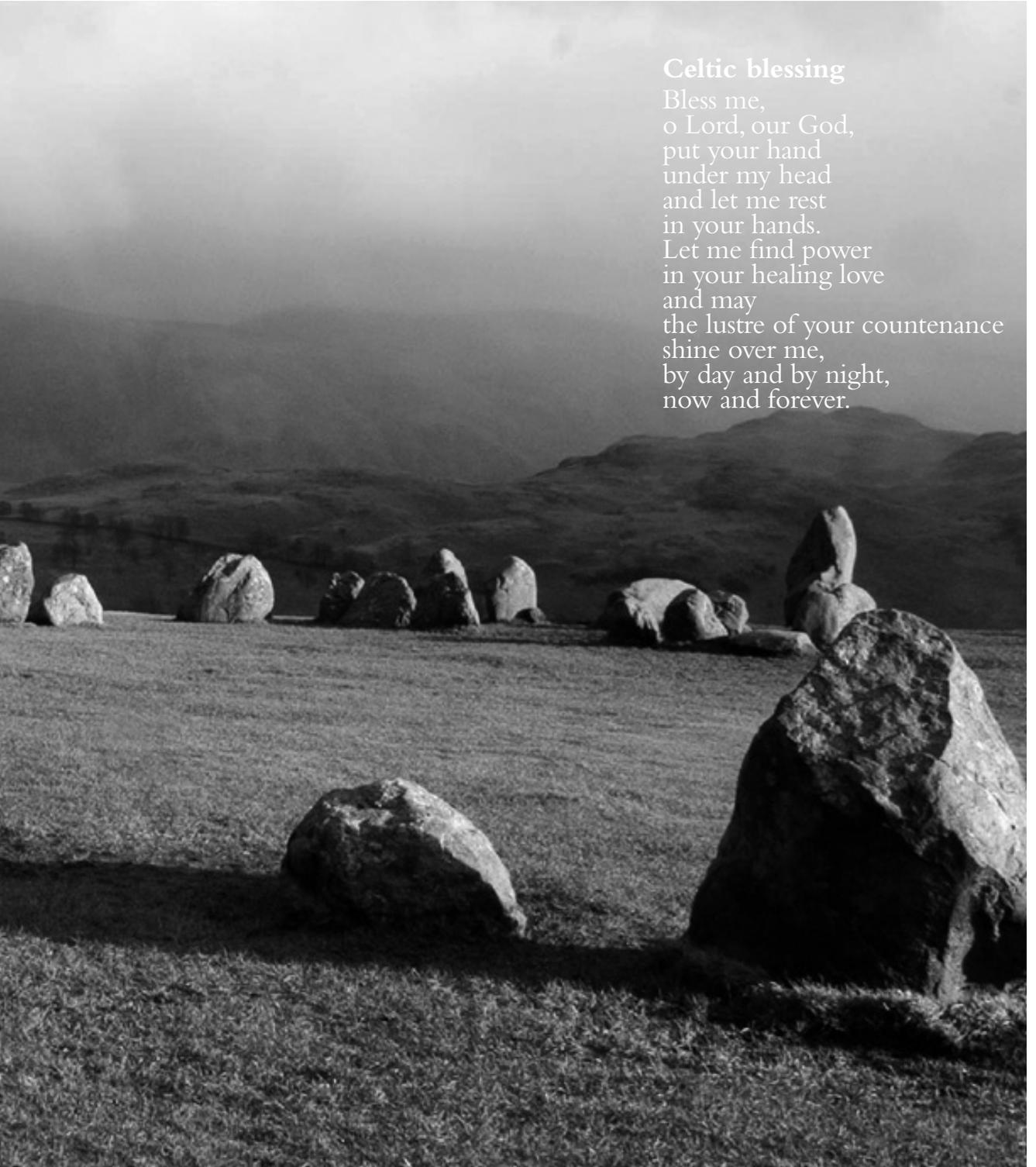
Castlerigg stone circle in Cumbria (England). A circle with a diameter of approximately thirty meters, in which 38 stones surround a rectangle of another ten stones. With its clearly astronomical lines, this site, built around 3,000 BC, constitutes an important example of megalithic astronomy and geometry, and was certainly used in religious ceremonies

# testimony



## Celtic blessing

Bless me,  
o Lord, our God,  
put your hand  
under my head  
and let me rest  
in your hands.  
Let me find power  
in your healing love  
and may  
the lustre of your countenance  
shine over me,  
by day and by night,  
now and forever.



Approximately 11,000 years ago, the new Stone Age began that involved a series of revolutionary developments. Although these developments showed strong regional differences, they had agriculture and cattle breeding in common that were practised for the first time in this period.

'Cimmerians' is the oldest known name of the 'Celtoi', peoples which, according to the Greeks, lived in the vast forests and regions to the north and the west of them. We find them later as Celts in England and Wales, as Gaels in Scotland and as Gauls in Gaul, present-day France.

About 3,000 years BC, all these peoples drifted from their original land beyond the Euphrates to their new habitats in Europe, in Gaul and Belgica, down to the *insulae sacrae*, the mystical islands in the west.

Modern esoteric thought about the peoples from that period also speaks of the so-called 'rest civilisation'. They actually had to start all over again after the centre of their original civilisations had disappeared due to great calamities and the vast knowledge that characterised their origin was lost.

They were peoples, who virtually did not record anything in writing, certainly not religious matters. Nor did they build altars, in which metals or nails were used. They were from the Biblical stone kingdom.

They did not have a coherent form of state, a coordinating government or an economic or political unity. They were autonomous in their

own region, but they shared a common religious sentiment and a language. This language was spoken on the whole European continent. Its imaginative power was unsurpassed, and it was a language of which the Irish and the Scots said that it was already spoken in Paradise.

It was the language that ensured that the different peoples time and again found each other. In the language, the common spirit, the habits, customs and rituals were expressed. As tribes, the Celts were autonomous in voluntary cooperation. In their own way, people and tribe maintained a link with the nature spirits and the spiritual hierarchies standing behind them. Every free Celt had a personal link with the divine, as far as his consciousness allowed this. They were related, embedded, in the world soul, not as the thoroughly individualised personalities that we are, but as part of a mysterious whole and as an active factor in it.

Here and there, a name reminds us of them. The root 'celt' can be found in 'Galatians' in Asia Minor or 'Galicia' in Spain and 'Gaul'. Nowadays, this language has virtually disappeared. It is only here and there that Celtic still resounds in a few surviving languages, particularly at the edges of Europe – Welsh, Scottish and Irish, in Gaelic and Breton. The Germanic name for the Celts was 'Walen'. We can still see this form in the names of regions like Wallis in Switzerland, Wales in Great Britain or

The Celtic people inhabited all regions from ‘the ends of the earth’ (Cape Finisterre in Spain and the British Isles) to the Black Sea, and from the North Sea to the Mediterranean

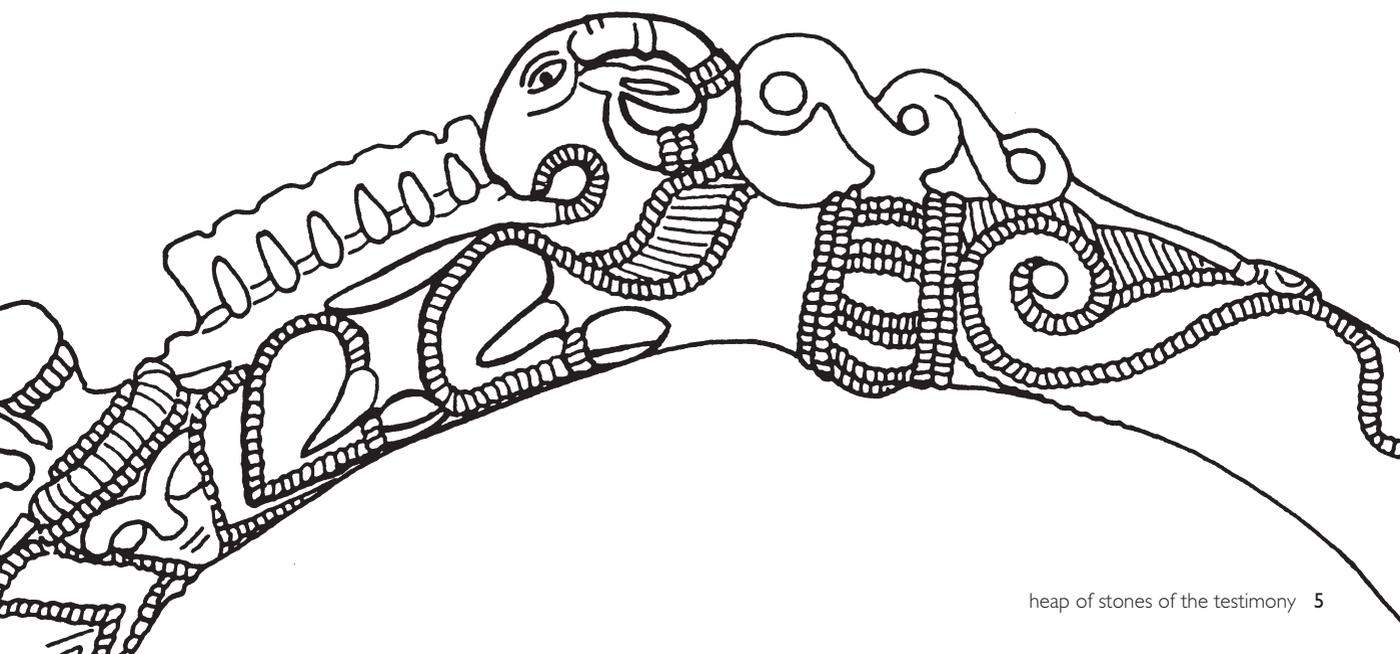
**Rudolf Steiner in Penmaenwahr, Wales:**

‘If we ascend the mountain and come across the stones of the Druids, and consider them the memorial stones of a striving for the spirit from those ancient times, we can imagine how the Celtic Druids of the time were yearning for the spirit. And then we see before us that they will not find the fulfilment of their longing, until we gain insight into the spirit again in our time.

[We gain this insight] ... by experiencing the coming, inner Christ in our way. Just as Christ first experienced the mystery of Golgotha in a physical figure, he returned in a spiritual figure because this is the only way, in which humanity will recognise him again. This is what we can strongly experience in this place, where these special monuments have been preserved.

R. Steiner, Penmaenmawr, 18-31 August 1923

Wallonia in Belgium. At one of the heights of Celtic civilisation, in the third century BC, the Celtic people inhabited all regions from ‘the ends of the earth’ (Cape Finisterre in Spain and the British Isles) to the Black Sea, and from the North Sea to the Mediterranean. In 387 BC, the Celts conquered the city of Rome, and thus, not the Romans, but the Celts became the founders of cities like London, Lyon, Geneva, Strasbourg, Bonn, Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade, Coimbra and Ankara. ✪



# mystery knowledge is timeless

Peace, love and justice formed the basis of druidism. Wisdom is living from it and approaching the world and humanity on the basis of this sincerity. It is knowledge linked with everything and everyone.

**H**ow can something be young that had its peak four thousand years ago? Isn't it said that the great Hu Gadarn re-structured druidism approximately four thousand years ago around Stonehenge, already old at the time! He was a contemporary of Abraham and he was the patriarch of his people: Hu, the mighty one.

Many remnants of this period can be found on the British Isles. On every ten hectares, there is a stone circle, a gallery, an 'orthostat' or upright stone, or a tumulus.

Standing next to them, we feel the riddle, the great question, crop up. We think that they must have been places of healing, and simultaneously places with religious purposes. Here time dissolves. We experience that often important events took place here: 'healing' and 'knowing God' are not separated here.

A druid is an initiate in the mystery knowledge; the word is related to the Indo-European root 'vid', as in the Indian Vedas: 'knowledge'. A druid diligently protected the secrets and transmitted his teachings and wisdom only orally. In everything, he saw the cooperation of 'the three', of the trinity of creation.

We are standing next to a stone circle; no one is with us, only grass and silent stones. Mystery knowledge is timeless. And here it is as if we perceive it again!

'Dis or Duwa (= Thau) is the triune God!

Bel or Beli Mawr is the great, creative Light!

Taran the guardian!  
Yesu or Hesus the coming saviour!

Everything consists of three.  
Trinity forms life,  
and every existence:  
father,  
light,  
spirit.

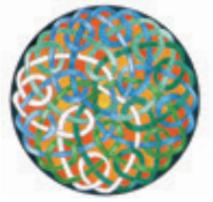
Three brilliant qualities of wisdom:  
love,  
wisdom,  
courage.

Three things that stem from the three original unities:  
all life,  
all good,  
all power.

The three foundations of druidism:  
peace,  
love,  
justice.

Three praiseworthy things in a human being:  
rest,  
wisdom,  
kindness.

The druids knew an energy of the Light, called Hesus or Yesu. And this very saving aspect was the reason that they wholeheartedly welcomed a



new revelation, in which Jesus Christ approached them as a messenger from the solar world. The oak was the holy tree of the deity and the mistletoe with its three white berries represented the trinity, but particularly Yesu, the Light. He, the Light power, made, after all, the two one, and removed the separation. Undoubt-

**Fingal's Cave is a sea cave on the uninhabited isle of Staffa that belongs to the Hebrides. The cave that is associated with the Celts, has inspired romantic poets and composers, like Mendelssohn who wrote the Hebrides Overture, and William Turner who painted 'Staffa, Fingal's Cave'**

edly, druidism expected the new impulse of the Light: Christ. In the druidic trinity, Hesus is 'the re-creator of the future'. In this way, the arrival of Christianity linked the sun with the mystery of the resurrection.

This concerns a knowledge that has disappeared, but which is still dormant under the surface of our consciousness. Link yourself – as they were linked. Forget time, fear and worry. Hear the first words. It is waiting for you. It slumbers – in order to wake up in many people of the new time. How time weeps now that our thinking no longer knows anything of the austerity, the honesty and the loftiness of the stone circles, why they were placed in a remarkably straight line with regard to each other, and how they combined the energy of those present. How-

ever, we and countless others yearn for this knowledge: to be intimately linked with creation, the free link with the spirit and our own autonomy – the core threesome of the Celtoi. ✪



# the celts and holy places

Contrary to what many people think, the Celts and the druids neither built temples nor did they know them. The ancient Welsh or Irish stories do not refer to buildings that were used as temples. Greek and Roman sources do not mention Gallic temples that might have existed before the conquest of those regions by Julius Caesar and his armies.

## LOCI CONSECRATI

Celtic societies had places where they experienced and worshipped nature, the presence of nature spirits and forces, and lofty gods. They are the so-called holy places or 'loci consecrati', to which some Latin texts refer. For instance, Cassius Dio (164 - around 235 AD), a Roman historian of Greek descent, wrote eighty books about Roman history, in which he extensively dealt with the Celtic revolt under Boudica in the year 64 AD. In his text, he used the word 'nemus', meaning 'an open place (or park) surrounded by trees', which brings us back to the Celts. We also see this word back in the Gallic 'niam' and the Breton word 'nenv'. The Celtic holy places were called 'nemeton'.

After the Gallic wars (around 59 - 53 BC) that Caesar waged, square temples appeared, dedicated to the Roman gods who had, however, nothing in common with the druidic, religious wisdom. In Ireland, which was never occupied by the Romans, no temples have been found. All ceremonies either took place on holy tumuli (mounds) or they were carried out in the forest. By the way, wood was used for building all kinds of structures. The megalithic remnants (dolmen) and the covered stone passages, in which the Irish people situated the abode of the gods, have never been places of worship, if only because of the fact that those hidden and wholly overgrown places were unknown to the people of

the time. They testify to another world, to a megalithic civilisation from long before our historiography, from long before the Celts. Modern scholars have gradually become more acquainted with these stone remnants, found spread all over the world.

**NEMETON** From the word 'nenh' or 'nemus', the concept of 'nemeton' has been derived. According to Lucanus (39-65 AD), the Celtic concept of 'nemeton' is not related to a physical but rather to a symbolic place, with the connotation of 'centre'. This may be a geographical location, but it might just as well be a time or a person, someone who distinguishes himself from the rest of society. The Celts were convinced that it was useless to put the gods in a hut as it were - for this is how they considered the Roman temples. It rather should be the opposite: particularly in freedom, or in the open field, a free person opens himself to the energy of those deities or a deity, so that an interaction develops. Filled with awe, the Celtic person experienced the spiritual reality, driving behind nature. Then the nemeton becomes both the place and the time where this holy encounter, which is like an outpouring (or inflow) of energy, occurs. Wellsprings and their environment, too, were places where contact with Nem (heaven) was able to develop and vital energies from the earth or the cosmos were assimilated in a concentrated form. A well-known place was the source of Barenton (Bel-enton), Norman-



**Carreg Samson.** A Neolithic burial chamber in Pembrokeshire (Wales), once (partly) covered by sand and stones, lonely looks out over a bay. Three of the seven orthostats or upright stones bear a capstone, weighing tons

## The altar in the druidic circle was called ‘cromlech’, stone of worship, and a hollow stone served as a basin for untouched, ‘holy’ rainwater

dy. Bel, Belenos or Beli Mawr was the Celtic god of the radiant light, of the fire of the sun, of purification. Therefore, such a source is a holy, open place of the Light, of healing, of Bel.

However, it is – and this is very important – the people who determine the place, guided by their intuition. A nemeton is always topical and is never found automatically. It is self-evident that the druids, the people who were able to link their vast knowledge of nature and of the forces of heaven with their intuition, always carefully selected such places! In this context, seeking a refuge from the Romans, as is sometimes suggested, did not play any role.

DESERT – DYSERT The same is true with regard to the concept of ‘desert’ that occupied a special place with the first, original Christians. From the moment that the message of the gospel was introduced, we see in the Greek and Roman towns that certain (philosophical or religious) circles were inclined to turn away from nature. However, the early Christians felt a great need for the simple interaction with natural life, because they were better able to experience the unity of creation

in that way. This is why they went ‘into the desert’ – an area where human activities were not dominant and where they returned to the simplicity of nature. This was what the first Christian hermits were seeking.

When the mediaeval monks founded their monasteries in places of tranquillity, though in the vicinity of human settlements, they imitated the example of the Breton and British hermits, who had already been seeking such places since the first century. In this way, they followed in the footsteps of the druids, who had, after all, never abandoned their link with nature. In Ireland, we find the word ‘dysert’ (the word means ‘abandoned’, but also ‘desert’) in the names of some monasteries.

The places of assembly of the druids were circular. They were always open from above and from the sides; by their form, they symbolised the dome of the sky. Metal – weapons – were not taken inside the circle. The altar in the druidic circle was called ‘cromlech’ (stone of worship) and a hollow stone, placed next to it, served as a basin for untouched, ‘holy’ water that was collected directly from the rain clouds. No druidic worship could be performed before sunrise or after sunset. The round form of the places also symbolised the

eternal cycle of nature and even the access roads, which formed a network throughout the whole country, had a symbolic function.

**CELTIC ACADEMIES** Diodoros of Sicily (90-21 BC) wrote a world history, consisting of forty books, in which, among other things, he mentioned: 'Amongst the Gauls and Britons, there are highly revered philosophers and theologians, called 'druids'. They are the guardians of an extensive knowledge of all sciences of that time.'

During the centuries BC, the British Isles had tens of druidic 'universities' that accommodated large numbers of students. Religion as well as the administration of justice and science were in the hands of this very advanced group. In order to acquaint oneself with the druidic wisdom along with everything belonging to it, twenty years were needed on the average – as well as a strong, healthy etheric body that was able to ensure a perfect memory! Moreover, it is shown by Greek and Roman sources that the nobility and the wealthy from Athens and Rome sent their children there to study law, science and religion.

Plato said that important parts of Greek philosophy stemmed from the West. Although many of the ancient Greek and Roman authors did not understand the druidic teachings, their texts demonstrate that they had only praise for their knowledge and wisdom. They related the druidic knowledge to the Pythagorean teachings. There are authors from

antiquity who departed from the idea that Pythagoras was taught by the druids. There is reason to assume that Musaeus, Orpheus and Pythagoras belonged to the priesthood of that time, to which the druids also belonged.

**THE TEACHINGS OF THE TRINITY** Julius Caesar tells us: 'To the druids, the immortality of the soul forms the basis of their teachings. They consider it their main motive for conducting a virtuous life.'

The core of druidism was the unity of the deity and this unity was the trinity. Procopius of Caesarea (530 AD) said: 'Hesus, Taran and Bel were the names of one deity; all druids recognise only one god.' They knew the so-called 'great mystery' that was passed on orally from one generation to the next: the teachings of the trinity.

To clarify this principle, which was at the same time the basic idea of the triads, the druids often used a tree. They selected an oak tree with two branches that grew virtually horizontally from the trunk, roughly in the form of a cross. In the right branch, they carved the name of Hesus (or Yesu, 'power'), in the trunk Taranis (wisdom) and in the left branch Belenis, which means Light and also love. Above this, they carved the name of the deity: Tan or Thau. Ages before the coming of Christ, a Celtic triad already existed: 'Lift up your heads, and open your eternal doors, you gates, and the king of glory will enter.'



**The famous cauldron of Gundstrup, found in Denmark, shows Celtic ritual images, but was actually made in Thrace. The cauldron was purportedly ordered for Celtic Scodisci, a tribe that invaded the middle-lower Danube region in 120 BC**

Who is this king of glory? Yesu – the mighty one, he is the king of glory.’

The druids taught the young people. Caesar said about this: ‘Young people come in large numbers to learn from them and they are highly revered. Many come of their own accord, but also many are sent by their families.’ The word ‘druid’ is not related to the Greek name for oak, as Pliny the Elder stated. It stems from the ancient ‘dru-wid’, from the Latin ‘videre’ and the Greek ‘idein’, ‘to see’. The literal meaning of druids is: ‘they who see

far’ or ‘they who know much’, but the Indo-European root ‘wid’ is closely related to the Gallic word ‘vidu’, tree.

In Celtic, there is a relationship between the word ‘to know’ and the word for forest. The relationship between knowing on the one hand, and religious-magical experiencing in connection with the venerable, old forest trees on the other, is not so strange, especially if we think of the tree of knowledge, which is found in the traditions of all peoples. The druids were knowledgeable people and at the same time, men of the trees, people who

## In the year 43, emperor Claudius ordered his troops to invade Brittany and to raze the druidic universities to the ground

knew nature and were healers, people who taught and performed their rituals in holy, open places.

**THE POWER OF THE MEMORY** According to Caesar, they thought about the stars and their movements, the dimensions of the world and of the land, about the nature of things, the power of the gods, and it was these memories that they passed on to the youth. This instruction could only take place by word of mouth, because the druids had two good reasons to distrust writing. On the one hand, they did not want their teachings to become public and on the other hand, they wanted to prevent their students from believing that they knew something – because they were able to write it down! – while neglecting their memory. This is an additional explanation for the long time needed for their studies. The main reason was, we can well imagine, that a young person should to a certain extent be a man, autonomous, free and mature, to be able to proclaim this wisdom.

A druid explained to the Greek philosopher Lucianus of Samosata: ‘We do not link eloquence with Hermes, as you do, but with the mighty Hercules... We believe that Hercules was a sage who was able to do everything he

did through the power of his eloquence, and who overcame all impediments through the power of his conviction. In my opinion, his fast arrows were nothing else than his words: sharp-pointed and well-directed to inflict harm to the (wrong ideas of the) soul; as you say yourselves: winged words.’

In the year 43, emperor Claudius ordered his troops to invade Brittany and to raze the druidic universities to the ground. Institutions and libraries were to be destroyed and he proposed to the Roman senate to impose the death penalty on professing the druidic religion. Subsequently, ‘many fled to the harbours to go to another country, looking for freedom.’

Ultimately, the Roman empire and the Roman church would wholly undermine the influence of the druids and make it disappear utterly. However, before this could happen, a remarkable fusion occurred between druidism, that was purely oriented towards the Light, and pure Christianity, that had already reached the West via an intact line, by the year 50. ✪

# a field that reflects pure values

Each nation has its sanctuaries, often erected on so-called holy places like, amongst other things, the nodes of earth rays. Literature about Celts and druids in general and about Ireland in particular contains a wealth of references to those remarkable places. But what exactly is a sanctuary?

*'I felt the breath of strange worlds stroke my face.'*

Ella Young, Celtic Wonder Tales

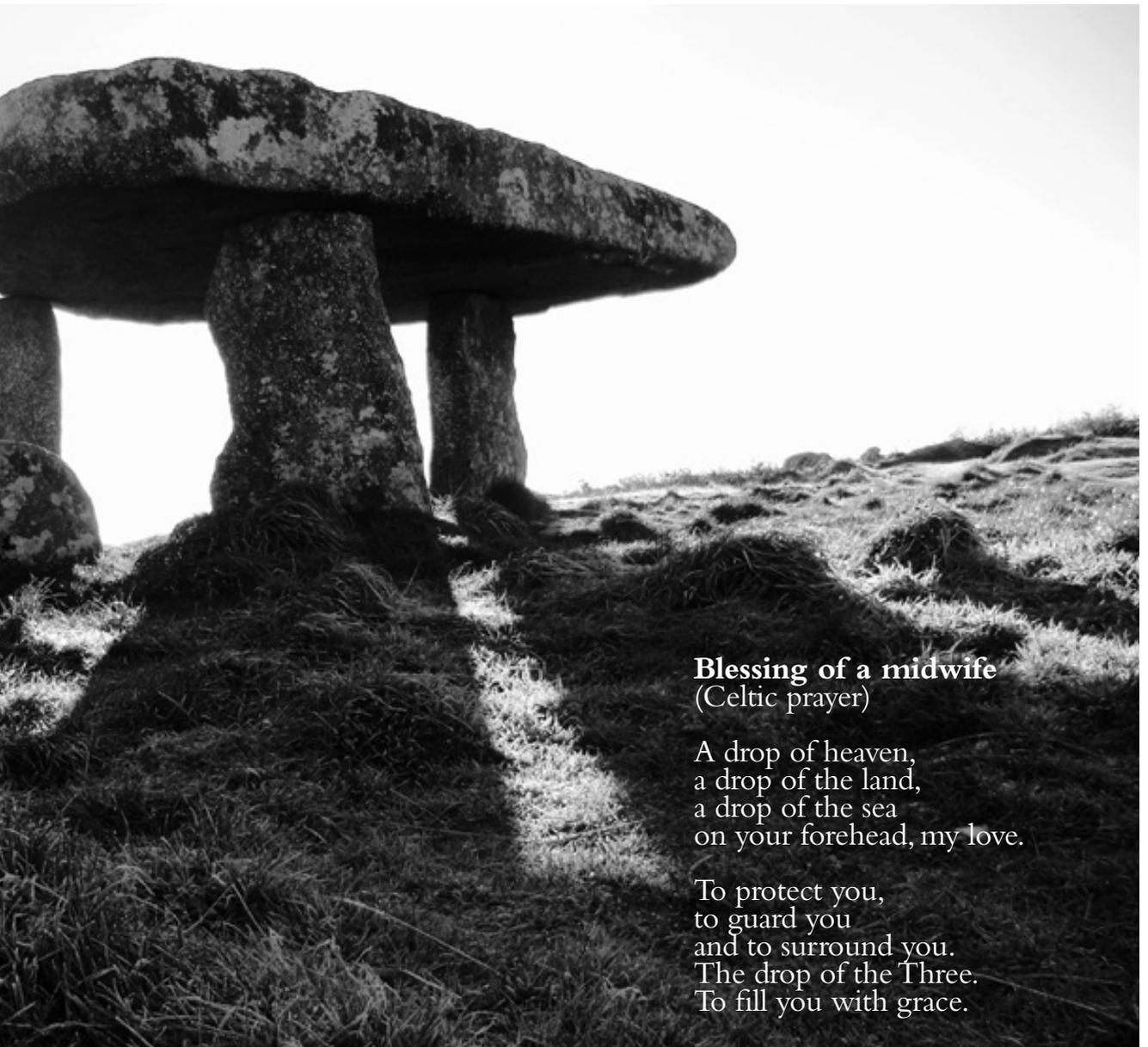
**W**hat makes a place a sanctuary? The word sanctuary itself explains this. 'Holy' means: whole, complete, perfect, and hence we use words like healing. A surgeon is a healer.

In Dutch, the word 'sanctuary' is related to the word house, although in its most abstract form, as far as the concept of form can be utilised.

In a number of Western European languages (Dutch, German, Swedish, Danish and Norwegian), the word 'mankind' refers to all aspects, properties and characteristics that evoke the immaterial concept of 'man' in our consciousness. This word refers to a unity, a collective. The opposite of this unity is implied in the word 'kingdom', referring to a multitude. Minerals, animals and plants form a kingdom, with a great diversity in each of them, the number of which does not mean anything to

**Lanyon Quoit or Table of the Giants, in Cornwall. Nowadays it is thought that the Celts did not wholly cover their megalithic monuments with sand, but left the granite capstone and the jambs uncovered to serve as background during ritual ceremonies**





**Blessing of a midwife**  
(Celtic prayer)

A drop of heaven,  
a drop of the land,  
a drop of the sea  
on your forehead, my love.

To protect you,  
to guard you  
and to surround you.  
The drop of the Three.  
To fill you with grace.



our consciousness. The human life wave is called mankind, the collective of all human forms of manifestation, in which the idea of 'Man' has been broken up, regardless of the time and the stage of development, in which mankind finds itself. It is like a flame that explodes into sparks.

The concept of 'kingdom' evokes an immense landscape, a diversity of forms of life that extends to the farthest corners of what we are able to imagine. The word refers to a concen-

tration, in the form of a pyramid, surpassing all kingdoms and firmly planted in the earth, but increasingly subtle towards the top. What both the horizontal 'kingdom' as well as the vertical 'house', referred to above, have in common, is their limited visibility as a result of our limited consciousness.

A house is a protected place in which we live together, and therefore, it is a spiritual house, too. Individuals assemble and combine the essence of their humaneness and their spiritual

## A sanctuary is a place where the union is sought, the restoration of the three-in-one

powers, to form a reflection of the one man. There, an unearthly space may be created, a special place or field, separated from the personality, separated from the physical place of assembly, down to 'in the world, but not of the world'. In this way, this house becomes a home. A house is static; a home is activity, life, movement. Spirit seeks the re-union with the healing spirit. The classical Rosicrucians from the seventeenth century called this building 'the House Sancti Spiritus'. The modern Rosycross refers to it as 'the Living Body'. There is no dead matter. The earthly building, in which this sanctifying, healing work is systematically carried out, and that is kept as pure as possible to this end, will stone-by-stone inhale this atmosphere and also emanate it again.

**SPIRIT OF TRUTH** In this way, a house, built by human hands, becomes a 'sanctuary', to the extent that we do not understand it in a material sense. Thus the concept of 'Christianity' can never refer to an organisation or a doctrine, let alone to a series of dogmas, but refers to a field in which the pure values of the Supernature are reflected and preserved. How many Christians would there really be? However, as above, so below: this irradiation by the Light takes shape in an order, in which the spirit of truth can be lived. This form wholly serves the work of salvation that is accomplished in it and may be an open place, a hut or a basilica. Celtic culture had a special

relationship with trees, which perfectly fitted into its vision of nature and man. As we cannot say of a human being that he is an animal, we can no longer say of a tree that it is a plant; both have surpassed their general earthly form. To the druids, the oaks and other trees in a forest were symbols similar to what the pillars of a cathedral were for the mediaeval person.

Stone or wood, marble or sand alone do not build true temples and cathedrals. Only the harmony of human hands, human heads and human hearts working together build beacons of light, regardless of the cultural framework, provided they form a home for the spirit of truth. Where people have assembled in the name of the Light, an inexhaustible wellspring of help and comfort springs up for those who seek the Light.

A sanctuary is a place where the union is sought of the energy of the Gnosis, man and world, of spirit, soul and body, the restoration of the three-in-one. Each human being bears a sanctuary in his heart; in every human being – however ignorant – the spark of the eternal fire slumbers, usually still hardly perceptible through the veils that the material world has woven around it. Yet, it is a Light that is never extinguished, because it arises from the eternal flame of love. ✪



# landmarks on the horizon



The great stone structures from the new Stone Age testify to an impressive geometrical knowledge. The builders measured and spoke with their heart, with one unit of measurement and with one language.

**T**he builders of the great stone structures from the period that we call the new Stone Age, which began approximately 11,000 years ago, had an entirely different consciousness than ours and their knowledge was of a wholly different nature. They would be unable to compete with our rational knowledge and with the large amount of information that we now have at our disposal. This would have outweighed their 'knowledge of the heart', their link with creation and the wisdom of their intuition, with which they approached life and their fellow human beings.

They did not know a division between art and science, between religion and philosophy, and between astronomy and astrosophy. They were nevertheless able to erect incredible constructions and they had an impressive geometrical knowledge at their disposal. They carefully followed the course of the celestial bodies and acknowledged the importance of the changing of the seasons. They were aware of the coherence between the human 'small world' and the macrocosm in the great world of the universe. For them, the energy flows in the human body did not hold any secrets. To them, the energy flows or lay lines, drawn over the earth, along which they erected their edifices (astronomical observation points? concentration points of energy? places of healing? religious constructions?)

**The fascinating fort Dun Aengus, a remnant from the Celtic Iron Age (around 500-100 BC), looks out over the sea on the rocks of Innishmore, an island on the Irish west coast.**

assembly points of knowledge?), were just as normal as a route planner is to us. The precision with which these nodes correspond to the positions and movements of the celestial bodies through time, leave us astonished; here, we find evidence that countless people in ancient societies lived on the basis of 'as above, so below'. Scholars assume that there was a single global language that was spoken until 15,000 years ago, just as people also measured and built on the basis of the megalithic yard as the unit of measurement. Language was holy, typical of what was divine; the word possessed power and was used very carefully. Nothing was written down, because everything was known. Only those who possessed knowledge, ruled the people; he who was king was knowledgeable, learned, connected. These groups determined where people could settle; they were the ones who had the knowledge of building and architecture – all kinds of knowledge were represented in them. Plato wrote in his *Critias*:

'For many generations, as long as the divine nature lasted in them, they were obedient to the laws, and well-affectioned towards the god, whose seed they were; for they possessed true and in every way great spirits, uniting gentleness with wisdom in the various chances of life, and in their intercourse with one another.'

Scholars say that everything seems to indicate that before the Flood of approximately 11,000 BC (Plato estimated the destruction of the island of Atlantis around that time), the earth had a high megalithic civilisation. We still discover

new places that show this with stone constructions of an immense size that sank below the water after the rise of the sea level. The astronomical orientation, the use of the megalithic yard of about 83 centimetre as the unit of measurement, which seems to have been used everywhere in the world, and the uniform symbolism are other hints of this.

During the 1970's, John Mitchell (1933-2009) published a great deal about these energy lines. Although they are hard to ascertain scientifically, the experts in the field believe, like he did, that the structure of lines of force that runs over the

**Reconstruction of an open place in Manching on the Danube (now in Bavaria), that was used as a grazing pasture for herds, thousands of years before a Celtic oppidum (settlement) was built there**

surface of the earth was known in the society that erected the mysterious stone constructions. They are always found in nodes, in places where these lines touch or intersect each other; they indicate important places of energy.

Megalithic society attuned itself to the electrostatic impulses of a still existing, mysterious web of interconnected, straight lines. Until this day, there are many people who can testify to the atmosphere or influence, emanating from these places. Mitchell discovered that the age-old monuments had always been built on perfectly straight lines with at least two other stone structures, and that the astronomical lines extended to other stones and sites, always oriented towards landmarks on the horizon. ✪



# celtic christianity



Ireland, the green island, is called the country of saints and scholars. For a long period, the druids guided young people there through further stages of development to independent thinking. Early Irish authors used the Latin word 'magi' for the druids. Of old, their religion looked forward to the return of the Light, and in this situation, young, pure Christianity found a fertile soil.

*How would we ever be able to forget the Irish isle, whence the lustre of such a great light and the sun of the faith have risen for us?*

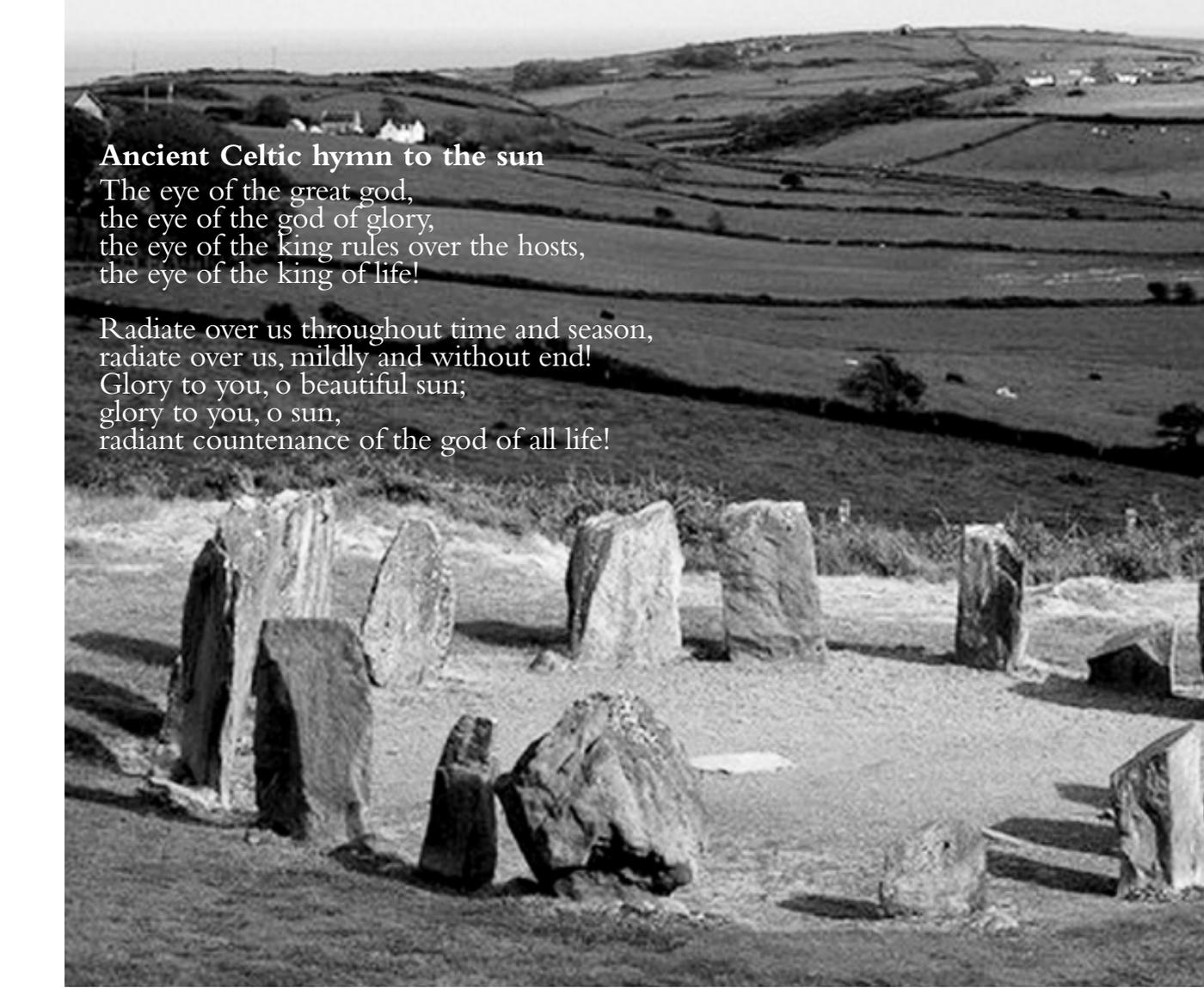
Abbot Grimold of St. Gallen (around 860 AD)

It was in Ireland that, during the first centuries of our era, without any outside interference, the very special marriage was achieved between the ancient wisdom of the mysteries and the new impulses of inner Christianity. It is a mistake to think that the original, more matriarchal and holistic culture of the Celts was roughly destroyed by the masculine, authoritarian culture of the Christians. This might be true for the restoration movement, imposed by Rome in the sixth century, but this certainly did not apply to the early Celtic Christianity of the first centuries of our era – which was a purely Irish product.

The truth is rather that in Ireland, the new, Christian message was immediately recognised by the representatives of the ancient mysteries. Subsequently, a young, spiritual movement, propelled by the new impulse of the Light of Christ, received its decisive contours on the basis of this ancient wisdom. In this way, Irish Christianity was, in no time, able to flourish and spread liberation far beyond its borders, during a gradual, peaceful process that never renounced the identity of the Irish attitude to life.

**TRADE NETWORK** From more than one direction (see elsewhere in this issue), the events in Palestine around Jesus' crucifixion were known amongst the druids. This was enabled by the many trade relations between Wales, Ireland and the Roman towns on the Mediterranean, as well as the many visitors who, in antiquity, visited the centres of druidism in Britain. Transmitted writings described the two major druidic teachings of eternity and the unassailability of the universe. Their laws were called 'heavenly judgements'; these were always passed on orally, but were eventually written down by order of the king of Ulster in 48 AD. Two hundred years later, in 266, King Cormac renewed the laws that still stemmed from antiquity; he rebuilt the academy of Tara-Skryne (founded in 1348 BC) and had the druids, many of whom had already become bishop or priest by that time, teach history, law and military training. This 'double function' was actually no problem, because it did not concern a fundamentally different vision! This is why, even after the conquest of Ireland by the English, the bards, judges, physicians and druids were allowed to keep their position in society.

In subsequent church history, this truth has been suppressed. Later, in the established churches, the fact was obscured that during its emergence, Irish Christianity was wholly based on the original, liberating, universal teachings and was not Roman at all. Rather



## Ancient Celtic hymn to the sun

The eye of the great god,  
the eye of the god of glory,  
the eye of the king rules over the hosts,  
the eye of the king of life!

Radiate over us throughout time and season,  
radiate over us, mildly and without end!  
Glory to you, o beautiful sun;  
glory to you, o sun,  
radiant countenance of the god of all life!

the opposite was true: the first Christian communities in Rome could develop due to the activity of Welsh noblemen, who had received the new faith from a direct source, and took it with them to Rome. And this was a different Christianity than the one Augustine and Patrick brought to Ireland five centuries later.

**TRIADIC KNOWLEDGE** Centuries before, it was the druids who had gained the insight that their ancient wisdom of the mysteries would disappear due to the dawning new consciousness. This wholly explains how it was possible that a voluntary spiritual transfer was able to occur. A new time began, requiring a new method of initiation which had been predicted; this was stored in their triadic knowledge and they wanted to cooperate in it. Before, initiation largely concerned the

development of the powers of the I, which could be reinforced by extreme physical ordeals.

Therefore, it was not without reason that the heroism and undaunted courage of the Celtic warriors instilled such fear in the Romans. To the Celts, the world was anything but hospitable. It was considered magically charged, populated by demons. Only the hardening of the warriors under the harshest conditions prepared them for the struggle against the dark powers. In this respect, they were helped by their relationship to the surrounding nature, supported by the planetary forces active in it, which they knew and were able to experience as reality, thanks to the druids. The latter taught them that the word Celt meant 'courageous', 'brave', 'undaunted'.



**In the Irish county of Cork, the almost perfect An Drom Beag can be found, also called 'Druid altar'. This stone circle was constructed in such a way that the imaginary line that runs from the altar stone through the centre of the portal stones, coincided with the point where the sun rises during the winter solstice on 21 December**

NEW, DIFFERENT COURAGE However, gradually, these powers dwindled and the Celts lost their old habits. The required courage and willingness to sacrifice began to arise from a wholly different nature. Fear would be overcome by devoutness, detachment and devotion. It would be based on the direct, immediate experiencing of divine being, no longer limited to nature, but also to be found within their own self, while everyone would personally be able to walk the path through the mysteries.

Their deeply felt adoration of the sun as the image of God's countenance confronted them with the encounter with Christ as the solar king, the central planetary spirit. In this mystery, the druids recognised the victory of the light over the darkness, which was formerly celebrated at midwinter. The druids have always opposed the idea that they should serve the Light of the sun as a revenging, blood-thirsty deity. The only sacrifice that was asked was that of the self, in struggle, if necessary in military discipline, to learn this attitude. What mattered from then on was a new energy: love. Imitating the son of God, one should now sacrifice oneself, but not necessarily as a bloody sacrifice. In Wales and Ireland, there are a few regions where Christianity was introduced without bloodshed. There Christianisation occurred spontaneously, without being imposed violently – because it was already there! The process of conversion from the worship of nature forces to inner transforma-

They knew the course of the stars and the influences of the cosmos; they were attuned to the changing of the seasons. Their contact with supernatural life was expressed in the worship of holy places, places of freedom, where only pure power circulated. There were special open places in the extensive forests, near confluent streams, in special places on the borders of a river, but also near ancient dolmen and menhirs, where they built with wood: open, wooden constructions.

In this context, they themselves possessed a sensitive intuition, a remnant from the ancient human power of clairvoyance, with which they were able to perceive and interact directly with the surrounding nature forces. We can see clues of this in their skull tonsure and the long neck hair that represented this connection.

## The supernatural sensitivity of the Celts was expressed in the worship of holy places, places of freedom, where only pure power circulated

tion through the new spiritual forces occurred spontaneously – because it was understood. In accordance with their independent nature and their loyalty to traditions, the Irish leaders of the people developed a unique combination of the new faith and their ancient paths of initiation. Because the Irish were never dominated by the Romans, and their own worship predicted the coming of a bearer of the Light, they naturally and soon accepted Christianity.

**PATRICK** Just as Augustine, before becoming a ‘church father’, was first instructed by the Manichaeans, Patrick was trained by the druids. He came from the British Isles and was captured by the Gaels. As the slave of a druid, he seems to have learned a great deal of the teachings and magic of the druids. He converted to Christianity and considered it his task to convert the Gaels. In this role, he baptised and ordained priests. It was particularly the striking correspondences between the new Christianity and Celtic druidism that enabled him to herald the second stage of Christianisation in Ireland. At least, this is as far as the information of the Christian monks is concerned, stemming from the first sources from the fifth century, when Patrick travelled around as a missionary from Rome. This was a quite different Christianity than the liberating impulse that reached the *insulae sacrae* during the first century!

This is why the church upholds the image of a Christianisation for which Patrick had laid

the foundation. Two hundred years after his death, he was introduced as the founder of Christianity – although he can only symbolise another kind of Christianity that had brought Ireland under the influence of Rome since the eighth century. However, it is obvious that his militant fight against the ‘pagan’ customs fits much better in the historiography of the conquerors. However, in the fire of his zeal, the Celtic heritage of the druids and the druidic wisdom disappeared. In his time, more than 180 books about the fortunes of the druids were burnt, while he himself admitted in his *Confessio* to have found Christians in Ireland, who ‘had come to Christianity of their own accord’.

After the Christianisation by Patrick, all details that were not in accordance with the Christian faith were dropped, and the (higher) druids, the true magi, were barred from becoming priests.

Thus the oral tradition disappeared, which still played a clear role during the first, not yet Christianised centuries, and that was later written down. These texts with their fairy-tale elements and their mythological symbols present an image of the druids in different functions. There is a noticeable distinction between a higher class of priests and a lower one. The general concept of ‘druī’ initially applied to all members of the priesthood. Caesar wrote the word in its Gallic form as ‘druis’ and later authors as ‘druida’. After Ireland had been Christianised, this word lost its meaning

and referred exclusively to lower classes of priests, a kind of shamanists, who were usually occupied with sorcery. Initially, bards, folk poets or folk singers were also members of the priesthood. In Gaul and Wales, the bards played a role as troubadours in Christian society until the end of the Middle Ages.

**TEACHINGS** However, because of the many names of the different categories and their functions within the class of druids, we should not forget the most important meaning of the word ‘druid’ – ‘he who possesses wisdom and knowledge’. Gradually, the meaning of the word disappeared from the consciousness of the Celtic peoples; in Brittany, it wholly disappeared, certainly after the Christianisation, and was replaced by ‘wizard’ or ‘sorcerer’. For those who were to a certain extent able to understand the inner teachings, the druids established oases of tranquillity and knowledge, while they who were not yet ready were guided on their path of experience, on which they were offered moral values of courage, bravery and responsibility.

The teachings of the druids, the triads, were very profound, and contain many universal elements. Some recognise Vedic knowledge or knowledge from the Orient, in them. We clearly see a direct influence from Egypt and Syria. It is, therefore, not surprising that Irish monasticism strongly resembled the spirituality of the Oriental desert fathers; there were contacts back and forth. In this context, one

of the first great theologians, Pelagius, travelled to Palestine and North Africa, and came into contact with the gnosis of Alexandria. And Caesar said about them: ‘The druids consider the immortality of the soul the basis of their teachings. They teach that the souls do not disappear, but move from one body to the next. They consider this their main motive for leading a virtuous life.’

One of their teachings was:  
Every end is a new beginning, and any beginning is an end.

Their threefold circles confronted a human being with the three worlds of Celtic cosmogony: The circle of Abred is that of the cycle of the experience in matter and its duality. The circle of Gwynfyd is the world of glory and bliss of spiritual being. The circle of Cengang symbolises the divine, the unchanging, the unknowable.

The Greek philosopher Hecataeus of Abdera (approximately 350 BC) already described the religion and form of society of Ireland and mentioned an ancient faith of the priests. The dead who were ready for Gwynfyd (the spiritual realm) were repelled by the moon and attracted by the sun, where they stayed forever, while those who were not yet ready returned to the earth after a stay in the moon valleys, repelled by the sun and attracted by the moon. ☼

# eiré – independent, magical, invincible

Since long ago, Ireland, with its undulating landscape, surrounded by a border of hills and mountains, protecting it against the ever-present sea, has been veiled in a mysterious mist. On the east coast, we find an empty dune landscape and clean, deserted beaches; the west coast is ragged and rough, where fjord-like inlets cut through the high rocks and the perpendicular cliffs.

To the Greeks, Hibernia ('the winter land born from the waves') once was one of the most important abodes of the Hyperboreans, the distant forebears of the Celts. Once, Eiré belonged to the Atlantic continent. According to esoteric records, it was 'during the times that the sons of the Hyperboreans, the Scythians, inhabited this land that the arch-druid Rama began his mission and guided a part of these inhabitants from the north to the east and led them into a new period of humanity'. From Central Asia, a part of this group, also called Celts, later settled in, amongst other places, Ireland.

Ireland, but also England, are often referred to with the mysterious name *insulae sacrae*. This does not alter the fact that for ages, 'the holy island' experienced the ravagings of mutual hatred, envy and one war after another. Nevertheless, Eiré is sometimes even called the Egypt of the West. It is good to distinguish between the Celtic conquerors and their rather violent, lowbrow culture and the original, 'native', druidic culture that is much older and very high-minded. In the myths and sagas, these cultural worlds are intertwined. Eiré is the place where magical stone formations still testify to an ancient civilisation. People speak of proto-druidic origins, and it is likely that the later druids used it.

Druidism is often mentioned in the same breath with the Celts, but as far as the latter are concerned, we should actually speak of a wholly different origin. Just as the oak tree





**The Last Supper. Illustration from a mediaeval manuscript, made in Edessa (Syria, current Turkey). Here was the cradle and the first centre of Aramaic Christianity**

## A new impulse irradiated the world with the ancient teachings of the liberation of the divine element in the human being

bears the beautiful mistletoe, which emanates a special fascination, the druids gave the Celts – unspoilt, though rough – a special, mysterious character. The appearance of the druids goes back to a much older sun cult that is sometimes referred to as that of the ‘proto-druids’. In this context, the Greek historian Diodorus of Sicily (1st century AD) spoke of a sun cult on an island in the north. And Pliny wrote: ‘... their land is open to the sun and has a pleasant temperature without too much wind. The inhabitants live in forests and caves, where they worship their gods undisturbed, and live in communities: they know neither war nor illness.’

Aristeas, a priest of Apollo, described Hyperborea as ‘a legendary country where people live in peace, follow a vegetarian diet, and are happy and courageous.’ In this context, it is interesting that Apollo, according to Herodotus, was worshipped as ‘the sun god coming from the winter land Hibernia’. There, Mount Meru was purportedly located, where this and the other world meet, the centre of the world!

**EXPECTATION** On this magical island, Eiré, that is Britain and Ireland, druidism flourished for a number of reasons considerably longer than elsewhere in Europe and seamlessly transformed into original Christianity that reached Ireland quite early. It is hard to explain the rapid spread of this new religion other than by the help and support of the druids. After all, they had expected Yesu and

Christ as the Light of the world that, coming from the spiritual sun, linked the earth with the divine principle in the cosmos again, and earthly man with his divine prototype. Tertulian spoke of ‘a people, not conquered by the Romans, but nevertheless subjected to Christ’. The English historian Gildas wrote in 360 AD about ‘an island far from the world and the visible sun that had received the rays of light, the holy precepts of Christ, the true sun.’ Many authors have recorded that Joseph of Arimathea and his eleven companions, having arrived in Avalon in 38 AD, in no time brought the new, liberating teachings to the Silurian court.

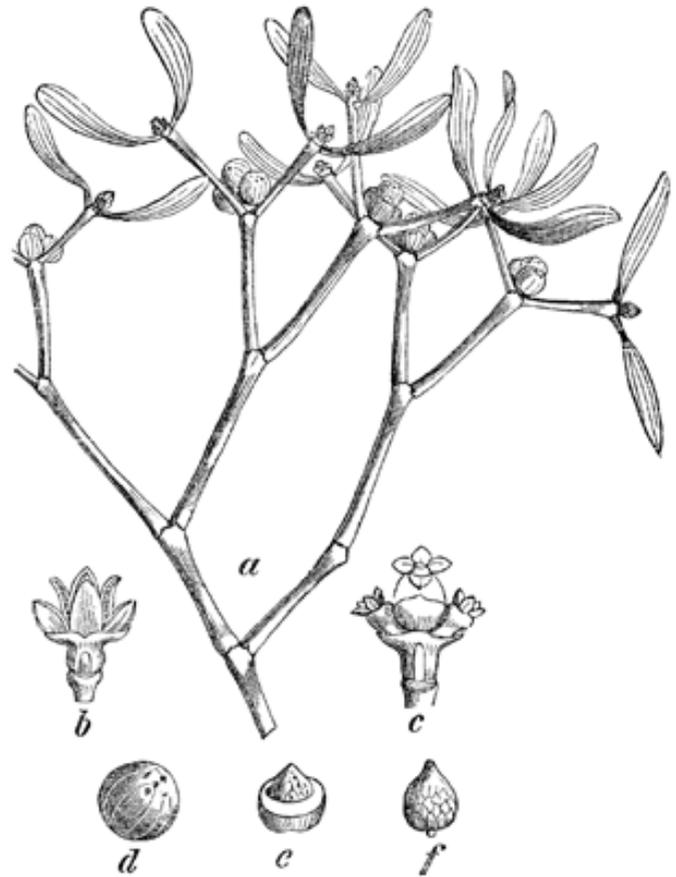
It cannot be emphasised enough that there was no question of any Christianity at the time, but only of a new impulse that irradiated the world with the ancient teachings of the liberation of the divine element in man, charged with new cosmic power. This is what truly underlies the event on Golgotha!

It was Joseph of Arimathea, a trader in tin (actually from Marmore, Egypt) who, after 38 AD, acquainted the famous king Llyr (King Lear from Shakespeare’s play) with the new teachings. In Llandaff (Wales), the latter built the first Christian temple! The ancient records relate that the rulers of Sicily had granted him 12 ‘hydes’ (600 hectares) of land on a ‘royal island’, where Glastonbury would arise later. Special mention should be made of Llyr’s son Bran, who later received the nickname ‘the

Blessed'. Bran and his son Caradoc, embracing the new religion of the Light, were baptised and declared their whole kingdom a Christian region. One of the Harleian manuscripts says: 'Christianity has begun in Britain with Bran and Caradoc, before the year 50 AD.' The result was that Cornwall and Wales, which were known as Siluria at the time, formed the first Christian kingdom in the world.

Powerful Rome from the first century of our era bowed to Claudius' decree to extinguish any Christianity and druidism in Britain. However, even four successive generals were unable to do so! And during a six-month truce, Caradoc was invited to come to Rome for negotiations. Caradoc's sister married the Roman general Plautius and stayed in Rome, while Caradoc's father Bran and his grandfather Llyr, likewise remained in Rome, although only after initially having been taken hostage. A few years after his return to the 'islands of tin', he was defeated after having been betrayed. The Romans paraded Caradoc in triumph through Rome and Rome shuddered for the never-before defeated Celtic British.

However, in an unprecedented act of benevolence, as Tacitus expressed it in his Annals, Claudius showed mercy allowing them to live. They spent the seven years of their exile in a house that is still known as the 'British palace'. There they received many refugees from Judea. They were the first and most important people to affirm the liberating religion of



**Mistletoe or *Viscum album***

Jesus the Lord. By their high-minded mode of life, they kindled the great longing for the new life in Christ's solar sphere in the hearts of thousands of seekers of antiquity. When they returned, around 58 AD, Linus and Claudia, two of their children, stayed in Rome to devote themselves to the new community there while the other children went back with their parents.

The great aversion of the heroic, druidic-Christian community towards the Roman Empire, does not in any way differ from the aversion of Henry VIII and Elizabeth I towards the Roman-Spanish influence in the English church. It was the same independent, English spirit that resulted in the reversal during the Battle of Britain in World War II. ✪

# a true knight

A quest for the Grail is a quest in which every person can engage. Overconfidence and impatience, no one is innocent. Ultimately, the mystery of the Grail is the mystery of the blood.





**T**he legend says: ‘Time and again, the sage had shown Artus that in every tribe, in every kingdom, in every world, man is imprisoned between earth and heaven, darkness and light. And one day, he told him about the Grail.

‘What is the Grail,’ young Artus had asked. ‘It is a chalice, a cup that received the blood of the crucified one!’

He told him that this chalice – this symbol – purportedly was still in this world, even at that time! Many had sought it. They knew that possessing it, even looking at it, would grant health and eternal life, and that it was the key to open the mysteries of life.

‘Is seeking the Grail the human striving for another, higher life?’

‘No,’ the sage answered. ‘It is the sun of life and it is the only thing that gives meaning to life.’

**GUILT AND INNOCENCE** Arthur or Artus is invariably linked with the Grail legend. We, westerners, depart from the idea that the Grail stems from mediaeval knighthood that originated after the fall of the Roman Empire. From the legends about Arthur, we are familiar with the Knights of the Round Table. We know Arthur’s struggle against his own creation, his son from his marriage to Morgan la Faye. This son, Mordred, also desired her and thwarted his father’s work. Arthur killed him during a fierce struggle, but was himself also seriously wounded. Suffering severely, he floated away in a boat, disappearing into the

St. Guilhelm le Desert

And who studied there? The nobility, the wealthy young people from the castles, the sons and daughters from the fortified farms and the castles on the high mountains, just as in the past promising young people studied at the countless druidic schools in Gaul and Britain

mists of Avalon. The only thing that remains is the tradition that this greatest king of England is not dead, but rather asleep and that one day, when the kingdom has been restored, he will return as king of the Grail to rule as the king of peace.

Does this refer to a kind of incest? Let us see these aspects within the human being as J. van Rijckenborgh, the founder of the Lectorium Rosicrucianum, does. In Arthur, we recognise the spirit, the microcosmic king. Morgan la Faye is the soul that, depending on who controls it, is in charge, and Mordred is one of the forces of the personality that would like to win the soul for its own purposes. It is the treason that occurs time and again, and which is perhaps best expressed in the story about Judas. All of it happens within a single human being – in this context, no one is innocent. The legend of the Grail deals with this guilt and innocence.

We know the time-tested legend of the quest for the Grail, the quest of Gawain, of Galahad and Percival. The origin is still older. We know a source in the stories of the Persians which deal with the same topic. They concern a young fool, who wants to come to the court, withstands the haughty royal household, and having approached the king, asks him what he should do to become a worthy knight – a human being. ‘Find the chalice with the secret of eternal youth, of the one life,’ is the reply. Sometimes, it is not a chalice, but a precious pearl as in this fragment ascribed to Mani,

who purportedly received it from the apostle Thomas:

‘Wake up and arise from sleep,  
and listen to the words of our letter!  
Understand that you are a prince!  
Into whose slavery have you come?  
Remember the pearl, for which you were sent  
to Egypt.  
Remember the radiant vesture,  
the golden mantle, which you will don  
again...’

**CRADLE OF THE GRAIL** The Grail was not found in England. Historians say that as early as the sixth century, there was a kingdom in Occitania where the Grail was highly revered. It extended from the south of France, across the Pyrenees, to northeast Spain. The counties of Razès, Barcelona and Toulouse and the duchy of Aquitania belonged to it. It is the cradle of the Grail, the womb of Catharism. In St. Guilhelm-le-Désert or Gellone, as the small town north of Montpellier was called at the time, there was a university devoted to the study of religion, which, in addition to Jewish mysticism and Arabic influences, also preserved the mysteries of the Grail. In early mediaeval France and Spain, there were several similar schools. At the time, Guilhelm-le-Désert, which later became a monastery, was famous for its scholars and its impressive library. In Charlemagne’s time, a tremendous cult around Mary Magdalene flourished in this town. There we find the first European



traces of the Parcival saga. And who studied there? The nobility, the wealthy young people from the castles, the sons and daughters from the fortified farms and the castles on the high mountains, just as in the past promising young people studied at the countless druidic schools in Gaul and Britain. There, the minstrels studied; there the troubadours learned to sing and relate the Grail saga; and in this way, the story of Parcival was passed on from one generation to the next. It was ultimately written down by Chrétien de Troyes and Wolfram von Eschenbach. They were the first ones to write down the story of the Grail wholly uncensored.

A fragment from the Grail legend by Wolfram von Eschenbach states: 'He sets out, Parcival, young, who had never been outside his fortified farm, untouched by the world, clothed in a fool's dress by his mother, because she thought that a young fool in a world of cruelty would be jeered with mild derision. A true knight serves, is charitable and condemns no one, whatever they say and do, because no one has created himself...'

What an unworldly attitude! However, particularly in the beginning, it is innocence that protects the true seeker. When Parcival set out,

his first victim, Herzeloide, his own mother, dies of sorrow for him. Then the question crops up: what is this innocence?

The question to Peschor, the Grail king, is again quoted by Wolfram: 'How did the Grail come to this region?' To this, the king answered: 'When Jesus had been crucified, Joseph of Arimathea, together with Nicodemus, took him off the cross. Then Joseph was thrown into a dark dungeon, where they wanted to starve him. He stayed in it for forty years without food or drink. But the Lord and Saviour sent him the Holy Grail to serve him, two or three times every day. It gave him food that was more delicious than the heavenly manna. And as long as Joseph remained incarcerated, he did not suffer any grief or difficulty due to his receiving the Grail and due to its holiness. When Titus and Vespasianus came to the land of Judea, they released Joseph from prison and took him to Rome. Joseph took the precious spear and in this way, the Grail came into his possession again by God's benevolence.' Some time after this, when Jesus' disciples spread, Joseph (with Mary Magdalene) sailed to this region (Occitania). They disembarked in Massilia, the current Marseille.

## The horse is an archetype of the soul which is, however, out of control without the powerful guidance of the spiritual human being

Peschor, the Grail king, continues his narrative: 'He built this manor and became king of the country; I am of his progeny and of his family. When he gave his soul into God's hands, the precious relics: the chalice, the Grail, and the spear were preserved. Ever since, they have not been away, and with God's help, they will not go away again either. King Peschor died, and Parcival took his place. King Artus attended the coronation celebrations. And it was the Holy Grail that was used and quenched all present.'

OVERCONFIDENT AND RESTIVE Parcival's quest continued. What did he seek? 'Service and seeking God' were the values that his mother Herzeloide had instilled in him. What did he seek? Once again, it appears that he who seeks the Grail, should examine the powers of the human blood, for in addition to struggle, certainly love abides there. The spirit of truth blows through the tales about the quest for the Grail, because they do not reject nature in any way, but rather give it the place it deserves. It does not reject the weak one. It shows us Parcival as an overconfident, restive seeker, who is confronted with the power of the blood in many ways. Condwiramur lives in a castle; Parcival is a wanderer who allows his horse to choose his path. The horse is an archetype of the soul, which certainly is open and innocent, but which is also out of control without the powerful guidance of the spiritual man of yore. It is a

long way to the Grail. However, the journey had not yet begun!

What is the Grail? In Trevrizent's cave, Parcival learns more:

'The Grail symbolises a *lapis ex coelis*, a stone from heaven [...].'

'Hear what nourishes the fighting knights:

They live on a stone

that must be noble in kind.

If it is still unknown,

its name is mentioned here to you,

it is called *lapis ex coelis*.

Through its power, the phoenix is burnt

so that it turns into ashes

and then, rejuvenated, rises above the glow.

The phoenix shakes its feathers

and acquires a light shine again

so that it becomes more beautiful than ever.

Even if a human being suffers a lot of pain,

he will not die on the same day

when he may behold the stone

nor the next week.

Nor will his countenance be disfigured:

The colour remains clear and pure

if he daily beholds the stone

just as he once was in his best days,

as a young man or girl.

Even if he would see the stone for two hundred years,

his hair would not turn grey.

Such power the stone gives to man

that his flesh and bones

are instantaneously rejuvenated,

This stone is called the Grail.'



**A Celtic phalera or breastplate for a warrior, to be considered a precursor of our medals. This object stems from about 100 BC and was discovered in Manerbio sul Mella in North Italy**

He who possesses such a stone and is its king may certainly be considered invincible, but Amfortas, the Grail king (whom we may see as the exalted human being, as the original, human prototype) suffers and no medicine, no herb and no 'stellar remedy' is able to cure him. Only a question, asked out of love, at the right place and at the right hour, is able to stem the impurity, the thrust of the pagan spear and the loss of creative power, because this is what the king suffers from.

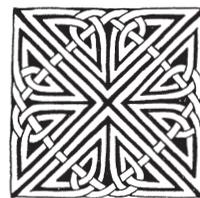
Now the question crops up: 'Why must the Grail king suffer?' The mystery is this: the eternal originates from Isis, the living one, that is, the mater, the son, the power, the genesis. It is the Spirit, God, the Ineffable One, who created the original worlds and the original manas. And here, in our world of experience, we accept this life as a matter of course, live it, use it, consume it, taking it for granted, and without feeling any responsibility, we abuse it, even destroy it. Precisely because of this death, this dying of the Light, Amfortas suffers. He is no longer able to bring forth, to create, and only an innocent young person like Percival who, like John, prepares the way for those coming after him, is able to save him, by asking the question.

**NEW VIRTUES** Ultimately, the mystery of the Grail is the mystery of the blood – and of the transfiguration of the blood. New virtues, the properties of the spirit-soul human being, are released through which the nourishment of

the Grail is assimilated. Then a wholly different being of a higher spiritual origin will change his life and give it colour, lustre and meaning.

The legend says: 'It is Percival who, innocent though haughty – a peculiar paradox – sets out on this quest, and accomplishes it successfully. At a certain moment, he travels together with another knight, who is in perfect balance with the light, emanating from the Grail, Galahad. And if then, in the middle of a forest, at a magical moment, the heavens open and this light and this lustre form a bridge to the 'unreachable realm' of the truly living ones (it is said that the Grail is no longer found in the material world), then Percival is profoundly moved – he has, after all, given his life – but it is Galahad who crosses the bridge. And Percival, the guardian of the Grail castle on the border of those two realms, now remains behind in this world as a knowledgeable one, as an inhabitant of the border to bear witness to the Light. ★

# johannes scotus, an irish freethinker



While elsewhere in Europe people were already living in the darkness of the Middle Ages, we see Johannes Scotus Eriugena as a lonely one, calling out in an increasingly withering, spiritual desert. This Eriugena (around 810-877), as he is called, justly bears the title of 'the last Christian universalist'. He betrays his Irish descent by the clear reference in his name: both Scotus as well as Eriugena simply mean: coming from Ireland.

Perhaps this descent partly explains his bold approach to reality. It is based on the all-encompassing unity of things. The little we further know of him illustrates the fate of someone who wanted to make something of the Light of divine wisdom shine in the darkest night. And although we hardly find any traces of his work in later centuries – in the thirteenth century, the pope even ordered what had been left of his work to be burned – his influence on later thinkers is nevertheless unmistakable.

It begins with the fact that Eriugena was one of the few people who still mastered Greek. Where did he learn it? Who taught him Greek? This remains a riddle. However, he translated and preserved for us *The Heavenly Hierarchies* that became a very important writing; for instance, Dante's *Divina Commedia* is unthinkable without this as a basis. Thus he formed a bridge to the wisdom of the ancient mysteries, at a moment when their power was spent, but at the same time, new impulses had not yet taken shape and this knowledge ran the risk of becoming wholly lost for Europe.

**FREE THINKER** Johannes Scotus was eminently suitable for this, because he purely felt the Irish spirit, so profoundly influenced by its druidic past. The divine is an ineffable reality. We are unable to describe it; in fact, we can only indicate what this reality is not. Words fail and descriptions only refer to what God is not. A part of the lofty divine aspect is within

the human being and it is even impossible to describe that: fundamentally unbound, infinite and absolutely unassailable.

Scotus stood out by his balanced judgement. Soon, the king of the West-Frankish Kingdom, Charles II the Bald (823-877), summoned him to Paris to head the palace school of the Carolingians in that city. There he had to mediate in a dispute concerning the divine providence, the aftermath of the old theological conflict between Augustine and that other Irish 'heretic', Pelagius (360-418?), who disagreed with the former's doctrine of original sin. However, even Eriugena was unable to imagine that a human being is destined to anything other than freedom and holiness. He was very modern! He argued that a human being is a microcosm of the great universe. In him, the natural senses work, but with his reason, he is able to trace the causes and activities of nature. And what is more, a human being is not only a natural being, but he also possesses a divine part. What is separated, what is 'sinful', belongs to the natural world. However, the divine aspect within would enable him – through grace – to return to what is divine.

He called this: the return of all living beings. He said this because whatever originates from God, will one day return to Him – the old maxim of the Rosicrucians: *Omnia ab uno, omnia ad unum*. In 853, this was enough for his adversaries to condemn his thinking as *pultes scottorum*, meaning as much as 'Irish mush'.



An ivory relief from Scotus' time shows the learned Gregorius, surrounded by writers

## Scotus dared to state that if man had not strayed, he would not even need the Scriptures!

Even more threatening for the church authorities was that Eriugena did not see a conflict between human reason and what the Scriptures teach. 'Let no authority unsettle you or distract you from the conviction that you acquire by straight, rational behaviour. True authority is never in conflict with straight reason, just as the latter never conflicts with true authority either. Both the one as well as the other undoubtedly stem from the same source, the divine wisdom.'

As one of the last of his time, he was, after all, still familiar with the divine reason which is, according to the divine promise, the heritage of man. This is why he first tested any doctrine against this high reason. Or rather, he dared to state, if man had not strayed, he would not even need the Scriptures! What mattered to him was unveiling the hidden meaning in these Scriptures. This is only possible through pure perception of the heart – and then of the spirit.

**PERIPHYSEION** Also his main work, *The Division of Nature*, an attempt at a great, all-inclusive cosmology, found no favour with the church authorities, and it is easy to understand why. To them, it was unacceptable that the Irishman blurred the distinction between what is divine and what is human. According to Eriugena, we should speak of one, all-inclusive nature only, which contains both God as well as man, the totality of all things, both what is as well as what is not. However, God

himself surpasses the distinction between being and not-being. He is not the creator of the visible world, although the divine ideas stem from him (as Plato said, too). These ideas seek a material form to express themselves and to develop themselves further in this way.

In more than one respect, Eriugena's philosophy of salvation is in line with the wisdom of the ancient Greek thinkers. Eriugena also accurately described the development that a person might experience. It is a path, leading to unification (henosis) or to becoming god (theosis), a path from not-being to being. Very expressively, he compared this process with how iron, by heating, ultimately only seems to be fire. In the same way, a creature will be transformed into God.

This is also the way of abstract thinking, because abstract thinking, a property of the soul, is able to reach the things that are time-

**Woman and man** According to Eriugena's ideas, woman and man are equivalent. 'A person is more than his gender,' he stated and he knew that the difference between the sexes was the result of the fall and served a high purpose. The true fall is the fall of the spiritual, divine thinking (manas) into the world of the senses. It is attracted by this fascinating world, in which the intellect can give form to and, therefore, seems to be equal to its Creator: Scotus saw this confirmed in the Holy Language: 'In Christ there is neither male nor female.'

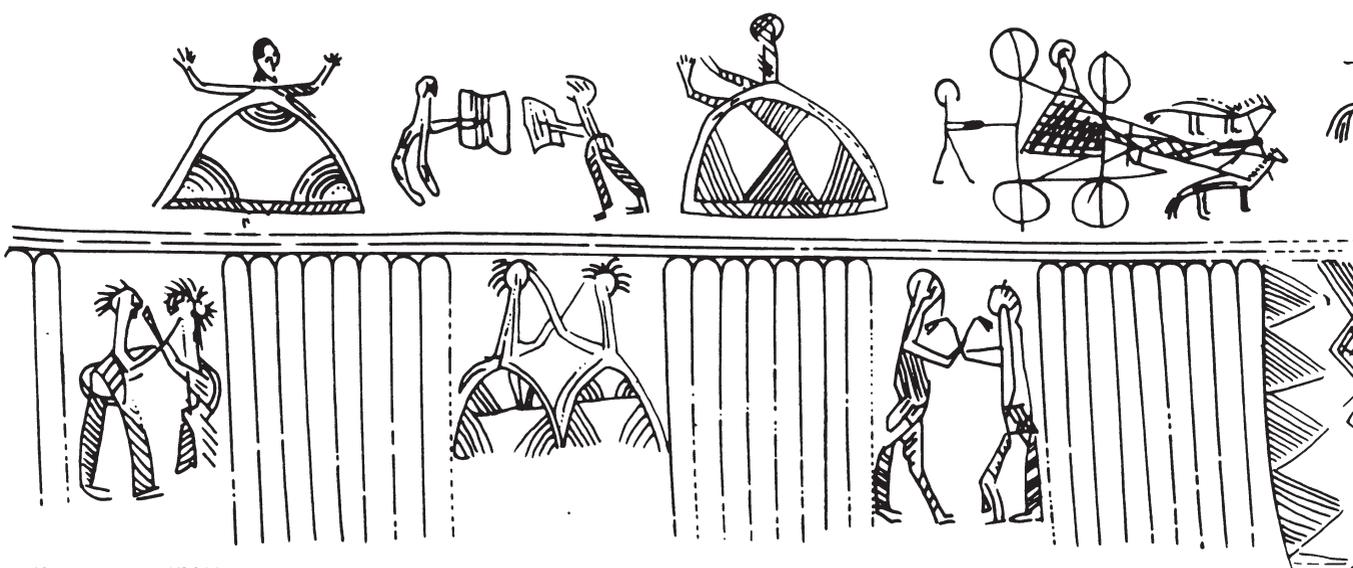
**Pelagius** This other Irishman, who lived four hundred years before Scotus, is sometimes considered one of the greatest intellectuals of his time. His life was strongly characterised by an ecclesiastical, theological debate with Augustine, particularly about the concept of original sin. To Pelagius, the freedom of the human will was of the utmost importance. According to him, children are born wholly innocent: it is important for man to lead a good and eminent life, because then he is able to partake of the divine nature.

In one of the few original writings that are left of Pelagius, the Letter to Demetrias, he states: 'The excellence of the soul, gifted with reason, exists in the freedom to do good as well as evil. [...] This is why the best acquire praise and reward and why there would be no virtue in the unwavering one, if he would not be able to surrender to evil.' And elsewhere in the same letter: 'God has made it a human property to be what he wants to be, so that he, capable of good as well as of evil, would naturally be capable of both and would turn his will to either. The only reason that he gave us the power to do evil is that we should do his will in accordance with our own will. Even the fact that we can do evil is, therefore, something good. It ensures that what is good is not done forcibly, but voluntarily.'

matter, place and time, does not exist in an absolute sense. In this way, a process of inner change offers a perspective on a complete return of everything to God, by which God will be everything in everyone.

**SOD OR SCOT?** For the greater part of his life, Eriugena enjoyed the protection of his patron, Charles the Bald, until finally, because Eriugena was condemned so often, a rift developed between them. According to a legendary anecdote, Charles and Eriugena were sitting at a table facing each other when Charles asked Eriugena: 'What separates a 'sod' (a fool) from a 'Scot' (an Irishman)? 'Only a table,' was his laconic reply. It is not surprising that the boldness of his behaviour and ideas ultimately

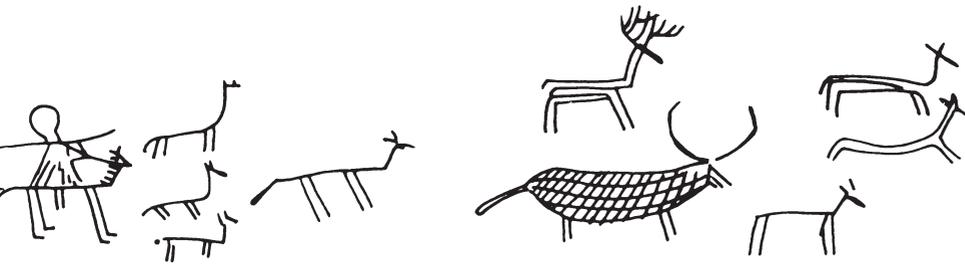
less and outside the material, physical world. Everything that has once been generated, like



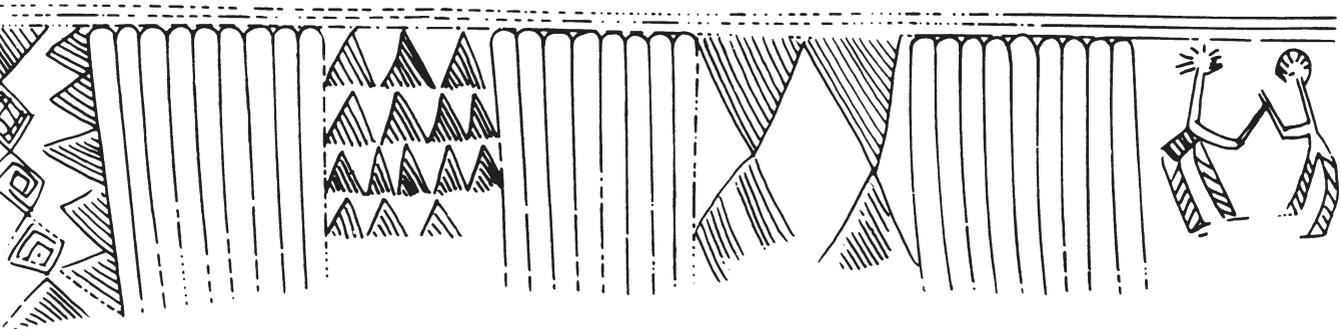
**A profound thought of Scotus** "Human greatness is not to be found in his likeness to the created world, but in the very fact that he is created in the image of the creator of nature.'Very purely, he refers to the twofold human nature, and expresses the fundamental, gnostic truth: 'It is through a certain wondrous and understandable division that the human being is divided into two parts. One part was created in the image and after the likeness of the creator: This does not partake of any animalism [...] while he partakes of animal nature in the other part and has been generated from the earth, in other words, from the common nature of all things. Deep down, human nature is just as unknowable and infinite as the divine one. It is not determined by the circumstances (even if it seems to be so). Any distinction between God and man never concerns the essence! It is the result of circumstances, it has surrounded the essence and it has been generated by ignorance, sin. Because just as God is infinite and unbound, so is original human nature: open to infinite possibilities and perfection.'

proved fatal. By the end of his life, Charles sent him back to Oxford to resume teaching there. It is said that an attack by one of his students ingloriously ended his life. On the continent, scholastic theology, in which Thomas Aquinas approached God only mentally, reigned supreme, while the influence of Eriugena, who said that only what is divine can comprehend God, waned. However, people like Master Eckhart had the greatest admiration for him; and the other gnostic mystic, Nicolas Cusanus, too, considered him his source of inspiration. The introduction to the first reissue of his main work says: 'The image of this great genius deserves a place next to that of Dante, Bonaventura and Jacob Boehme.' It is like an

echo of the new life that approaches us from a time and a civilisation that – just as that of each of us – existed in a state of the greatest possible confusion. ✪



**Celtic decorations on a vase from Sopron-Burgstall, Hungary, from the seventh century BC**



# the grail of the light

Almost all mediaeval versions of the legends of the Round Table of King Arthur and the Grail occur in France and Great Britain and clearly bear not only a Christian, but also an ecclesiastical stamp. The Celtic narrative, which is clearly manifested in the stories of Arthur and the Grail, has influenced Western European literature in many places.

In the ancient Celtic myths and sagas, a magical cauldron or cup often plays an important role. The Celts firmly believed that it was of a divine descent, because the gods mixed the creative and life-giving elements in it. If a mortal human being drank from it, he partook of liberating knowledge and was transformed from a mortal into an immortal being. The Finnish Kalevala, too, sings of the sampo (chalice, shield or world column), and we also encounter it as the mixing vessel (Greek: crater) with Plato and Hermes. In the Vedic tradition, we see it reappear as the source of the soma, the food of immortality. It is a mixing vessel, the inexhaustible content of which is only intended for initiates because, the Celtic stories say, food for cowards cannot be cooked in it. This is what can be read in the song *Preiddeu Annwfn* (The Prey of Annwfn), a story in the book of the bard Taliesin. The special mixing vessel possesses both a life-giving and life-destroying effect, because in the wrong hands, it does not bring a blessing but rather disaster. The hero should first demonstrate himself to be a brave warrior before he can achieve immortality.

**MABINOGION** In another Celtic story, the mixing vessel belongs to Keridwen, the main goddess from the story cycle of the Mabinogion, a collective term for a number of mediaeval texts from Wales. Keridwen shows much similarity with the gnostic Sophia, the primordial mother. She is the spouse of Hu-Gadarn,

the Light, the sun, but she is separated from him. We see her as a field, as primordial nature, and also as an energy field. She is nature that gives birth to all forms, so that they may change and be transformed!

In her mixing vessel, Keridwen brews a mixture of pure wisdom and knowledge that must cook for a year and a day. Gwion Bach (Taliesin) has the task of stirring the mixture, but three drops land on his fingers. When he puts his burnt fingers into his mouth, he suddenly becomes omniscient. In this way, the boy arouses Keridwen's wrath and she wants to kill him. By pursuing him, she forces him to adopt the forms of different animals like a hare, a fish and a bird. Ultimately, he turns into a grain of seed and then Keridwen, who had changed into a hen, picks him up in her beak. Nine months later, she gives birth to a child: the later famous bard Taliesin.

We may see the three drops as the forces of touch, transformation and realisation. Young Gwion assimilates these three forces of Keridwen. Genesis, transformation and rebirth guide him on his way through the four elements, of which man is composed: air, earth, fire and water. In the end, the experiences that he gains in this way prove to be useless. Finally, he seems lost in a state of confusion. However, only in this way, is he able to satisfy the conditions implied in the energy field, in which he walks his path, the three energies that are hidden in the concoction of the mixing vessel.



## THE ANCIENT LEGENDS OF THE GRAIL IN CELTIC TRADITION



All experiences of the person Gwion are concentrated in the grain of seed that Keridwen, primordial nature, assimilates again. And Gwion is reborn in the new man Taliesin – the singer of the Light. It is through his courage that Taliesin is able to restore the link with

**The stones of the Ring of Brodgar on the Orkneys are the remnants of a complex, where purportedly the sages and astronomers were occupied with studying the cosmos and performing related magical ceremonies. A network of ‘low roads’, linking the Neolithic, holy places, was spread all over England and Britain. © Marco Francino**

**The legend of the Grail**, a cup that radiates Light, is very old. The Sufis knew it as a wine cup that caused spiritual drunkenness by drinking from it in the sense of being wholly seized by the spiritual aspect that grants perfect insight and makes a human being one with the Gnosis. The first to transmit these spiritual truths, veiled in a poetic garment, was Omar Khayyam, who lived and worked during the eleventh and twelfth century (1048-1122). The crusaders brought this hidden meaning of the cup with them to Europe and interpreted the Grail as the chalice of the Last Supper.

The quest for the ark, which was very popular at the time, turned into the quest for the Grail. There is an analogy with the area that was lost by the crusaders: in the Grail saga, it is represented as the kingdom that is destroyed. Only the restoration of the temple of Jerusalem, possible when the knights of the temple would have gained the victory, would be able to revivify the lost kingdom to its full glory.

This approach also explains the continuing power of the Grail legend during the 12th century. In 1197, Wolfram von Eschenbach described the Knights of the Round Table as knights of the temple. It may be assumed that the story of the discovery of the tomb of Arthur (Artus) in Glastonbury Abbey (in 1190) found its way to France via noble families.

Hu-Gadarn – his father. In this way, he is able to defeat Keridwen and testify to it as bard in the world of men.

**THE VOICE OF THE ORACLE BRAN** Bran Fendigaïd the Blessed was the son of the sea god Llyr and the maternal grandson of Belenos, the sun god. In the epic, Bran marries his sister Branwen to the king of Ireland, Matholwch. In this way, he wants to link all Celtic nations. This is very much against the wishes of his half brother Efnisien, who even attacks the Irish king during his wedding feast. As a gesture of reconciliation, Bran gives Matholwch the mixing vessel of rebirth, in which dead war heroes may be revived again.

After the wedding, Branwen lives at the court in Ireland, but the people do not like her; along with her son, she is expelled from the court and forced to work as a maid. Once she has dispatched her favourite raven to Bran to inform him of her fate, he comes to her aid with a strong army, which wades through the Irish Sea and defeats Matholwch.

Although Branwen ensures that her son Gwern will become heir to the throne, during the victory celebration, the boy is thrown into the fire, after which a fierce fight breaks out. The Irish are on the winning side, because their warriors are time and again revived in the magical mixing vessel. The perpetrator of the attack repents and destroys the mixing vessel, yet simultaneously this breaks his heart. Bran is mortally wounded in his thigh by an

arrow. He asks his companions to cut off his head and bring it to Gwynfryn (the white hill where the Tower of London is standing now). When Bran dies, all harvests in Britain wither and for a long time, the country remains barren. Only seven Brits survive and return to their country with Bran's head.

After many adventures in different places, they finally arrive with the head in London, where it is buried. During their journey, Bran's head reassures them and helps them always to look at things with a certain objectivity as well as a sense of humour. The head was buried facing the continent, because the oracle had predicted that then no invasions by foreign nations would occur. Archaeological excavations show that the cult of the head was also very popular amongst the Celts of ancient Europe.

In Bran, we also recognise Bron, one of the Knights of the Round Table of King Arthur. In his mission, we further see the image of the wounded fisher king who was appointed as the guardian of the Grail, which resulted in his becoming tired and ill. To the Celts, it was self-evident that the country of which he was king had become barren because of this.

The image of the severed head on a chalice with blood appears in many stories. We think of the stories of Peredur, of the Medusa or of John. On different levels, we can see in these stories the symbol of the old I-ensoulment that must be sacrificed in the chalice, because the nature soul sacrifices its head and blood,

**Taliesin (around 534-599)** was a famous poet (bard), who was at least active at three courts of Celtic kings. Probably, his poems have been passed on in the Book of Taliesin (Welsh: Llyfr Taliesin). It is one of the oldest, preserved Welsh manuscripts. It dates from 1275. The work contains a collection of poems in the Welsh language. Other poems, amongst which are lyrical elegies, are borrowed from Latin texts. The references to King Arthur, which also appear elsewhere, are striking. In the manuscript, we also find the oldest reference in Western languages to the heroics of Heracles and Alexander the Great.

in other words, its mortal soul, so that the dormant, divine soul can wake up and regain its health.

In the story of Peredur that is also related in the Mabinogion, Peredur defends the honour of Gwenhwyfar and saves her golden cup that had been stolen by a strange knight. As a reward for his efforts, his warriors, who actually are aspects of himself, may as true seekers of the Grail, visit the island of the blessed, or the island of youth, a place where a kind of Grail castle is to be found.

ANNWFN In many Celtic stories, the chalice, the mixing vessel or the source, is found in the other world. In the more tenuous spheres of our world, we find the reflections of the other world.

For the early Irish, the link between everyday reality and the tenuous realms had not yet been broken. However, the tenuous world passes into a hidden underworld, called Annwfn. Sometimes, a dark cave allows access to it, often reached via a source (the fairytale of Mother Hulda reminds us of this), and it is guarded by nine virgins. Sometimes, the stories speak of a wondrous island in the West, veiled in mists, and hardly further away than a sailing trip, a wonderland with four towers, where a blessed people lives. They have golden hair, houses of white marble and furniture of gold and silver. They drink from crystal cups and are protected by a magical armour that protects them against wounds.

In *The Adventures of Connla*, a fairy guides the young hero with a glass ship to a beautiful country, to a region where neither death nor decline can rule. Initially, the other world seems unattainable and unassailable. Nevertheless, the 'human' hero, like for instance Cuchulinn in the Irish *Serglige Conculaind*, must later liberate this sacred country from hostile giants before he is allowed to return to the earth. The same thing happens in *The Struggle of Moytura*, in which Lug must liberate the country of the Tuatha Dé Danaan from the Fomorians, who had stolen the Cup of Plenty, filled with supernatural powers. In this way, the Grail cup, which initially was the exclusive property of the gods, comes as a talisman into the hands of the people. In other stories, they become the guardians of the remedy that is kept in the mixing vessel, because the worlds of gods and men increasingly drift apart.

PREIDDEU ANNWFN How dangerous the crossing to the other world might be is shown by the story of the Preiddeu Annwfn. In it, the hero tells how he sailed to Annwfn with Arthur and three ships filled with men. This Annwfn is called by different names, like Castle on the Mountain, or the Castle with Four Towers, or the Glass Castle. Within the walls of the castle, Gweir, one of three prominent prisoners from Britain, known from the Welsh triads, is kept in chains.

The storyteller, Taliesin, relates how the men set sail to recover the magical mixing vessel,

**To the Celts, light places in forests, that is, places where the light played through the trees, had a spiritual meaning. Every tree or plant, too, has its own effect and meaning. For instance, the birch tree is dedicated to Bergha or Brigit, goddess of the word and of poetry. The druids worshipped her as the goddess of rebirth; from her, they received the power of foretelling and of healing. The artisans worshipped her as the goddess of forging.**



## A new inner, etheric meaning of the Grail spreads its Light, and informs us about new times that are approaching

set with jewels and pearls, from Pen Annwn, the ruler of the underworld. The mixing vessel is the mysterious source of wisdom and knowledge that is guarded and kept warm by nine maidens. Only seven men from the original group return, although the poem does not tell how the others died. In no uncertain terms, it makes short work of the ignorant 'small people' and monks, who do not understand anything of the wisdom and knowledge that the bard, unmistakably one of the seven survivors, proclaims.

When a warrior gives and sacrifices himself with all his natural powers, the transformation into the inner human being in Christ, into the holder of the Grail cup, takes place within him. The end of this poem of barely sixty lines about Preiddeu Annwfn relates:

'As a group of beaten wolves,  
monks crowd together  
after a struggle with those who know.  
They know nothing,  
nothing of the dawn that follows the dark  
night.  
Nothing of world's course,  
or of the raging power  
of the storm that strikes the land.  
The tomb of the holy one is deeply buried in  
the soil.  
I praise the Most High, prince of lofty abode:  
May sadness depart from me; Christ is my  
reward.'

Nowadays, wisdom is no longer granted to mediators between gods and men, like it was in the past granted to religious authorities or kings. The person who dauntlessly fights the counterforces within himself with the light of Hu-Gadarn, will gain wisdom. Nine is the number of humanity. Every human being is able to drink from this Grail cup, because in a symbolic sense, he himself inwardly bears the mixing vessel.

With its symbolic language, the world of the Celts shows itself as a cruel and harsh world, in which the courageous warrior often falls on the field of honour. However, although the divine world becomes ever harder to access during his dangerous passages and 'the twilight of the gods' is in full swing, a light dawns on the distant horizon that makes him surmise something of a new dawn. The hero discerns a new Light; the ancient symbols regain their lustre and point the warrior, who sacrifices himself, to the ultimate victory – not only over death, but also over ancient nature religion. The magical atmosphere of this rich tradition of Irish stories of the mixing vessel of rebirth, the source of eternal youth, does seem remote and of another time, another period of humanity. However, a new inner, etheric meaning of the Grail spreads its Light, and informs us about new times of soul development that are approaching. ☸

# the poet's irish heart of w.b. yeats

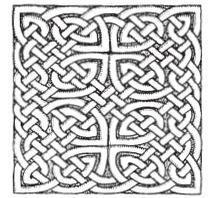
In Eire, as he himself often called his beloved fatherland, the country whose 'ancient ways' he honoured, W.B. Yeats is called the father of all singers. Many modern authors and artists from this country of the art of singing and music still feel indebted to him. If ever a poet was a seeker, it was William Butler Yeats.

**N**o poet has ever sung about Ireland and its Irish soul as lyrically as Yeats has done. In this context, we perhaps overlook the fact that the tranquillity, emanating from the Irish landscape, is also reflected in his work as the inner peace that he seeks in his tormented heart. With his immortal poems, he is always able to move the heart of the many readers who, like him, are seeking an original fatherland.

William Butler Yeats (1865-1939) was not destined to become a poet but, just like his father and grandfather, a minister in the Church of Ireland (the Irish-Anglican church). However, he did not choose theology, but rather began by studying law and the fine arts, after which he soon turned to poetry as his main activity. This was partly influenced by the Irish painter G.W. Russell (1867-1935), who was able to perceive elves and spirits in the mysterious



The Irish name of the stone circle 'Grange Lough Gur' in the county of Limerick means 'Stones of the Sun'. With a diameter of 50 meters and 113 stones, it is one of the largest and most impressive stone circles in Ireland, erected around 2000 BC. The largest stone, **Ronnach Croim Duibh**, has a height of 4 meters and weighs 40 tons! The structure of the circle is such that on the morning of the summer solstice, 21 June, the sun shines exactly on the centre of the circle.



Irish landscape. Particularly in his early work, Yeats was strongly guided by his love for Irish folk traditions and by the nationalistic struggle for freedom.

**THE RED ROSE** In his work, the image of the red rose has a dual meaning, often referring to Ireland and the imperishable perfection of his 'happy townland', but often, also representing the pure love for the unattainable dream

woman. In addition and in a more hidden way, 'the most secret and inviolate rose' refers to the spiritual aspiration that increasingly drove him.

This quest not only speaks from his poems, but in 1885, Yeats founded the Dublin Hermetic Society. In this period, he also met H.P. Blavatsky in London, who acquainted him with esoteric symbolism. For a short time, from 1888-1890, he was even a member of the



esoteric section of the Theosophical Society. Later, together with his soul mate Maud Gonne, he joined the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. This is a Rosicrucian society with a main temple in London, in which, apart from its founder MacGregor Mathers, the historian A.E. Waite was also a member. The latter chronicled the whole history of the Rosycross and Freemasonry, but he became particularly renowned by the tarot cards, named after him.

Together with Maud, Yeats wrote quite a few initiation rituals for this group and for years, he remained a loyal member. This background can be clearly traced in the rich imagery of his poetry. In many places, the influence of the writings of Emmanuel Swedenborg, Jakob Boehme and, the not to be forgotten works of William Blake, also resound in his lyrics. In this way, Yeats courageously rowed against the dominant, materialistic tide, which he considered a form of mere ignorance. He himself firmly believed in the immortality of the soul. Nevertheless, this belief sometimes also led him onto slippery paths. It was also the cause of many failed ambitions and of a generally not very easy life. Thus it is hard for us to understand that he attempted to analyse the visions of his spouse who, as a kind of psychic, recorded messages from yonder side via automatic writing. In *The Vision*, he constructed a complete esoteric system on this basis, in which he described huge, spiral cycles through which history alternately balances between what is objective and what is subjective. Above this temporality, the spiritual self is to be found, the 'inviolable spark of divinity, which stays separated from all incarnations', in other words, the undamaged spark of what is divine and is wholly free from everything material. In this work, we also find a large number of

references to the mythology of Ireland, with which Yeats was quite familiar through his many studies, and which he further elaborated in his *Fairy and Folk Tales* and *The Celtic Twilight*. In the meantime, it had become clear that his horizon extended much further than Ireland and Celtic culture. Thus, he published, together with the Indian Sri Purohit Swami, a still very much appreciated translation of the Upanishads.

**A LABOURING WORLD** Yeats suffered severely from the volatility and transience of life in what he experienced as 'a labouring world'. He was weighed down by the many worries that social and political life as well as his personal love life involved. Daily life was depicted with its 'heavy mortal hope', which does not offer much more perspective than old age filled with regret and homesickness. It is a theme that ever more frequently appears with the poet's aging, as does the homesickness for lost innocence. In him, the notion of the uselessness of things and the futility of human striving increased.

His brief appointment as a senator in parliament and the award of the Nobel Prize did not change this a great deal. Being conscious of the fact that he no longer had meaning, despite all his wisdom, made him feel caught in a web of worries. 'But now I have grown nothing, knowing all. Ah Druid, how great the webs of sorrow,' Fergus sighs in his conversation with a druid. His disappointment in love inspired Yeats to the golden advice: 'Never give all the heart.' In addition, in quite a number of his poems, he mocked the sham erudition of 'the old, learned, respectable bald heads', although he said pityingly about the scholars that they, respectable and old and with all their erudition, are not aware of any evil.



**A HEAVY HEART** Nevertheless, Yeats felt that it was not the amount of time a man lives that makes him old and worn, but rather his heavy heart. This is the actual cause of any decline that is attached to a person ‘as a tin to a dog’s tail’.

Yeats knew that it is passion that makes the human heart so heavy, yet the soul loves what most wounds it, ‘what hurts the soul, my soul adores’. This passion even kept the author from his true task, as virtually everything lured him away from writing poetry, for he complained: ‘All things tempt me.’

However, between the lines, Yeats offered his readers an alternative to this woeful life: learn to listen to the ‘strange things said by God to the bright hearts’. This is the core message of ‘the rose upon the rood of time’, with which he declared himself to be a Rosicrucian. This rose confronts its eternal beauty with its aversion to the time that has grown old and monotonous, and to history that time and again repeats itself. To this end, the poet must achieve a radical reversal: ‘Gaze no more in the bitter glass’ and penetrate to a right choice, just as he intended to do in the poem, *The Two Trees*.

*Beloved, gaze in thine own heart  
The holy tree is growing there  
From joy the holy branches start  
And all the trembling flowers they bear (...)  
There the Loves a circle go,  
The flaming circle of our days*

*Gyring, spiring to and fro  
In those ignorant leafy ways. (...)  
Beloved gaze in thine own heart.*

**AN END TO EARTHLY FORMS** In the meantime, two of Yeats’ poems have become classics. Even if reviewers analyse them to the bone, for the readers to whose hearts they appeal, their clarity leaves nothing to be desired. About ‘Sailing to Byzantium’, the poet himself explained that to him this holy city symbolises the quest for spiritual life. This is why he sang about it as the city of eternal youth. ‘No country for old men’ and not an abode for old men, who are insignificant in their material garb like ‘a tattered coat upon a stick’. It is, however, a city of sages, upon whom he calls to step to the fore from the holy fire to rouse his soul to life with their songs. He begs them to consume his heart that is sick with longing, chained to a dying animal, and to incorporate him ‘into the artifice of eternity’. And he sighs in the last verse:

*‘Once out of nature I shall never take  
My bodily form from any natural thing,  
But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths take  
Of hammered gold and gold enamelling  
To keep a drowsy Emperor awake  
Or set upon a golden bough to sing  
To, lords and ladies of Byzantium  
Of what is past, or passing, or to come.*

In the first verse of ‘The Second Coming’,

**Sword**

air  
spring  
yellow  
Arthur  
east



**Paten**

earth  
winter  
green  
Gawain  
north



**Grail**

water  
fall  
blue  
Parcival  
west



**Spear**

fire  
summer  
red  
Amfortas  
south



the flight of a falcon threatens to lead it ever further beyond the range of the falconer. It is Yeats' image of anarchy, by which a world perishes that is no longer able to find the centre, because if there is no centre, ultimately everything collapses. However, the poem's second verse offers the perspective of a return, a rebirth, a hope awakened by the age-old image of the sphinx:

*Somewhere in sands of the desert  
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,  
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun.*

During twenty centuries of petrified sleep, this sun has become darkened. And even now, the result is not yet clear! It is still a question whether the almost lost hope can be fulfilled in this time of the end, now that simultaneously the time comes that the monstrous animal crawls towards Bethlehem to be born. In this way, Yeats evokes the apocalyptic, final struggle between the lamb and the beast from the abyss.

Regardless of the sweet memory of the old Ireland of his youth that continued to live in him, Yeats was unable to shake off the reality of war and conflict, which not only strongly afflicted his country, but also his own life. However, he continued to believe in eternal peace, born from temporary struggle. 'Through the fire to the Light', 'Per ignem ad lucem', was the aphorism he chose upon his initiation into the Order of the Golden Dawn. ☉

The four pictures on the left are known as The four blessings of the 'Túatha' or 'the people of the goddess Danu', a mythological, Irish people. Their history is recorded in the Irish manuscript 'The Book of Leinster' from around 1150. Yeats was the first one to relate these pictures to the four aces of the Tarot.